

Resources for Language Access in Rural Communities

Understanding health information is a basic step toward better health. Language access is a building block of that understanding, since it makes services and information available in local languages other than English through translation and interpretation. For organizations that serve Refugee, Immigrant, Migrant (RIM), and farmworker populations, language access serves to connect constituent communities with crucial health resources. Yet rural and semi-rural places, where there may be fewer local models and available bilingual speakers, can pose unique challenges for language access planning.

This curated list of resources aims to help rural and semi-rural organizations and clinics seeking to provide equitable language access. The tools linked below provide basic steps to successful language access programs, for those just starting or those seeking improvement in a particular aspect such as staff training, emergency responses, and understanding local demographics. All are featured here because of their high quality and adaptability to budgets, staffing, and demographics of rural contexts. All are related to the core steps of language access implementation: needs assessment, language services, notices of availability of services, training, and evaluation.

Language access leads to better health outcomes and it is also the law. Language access measures are required of all entities that are recipients or sub-recipients of Federal funding, according to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and numerous other statutes. For a more complete accounting of the ongoing language access legal framework, please consult California Rural Legal Assistance's [Frequently Asked Questions about Executive Order 14224](#).

Core Steps for Language Access Planning:

1. Needs Assessment
2. Language Services
3. Notices of Availability of Services
4. Training
5. Evaluation

(“[Guide to Developing a Language Access Plan](#),” p. 2)

Introduction & Context

[Interpreting in Rural Communities](#)



Developed by: [American Translators Association](#)

Description: Highlights the challenges of delivering interpreting services in rural areas and shares examples of innovative strategies tailored to a specific small town.

Adaptation Tip: Partner with local schools to understand languages spoken locally and develop whole-community approaches to language access.

[Language Access is Social Justice](#)



Developed by: [The INS Group](#) (Note: does not represent an endorsement of INS paid services.)

Description: A blog-style overview of language access directed specifically at nonprofits.

Adaptation Tip: When planning language access, know the difference between language access and language justice measures, since partners and constituents may want to know which framework you are using. It is possible and likely that you will want to use elements of each.

Basic Tools for Language Access Planning

[Guide to Developing a Language Access Plan](#)



Developed by: [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#)

Description: Step-by-step guide that outlines key components of a language access plan, including assessment, service provision, and staff training.

Adaptation Tip: Though there is no one-size-fits-all approach to language access planning, it is important to understand and plan for each of five elements (needs assessment, language services, notices of available services, training, and evaluation) as efficiently outlined in this resource.

[U.S. Census Data on Language and English Proficiency](#)



Developed by: [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Description: Access community-level data on language spoken at home, limited English proficiency, and national origin to build awareness of local languages and prioritize services.

Adaptation Tip: Use these tables to filter for language data for localities: B16001 (Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over), B16004 (Age by Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over), and S1601 (Language Spoken at Home).

[Introduction to Language Access Plans \(web-based eLearning module\)](#)



Developed by: [Medicare Learning Network \(MLN\)](#)

Description: Free, self-paced training on 1) language access plans, 2) needs assessments, 3) providing language services, 4) training, and 5) evaluating language access efforts.

Adaptation Tip: Use this learning module to train all staff on the basic steps leading to language access in compliance with Federal guidance.

Organizational Assessments

[Organizational Language Justice Protocols Assessment](#)



Developed by: [Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence](#) (Ana Paula Noguera) and [Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles](#) (Joann Lee)

Description: A comprehensive self-assessment tool comprised of the following sections: Language Data, Protocols, Identifying and Documenting Language Preference, Informing the Public, Bilingual/Multilingual Staff and In-Language Support, Interpreting Support and Working with Interpreters, Written Resources, Training, Monitoring, and Systemic Advocacy.

Adaptation Tip: Choose from the elements in this tool to design assessment and service goals that fit the scope of your organization's language access objectives.

Lessons From 25 Years of Language Access in the USA

Behind the Scenes: Mapping How State and Local Governments Implement Language Access Measures



Developed by: [Migration Policy Institute](#)

Description: An interview-based review of state and local language access measures that covers diverse successful practices of creating language access.

Adaptation Tip: Connect with community feedback for information on how to build a language access plan (Leveraging Community Feedback, p. 23); Consider different approaches for funding and budgeting for language access (“Funding and Budgeting for Language Access Measures, p. 24); Provide tools to managers and front-line staff for “making language access easy,” while educating your organization about the whole-organization approach of providing access in multiple languages to people with Limited English Proficiency (p. 37). Avoid looking for a “one-size-fits-all approach” and instead identify “needs, goals, and necessary actions...that can be successfully addressed” using tested strategies and practices (p. 40).

Providing Language Services to a Diverse Population: Lessons from the Field



Developed by: [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#)

Description: Case studies and practical examples of how health providers implemented language services with examples from rural strategies and partnerships.

Adaptation Tip: Calibrate language services in accordance with the size of your organization or clinic and the diversity of languages spoken in the patient population (“Deciding Which Approaches to Implement,” page 5).

Guides for Investing in Language Access Measures

For Interpreting: Guide to Buying Interpreting Services

For Translation: Guide to Buying Translation Services



Developed by: American Translators Association

Description: Clear guides for non- and for-profit entities looking to purchase interpretation and translation that are accurate, culturally and locally appropriate, and cost-effective.

Adaptation Tip: It is tempting to enlist bilingual people as translators and interpreters, but without ethics training and shared organizational standards, interpreters can offer personal advice or omit required information. Professional services are a key to successful language access.

Language Access During Emergency Response

Preparing to Respond to Interpreting and Translation Needs During a Disaster



Developed by: [California Healthcare Interpreting Association](#)

Description: Recorded webinar details successful ad-hoc measures and post-event insights from the 2017 North Bay Area Fires, an area with a large population of Spanish-speaking farmworkers.

The presenter, Julie Burns MEd, is a Spanish↔English medical interpreter and National Council on Interpreting in Health Care “Language Access Champion” award winner. She focuses on providing life-saving emergency response information to those who don’t speak English, may fear accessing government services, or speak languages other than English and Spanish, including Deaf people.

Adaptation Tip: Through pre-disaster outreach, identify trusted bilingual community members and organizations with whom to coordinate for emergency response. Be prepared for the spread of misinformation to non-English speaking populations during a disaster. Designate a role in local government emergency response for language access coordination. The section relevant to language access planning ends at 41:06.

Tips and Tools for Reaching Limited English Proficient Communities in Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery



Developed by: [Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division](#)

Description: A fourteen-page guide, plus appendix, that covers the essential steps to building and emergency language access plan.

Adaptation Tip: Many of the steps for language access planning apply to emergency language access planning. Save time by creating an emergency language access plan as part of your language access planning activities.

Community Engagement & Listening

Establishing & Sustaining Community Committees Toolkit



Developed by: [National Center for Farmworker Health \(NCFH\)](#)

Description: A toolkit to help rural CBOs engage community members in meaningful decision-making.

Adaptation Tip: Organize Language Access Advisory Groups or listening sessions to understand where community members most feel the lack of language access services and are willing to support. Go back to this group to assess services periodically or understand new needs.

As a farmworker and RIM population-serving organization or clinic, language access can transform the reach, effectiveness, and safety of your services. It can also deepen bonds of understanding and community cohesion. The tips offered here cover all necessary aspects of language access planning and can be implemented over months or years. The most important step is to get started with implementation or improvement, making space for a vibrant new area of community collaboration and improved health and safety outcomes.



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