

A Guide for Providers

Engaging Immigrant Seniors in Community Service and Employment Programs

This guide was produced by Senior Service America, Inc., a nonprofit organization that provides civic engagement and employment training opportunities for low-income older workers, in partnership with the Center for Applied Linguistics. SSAI is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to administer the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). SSAI administers an equal opportunity program and is in compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act. This guide was prepared entirely with grant funds from the Department of Labor. The opinions expressed in this guide do not necessarily represent or reflect the policies of the Department of Labor.

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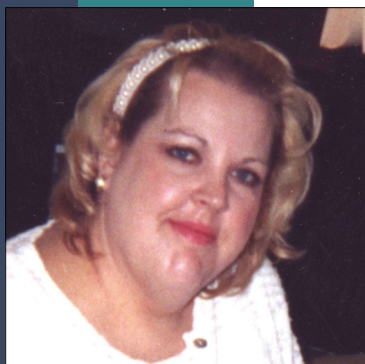
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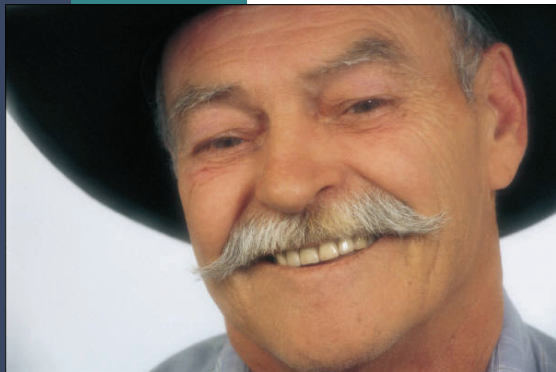


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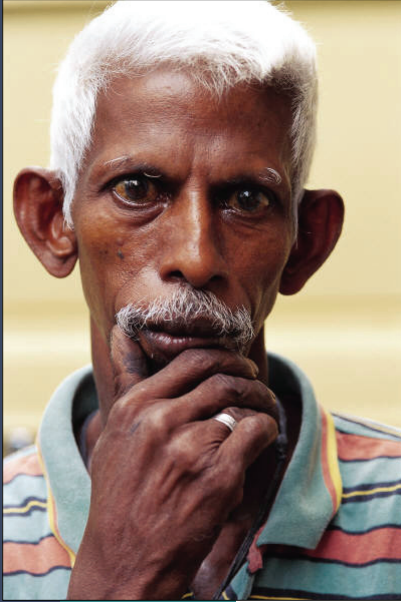


*Dedicated to Greta Peters, the late SCSEP director of East Side
Neighborhood Services in Minneapolis, who with her agency brought
Somali elders into their program and inspired this publication.*



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Preface

During the 1990s, many immigrants to the United States chose to live in communities far from the traditional gateways for earlier generations. California, New York, and Texas continue to be home for the majority of immigrants, but in the last decade North Carolina, Georgia, and Nevada have more than tripled their numbers of foreign-born residents. And the population of immigrants has doubled in 15 other states, including many in the Southeast and Midwest.

Too often, immigrants become isolated from their neighbors because of differences in language and culture. Such isolation, especially among older adults, can harm their emotional and physical well-being.

How can aging and workforce development agencies help older immigrants overcome isolation by

joining the workforce? How can older immigrants be introduced to American concepts of community service so that they might contribute to the social fabric of their new community?

This guide is intended to provide new resources to help you and your agency answer these questions. We hope to introduce you to ways of communicating effectively across different languages and cultures in the work-place setting. Most of this guide — especially the section *Senior Scenarios* — contains practical advice and tips you can apply right away.

We also want to update you on the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), the only federal program charged with assisting our nation's most vulnerable low-income older adults — including immigrant seniors — to join or re-enter

the workforce. First established more than 40 years ago, SCSEP is one of the major programs authorized by the Older Americans Act. It has become an indispensable program in response to the aging of the Baby Boomers and a projected increase in poverty among persons over 55.

By participating in SCSEP, immigrant seniors overcome isolation through

paid community service employment opportunities. SCSEP creates new roles that embrace these seniors' knowledge of other languages and cultures as a valuable resource, rather than a barrier to overcome. In these new roles, older newcomers learn about the work-place culture of their new homeland, help meet vital needs by working in local agencies, and ultimately reduce their financial dependence on others.

Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)

The Senior Community Service Employment Program began as part of the War on Poverty 40 years ago and was so successful that it became a national program under the Older Americans Act in 1973. It is referred to by its acronym — SCSEP (pronounced *SEE-sep*) — and operates in nearly every county in the nation.

To participate in SCSEP, a person must be:

- Age 55 or older;
- Legally eligible to work in the United States; and
- Living in a household with income no more than 125 percent of the federal poverty level (or about \$11,000 for an individual, \$16,000 for a couple).

By law, SCSEP gives special attention to veterans as well as seniors most in need — individuals who are at least 60 years old and meet at least one of the following characteristics:

- Income below 100 percent of the federal poverty level;
- Physical or mental disabilities;
- Language barriers;
- Cultural, social, or geographic isolation; or
- Poor employment history or prospects.

Once enrolled in SCSEP, participants are paid minimum wage while they gain marketable job skills working part-time in nonprofit and public organizations, including senior centers, schools, and libraries. The program provides a win-win for participants and their communities. Participants help community organizations extend their reach and capabilities, while developing their own job skills, self-confidence, and a restored sense of self-worth. In 2004, SCSEP participants across the nation contributed 46 million hours of service to their communities, and about 18,000 participants gained regular employment outside the program.

For more information, <http://www.doleta.gov/seniors>.

Acknowledgments

This guide is the product of a collaboration involving many individuals and organizations who care deeply about aging and the growing diversity of our nation. Since Senior Service America and the Center for Applied Linguistics started working on this guide in 2002, we have been encouraged and supported by our usually separate and distinct networks of colleagues. This joint effort has created new partnerships and brought our networks more closely together.

The American Society on Aging provided critical advice from the very start. Gloria Cavanaugh and Carmelita Tursi, now affiliated with AARP, helped us frame the issues and, later, test our Senior Scenarios with professionals in aging from throughout the nation. We hope this guide adds to their longstanding effort to advance a new standard of professionalism in aging, with diversity and cultural competence at its core.

The four leading minority aging organizations that, like Senior Service America, are national SCSEP sponsors not only endorsed our effort but also provided invaluable feedback:

- **the Asociación Nacional Pro Personas Mayores** (National Association for Hispanic Elderly),
- **the National Indian Council on Aging,**
- **the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging,** and
- **the National Caucus and Center on Black Aged.**

(Find more information about these organizations, beginning on page 101.)

Many of Senior Service America's local SCSEP partners generously contributed their ideas and experiences through interviews, site visits, and workshops at our annual conferences. They also helped us meet with and learn directly from SCSEP participants who themselves are older immigrants. Several deserve our special thanks:

- LaTonya Rhines, Marilyn McCorkle, and Robert Culver at Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments in Huntsville, Ala.;
- Renee Griffin and Ellen Whitlock at Senior Resources of Guilford in Greensboro, N.C.;
- Greta Peters, James Worlobah, and William Laden at East Side Neighborhood Services in Minneapolis;
- Jennifer Lo and David Chen at the Chinese American Planning Council in New York City;
- Joanne Waters at the Center for Senior Employment, in Modesto, Calif.

We also must acknowledge the staff members from each of our organizations who are responsible for this guide. At the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Miriam Burt and Lynda Terrill wrote the greater part of this guide.

At Senior Service America, Laura Chenven coordinated the work with CAL, wrote several chapters, and shepherded the guide to completion. Valdes Snipes-Bennett, and SSAI's program officers Janet Parsons, Chris

Garland, Glendale V. Johnson, Eleanor LaBorde, Michi McNeace, and Mohan Singh also provided assistance.

Carolyn Boccella Bagin of the Center for Clear Communication contributed smart design and navigational aids to make this guide inviting to read and easy to use.

Finally, we wish to thank Greta Peters, a former SCSEP director who passed away last year. In 2002, Greta and Bill Laden, the executive director of her agency, East Side Neighborhood Services, hosted our first site visit to conduct research for this guide.

We were eager to learn how East Side Neighborhood Services, which has served immigrant, refugee and low-income individuals and families since its start in 1915 during the settlement house movement, was working nearly a century later with a large number of Somali elders as participants in their SCSEP program. Greta and her agency generously shared their successes as well as their ongoing challenges.

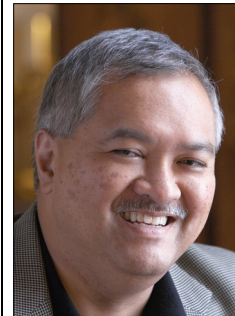
We will always remember and be inspired by Greta for her openness, warmth, and commitment to building a more inclusive community.

An invitation: Continue the conversation

As our nation becomes increasingly gray as well as more diverse in language and culture, we hope this guide will spark a richer dialogue about how to prepare older newcomers to participate fully in 21st Century America.

To meet this challenge, every agency will need to contribute. We invite you to share your ideas and experiences through a special section on the Senior Service America website, www.seniorserviceamerica.org.

— **Anthony R. Sarmiento**
and **Donna Christian, Ph.D.**



President and Executive
Director
Senior Service America



President
Center for Applied
Linguistics



Introduction

Throughout our history, immigrants have given this country their dreams, their labor, and their wisdom. As each group arrives — the Vietnamese, Somalis, Salvadorans, Bosnians, Chinese, Irish, and all the rest — they bring their ideas, their food, their holidays, and their strong hands and minds to enrich our nation.

Most of us have ancestors who came to the United States as immigrants — either willingly or unwillingly. We know how their welcome, or lack of it, affected their lives and the lives of generations that followed.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) can help many immigrant elders achieve economic self-sufficiency and meaningful civic participation. How well we are able to respond to the

needs of immigrant elders directly affects their chances of success. The more we are able to communicate effectively across different cultures and languages, the more effective we can be in serving our diverse communities.

In addition to physical and psychological changes that are part of the normal aging process, immigrant elders also must deal with dislocation and loss, isolation because of language and cultural differences, and confusion — and sometimes shock — at various American attitudes and cultural practices.

To participate fully in American society, immigrant seniors may need help understanding and using English in the workplace and in their communities. They may need help comprehending mainstream U.S.

culture, especially as it affects the world of work. For example, they may need to learn how to make small talk on the job and adapt to American concepts of time and schedule. These elders may also need assistance in figuring out mainstream American ways of dealing with gender, age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.

This guide is written primarily for the staffs of organizations that assist immigrant seniors to enter or re-enter the workforce. Our intended audience includes the staff of SCSEP programs, One-Stop or workforce development agencies, agencies on aging and other providers of services to older adults, and English language or ESL instruction programs.

The first part of this guide provides an overview of the older immigrant population in the United States and describes ways to think about how language and culture are interconnected. We give special attention to cultural differences in work-place settings. In its next part, this guide offers practical information and advice on integrating low-income immigrant seniors into the economic and community life of their new country. It includes scenarios to promote reflection on real work situations, helpful information to use when selecting English as a second language (ESL) providers and teachers, and activities that encourage English language communication. Finally, this guide concludes with a list of references and additional resources to

help service providers working in multicultural environments.

In reading the rest of this guide, consider:

- Building bridges between cultures is a two-way process that takes effort on the part of immigrants and the native-born. We all can learn from one another, and we all need to make an effort to communicate.
- Learning a new language is a difficult process and can take many years, especially for those who did not complete a high school education.
- Culture affects individuals in unique ways, including how they treat others and how they expect to be treated by those from different age groups and gender.
- No matter what their cultural background, immigrant seniors are individuals and may or may not behave in ways that are typical for their cultures.
- Sensitivity to cultural and language differences and our competence in dealing with diversity has a big impact on efforts of SCSEP providers — among others — to recruit, retain, and place immigrant seniors, as well as those who come from different regions of this country.



Foreign-born Elders in the U.S. Today

The United States has been a magnet for people around the world for centuries, and the attraction is accelerating. Immigration patterns during the 1990s are similar in many ways to those of earlier decades. But the most recent census has revealed new dynamics, particularly in the last few years. This chapter describes some of the major changes, which have implications for SCSEP.

According to the 2000 Census, the foreign-born population topped 31 million, a little more than 11 percent of the nation's total population. Between 1990 and 2000, the foreign-born population increased by more than half, from 19.8 million to 31.1 million. This sharp influx represents a significant acceleration in immigration rates, compared with earlier decades. (For a concise and excellent overview, see *The Foreign-Born Population: 2000*, A

Census 2000 Brief, available on the U.S. Census Bureau website, www.census.gov).

The total number of foreign-born individuals in the United States is unprecedented. And if immigration continues at its current pace the foreign-born percentage of the total population by the end of the decade will surpass the record high of 14.8 percent, reached in 1890, according to the Center for Immigration Studies.

"Legal immigration alone in the 1990s likely matched or exceeded the previous historical peak decade of 1901-1910, when 8.8 million legal immigrants were admitted," according to a CIS overview of the history of immigration. "Adding the settlement of illegal aliens makes the 1990s without doubt the period of greatest immigration in American history."

Among the foreign-born in the U.S. today, one in five is at least 55 years old, nearly the same percentage as in the native-born population. Most of the foreign-born population — 59 percent — are 25 to 54 years old, the prime years for working and generating income. Most have completed their education and are not eligible to retire.

Foreign-born older persons have brought a wide range of immigration experiences to their new homes. Some fled from war as refugees, others were granted political asylum from an oppressive government. Many more relocated to be with family members. Some arrived as children, others arrived already matured. Many have become citizens, while others have remained legal residents.

A nation from many nations

They come from many more nations than in earlier decades, thus increasing the diversity of the United States. More than half (52 percent) are from Latin America, primarily from Mexico, the country of origin of nearly 30 percent of America's newcomers. They also come from Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. Another 26 percent are from Asia, 16 percent from Europe.

The remaining 6 percent emigrated from other parts of North America, as well as from Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island nations.

Birthplaces of America's newcomers

Country of birth	Number	Percentage of foreign-born population
Total foreign born	31,107,889	100.0
Top 10 countries	18,157,587	58.4
Mexico	9,177,487	29.5
China	1,518,652	4.9
Philippines	1,369,070	4.4
India	1,022,552	3.3
Vietnam	988,174	3.2
Cuba	872,716	2.8
Korea	864,125	2.8
Canada	820,771	2.6
El Salvador	817,336	2.6
Germany	706,704	2.3
All other countries	12,950,302	41.6

— Census 2000 Brief, U.S. Census Bureau

New settlement patterns

During the 1990s, more immigrants chose to settle in communities other than the traditional gateways that welcomed earlier generations. While more than half of the total foreign-born population of the U.S. live in California, New York, and Texas, many others moved to the South and Midwest, bringing new cultures — and challenges — to long established regions. The number of foreign-born residents in North Carolina, Georgia, and Nevada has more than tripled in the last decade, and the immigrant population in another 15 states has more than doubled. Recent newcomers have chosen to live in smaller cities and towns, not just the urban centers that already were home to large immigrant communities.

States with the most foreign-born residents in 2000

State	Foreign-born population
California	8,864,188
New York	3,868,094
Texas	2,899,640
Florida	2,670,794
Illinois	1,529,058
New Jersey	1,476,327

— Census 2000

States where the foreign-born population at least doubled from 1990 to 2000 (Percentage reflects increase.)

North Carolina	274%
Georgia	233%
Nevada	202%
Arkansas	196%
Utah	171%
Tennessee	169%
Nebraska	165%
Colorado	160%
Arizona	136%
Kentucky	135%
Minnesota	130%
Idaho	128%
Kansas	114%
Iowa	110%
Oregon	108%
Alabama	102%
Delaware	102%
Oklahoma	102%

— Census 2000

Largest metropolitan settlements

The largest immigrant populations in 2000 were in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston. Four counties are home to the largest foreign-born populations, encompassing 22 percent of the total: Lost Angeles County, California, with 3.4 million; Miami-Dade County, Florida, with 1.1 million; Cook County, Illinois, 1.1 million; and Queens County, New York, 1 million.

English language competency

Most foreign-born families (more than four of every five) speak a language other than English at home. While most households include at least one member with good English-speaking skills, Census 2000 identified 4.4 million households with a combined 11.9 million people as “linguistically isolated.” That designation means that no person older than 14 in a household speaks English very well.

How well a person in the United States speaks English makes a big difference in how well he or she can perform activities in daily life, from grocery shopping and banking to communicating with public officials or various service providers.

Languages spoken at home

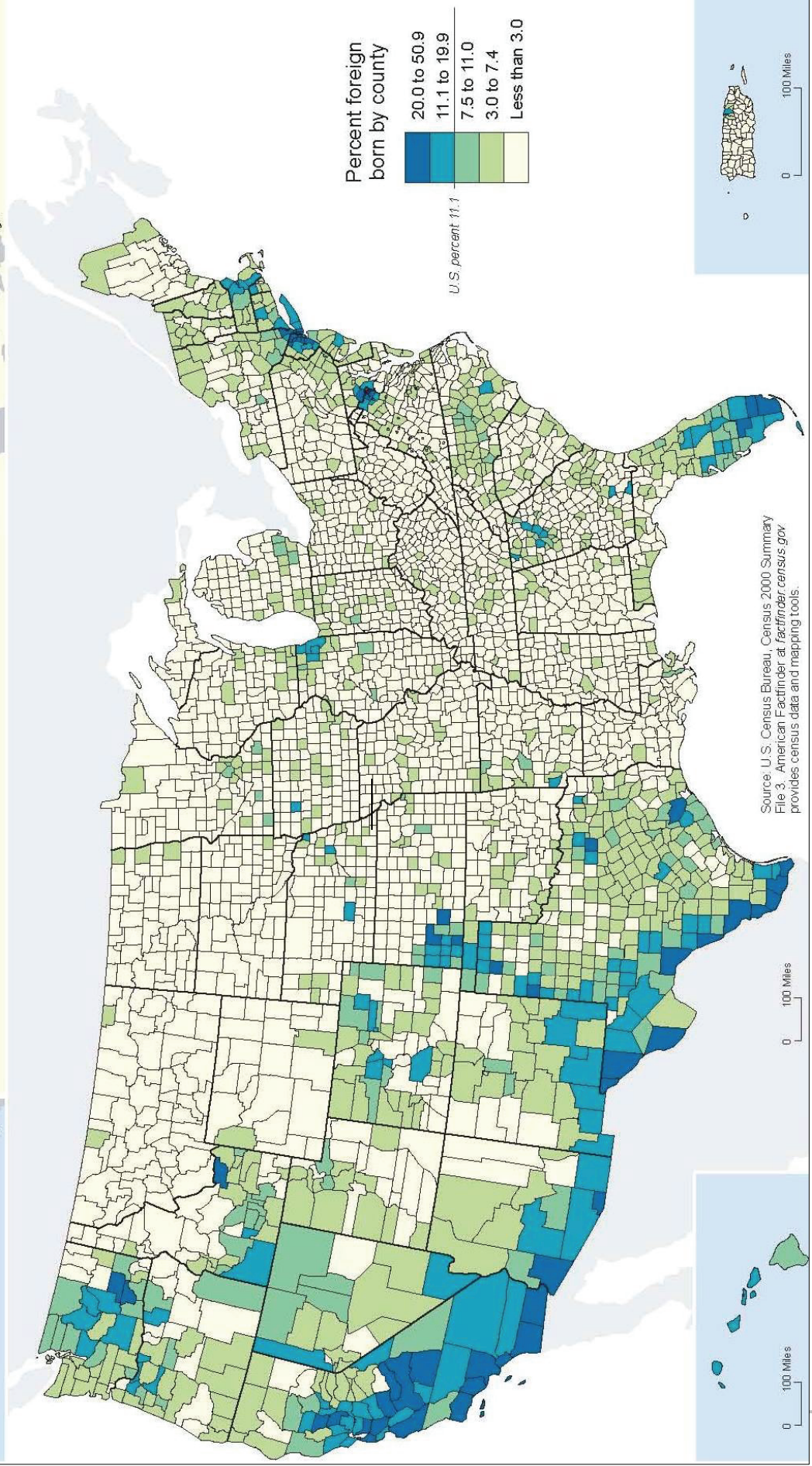
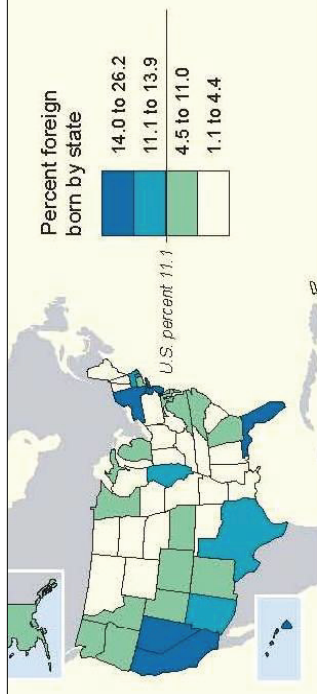
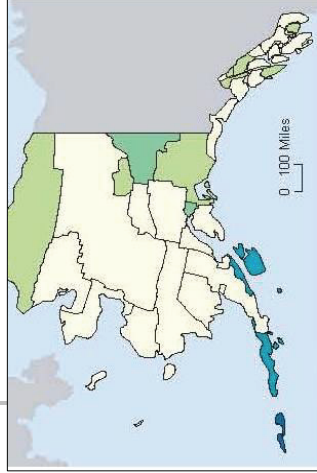
	Estimate
Total households	108,419,506
English	88,415,804
Spanish:	11,184,953
Linguistically isolated	3,179,603
Not linguistically isolated	8,005,350
Other Indo-European languages:	4,971,431
Linguistically isolated	828,447
Not linguistically isolated	4,142,984
Asian and Pacific Island languages:	3,027,884
Linguistically isolated	901,397
Not linguistically isolated	2,126,487
Other languages:	819,434
Linguistically isolated	138,820
Not linguistically isolated	680,614

— American Community Survey 2003

Where the foreign-born have settled

This map offers a county-by-county look at where newcomers to America have put down new roots. New patterns — settling away from traditional gateway cities of the past — are bringing new challenges to immigrants as well as service providers.

— Census 2000 Brief



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3. American Factfinder at factfinder.census.gov provides census data and mapping tools.



Cultural Differences in America

As we reach out to immigrant seniors, many of whom only recently arrived from places around the globe, it is helpful to remember how we work with cultural differences every day, even among native-born Americans. Variations in culture were a part of the New World landscape even before the first wave of European settlement in the 16th Century. Numerous Native American tribes populated the continent before the Europeans set foot on it.

We can hear the differences in the voices of our neighbors — do they speak with a Brooklyn accent or a Texas drawl? We see the differences in dress — do men wear loafers or western boots to work? We taste the difference in the food we eat — does home-style cooking mean roast beef and gravy or crawfish *étouffé*?

Variations in culture have been a part of the New World landscape for centuries, even before the first wave of European settlement.

Our cultural background factors into our everyday decisions: from what clothes we put on in the morning to what to put on our tables for dinner; whether we wait in line patiently at the bus stop or push our way to the front. How long we pause before we speak, the words we use, the food we eat and when we eat it, or even the cars we drive are different depending on what region of the United States we come from. For each of us, culture plays an integral and complex role in all aspects of our lives — from birth, through

By asking immigrant seniors how they wish to be addressed, you can help them feel more comfortable in your program or on a job.

puberty and child-bearing years, to old age and death.

Paul Coverdell, in his *Building Bridges: A Peace Corps Classroom Guide to Cross-Cultural Understanding*, defines culture as a “system of beliefs, values, and assumptions about life that guide behavior and are shared by a group of people. It includes customs, language, and material artifacts. These are transmitted from generation to generation, rarely with explicit instructions.”

Language as a tool

Human beings have been tool makers for thousands of years. Tools helped us expand into environments where we otherwise could not have survived. As cultures became more complex, language came into being and remains our most important tool. We use language to greet, teach, learn, explain, disagree, reassure, dominate, and cooperate — we use it in everything we do.

Languages differ in many ways: the sounds that are used in speaking (*phonology, pronunciation*), the words that make up the language (*vocabulary*), the way in which they are written (*alphabet*), and the order and style in which the words are written (*syntax* and *grammar*).

Even among native English speakers in the United States, there are differences. Have you ever crossed a state line and discovered, at least initially, that you’re having a hard time understanding the waitress at Bob’s Big Boy restaurant, or the ticket taker on the turnpike, or the sales clerk at the local department store?

The words they use and even the way they say them may seem strange to you. For example, depending on the Big Boy restaurant — Bob’s in North Dakota, Elias Brothers in Michigan, or Frisch’s in Tennessee — the carbonated drink you order might be called a *soda*, *soda pop*, *pop*, *Coke*, or a *soft drink*. Then, when you get the bill at Frisch’s Big Boy, the waitress might ask you if you need a *writing pen* to sign your credit card receipt. She calls it that because *pin* and *pen* are pronounced identically in the Southeast region of the country, so people often indicate which word they mean by saying *sticking pin* or *writing pen*.

In their book, *Do You Speak American?*, Robert MacNeil and William Cran (2004) point out differences in pronunciation, choice of words, and even use of grammar in different parts of the country. For example, someone who wants a large sandwich would order a *grinder* in New England, a *wedge* in Rhode Island, a *hero* in New York, a *hoagie* in Philadelphia, and a *submarine* in Ohio.

On an island in Maryland, people use a unique form of expression. They say, “of a winter,” as in, “We go ice-skating of a winter.” In the South, you might be, “fixin’ to do something.” And in Harlem you might say, “I be working.” The language (including English dialects) spoken is likely to have a strong influence not only on how a person thinks but also on the way that he or she pronounces and makes sentences in English.

Ways of talking

In addition to the way languages are put together and how they sound,

other cultural differences exist in language. These differences include:

- Volume of voice
- Gestures
- How far away people stand when speaking
- Whether people look each other in the eyes when speaking
- Whether males and females are supposed to speak directly to each other.

Being aware of the various ways people of different cultures use language can help improve communication with immigrant seniors.

Forms of address

How we address one another is an important part of language and culture. For example, unlike English, some languages, such as Japanese and French, use formal pronouns to address elders and people in positions of authority.

Familiar forms are used with peers and children. In some cultures, familiar forms can be thought of as “talking down,” a form of disrespect, and an indicator of low social status.

Some immigrant seniors may feel uncomfortable being addressed by their first names or when young people talk to them in a familiar way. The way seniors are addressed in the United States varies by region as well as circumstance.

Some American workplaces are quite formal, where a person would never think of calling a co-worker — and especially a supervisor — anything but Mr., Ms., or Mrs., but many workplaces seem to expect co-workers to call one another and their supervisors by first names.

How does any new employee — immigrant senior or otherwise — find out what is appropriate at work? Helping immigrant seniors adjust to the workplace will involve encouraging them to observe the common practices in the workplace and explaining the varied ways that people are addressed here in the United States.

By asking immigrant seniors how they wish to be addressed, you can help them feel more comfortable in your program or on a job.

Social language

Language has a variety of social purposes that sometimes belie what is actually being said. For example, in some cultures, it is impolite to say *no* to an invitation, even if one has no intention of attending the function. Conversely, in some cultures, it is polite to say *no* several times when offered food before saying *yes*. A host who did not repeatedly offer food to guests in this situation might see those guests leave hungry.

Customs such as these can create misunderstandings on the part of both the immigrant and the native-born person and can contribute to the

difficulties immigrants have in negotiating the social environment.

Accent

It is very difficult to learn a second language as an adult. Many people do not realize that after the age of 13 or so, it is unlikely that someone will be able to speak a new language without having an accent.

Even here in the United States, we have a number of regional accents, and some of us find it hard to understand people from different regions of the country. Those accents are persistent. You can recognize a New York, Boston, or Texas accent even after a person has lived in another part of the country for many years.

It may be even more difficult to understand the accent of a person for whom English is not a first language. Consider the case of a famous former Secretary of State. Henry Kissinger came to the United States from Germany in 1938 as a teenager. Despite receiving a B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from Harvard University, he continues to speak English with a strong German accent.

Differences among languages

To help understand some of the ways that other languages differ from English, let us consider Spanish. It is the language of the majority of immigrants in the United States.

Like English, Spanish is an Indo-European language that uses the

Roman alphabet. Spanish and English have many words that look similar and mean basically the same thing (*cognates*). Examples include such words as *historical* / *histórico*; *presentation* / *presentación*; *to study* / *estudiar*.

The numerous cognates may facilitate an immigrant's reading in English. However, the differences between pronunciation of Spanish and English letters and words may interfere with Spanish speakers' being understood in the United States.

For example, in *histórico*, the *h* is silent, and the *i*'s are pronounced like English *e*'s. Furthermore, the sound of *a* in Spanish is similar to the *a* in the English word *all*, rather than the vowel sound used in the name *Al*. This means that the Spanish speaker might transfer these sounds to the English *historical*, saying it in a way that might sound something like *ees-to-ree-call*.

The situation with cognates is further complicated because some cognates are "false friends" — they do not mean the same thing at all. For example, the Spanish verb *asistir* does not mean *to assist*, but rather *to attend*. Similarly, the Spanish verb *atender* does not mean *to attend*, but rather *to wait for*.

Given these differences, a native Spanish speaker might find it hard to select the correct verb when speaking English (or, for that matter, so might an English speaker who is speaking Spanish).

The way words are put together (*grammar* and *syntax*) is also different in Spanish and English.

For example, in English, you might say:

I took my father's green shirt to the dry cleaner last week, but they didn't get it clean.

Knowing something about the languages of the seniors in your program will give you insight into the difficulties they are facing and can help you improve your ability to communicate with them.

In Spanish you might say:

La semana pasada llevé la camisa verde de mi padre a la tintorería, pero no la limpiaron bien.

Literally translated (word for word) this would be:

The week past took the shirt green of my father to the dry cleaner, but no it cleaned well.

Given these differences in word order (*syntax*) and grammar, it is also not surprising or a sign of a lack of intelligence or education if a native Spanish speaker makes English sentences with the words in an improper order.

These examples offer a glimpse of a few of the difficulties native Spanish speakers sometimes encounter when speaking English. But consider a native speaker of a language that is less like English.

The two major languages spoken by Chinese immigrants are Mandarin or Cantonese. Both of these languages are non-alphabetic; pictures or symbols are used to depict whole words.

Chinese-speaking immigrants must learn the English alphabet and the use of sound–symbol correspondence. They must also learn English intonation rules (e.g., the voice goes up in a *yes/no* question) and stress (e.g., not all words are equally stressed in English).

Chinese languages, as well as Vietnamese, are tonal languages. In these languages, changing the intonation and pitch of words changes the meaning of words. For native English speakers, these concepts can be very difficult to grasp. Think of

the challenges immigrants from these areas face when learning to understand, speak, read, and write English.

Arabic is another language that differs from English, using a non-Roman alphabet that is written from right to left rather than from left to right. Think about the challenge to Arabic-speaking immigrants that learning English (especially reading and writing) would present.

While you may be unable to learn more than a few words in the languages spoken by the seniors in your program, knowing something about their languages will give you insight into the difficulties they are facing and can help you improve your ability to communicate with them.

Language and literacy

Speaking a language and knowing how to read and write in it are different skills. You cannot assume that immigrant seniors are literate (that they have the ability to read and write) in each language they speak — native or otherwise.

Many seniors came to the United States as economic and political refugees. War and economic strife may have disrupted their education before they achieved full literacy.

Other immigrants, such as the Somali Bantu, come from cultures where no written version of their language exists. Being aware of the seniors' literacy in each language they speak will help you better understand some of the problems they may encounter.

The impact of culture

Culture includes the way people understand themselves in relation to others — how they view their past, present, and future. The act of immigrating to a new country can have an impact on a person's self concept. How an individual views his age, ethnic background, class, gender, religious affiliation, and other core beliefs is affected by how he is perceived in his new culture (Ullman, 1997). For example, a senior from China, where age is venerated, might be appalled to find himself suddenly without the status his age had afforded him in his own culture. If he cannot speak English well, he may also find himself bereft of his ability to communicate. Even if he held a professional job in his native country and speaks English well, he may be

unable to obtain a similar job in the United States because he lacks U.S. credentials or experience in a U.S. workplace. These factors can have an enormous effect on his self-image and his social identity.

Religion and culture

Immigrants to the United States practice different religions — Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, among others. They may be agnostics, atheists, or animists. Cultural beliefs relating to religion can be among the most profoundly held and the most difficult to try to adapt in a new environment. The clothes they wear, their head coverings, their holy days may all reflect the religious traditions and beliefs of immigrant seniors.

Islam is the second largest religion in the world, with more than 1.2 billion adherents. Muslims reside in 184 countries and represent many different ethnic groups and linguistic backgrounds.

Muslim Americans today belong to more than 75 different ethnicities and nationalities and represent many different interpretations of Islam. Muslim immigrants come from differing educational backgrounds, social classes, and language backgrounds and have different ways of expressing their faith.

They include people who wear western dress and adapt their religious observances to a western lifestyle, as well as people who maintain their traditional customs of dress, food, social relationships, and religious observations. These traditional customs may include women keeping their heads covered in public, eating no pork, drinking no alcoholic beverages, and ritual praying five times a day.

For more information on working with Muslims, see *Muslim Refugees in the United States* (Malooof & Ross-Sherriff, 2004).

Since September 11, 2001, tensions have heightened in the United States regarding immigrants, especially those from the Middle East and some parts of Africa and South Asia. Sometimes internalized stereotypes about people from different cultures make it difficult to see each person as an individual.

Sometimes we look at immigrants with apprehension, and lately, those who display their Middle Eastern roots through the clothes they wear, the food they eat or do not eat, and the religion they practice have been the focus of that fear.

Gender roles

Gender roles are an important part of culture everywhere. For example, among Somali elders, men and women do not typically shake hands with each other. This deeply ingrained cultural practice might have a significant impact on employment. Imagine how an American woman interviewing a Somali man for a job would feel if the man refused to shake hands.

Imagine how the Somali man would feel if after 60 years of believing that it is wrong for unrelated men and women to touch each other, he finds himself in a situation in which he is pushed to shake hands with a woman, perhaps even one who is younger and unmarried.

SCSEP project staff may have to explain an unfamiliar behavior to an employer who might otherwise miss out on the good qualities of an immigrant senior because of differing cultural practices concerning gender.

Just as Americans do not always agree about how men and women should

relate to each other, people from other cultures also may disagree. For example, male family members from many traditional cultural backgrounds may be uncomfortable with the women in their family working outside the home, especially in unfamiliar environments.

In addition, women from some cultural backgrounds may be uncomfortable interacting regularly with strangers, particularly with men who are not family members. These women may be ill at ease with jobs that require frequent contact with the public.

However, just as individual differences among Americans exist, individuals even from the most traditional cultures may be very comfortable, even enthusiastic at the opportunities to change those traditional roles.

Culture and the individual

Learning about the language, customs, and religion of the seniors you work with is the first step to helping them become successful, productive, and fulfilled in the U.S. workplace.

However, many individual variations in behavior and culture exist among people of the same nationality. Some American-born people do not eat meat of any kind. Some do not mix dairy and meat. Some do not eat or use any animal byproducts. Some do not drink alcoholic beverages.

People in the United States make lifestyle choices according to their personal values, and this includes immigrants. Many immigrants who practice traditional customs have been able to navigate life and work in the United States by making adjustments

Learning about the language, customs, and religion of the seniors you work with is the first step to helping them become successful, productive, and fulfilled in the U.S. workplace.

that work for them. For example, some Christian immigrants attend Mass on Saturday evenings so they can be on the job Sunday. Getting to know the individual seniors in your program is just as important as understanding their diverse cultures.

Advice for providers

Some immigrant seniors may be familiar with more than one language. For example, a Bolivian might speak Quechua, an indigenous, Native American language, rather than Spanish as her first language. A Somali elder might read Italian in addition to his native Somali, and he might also read and speak Arabic. Learning about the languages immigrant seniors speak will help you know more about them and their strengths as well as the challenges they face in speaking English.

While it may be difficult or impossible to become an expert in each culture and language you encounter, several simple guidelines will foster positive interactions between SCSEP staff members and participating seniors:

- **Give immigrant seniors time to adjust to new situations.** When elders are new to the country or unsure of their English, they may feel anxious.
- **Look for the individual qualities of each immigrant senior.** Not all differences are cultural.
- **Respect the knowledge, skills, and experience of the elders you work with.** Recognize that their knowledge and skills might lie in areas that are unfamiliar to you.

Getting to know the individual seniors in your program is just as important as understanding their diverse cultures.

- **Learn about values outside of your own culture.** Your interaction with seniors from different cultures can be a learning experience for you as well as them.
- **Keep in mind that many differences exist between the wealthier countries of the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe and the poorer countries of Latin America, Asia, and Africa.** Social class differences can have an impact on behavior as well.
- **Be prepared to help diverse seniors adjust to changes in their lives** and be open to their view of the world.
- **Investigate the issues and find the information you need.** If you need information about a particular culture, go to the experts, such as the Center for Applied Linguistics' Cultural Orientation Resource Center at www.culturalorientation.net (See page 89 for more resources).
- **Hire bilingual staff or find translators if possible.** You will learn more about seniors with limited proficiency in English if they can describe their experience and their needs in their own language.
- **Remember that we are more alike than we are different.** Enjoy the differences in customs — food, dress, and holidays — but understand that we all laugh and cry, are angry and sad, love our families, and want to succeed.



Getting Started: Outreach, Recruitment, and Service

In areas of the country that have long been magnets for immigrants, many SCSEP programs have built strong relationships with immigrant and refugee advocacy and community organizations. For programs in areas experiencing a new influx of immigrants, connecting with the newcomers may be a bigger challenge. Some programs have started new recruitment drives.

In this chapter, we look at the experiences of two SCSEP programs funded by Senior Service America — one in North Carolina and one in Alabama — to learn how they are meeting this challenge.

Renee Griffin, assistant director of community based services of Senior Resources of Guilford in Greensboro,

N.C., and LaTonya Rhines, legal service provider for Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG) in Huntsville, Ala., spoke to us about their efforts. Among the first issues they discussed is the need to recognize the factors that make it difficult to recruit and serve immigrant and refugee seniors. These include:

- Language barriers;
- Immigrants' attitudes about relying on organizations for support, rather than on family;
- Immigrants' fear of government agencies;
- Immigrants' fear of social and financial exploitation;

It is necessary to establish a rapport with the leaders who are well liked and respected.

- Immigrants' fear that using services could affect their ability to remain in the United States;
- Fear of the unknown (on both the part of the immigrants and the service provider).

Rhines and Griffin offered advice on addressing these challenges:

Contact community leaders.

Working through established community organizations is an effective way to reach immigrant and refugee seniors, they said.

In Huntsville, TARCOG contacted the Latino community through the local Catholic Church and through community and social leaders. These leaders then took the information back to their communities.

In Greensboro, Senior Resources of Guilford's initial contact with the Vietnamese community was the pastor of a Vietnamese church. Subsequently they made contact with other groups by attending festivals and other events sponsored by the target community. "It is important for immigrant and refugee groups to recognize agency personnel as familiar and concerned advocates," Ms. Griffin said. "This goal is accomplished by attending and participating in their events."

Reach out through family members.

This approach is important both because of the language issue — since children often speak English better than the elders — and because Latinos often live in multi-generational households or in close proximity to each other, Ms. Rhines noted. Although making initial contact through the elder's children is a good

first step, it is not advisable to rely on this method for all the services for immigrant and refugee seniors. When children are called upon to translate for older family members, it can upset the lines of authority in the family and bring shame to the elders.

In many cultures, children are expected to care for elderly parents while grandparents are expected to pass down history, cultural information, and family traditions to the younger generations. Furthermore, it is often impossible or inadvisable to pull children away from work and school to translate for the seniors.

Hire bilingual staff. Senior Resources of Guilford hired bilingual staff to conduct outreach and help serve the immigrant seniors. Ms. Griffin felt this was "absolutely" necessary. TARCOG recognizes this as well and is in the process of developing its bilingual capacity. For these reasons, the services of bilingual staff are needed throughout the program, not just during recruitment.

Use native language ads. Ms. Rhines suggested placing Spanish-language announcements and advertisements in the following places:

- Latino-owned businesses
- Doctors' offices
- Health departments
- Schools
- Local community events
- Latino newspapers
- Spanish Yellow Pages
- The Internet.

It is also recommended to link these advertisements to your agency's services in the native language on your

web page. In Alabama, TARCOG's bilingual staff is translating brochures into Spanish and helping to develop ads and public service announcements for Spanish-language cable television and radio stations. Using TV and radio is especially useful because some elders lack literacy skills in any language.

Attend community events. It is important to be present at community events including those hosted by immigrant groups, Ms. Griffin said. In addition, these events help you get to know the community, including its leaders, as well other groups that serve and advocate for immigrants.

Collaborate with other groups. Ms. Griffin named another key factor in the success of Senior Resources of Guilford: Forming coalitions with other providers from both the English-speaking service-sector and the immigrant community.

After the program successfully served the Montagnards, a minority group from Vietnam, local refugee resettlement agencies approached Senior Resources of Guilford to see whether the program could also offer services to elders in the Bosnian, Cuban, and Russian communities. Similar partnerships with other organizations could help provide bilingual support for those serving immigrant seniors, Ms. Rhines suggested.

Educate yourselves. Both Senior Resources of Guilford and TARCOG stressed the importance of knowing about the cultures of the target immigrant groups. The staff of Senior Resources of Guilford had to learn new ways to reach out and provide services.

They realized that meetings for each immigrant group could not necessarily happen on Saturdays. For example, Saturday worked well when hosting dinners for Vietnamese and Montagnard Buddhist and Christian communities, but it was not satisfactory for many Jewish elders from Russia who consider Saturday a day of religious observance. These Russian immigrants and other immigrant groups from West and North Africa also have dietary restrictions that affect whether they would consider attending a dinner.

Ms. Rhines of TARCOG cited the need to "do your homework" and to know some of the major customs of each immigrant group. For example, "It is extremely important to realize that the Latino population in the United States consists of individuals from several different countries," Ms. Rhines said.

Immigrants from Asian countries speak many different languages as well. Sometimes immigrants from the same country speak different languages (e.g., Cantonese and Mandarin are both spoken in China).

Learn a little of the language. In addition to knowing something about the culture, Ms. Rhines suggested that the service providers learn a few phrases in the immigrants' native language. When visiting Spanish-speaking elders at home, for example, Ms. Rhines advocated showing respect for the senior and her culture by "interjecting some basic Spanish into the conversation if possible." She also advised caution and recommended learning to say, "*I only speak a little Spanish,*" in Spanish or a comparable phrase in other languages, so that you do not get in over your head.

Be mindful that the senior may come from a culture that does not value informal ways of addressing elders or non-familial acquaintances.

Learn rules of social interaction.

When visiting immigrant and refugee elders, remember that you only get one chance to make a good first impression, Ms. Rhines cautioned. Try to address each member of the family individually regardless of their English language ability. Although you may be speaking English and what you are saying is being translated into the native language by a bilingual staff member, community member, or family member, speak directly to the individual, not to the translator.

Don't segregate the elders.

Ms. Griffin counts as a success that Senior Resources of Guilford has been able to serve immigrants and refugees in an integrated program with native-born elders. The staff has organized field trips for all participants as well as events at which immigrants share information about their culture through food, videos, and oral presentations.

Seniors already being served may fear losing some of their funds and services as new groups come in. These kinds of activities alleviate some of the apprehension and resentment that serving new cultural groups can bring to others.

Furthermore, September 11, 2001, changed people's attitudes and made some of them more suspicious of immigrants and refugees. Senior

Resources of Guilford has found that "enlisting the aid of the immigrants to explain their cultures" has been a successful part of their program.

Get support from the top. Make sure someone high up in the organization supports inclusion. "Your program's leader must have a clear vision and be committed to serving the immigrants and refugees. That leader must be willing to articulate that vision for everyone frequently. Be aware that you may encounter hostility within the staff, mainstream clients, and even advocates for senior issues who are not enthusiastic about extending services to non-citizens," Ms. Griffin said.

Be patient. "Recognize that it takes time to earn trust and respect from new groups. Your programs won't be up and running in six months. It may take a couple of years," Ms. Griffin cautioned.

If you follow these suggestions, however, you may be surprised at the success you achieve. Senior Resources of Guilford reports that its service to immigrant and refugee seniors does not come at the expense of other seniors. The agency continues to serve native-born seniors but has expanded its service to involve newcomers to the community, including many Asian immigrants.



The Benefits of Community Service

SCSEP programs focus on two critical elements: the participants and the communities they are serving. When considering immigrant seniors, it is easy to think of their special needs while forgetting their special capabilities. While many immigrant seniors need extra services, such as English language instruction and orientation to American culture, they also bring with them an understanding of their communities that can make them an invaluable source of service and support to their families, friends, and neighbors. They can make significant contributions to their communities while learning valuable work-place skills.

A number of SCSEP programs provide support to immigrant communities not only through training and employment services, but also by placing immigrant seniors in service roles that make the

most of their experience, traditional roles, and understanding of their own culture.

Eastside Neighborhood Services in Minneapolis serves a large Somali population. This group faces many obstacles to social integration and employment. Some Somalis have little education, which makes learning English particularly difficult. Many are devout Muslims who pray five times a day at prescribed times. Furthermore, men and women who are not in the same family do not touch, making social customs such as shaking hands uncomfortable.

These deeply felt beliefs and practices can get in the way of community service and job placements, especially when employers and host agencies are not familiar with Somali culture.

The SCSEP program director, James Worlobah, is well informed about Somali culture and the barriers these immigrants face. His program addresses the needs of Somali elders for employment and community service while building on the traditional roles of seniors in their culture. His extensive relationships with the not-for-profit community serving Somali immigrants and refugees helps recruit seniors to SCSEP.

The community organizations also function as host agencies for SCSEP participants and have given a number of Somali seniors an opportunity to work as counselors for youth and families in crisis. This type of position takes advantage of the traditional role of Somali elders as leaders of the family and community and as role models for youth. The community service placement provides Somali elders with a bridge to understanding the American workplace, an opportunity to build English language skills while working, and a chance to make a major contribution to their own communities as they struggle to adapt to a new culture.

This service model builds self-esteem for immigrant seniors, reinforces the value of their experience, and helps to mitigate some of the isolation and dislocation felt by many seniors.

In Modesto, California, the Center for Senior Employment places immigrant seniors in a predominately Latino school that is located in a low-income area. Many of the students are children of seasonal farmworkers, and families follow the crops, frequently leaving school for months at a time. The foreign-born seniors play important roles in the lives of these children as tutors and mentors. The seniors provide valuable one-on-one and small group learning opportunities in the classroom that otherwise would be impossible, Joanne Waters, project director, said.

While the seniors help young students with their language skills, they themselves are developing their own English skills and studying for their GEDs. The children and the seniors engage in intergenerational support to become more proficient in English as well as in other academic subjects. Meanwhile, as venerated elders and grandparent figures, the seniors mentor the children on behavior, present stable adult role models, and help bridge the cultural gap between home and the classroom.

In both of these examples, the value of SCSEP training and community service is multiplied as the seniors use their position as valued elders to build the strength of their own communities.



Senior Scenarios: What Would You Do?

In this section we offer nine scenarios that examine issues that may occur in work situations. The scenarios are composites based on real situations that the authors have encountered in classes and the workplace.

Each represents problems faced by immigrant seniors, program directors, supervisors, and co-workers that could occur because of language or cultural misunderstandings.

We believe the scenarios will be helpful to SCSEP program directors and staff members who offer community service and employment opportunities to immigrant seniors, to those who provide ESL instruction, to those who contract for ESL services, and to those who are preparing to offer services to this population.

Immigrant seniors, who are learning about the culture of their new country, may also find the scenarios and the topics covered both useful and illuminating.

How to use the scenarios

Consider using the scenarios:

- As self-study exercises to identify strengths and challenges immigrant seniors bring to the workplace as well as ways of meeting challenges;
- As exercises to help program staff distinguish between individual employment issues and cultural misunderstandings;

- As group activities in which service providers facilitate discussions with staff who work with immigrant seniors;
- As problem-solving activities with the immigrant seniors themselves;
- As part of an orientation for staff working with immigrant seniors.

The scenarios are not meant to be an exhaustive discussion of all the issues that immigrant seniors bring to the

workplace, but rather as an orientation to a few key areas where they may be challenged.

As you go through these scenarios, you will find many tips that will help you pave the way for greater success for immigrant seniors and SCSEP agencies.

While each scenario has its own TIPS (Training and Information to Promote Success), there are a few that are worth considering before you review the scenarios.

The Memo and Mr. Mohammed

Setting

It is Sayeed Mohammed's first day as a SCSEP participant at the community center in a mid-size city in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. As administrative assistant, his duties include photocopying materials for the Center staff and other clerical tasks as needed. He sits at the front desk and answers the phone when the receptionist is on break or at lunch. Additionally, he provides interpreter services to Pakistani clients who do not speak English.

Situation

Mr. Mohammed worked in the government in Lahore, Pakistan, where his job conferred a high status on him and his family. He can read and write English easily, but he has a little more difficulty understanding oral English, especially when spoken with an American accent. His supervisor, the receptionist Betsy Green, explains to Mr. Mohammed how to run the photocopier. She speaks English rapidly, explaining while she photocopies a memo. When she is done, she asks Mr. Mohammed if he understands. "Yes!" says Mr. Mohammed. Ms. Green then goes to lunch.

Donald Gregory, another Center employee in his early 30s, needs to get 15 copies of a memo made. Mr. Mohammed says that he will do it soon. Mr. Gregory nods and says he'll come back in 15 minutes to pick it up. When he returns, the copies have not been made. Mr. Mohammed says he was busy, but he'll do it soon. Mr. Gregory is a little perplexed because Mr. Mohammed does not appear to be doing anything. When pressed for a time when the copies will be done, he repeats "soon."

Mr. Gregory returns in half an hour. By this time, Betsy Green has come back from lunch. She overhears Mr. Gregory asking for his copies. Seeing they are not done yet, she picks them up and photocopies them for him right then, looking at Mr. Mohammed in exasperation. Mr. Gregory thanks her and walks away, not looking at Mr. Mohammed but shaking his head slightly.

Thinking about the situation

- What might be the reasons for Mr. Mohammed's behavior? Could any of them be the result of a cultural misunderstanding? Could any be due to a lack of familiarity with office technology?
- What kind of information might help Ms. Green understand Mr. Mohammed's behavior?
- What could Ms. Green do to help Mr. Mohammed improve his job performance?
- What additional skills or information does Mr. Mohammed need to improve his job performance?
- Is there another way that Mr. Gregory could have handled the situation?

Mr. Mohammed may feel sensitive about his status as a SCSEP participant and the job he is to perform. He experienced a high social status through his job in Pakistan. Taking direction from a woman or from a younger person may also be difficult for him. Overcoming these barriers to good job performance in the United States may take some training and discussion on the part of both Mr. Mohammed and Ms. Green.

Ms. Green's and Mr. Gregory's behavior may cause Mr. Mohammed embarrassment. Gaining more understanding of the reasons for Mr. Mohammed's lack of performance may improve cross cultural understanding and tolerance in the workplace. Answering the phone may be a surprisingly complex task for an English-speaking immigrant who is unfamiliar with American English. Mr. Mohammed should have an opportunity to practice this task in the presence of Ms. Green so she can both observe and assist while he is learning.

Try to:

- Break the task up into small parts. After each part, you can
 - Ask the senior to repeat what you told him.
 - Have him show you that he understands; watch him do the task.
- Teach the following techniques for indicating lack of comprehension:
 - Isolate the word he doesn't understand and ask, "What does X mean?" Or "I don't understand the word X."
 - Teach him to say, "I should do what with the paper?" or "Then I press what?"
- Specify the time expectation. For example, say, "I need this job done in the next 10 minutes."
- Teach the senior to use more definitive statements such as, "I can do this job in 15 minutes."
- Rephrase instructions and demonstrate the task instead of repeating instructions when an immigrant senior indicates a lack of comprehension. Avoid asking the question, "Do you understand?" A "yes" answer may not indicate the level of understanding.

Avoid:

- ## Promoting cultural understanding

- Generally, in the United States, it is not good practice to say you understand something when you do not. On the job it can appear as if you do not care about the work.
- Some other cultures have a more flexible attitude about time than we do in the United States. In the U.S. workplace, when someone asks for a job to be done by a certain time, they expect it will be completed by then. Responses such as, "Soon," are generally not acceptable.
- Women may supervise men in the workplace. Younger people may supervise older people. This practice may be hard for some seniors from other cultures in which age and gender may hold more importance than background and position.

- The importance of expressing a lack of comprehension in the United States, especially regarding instructions
- The importance of asking questions for clarification rather than guessing — or doing nothing at all
- The importance of time and punctuality in U.S. culture, particularly in the workplace
- Recognition that poor performance in the workplace may be due to language and cultural issues rather than poor attitudes or laziness
- The perceived social status of a job as a factor in the job performance.

Senior Scenarios: What Would You Do?

The Teenager and Mrs. Samater

Setting

Six local groups share space at a community center in a large Midwestern city. The current tenants are a senior center that also administers the SCSEP program, an after-school homework and technology club for neighborhood children, a teen center, a small community gym, the community multicultural office, and a family health outreach program run by the local health department and the public schools.

Because space is limited and the children and teens are likely to be noisy after school, activities, space, and schedules are closely monitored. Many of the seniors participate in low-impact aerobics classes, eat lunch at the seniors program, and access routine health care through the outreach program.

Situation

Sahra Samater, 59, learned some English as a child in Mogadishu, Somalia, and has been able to start her work at the community center as a part-time custodian. Her supervisor, Mary Ann Franklin, is pleased with Mrs. Samater's punctuality and careful work.

Ms. Franklin has noticed, however, that Mrs. Samater doesn't seem to feel comfortable talking to people from other programs. Robert Briscoe, 17, one of the regular participants in the teen program, has been trying to talk to Mrs. Samater. Like many teenagers, Robert is a bit loud and brash because he is usually trying to impress his buddies with how cool he is. He has been following Mrs. Samater around when she is emptying the trash cans in the gym and common areas and saying things like, "Hey, Mama, want me to help you lift the trash? You look too old to do it."

One time, Robert said, "Why do you wear that towel on your head? It's too hot around here for that." He expected that Mrs. Samater would just joke back or at least tell him to be quiet.

Mrs. Samater is still doing her job well, but every day she is quieter, and she is no longer smiling, even at the little children.

Thinking about the situation

- How might differences in gender and age-related roles between Mrs. Samater's and Robert affect her job satisfaction?
- What would help Robert and Mrs. Samater increase their understanding of each other?
- How can Ms. Franklin help Mrs. Samater feel more comfortable in her assignment?
- Is there a way that Ms. Franklin can help Robert understand the impact of his behavior on Mrs. Samater?

Promoting effective communication

- Directly address the cultural aspects of language, including those that deal with age and gender.
 - Ask immigrant seniors how they wish to be addressed, and share that information with others in the workplace.
 - Help immigrant seniors understand that many varieties of English are spoken in the United States. Hearing unfamiliar varieties can be particularly upsetting to well-educated seniors or seniors who have studied English in their native countries.
- Help immigrant seniors and those they work with understand that different varieties of English are appropriate in different situations and for different audiences.
 - For example, the language in the newspaper is different from the language of the academic classroom, and both of those are different from the language of the gas station or convenience store.
 - “What’s up, man?” is appropriate for greeting a friend on the street but not for being introduced to one’s supervisor, where, “Hello, how are you?” could be more appropriate.
 - Also explain that people in different regions in the United States have different dialects and accents.
- Give learners the words or phrases they need to succeed at work.
 - For example, Mrs. Samater may need help explaining that wearing a head scarf is part of her religion and that she is comfortable and happy to wear it.
 - Since she works in a place that supports a teen center, Mrs. Samater may need help understanding teen slang. She may need to know how to use some phrases appropriate to the situation, such as, “How’s it going?” or maybe even, “Give me a break.”

- Failing to give seniors explanations about important language and culture points — even for beginning English speakers. Explaining about the different varieties and registers of English that are used by people of different ages and in different settings may take a while, but they need real answers for their questions and problems.
- Assuming that once something is stated, it is understood. Be prepared to restate yourself using different words if possible. Give examples and use visual, audio, or multimedia examples. Try various activities or find native language assistance, especially for important and sensitive cultural issues such as the ones facing Mrs. Samater.

Help immigrant seniors learn:

- The United States has a diverse population — socially, culturally, economically, ethnically, and linguistically. What’s more, unlike in some parts of the world, different groups interact often with each other.
- Small talk between workers and other people in the workplace is a common part of U.S. working culture.
- In the United States, young people often speak informally to their elders — although opinions are mixed on this practice, even among native-born citizens. Younger, male individuals address older, female individuals directly, a practice that Mrs. Samater may find unfamiliar. It is not clear that Robert was trying to be disrespectful. Rather, his behavior probably reflected his ignorance. He may not have understood about Mrs. Samater’s head scarf, often called a *hijab*.
- Even before a person speaks English fluently, the ability to make “small talk” is very important in the United States.
- In the United States, it is acceptable for workers to go to their supervisors and explain that they are having difficulty and need help dealing with a work-related situation.

- Intergenerational and gender issues in language and speech
- The American practice of informality between people of different ages, genders, and backgrounds, particularly in the workplace
- The diversity of the population in the United States
- The different varieties of English spoken in the United States
- The frequency and importance of small talk with co-workers and other people encountered in the workplace
- Misunderstandings related to cultural and ethnic differences, such as women wearing a head covering at all times in public

What do you think?

Scenario 3

Mr. Beltran's Social Isolation

Setting

The setting is a community center in a mid-sized city in the Southeast. Like many cities in the South, this city has experienced a rapid growth in the number of immigrants of all ages.

Situation

Jorge Beltran, 73, from rural Guatemala, has been a migrant farm-worker for more than 20 years. He ended up staying in the area after he became too frail to do heavy work at one of the local farms. Because he is alone and needs to support himself, he was referred to a SCSEP program.

Through the years, he learned very little English because he didn't need it on the farm. In fact, his first language isn't Spanish but a Mayan language. The program coordinator, Frances Mary McNaughton, knows that Mr. Beltran needs job training and English classes. She is worried about him because, although he was initially quite enthusiastic about working at the community center, he has recently seemed distracted and every day seems to have less interest in the programs available to him.

Because of the difficult and isolated life Mr. Beltran leads, Ms. McNaughton is worried that he is unable to fit into mainstream American life. Furthermore, she is beginning to feel awkward with Mr. Beltran. Just last week, Mr. Beltran attempted to kiss her when they were sitting together going over paperwork.

Thinking about the situation

- What might be the cause of Mr. Beltran's decreasing involvement with the program?
- What does Mr. Beltran need to know about social behavior on the job?
- What can Ms. McNaughton do to address her own discomfort?
- What can be done to improve Mr. Beltran's communication skills in English while simultaneously addressing his employment needs?

Reviewing the rules of the workplace up front is a good practice for immigrant seniors. If Mr. Beltran knew more about the laws concerning sexual harassment, he might not have crossed the line by trying to kiss Ms. McNaughton. In order to understand some of the social rules of the workplace, Mr. Beltran may need the help of bilingual staff or a translator because of his limited English.

Promoting effective communication

- Use a variety of methods to teach necessary language skills for the workplace. These include hands-on and experiential activities when planning training, especially for seniors who have not had access to formal education. Index cards with important words and phrases on them, a picture dictionary, and such things as portable representations of work safety signs and other sight words may be good resources.
- Learn about the participant's linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
 - For example, although Mr. Beltran also speaks Spanish, his native language is Quiché, one of the several Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala. Because of this background, the way Mr. Beltran learns and speaks English will be different than if he were a native-Spanish speaker.
 - His native language is not as closely allied with English as Spanish is, but he will probably experience fewer problems pronouncing English vowel sounds than a native-Spanish speaker would.
- Enlist the student's input, needs, and goals in all language activities. For example, because Mr. Beltran has already learned a second language — Spanish — he has already demonstrated some facility in language learning. Ask him (with a translator if necessary) if he remembers how he learned Spanish. Ask him what has been easy and difficult for him about learning English.
 - Does he like to hear conversation and then practice writing words, phrases, or sentences after he has understood them?
 - Does he translate English into his native language in his head and then translate back to respond in English?
 - Does he enjoy listening to music and TV in English or Spanish?

The more you ask the student for input, the more you are able to serve him effectively. Plus, you are helping the immigrant senior by involving him in his own learning process.

- Expecting that once something has been explained it is understood. Closely observe how seniors are reacting to new material of any kind. Do they understand the material? Is it pertinent to them? Is the language level appropriate?

Help immigrant seniors learn:

- Gender issues are taken very seriously in the United States, particularly in the workplace. Among federal workers the law is so broad that if a person feels that he or she has been sexually harassed by a word or action, it is enough to pursue a claim. Mr. Beltran grew up in a vastly different environment, so he needs to learn about sexual harassment policy and appropriate work-place practice.
- The National Institute for Health Statistics suggests that a significant number of seniors suffer from depression (Garnett, 2000). Because he is no longer working, because of his isolated life, and as demonstrated by his inappropriate behavior, Mr. Beltran may be showing signs of emotional distress — distress that he himself may be unaware of. Immigrant seniors need to know that seeking help for emotional problems is much more acceptable in this country than in many other cultures. Mr. Beltran and others like him also may need assistance to navigate the healthcare system to find the help they need and can afford.

- Gender-appropriate behavior on the job and the legal ramifications of inappropriate behavior
- The importance of assessing possible depression or emotional distress
- Isolation as a factor in social behavior
- The difficulties of communicating with immigrant seniors who have limited English proficiency and a lack of schooling in the native language
- Addressing the discomfort and possible stress of program personnel who work with immigrant seniors

Senior Service America
Center for Applied Linguistics

Mei Chen on the Line

Setting

Mei Chen, 58, came to the Pacific coast of the United States five years ago from the Guangdong province in China. She felt lucky to emigrate because, as a member of a non-government sanctioned religious group, she feared official disapproval or worse.

Mei Chen now lives in an apartment complex where several other Chinese families live. Monday through Friday mornings, Mei Chen and three other elder Chinese women take a 5:15 a.m. bus to their job at a community hospital cafeteria.

Situation

Mei Chen and her friends seem to enjoy working in the hospital cafeteria. Their supervisor, George Franks, admires the efficiency and hard work he sees in his elder employees, but lately he has been getting some complaints from other kitchen workers and some of the cafeteria patrons.

When Mei Chen and her friends are working together — cutting up fruit, pouring juice, cleaning up, or even serving on the line — they talk to one another in their native Mandarin language. Another employee, Louisa Dade, a local area native said, “Those ladies don’t know how to be friendly at all. They make my head ache — jabber, jabber, jabber — they sound like little Chinese chickens.”

One of the hospital administrators, Calvin Brown, told Mr. Franks, “I think that employing immigrant seniors is a good idea for everyone, but why don’t you teach them English and good manners before you send them over here?”

Thinking about the situation

- What can Mr. Franks do to improve communication between the immigrant seniors and other workers?
- What would help Mrs. Chen and her friends become more comfortable and a more integral part of the workplace?
- What would help Ms. Dade and Mr. Brown address their discomfort?
- What kinds of language skills might help Mrs. Chen and her friends?

Many Americans are monolingual and do not understand how difficult it is to learn another language and how long it takes. Sharing information about learning another language can help native-born workers better understand the behavior of their culturally diverse colleagues.

Try to:

- Analyze work and social language tasks, and ask the SCSEP participants to do the same. Let them discuss the following:
 - When is English necessary and appropriate?
 - What vocabulary, phrases, and sentences are needed? Why and when?
 - When might it be appropriate to use the native language?
- Brainstorm with diverse seniors about their strengths and challenges in English. Teach the seniors some techniques for indicating lack of comprehension. For example, teach him to isolate the word he doesn't understand and ask, "What does X mean?" or "I don't understand the word X." Or teach her to say, "I should do what with the paper?" or "Then I press the what?"
- Make certain that the diverse seniors are learning social language to use in the workplace with co-workers, supervisors, and customers. If no formal classes are available and it is impossible to start classes, hold small group meetings with the diverse seniors. Discuss greetings, responses to greetings, and appropriate topics for "small talk" on the job.
- Try to become more comfortable listening to other languages. Thousands of languages are spoken in the world today. Enjoy the diversity — maybe you can learn a little about another language as well.

[illegible]

Avoid:

- Automatically assuming that something is wrong when diverse seniors speak in their native language. It can be very frustrating to adults when they can't express complex thoughts with their limited English. Sometimes the quickest way to understand a work issue or to solve a problem is by talking it over with a colleague in the native language.

Promoting cultural understanding

Help immigrant seniors and their co-workers learn:

- More than 80 percent of U.S. workers speak just one language — usually English. Explain to immigrants from multilingual areas of the world that some American workers feel uncomfortable hearing a language they don't understand.
- It is difficult to learn a new language. Some may think that studying a textbook at home or taking a class for a few months should be enough for a motivated student to learn a language when, in fact, it takes many years.

Key issues to consider

- The use of native language on the job
- Knowing social language and how and when to use it
- Addressing the discomfort of not understanding what others are saying
- Americans' lack of understanding of the difficulty of language learning
- Monolingualism in the United States

What do you think?

Scenario 5

Mr. Rubin's Expectations

Setting

The setting is a large multi-use community center in a mid-sized Midwestern city. Yosif Rubin, 61, came to the United States just before the break-up of the Soviet Union.

In the USSR, Mr. Rubin was a defense department engineer. When he came to the United States, he originally lived with his son and daughter-in-law, both of whom work in high-tech firms.

Mr. Rubin wasn't comfortable sharing the small condo with them and their two young children. He rented an efficiency apartment for himself, fully expecting to be able to pick up a part-time computer job himself. He wasn't able to get a job, and his income was very limited, so he enrolled in SCSEP.

Situation

Mr. Rubin studied German and English as a young man and he prides himself on being well educated. He is not shy when talking to Lynn Blackwell, his supervisor. In fact, he has told her many times how to reorganize SCSEP.

Mr. Rubin has told her again and again, "This program has inefficient system. You must make it so that the wages are better. I was chief computer engineer in defense system in Ukraine. I know to organize more than you. Perhaps you just are social worker lady."

Recently, he attended an interview for a job entering data for a local food assistance program. Mr. Rubin said to the interviewer, "I don't understand USA — richest country in the world, but no food for poor. Must have then stupid computer system for poor also?"

Although Mr. Rubin has the English and work skills to get a reasonable part-time job, he hasn't been offered one yet.

Thinking about the situation

- Why might it be difficult for Mr. Rubin to find a job? What linguistic, cultural, and personal challenges might Mr. Rubin be facing?
- What can Ms. Blackwell do to help Mr. Rubin become more employable?
- What can Mr. Rubin do to improve his employment prospects?

Because of Mr. Rubin's skills and education, he may be able use a training program to better establish his credentials in this country.

Promoting effective communication

- Focus on language and communicative skills that diverse seniors need for success.
 - For example, Mr. Rubin could use help understanding the mistakes he makes with modals (*should, would, must*, etc.) because his misuse and overuse may be causing him to sound more impolite and cranky than he means to be.
 - Immigrants often hear words like “*stupid*” on TV and don’t realize how inappropriate they are in the world of work.
- Understand that the comprehension and use of social language along with the processing of cultural information will take time. The amount of time will vary from person to person.
- Help immigrant seniors practice appropriate language and cultural behaviors for job interviews in the United States.
- Consider Mr. Rubin’s suggestions, if appropriate. He may have some ideas worth implementing. As annoying as he may be, he still needs to be treated with respect and courtesy.

- Categorizing or stereotyping seniors into simple categories like “shy,” “aggressive,” “rude,” “has learning disabilities,” or “too old to learn.” In Mr. Rubin’s case, rudeness aside, he is a person who has probably suffered several blows to his self-esteem. Give him time and the tools to cope with and acknowledge his situation.
- Do not expect that explaining something once or twice means that you’ve taught it, and seniors have learned it.
 - ❑ It is important to continue to recycle topics and material.
 - ❑ Re-present material in different ways (for example, orally, in writing, etc.).

- While Americans often appreciate direct and informal speech, they also value politeness. For example, Mr. Rubin needs feedback that his constant negative statements and comparisons to his former situation — to the detriment of the current situation — are considered rude.
- A fine line exists between standing up for oneself and boasting. Americans tend to admire the one and strongly dislike the other. Because Mr. Rubin understands English well, Ms. Blackwell — or maybe his adult children who appear to be successful in their own work endeavors — could explain outright the negative reactions he is getting.

- The value placed on combining direct and polite speech in English
- Understanding the impact of cultural differences in how one presents oneself
- The importance of a positive attitude on the job
- Addressing the personal and cultural losses experienced by many immigrant seniors

What do you think?

Scenario 6

Mrs. Mangabay and Her Family

Setting

The setting is the neighborhood community center in a city in the Pacific Northwest. Luz Mangabay, 63, came to the United States from the Philippines. She had originally lived with her daughter, a nurse, who came here as part of the push to fill registered nurse (RN) positions in American hospitals.

The daughter acquired enough language for certification and began working in a local hospital. A year ago, the daughter went back to the Philippines to meet her old boyfriend. Now the daughter is married, pregnant, and her husband, her extended family, and she are staying at Mrs. Mangabay's small apartment.

Situation

Mrs. Mangabay has been working — first in a community service assignment and now as a part-time, unsubsidized worker — on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons as the receptionist at the community center.

She has a fairly good command of English. Her studies in school were in English, and she is fairly comfortable with American English, especially social English, having owned a small shop, a *sari-sari* store, outside Subic Naval Base in the Philippines.

She has been a favorite at work. She has never been absent. She is capable and friendly, and she works hard. However, twice last week she left early, once to accompany her daughter to the doctor and once to take the bus to meet another one of her daughter's in-laws at the airport.

Today Mrs. Mangabay told her supervisor, Derek Holmes, that she had to leave early to prepare a special traditional meal for all the relatives who are currently living in her small apartment. Mr. Holmes is concerned that an attendance problem is developing.

Thinking about the situation

- What factors may be causing the changes in Mrs. Mangabay's job performance?
- Is there a way Mr. Holmes can address the work-place problem without forcing Mrs. Mangabay to choose between job and family?
- How else can Mrs. Mangabay handle her family pressures? What kind of support might help her address her family and employment issues?

Promoting effective communication

- Focus on the kinds of language immigrant seniors need for work-place purposes. Mrs. Mangabay knows English well but may need help to understand the best way to ask for time off. Teach immigrant seniors ways to make requests and ask for permission.

- ❑ “Would it be possible for me to ...?” (“... leave early tomorrow at 4 p.m. to pick up my sister at the airport?” “...take an extra hour at lunch this Friday to go to my son’s school and see him in the holiday play?”)
- ❑ “Would it be a problem for me to ...?” “I’d really like it if I could ...” “It would be very important to me if I could ...”
- ❑ “What do you think about me ...?” (“...leaving early next Monday to attend a parent-teacher conference?” “...taking a two-hour lunch next Wednesday to see my mother?” etc.).

- Avoid:

- Senior Service America
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Help immigrant seniors learn:

- ### Senior Scenarios: What Would You Do?

Scenario 7

Keeping Mr. Ayala at Work

Setting

Jose Luis Ayala came to a large southwestern city 23 years ago from his native Chihuahua, Mexico. When he could no longer support his family, Mr. Ayala left the small farming village where he had been born. Because he was an undocumented immigrant, Mr. Ayala worked “under the table” at any agricultural, construction, or manufacturing job he could find.

In 1989, he obtained legal permanent residence status by filling out the proper government paperwork and attending 40 hours of English and civics class at a local adult ESL program. Those few weeks of class were the only formal education Mr. Ayala had ever received. He liked going to school, but once he had his immigration papers, he went back to working two jobs a day.

In 1999, Mr. Ayala hurt his back in a construction accident. This condition has been aggravated by osteoarthritis. Now, at 63, divorced, with his children grown and moved away, Mr. Ayala works 20 hours a week as a janitor at the YMCA in his neighborhood.

Situation

Everyone at the Y likes Mr. Ayala. In fact, he is a popular figure in the neighborhood at large. Because he is so popular and because the osteoarthritis is making it increasingly difficult for Mr. Ayala to perform his janitor duties, his supervisor, Suzanne Gomez-Smith, would like to make Mr. Ayala a desk clerk.

Although he makes mistakes, Mr. Ayala speaks English quite well. In this neighborhood, it’s also useful to speak Spanish. However, Mr. Ayala can barely read or write in either language, so he has difficulty writing down phone messages, filling out supply requisition forms, and registering new members.

Ms. Gomez-Smith is concerned about how losing his job will affect Mr. Ayala. She knows that he misses his children and speaks of them often and that the Y is his home away from home. She doesn’t want to fire him, but he can no longer do the physical labor required for janitor work.

Thinking about the situation

- What kind of training might help keep Mr. Ayala employed?
- What accommodations might help Mr. Ayala be better able to perform a desk job?
- What can Ms. Gomez-Smith do to help Mr. Ayala with some of his feelings of loss and loneliness?

Training for specific job-related skills may help Mr. Ayala learn enough to perform a desk job. It might be valuable to investigate accommodations for the blind and people with learning disabilities that could be adapted to workers with limited literacy skills in English.

- Work with learners to analyze specifically what kinds of help they need to perform job-related reading and writing tasks.
- Make it easier for seniors by simplifying the literacy tasks. Make forms simple to use. Many forms are needlessly complicated. For example, the font may be too small, the spaces for writing may be too small, or old-fashioned or bureaucratic language may be used. Develop simplified forms in plain language that are easier to use. A customized, job-related ESL class could help seniors learn how to use the forms they encounter at work.
- Concentrate on the specific language and literacy skills Mr. Ayala will need for his new job, such as “Mr. Smith, call back (202) 374-4431.” Use a variety of techniques to help Mr. Ayala learn to read and write. Copying letters and reciting the alphabet will not be enough to help him become literate in English.
- If even a limited amount of reading and writing seems too difficult for Mr. Ayala, investigate ways to develop a job that stresses his strengths — spoken languages and friendly personality — rather than his lack of literacy skills. Perhaps Mr. Ayala could use his bilingual skills to help the YMCA connect more with Latino parents or translate for families at YMCA board meetings.
- Investigate adaptive technology to help Mr. Ayala perform his job. Voice-based computer programs exist for the blind and dyslexic that link spoken and written language and could be adapted for those with difficulty reading and writing.

- **Overrating the literacy issue.** Because a person cannot read or write does not mean that he or she is lacking in knowledge, skills, and abilities.

- Even though many people in the United States — both native and foreign born — have limited literacy skills, a large majority of jobs assume at least some basic literacy skills.
- Becoming literate in a second language is harder if a person is not already literate in his first language.
- Unlike in some other cultures, in the United States there is a general feeling that people are never too old to learn.
- Most communities have adult classes in everything from painting or martial arts to learning English or fixing cars.
- Seniors can find information about free or low-cost classes from local public schools, public libraries, or other literacy organizations.
- Many American elders also experience separation from their families. Although families are very important in the United States, elders are generally expected to be more independent than may be the case in many other cultures. For example, in some countries, an aging or ill parent might expect to move in with one of his or her children. In the United States, seniors often live independently or in a senior residence community. Elder parents and adult children love each other but often like to give each other “space.”

- Using training and technology to prepare immigrant seniors with limited literacy skills for new jobs
- The effect of native language literacy on becoming literate in English
- The importance of literacy in English for employment
- The independence of seniors in the United States
- The impact on immigrant seniors of families living far apart

What do you think?

Scenario 8

Mrs. Le and the Missing Messages

Setting

Ngoc Anh Le left her native Vietnam in 1993 and settled with her husband in a fast-growing city in the Southeast. Her husband, Tranh Nguyen, had been in the South Vietnamese Army during the Vietnam War and later had been a prisoner in a “reeducation camp” for six years. During those six years, Mrs. Le took care of her 4 children by working as a clerk and general assistant in a photography and movie firm in Saigon. Mrs. Le’s husband died in 1999.

When Mrs. Le became a SCSEP participant in 2003 (at age 57), her first community service assignment was to work in the administrative office of a local nonprofit program that matches low-income people with decent, subsidized housing. She received this placement because her spoken English was good if sometimes difficult to understand. Furthermore, she had experience working in an office.

Situation

Mrs. Le’s supervisor, Marianne Feldman, is the office manager. Ms. Feldman is in her early forties. Because she usually has morning meetings with case workers, she has asked Mrs. Le to manage the front office from 9 to 11:30 a.m. During that time, Mrs. Le answers the phone, takes messages, files new periodicals and recent case folders, sorts mail, and greets people who come into the office. When Ms. Feldman trained Mrs. Le, Mrs. Le assured Ms. Feldman that she could do the job — “No problem,” she said.

Ms. Feldman has been puzzled about what’s going on in the office in the morning. Whenever she asks Mrs. Le if taking care of the office by herself is okay or if she needs any help or a work task explained again, Mrs. Le smiles and says everything is fine. However, three times this week Ms. Feldman has received irate calls from clients who said they left messages for her, but she never got back to them. Ms. Feldman never saw any messages. Furthermore, she can’t find three important case files in the filing cabinet, and fewer requests for information about the housing program are logged in than there were before Mrs. Le worked there.

Ms. Feldman was sure that Mrs. Le was right for this position, but now she has her doubts.

Thinking about the situation

- What can Ms. Feldman do to determine whether Mrs. Le understands her job responsibilities?
- What would help Mrs. Le meet the needs of the customers more effectively?
- What can Ms. Feldman do to help Mrs. Le improve her job performance?
- What factors might influence Mrs. Le’s attitude about her job?

People of all ages and in all work situations can benefit from hands-on assistance and a review of job tasks. Because different people learn in different ways, a supervisor should offer written, verbal, and hands-on assistance:

- Most people — of any age or situation — do not respond well to questions such as, “Is this too tough for you?” “Do you need some extra help?” or “Are you having problems?” Even if the job is difficult and they are clearly having a problem, many workers will not respond candidly to those questions.

Promoting effective communication

- Make sure seniors know questioning and clarification language. Help them practice the *wh-* questions (*who, what, why, where, when*).
- From the beginning, work with the immigrant seniors to build an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. Reassure seniors that asking a question about work or a lack of understanding is acceptable and even expected in the American workplace.
- Be aware of and sensitive to the ways different cultures respond to American directness. Like many cultures, Vietnamese culture does not put the same value on being direct as American culture does. If a Vietnamese person is confused or needs help, he or she may not feel it is appropriate to come right out and say so. This difference can lead to many difficulties. Americans may become upset that he or she is not explaining needs or wants, but Americans' directness may seem rude to a person who is not used to the American style. In addition, people from some cultures may feel the need to answer "*yes*" to any question because answering "*no*" or "*I don't understand*" might seem impolite to them. To address

this issue, service providers or supervisors could rephrase questions as open questions that do not take a *yes* or *no* answer. (For example, instead of asking Mrs. Le if everything is okay when she is in the office by herself, her supervisor could ask her to demonstrate how she uses the phone and other tasks.)

- Avoid:

- ## Promoting cultural understanding

- American directness does not necessarily imply a lack of respect.
- In class, at work, or in the community, often words or phrases will be used that diverse seniors don't understand. It's important that seniors know that it is acceptable (and expected) for them to ask for clarification. They need to know such appropriate language as, "Please repeat," "Can you say that again?" "I don't understand," and "Please speak slowly."
- In the United States, even when supervisors are younger than those they supervise, they expect the same attention and respect as those who are older.

- Differing cultural expectations about direct communication
- Ways of asking and answering questions
- The difficulty of managing many tasks at once
- Mentoring and apprenticeships to assist seniors with new jobs
- The impact of age and perceived status on relationships with supervisors

Senior Scenarios: What Would You Do?

Scenario 9

The Frustrations of Ms. Babcock

Setting

The Center for Aging Services is in a suburb of a large city. It is a big organization with many native-English-speaking SCSEP participants and many foreign-born seniors from Bosnia, China, El Salvador, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Hong Kong, India, Laos, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, Serbia, Somalia, Sudan, Turkey, Vietnam, and more. Seniors are required to fill out registration forms before they are eligible for services.

Situation

Today the seniors turned in their registration forms. The forms ask for name, address, phone numbers, date of birth, previous work experience, years of education, languages spoken, and days and hours available to work.

Moira Babcock, the SCSEP project director, prides herself on being efficient and has created a form that contains all of this information on one side of the paper. The printing is a little small and the space for writing is limited, but Ms. Babcock is concerned about saving paper and having neat, slim files.

Instead of giving the SCSEP participants the forms to fill out overnight, she gave them an hour this morning to fill them out while they were at the center. She wanted to make sure they wouldn't lose the forms when they took them home. This way, she is certain, they will fill them out and turn them in promptly.

As she reads their returned forms, Ms. Babcock finds herself getting increasingly upset. Some of the seniors have mixed up their first names and last names. Others have mixed up "day" and "month" on both date and birth date. Many seniors from Somalia and Afghanistan say they were born on January 1.

Many did not fill in their previous work experience, and she knows that most of the seniors worked before coming to the Center. The handwriting of most of the participants is hard to read. They have not been careful to stay on the lines; they have written too big for the space allotted; and she isn't sure what some of the responses say because the spelling is so atrocious. Not only the foreign-born seniors, but also some of the U.S.-born participants have made these errors. The more Ms. Babcock thinks about it, the more frustrated she becomes. She wonders why none of the seniors told her they were having difficulties filling out the form.

Thinking about the situation

- What management practices of Ms. Babcock do not match the needs of the immigrant seniors?
- What changes would make it easier for the seniors — immigrant and native born — to register and comply with the procedures?
- What could Ms. Babcock do to help address her own frustration?
- What skills or accommodations would help the immigrant seniors fill out forms?

Many elders, whatever their literacy skills, will not have the manual dexterity and handwriting skill to write neatly on short lines with little space.

Promoting effective communication

- Use a clear, readable typeface, plenty of white space, and plenty of room for seniors to fill in the answers. Use two or three pages if necessary.
- Distribute a completed model form with the form you want the seniors to fill out. If possible, ask the year of birth only rather than exact date of birth.
- Allow seniors to fill the form out at home, where family members can help them. This will allow them to “save face,” whether they are non-native English speakers or not, if they have problems reading and writing.
- Provide non-judgmental assistance for filling out the forms.
- Consider providing bilingual staff for assistance with forms.

- Assuming that because immigrant seniors are literate in a language other than English and can speak English, that they can read and write in English.
- Assuming that because no questions are asked, everyone understands what to do or is willing to admit openly that they have difficulty with the task.

- In some countries — for example, China and Vietnam — the *family name* (what we call the *last name*) is listed first, and what we call the *first name* is listed second. When writing forms, especially for those who may not have been in this country for very long, use the term *family name* rather than *last name*.
- Many other countries in the world write dates by putting the day first, and then the month. This means that June 16, 1950 (6/16/50) would be written 16 June 1950 (16/6/50). New arrivals to the United States or those who have not had to read or write much in English may not know this difference.
- In some countries, especially those in developing areas of the world that do not have long histories of written language, people do not place as much importance on the exact dates on which specific events occurred. Most people will know the year of their birth, but many people may not know the month and the day. Furthermore, in some cultures, a person's age is counted differently than we do in the West. In China, for example, people are considered a year old when they are born. In any case, many immigrants and refugees, especially those from Muslim countries in Africa and those who were uncertain about their actual date of birth, were instructed to list their birthday as January 1st when they filled out immigration papers.
- Some foreign-born seniors come from countries where the language has only recently been codified — in other words, matched up with a writing system. For example, the Somali written language, which uses the Roman alphabet, was developed in the 1970s, long after most seniors coming from Somalia would have been in school.

- Many seniors, including native English speakers, may struggle with English literacy tasks. This does not mean they are stupid, have a bad attitude, or are unteachable. Some may never have had the opportunity to learn to read due to economic or social disadvantages; others are impeded by poor vision and motor skill deficits related to age. The senior may feel shame about the lack of literacy and a reluctance to ask for help with reading and writing tasks.
- If the seniors know how to read in a language other than English, the following factors may influence their ability to read in English:
 - Some languages are written with characters, or small pictures or symbols, rather than letters. Chinese languages, including Mandarin and Cantonese, are

TIPS

written this way. In addition, Chinese is read from top to bottom rather than from left to right like English.

- ❑ Other languages are written with an alphabet that is different from the Roman alphabet used in English. Arabic is an example of this type of language. It is read from right to left rather than from left to right. What's more, Arabic writing does not always include the vowels.
- ❑ Languages, such as Spanish, French, Croatian, and German, are examples of Roman alphabet languages. Some languages, such as Hmong, are written with the Roman alphabet but use diacritic marks over letters (for example, Ĉġă) to show tones or other important information.

Key issues to consider

- The challenge of reading and writing small print
- Differences in literacy practices across cultures and languages
- Cultural differences in how dates and ages are recorded
- Different alphabets
- Shame associated with lack of literacy

What do you think?



Communicating in English: Making it Work

Speaking English is important to immigrant seniors for a variety of reasons. They need English for daily life — to visit the doctor, to go to the store, and, increasingly, for the workplace.

Immigrant seniors may have faced great physical and emotional hardship and trauma, making them reluctant or fearful to learn new and sometimes difficult skills. These seniors may also have to handle documents and forms written in English.

More so than other immigrants, however, elders often find themselves isolated, sometimes from their own cultural community, but certainly from the greater English-speaking community. Luckily, many strategies and activities can support the goal of

helping diverse seniors increase their English-language proficiency and decrease their possible social isolation while engaging in enjoyable, age-appropriate, job-related learning.

Plain language

Reading and writing in English is important in our society. For some people, learning these skills may be more difficult than learning to speak English. Programs can help minimize the difficulty of reading English by ensuring that all documents are written in plain language.

Sometimes we make reading and writing tasks more difficult than they have to be by using forms and

documents that are unnecessarily complex — with small print and difficult words. Think about how many literate native speakers of English find themselves feeling helpless and confused when forced to deal with instruction booklets for filling out taxes or assembling a new gadget.

A few simple measures can improve the functional English literacy of the SCSEP program participants:

- **Make sure that forms and documents contain plenty of white space.** The more you heighten the contrast in your documents between words and white space, the easier they are to read.
- **Translate technical terms into their plain language equivalents.** For example, say, “Adjust the focus of the lens.” not, “Recalibrate the visual acuity of the refractory device.”
- **Use a readable typeface in an appropriate size.** It will be easier on elders’ eyes and will also make reading less difficult.

Communicative activities

Communicative activities help build the language proficiency of seniors. Such activities include those that encourage and require a SCSEP participant to talk and listen to other people in the program, at work, and in the community.

Even as we encourage immigrant seniors to learn English, bilingual staff and translators are an invaluable resource for your program.

Communicative activities help people find out information, get to know others, function in their communities, learn a new work skill, or learn about a new culture. They can take place in a classroom, in a meeting, or informally in a workplace. Even when learning is focused on developing reading or writing skills, communicative activities support learning a language.

Encouraging and promoting opportunities for communicative activities at your program or worksite can help make learning English into an active and comfortable experience for seniors. It also decreases their sense of isolation. (See *Building Communication Skills* beginning on page 73 for examples of communicative activities.)

Bilingual staff and translators

Even as we encourage immigrant seniors to learn English, bilingual staff and translators are an invaluable resource. Translators and bilingual staff can provide you with information about the immigrant seniors in your program that you could not otherwise obtain.

Knowing more about participants’ culture, work and education history, home life, and concerns will help you provide appropriate services to immigrant seniors in terms of training and job placement. In addition, bilingual staff can give you feedback on how well the seniors understand your expectations and where communication gaps need bridging.

Overcoming challenges

While leaving one's native country, language, and culture is a dramatic change for all, immigrant elders may feel especially isolated — linguistically and culturally — which can exacerbate their feelings of powerlessness or fear (Grognet, 1998).

For example, elders who have lost their homes, their documents or papers, or even their glasses may feel that they have lost their status. (They certainly have left their comfort zones.) Many elders may say, "I can't learn English" or "I'm too old." In some cultures, learning new things at an older age is not expected. This belief is a particular impediment for seniors who need to find jobs to support themselves.

These seniors may need to find a comfort level that allows them to learn new skills. You may be able to help them by walking them through the learning process, including who will be teaching and what the expectations are.

How much formal education seniors received in their native countries varies widely. It is almost certain, however, that the education they received was teacher-directed.

Once they overcome their initial discomfort, most learners adapt and prosper in a learning system with increased interactivity and independence.

In many educational systems, learners are expected to listen to the teacher and respond to questions in unison with one correct answer. Because of this educational experience, many elders become uncomfortable when they are asked to get up, move around, and work in pairs or groups.

Some have difficulty accepting that more than one answer may be correct. However, once they overcome their initial discomfort, most learners adapt and prosper in a learning system with increased interactivity and independence.

Group and pair activities have some challenges of their own. Consider differences in age, social background, country of origin, and education, as well as English ability. Some learners may be uncomfortable in groups with others they consider to be more prominent or of higher status. Also, some men may resist being in groups where women are leaders.

Although facilitators can often encourage reluctant learners to try new activities, they should be sensitive to potential difficulties arising from group and pair work. Discussions of cultural and personal differences in learning styles and interaction patterns may help overcome initial resistance.



Considering ESL: Essentials for a Quality Program

Adult English as a second language (ESL) is the term used to describe English-language instruction for adults whose native language is not English. (*Adult English for speakers of other languages*, or *adult ESOL*, are other terms also used to describe this kind of instruction.) Increasingly, some programs and government agencies are using the term *English literacy*.

Finding a provider or being a provider

You may decide that your agency needs to find an English program for the immigrant seniors you serve, or you may decide to hire an instructor and provide those classes yourself.

Where do you begin? How do you recognize a good program or find a good teacher?

In your search for a good program or a good teacher, you should be guided by the following three principles:

- **It takes a long time to learn English** (or any other language).
- **A good program or teacher will not make promises that cannot be kept.** For example, a good program and good teachers will not claim that learners will be able to speak English fluently in three short days (or weeks or months).
- **A good program will be learner-centered.** Teachers will be concerned with what your seniors want to learn and why they want

to learn it. Should you visit one of these programs, you will hear the sound of language being used as students speak to one another rather than the sound of the teacher talking on and on while the students listen silently.

There are many good ESL programs for seniors with limited English proficiency. There are also some that are not so good. Knowing the answers to the following questions should help you evaluate which programs and teachers are likely to meet the needs of SCSEP participants and improve their English language and communication skills.

How long does it take to learn English?

The amount of time it takes an adult to learn English varies from person to person and depends on several factors:

- Age
- Educational background
- Level of literacy in the native language
- Opportunities to interact with native English speakers.

Educators believe it takes from five to seven years to go from not knowing any English at all to being able to accomplish most communication tasks, including academic ones (Collier, 1989).

Research done in 1985 concluded that it would take from 500 to 1,000 hours of instruction for an adult who is literate in her native language but has had no prior English instruction to reach a

level at which she can satisfy her basic needs, survive on the job, and have limited social interaction in English (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Social Security Administration, Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1985).

The frequency and intensity of instruction is important, too. Language learners need time to practice. Just as with many skills, if you don't use them you lose them. The more time seniors spend using the language and practicing it, the more likely they are to achieve a level of English language proficiency that meets their needs.

What programs exist for ESL students?

ESL programs vary in scope and content. Some programs, especially those for recent arrivals including refugees, emphasize survival or life skills in the curriculum and focus on improving listening and speaking abilities (oral proficiency).

Other programs stress vocational or work-related topics, citizenship and civics education, family literacy, academic, or General Educational Development (GED) preparation.

Learners who lack literacy skills in their native language and those unfamiliar with the Roman alphabet may be placed in classes that focus on developing basic literacy skills.

Classes are provided by local educational agencies, community colleges, local businesses and unions, community-based organizations, volunteer groups, churches, and for-profit language schools.

Where can I find a good ESL program?

A good place to look is online at America's Literacy Directory. To view a list of programs on the Internet, users simply enter a zip code at **www.literacydirectory.org** (check *learning English as a second language*).

The directory provides detailed information about types of services, class times, program fees, and directions to the programs in the neighborhood.

If Internet access is not available, call the National Literacy Hotline. English- and Spanish-speaking operators are available between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST) Monday through Friday. At other times, callers may leave a voicemail message.

Who is Maria Villaran?

- 1 Salvadoran immigrant
- 2 Grandmother
- 3 Spanish instructor
- 4 GED graduate, Connecticut
- ☒ All of the above

More Americans than ever are passing the GED Tests to earn what they missed years ago — a high school credential. Senior Service America helps 15,000 seniors a year get training and jobs through the Senior AIDES Program. With the GED diploma, you can prove what you know. With Senior Service America, you can make it work for you.

Senior Service America **GED**
prove yourself.
www.seniorserviceamerica.org/ged
1-800-62-MY-GED

Maria Villaran, 67, GED Class of '01

Senior Service America encourages SCSEP participants to enroll in GED classes to build important skills.

National Literacy Hotline

Toll-free number: **(800)228-8813**

TDD/TTY: **(877) 576-7734**

How will I recognize a good ESL program?

Following are some programmatic and instructional practices to help you find the quality programs that fit the needs of SCSEP immigrant participants.

Learner assessment

How programs assess learners and how they use those assessments are important indications of the quality of the program.

Assessments include tests but also include measures of performance and change in the ability of English-language learners to use the language.

Knowing a little about the purposes and types of assessments will help you evaluate a program's strengths and weaknesses. Many purposes of learner assessments exist including:

- Placing learners in appropriate instructional levels and classes;
- Measuring their progress;
- Motivating learners to progress to more advanced levels;
- Qualifying for enrollment in academic or job training programs;
- Documenting program effectiveness;
- Demonstrating learner gains in order to meet accountability requirements;

- Determining learners' goals and needs;
- Providing for learner self-assessment.

Because of these different purposes, programs use a variety of assessments. Many programs use standardized assessments that allow them to compare learners to others around the country. These assessments are given, in part, because they are required for programs receiving funding from the U.S. Department of Education or U.S. Department of Labor.

Other programs use their own in-house assessments of learner skills (sometimes in addition to standardized assessments).

Many programs try to include some form of learner self-assessment to help learners keep track of their own progress in the ways they find important. For example, some learners may feel it is more significant to track how well they are reading the newspaper's classified ads or talking to neighbors than how well they do on a test. (Please see *Assessing success* in the *References and Resources* for further information about various kinds of assessment.)

Most teachers can tell you about the assessment systems they use and why they use them. Good programs assess learners' English-language skills at initial enrollment and at regular intervals after that to measure progress.

Furthermore, good programs match assessments to the content and goals of instruction. For example, if a program concentrates primarily on helping adult ESL learners enhance their speaking and listening skills, it would be inappropriate to assess their

progress with a paper-and-pencil reading and writing test. An assessment of speaking and listening would be more likely to measure what the students are learning.

Needs assessment

Seniors come to ESL programs for diverse reasons. While individual learner assessments look at the language proficiency of learners, a needs assessment addresses why people engage in learning and what they want and need to learn.

Although immigrant seniors may say they just want to "learn English," they often have specific goals in mind. For example, immigrant seniors in SCSEP programs may need to learn specific skills to help them get and keep good jobs. Some may want to acquire enough English to become citizens. Others may want to read to their grandchildren and help them in school, or they may want to improve their social conversation with neighbors. Some seniors may want to become fluent enough in reading and writing to get a GED or go into a certificate or academic program. Good programs try to address those needs.

Good programs also look at the needs of the other stakeholders, including employers. Especially in job-related programs, immigrant elders need language skills to get and keep good jobs.

Do they need to read the want ads, or fill out a job application form, or feel comfortable in a job interview? Will they have to interact with customers? Programs that conduct needs assessments will most likely teach language skills that help immigrant seniors meet personal, social, and employment goals.

A needs assessment addresses why people engage in learning and what they want and need to learn.

Hours and intensity of instruction

Learning a language takes practice. If fewer than six hours of instruction per week are provided, there is probably too little time for practice. Similarly, a course of fewer than 60 hours total will be too short to have a major impact on a senior's general language ability, although it could improve specific work-related language and vocabulary.

Consider both the number of hours of instruction offered as well as the frequency of instruction. Classes should be given at least twice a week for optimal learning.

Combining technology and instruction

Technology cannot replace a teacher. We do not recommend that seniors take a class online or rely on a software-based, self-study program rather than enrolling in a class or face-to-face program.

However, research does show that technology can *assist* in learning a language by providing additional time and venues for students to practice both inside and outside the classroom (Center for Impact Research, 2002; Porter, 2002)

Technology in the classroom takes a variety of forms. Videos, television, audio recordings, the Internet, and computer-assisted instruction can all contribute to a well-balanced language instruction program. For example, videos or television programs could be useful in a lesson on intercultural interactions. Learners could create audio recordings of a dialogue between an employer and an employee discussing a grievance.

Technology cannot replace a teacher.

Seniors could work individually or in groups on a software program or participate in activities that use sites on the Internet.

Finding the right balance between instruction and technology can enhance a good program.

We recommend that you observe to see how a program incorporates technology. The instructor or program administrator should be able to tell you about their objectives for using technology.

Find out if they use technology to:

- Bring authenticity or variety to the language and content being taught;
- Motivate the learners by tapping into their interest in current videos, software programs, or computers in general;
- Address diverse learning styles by taking advantage of the different modalities of audio, video, and text that technology offers?

Finally, find out if the technology is used on-site or from home. Many seniors may not have access at home.

These questions will help you get a picture of how well technology and instruction are integrated.

What are some teaching methods?

There is no one best way to teach English to immigrant seniors. However, instruction is most effective when it considers learners' real needs and builds on their knowledge and

Good programs often use activities from all of these approaches.

experience. ESL teachers use a variety of methods to teach adults to speak, read, and write English. The following are some of the terms staff might use to describe their program and their approach to curriculum:

Competency-based approach

In the competency-based, ESL approach, learners are taught how to use the language in concrete situations. Competency-based curricula state language-learning objectives in terms of what the student will be able to do with language in practical situations — for example, read a want ad, follow directions in a manual, take a telephone message, or participate in a small-group discussion at work.

Competencies include both practical survival skills and more academic skills, such as:

- Providing personal information, such as the information required on a job application;
- Using public transportation;
- Obtaining food and housing;
- Using the newspaper to find a job;
- Following directions for a work-related task;
- Taking notes during an academic lecture;
- Distinguishing between fact and opinion in a newspaper article.

In this teaching approach, the curriculum builds practical language skills that learners need to achieve competency in a task.

Project-based approach

Project-based instruction is an approach that puts learning into context by presenting students with problems to solve or products to develop.

Some examples are:

- Working together to create a directory of job search-related websites;
- Putting together a flyer on adult education resources in the community;
- Interviewing local employers who have hired immigrant seniors and reporting on their findings;
- Creating a cookbook of international recipes from program participants.

Project-based learning functions as a bridge between using English in class and using English in real-life situations outside of class. It places learners in situations that require authentic use of language in order to communicate (for example, being part of a team or interviewing others).

When learners work in pairs or in teams, they find they need skills to plan, organize, negotiate, argue a point, and arrive at a consensus. They need to work together to decide what tasks to perform, who is responsible for each task, and how information will be researched and presented.

These skills are important for success in the workplace as well as at home and in the community.

Focus-on-form approach

A purely grammar-based approach is not advisable for SCSEP program participants who have an immediate need to use the language in real situations. Immigrant seniors need to be able to communicate in English, even before they have full grasp of the grammatical forms.

A focus-on-form approach uses the specific English skills they need immediately and uses this context to draw out grammatical lessons. Teachers consider learners' needs and goals and their readiness to understand the grammatical content.

Some examples of this kind of grammar instruction are:

- Asking for leave from work as a way of learning about the future tense,
- Practicing job interview questions and answers about work experience as a way of learning about the past tense,
- Learning the names of job-related equipment to learn about nouns and the articles "a" and "the."

Task-based approach

Task-based instruction promotes interactive language. Activities are structured so learners must speak with other learners while they complete a task. The survey activity in the following chapter is an example of a simple task that can only be accomplished by talking to another participant.

Research suggests that learners produce longer sentences and negotiate meaning more often in pair and group

work than in teacher-fronted instruction.

Information-gap tasks, in which two people share information to complete a task, give learners an opportunity to ask and answer questions. In one-way information-gap tasks, one learner has all the information (for example, one learner describes a picture while the other draws it).

In two-way information-gap tasks, both learners have information they must share with the other to complete the task (for example, each has a different schedule and the task is to find a time when they both are free to meet).

Good programs often use activities from all of the approaches mentioned above. What is important is that the students are talking in English to one another as well as to the teacher, that real, natural conversation is occurring, that the classroom content is related to learners' needs, and that the students are talking at least as much as the teacher.

What are key class considerations?

Several classroom-based considerations help promote the learner's success:

Class size

Optimally, no more than 20 students should be in a class; 10 or 15 learners are even better. However, given budgetary and other constraints, classes may exceed those numbers.

If the class is very large, the teacher must be especially careful to meet the

needs of all the students and to allow for plenty of time for student-to-student interaction. Assistants or student aides can sometimes mean the difference between success and failure in a large class.

Attendance

Adult learners have busy lives and multiple responsibilities. They are not captive learners as are children in the K–12 system.

It should not be surprising if some seniors have difficulty attending each session. However, if the seniors seldom make it to class, and if they do not return for another session, chances are that the program or the individual class is not meeting their needs.

Language diversity vs. homogeneity

It can be very helpful if the teacher speaks the student's native language and is familiar with the student's country and culture. It can also be helpful if students with more English ability can translate for those with less.

However, many ESL programs have heterogeneous classes; that is, they serve students from many different cultures who speak many different languages. (If the students all speak the same language, the classes are homogeneous.)

The teacher, of course, cannot be expected to speak all the native languages of students in her class. In heterogeneous classes, students have the opportunity — and the need — to speak English to one another and to the teacher to communicate. Sometimes these learners get more practice with

English than those in a homogeneous class.

Cost of classes

Some classes — often those provided by churches and other community-based groups — will be free of charge. Others, such as those offered through the public school system or community colleges, receive funding from the state but may charge a small fee or tuition in addition.

Some classes are available through One-Stop Career Centers. Classes offered through proprietary schools and private academies may be quite a bit more expensive. Programs may have waiting lists because of insufficient funding to meet the demand for ESL instruction.

Is there anything else?

Yes! Ask the seniors about the program. Do they like it? Is it serving their needs? You may also want to observe the class to see:

- If the students are comfortable yet engaged in the class;
- If the students are speaking to one another and to the teacher in English;
- If the students are working in pairs and in groups doing real tasks, such as giving directions to each other, talking about schedules, and solving problems; and
- If there is the sound of English being spoken!



Building Communication Skills

SCSEP project directors and staff engaged in helping immigrant seniors improve their language skills may find the following activities useful. Some are structured as ice breakers; others are appropriate as part of a workshop or training session.

These skill-building activities all encourage interaction among seniors while promoting English language acquisition for real and practical purposes.

An Ice-breaking Survey

- Highlights:** Conducting surveys is effective as an ice-breaking activity which also promotes communicating in English. Using the survey information is important — it gives real purpose to the exercise and can be as simple as discussing the results or charting them in a graph.
- Objectives:**
- To gather information from a diverse group of people
 - To increase proficiency and confidence in asking questions
 - To improve skill at writing the English language
- Level and context:** This activity is useful at both the beginner and more advanced levels of English language proficiency depending on the complexity and types of questions asked. The questions can be tailored to both social and work-place contexts.
- Estimated time:** Time varies according to the number of questions asked and the type of information gathered. A short survey with one or two questions takes about 30 minutes, including time to process and discuss the information.
- Materials:** A survey form (*See page 77*), flipchart, and markers
- How to:**
1. Pre-teach and practice the questions and vocabulary needed to answer the questions. For example, if the exercise involves asking about countries of origin, get all the names of the native countries recorded so the information is handy for people to copy.
 2. Hand out the surveys. Explain that participants will need to walk around the room asking everyone the questions and recording the answers.
 3. Model the procedures with one or two participant volunteers and check the comprehension of instructions. For example, ask, “What question are you asking?” or “How many people will you talk to today?”
 4. Once they begin the survey, monitor the process, and assist learners if they ask for help. *Note:* Don’t be alarmed if you see someone copying from another’s paper. The main idea is to get authentic communication going on. It is fine for people to help one another. Do watch out for one person who appears to be

doing all the work. The activity should give an opportunity for a quieter or less confident person to participate as well.

5. Discuss the information with the group. You can ask questions such as, “How many people are from Somalia?” You can have learners work in small groups to categorize information, create graphs, or write sentences summarizing the information.

Evaluation:

Collect the information sheets and assess how easy or difficult this task was for individual learners. Reviewing the individual papers allows you to assess each learner and make some individual corrections or suggestions.

Appreciation for their communicative effort by writing “good work” or “thanks” on their papers helps encourage future participation.

Extension activities:

This survey can be adapted to use with groups that include both native-English speakers and immigrant seniors. Questions, such as, “Where did your family come from originally?” help immigrant and native-born seniors get to know one another.

Survey 1: Beginning Level

Directions: Please ask the question of every person in your group. Write down the names.

Your name _____

Date _____

Name	Country of origin
Jong-Li	Korea

Survey 2: Intermediate Level

Note: This variation of the survey exercise requires participants to talk to each other until they find someone who answers “yes” to a question. Then they list that person’s name on the survey form. Check to see that learners are able to form questions that will give them the answers they need. You can easily adapt this form to use questions that are relevant to your program and participants.

Directions: Talk to people in the group. Ask questions to find who fits in each category. Write down their names.

Find someone who ...	
Activity	Name
... can speak another language in addition to English	
... has grandchildren	
... likes to play or watch soccer	
... listens to jazz music	
... uses a computer	
... drinks coffee every morning	
... doesn't like talking about politics	

Conversation Grid

Highlights:

A conversation grid activity fosters independent and cooperative conversation that approximates authentic conversation — without the facilitator being directly involved. Any topic can be used. This activity can help the facilitator assess the language levels of participants through observation.

Objectives:

- To practice and increase knowledge of language structures for questioning
- To use questioning to obtain information in English
- To acquire new vocabulary
- To practice interactive conversation
- To help facilitators assess learners' oral and written competency, including questions and vocabulary

Level and context: This activity is appropriate for all levels of participant proficiency. It will also work for multilevel groups. The content of the questions varies.

Estimated time: 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the complexity of the questions

Materials:

- Picture of a grid on a chalkboard, overhead, or flipchart
- Copies of the grid for each learner. (*See examples following this exercise.*)
- Pens or pencils

How to:

1. Draw a large grid on the board, overhead, or flipchart. Hand out copies of conversation grids to learners. Explain that they will interview one another and record the answers to the questions on the grid.
2. Review language structures and key vocabulary that are needed for the activity. Have learners practice saying the words they will need and writing them down. Use learner input whenever possible. For example, if one of the questions is going to be about native countries, use learner input to write all the country names on the board or flipchart, so that the

words will be accessible when learners begin to work on their own grids.

3. Discuss conversation questions to make sure each learner understands them. Discuss possible answers and how to record them. Model the task with one or two volunteers. Model correct answers or state them as if you are asking for verifications, as in, “Did you say, ‘Her name is Lila Martinez?’” This method is more effective and polite than stopping everyone and correcting an individual.
4. Check comprehension of instructions. For example, ask, “How many questions are you asking each other?” and “How many people will you talk to today?”
5. Once the group begins the activity, monitor its progress, and be ready to assist learners if they ask for help. *Note:* Some will finish only one conversation while others may do several. That’s okay; people process, learn, and interact at different rates.
6. Stop the activity when you determine that the general buzz has quieted down. Discuss the information the seniors found out. Ask participants to tell the group something they learned.
7. Tabulate the results of the exercise on a master grid or have seniors work in small groups to do a tabulation of their own grid information.

Evaluation: Evaluation is ongoing throughout the activity. You can participate or just observe the conversations to note communicative abilities (as well as observe writing abilities from the grids).

Extension activities: Learners could develop their own questions. They could expand the conversation to other groups (such as seniors who are native speakers of English). They could also expand the use of this activity to the workplace, a restaurant, or a church.

Conversation Grid 1: Personal Information (complete questions and answers)

What's your first name? (Spell it, please.)	Where are you from?	How long have you lived in the United States?	What languages do you speak?
Jong-Li	She is from Korea.	She has lived here for 18 years.	She speaks Korean.

Conversation Grid 2: On the Job

Note: The number of rows on a grid can vary depending on how many interviews you want learners to do.

What's your family name? (Spell it, please.)	What was your job in your country?	What was your last job in the U.S.?	What kind of job are you looking for?
Lee	A mechanic	A store clerk	A clerical job

Vocabulary Circle — Job-related

Highlights: This activity gives immigrant seniors a chance to learn and practice job-related vocabulary while talking with other program participants.

Objectives:

- To learn and practice new job-related vocabulary
- To practice dialogues and communicative interaction between seniors

Level: All or mixed levels

Estimated time: 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the number of people involved

Materials:

- Index cards with a picture of a work-related item or process on one side and its name on the other. For example, if seniors are preparing for janitorial work, the index cards could have pictures of mops, pails, cleaning supplies, etc., on one side and the words for these items on the other. If seniors are preparing for bilingual clerical work, the cards could have pictures of telephones, fax machines, computers, etc.
- Alternately, items can be used instead of cards. For example if the seniors are preparing to go into clerical jobs, various items they need to use could substitute for the index cards.

How to:

1. Review questions that learners will ask one another, such as, "What is it?" "What do you do with it?" "How do you use it?"
2. Review the names of the items you will ask about.
3. Form two concentric circles with even numbers of participants.
4. Have the people in the inner circle hold up the index cards with the picture of the item facing their partner. They ask the participants in the outer circle, "What is it?"
5. The participants in the outer circle answer, "It is a ____." If the participant does not know the name, the person holding the card tells him or her the name of the item in English and then repeats the question.

6. If the group has more advanced language skills, the inner circle group can ask the more advanced questions, such as, "What do you do with it?" "How do you use it?" etc.
7. After all outer participants have gone around the circle once, the two groups switch places and repeat the exercise so that each participant has a chance to both ask and answer questions.

Evaluation:

The facilitator should observe how learners are conversing to see if any of the participants are having difficulty with the task. Discuss the activity when completed to see if some words or concepts were difficult for the group. Review those words or concepts.

Extension activities:

This type of exercise can be repeated with many subjects. For example, a health and safety vocabulary circle could show pictures of job-related injuries and the questions could be, "What happened?" "What hurts?" "What did the worker do?" "What should the worker do?"

Role Plays — Ask and Answer

Highlights: Immigrant seniors need to learn ways of asking questions on the job. This exercise gives them practice using different forms of questioning.

Objectives:

- To learn ways of asking questions
- To practice dialogues that will be useful on the job and in the community

Level and context: This activity can be used at beginner and intermediate levels.

Estimated time: The time depends on the number of learners in the group. A group of 10 should be able to practice dialogues in about 30 minutes.

Materials:

A handout of questions that could include the following:

- What is it?
- Could you repeat that?
- What do you call that?
- What would you like me to do?
- You do what with what?
- Could you show me how to do it?

A handout of phrases asking immigrant seniors to perform a job-related task. These phrases could include the following, depending on the type of work you are helping seniors prepare for:

- Please copy this memo.
- Please clean the counter.
- Please bring this report to your supervisor.
- Please fax this letter.
- Please empty the trash.
- Please file these papers.

If possible, include props; they make the activity more enjoyable

How to:

1. Pair learners. One learner plays the supervisor; the other plays the worker.
2. The supervisor asks the worker to do a job-related task. The person playing the worker selects an appropriate clarifying question. The person acting as the supervisor either repeats the request or, if they like, they can try to find another way of explaining the request. They can also demonstrate or show the questioner what to do.
3. Reverse roles with another question.

Evaluation:

Go over the exercise with the group and discuss what was easy or difficult about it, what worked, and what didn't work. Observe if participants had difficulty either asking the questions or answering them. Review the questions and answers again with the group to reinforce the group's understanding.

Extension activities:

This exercise can be repeated with other types of job-related dialogues, including job interview questions.

Using Classified Ads

Highlights:

Finding job advertisements in a newspaper requires knowing specialized vocabulary and abbreviations. This activity uses teams to find information and fosters using the English language while gaining job-search skills.

Objectives:

- To help immigrant seniors learn how to use help wanted ads to find jobs
- To improve seniors' knowledge of job search-related vocabulary and abbreviations
- To practice using English to find and share information

Level:

Multiple levels

Estimated time:

Approximately 30 minutes

Materials:

- Newspaper classified ads for jobs
- A handout with job search-related vocabulary and abbreviations
- Pen and paper for participants to write down jobs of interest

How to:

1. Review job search-related vocabulary and abbreviations with the group. Distribute a handout with key terms written on it.
2. Divide seniors into pairs or small groups.
3. Give each group a selection of classified ads for jobs that includes jobs they might be interested in applying for.
4. Assign each group to select at least three jobs they would be interested in applying for. They must agree on the jobs they select and can only talk in English to do so.
5. Each group is to report back to the larger group on their selection, why they made the selection, and what the requirements are for the jobs.

6. After each group has presented their choices, give participants a chance to walk around the room and get information about jobs they may want to apply for.

Evaluation:

As seniors make their group selections, see if they need assistance. After the reports, discuss the activity with the group to find out what difficulties they may have had or if there were specific words and job descriptions they had trouble understanding.

Extension activities:

With beginners, you may want to give each group only one ad and have them discuss and present the meaning of that ad.



References and Resources

This reference section is divided into two main sections. The bibliographic references are listed first. The additional resources are divided into five sections:

- Working with seniors
- Work-place issues
- Cultural issues
- Teaching immigrant seniors
- Assessing success.

Resources include journal articles, digests, websites, and books. Many of the documents cited are available online.

The resources have been annotated to enable readers to see — in a general way — what kinds of materials are available and whether a particular resource may be useful.

References

Burt, M. (2003). *Issues in improving immigrant workers' English skills*. CAELA Brief. Washington, D.C.: National Center for ESL Literacy Education.

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/Workplaceissues.html

This article describes how English literacy and fluency seem to have a positive influence on economic self-sufficiency and identifies five issues that need to be addressed in work-place education. These issues are:

- The length of time it takes to learn English
- Language use in the workplace and elsewhere
- Language and identity

- The relationship between training and worker performance
- Measuring outcomes.

Camarota, Steven A. (2002) *Immigrants in the United States – 2002/ A Snapshot of America's Foreign-Born Population*. Center for Immigration Studies, Washington, D.C.:

<http://www.cis.org/topics/history.html>

This report provides excellent history and contextual background to immigration patterns in the United States.

Center for Impact Research. (2002). *What's new? Reaching working adults with English for speakers of other languages instruction (ESOL): A best practices report*. Chicago. Retrieved July 25, 2003, from

<http://www.impactresearch.org/documents/esolwhatnew.pdf>

This report discusses ways of providing English language instruction for working adults. It focuses on the use of distance learning models.

Collier, V.P. (1989). How long? A synthesis of research on academic achievement in a second language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23(3), 509-31.

This seminal report discusses research on the length of time needed for children learning English to move from no proficiency to being able to accomplish most communication tasks including academic work. The report is useful to those working with adults, since there are no comparable studies of adults learning English, and there is some transferability to the situation of adults learning English.

Coverdell, P. (n. d.). *Building bridges: A Peace Corps classroom guide to cross-cultural understanding*. Washington, D.C.: World Wide Schools.

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/bridges/>

Although this resource is designed for secondary teachers and their students, the information and activities related to defining culture, cultural differences and similarities, and identifying and addressing cross-cultural misunderstanding apply to a variety of situations, including training for service providers, employers, or employees.

Garnett, C. (2000 June). Don't accept the blues: Depression in the elderly is treatable. *The NIH Word on Health*. Available from

<http://www.nih.gov/news/WordonHealth/jun2000/story01.htm>

This article stresses the need to be proactive when observing signs of depression in the elderly. Family members and those working with the elderly should recognize that depression is not a normal part of aging and thus should seek the information and resources needed to treat the depression promptly.

Grieco, Elizabeth. (2002) *Characteristics of the Foreign Born in the United States: Results from Census 2000*.

Migration Policy Institute, Washington, D.C.

<http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/print.cfm?ID=71>

This report discusses patterns of internal migration among foreign-born newcomers to the United States.

Grognet, A. (1998). *Elderly refugees and language learning*. Denver, Co: Spring Institute for International Studies.

<http://www.spring-institute.org/Documents/Docs/6.pdf>

This brief acknowledges that no research suggests that elderly refugees (and others) cannot be successful at learning a new language. However, several factors that may affect language acquisition are explored (e.g., mental health, social identity, cultural expectations, and attitudes and motivation). It suggests four strategies to help elders learn English:

- Eliminating emotional barriers,
- Incorporating adult learning theory into teaching
- Making the learning situation and materials relevant to the needs and desires of older refugees
- Tapping into the goals of the refugee community

He, Wan and Schacter, Jason P. (2003) *Internal Migration of the Older Population: 1995 to 2000*. Census 2000 Special Reports. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.

<http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/censr-10.pdf>

Using Census 2000 data, this report discusses the internal migration of the older population.

Larsen, Luke J. (2004) *The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2003*. Current Population Reports, P20-551, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.

www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/p20-551.pdf

This report provides demographic and socioeconomic information

about the foreign-born population in the United States .

MacNeil, R., & Cran, W. (2005). *Do you speak American? USA*: Doubleday.

A companion to the PBS series of the same name, this book chronicles a journey across the United States in search of linguistic variety and idiosyncrasy. It provides insight into cultural differences that exist within one country.

Malone, Nolan *et al.* (2003) *The Foreign-Born Population: 2000*. Census 2000 Brief, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.

<http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-34.pdf>

This Census 2000 Brief describes information about geographic settlement patterns among the foreign-born population in the United States, including data about countries of origin.

Maloof, P.S., & Ross-Shariff, F. (2003). *Muslim refugees in the United States: A guide for service providers*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.

<http://www.culturalorientation.net>;
<http://www.cal.org>

This book provides information not only about the special needs of Muslim refugees but also stresses the diversity of this population. While their religion provides some common challenges to resettlement in the United States, their different countries of origin demands sensitivity to their cultural differences as well. The book also offers many resources and support organizations for Muslim refugees that will be helpful to service providers.

- Shin, Hyon B. and Bruno, Rosalind. (2003) *Language Use and English-Speaking Ability: 2000*. Census 2000 Brief, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.
<http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-29.pdf>
This brief presents data and analysis about the ability to speak English, and languages spoken in the home.
- Smith, J.P., & Edmonston, B., Eds. (1997). *The new Americans: Economic, demographic, and fiscal effects of immigration*. Panel on the Demographic and Economic Impacts on Immigration & National Research Council; Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
<http://www.nap.edu/catalog/5779.html>
This book gives evidence of the positive effect immigrants have on the overall economy of the United States.
- Porter, D. (2002). *The California adult education 2000-2002 innovation and alternative instructional delivery program: A review*. Dominguez Hills: California State University School of Education, California Distance Learning Project. Retrieved June 18, 2003, from
<http://www.cdiponline.org/pdf/innovationPrograms00-02.pdf>
This report chronicles the use of technology to provide instruction in California to adult English language learners. It concludes that, although there are problems, distance learning has the potential to be efficient, effective, and equitable.
- Ullman, C. (1997). *Social identity and the adult ESL classroom*. CAL Digest. Washington, D.C.: National Center for ESL Literacy Education.
http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/socident.html
This digest explores how theories of social identity (the way in which people understand themselves in relation to others in the present, past, and future) and language learning have developed. It discusses ways in which teachers might support adult English language learners in the process of self re-creation—with the ultimate goal of making language learning more effective.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2003). *The Foreign-Born Population: 2000*. Washington, D.C.
<http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-34.pdf>
This profile includes current data, such as age and sex, educational attainment, occupation, and poverty status of the foreign-born population in the United States.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2003) *Household Language by Linguistic Isolation*. 2003 American Community Survey Summary Tables. American FactFinder P036.
<http://factfinder.census.gov>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Social Security Administration, Office of Refugee Resettlement. (1985). *Competency-based mainstream English language training resource package*. Washington, D.C.
Although not a product of experimental research, this seminal publication looks at studies done for the Mainstream English

Language Training (MELT) project. In response to the needs of programs serving the Southeast Asian refugee population, MELT explored the number of instructional hours it would take for an adult who is literate in her native language but has had no prior English instruction to reach a level where she can satisfy her basic needs, survive on the job, and have limited social interaction in English.

Resources

Working with Seniors

Brown, H., Prisuta, R., Jacobs, B., & Campbell, A. (November, 1996). *Literacy of older adults in America: Results from the National Adult Literacy Survey*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.

<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=97576>

Although this document does not deal in-depth or specifically with literacy and immigrant elders, it is useful in setting the stage for understanding the concept of literacy and its particular connections with native and non-native elders in the United States.

Coalition of Limited English Speaking Elderly (CLESE)

<http://www.clese.org/>

CLESE is a nonprofit coalition of more than 40 Chicago-area agencies that work with immigrant groups and seniors. With various funding (including a major English Literacy/Civics grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, CLESE has developed many resources

that may be useful to those working with immigrant seniors. Several downloadable resources are described and available at

http://www.clese.org/products_papers.htm

including *Bright Ideas: Tips for teaching ESL to the elderly* and *10 steps to success in the Bright Ideas classroom*.

Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging, 26(3)(Fall 2002). "Recognizing diversity in aging, moving toward cultural competence." Information about this journal is available at

<http://www.asaging.org/index.cfm>

The articles in the issue deal with a variety of topics related to seniors and diversity. Topics include technology, health, cultural competence, and cultural awareness.

Hartman, C. (1999). "Memories of Chinese Festivals" in *Learners' lives as curriculum*. Weinstein, G., ed. (p. 12-21) Washington, D.C. and McHenry, Ill.: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.

This chapter describes an example of how elders can work toward empowering their lives and expanding their English at the same time they remember their childhoods and shared culture.

Stein, D., & Rocco, T.S. (2001) *The older worker*. Myths and Realities No. 18. Columbus, Ohio: Eric Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education.

<http://www.cete.org/acve/docgen.asp?tbl=mr&ID=108>

This brief document discusses perceptions and realities about older workers.

Weinstein-Shr, G. (1993). *Growing old in America: Learning English literacy in the later years*. CAL Digest. Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education.

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/grow.html

This digest argues that it is both feasible and appropriate to provide language and literacy instruction for older immigrants and refugees and discusses the needs and resources of these older learners. It discusses factors that influence language and literacy acquisition and highlights promising programs and practices for serving older adults.

Wiley, T. G. (1997). *Myths about language diversity and literacy in the United States*. CAL Digest. Washington, D.C.: National Center for ESL Literacy Education.

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/myths.html

This digest examines myths or misconceptions about language diversity, including the ideas that English literacy is the only literacy worth noting and English illiteracy is high because language minorities are not as eager to learn English and assimilate compared to prior generations.

Work-place Issues

Gillespie, M. (1996). *Learning to work in a new land: A review and sourcebook for vocational and workplace ESL*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics and Project in Adult Immigrant Education.

This report provides a detailed overview of vocational and work-

place ESL instruction in the United States. It reviews existing research and practice, presents program models, details funding strategies, and explains how to set up a workplace ESL program. It also includes examples of classroom activities and tools to use in needs assessment, learner assessment, and program evaluation.

Marshall, B. (2002). *Preparing for success: A guide for teaching adult English language learners*. Washington, D.C., & McHenry, Ill.: The Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.

Legislation including welfare reform initiatives and the Workforce Investment Act underscore the demands placed on the educational system by the employment market. This book gives advice to instructors working with adult English language learners on how to respond to these demands and integrate employment participation skills into instruction. It includes classroom activities and instructional resources that help to ensure that students will have the language skills necessary to thrive in the workplace.

Cultural Issues

Capps, R., Fix, M. E., & Passel, J. S. (2002, November 26). *The dispersal of immigrants in the 1990s*. Immigrant Families and Workers: Facts and Perspectives Series, Brief No.2. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410589>

This article describes central issues, trends, and policy implications of

current immigration patterns in the United States. Clearly written text and statistics as well as the bibliography make this a useful article for those beginning to think about immigrant issues.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada.
Cultural profiles project.

<http://www.settlement.org/cp/english/index.html>

Although this website is focused on immigrant groups in Canada, the cultural information it provides is clear and easily accessible. It includes information about the history, education, and holidays of more than 100 countries. An annotated resource list also is available for each country.

Cultural Orientation Resource Center
<http://www.culturalorientation.net>

This extensive website, established to link overseas cultural orientation with domestic resettlement programs, offers a great deal of background and up-to-date information about refugees and their concerns. The website includes culture profiles fact sheets which give pertinent country and cultural background about such groups as the Sudanese, Iraqi Kurds, Somalis, Haitians, and Cubans as well as questions frequently asked by refugees. New resources include profiles of the Somali Bantu and Muslim refugees. A *Best Practices* section of the website includes several employment-related activities, such as helping refugees understand U.S. work-place values and recognizing skills and barriers to employment.

McKinney, J., & Kurtz-Rossi, S. (2000). *Culture, health, and literacy: A guide to health education materials for adults with limited English literacy skills*. Boston, Mass.: World Education. (ED465311)

<http://www.worlded.org/us/health/docs/culture/>

This guide identifies and annotates a variety of resources that teachers and programs can use to assist adult English language learners access health information and appropriate healthcare. The guide discusses seven kinds of resources:

1. Background information that informs education and healthcare workers about the culture complexities of immigrants;
2. Fact books, readers, and stories
3. Bibliographies and resource guides
4. Curricula and workbooks
5. Videos and audiocassettes;
6. Web sites
7. Pertinent organizations and agencies.

Teaching Immigrant Seniors

America's Literacy Directory is available at **<http://www.literacydirectory.org>** or by calling 1-800-228-8813 (tdd/TTY1-877-576-7734).

Users enter a zip code along with the kind of instruction needed. The directory then provides detailed information about types of services, class times, program fees, and directions to local educational programs.

Arlington Education and Employment Program. (1994). *The REEP Curriculum: A Learner-Centered ESL*

Curriculum for Adults (Third Edition).

This comprehensive curriculum includes helpful information any ESL teacher could use—from a novice teacher to a veteran of many years. The curriculum includes units on learner needs assessment, learner evaluation, and instructional units from pre-literate with no English ability through high advanced levels. It also contains a transitional self-study unit to prepare learners for college level ESL. The appendices contain information on cross-cultural issues; using computers with language instruction; sample lessons, activities, and assessments; and a bibliography of resources. If you could have just one document to help you plan and deliver ESL instruction, this would be the one. The newest version of the *REEP Curriculum* is available online at http://www.arlington.k12.va.us/instruct/ctae/adult_ed/REEP/reep_curriculum

Bell, J. (2004). *Teaching multilevel classes in ESL*. 2nd edition Ontario, Canada: Pippin Publishing Corp.
<http://www.pippinpub.com>

The author describes a variety of features that make a class multilevel, including differences in language proficiency, education experience, and situational factors. The author also reviews the challenges of planning curriculum and teaching multilevel classes while offering strategies for classroom management and practical activities.

Bell, J., & Burnaby, B. (1984). *A handbook for ESL literacy*. This book was written for both novice and experienced instructors

who are teaching initial reading and writing skills to adult English language learners. It provides background information about literacy theory and offers practical suggestions for lesson planning. It is a classic adult ESL education guide.

Brod, S. (1999). *What non-readers or beginning readers need to know: Performance-based ESL adult literacy*. Denver, Colo.: Spring Institute for International Studies.

This small book provides practical information and activities for what adult ESL learners need to know to be successful in their new lives. The book also includes guiding principles for working with seniors.

Center for Adult English Language Acquisition. (2003). *FAQ 18: What do beginning adult ESL teachers, tutors, and volunteers need to know?*
http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/faqs.html#eighteen

This article acquaints those new to the field of adult ESL with four topics they need to understand to be effective teachers:

- Principles of adult learning
- Second language acquisition
- Issues related to culture
- Instructional approaches that support language development in adults.
- The article has online links to many other resources.

Center for Adult English Language Acquisition. (2003). *OECD Review of Adult ESL Education in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.

This background report, which was prepared for the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, describes adult ESL education in the United States as well as current practice and trends in the field. This paper also includes a glossary of terms and appendix detailing language assessments typically used with adult English language learners.

Florez, M., & Burt, M. (2001) *Beginning to work with adult English language learners: Some considerations*. CAL Q & A. Washington, D.C.: National Center for ESL Literacy Education.
http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/beginQA.html

This Q&A discusses pertinent information for teachers beginning to work with adult English language learners:

- Understanding and application of principles of adult learning in ESL contexts
- Second language acquisition
- Culture and working with multicultural groups
- Appropriate instructional approaches.

Florez, M., & Terrill, L. (2003) *Working with literacy-level adult English language learners*. ERIC Q & A. Washington, D.C.: National Center for ESL Literacy Education.
http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/litQA.html

This Q&A describes who literacy-level learners are, examines what skills literacy-level learners need to develop, and discusses the appropriate scope of literacy-level

classes as well as activities and techniques to support them.

Holt, G. M. (1995). *Teaching low-level adult ESL learners*. CAL Digest. Washington, D.C.: National Center for ESL Literacy Education.
http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/HOLT.html

This digest explains how to identify and assess the instructional needs of adults learning to become literate in a second language. It also discusses techniques that facilitate instruction and describes appropriate classroom materials.

McGroarty, M. (1993). *Cross-Cultural issues in adult ESL classrooms*. CAL Digest. Washington, DC.. National Center for ESL Literacy Education.
http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/cross_cultural.html

This digest identifies some of the cultural factors that can influence learner and teacher behavior during classroom ESL literacy instruction.

McKay, H., & Tom, A. (1999). *Teaching adult second language learners*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

The authors focus specifically on adults learning English. It provides a summary of the principles of teaching adults and a variety of activities organized by life- skill topics.

Shank, C., & Terrill, L. (1995). *Teaching Multilevel adult ESL classes*, CAL Digest. Washington, D.C.: National Center for ESL Literacy Education
http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/SHANK.html

This digest explains the rationale for using multiple grouping strategies in adult ESL classes and explains typical grouping strategies and effective instructional techniques.

Silliman, A., & Tom, A. (2000). *Practical resources for adult ESL: A selection guide to materials for adult ESL and ESL/ESOL literacy*. Burlingame, Calif.: ALTA Book Center Publishers.

This book gives specific advice about resources available for teachers of adult English language learners. The choices include teacher materials, class texts, and multimedia resources.

Tom, A. (2002, May-June). Dear Abbie: Working with ESL seniors. *Hands-on English* 12(1), 12.

This article gives tips on working successfully with older learners.

Assessing Success

Center for Adult English Language Acquisition. (2002). *Assessment with adult English language learners*. CAELA Fact Sheet. Washington, D.C.

This article explains trends and issues related to assessment of adult English language learners and offers best practices related to both standardized and performance-based assessment.

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/collections/factsheets.html#assess

Center for Adult English Language Acquisition. (2001). *CAELA resource*

collections: Assessment and evaluation in adult ESL. Washington, D.C.

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/collections/assessment.html

This resource collection provides materials about testing issues, standardized tests currently in use by adult education programs, and standards initiatives. Although most of the resources focus on assessment and evaluation in the United States, relevant documents from Canada, Australia, and Europe are also included.

Holt, D., & Van Duzer, C. (2000). *Assessing success in family literacy and adult ESL*. McHenry, Ill. & Washington, D.C.: Delta System & Center for Applied Linguistics. This book provides guidance on developing an effective evaluation plan for adult English language programs—whether in the context of family literacy, work-place and workforce literacy, or general language development. With an emphasis on surveys, interviews, observation measures, and performance samples, the authors show how staff members and learners can gain accurate information about how well they are meeting their goals. The book provides many sample assessment tools and examples of strategies for summarizing and analyzing assessment data that can be customized.

Van Duzer, C., & Berdan, R. (1999). Perspectives on assessment in adult ESOL instruction. In J. Comings, B. Garner, & C. Smith (Eds.), *The annual review of adult learning and literacy* (pp. 200-242). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/ann_rev/chap6.rev.htm

Weddel, K.S., & Van Duzer, C. (1997). *Needs assessment for adult ESL learners*. CAL Digest. Washington, D.C.: National Center for ESL Literacy Education.

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/needas.html

This digest defines needs assessment, explains why needs assessment is important, describes appropriate tools, and gives examples of needs assessment in an adult ESL program.

Standardized assessments used in programs funded by the U.S. Department of Education

BEST (Basic English Skills Test) (Literacy skills section)

Center for Applied Linguistics
4646 40th Street NW
Washington, DC 20016-1859
202-362-0700
<http://www.cal.org/BEST/>

BEST Plus (Oral English Proficiency Test)

Contact Information:

BEST Plus

c/o Center for Applied Linguistics
4646 40th Street NW
Washington, DC 20016-1859

Toll free: 1-866-845-BEST (2378)

Fax: 1-888-700-3629

Email: best-plus@cal.org

User support hours: Monday — Friday
9am-7pm
Eastern Time

Web site: www.best-plus.net

Center for Applied Linguistics: www.cal.org

CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System)

5151 Murphy Canyon Rd.
Suite 220
San Diego, CA 92123-4339
858-292-2900 or 1-800-255-1036
<http://www.casas.org>



Our Partners

Senior Service America (SSAI) is a nonprofit organization that provides community service and employment opportunities for low-income older adults who wish to re-enter the workforce. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor since 1968, Senior Service America administers SCSEP grants to more than 100 nonprofit agencies in 23 states and the District of Columbia to help qualifying adults learn job skills while working at nonprofit and government organizations. This dual focus — contributing meaningful service to the local community while developing marketable job skills — is a cornerstone of Senior Service America.

<http://www.seniorserviceamerica.org>

Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) is a private nonprofit organization working to improve communication through better understanding of language and culture. Established in 1959, CAL has earned an international reputation for its contributions to the fields of bilingual education, English as a second language, foreign language education, dialect studies, literacy education, language policy, refugee orientation, and the education of linguistically and culturally diverse adults and children. CAL's staff of researchers and educators conduct research, design and develop instructional materials and language tests, provide technical assistance and professional development, conduct needs assessments and program evaluations, and

disseminate information and resources related to language and culture. <http://www.cal.org>.

Asociacion Nacional Pro Personas Mayores (National Association for Hispanic Elderly), founded in 1975, is the nation's oldest organization for Hispanic elderly. It is a private nonprofit corporation with both public and private funding. The association works with the nation's diverse Hispanic communities and focuses on employment, housing, and health. The association administers a SCSEP program in four states. <http://www.anppm.org>

National Caucus and Center on Black Aged (NCBA) is the only national organization aimed at improving the quality of life for African-American and minority elderly. Founded in 1970 by the late Hobart C. Jackson of Philadelphia, NCBA has worked to eliminate obstacles to fairness and equal access for low-income black and minority seniors. NCBA's focus is on housing, employment, and health. NCBA administers a SCSEP program in eight states and the District of Columbia. <http://www.ncba-aged.org>

National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA), a nonprofit organization, was established in 1979 to advocate on behalf of Asian-Pacific Islanders in their senior years. NAPCA serves thousands of API seniors who represent the fastest growing segment of the aging population and who face unique challenges, including cultural and language barriers and access to services and employment opportunities. NAPCA brings critical issues affecting the API aging community to the forefront of national debates and provides much needed access and information in an effort to improve their quality of life. NAPCA administers a SCSEP program in eight states and the District of Columbia. <http://www.napca.org>

National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) was founded in 1976 by members of the National Tribal Chairmen's Association to advocate for improved, comprehensive services to American Indian and Alaska Native Elders. A nonprofit organization, it is considered the nation's foremost advocate for American Indians and Alaska Native Elders. NICOA administers a Senior Community Service Employment Program in 15 states. <http://www.nicoa.org>



"(This book) is more than a guide. It is a reminder that if language and culture can be barriers, they can also become bridges to understanding the diversity of older minorities and how to better serve them. Indeed, our elderly are our best heritage."

— **Dr. Carmela G. Lacayo, president and CEO**
Asociacion Nacional Pro Personas Mayores
(National Association for Hispanic Elderly)



"It is difficult to encompass the challenges in serving elderly immigrants and refugees, including the limited English proficient; however, this guide is an important step in addressing some of the gaps that service providers may face."

— **Clayton S. Fong, executive director**
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging



"It is critical that we remember there is a growing vulnerable senior population I commend SSAI for taking the lead to bring together national aging organizations to address this growing problem."

— **Karyne D. Jones, president and CEO**
National Caucus and Center on Black Aged



"We appreciate the work that Senior Service America has done nationally to help improve services to immigrant seniors and to assist those of us who provide services to do so with sensitivity to language and culture."

— **James T. DeLaCruz Sr., chairman**
National Indian Council on Aging