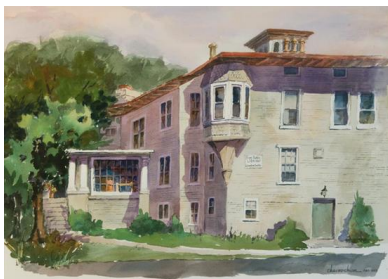


## Lambertville Free Public Library – Organizational overview



### **Summarize the nominated organization's mission or statement of purpose.**

The mission of the Lambertville Free Public Library is to provide accessible space and resources that inspire and assist the community to learn, explore, create, and connect.

### **Provide a brief history of the nominated organization, including any major institutional changes (for example, leadership, staff, governance).**

We are a small, independent library, the only public library for the residents of Lambertville, a historic city of 4,100 on the Delaware River in New Jersey. The library opened in 1882 as the Stryker Library, funded by a substantial initial bequest from local businessman Samuel Stryker that required matching funds by city residents. In 1925, Lambertville residents voted to support the library through tax-based funding and the library's name changed to Lambertville Free Public Library.

We are housed in the historic 1830 Lilly Mansion, close to the elementary school and within walking distance for most residents. The library staff of thirteen all work part-time and know most patrons by name. The mayor appoints nine members, all volunteers, to the Board of Trustees. The library has a tax-based annual budget of \$318,000, holds about 25,000 physical items, and participates in the state inter-library loan program and a consortium for eBook services. Our local history projects, robust children's programs, and local author events have been ongoing positive contributions to city life. Our independent status enables us to respond directly to our community, providing services and programs that create the truly warm atmosphere of a neighborhood library, deeply woven into the fabric of our small city.

### **Explain why the nominated organization deserves to win the National Medal for Museum and Library Service.**

In recent years, we recognized that the city's population was changing and that the number of Spanish-speaking residents was increasing significantly. Library staff decided to create a program to improve and increase services for this growing population, so we applied for a competitive subaward made by the New Jersey State Library using 2021 ARPA funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

This award enabled the library to act as a community leader in removing barriers and opening doors for our Hispanic population, and in showing how collaborative work among organizations can effect positive change in a community and in individual lives. We are an example of what a small library with dedicated staff and local support can achieve.

Our staff partnered with local social service organizations to work hand in hand with members of the Hispanic community to identify what was most needed. This outreach created new connections among several community groups. These fresh pathways of communication generated a novel and welcome sense of belonging for our Hispanic population, supporting them in building stronger connections with the local government, schools, and the city at large. Also, the grant-funded program led to the library's creating Lambertville's first-ever cultural festival that showcased the Oaxacan heritage of the Hispanic community and provided an opportunity for all Lambertville residents to come together.

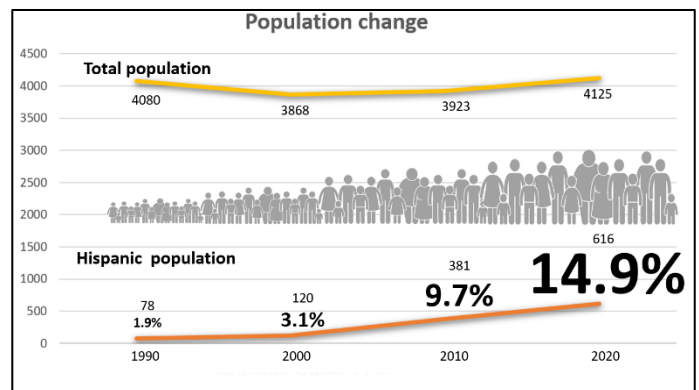
The impact has been substantial. We recently celebrated our second Oaxaca Festival, drawing 40% more attendees and many more volunteers and sponsors. We were also chosen to present at the state library conference, drawing a packed audience and widespread congratulations for "Latinas en Lambertville: How a Small-town Library Created a Space of Belonging for its Hispanic Community."

## Lambertville Free Public Library – Narrative section

### Describe your community, including its demographics.

According to the 2020 census, Lambertville’s median age was 53 and 82% of the 4100 residents identified as white; 14.9% identified as Hispanic, of whom 66% were Latin-American born. In contrast, the 2000 census showed a Hispanic population of 3.1%. In 2022, of 219 students at the Lambertville elementary school, 123 identified as white (56%) and 69 identified as Hispanic (32%).

Fisherman’s Mark, Lambertville’s leading social service agency for the past 40 years, works with 229 regional Hispanic families, with an average monthly household income of \$1597 in 2023. Of those families, roughly 70% work in the hospitality industry and related fields (restaurants, hotels, house cleaning), 15% in construction, and 15% in farming and landscaping, all jobs that are especially sensitive to changes in the general economy.



### Describe the community's major needs and how you identified them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the library responded with new ways of reaching our residents but became more aware of areas where we could serve our community better, particularly our adult Spanish-speaking population. Although the library had bilingual staff members, a suitable collection of Spanish children’s books, and volunteer tutoring for children who were learning English, we needed to develop materials and services for the adults. To plan these enhanced services, the library Board and staff consulted Ricardo Zapata, a member of the Board of Trustees as well as Fisherman’s Mark Community Engagement Manager. This organization’s extensive relationships with the Hispanic community made it an effective partner to administer a Spanish-language survey on use of library resources. Previously, when the library Board of Trustees embarked on preparing a five-year plan using a patron bilingual survey, there were no Spanish-speaking respondents. The second survey had many Hispanic respondents and identified the following needs: more information, signs, and books in Spanish, more adult programs in Spanish including ESL, more staff who speak Spanish, and more spaces for reading.

On September 1, 2021, Lambertville suffered catastrophic flooding from Hurricane Ida, and hundreds of residents were displaced, including many from our Hispanic population. The library became an emergency supply center for the city. During the ensuing months, bilingual staff spent countless hours ensuring residents processed their FEMA applications correctly, establishing a heightened level of trust with our Hispanic community. From these interactions, library staff realized that the Hispanic community, particularly adult women, had additional practical challenges such as setting up email and voicemail, communicating with their children’s schools, opening bank accounts, establishing credit, and addressing stress relief and mental health.

### Referring to the community and its major needs you identified in Section B.1, describe the range of specific programs, services and partnerships that have been developed to address those needs

In September 2021, we received notice of a \$13,000 grant from IMLS ARPA through the NJ State Library to improve library services for the adult Hispanic community. The library used the grant to translate parts of our website into Spanish, install new bilingual interior signage, greatly increase our Spanish book collection, and hire a bilingual Spanish programmer. To create more spaces for reading, library staff and volunteers completely rearranged the library interior.

With the grant, we intended to develop a 10-week program for women in Spanish called Latinas en Lambertville. To reach these women, our bilingual staff engaged with Latinas on the street, at food pantries, in workplaces, and in laundromats. The library’s first partner in the program, Fisherman’s Mark, made 100 phone calls to their clients to invite



them to participate. Despite our initial outreach to Latinas, we had no participation, so we sought to identify and remove barriers that were inhibiting attendance and to develop additional partnerships using community input.

**Describe how you work with the community you serve to develop these programs and services.**

We met with leaders in the Hispanic community to solicit their advice on how to attract wider participation. We learned Lambertville Latinas typically juggle unpredictable work schedules and are primary caregivers of their children, so we scheduled two sessions, one during the library's closed morning hours and one in the evening. We recruited bilingual teen volunteers and tutors to provide activities and homework help for children of attendees in a neighboring room. We learned that requiring registration or mandatory attendance would likely reduce participation, so we designed each session to be stand-alone. Importantly, Fisherman's Mark donated on-site meals served by library volunteers to reduce dinner time stress for attendees. We relaunched the 10-week program in 2022 with great success, hosting an average weekly attendance of 25-30 women and their children, an extraordinary number for our small library.

The initial sessions focused on teaching basic technology skills such as cell phone use and email setup. Bilingual guest speakers covered desired, practical topics such as immigration, banking and credit, local school and educational resources, health, and wellness, and starting a business. The program also included an ESL component, meditation, and self-care elements as an introduction to stress reduction and mental health.

We also partnered with a Hunterdon County United Way representative who attended most sessions and provided resources on health and wellness, COVID testing, county services, and connections to other Spanish-speaking experts with cultural competence. Beyond the library, we worked with Lambertville's ACME Screening Room to present the subtitled HBO series '*Habla*', in which Latinos share their experiences in America. Following the film, Latina attendees shared their own stories and perspectives, leading to candid exchanges among the attendees.

After several program meetings, we felt a sense of trust among our participants. Teen volunteers had the freedom to develop children's activities, leading to a level of engagement from the children that sometimes became the incentive for their mothers to attend. As the program progressed, the women bonded by sharing experiences in an environment where they felt safe. Library staff allowed each session to flow according to the expressed needs of the participants, spending time on certain portions and staying later if the group desired. During the program, we repeatedly polled the group to inform the purchasing of new books in Spanish. Additionally, Fisherman's Mark secured catering training with a local chef for those attendees interested in starting a home catering business.

By the program's end, Latinas en Lambertville members had formed close bonds with each other and the library staff and volunteers. We issued certificates of achievement to celebrate their attendance and the successful completion of the program. As a group, they expressed a desire to give back to the community by creating an event to share the rich artistic culture of their native Oaxaca, Mexico, where the majority of our Hispanic population are from. Hispanic families worked with library staff to plan the event, using some of their new skills. The library reached out to community members and organizations to help the Latinas fulfill their vision.

The library transformed into a hive of exciting volunteer and staff activity. Those in the catering training program planned and served an authentic Mexican menu, with food donated by Fisherman's Mark. Some Latinas en Lambertville members created a Oaxacan dance group, practiced regional dances to showcase, and also brought in other dancers from the region. Hispanic and non-Hispanic businesses and individuals donated decorations and funding. A member of Soupçon Salon, our local artist co-op, worked with Hispanic teen volunteers to create a magnificent piñata representing Oaxacan *alebrije* (fantastical creatures), while other co-op members ran the sound system and constructed background sets. In August 2022, with the help of over 100 Hispanic and non-Hispanic volunteers, the library presented Oaxaca Day, Lambertville's first-ever Hispanic cultural festival, which welcomed over 500 attendees.

**Please describe how the efforts named above inform strategy and practice across the institution.**

With the success of this program, library staff not only learned how to maximize access for Spanish-speaking residents, but also realized these new ways of programming hold relevance across all segments of our community. As an institution, we learned to reject a one-size-fits-all way of thinking, to stay flexible, and to adjust our program expectations, knowing that this would require much more effort. We learned to question ourselves to ensure we were looking beyond our assumptions through repeated, intentional listening to understand the true needs of our target group. We also needed to be aware of our participants' needs in terms of families and work schedules. In sum, we learned the importance of tailoring each program to its intended audience to achieve results.

**Describe how you serve community members of all abilities and/or the specific programs and services you provide to enhance access.**

We are a public institution, providing open and accessible service to all. The building is handicapped accessible, and the collection encompasses large-print books and digital and physical audio books; we also deliver to homebound patrons as needed. To increase access, we removed all fines and fax costs, as well as printing charges for students. We focus on a diverse range of offerings and programs so that all members of our community will find there is something for them at their library. We continue to evolve and adapt our offerings to better serve individuals of all abilities. We want the library to be viewed as a fully accessible "third place" in our city, a welcoming public spot beyond home and work where both serendipitous and intentional in-person connections are made.

**Describe the impact of your organization's programs and service on the identified community needs. Be specific, using the qualitative, quantitative or both types of descriptors as appropriate.**

With the ARPA grant, library staff more than doubled the size of the library's Spanish book collection, adding almost 300 new books and relocating the collection to a more comfortable and convenient location. In 2022, we more than doubled our pre-pandemic circulation of adult books in Spanish, and we are on track to triple it in 2023. Use of bilingual materials for the children's summer reading program also grew. We specifically tailored website pages in Spanish to respond to the interests and needs of the target population. Since their posting in July 2022, these website pages have received over 700 visits. The new bilingual directional and informational signage throughout the building has helped the traffic flow for everyone. Latinas en Lambertville participants learned to use voicemail and email, which increased their ability to navigate communications with schools, doctor offices, and banks. Their new technology skills also helped them to fully use library online resources, and we signed up 36 new library patrons.

The Oaxaca Festival helped the Hispanic community to feel at home in the library and created a sense of community for them both inside and outside of the library. Hispanic patrons asked library staff for assistance in planning other community events, such as securing a site for the traveling Virgin of Guadalupe icon and discussing the potential for a local pop-up Christmas market of handmade goods.

All these programs had a ripple effect, creating goodwill throughout the community. The mayor held the municipal government's first listening session with Spanish families at the library with staff translating. Many Hispanic and non-Hispanic residents now report a new confidence allowing them to communicate and interact in everyday activities. Other community groups have begun using the library as a resource for Hispanic outreach best practices.

The cumulative effects of our program, started with just a \$13,000 ARPA grant, are many and meaningful:

- The Hispanic residents say they feel seen and proud of their cultural roots.
- Community groups and individuals are eager to initiate, collaborate, and participate.
- Both English and Spanish speaking residents report feeling a stronger sense of community.

**How has your organization used these data to inform continuing and/or new programs and services?**

The library continued its Latinas en Lambertville program with another 10-week session in 2023, this time with meals donated by Fisherman's Mark and the Centenary United Methodist Church. The Hispanic teen volunteers maintained their wide-ranging involvement, with one joining the library staff. To meet the needs of both English and Spanish speakers, we are planning to purchase phone-accessible language learning software. Our first Oaxaca Festival produced so much interest in the Hispanic community's roots that the Lambertville Historical Society has asked the library to collaborate on an oral history project exploring their lives in Oaxaca, their decisions to come to Lambertville, their experiences en route, and their lives in their new hometown. The library received a donation of four laptops from local group Los Puentes and is planning a bilingual computer skill workshop with staff and teen volunteers. Eventually, the library, along with our partner groups, envisions creating an entrepreneurial resource system for our Hispanic community.

Following many calls from throughout the community for a second Oaxaca Festival, the library staff worked with the Latinas en Lambertville group to create leadership groups to take on segments of the festival, such as using the commercial kitchen at Fisherman's Mark to prepare 1,000 tamales the day before the event. Again this year, over 100 enthusiastic and creative volunteers from throughout the community came together to make the festival happen. The organizations who helped last year returned and additional groups reached out to the library: the women's Kalmia Club offered its clubhouse for the local dance group to practice, and the Lambertville Elks Club helped with fundraising and food donations. Local artist James Dupree, who had studied in Oaxaca, showcased Oaxacan art in his gallery. He also partnered with the library and the ACME Screening Room on the eve of the festival to present a special showing of documentaries featuring Oaxacan crafters, followed by an in-person presentation from those crafters. Hunterdon County awarded a Special Projects grant to film a short documentary around the event. Centenary United Methodist Church lent tables and chairs. Mejia Painting crew brought ladders to hang decorative flags and pinatas. Another Oaxacan group from New Brunswick, NJ, brought a trailer full of decorations to share. This year we welcomed over 700 attendees.

**List your organization's three primary sources of revenue.**

97% of our budget is from public tax funding, with the remaining 3% from front desk income such as printing fees and used book sales, and from private donations.

**Describe how your organization financially supports the programs and services discussed above. Does your organization have a sustainable funding model that will continue to enable these programs and services?**

To raise funds for the 2023 Oaxaca Festival, the library held a dance fundraiser in partnership with the Lambertville Elks Club and the local Fred Astaire Dance Studio. We also received over 50 individual donations. While the Hispanic program began with the IMLS ARPA grant, the library Trustees have committed to continuing to support this work in the library budget. This includes retaining Hispanic programming staff, doubling the budget for books in Spanish, and adding a budget line for Hispanic programming.

**Identify any private or non-profit groups that support your organization's mission and activities and describe the extent of their support.**

There are no additional groups financially supporting the library.