



CITY OF HOUSTON

Administrative Procedure

Subject: **Language Access**

A.P. No:

2-11

Effective Date:

May 16, 2014

1. AUTHORITY

1.1 Article VI, Section 7a, City Charter of the City of Houston.

2. PURPOSE

2.1 Establish policies for providing information about City services, programs and activities to residents and visitors with Limited English Language Proficiency (LEP).

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1 Houston is an international city of commerce, culture, trade, travel, and tourism. Over 100 different languages are spoken in Houston's neighborhoods. All Houston residents and visitors, regardless of their proficiency level in English, should have access to essential public information about City programs, services, activities, and other benefits. The City shall facilitate communication between City staff and LEP individuals.

3.2 While continuous efforts shall be maintained by implementing and expounding on a department's language access protocols, it is understood that this multiphase process shall be enacted and improved upon over an extended period of time.

4. SCOPE

4.1 This policy applies to all City departments.

5. DEFINITIONS:

Bilingual or Multilingual Employee – An employee compensated and formally recognized by the City for being functionally competent with two or more languages.

Essential Public Information – Any information developed or used by the department and deemed vital for purposes of public safety, public health, and public welfare.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) – Individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.

Approved:

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6. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.1 All City departments that provide services directly to the public shall designate a Language Access Coordinator (Coordinator) to effect the creation and execution of the department's Language Access policy and implementation plan. The Coordinator's will serve as their department's liaison, and they will work regularly with the Mayor's Office Language Access Designee.
- 6.2 The Mayor's Office Language Access Designee shall be the Office of International Communities, which shall assist in the provision of language services to the public and provide technical assistance to City departments in providing such services.

7. POLICY

- 7.1 When feasible, the City shall provide essential public information for a minimum of the top 5 commonly-used languages utilized by the City's culturally diverse population. The City will depend on a variety of relevant sources (example: US Census) to determine the commonly-used languages. The information is available using the following internet links: <http://www.houstontx.gov/ispeakhouston/>, or www.ispeakhouston.org
- 7.2 Language assistance will be provided through the use of competent bilingual staff interpreters, or interpretation or translation services.
- 7.3 All interpreters, translators, and other resources needed to comply with this policy shall be provided without cost to the LEP individual being served. Constituents and visitors will be informed that these services are available free of charge.
- 7.4 All City departments that provide services directly to the public shall provide information about LEP services by developing and implementing department or agency-specific language access plans.
 - 7.4.1 Departments will conduct regular reviews of its language access resources and plans and update them as necessary.
 - 7.4.2 Departments that are not required to implement a language access plan (Finance, Fleet Management, General Services, Human Resources, Information Technology, and Legal) should ensure that its employees are aware of this program.
- 7.5 City employees who routinely have direct interaction with the public:
 - 7.5.1 Shall be trained in language access policies and procedures that shall include protocols for assisting LEP populations.
 - 7.5.2 Shall be trained on efficient communication techniques, the effective use of an interpreter, and on how to properly interact with LEP individuals.
- 7.6 Reporting
 - 7.6.1 All Coordinators shall report plan progress, assessments, and recommendations periodically to their department heads and the Mayor's designee.
 - 7.6.2 The Mayor's Office Language Access Designee will work with the Coordinators to develop protocols to measure the progress of the departments, as well as obtain feedback from the public constituencies with regard to LEP's served by City departments.

7.7 Language Access Portal

- 7.7.1 The City of Houston shall maintain a Language Access Portal on the City's website that can be accessed at <http://www.houstontx.gov/ispeakhouston/> or www.ispeakhouston.org.
- 7.7.2 The Mayor's Language Access Designee will be responsible for ensuring that the content on the Language Access Portal is current and accurate.
- 7.7.3 The Language Access Portal will contain Language Access tools such as iSpeak cards, the department language access plans, City policies related to Language Access, current demographic information of the different foreign languages spoken in the City, and other important information related to Language Access.

8. CITYWIDE LEP INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE PROCEDURE

This procedure should be applied when assisting LEP individuals, whether in person, or by telephone, and may be adjusted given the circumstances.

8.1 Identification

- 8.1.1 City employees should identify the language and communication needs of the LEP individual.
- 8.1.2 If necessary, employees may use a language identification card, iSpeak cards or posters to determine the language. Language Access tools are available online at www.ispeakhouston.org, or <http://www.houstontx.gov/ispeakhouston/>.

8.2 Interpreters

8.2.1 Departmental

- 8.2.1.1 City employees should first use their in-house staff, if available, to interpret.
- 8.2.1.2 Departments shall maintain a list of bilingual, or multilingual employees that includes the language(s) they speak, and their phone number. This list shall be made readily available to all departmental employees.

8.2.2 Friends/Family

- 8.2.2.1 LEP individuals who prefer to use a family member, or friend as an interpreter, may do so if they request it.
- 8.2.2.2 For official proceedings, a certified interpreter may be required.

8.2.3 Language Line

- 8.2.3.1 When a bilingual employee is not available, employees may use the Language Line through the 311 Help Service Line Division.
- 8.2.3.2 Departments shall be assessed charges for Language Line services and for any indirect costs associated with the 311 agent's time.
- 8.2.3.3 311 shall establish procedures for tracking interdepartmental requests for Language Line Services. The 311 agent will, at a minimum:
 - 8.2.3.3.1 Request the name & contact information of the employee requesting the Language Line Service.

- 8.2.3.3.2 Update or create a record documenting the language assistance rendered, At a minimum, the agent must record the name and contact information of the employee requesting Language Line interpreter services, as well as the department, division, and section, and the specific language used. The agent will also record whether 311 in-house staff, or the Language Line provided the interpretation services.
- 8.2.3.4 Telephone language interpretation through 311 should be performed in the following manner:
 - 8.2.3.4.1 Employees should determine the language needs of the LEP individual, if possible.
 - 8.2.3.4.2 Employees should inform the 311 operator of their name, their department, and the language for which the LEP individual needs interpretation assistance. If the specific language is not known, the employee is to inform the 311 operator that assistance is needed in making the determination.
 - 8.2.3.4.3 Once a Language Line interpreter has been connected to the call, the employee shall explain the nature of the call, and the interpreter's task before the interpretation process begins. Once satisfied with the connection, the 311 agent will disengage from the call.
 - 8.2.3.4.4 Before ending the call with the interpreter, the employee should request that the interpreter ask the LEP individual whether or not he or she is satisfied with the information he or she received and if there are any questions.
 - 8.2.3.4.5 When finished, the employee should say "End Call" to complete the interpretation service.

9. CONFLICT AND REPEAL

- 9.1 This Administrative Procedure supersedes Executive Order 1-17, Language Access, signed July 31 2013, which shall be of no further force or effect.