



# How a Small Town Library Created A Space Of Belonging For Its Hispanic Community



Jennifer Sirak, Director, Lambertville Free Public Library  
Trina Bardusco, Hispanic Outreach and Programming  
Frances Bardusco, Bilingual Librarian  
NJLA Conference - June 2023



# Lambertville, NJ



**Population: 4,149**

**26% Hispanic**

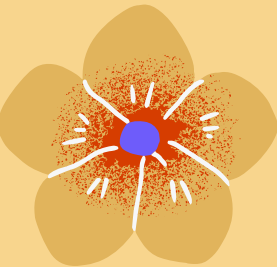
**30 minutes north of Trenton**

**on the Delaware River**

**Smallest public high school in NJ**

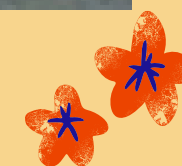
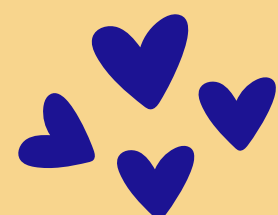
**2023 Graduates = 70**



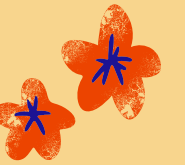
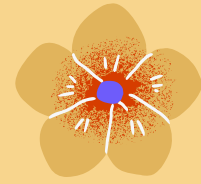


# Our Library

- Independent library established in 1882
- 12 part-time staff members
- Annual budget of \$318,000
- Housed in a city-owned small historic mansion built in 1830
- Walkable to most of our population
- **Not a lot of resources but lots of flexibility**





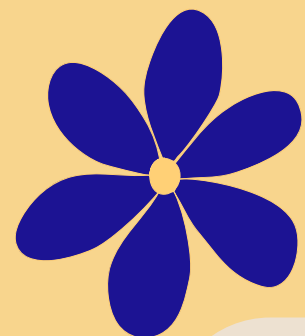


## Our library has been a welcoming place for Hispanics for the last 30+ years

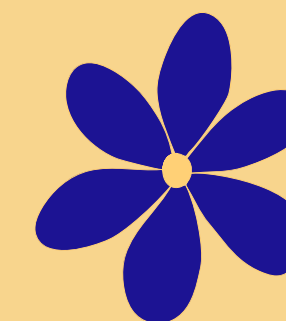
- Bilingual staff
- Volunteer tutoring for Hispanic children
- After-school space
- Programs and events
- Faxing, translations, filling out documents
- Computers as link to their homes and families
- Lots of smiles and overall support







# But we wanted to do more



We received the  
**NJSL American Rescue Plan Act Grant (ARPA)**  
in August 2021, to increase services for our Hispanic community

## Our goals:

- Expand materials for Hispanic adults
- Add Spanish Language website content
- Display new bilingual interior signage
- Add a part-time Hispanic outreach programming staff member to start regular programming for adults



On September 1, 2021,  
Lambertville was hit hard  
with catastrophic flash  
flooding by Hurricane Ida



Suddenly, the  
library became a  
crisis center





**The library served as a base for meals, supplies and volunteers**



**NJ Governor Phil Murphy greeted the press at the library in the aftermath and concurred that libraries do rock!**

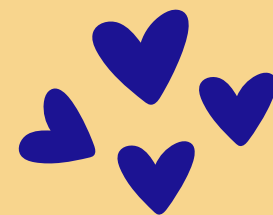




# Many Hispanic families were displaced

They came to the library for help navigating FEMA

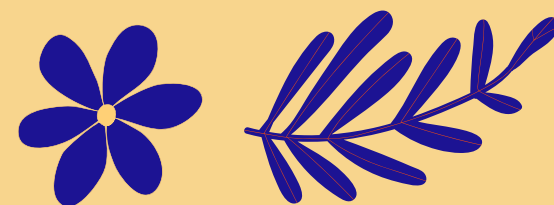
We spent several months and many, many hours helping them file for assistance. We learned first hand what their needs and skill levels were







**We gained their  
trust  
and also learned  
about their dreams  
and aspirations**







We hosted our first-ever Day of the Dead program as a healing event after Ida in late October. It also honored those lost to COVID and brought together over 200 people.

Hispanics and the community at large had the opportunity to share a special moment



[WATCH VIDEO](#)



[Link to video on website](#)





After building this trust,  
we felt good about finally launching our  
Latina women's empowerment program at  
the library!



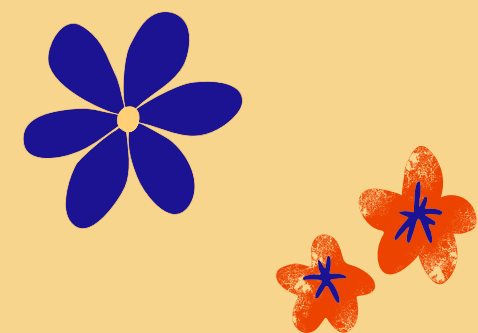


- We created surveys

- We picked a time

- We made flyers in Spanish and hung them in the library and around town

- We prepared refreshments





# NOBODY CAME!



We knew we had trust with this community after coming together for the past few months, so how could we pivot to improve our outreach?

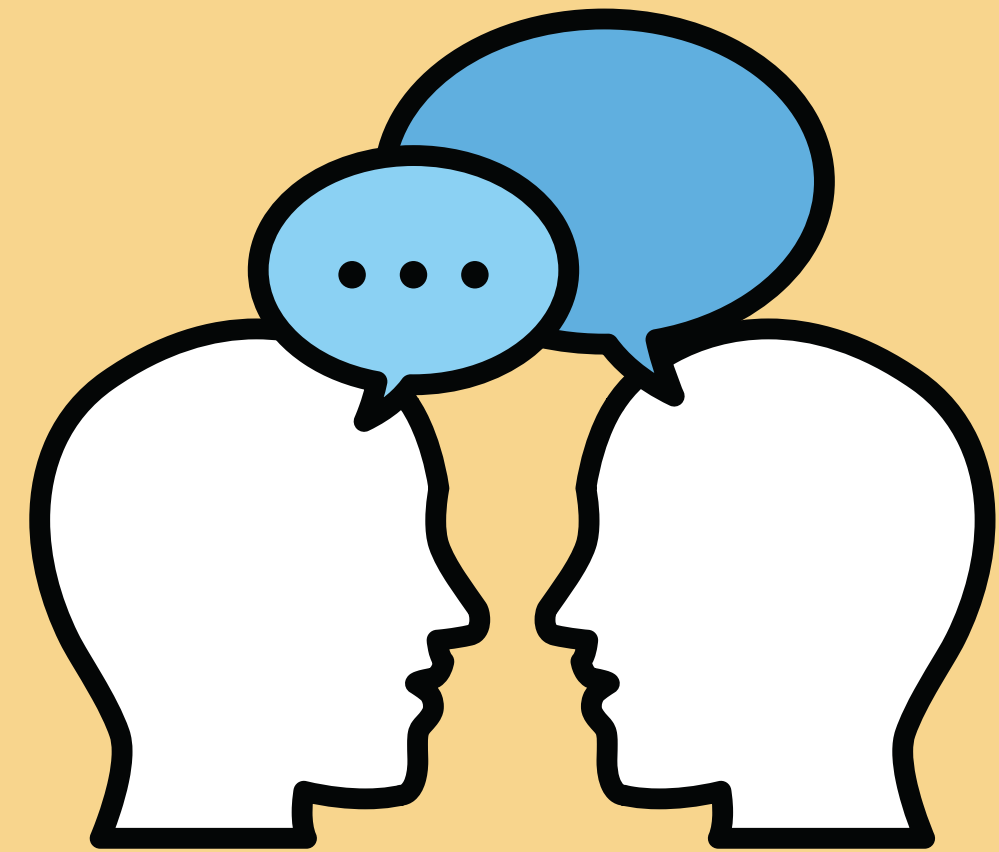




# How to get it right!



## Dig Deeper



**MEET THEM  
WHERE THEY ARE**



# How to work toward Cultural Competence



- Ask thoughtful questions and listen
- Set aside what you think you know
- Get to know cultural practices, values and world views
- Take note of interests, needs and aspirations which can later inform your programming
- Recruit a native Spanish speaker who is connected to the community - this person could have any background





# What we learned: Outreach #1

## We leaned into our local social services and community leaders

- We met at length with a Latino community leader who gave us feedback.
- We spoke with Latinas whom we had helped during FEMA to learn about their needs.
- We chatted with Latinas around town to learn more.
- We connected with our local social services groups.



# What we learned: Outreach #2

## We revisited our survey

- We discovered cultural assumptions of libraries were different - Some people were not accustomed to or comfortable with checking out books from a library.
- Some people came from places that did not have libraries at all.
- Library vocabulary such as genre, overdue, check-out, picture book, initially had no meaning to our population.
- We had better success when our social services partner worked one on one to get our surveys filled out.





# What we learned: Outreach #3

## Language matters in advertising

- Google translations for flyers could be awkward or too formal. Find a native speaker who knows how to speak to your target group.
- "Female empowerment" sounded too aggressive to our group, as if they were leaving their families behind, so we changed it to "a workshop for the advancement of Latinas and their families."

## Call AND text - one on one - some people may not have email

- Our partners called all their contacts to tell them about the program
- After the group began, we started a WhatsApp group and ALSO texted individually EVERY week.
- Be aware that some people may not have voicemail set up (we included phone set up early in our program).





# What we learned: Outreach #4

## **Schedule the program at a convenient time for your participants**

- This could mean different times or days than you anticipate. For us it meant holding a program when the library was actually closed.

## **Be flexible with time - Late? No problem!**

- Latinas juggle unpredictable schedules in the service industry and are primary caregivers of their children, so we made it a point not to add stress by being flexible.

## **The program was NOT sequential - Miss one? Come to the next!**

- Each module stood alone, so participants felt safe and comfortable if they missed one.



Aprender, Avanzar y Soñar...

Learn, Advance and Dream...

We focused on the aspirational. The goal was to uplift and highlight the positive, celebrating what they do have, and inspiring them to learn what they don't know





# Latinas en Lambertville

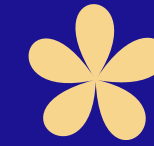
10-week workshop for Hispanic women







25 women in regular attendance



An average of 10 women attended our morning sessions with their very young children, with child care provided by specialized volunteers

An average of 15 participants attended in the evening with their older kids

Women and children received full meals

Our mostly Hispanic high school teen volunteers for the evenings got community service hours

We had guests such as an immigration lawyer, mental health expert, and a local banker



# LATINAS EN LAMBERTVILLE

**Workshop Sample Module Translated**





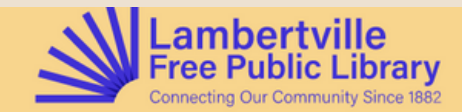


# LATINAS EN LAMBERTVILLE

LEARN, ADVANCE, DREAM

10 WEEKS, EVERY WEDNESDAY, LIMITED SPACE

Date	Focus	Topics
March 9	Getting ahead successfully	Speak with confidence, get what you want, introduction to the resources of the library
March 16	Tools that make your life much easier	Time management, self-discipline, your telephone as a computer
March 23	Taking care of yourself	Mental health, self-esteem, meditation, positive thinking, breathing,
March 30	You and your family's health	Local medical resources, healthy diets, and recommendations
April 6	Your purpose in life	Your personal story, how to live in the present, education for you
April 13	Your children	How to speak to your children, signs that they need help, opportunities to further their education
April 20	Your finances	Budgeting, taxes, credit, debt, and credit score
April 27	Having your own business	Tools, opportunities, and what you should know
May 4	Plan your goals	Visualize your wishes, make a concrete plan for your dreams
May 11	Your future	Your next steps



# LATINAS EN LAMBERTVILLE

LEARN, ADVANCE, DREAM  
 FREE PROGRAM TO UPLIFT WOMEN  
 AND THEIR FAMILIES



Bring your children!



Activities and homework help

10 weeks, every Wednesday

March 9th to May 11th

AM and PM Sessions

10:30 am-12:30 pm with breakfast

6:30 pm-8:30 pm with dinner

Lambertville Library, 6 Lilly Street





# LATINAS EN LAMBERTVILLE

APRENDER, AVANZAR Y SOÑAR

10 SEMANAS, TODOS LOS MIÉRCOLES (HAY CUPO LIMITADO)

Fecha	Enfoque	Ejemplos
9 de marzo	Salir para adelante con éxito	Hablar con más seguridad, y conseguir lo que uno quiere. Introducción a los recursos que hay en la biblioteca.
16 de marzo	Herramientas para que la vida sea más fácil	Manejo de tu tiempo, autodisciplina, tu teléfono como computadora
23 de marzo	Cuidar de tí misma	Salud mental, autoestima, meditación, pensar en positivo, respiración y tomo de consciencia
30 de marzo	Tu salud y la de tu familia	Recursos médicos en la zona, dietas saludables, y recomendaciones
6 de abril	Tu propósito en la vida	Tu historia personal, cómo vivir en el presente, y educación para ti misma
13 de abril	Tus hijos	Cómo hablar con tus hijos, signos que necesitan ayuda, y oportunidades para que sigan estudiando
20 de abril	Tus finanzas	Hacer un presupuesto, los impuestos, financiamiento, crédito, débito y que es un credit score
27 de abril	Tener tu propio negocio	Herramientas, oportunidades, y lo que debes saber
4 de mayo	Plan para tus metas	Visualizar lo que deseas, y hacer un plan concreto para realizar tus sueños
11 de mayo	Tu futuro	Tus siguientes pasos



# LATINAS EN LAMBERTVILLE

APRENDER, AVANZAR Y SOÑAR  
PROGRAMA GRATIS PARA APOYAR  
A LA MUJER Y SU FAMILIA



**10 semanas, todos los miércoles**

febrero 1 al 29 de marzo



**Dos horarios para elegir:**

10:30am- 12:00pm con desayuno

6:30pm-8:00pm con cena

**Lambertville Library, 6 Lilly Street**

Para más información:

llame a Trina (347) 837-1542

[www.lambertvillelibrary.org](http://www.lambertvillelibrary.org)



# Day 1

## Latinas en Lambertville



- ★ Speak up
- ★ Advocate for yourself

# EMPOWERMENT PIECE: WONDER WOMAN STANCE

This body language helps you speak up with confidence!





# Tell us about a time you wanted to say something and didn't



Practice English in real-life scenarios: at the bank,  
doctor's office and school  
**“I would like to...”**





# Guided Meditation

\*Opening our hearts to self love and confidence





**Homework: Please set up your phone voicemail for next week.**

**(Let your voice be heard! You know we will call you!)**





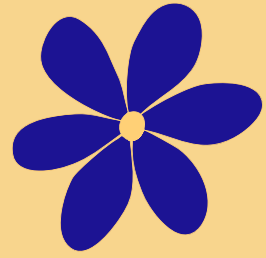
# Library Resources and Literacy

We maximized the learning opportunity, teaching how to use their phone like a computer through using the library's digital resources.

- Acquiring Library cards through website and how to use a library
- Downloading magazines in Spanish using Flipster
- Learning English using the Rosetta Stone app
- Setting up a Latinas en Lambertville WhatsApp group

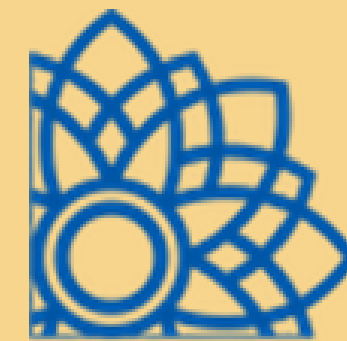
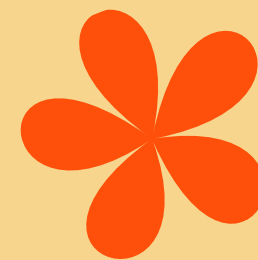




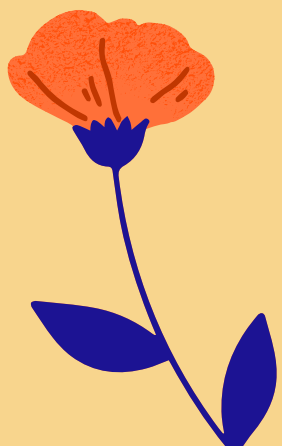


Fisherman's Mark, a local social services agency and food pantry, provided meals for the women and children, which were crucial for the success of the program

**Ricardo Zapata, the Operations Manager,** was also pivotal to community outreach and part of the team that applied for the ARPA grant



**FISHERMAN'S MARK**  
HELP WHEN HELP IS NEEDED







Gabriela Bonnavent, an active community organizer from United Way, who knows our Hispanic families in town, provided a stream of information and resources in addition to outreach

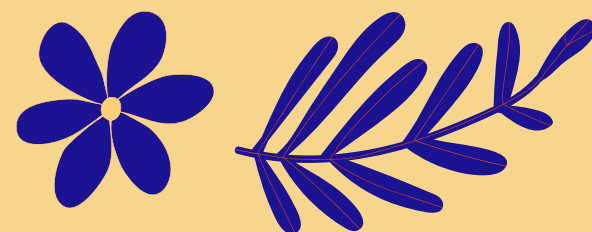






The Latinas were most appreciative of learning things and having conversations they weren't anywhere else

We honored them and their stories, providing food for thought that expanded their horizons





# What we learned:

## Programming #1

### **Invite children**

Childcare is a financial issue, and Latinas are wary of separation. We recruited teen volunteers to keep children occupied with fun activities that we prepared in a space nearby.

### **Offer a complete meal**

Thanks to our relationship with a local social services agency, Fisherman's Mark, we could pick up and set up nutritious - and enjoyable - meals. Bonus - leftovers were taken home.

### **Be prepared to accept every skill level - no judgments!**

Some participants may have very little formal education. We made the program themes universal.



# What we learned: Programming #2

## **Listen to their stories**

We created a safe space for genuine sharing, letting things flow without trying to control the outcome.

## **Bring in people who can help**

We invited relevant and relatable professionals to cover topics that interested them and could offer guidance.

## **Be flexible and willing to pivot or adjust throughout the program**

Expert Latinos wanted to help and share their skills. Mac and cheese was not eaten. Bingo was a big hit for the children; we had to get more prizes!







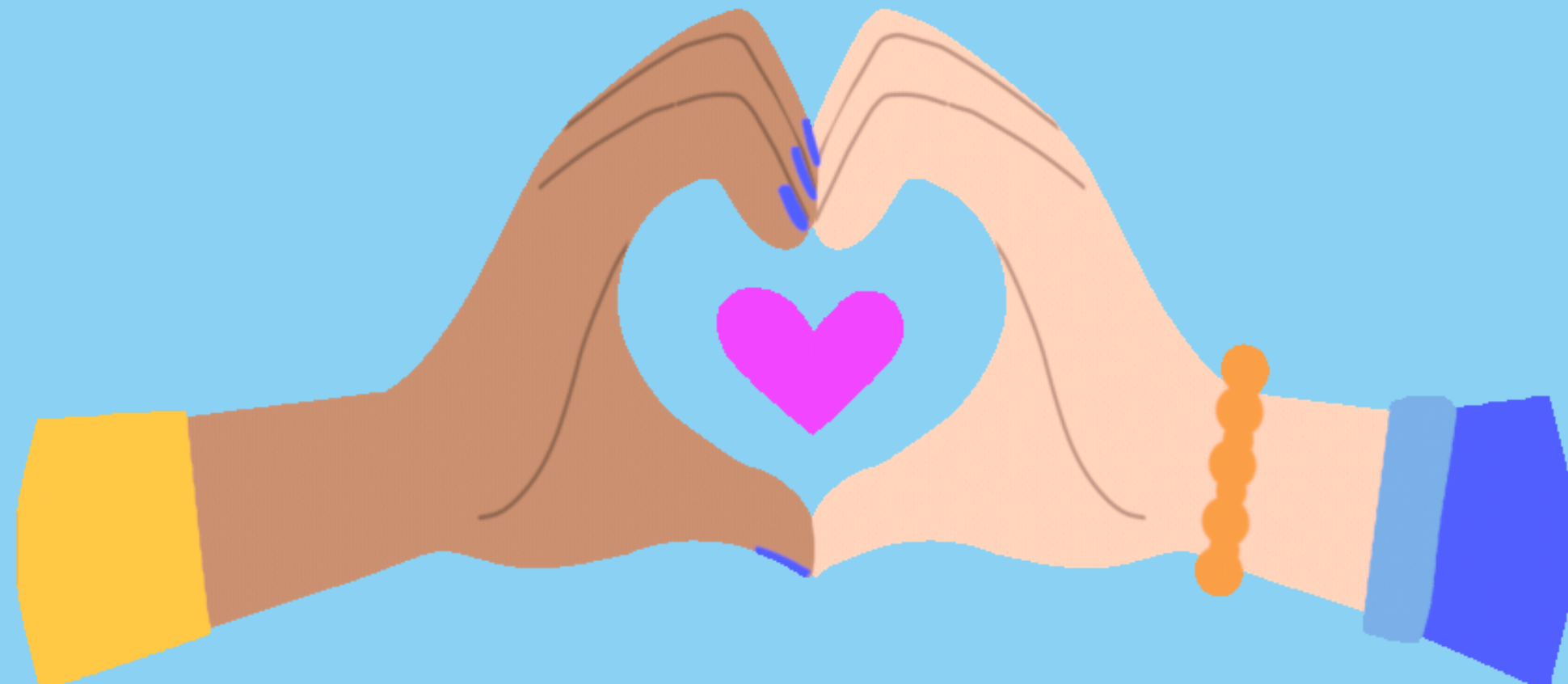
# Get the Youth invovled!

- Practiced their Spanish
- Learned about their roots
- Demonstrated computer work

**They were so enthusiastic and  
did a great job; we hired these  
two!**



**Be the bridge between Hispanics and the  
community at large**







# Oaxaca Festival August 2022



90% of the Hispanics in Lambertville hail from Oaxaca, Mexico

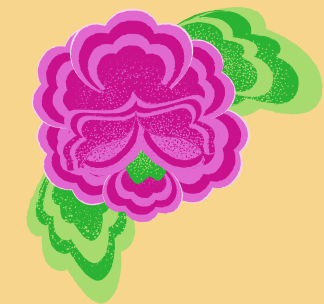
More than 500 people attended this first-ever cross-cultural event.

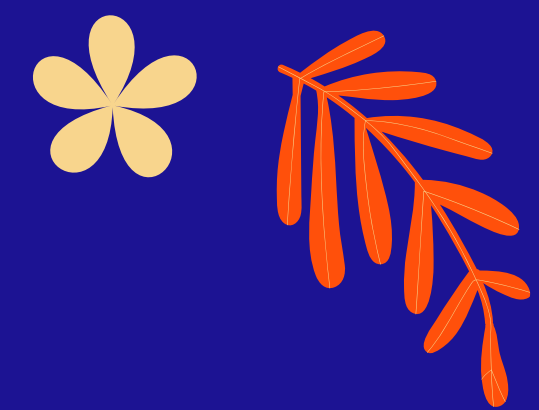
It encouraged residents to further engage with the Hispanic community organically in a social setting

It has opened hearts and minds, and there are calls to make it an annual event

The Latinas helped to plan the event and rehearsed their traditional dances on our lawn.

We had an amazing amount of volunteers and donations that helped make the festival possible





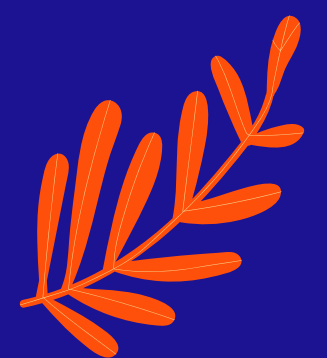
# Latinas en Lambertville now!

We still meet regularly

We are actively planning our second Oaxaca Festival on August 20, 2023

The Mayor visits our group to have conversations about town issues

We have become an organic liaison with City Hall and the Latinx community





# See you at the Oaxaca Festival!

## August 20, 2023

Links to the videos again

[Oaxaca Festival 2022](#)

[Day of the Dead 2021](#)

Link to our [blog post](#) on the ARPA Grant

# Contact Information



Jennifer Sirak, Director

[jennifer.sirak@lambertvillelibrary.org](mailto:jennifer.sirak@lambertvillelibrary.org)

609-468-3780



- ✉ [staff@lambertvillelibrary.org](mailto:staff@lambertvillelibrary.org)
- 💬 [@lambertvillelibrary](https://www.instagram.com/lambertvillelibrary)
- ☎ +609-397-0275
- 📍 7 Lilly Street Lambertville, NJ 08530
- 🌐 [www.lambertvillelibrary.org](http://www.lambertvillelibrary.org)

