



## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2020.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

**County:** County of Henrico

**Program Title:** Multilingual Storytimes

**Program Category:** Customer Service

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

**Name:** Brandon Hinton

**Title:** Deputy County Manager for Administration

**Signature:** 

## **Program Overview**

Librarians at Henrico County Public Library (HCPL) leveraged personal experience, professional expertise, and a commitment to inclusive services to create storytimes for English Language Learners that meet community needs and can be conducted by staff with or without special language skills. Using rhymes and songs from his childhood, and building upon his existing knowledge through research of Pura Belpré and José-Luis Orozco, one HCPL librarian began hosting a Spanish-English bilingual storytime, *Cuentos Bilingües*, in 2017. Inspired by the success of *Cuentos Bilingües*, a librarian at HCPL's Tuckahoe Library created a multilingual storytime, *Hello!*, for English Language Learning families who speak a variety of languages, though she herself is only fluent in English. Languages represented in Henrico County Public Library storytimes now reflect the diversity of the County's residents, and multilingual storytimes have proven popular, with strong attendance and positive feedback.

## **Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality**

Henrico County has seen an influx of new residents in the past twenty years, a large portion of which are immigrants to the United States from countries in Central and South America, the Middle East, Southern and Southeast Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. Support for English Language Learners in the public schools are offered to students who speak over 100 languages. At the Libbie Mill Library, which serves a diverse community that is urban in density, many library users are native Spanish speakers from Central and South America. A Latinx children's librarian at Libbie Mill took notice of the need for early literacy support for bilingual and Spanish-speaking children and families. The librarian puts it best: "A lot of our Spanish speaking families were always curious about our storytimes. It's just hard when it's not in your own language!" He designed *Cuentos Bilingües*, a Spanish-English storytime, in order to provide early literacy support for Latinx families.

Inspired by Cuentos Bilingües at Libbie Mill and the needs of her own diverse community, a Librarian at the Tuckahoe Library worked to create early literacy support for English Language Learning families in Western Henrico County. Tuckahoe library serves a high density suburban community and has the largest numbers of refugee and immigrant patrons of any library branch within Henrico County. Patrons from a wide range of countries including Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Columbia, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, and Venezuela frequent the Tuckahoe Library. Library staff observed that though children were being exposed to English language learning at their preschool or elementary school and out in the community, there was a need for reinforcement as they learned to navigate the multiple languages spoken inside and outside of their homes. In addition, many of the parents and caregivers of these children wanted and needed additional practice with their own conversational English skills. An additional challenge stemmed from the fact that few staff members at Tuckahoe Library speak languages other than English. The resulting multilingual storytime at Tuckahoe Library, called Hello! Storytime,, draws a diverse group of English Language Learners from a variety of backgrounds, and was designed to be conducted by native English speaking staff with no need for special language skills.

Public libraries strive to provide accessible learning resources and doing so in increasingly diverse and multilingual communities can be a challenge. Multilingual storytimes at Henrico County Public Library help meet the need for early literacy support, an essential facet of public library service, to an increasingly diverse community.

### **How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria**

Public Libraries consider access to information and connecting the community with resources to support reading and learning as foundational to their work. In growing and diversifying communities, libraries can struggle to provide early literacy programming to their multilingual

communities despite a strong desire to provide inclusive services. Librarians at HCPL approached this problem in two different ways, but each approach shared a dedication to serving the community. One librarian drew upon personal experience and cultural knowledge to serve the Latinx community that frequented his library location and ended up serving speakers of many languages in a bilingual Spanish-English storytime that also explores other cultures. Another librarian, who lacked in-depth knowledge of languages other than English but served a community home to dozens of languages, developed a storytime to teach English language rhymes to children and families from a wide variety of backgrounds. Cuentos Bilingües at Libbie Mill shows that engaging a multilingual community can be achieved when librarians are able to express and draw from their cultural identities. Hello! Storytime at Tuckahoe shows that the librarian's engagement in their community, resulting in a firm understanding of community needs, can lead to successful multilingual early literacy programming.

At least one of these approaches could be employed by any public library system across the state. The success of both programs in repurposing existing library materials—storytime supplies and dedicated staff—can result in new and increased library usage among diverse populations. In addition, the programs promote not only language learning, but a cultural exchange between participants. Perhaps most importantly, the library has demonstrated that its doors are open to County residents who are English Language Learners, and that it is truly a space for access to resources to support reading and learning, regardless of cultural background.

### **How Program Was Carried Out**

In 2017, a Librarian at Libbie Mill Library noticed an increasing number of Spanish-speaking families were curious about storytimes at the library. However, the storytimes were entirely in English, adding an obstacle to accessing early literacy activities for these families. Working with

the Henrico County Public Library's Youth Services Coordinator, the librarian planned for a new storytime called Cuentos Bilingües in the latter half of 2017. The storytime debuted in January 2018. Initially, he drew materials from his own upbringing. His mother is a musician, and his childhood was full of songs and rhymes that he adapted for Cuentos Bilingües. The librarian plays both keyboard and guitar, and uses music, rhymes, and reading aloud to bring literacy to life. As he continued the program and needed fresh material, he researched Latinx librarian Pura Belpré, and bilingual children's author José-Luis Orozco. Orozco's work led the librarian to collect rhymes from other cultures and incorporate them into the storytime as well.

The librarian promoted Cuentos Bilingües to regular patrons as well as attendees to the library's ESL (English as a Second Language) Conversation Cafes. His goal was to make native Spanish speakers feel welcome in the library, but also to teach non-Spanish speakers how to converse in Spanish and learn about new cultures. Cuentos Bilingües has had as many as twenty-five participants at a time, with a core group of approximately 15 regular attendees. It is held weekly, on Tuesday evenings, at a time convenient for working families. The librarian has promoted the storytime with flyers, and direct outreach at his library's ESL Conversation Café programs and the library has marketed through its website and printed program guides, as well as on Spanish-language radio station WBTK. The storytime is very diverse, with approximately half of the attendees being native Spanish speakers, and the other half speaking English or other languages. The program provides essential early literacy programming for diverse families and reinforces preschool and kindergarten education in a casual setting.

Inspired by the success of Cuentos Bilingües, Hello! Story Time at HCPL's Tuckahoe Library was designed to provide an opportunity for English Language Learning families to develop and practice practical English language skills. Hello! Storytime was developed in 2018, and grew out

of a conversation between a Children's Services Supervisor at the Tuckahoe Library and HCPL's Youth Services Coordinator. Library staff discussed how to address an issue many public libraries face: how to develop early literacy programming for English language learners who do not share a common first language, that can be led by staff members whose only language is English. Around the same time, a father came in and asked for common American childhood rhymes to share with his family. The librarians knew they needed to act, and the idea for Hello! Storytime was born.

Utilizing repetition of simple rhymes, songs, and concept books, Hello! Storytime aims to expose its audience to useful everyday English words and phrases. At the end of the structured program, an extended playtime also serves as an informal "conversation café" setting, where adult and child patrons can practice conversational skills together and with the program leader.

Hello! debuted in January of 2019. Attendees have included a mix of native and non-native English speakers, including children from 18 months to 6 years old and their adult caretakers. Hello! Functions equally well for toddlers developing first-time language skills and for older children and adults learning a second or third language. Henrico County has supported this program through marketing on the HCPL website and program guides, as well as in-house marketing. During the development process, staff also reached out to local refugee support groups ReEstablish Richmond and the International Rescue Committee for help in promoting the program to their clients, many of whom are already Tuckahoe library patrons.

### **Financing and Staffing**

Multilingual Storytimes at Libbie Mill at Tuckahoe Libraries have no cost other than an investment of staff time to research and plan the weekly material. However, this is no different from any other

storytime. Many library systems may not have the resources to hire an ESL Educator, or to pay translators, but HCPL's programs show that every library system with dedicated staff can create a storytime that is inclusive to speakers of all languages. The HCPL Multilingual Storytimes are an example of determined and experienced staff repurposing existing library materials to meet new goals. The existing staff members and storytime materials, when dedicated to this new purpose, are able to engage a wider community of people with early literacy services, increasing the return on the library's initial investment in general staffing and storytime materials.

### **Program Results**

Cuentos Bilingües at Libbie Mill has been a success, with a diverse, core group of families that come week to week. The program has been ongoing for two years and continues to grow. At each session, curious children and their caregivers crowd excitedly around the librarian, who strums a guitar and sings La Granja (The Farm) or La Araña Pequeñita (The Itsy Bitsy Spider), among other rhymes and stories.

There have been 40 sessions of Hello! Story time at the Tuckahoe Library, with the highest attendance being 26 children and caregivers. A core group of regular attendees has developed in less than a year, and this group continues to grow.

Staff continue to explore ways to reach these storytimes' intended audiences through additional contact and marketing to local community organizations, public schools, and non-profits. Library staff have observed that Cuentos Bilingües and Hello! Storytimes are developing more than just language and literacy skills among the participants, but are also developing relationships between people, cultures, and the library. At Tuckahoe Library, staff have noticed a greater engagement with all library programs among families who attend Hello! Storytime. At Libbie Mill, librarians'

cross-promotion of Cuentos Bilingües with the popular ESL Conversation Café program has demonstrated a dedication to Spanish-English bilingual and English language-learning patrons, that has in turn resulted in greater engagement with the library. These programs inspire language learning as well as library use, and result in learning about other cultures and the diversity of the Henrico community. These programs build literacy skills and build community, and result in increased library use and cultural exchange.

### **Brief Summary**

Librarians across Virginia and the country are working to create inclusive early literacy experiences for their communities to support early learning for increasingly diverse communities. Some librarians may be fluent in languages other than English, and many are not. Multilingual Storytimes at Henrico County Public Library, Cuentos Bilingües and Hello! Storytime, show how librarians can use existing language skills, or develop new skills and services without fluency in another language, in order to create inclusive storytimes for English language learners. These storytimes provide meaningful cultural exchange opportunities for families learning English, or families who speak English but wish to learn more about other cultures and the diversity of their own communities. Multilingual storytimes reinforce language learning in school, offer the same support for early literacy as traditional storytimes, and build community.

Multilingual storytimes can be developed at no additional cost to a library system. Libraries in Virginia could easily replicate these programs by leveraging existing language skills of their staff to create a bilingual storytime like Cuentos Bilingües, or by creating a multilingual English language learning storytime like Hello!, that can be conducted by staff without special language skills. These programs can help meet the emerging literacy needs of diverse communities across the state.





**Multilingual Storytimes**  
**Supplemental Materials**

Welcome Song from Hello! Storytime




# Hello Song

Clap everybody and say hello  
Clap everybody and say hello  
Clap everybody and say hello  
Say hello this morning

Hola	Saalam بيلو
Bonjour	Vanakkam வணக்கம்
Jambo	Namaste नमस्ते
Marhaban	مرحبا

Spanish Language Rhyme from Cuentos Bilingües



## La granja

(the farm)

Vengan a ver mi granja que es Hermosa  
(come and see my farm it is beautiful)  
(x2)

El patito hace así: quack quack!  
(the duckling goes like this: quack quack!)  
(x2)

O vengan amigos, vengan amigos, vengan amigos,  
vengan!  
(come friends, come friends, come friends,  
come!)  
(x2)

Con....

El cerdito-oink (piggy)  
El caballo-ehhh (horse)  
El burrito- ee jah (donkey)






Photo of participants and Libbie Mill Librarian at Cuentos Bilingües



Hello! Storytime Flyer



## Hello Story Time @ TU

Thursdays @ 10:00 a.m.

Join us Thursday mornings to share simple stories, rhymes, songs and play to help build English language skills. Not just for children but for the whole family!

Photo of Tuckahoe Librarian and participants at Hello! Storytime

