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Initiative: Language Conversation Circles

Intro

We propose an initiative to host meetings at the King Library where students and San José community members can meet to speak in a language they are learning to practice their skills and learn from each other. The San José Public Library already has such a program hosted at other branch libraries, where people of all ages can meet to speak in English, Spanish, and teens can speak in Vietnamese (SJPL, 2025). It is clearly an important program that the library has chosen to invest in, so we know that this meets a community need. However, there is no such program at the King Library despite the fact that it is the central branch for SJPL. This plan supports the strategic goals of the SJSU King Library, builds on an already important program, and celebrates the diversity of the South Bay community.

Strategic Fit

The strategic plan lists goals to “increase collaborative programming with San Jose Public Library,” “increase collaborative programming with University,” and “create an inclusive library environment and infrastructure where diverse populations can flourish” (SJSU, Library Strategic Plan, 2025). By bridging a public library program with academic departments, this initiative supports two strategic goals in one. This initiative creates a shared space for cultural exchange, language learning, and community building.

Target Audience and Impact

This initiative is aimed towards second-language learners who are students at SJSU or members of the broader San Jose community. All language learners are helped by having more opportunities to practice conversation. Additionally, this program would connect San Jose Public Library members to rich language learning resources provided by King Library which they might be unaware of while supporting the strategic goal of further connecting SJSU and SJPL.

What It Is

Modeled after what SJPL already has in place, we imagine weekly hour long conversation groups at different levels and different languages. A full version of the program would have beginning, intermediate, advanced groups in as many languages as make sense open to middle schoolers and up. We propose starting with Vietnamese, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese, based on the public library and the SJSU language classes (SJPL, 2025; SJSU, World Languages and Literatures Department Course Offerings, 2025). The major consideration is getting people to come, so there would need to be a concentrated advertising campaign to students in language classes, and at other branch libraries. The groups also require support. The library already has language e-resources to support learning which could be used.

Rough Scope and Needs

This initiative requires a reserved space in the library for 9 conversation hours a week, preferably utilizing the Public Meeting Rooms in King Library. There needs to be staff present during the meetings as well as assisting in set-up and tear-down of the meeting space. Language learning materials for use in each meeting will have to be printed and distributed to participants, and

advertising is essential to getting the word out to patrons, especially in the trial and early stages of the program. Finally, partnership and collaboration both with the professors in the academic departments for language learning at SJSU as well as with the SJPL staff responsible for their current language conversation program are necessary. This would involve meeting with these parties early in the program's planning stage to make sure that we can meet their needs for involvement in the program as well as take advantage of their expertise.

Estimated Budget

The rough budget estimate for this program is **\$15,000** per semester. This number comes from assuming 12 weekly hours of labor over the semester's 15 weeks by librarians who are paid \$67 per hour (\$45 before benefits are accounted for (SJSU Careers, 2025)), which adds up to a total labor cost of \$12,160. There is also \$750 allotted for preparing and printing programming materials (\$50 per week) and \$500 for advertising. The central services overhead is \$1,200. Adding all of these costs, we get \$14,510, and leaving some leeway for costs not accounted for in this rough summary we get our total of **\$15,000**.

High-Level Timeline

We propose a phased rollout for the Language Conversation Circles initiative over the course of one academic semester. In the first two months, the focus will be on planning and outreach. This includes coordinating with relevant language departments at San José State University and program staff from San José Public Library, scheduling meeting rooms within King Library, and launching a marketing campaign to recruit participants (SJSU, World Languages and Literatures Department Course Offerings, 2025; SJPL, 2025). During months three and four, we would pilot weekly conversation sessions in Vietnamese, Spanish, and Mandarin. These sessions would be held in King Library's public meeting rooms and monitored for attendance and learner engagement. In month five, we would evaluate the program through participant surveys and feedback from faculty and SJPL partners. This evaluation phase would help us adjust language offerings, session formats, and staffing models to better serve community needs. If successful, we would then move into a planning phase for long-term integration and possible expansion in month six, which may include adding new languages or offering more sessions per week to meet demand.

Call to Action

This initiative is timely and strategically aligned with the library's goals to "increase collaborative programming with San José Public Library," "increase collaborative programming with the University," and "create an inclusive library environment and infrastructure where diverse populations can flourish" (SJSU, Library Strategic Plan, 2025). By hosting language conversation sessions at King Library, we create an opportunity for authentic cultural exchange between students and the broader San José community. It directly addresses the expressed needs of language learners by increasing access to informal speaking practice and encouraging library engagement (SJPL, 2025). We respectfully ask the Library Leadership Team to allocate \$15,000 from the strategy fund to support this pilot and to assist in coordinating space reservations and outreach with key campus and public library stakeholders.

Sources

SJSU. (2025). *Library Strategic Plan*.

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