Finding PH10

Language Assistance for LEP Persons

In this finding, please find the following:

a. Four Factor Analysis
b. Biennial Language Access Plan (DC)
c. Language Access Guidelines
d. Six-Month Language Access Plan

DCHA’s Language Access team manages and coordinates translation and interpretation services, designs and facilitates employee training in language access requirements and resources, tracks interactions with Limited English Proficient (LEP) and Non-English Proficient (NEP) customers, produces reports, and develops and executes language access plans in collaboration with the District of Columbia Office of Human Rights (OHR). On September 8, 2022, DCHA submitted its Biennial Language Access Plan (BLAP) to the OHR.
The DC Housing Authority (DCHA)

Four Factor Analysis

Limited English Proficiency/Non-English Proficiency (LEP/NEP) customers

November 2022

A. Mission Statement

The mission of the DC Housing Authority is:

• To provide quality affordable housing to extremely low-to-moderate income households;
• Foster sustainable communities; and
• Cultivate opportunities for residents to improve their lives.

B. Background

The DC Housing Authority is the largest landlord in the District of Columbia and one of the largest Public Housing Authorities in the country. In addition to providing conventional public housing, the DCHA also provides affordable housing through the administration of the Housing Choice Voucher program and several locally funded rental assistance programs. These programs include Local Rent Supplement Program, which supports District-identified special populations including the Department of Human Service’s Permanent Supportive Housing and Targeting Affordable Housing programs. Additionally, the DCHA administers local rental assistance programs on behalf of the Department of Behavioral Health, the Department of Aging and Community Living and DC Health respectively. The significant investments in DCHA from the local government make it unique in Public Housing Authorities across the nation.

C. Four Factor Analysis

1. Number or proportion of Limited English Proficient (LEP)/Non-English Proficient (LEP/NEP) persons served or encountered in the eligible service population.

A. Eligible Service Population

DCHA administers two main housing programs for low and extremely low-income households funded by both the local and the federal government (HUD): public housing and rental assistance through the Housing Choice Voucher program and the Local Rent Supplement Program.

The service populations for its programs are low and extremely low-income households in the District of Columbia. According to the most recent American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 21.5 percent of residents in the District of Columbia speak a language other than
English at home; 8.2 percent speak English less than very well; and 13.2 percent speak Spanish at home.

DCHA currently lacks adequate, reliable data regarding clients’ language preferences. Updating this data is a priority for the agency in the next six months.

B. DCHA Determination of Interpretation/Translation needs of service population

While DCHA’s language data requires updates, its language services data does not suggest that the agency meets the threshold for vital document translation. The agency is committed to ensuring its programs are accessible and has elected to proactively translate vital documents into Spanish while updating its data over the next six months.

Based upon the data available, including requests for interpreters, DCHA has determined that Spanish, Amharic, and Vietnamese are the most common LEP/NEP languages requested. DCHA also notes that sign languages (American Sign Language, Signing Exact English, and Pidgin Signed English) are commonly requested. The agency manages these requests through the reasonable accommodation process rather than language access services.

2. Frequency with which LEP persons come into contact with the program.

The list of DCHA departments in Table 1 offer direct services to public housing and local voucher residents, housing choice voucher participants and applicants. These direct service departments underwent training on the LAP guidelines in 2021 and 2022. Due to the pandemic, all of the scheduled annual trainings were conducted virtually. DCHA also provides language access training for all new employees during the 2-day new hire orientation sessions hosted by the Office of Human Resources. Even though most of DCHA’s services are provided remotely, all direct service departments have been trained on the use of the Language Identification Card, the Interpreter Request Form, and the vital document translation request process. Customer-facing staff has been trained on the process of requesting interpreters and written translations online, as well as the availability of the Language Line for on-demand phone interpretation. In addition, DCHA contracts with local language access agencies to provide quality control and some translation services for the LEP/NEP populations we serve.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Service Departments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Eligibility and Continued Occupancy Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Housing Choice Voucher Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Office of the General Counsel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Office of Human Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Office of Capital Programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Office of Fair Hearings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Office of Resident Services
- The Office of Property Management
- The Office of Public Safety
- The Office of Audit & Compliance
- The Office of Customer Engagement, which includes our Call Center

Table 1. Direct Service Departments

In the last year (October 27, 2021 – October 27, 2022), the agency received 111 language access requests via the Intranet. As detailed in the Table 2, Spanish accounted for half of the requests received. Forms of sign language account for over a quarter of the requests, and are managed via reasonable accommodation requests. Amharic and Vietnamese make up another 17%. Other languages account for the remaining 5% of requests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Request Count</th>
<th>Request %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Sign Language (ASL)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amharic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signing Exact English (SEE)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pidgin Signed English (PSE)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Min</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Language Access requests by language October 27, 2021 – October 27, 2022.

Since language services are available without logging in and to the public, not all requests can be tied to the person making the request. However, as show in Figure 1, for the 78 unique individuals making language requests and tied to a program, 79% have tenant-based vouchers, 17% have project-based vouchers, and 4% are public housing residents.

Figure 1. Language Access requests by program type.
In addition, DCHA tracks all calls to the Language Access line through the Call Center. The trends were very similar to the requests received via the Intranet, with the exception that sign languages were not requested. Due to the verbal nature of the Language Access line, this is to be expected. Spanish accounted for the majority of the requests, with Amharic and Vietnamese receiving requests, as well.

![Language Access Calls- Top Three](image)

**Figure 2. FY2022 Interpreter Request by Language via DCHA main number**

Considering all of the data available, it is clear Spanish is the most frequently requested language, followed by Amharic and Vietnamese.

3. **Nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program.**

DCHA provides the basic need of affordable housing to District residents. Its services are central to the wellbeing of every family it serves. DCHA will continue to focus its efforts on providing language access services in the areas of eligibility for housing, leasing and recertification of eligibility, and termination of these benefits, as these aspects of DCHA’s operations are most likely to have the greatest impact on LEP/NEP persons.

4. **Determine the resources available to assist LEP/NEP individuals.**

DCHA provides interpretation services free of charge to Limited English Proficient (LEP) and Non-English Proficient (NEP) customers who interact with the housing authority over the phone, via video conferencing applications, and in-person. All housing authority staff, including call center agents, housing inspectors, program specialists, and property management staff, has instant access
to a language access line where interpreters are available over the phone through DCHA’s vendor ACSI Translations.

DCHA provides interpretation and translation language services to its residents, voucher participants and applicants free of charge.

**Provision of Interpreter Services (Oral Language Services)**

1. DCHA provides interpretation services through bilingual employees and contracted vendors in-person and by using the Webex platform for administrative hearings, resident meetings and redevelopment updates. Spanish interpretation is provided as a courtesy at voucher briefings and public hearings. Interpretation for additional languages and meetings is provided upon request.

2. Interpretation services by the language line includes DCHA provided interpretation services for a wide range of activities, including, but not limited to the following:

   - Eligibility Interviews
   - Lease ups
   - Housing Inspections (virtual)
   - Recertifications
   - Redevelopment Resident Meetings
   - Property Management meetings
   - Fair Hearings
   - Meet/Lease Events

3. Additional DCHA language access services include:
   a. On all flyers, DCHA includes a Language Advisory in the top 5 languages that an oral interpretation of the documents is available, with contact information for requesting an interpretation.
   b. Language Identification Posters have been distributed to all DCHA employees and posted at all areas of contact with LEP/NEP persons at our main building and property management offices.
   c. DCHA Language Access staff will continue to create multilingual flyers and signage for Management Offices that facilitate communication with LEP/NEP residents.

4. Interpretation Services by Phone

   DCHA provides phone prompts through the interactive voice response system in Spanish and “all other languages” for current and prospective applicants, voucher holders, and public housing residents who wish to contact DCHA through its main number. The majority of the LEP/NEP calls received that require interpretation are for Spanish.
Provision of Translation Services (Written Materials Language Services)

1. As a courtesy to clients whose primary language is Spanish, the most common LEP/NEP language at DCHA, the agency’s Vital Documents have been, or will be, translated into Spanish on an ongoing basis as allowed by available appropriated funds. DCHA’s Vital Documents include, but are not limited to:
   - Applications to receive services, benefits or participate in programs or activities
   - Annual Reviews/Income Re-certifications
   - Notices of public hearings
   - 48 Hours Notices for management office
   - Notices containing information regarding eligibility or participation
   - Notices advising of free language assistance
   - Public Housing and voucher Leases
   - Generic 14 and 30-day Notices to Quit
   - Generic notices of rights, denial, loss, or reduction of benefits or services
   - Discrimination complaints
   - Resident Grievance Procedure
   - Transfer Guide
   - Policy updates (Civil Rights Brochure, Notice of Occupancy Rights under the Violence Against Women Act, Smoke Free Policy)

2. DCHA works with the Mayor’s Office on Latino Affairs (MOLA), Mayor's Office on African Affairs (MOAA), Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (MOAPIA), and the agency’s translation vendor ACSI Translations to communicate with LEP/NEP customers over email and mail.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Name</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Install language access application on staff’s devices</td>
<td>01-01-2023</td>
<td>09-30-2024</td>
<td>Work with ITD to install language access application on agency smart phones and tablets. DCHA’s language access vendor is ACSI who provides a video remote interpreting call application for Apple and Android devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide foreign language testing to bilingual staff</td>
<td>01-01-2023</td>
<td>09-30-2024</td>
<td>Partner with ACTLF licensee (currently Language Testing International) to provide the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) test to bilingual employees to ensure their language proficiency meets the agency’s standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribute the list of bilingual staff</td>
<td>01-01-2023</td>
<td>09-30-2024</td>
<td>Maintain and distribute a list of bilingual staff who agree to act as interpreters and who passed the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) test at a level required by the agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect language data through Customer Kiosks and Customer Solutions Center</td>
<td>01-01-2023</td>
<td>09-30-2024</td>
<td>Develop and install a section/feature asking customers to select their primary language on customer kiosks and Customer Solutions Center desktop stations. Collect the data and transfer to DCHA customer databases (Voyager, Microsoft products, etc.). This data will be analyzed and used to make decisions about document translation, bilingual staff placement, and summer outreach events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect language data through Customer Relationship Management system</td>
<td>01-01-2023</td>
<td>09-30-2024</td>
<td>Develop and install section/feature asking customers to select their primary language in MS Customer Relationship Management system. Collect the data and transfer to DCHA customer databases (Voyager, Microsoft products, etc.). This data will be analyzed and used to make decisions about document translation, bilingual staff placement, and summer outreach events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality control of language access line calls</td>
<td>01-01-2023</td>
<td>09-30-2024</td>
<td>Conduct monthly quality control of calls coming into the call center from LEP/NEP customers. Provide feedback and suggestions for improvements to the call center staff as well as additional training if necessary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Conduct customer satisfaction surveys | 01-01-2023 | 09-30-2024 | Create and distribute customer satisfaction surveys in customer’s primary language to select LEP/NEP customers who contacted DCHA to request information or services. Create the survey in collaboration with MOLA. Utilize customer kiosks, Customer Solutions Center, and MS Customer Relationship Management system to identify the customers and distribute the surveys. Analyze and 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of translated documents</td>
<td>01-01-2023</td>
<td>09-30-2024</td>
<td>Partner with constituent groups (MOLA/MOAA/MOAPIA) for review of translation of vital documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarterly needs assessment</td>
<td>01-01-2023</td>
<td>09-30-2024</td>
<td>Hold quarterly check-ins with MOAA, MOAPIA, and MOLA and/or similar groups representing LEP/NEP constituents to solicit feedback and discuss recommended improvements to DCHA’s Language Access services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage bilingual applicants</td>
<td>01-01-2023</td>
<td>09-30-2024</td>
<td>Add language to recruitment notices for all public-facing positions encouraging bilingual candidates who have passed language proficiency tests to apply. Languages sought will include Spanish, Amharic, Vietnamese, and French. After our HR Department procures the new HRIS, we will work with that department to add language to job postings to attract/encourage bilingual candidates to apply. We will also partner with MOLA/MOAA/MOAPIA by sending job announcements to them for potential candidates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment outreach on targeted websites</td>
<td>01-01-2023</td>
<td>09-30-2024</td>
<td>Post job announcements on job banks and websites that are geared toward LEP/NEP communities and through MOLA, MOAA, MOAPIA to increase pool of bilingual applicants. Bilingual staff are a great asset to DCHA frontline departments who interact with the housing authority's diverse customers daily over the phone and videoconferencing applications. This includes housing program specialists, mobility specialists, eligibility specialists, call center representatives, and more.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Recruitment fair                                  | 01-01-2023 | 09-30-2024   | Hold a job recruitment fair, potentially in coordination with other agencies. Target advertising for event to LEP/NEP communities to attract bilingual applicants. Contact MOLA/MOAA/MOAPIA for support or assistance with outreach. Our HR Department will host recruitment fairs after we procure our new HRIS. This is expected to occur in 2023. We will work with our HR Department to include language that encourages bilingual applicants to apply. Additionally, we will work with our Resident
| Services team and have them target advertising to our LEP/NEP customers for job fairs. |
|---|---|
| **New employee training** | 10-01-2022 | 09-30-2024 |
| Continue training on language access requirements and resources for new employees. This training takes place every two weeks during new employee orientations and is conducted by a language access team member and/or a designated HR trainer. |
| **Training refreshers** | 01-01-2023 | 09-30-2024 |
| Continue training on language access requirements and resources as a part of mandatory policy update training. Policy update trainings are required every two years. In addition, partner with MOLA to offer extended cultural competency training during the annual Customer Service Week. |
| **Create an online training series** | 01-01-2023 | 09-30-2024 |
| Create an online training series in effective communication and language access (language access policy, cultural competence, intercultural communication, plain English). Training will be available online to all staff. Partner with MOLA to offer the extended cultural competency training online. |
| **Identify and translate vital documents** | 01-01-2023 | 09-30-2024 |
| Identify the most-requested documents for each public-facing department (PMO, HCVP, OFH, OPAC, and ORS), translate into required languages, and upload to DCHA online repository of translated documents. For previously translated documents, confirm that no changes have been made to English-language version since document was last translated. |
| **Provide customers with access to online repository** | 01-01-2023 | 09-30-2024 |
| Redesign the DCHA online repository of translated documents for use by customers. Provide link to the repository across customer platforms (website, customer portal, kiosks, Customer Solutions Center, etc.). |
| **Redesign the website for language access** | 01-01-2023 | 09-30-2024 |
| DCHA is in the process of redesigning the official website. Ensure the website is accessible to LEP/NEP customers by providing Google translation across the website and access to the DCHA online repository of translated documents. |
I. PURPOSE

The purpose of these guidelines is to reflect the District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA’s) compliance with the requirements of Law 15-167, the “Language Access Act of 2004.” Law 15-167, enacted on April 21, 2004, promotes greater public access and participation in government services, programs, and activities. D.C. Official Code § 2-1931 designates DCHA as a covered entity under this law. DCHA, pursuant to relevant law, will provide equal access to programs and services to all persons living in, working in, or visiting the District of Columbia, regardless of their ability to speak English. Specifically, DCHA:

i. Identifies a Language Access Point of Contact;

ii. Offers interpretation services;

iii. Collects and analyzes data on the demand for agency services in languages other than English;

iv. Submits a yearly implementation report on the data collected and resulting analysis to the D.C. Office of Human Rights;

v. Provides written translations of vital documents into non-English languages that meet the language threshold; and

vi. Trains staff on language access compliance.

II. AUTHORITY

These guidelines are consistent with DCHA’s mission, as well as applicable federal and District of Columbia laws, rules, and regulations. These laws, rules, and regulations include but are not limited to DC Code § 6-201 et seq.; the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the Language Access Act of 2004, D.C. Law 15-167, D.C. Official Code §2-1931 et seq., effective June 19, 2004; and D.C. Municipal Regulations 4-12 (Language Access Act).

III. APPLICABILITY

These guidelines will apply to all DCHA members, defined as all employees as well as volunteers, contractors, and affiliates providing direct services to the public on the agency’s behalf.
IV. DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of these guidelines, the following definitions apply:

A. “Bilingual” refers to the ability to use two languages proficiently.

B. “Customer” means an individual who may attempt to benefit from or receive services that DCHA provides.

C. “Interpretation” is the conversion of oral wording from one language (the source language) into equivalent oral wording in another language (the target language). Interpretation may occur in-person or over the phone. Although the public and media often use the term interchangeably with “translation,” the word “interpretation” refers to oral speech and “translation” refers to written texts.

D. “I Speak’ Cards” are a resource with which limited or non-English proficient individuals may identify their primary language. The wallet-sized cards are promulgated by the D.C. Office of Human Rights and state the following in both English and the applicable non-English language: “I speak [non-English language]. I need assistance and have the right to receive assistance in my spoken language. Please provide me with an interpreter and note my spoken language in your permanent records. Thank you.”

E. “Language Access Point of Contact” or “Language Access Coordinator” refers to the official within DCHA who coordinates and supervises DCHA’s activities undertaken to comply with the provisions of this guidelines.

F. “Language access services” entail assessing the need for assistance in a language other than English and offering interpretation and/or translation to facilitate communication.

G. “Language Identification Guide” or “Language Identification Sign” is a tool that helps identify a customer’s primary language. The Language Access Coordinator supplies this tool to members.

H. “Language threshold” denotes DCHA’s exposure to a non-English language spoken by a limited or non-English proficient population that constitutes 3% of the agency’s customers or 500 individuals, whichever is less. Once DCHA reaches the threshold for a language, the agency must provide translations of vital documents in that language.

I. “Limited English proficient (LEP)” describes an individual who does not use English as a primary language and who has a limited ability to speak, read, write, or understand English.

J. “Members” are all agency employees, as well as volunteers, grantees, contractors, and affiliates providing direct services to the public on behalf of DCHA.
K. “Non-English proficient (NEP)” describes an individual who does not speak, read, write, or understand English.

L. “Primary language” indicates the language that a customer is most comfortable using. It is usually (but not always) the person’s first or native language.

M. “Translation” is the conversion of written wording from one language (the source language) into an equivalent wording in another language (the target language). Although the public and media often use the term interchangeably with “interpretation,” the word “translation” refers to written texts and “interpretation” refers to oral speech. There are two forms of translation:

1. Written translation is the conversion of written text from the source language into written text in the target language.

2. Sight translation is the oral rendering of a written text from the source into the target language; it is not normally a direct word-for-word translation.

N. “Vital documents” include the applications, notices, forms, agreements, and outreach materials that DCHA publishes or distributes to inform customers about their rights or eligibility requirements for participation in agency programs.

V. PROCESSES

A. Data collection

DCHA will collect data on the demand for agency services in non-English languages. This data collection serves two purposes:

1. To determine whether DCHA has reached the language threshold for a given non-English language, establishing the language(s) into which the agency must translate its vital documents; and

2. To record the customer’s primary language in DCHA’s files, ensuring that further interactions with previously identified LEP/NEP customers include appropriate language accommodations.

Accordingly, members will document all agency encounters with LEP/NEP customers. The Language Access Coordinator will report the resulting data to the D.C. Office of Human Rights on a quarterly basis. At the end of each fiscal year, the Language Access Coordinator will submit an implementation report identifying the non-English languages that meet the agency’s language threshold, as well as the resources available to the LEP/NEP populations who speak these languages.

B. Signage

Members will ensure that all DCHA facilities that are open to the public — including
mobile locations – feature visible signage informing customers of their rights to obtain assistance in a language they can understand, free of charge. Signage must include information in all non-English languages that meet the agency’s language threshold. To inform the public of language access services, DCHA’s facilities will feature the following signs and posters:

(1) Desktop Language ID Guides

(2) Language Access posters/signs at DCHA’s Headquarters and public housing properties.

C. Translation

DCHA will provide written translations of vital documents into all non-English languages that meet the agency’s language threshold. These documents include but are not limited to applications, notices, complaint forms, outreach materials, and other documents regarding customer rights or program eligibility requirements. Translations of vital documents must be as accessible to the public as the English versions are. To this end, members will distribute the translations within DCHA, make them accessible at the entry points of agency facilities, and post them online.

D. Interpretation

Members will establish and maintain full and effective communication with customers of all English proficiency levels. To this end, members will offer interpretation services either over the phone or in person in the primary languages of all customers identified as LEP/NEP. In so doing, members will:

(1) Avoid assumptions about a customer’s primary language and make every effort to ascertain it (for example, some Central Americans use an indigenous dialect as their primary language rather than Spanish);

(2) Provide interpretation whenever requested by a customer, regardless of the customer’s perceived level of English proficiency;

(3) Neither discourage LEP/NEP customers from seeking services at DCHA, nor refuse services to such customers;

(4) Deliver services in a timely manner, i.e., without delays that are significantly greater than those that English proficient customers experience;

(5) Exclusively use professional and qualified interpreters to interpret for LEP/NEP persons, and not family, friends, neighbors, volunteers, bystanders, or children;

(6) Provide interpretation for LEP/NEP customers attending DCHA’s public meetings if the agency receives notice of their presence at least five (5) business days in
advance of the public meeting; and

(7) Make interpretation services available to LEP/NEP customers who participate directly in DCHA’s administrative hearings, whether or not the customer is accompanied by an advocate or attorney.

E. Waiver of language access rights

LEP/NEP customers may insist on using a family member or friend as their interpreter, or may otherwise refuse DCHA’s language access services. In such cases, DCHA will obtain written consent that waives the customer’s rights to translation and interpretation services. To do so, agency members will provide customers with a waiver form in their primary language, which the Office of Human Rights supplies. If a written translation is not available in the customer’s primary language or if the customer is unable to read, DCHA may use sight translation to convey the contents of the waiver form to the customer.

F. Bilingual staff

The Language Access Coordinator will maintain a list of bilingual staff members who agree to act as interpreters for the LEP/NEP population whose primary language they speak (where applicable). Staff interpreters must be able to:

(1) Communicate fluently and accurately in the non-English language(s) in which they claim proficiency;

(2) Interpret exact concepts without distorting meaning in either language; and

(3) Understand the obligations of confidentiality as appropriate.

G. Language access training

All DCHA members in public contact positions will be proficient in the requirements and legal obligations for serving LEP/NEP customers. To this end, members will attend either web-based or in-person trainings provided by DCHA or the D.C. Office of Human Rights.

Training will occur as part of the onboarding process for new members, and as part of continued professional development for existing members.

H. Funded entities and contractors

Funded entities, or contractors hired by DCHA to carry out services, programs, or activities directly to the public are required to a) collect data regarding contact with LEP/NEP customers and report this data to DCHA on a quarterly basis, b) provide oral interpretation services, c) translate vital documents, and d) train personnel on all compliance requirements according to the same standards required of DCHA.
I. Language access complaints

Any person or organization may file a public complaint alleging a violation of the Language Access Act. The D.C. Office of Human Rights addresses these complaints, which may regard both individual and systemic noncompliance. A customer may file the complaint directly, but a person or organization with an interest in the customer’s welfare may also file a complaint on the customer’s behalf. Members shall in no way retaliate against complainants and/or their representatives, and will provide these persons or organizations with the same level of service that other customers receive. Should a customer wishing to file a language access complaint contact DCHA, members will report the incident to the Language Access Coordinator, and provide the customer with the following resources:

(1) The Office of Human Rights Language Access Complaint Form;

(2) The URL for the online Office of Human Rights Language Access Complaint Form (http://ohr.dc.gov/webform/language-access-public-complaint-form); and/or

(3) The Office of Human Rights phone number (202-727-4559).

J. Resources

Members will have the following resources available to better serve LEP/NEP customers: digital and hard-copy translations of vital documents; access to contracted in-person and telephonic interpreters, as well as to the list of DCHA bilingual staff interpreters (if any); materials from the Office of Human Rights, such as “I Speak” Cards and Language ID Guides; and training.

VI. PROCEDURES

A. Identifying LEP/NEP persons

Members must keep in mind the fact that LEP/NEP designations are context-specific; LEP/NEP persons may possess sufficient English language skills to function in certain types of communication (e.g., speaking or listening), but still be LEP/NEP for other purposes (e.g., reading or writing). When members suspect or are told that customers they encounter are LEP/NEP, they will use the following protocol to determine whether or not the customers are actually LEP/NEP:

1. Ask: “Do you speak English very well?”

   a. If the person answers “Yes,” continue communicating with the person in English. Individuals who speak any non-English language and also report speaking English “very well” should be regarded as English proficient and should not be considered LEP/NEP persons.
b. If the person answers “No,” appears not to understand what the member is saying, otherwise indicates a lack of comprehension, or states “I speak it a little” or “I speak it okay,” the member may assume that the person is LEP/NEP and attempt to identify the primary language following the procedures described in part IV.B of these guidelines. Individuals who report speaking English as anything less than “very well” (i.e., “well,” “not well,” or “not at all”) will be regarded as LEP/NEP and eligible to receive language access services.

2. If the LEP/NEP person can speak or understand some English, the member will state: “I can request an interpreter in your language to interpret for you in person or over the phone. Would you like me to get an interpreter?”

a. If the LEP/NEP person answers “Yes,” the member will:

1) Proceed to identify the LEP/NEP person’s primary language as specified in Part VI.B below; and

2) Obtain an interpreter to facilitate communication with the LEP/NEP person.

b. If the LEP/NEP person answers “No,” the member will:

1) Ensure that the LEP/NEP person understood the question and confirm that the customer does not want an interpreter.

2) If the LEP/NEP person confirms that an interpreter is not wanted, the member shall proceed with communicating in English.

B. Identifying the primary language

Members will attempt to identify an LEP/NEP customer’s primary language using the following three approaches:

1. Ask the LEP/NEP person and check for an “I Speak” Card.

Members may ask an LEP/NEP person: “What language do you speak?” or “What language do you speak the best?” If the LEP/NEP person understands and answers the question, and/or displays an “I Speak” Card, the member will immediately follow the procedures in part VI.C.2 of these guidelines to obtain an interpreter for the primary language.

2. Use the Language ID Guide/Sign.

The Office of Human Rights provides a guide for identifying a customer’s primary language. Members obtain this guide from the Language Access Coordinator, and will display it to LEP/NEP customers who are unable to identify their primary language in response to a member’s questions. If the customer successfully identifies a language using the guide, members should follow procedures in part VI.C.2 of these guidelines.
to obtain an interpreter for this language.

3. Contact interpretation service provider.

If LEP/NEP customers do not appear able to read or understand the Language ID Guide or are otherwise unable to identify their primary language, members will contact DCHA’s interpretation service provider by following the procedure outlined in part VI.C.2.b below. With assistance from the service provider, members will attempt to ascertain the LEP/NEP customer's language in order to obtain a suitable interpreter.

C. Obtaining an interpreter

Whenever a DCHA member contacts or is contacted by an LEP/NEP customer by telephone or in person, the member will:

1. Ascertain the LEP/NEP customer’s English proficiency and primary language as described in parts VI.A and VI.B above, respectively.

2. Request an interpreter.

   a. Request an interpreter from DCHA’s Interpretation Services Provider by calling the number provided or through the application and providing DCHA’s Client ID, Organization Name, and Access Code. For more information, see Attachment I.

   b. For in-person meetings, Members may request an in-person interpreter before the scheduled appointment.

      • To request an in-person interpreter, Members will submit a complete request to the Language Access Coordinator at least three (3) business days before the scheduled appointment.

      • Requests may be submitted by email at LA@dchousing.org or online at: https://www.dchousing.org/vue/customer/language.aspx.

      • Requests may include the following information: customer’s name, date and time of the appointment, location of the appointment, topic and purpose of the appointment, duration of the appointment, and what language is needed.

D. Collecting data

DCHA will use the following mechanisms to collect data:

1. Service provider Reports and Invoices;

2. Reception area or Information desk sign-in sheets that include multilingual language preferences;
3. Flags/tags/specialized labels for LEP/NEP case files within DCHA’s record management system (e.g., Voyager);

4. Requests for translation services submitted via DCHA’s website;

5. Reports from bilingual staff on the number of times they are asked to assist an LEP/NEP individual; and

6. Tally of customers who use interpretation equipment at outreach events.

E. Translating vital documents

1. The Language Access Coordinator will identify and maintain a record of all vital document translations.

2. If a vital document translation is not available on the agency Internet or Intranet websites, members will request a translation of that document by contacting LA@dchousing.org. The request should include: the document(s), target language for translation, and date needed.

3. Should LEP/NEP persons require a vital document that has not been translated into their primary language, members will follow the procedures outlined in part VI.C.2.b to contact ACSI or DCHA’s Translation and Interpretation Contractor. Members will request a sight translation by reading the document to the interpreter.

F. Written communication

1. If a member receives a letter or other written communication in a non-English language, and the member is not bilingual in that language, the written communication will be promptly forwarded to LA@dchousing.org.

2. The Language Access Coordinator, or his/her designee, will provide the member with an acknowledgement letter in the sender’s language, and arrange to have the original correspondence translated into English.

3. The member will send the acknowledgement letter to the sender.

4. Once the written communication is translated into English, the Language Access Coordinator, or his/her designee, will forward the English version of the communication to the intended agency recipient for response.

5. The member responsible for writing the response will do so and then forward the response to LA@dchousing.org.

6. The Language Access Coordinator, or his/her designee, will arrange to have the
response translated into the target language and return the translated response to the member.

7. The member will mail or email, as appropriate, the response to the sender.

G. Funded entities and contractors

DCHA will use the following procedures to ensure that funded entities and contractors hired by the agency to provide services directly to the public comply with the requirements of the Act, according to the same standards required of the agency.

1. Include language access compliance requirements for funded entities and contractors in all Notices of Funding Availability (NOFA) and Requests for Proposal (RFP) for direct public services issued by DCHA.

2. Ensure that all funded entities and contractors certify in writing that they will meet language access compliance requirements in contracts, memorandums of understanding, or work agreements signed between funded entity/contractor and DCHA.

3. Ensure that funded entities and contractors that provide services directly to the public receive language access compliance training through OHR, or using training material approved by OHR.

4. Provide guidance on language access compliance to funded entities and contractors that provide services directly to the public by connecting them to translation and interpretation vendors, and by providing them with a clear process for collecting data and for reporting all encounters with LEP/NEP customers to DCHA.

VII. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Executive Director

1. Establish (or designate a member or team to establish) procedures for:

   a. Providing interpretation over the phone and in person;

   b. Engaging in written communication with LEP/NEP customers;

   c. Translating vital documents; and

   d. Collecting data on LEP/NEP encounters.

2. Appoint a Language Access Point of Contact responsible for overseeing the agency’s compliance with the Language Access Act of 2004.
B. Language Access Coordinator

1. Ensure DCHA’s compliance with the Language Access Act of 2004 and corresponding guidelines and regulations.

2. Submit a yearly implementation report that details how determination of language threshold languages was made to the Language Access Director at the Office of Human Rights.

3. Provide guidance, advice, resources, and training to DCHA members regarding the language access services.

4. Identify and screen bilingual staff members to serve as agency interpreters.

5. Identify and maintain a record of DCHA’s vital documents.

6. Track, monitor, and investigate public complaints regarding alleged language access violations at DCHA.

7. Offer guidance on corrective measures for conduct contrary to these guidelines.

C. Language Access Team Assist the LAC with data collection, annual reporting, customer complaints, training of personnel in public contact positions, and other elements of compliance.

VIII. APPROVAL

These guidelines are effective as of March 31, 2021.

Cheryl Robinson Date
3/26/2021

Cheryl Robinson
Language Access Coordinator
Identification of LEP/NEP customers and their languages: data collection and analysis

The DC Housing Authority (DCHA) created a web-based customer communication system that processes all requests from customers who contact the agency over the phone and email. Each request is tracked and requests from LEP/NEP customers are tagged. The system allows for identification of LEP/NEP customers, their primary languages, programs they participate in, and services they request. DCHA will continue to use the system for data collection and analysis purposes.

DCHA will develop and install a section/feature asking customers to select their primary language on all customer kiosks and Customer Solutions Center desktop stations. DCHA will collect the LEP/NEP customer data from the web-based customer communication system, customer kiosks, and the Customer Solutions Center and transfer clients’ preferences to DCHA customer databases. DCHA will also begin identifying LEP/NEP customers at other customer touchpoints:

- Customers receiving translation services
- Customers receiving in-person interpretation services
- Customers who interact with DCHA staff outside of the customer service call center, Customer Solutions Center, and DCHA website (customers submitting maintenance requests, receiving assistance at the property management offices, etc.).

This data will be analyzed and used to make decisions about document translation, bilingual staff placement, and outreach events.

Translation services: online repository

DCHA provides written translations of vital documents to all LEP/NEP customers whose primary language meets the agency’s language threshold. Translated documents are stored in the online repository on DCHA’s Intranet. DCHA staff has instant access to the repository where they can download translated documents, forms, program descriptions, etc.

If a document translation is not available in the repository, the staff member contacts the language access team who has the document translated with the assistance of the Mayor’s Office on Latino Affairs (MOLA), Mayor’s Office on African Affairs (MOAA), Mayor’s Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (MOAPIA), or DCHA’s translation vendor ACSI Translations.

If a requested document is not vital or the customer’s language does not meet the language threshold, DCHA provides verbal translation to the LEP/NEP customers using the language access line.

MOLA, MOAA, and MOAPIA and DCHA’s translation vendor ACSI Translations will also continue to provide translation assistance to DCHA staff who communicate with LEP/NEP customers over email, mail or virtually.
DCHA’s language access team is in the process of redesigning the DCHA online repository of translated documents for use by customers. DCHA will provide a link to the repository across customer platforms (website, kiosks, Customer Solutions Center, etc.). DCHA will also identify the most requested documents for each public-facing department, translate the document(s) into required languages, and upload them to the DCHA online repository of translated documents. For previously translated documents available in the online repository, DCHA language access team will confirm that no changes have been made to the English language version since the document was last translated.

DCHA is also in the process of redesigning the official website. The website will be easily accessible to LEP/NEP customers by providing Google translation across the website and, as mentioned above, access to the DCHA online repository of translated documents.

**Interpretation services: bilingual staff identification and testing**

DCHA will partner with ACTLF licensee to provide the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) test to bilingual employees to ensure their language proficiency meets the agency’s standards. DCHA will also create, maintain, and distribute a list of bilingual staff who agree to act as interpreters and who passed the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) test at a level required by the agency. DCHA will add language to recruitment notices for all public-facing positions encouraging bilingual candidates who have passed language proficiency tests to apply. Languages sought will include Spanish, Amharic, Vietnamese, and French.

**Staff training: current programs**

DCHA conducts mandatory training on language access requirements and resources for all new employees. This training takes place every two weeks during new employee orientations and is conducted by a language access team member. The training program has been reviewed and approved by the District of Columbia Office of Human Rights (OHR). DCHA also conducts the training on language access requirements and resources as a part of mandatory policy update trainings. Policy update trainings are required every two years. Both training programs include detailed instructions on how to identify customer’s primary language as well as offer and access interpretation and translation services at every interaction with LEP/NEP customers. Additionally, every year during the annual Customer Service Week, DCHA offers extended cultural competency training in partnership with the Mayor’s Office on Latino Affairs (MOLA).

In addition to the trainings, DCHA created the Language Access Task Force to include staff from every customer-facing department within DCHA. The task force includes a representative for each department to ensure all staff are aware of the language access policies, procedures, and training offerings. The team meets quarterly for updates, recommendations for improvement, and any policy changes.

DCHA’s language access team distributes language access materials to all staff. This includes digital copies of the training materials, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) (reviewed and approved by OHR), cards with instructions on how to access the language access services, language ID boards used to identify primary language of LEP/NEP customers and more.