

LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION & REGULATORY AFFAIRS

January 31, 2014



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INTRODUCTION

This Language Access Plan (“LAP” or “Plan”) for Administration & Regulatory Affairs (“ARA” or “Department”) has been prepared in accordance with Executive Order 1-17 and outlines ARA’s current and planned actions to improve access to ARA’s programs and services by limited English proficient individuals.

Mayor Annise Parker implemented Executive Order 1-17 on July 31, 2013. The order requires all City departments to establish policies for providing information about City services, programs, and activities to residents and visitors with limited English language proficiency (“LEP”).

PURPOSE

The purpose of the LAP is to implement a process by which ARA will provide greater access and participation in its services, programs, and activities for LEP individuals. This LAP sets forth a framework for the language services and procedures that ARA will implement in order to address the needs of LEP individuals. This plan defines procedures on how to identify a person who may need language assistance, the ways in which language assistance may be provided, training staff, program monitoring, evaluation and documentation, and information for future plan updates.

KEY TERMS

Essential Public Information: Per Executive Order 1-17, “Essential Public Information” is any information developed or used by the department and deemed vital for purposes of public safety, public health and economic development. This term is used interchangeably with the term “vital documents.”

Interpretation & Translation: Interpretation involves *oral* communication. Translation involves *written* communication. Interpretation involves the immediate communication of meaning from one language into another. An interpreter conveys meaning orally, as a result, interpretation requires skills different from those needed for translation. Interpreting is a complex task that combines several abilities beyond language competence in order to enable delivery of an effective professional interpretation in a given setting. From the standpoint of the user, a successful interpretation is one that faithfully and accurately conveys the meaning of the source language orally, reflecting the style, register, and cultural context of the source message, without omissions, additions, or embellishments on the part of the interpreter.

Professional interpreters are subject to specific codes of conduct and should be trained in interpretive skills, ethics, and subject-matter language. When utilizing the services of interpreters, the department should request information about certification, assessments taken, qualifications, experience, and training. Interpreters may be physically present, or, in appropriate circumstances, may appear via videoconferencing or telephonically. When videoconferencing or telephonic interpretation is used, options include connecting directly to a specific professional interpreter with known qualifications, or using a company that provides telephonic interpretation services and has in place quality control and privacy safeguards. If bilingual staff is asked to interpret or translate, staff should be qualified to do so.”¹

Language Access Coordinator: Per Executive Order 1-17 each department is responsible for designating a Language Access Coordinator to effect the creation and execution of the department’s Language Access policy and implementation plan. The coordinators will serve as their department’s liaison, and will work regularly with the Mayor’s language access designee.

Language Line Services: Language Line Services is a private vendor that provides translation and telephonic interpretation services in 179 languages.

Limited English Proficient (LEP): For the purposes of this plan and the activities to be undertaken in its execution, an LEP individual is someone who does not speak English as their primary language and who is not able to speak, read, write or understand English at a level that allows him/her to interact effectively with department staff.

¹ See United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Language Access Plan, February 2011, 2 available from http://www.lep.gov/guidance/040312_crcl-dhs-language-access-plan.pdf. The definition was slightly modified to conform to ARA’s Plan.

DEPARTMENT DESCRIPTION

ARA's mission is to effectively deliver superior administrative and regulatory services to our customers through the efforts of a highly dedicated and professional staff committed to world class customer service and excellence in everything we do.

ARA provides a wide array of services administered through ten divisions — Administrative Services, Bureau of Animal Regulation and Control (BARC), Director's Office, Franchise Administration, Insurance Management, Operations/3-1-1, Parking Management, Payroll Services, Regulatory Permitting, and Strategic Customer Initiatives. ARA serves citizens of the community and provides support to other City departments. Direct services to the public are primarily provided by BARC, Franchise Administration, Operations/3-1-1, Parking Management, and Regulatory Permitting divisions. Services include, but are not limited to:

- ARA's Operations/3-1-1 Division is responsible for managing **the City's 3-1-1 customer service center**. The 3-1-1 customer service center provides the public with quick and easy access to all Houston government services and information while maintaining the highest level of customer service. Calls to 3-1-1 are answered by a live call center representative, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
- BARC provides **animal care and control services** for the city of Houston. BARC provides shelter and veterinary care for all animals brought to the shelter. Shelter services also include dog licensing, animal adoptions, and the acceptance of owner-surrendered animals. BARC administers several campaigns, programs and services to promote and educate the community about responsible pet ownership and the humane treatment of animals including spaying/neutering, microchipping, vaccinations and training class services.

Field services include enforcement of the relevant City animal codes and laws, impoundment of stray animals, and investigation of animal bites. Additional field services include investigating disputes involving animals, animal license enforcement, animal rescue, investigation of animal cruelty and abuse, behavioral complaints, crimes against animals, other crimes involving animals, and response to sick and injured wildlife.

- Regulatory Permitting: Commercial Permitting Section is responsible for **issuing and enforcing more than 72 commercial or business permits, licenses and fees**. In addition to processing permits and licenses and collecting fees, the section assists customers with questions about city codes and requirements for permits, performs compliance investigations and enforces the city code of ordinances related to commercial or business permitting and licensing.
- Regulatory Permitting: Transportation Section is responsible for issuing licenses and permits to the operators and drivers of several different categories of vehicles-for-hire including taxicabs, limousines, private school vehicles, scheduled ground transportation and charter

sightseeing vehicles. One important direct service to the public includes handling of **vehicle-for-hire customer complaints and assistance**, which includes lost items.

- Regulatory Permitting: Burglar Alarm Administration Section, **oversees burglar alarm permitting and false alarm collections for monitored burglar alarm systems** within the City limits. In addition to permitting and collections, the section also encourages burglar alarm permitting education and compliance among homeowners and commercial entities, as well as false alarm prevention to reduce the number of false alarm notifications within the city limits.
- Franchise Administration manages the City's franchise or right-of-way use agreements between the City of Houston and various utilities. The Division also oversees the City's **Utility Complaint Line Unit**. The Utility Complaint Line serves as a central call center at the City for utility related customer complaints. The complaint line regularly responds to utility complaints from citizens regarding cable, telecommunications, electric, and natural gas issues.
- The **Parking Management** Division processes parking related permits, meter reservations, and citation payments. Additional services include processing declarations of ownership, enforcing State and City parking regulations, enforcing the City's Valet Parking and News Rack Ordinances; and management and maintenance of pay stations and parking meters.

Staff Contact with LEP Individuals

Contact between ARA staff and LEP persons primarily takes place through phone calls, in person at a point of service facility, in the field or at public meetings, and through written communication. At this time, limited data is available regarding ARA staff contacts with LEP persons. Conversations with ARA staff provide anecdotal evidence about the frequency of contacts of the various LEP language groups with ARA programs, services and activities. The anecdotal evidence suggests that staff most frequently come in contact with LEP Spanish speakers that need language assistance. The second most frequent contacts are with Vietnamese speakers; however, these contacts are much less compared with LEP Spanish speakers. Regulatory Permitting's Transportation Section also reports Farsi and speakers of various African dialects among the most frequent contacts. With the implementation of this plan, ARA will also implement a process for tracking contacts with LEP individuals.

LANGUAGES COVERED

Executive Order 1-17 mandates City agencies to provide essential public information in a *minimum* of the City's top five languages spoken by LEP individuals. The City used the 2008-2012 American Community Survey ("ACS") 5-year estimates to determine the potential LEP population in the City of Houston. According to ACS data, Houston has a total population of 1,961,100 million persons five years and older. Of this total, the Census estimates that 467,000 or 24.1 percent of Houston's population are LEP — speak English less than "very well".

Given the particular nature of interaction the City has with the public both orally and in writing and the ACS estimates, the City identified the following languages as the baseline languages for translation and interpretation services:

- Spanish
- Vietnamese
- Chinese
- Arabic
- Urdu

ARA will implement its LAP using the five baseline LEP languages for the City of Houston. Essential public documents will be translated into the five baseline languages as practical. Other translations will be undertaken on the basis of need to accommodate all LEP individuals. Interpretation services will be provided in all available languages in addition to the five baseline languages, through ARA's bilingual staff and / or Language Line Services.

LEP populations served by ARA may vary from the baseline languages. LEP populations may also vary among the departmental divisions. Therefore, based on periodic reviews, ARA will add or remove additional languages as necessary to meet actual departmental demand. At the time this plan was drafted, limited data was available regarding ARA staff contacts with LEP persons. As outlined later in this plan, ARA will perform periodic reviews, and implement a process to track data from Language Line, surveys, and other resources to determine actual demand for language access services.

LANGUAGE ACCESS MEASURES

In order to improve access to ARA's programs and services by limited-English proficient individuals, ARA will implement the following array of language assistance services. Actions will be implemented and monitored by ARA staff.

Leveraging Existing Resources

ARA will leverage existing resources to implement the Department's LAP.

1. **Use of existing bilingual employees:** the primary resource for interpretation services will be existing ARA staff. The use of bilingual employees as interpreters allows the department to provide the public with a more timely and personalized response while simultaneously reducing inconvenience to LEP persons. The City of Houston implements a bilingual pay system in which employees are identified as translators.² Currently, ARA employs eighty-nine bilingual employees.³ Eighty employees are bilingual in English and Spanish, eight in Vietnamese and one in an African Dialect. On-site bilingual employees will provide translation and interpretation services. Employees will also perform quality reviews of translated documents and correspondence received in languages other than English.

ARA will coordinate a departmental **Language Bank** of volunteers to assist with translation and interpretation services. The initial Language Bank will consist of employees receiving bilingual pay. The list of employees for the Language Bank will be updated bi-annually to ensure that employees who have left ARA are removed from the list. ARA will also explore the possibility of coordinating the Language Bank across departments.

2. **Use of Language Line Services:** ARA's 3-1-1 call center offers interpretation in a total of 179 languages by means of a language vendor contract with Language Line Services. The department will continue to utilize the 3-1-1 contract for Language Line Services, extending the resource to all ARA divisions. 3-1-1 will administer Language Line operations for the department. Language Line will be used to provide interpretation via telephone when ARA bilingual staff are unavailable. Language Line Services is a private vendor that provides translation and telephonic interpretation services in 179 languages. The Department currently only utilizes Language Line for telephonic interpretation.

ARA will avail itself of any additional citywide resources as appropriate and as such resources become available.

² City of Houston Administrative Procedure No. 3-9, "Bilingual Pay Policy for Municipal Employees," January 4, 2011.

³ Bi-lingual pay report for the Department of Administration & Regulatory Affairs, provided January 3, 2014. The information provided in this report is subject to change due to attrition.

Oral Translation Services

Contact between ARA staff and LEP persons primarily takes place through phone calls, in person at a point-of-service facility, in the field or at public meetings. In order to provide interpretation services, ARA will use the following processes.

1. Develop and maintain a Language Bank Directory. ARA will develop and maintain a list of employees able to provide interpretation support. The initial Language Bank will consist of departmental employees already receiving bilingual pay. The Directory will be available to all ARA staff.
2. Identify the language needs of the LEP individual. Staff members having direct contact with LEP individuals will assess the language needs of the LEP individual.
 - a. When a caller speaks a language other than English, and bilingual staff are not available, contact can be made with Language Line through 3-1-1, to assist in identifying the language spoken and providing an interpreter.
 - b. Staff having direct contact with LEP individuals in person at a point-of-service facility or in the field will be equipped with the US Census Bureau's "ISpeakCard?" language identification flashcard to facilitate language identification, if necessary. The Department will also issue a condensed version of the primary language identifier card that is designed in a pocket-sized card format for use in the field.
3. If the staff member having initial contact is listed in the Language Bank Directory and speaks a language relevant to the LEP individual, then that staff member will assist. If the staff member does not speak the language, the staff member will refer to the Language Bank Directory to identify bilingual staff that may best assist the client with oral translation services.
4. If communications become difficult for any reason or if at any time the employee determines that his or her level of language proficiency is insufficient to complete the interpretation, Language Line should be used via 3-1-1.
5. If the Directory does not include an ARA staff member that speaks the language relevant to the LEP caller, or a staff member listed in the Directory is unavailable to assist at that time, then the staff member may use Language Line through 3-1-1 to communicate with the LEP individual.
6. Departmental cellular phones will be used to acquire oral interpretation services in the field.

Public Hearings/Meetings

To the extent feasible, an interpreter will be provided for public meetings and hearings. Interpreters will be provided upon request in advance of public hearings/meetings. Use of bilingual staff will

remain the preferred method for providing interpretation services. ARA may provide interpretation for public hearings/meetings without advanced request, as need is anticipated, and to the extent feasible. ARA may contract with area vendors, or through a city-wide contract, to provide interpretation services for public hearings/meetings to the extent funding is available.

Written Translation Services

Identifying Essential Public Information and Vital Documents

ARA will undertake a review to assess which program documents qualify for written translation, and the best way to undertake translation services. As part of the review, each ARA division will be responsible for identifying 'essential public information/ vital documents' and the feasibility of translating the documents into the five baseline languages. In addition:

1. ARA will establish criteria for identifying essential public information/ vital documents and for selecting documents to be translated.
2. Divisions will identify and provide the Department Director or Director's designee with a list of possible essential public information/ vital documents.
3. The Department Director or the Director's designee will work with the divisions to select essential public information/ vital documents and the appropriate languages for translation.
4. Through a process of prioritization, ARA will identify the essential public information/ vital documents to be translated. Consideration will be given to, among other things, document type, demand, the LEP groups and number of LEP individuals seeking access to the documents, and frequency of contact with the document.
5. Periodic reviews will be performed to identify additional documents, and, in regards to existing essential public information/ vital documents, for revisions and to determine if the information is still relevant for each particular division.

In every instance, the automatic translation of written documents and forms may not be appropriate, and may not provide the best service to LEP individuals. ARA believes that frequency of contact with the document and organizational resources should be considered. Consideration should also be given to the purpose of the document. For example, if the document purpose is to obtain information, and the document must be referenced later by staff, completion of certain forms in the LEP individual's primary language would be impractical. Documents not selected for automatic translation will be translated or interpreted on an as needed basis and upon request.

ARA does not currently collect data on which documents and programs are most accessed by each LEP language group. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the frequency with which LEP clients access certain ARA programs, services and activities. As previously stated, anecdotal evidence through conversations with ARA staff suggests that Spanish speakers have the greatest demand for

language services. In the future, data collection will be implemented to allow ARA to assess LEP needs. The data will be used to refine the LAP during future reviews to more effectively serve LEP clients.

Translating Essential Public Information/Vital Documents

In order to translate the essential public information/ vital documents, ARA will use the following resources and processes:

1. ARA will identify and create a list of essential public information/vital documents. From this list, ARA will identify documents for translation. Through a process of prioritization, ARA will identify the information/documents to be translated.
2. To the extent possible, ARA will work to simplify documents using symbols, plain text, and other graphics to make information as readily accessible as possible.
3. ARA will use the City's approved vendor for translation services in accordance with procedures set out by the administration.
4. Translation services and quality control will also be provided using ARA's internal Language Bank.
5. ARA will post translated documents on its website — www.houstontx.gov/ara/index.html when available.
6. If an LEP client requires assistance to understand an English document, staff will arrange for an interpreter to orally interpret the document. Documents may also be translated upon request. Determination will be made on a case by case base.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Documentation

In order to ensure effective and efficient implementation of ARA's translation/interpretation plan, the department plans to conduct the following routine monitoring, evaluation, and documentation of the language access plan implementation. The department understands that this internal process can inform, but does not substitute, reporting requirements established under Executive Order 1-17 that will be shared with ARA by the Mayor's designee.

Collecting, analyzing and maintaining data is one way that ARA may assess the effectiveness of the LAP. ARA will explore ways to regularly collect and maintain data regarding encounters with LEP individuals. The data may include the following:

1. Number of LEP individuals requesting LAP services.
2. Method of communication.

3. Type of language needed.
4. Type of language service needed.
5. Department service requested or provided.

Collection tools may include:

1. Language Line Reports. For interpretation provided using Language Line interpreters, the Department will rely on Language Line reports to monitor usage.
2. LEP Request Form. ARA will develop a language request form for whenever translation/interpretation services are needed.
3. LEP Daily Log. For services provided by ARA staff, staff will be asked to log the encounter. The log will include the date, time, service provided, language used and any other relevant comments.
4. Surveys of staff and customers regarding language access services.

The Department's Access Plan Coordinator ("Coordinator") will perform regular reviews of the plan. The review will include an evaluation of the data collected regarding LEP services and staff feedback. The plan will be refined as needed based on this review. The plan may be changed or updated at any time.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AND STAFF TRAINING

Pursuant to Executive Order 1-17, reporting requirements and employee training will be facilitated through the Mayor's designee, the Office of International Communities. These items will be provided separately to the department.

Staff Training

Per the Executive Order:

- City employees who routinely have direct, substantive interaction with the public (front-line employees) shall be trained in language access policies and procedures that shall include protocols for assisting LEP populations. Training shall be provided by the Mayor's designee.
- Additional department specific training may be provided for employees to review the Language Access Plan elements and inform staff of their responsibilities relative to LEP persons. On a periodic basis refresher training may be provided to staff who regularly interact with LEP clients.

Reporting Requirements

Per the Executive Order:

- All Coordinators shall report plan progress, assessments and recommendations periodically to department heads and the Mayor's designee.
- The Mayor's Designee will establish a reporting format, report submission interval and technical assistance to departments. Reporting logistics should be established within six months of the Executive Order.
- The Mayor's Designee will work with the Coordinators to develop protocols used to measure the progress by the department, as well as by feedback from the public constituencies with limited English proficiency served by the City department.

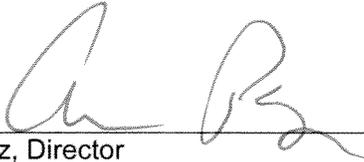
PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

ARA's LAP will become effective July 1, 2014.

APPROVAL SIGNATURE

The Department of Administration & Regulatory Affairs Language Access Plan was approved January 31, 2014, and was submitted on the same day to the Administration as required by Executive Order 1-17.

Department Signatures & Contacts



Tina Paez, Director
Administration & Regulatory Affairs

Date

1/30/2014



Alisa Talley
Department's Language Access
Coordinator

Date

1/30/2014