



LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

TERRY GARRISON, FIRE CHIEF

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PURPOSE

On July 31, 2013, Mayor Annise Parker signed Executive Order 1-17 under the authority of Article VI, Section 7a, of the City Charter of the City of Houston. The order mandates 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).

The language access order calls for the translation of essential public information into five languages other than English for which there is the greatest need among Houston residents. The Office of International Communities, which oversees the project, will conduct a data-driven language needs assessment, working closely with City departments, international community leaders and stakeholders and university-based experts to identify the five languages that will be adopted into the plan.

The language access executive order is aligned with Mayor Parker's commitment to strengthening the city's economy and improving the quality of life for all Houstonians.

In addition to the mandate presented by Executive Order 1-17, federal precedents exist for the provision of language access services and which are relevant to the City. The two main legal bases for language access are Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on national origin, and 2000's Executive Order 13166, which affirms Title VI's language access requirement and outlines additional requirements. Any entity receiving federal support, even indirectly, is required to provide language access. Moreover, Title VI applies to a recipient's entire program or activity. This means all parts of a recipient's operations are covered, regardless of whether the recipient is only partially funded through federal funds. Language access requirements are therefore relevant to a wide variety of programs, services and activities provided by Houston city agencies.¹

As per the requirements of Executive Order 1-17, the Houston Fire Department (HFD) has prepared this Language Access Plan ("LAP" or "Plan") in order to create a set of protocols for providing meaningful access to Department services, programs, and activities (both written and orally communicated) to LEP individuals.

¹ Executive Order 13166 can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2000-08-16/pdf/00-20938.pdf> and related guidance on implementation of the federal Executive Order can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2002-06-18/pdf/02-15207.pdf>

DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

About the Houston Fire Department

The Houston Fire Department was established in 1838 with one station, Protection Company No. 1. It grew to a volunteer fire department status with three stations by 1859. After having provided volunteer firefighting services for 57 years, the City of Houston Fire Department began paying its firefighters in 1895. HFD is the 3rd largest fire department in the United States and is responsible for preserving life and property to a population of more than 2 million in an area totaling 654 square miles.

Our commitment to the public we serve is unwavering and consistent. This commitment is fully expressed in our motto: “Courage, Commitment, and Compassion”. Our menu of responsibilities is ever changing, but our basic areas of service are prevention and enforcement, public education, pre-hospital emergency care & transportation, and fire control. Our service has evolved to include hazardous materials, technical rescue, tactical medicine, swift water rescue, and social service calls. Our commitment to the public we serve is unwavering and consistent. This commitment is fully expressed in our motto: “Courage, Commitment, and Compassion”.

Department Divisions

- ❖ Emergency Response
 - Operations
 - Emergency Medical Services
 - Professional Development
 - Communications
- ❖ Planning/Administration
 - Information Technology
 - Human Resources
 - Member Support
- ❖ Prevention/Support
 - Preparedness & Homeland Security
 - Resource Management & Special Projects
 - Staff Services
 - Arson Bureau
 - Life Safety Bureau
- ❖ Finance

Contact Information

Director – Fire Chief

Terry Garrison
600 Jefferson St., 7th Floor
Houston, TX 77002
832.394.6702
terry.garrison@houstontx.gov

Language Access Coordinator

George Salcedo
600 Jefferson St, 6th Floor
Houston, TX 77002
832.394.6645
george.salcedo@houstontx.gov

KEY DEFINITIONS

Essential Public Information: As per the Executive Order, “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.”

Executive Order 1-17: This is a policy directive signed by the Mayor that mandates 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).

Interpretation & Translation: Taken verbatim from the US Department of Homeland Security’s 2012 Language Access plan²: “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.

DHS Components utilizing the services of interpreters 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 are 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. Assessment of ability, training on interpreter ethics and standards, and clear policies, as noted below, that delineate appropriate use of bilingual staff, or contract interpreters and translators, will help ensure quality and effective use of resources.”³

iSpeak Cards: These are cards that can be used to help an LEP individual obtain interpretive services. LEP’s are instructed to go online to find their language and print them. They can insert their name on the blank line on both the English and the non-English language statements. They then cut along the border lines, place back-to-back with adhesive (glue or paste), and laminate

² Definition available on pages 2 and 3 of US Department of Homeland Security February 2011 Language Access Plan, available at: http://www.lep.gov/guidance/040312_crcl-dhs-language-access-plan.pdf

³ For the purposes of this language access plan, the term “DHS Components” in the definition can be substituted for “Agencies”

the card. They can keep these cards in their wallet to be used to help them get interpretive services when needed. You can access iSpeak cards at many online resources, including: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/civilrights/PG584.htm>

iSpeak Houston: This is the designee for all language access activities in the City of Houston. As a part of the Department of Neighborhoods, iSpeak Houston oversees the City of Houston Language Access Task Force and liaisons with the City departments through the Language Access Coordinators, who also serve as members of the task force. In addition to serving as the hub for all language access activities, iSpeak Houston offers language access technical support and services to City of Houston staff.

Language Access Coordinator: These individuals are responsible for devising and ensuring that the City department they represent is in compliance with the Mayor's Executive Order 1-17, and that their department adheres to its language access policy directives, plan and procedures to provide meaningful access to LEP persons. They also represent their department on the City of Houston Language Access Task Force.

Language Line/Telephone Interpreting: This is a service that connects human interpreters via telephone to individuals who wish to speak to each other but do not share a common language. The telephone interpreter converts the spoken language from one language to another, enabling listeners and speakers to understand each other. Interpretation over the telephone most often takes place in **consecutive mode**, which means that the interpreter waits until the speaker finishes an **utterance** before rendering the interpretation into the other language. Telephone interpreting is one modality or delivery mechanism for providing interpreting services. Other forms of delivering interpreting services include in-person interpreting and video interpreting for the deaf and hard of hearing. For the City of Houston, the service can be accessed through the 3-11 service help line at no cost to constituents. Departments that utilize the service line, however, will be assessed a fee for utilizing the service. Fees are charged by the minute, and fees per language may differ.

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 is not able to speak, read, write or understand the English language at a level that allows him/her to interact effectively with Department staff. Individuals maintain the right to self-identify as a LEP person and should not in any circumstances be expected to pay for translation or interpretation services in order to effectively communicate with the Department.

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. Given the particular nature of interaction, both orally and in writing, the HFD has with the public; the HFD has determined that the following languages will be covered for translation and interpretation services:

- Spanish
- Vietnamese
- Chinese
- Arabic
- Urdu

The top five languages in the above list might not necessarily cover the languages of all individuals seeking programs, services, and activities from the department. In an effort to avoid the misperception of unequal services or uneven coverage of language access services to communities who speak languages not identified in the list, the department will follow the City-wide protocol for handling LEP individuals.

If a request is made for an essential document that is not available in the above list of languages, when feasible, the department will utilize the City-wide translation vendor to translate the requested essential document. The decision to translate the document will be determined by the Fire Chief, or his/her language access representative.

The selection for the five languages was approved by the Mayor. The data is from the U.S. Census/American Language Survey. The list of languages with selection rationale by the Houston Planning Department is found in the Appendix.

LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES

This section describes how the HFD will determine what information is considered essential/vital, and how it will provide translation/interpretation services of that information. A list of essential documents can be found in the Appendix.

Translation of Essential Public Information Criteria

The HFD will use the following criteria for determining what constitutes “Essential Public Information” and “Vital Documents”:

- 1) Division/Command Executive Assistant Chief's will provide the Fire Chief with a list of documents they consider essential/vital information.
- 2) Division/Command Executive Assistant Chief's will provide a brief written explanation of why they consider the information essential/vital.
- 3) The Fire Chief will work with iSpeak Houston to review the documents.
- 4) The Fire Chief will determine for the department which documents provided by the division are essential/vital.

Implementing Translation of Essential Information

In order to translate the essential public information outlined in the section above, the HFD will use the following resources and processes:

- 1) Documents will be translated using the City's approved vendor for translation/interpretation services in accordance with procedures set out by the administration.
- 2) To ensure quality assurance, all documents that have been translated will be reviewed by the Community Language Access Committee of the Mayor's International Communities Advisory Task Force, and the Language Access Coordinators.
- 3) If the documents are approved for translation, then they will be made available to the public online in PDF format on the Department's webpage.
- 4) When feasible, the documents in print format will be made available in public areas.
- 5) If the documents do not meet the quality assurance standards identified by the committee, then the committee will be sent back to the translation firm with specific instructions that will improve the content of the information.
- 6) The revised documents will be submitted for review by the committee. If the documents are approved, they will be sent to the Fire Chief, who will send an approved copy of the document to the Division/Command Executive Assistant Chief's.
- 7) Copies of the approved documents will be on file at the Department's Public Information Office.

- 8) Essential/Vital documents/information which are approved through this process will be reviewed every two years for revisions, and to determine if the information is still relevant for each particular division.

Interpretation Services and Implementation

Where the HFD conducts in-person or telephonic or otherwise orally-communicated business with the community, it will provide, when feasible, interpretation services for LEP individuals. It plans to do so by following the City's Administrative Procedure for handling LEP individuals. Refer to the Appendix for a copy of the Administrative Procedure.

Monitoring, Evaluation & Documentation

In order to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the HFD translation/interpretation plan, the HFD plans to conduct the following routine monitoring, evaluation, and documentation of the language access plan implementation.

The HFD understands that this internal process can inform, but does not substitute, reporting requirements established under Executive Order 1-17 and that (will be or have been) shared with the HFD by the Mayor's designee.

Ensuring the quality of our language services is critical to communicating effectively with LEP individuals. The HFD will work in collaboration with iSpeak Houston to rollout the following evaluation mechanisms to ensure the successful implementation of its language access initiatives.

Each division of the HFD will be required to maintain records of all service requests received for written translation services, on-site interpretation services, and over-the-phone interpretation services. This information will be sent to the Fire Chief's designee at the end of each quarter.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS & EMPLOYEE TRAINING

The Houston Fire Department understands that, under the requirements laid out in 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/have been) provided separately to department based staff and field personnel.

The training module includes information on:

- The HFD's role in facilitating the provision of Language Access services
- Accessing translation and over-the-phone interpretation services from the Translation and Interpretation Unit
- Obtaining translated signs for posting and Language Identification Cards for LEP's to use when identifying a person's primary language

Reporting Requirements

Per the Executive Order:

- 7.5.1 All Coordinators shall report plan progress, assessments and recommendations periodically to department heads and the Mayor's designee.
- 7.5.2 The Mayor's Designee will establish a reporting format, report submission interval and technical assistance to departments. Reporting logistics should be established within 6 months of this Executive Order.
- 7.5.3 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.

HFD divisions will collect findings using the tool located in the Appendix. This information will be collected at the point of service delivery, and will be submitted to the Division/Command Executive Assistant Chief and/or the Fire Chief's designee on a quarterly-basis.

Staff Training

Per the Executive Order:

- All 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.
- The Department will comply with all training requirements.

APPROVAL SIGNATURE PAGE

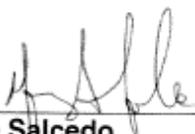
The Houston Fire Department's Language Access Plan was approved on February 06, 2014, and was submitted on the same day to the Administration as required by Executive Order 1-17.

Department Leadership:



Terry Garrison
Fire Chief

Date 2-6-14



George Salcedo
Department's Language Access
Coordinator

Date 2-6-14

APPENDIX

TOP FIVE LANGUAGES OF NEED SPOKEN IN HOUSTON

Ability to Speak English “Less Than Very Well” in City of Houston



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Source: 2012 American Community Survey,
U.S. Census Bureau
Date: January 17, 2014

Introduction

Data on ‘Language spoken at home by Ability to Speak English’ were derived from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2008-2012 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates. The data includes only population 5 years and over who have the ability to speak a language. This data is collected in an effort to measure the current use of languages other than English. The ACS collects information from a large annual sample of approximately 3 million housing unit addresses and therefore provides more reliable statistics. The usefulness of the self-rated English-speaking ability question was established in the 1980s.

Respondents were instructed to print the name of the non-English language spoken at home. If the person spoke more than one language other than English, the person was to report the language spoken more often.

City of Houston

English-speaking ability varied widely among the speakers of the top ten languages spoken in the City of Houston. The top ten languages spoken in Houston are: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, French or Creole, Urdu, Arabic, Hindi, and Tagalog (Philippines) and Korean.

The Census Bureau distinguishes the ability to speak English between “Very Well” and “Less Than Very Well”. In Houston, the “Less Than Very Well” category ranked numerically are, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, Urdu, Korean, French or Creole, Hindi, and Tagalog (Philippines). Those who speak “Less Than Very Well” category varies between 397,429 persons (Spanish) being the highest and 1,551 persons (Philippines-Tagalog) being the lowest. The higher proportion indicates that they have a huge difficulty in conveying information clearly in English from normal conversations to obtaining assistance from non-profit organizations, Government etc.

Recommended 5 Languages based on numerical rank are (Speak English “Less than Very Well”): Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic and Urdu.

**Language Spoken at Home (Other than English)
City of Houston**

	Speak English "Less Than Very Well"	Speak English "Very Well"	Total
Spanish or Creole	397,429	332,099	729,528
Vietnamese	21,584	11,701	33,285
Chinese	13,521	10,765	24,286
Arabic	3,324	5,256	8,580
Urdu	2,783	5,090	7,873
Korean	2,498	2,174	4,672
French or Creole	2,486	7,959	10,445
Hindi	2,041	6,162	8,203
Tagalog (Philippines)	1,551	5,434	6,985

ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTS

HFD's Fire Prevention & Life Safety Guidebook

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IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS & WEBSITES

The Houston Fire Department

600 Jefferson, 7th floor
Houston, Texas 77002
www.houstonfire.org

Emergency Calls	9-1-1
Main Number (non emergency)	832-394-6700
Public Affairs	832-394-6633
Arson Investigation	713-247-8900
Ambulance Records	832-394-6860
Ambulance Billing	1-800-929-6209
EMS	832-394-6800
EMS & Fire Records	832-394-6860
Fire Alarm Permits	832-394-8811
Fire Prevention/Codes	832-394-6900
OIG/IAD Complaints	713-247-8960
Public Education	832-394-6741
Public Information	832-394-6706
Recruiting	832-394-6600
Free Smoke Detector Program	832-394-6633
Schedule a fire truck visit, speaker or fire station tour	832-394-6633
Juvenile Firestoppers Program	713-247-8826

Houston Police Department

1200 Travis Street
Houston, Texas 77002
www.houstonpolice.org

Emergency Calls	9-1-1
Main Number (non emergency)	713-884-3131

City of Houston Office of Emergency Management

5320 North Shepherd
Houston, Texas 7091-5738
www.houstonoem.net

Main Number	713-884-5738
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American Red Cross

2700 Southwest Freeway
Houston, Texas 77098
www.redcross.org/tx/houston

Main Number	713-526-8300
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Harris County Fire Marshal

2318 Atascocita
Humble, Texas 77396
www.hcfmo.net

Main Number	281-436-8000
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Centerpoint Energy

www.centerpointenergy.com

Report a Gas Leak	713-659-2111 1-888-752-8036
Call Before You Dig	811
Power Outage	713-207-2222 1-800-332-7143
Report Down Power Lines	713-207-2222

Child Car Seat Inspections

Through Safe Kids of Greater Houston
www.safekidsgreaterhouston.org

Main Number	832-828-1314
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Texas Poison Center Network

www.poisoncontrol.org

National Emergency Number	1-800-222-1222
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Federal Emergency Management (FEMA)

www.fema.gov

Main Number	1-800-621-3362(FEMA)
TTY	1-800-462-7585

MONITORING ASSESSMENT TOOL

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