Language Access Services: Assessment & Planning

A Toolkit for Community-Based Organizations

NCFH
National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This Language Access Services Assessment and Planning Tool is designed to help community-based organizations (CBOs) recognize and consider key elements in providing language access services to rural and semi-rural refugee, immigrant, migrant (RIM), and farmworker communities with limited English proficiency (LEP).

The tool is intended to help CBO staff:
1)Evaluate current organizational language access services and identify current gaps and needs. 2) Identify internal and external resources and assets to strengthen language access services. 3) Develop preliminary plans and goals to improve language access across the CBO and programs. For example, a CBO can use the tool to map current bilingual staff strengths and opportunities, as well as external resources and interpreters in the community, while assessing current service utilization. This tool also helps assess language resources available in the community and provides considerations for implementing changes to language access services at your organization.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to language access planning. However, understanding the key elements and planning in advance is essential. This document provides guiding questions and key considerations to support the brainstorming process.

Lastly, effective interpretation supports positive experiences among community members and better health outcomes. Your organization has an opportunity to do its part in creating an environment where all community members feel valued and respected. A language access plan is your map for achieving this goal!

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document is organized into two sections: Part I and Part II.

Complete each section in sequence, but before you dive into the assessment and plan, determine who within your organization will lead language assistance efforts. The staff member or committee that you designate will be responsible for overseeing, assessing and planning, implementing, and evaluating your organization's language access plan.

Part I: Initial Assessment

1. Begin by carefully reviewing the Initial Assessment section.
2. Document your findings in a separate working document.
3. Use this tool as a reference guide to ensure all relevant areas are addressed and properly evaluated.

Part II: Plan Development

1. Review the information gathered during the Initial Assessment.
2. Use your documented findings to inform and guide your planning process.
3. Begin developing your Language Access Services Program plan based on the identified needs, gaps, and priorities.

RESOURCES
Curated materials to support implementation

TIPS
Practical guidance from the field

Glossary terminology:

Translation - The conversion of written message from one language to another in a written form. "Translation" is often used interchangeably with "interpretation." However, "translation" refers to written documents, while interpretation refers to vocal or signed messages.

Interpretation - The spoken message from one language to another, preserving the content and meaning of the original message. An interpreter is the third party in a conversation who bridges the linguistic and cultural gap.

Simultaneous interpretation - or "conference interpretation" in which interpretation happens by a third party through headsets worn by interpreter and audience participants for the purpose of an interactive meeting.

Consecutive interpretation - where interpreter and speaker take turns, best used for health care.

Remote Simultaneous Interpretation (RSI) - simultaneous/conference interpretation provided through audio and video connection during an online meeting.

In-person interpretation - when the interpreter is physically present, working with a client-provider pair or group. Language Justice and Deaf Advocacy groups favor in-person interpretation because it is more culturally congruent and linguistically intelligible.

PART I: INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Use this initial assessment to evaluate your current services and determine whether you need a Language Access program. This section may take days to weeks to complete as an appointed person on your team may be required to gather information through research, networking, and conversations both within your organization and with external partners or stakeholders. After completing this section, see **Part II: Development of Language Access Program of this document.**

Language Inventory

Please provide the total number of languages spoken by the community you serve and list each language.

If your organization lacks internal data, there are publicly available sources that estimate the language needs of the populations it is likely to encounter. The U.S. Census Bureau gathers information on languages spoken other than English across the country and can be used as an external data source. The Census website offers language tables with detailed information on the most commonly spoken non-English languages in the U.S., available at national, state, and county levels.

See an example list of primary tables here: B16001, C16001. You must use the filter to the lefthand side and narrow down the table by geography to see if your county is listed.

See this video which demonstrates how to navigate the data.census.gov site

Asset Mapping

Organization Strengths

- How many CBO team members are bilingual?
  - Which languages to bilingual staff speak?
- How many CBO team members have adult translation/interpretation experience?
- How many CBO team members have adult translation/interpretation training?
  - Of those that do not have training, how many are interested in training?
- How many staff (or names of staff) are assigned to develop language access services?
  - What percentage of their time is dedicated to developing language access services?

Community Strengths

Make a list of free community resources that exist in your area both physically and online. Use the following questions to help guide your list.

- Are there other volunteers who speak a non-English language? How many?
- Do language access resource exist at health departments and health clinics in your area? Do their staff speak non-English languages?
- What community centers, libraries, community spaces offer language access services? Do they have staff that speak a non-English language?
- Do schools in your area have dual language programs? What services are available at the schools? Do some teachers speak non-English languages?

TIP: Is forming an advisory committee of community members and experts who can speak to language access feasible? Who are members of your community who can be consultants and have knowledge on the subject, and can help with asset mapping for community language needs?

Consider starting a Community Committee which is a structured group of community members representing a specific population that a community-based organization (CBO) engages to provide input, feedback, and support in achieving its mission.

Current Level of Language Services Provided by CBO

Availability of Language Service Providers

- What languages are available for interpretation? Make a list.
- Are community members required to have their own interpreter to engage with your services?
    - During outreach?
    - During office visits?
    - During community meetings?
- Are children sometimes asked to interpret?
- How long will it take to secure interpretation services for your different programs to service community members in need?
- Are phone answering services available in needed languages?
- Are after-hours phone instructions provided in needed languages?
- Are language identification tools available?
- Is there a cost to the user the services? If so, which ones?

Checklist

Internal Assessment
Language Inventory
Community Assets
Availability of languages

See examples of the City of Austin's language identification posters, iSpeak Cards, brochures: Brochure , Poster , Desktop

Translation of Materials and Documents

- Are organizational documents translated in all needed languages?
- Are organizational documents translated in only some needed languages?
- Is health education material available in needed languages?
- Is social service material available in needed languages?

TIP: What documents should your organization prioritize for translation? Think about this from the perspective of someone who does not speak the dominant language, such as English or Spanish. Examples of documents include: applications, contracts, consent forms, and announcements of important services offered.

Community and Information Access

- Are community members notified of available language services and how to access them?
- Are physical or in-person signage translated in needed languages and displayed throughout the CBO?
- Are your organization's webpage, social media, and other online applications displayed in needed languages?

TIP: How will your organization prioritize translation of signage? Has the community expressed needs of where signage is missing? Be mindful of community literacy levels. Best practices include keeping literacy levels below 6th grade reading level. If possible, strive to reach 3rd or 4th grade. Have community expressed needs of where signage is missing? Is this something you can talk to a language access advisory committee about?

Interpretation and Language Services Available

- Do you have a list of trained interpreters?
- Is it readily available to front line staff?
- Does it need to be updated?

Organizational Infrastructure

Policies and procedures

- Do you have a policy for language access services (may include interpretation, translation, general language access)?
- Do you have procedures?
- Are staff familiar with your current policy and procedures? Do they have access to the policies and procedures?
- Is there current training provided to staff on these policies and procedures?
- When and how often are staff trained on language access policies and procedures
- How are new staff oriented to language access policies and procedures?

Budget for language access services

- Is there an organizational budget for language access services?
    - Record your budget for hiring interpreters. Specify any restrictions or by program as needed.
    - Record your budget for translation. Specify any restrictions or by program as needed.
- Do you have contracts in place with external language access services?
- Does your organization compensate staff for their additional language access skills?
    - What is the compensation structure?
    - What are the expectations for staff?

PART II: DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES

Based on the results of the assessment, use the information you have gathered to develop your language access service plan. Now that you know what you currently have in place, set your priorities based on the gaps you have identified and define your next steps. Use this development section to refine your language access service plan.

Language Access Availability Tools and Notices

- How many iSpeak Interpreter posters will you need and in what languages?
- How many iSpeak cards and materials will you need and in what languages (poster, brochures)?
- Do you have a notice on your webpage that you have language access services?
- Where on your website will you communicate about your language access services?
- How do you plan to notify your community about current or new language access services?

Language Service Availability

- Are there trained interpreters available in your area?
- Are some of your services "low risk" (for example, tabling for general information) where non-trained interpreters are permissible
- How will language services be provided?
- When will in-person be crucial?
- When will remote interpretation be needed?
- Make a database of qualified interpreters and translators.

FIGURE 1: COMMON SECTIONS OF A LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

NEEDS ASSESSMENT
- Number of individuals with limited English proficiency
- Points of contact
- Level of interaction
- Stakeholder engagement

LANGUAGE SERVICES
- Develop policies and procedures
- Interpretation services
- Translation services

NOTICES
- "I speak" cards
- Patient rights
- Taglines
- Signage

TRAINING
- Front-line staff
- Providers
- Leadership

EVALUATION
- Monitor complaints or suggestions
- Keep current on community demographics
- Track utilization

See Center for Medicare and Medicare Services (CMS) Figure 1, which demonstrates the common components of a language access plan, including a needs assessment, a description of language services provided, notification procedures, staff training, and evaluation measures.

Consider this Indigenous Language Interpreter Directory is a collection of various organizations and businesses across the United States that offer Interpretation services for Mesoamerican Indigenous languages.

Utilizing WhatsApp for Real-Time Language Interpretation on Agricultural Worksites. NCFH staff tested using WhatsApp to interpret health education talks for farmworkers who speak Tzotzil and Spanish. Learn more about how it went and our tips for using this popular communication platform in the field.

Staff Training

- What type of staff training is needed?
  - For bilingual staff training?
  - For frontline staff training?
- How will bilingual staff be trained in the ethics and techniques of interpreting and translating?
- What additional training opportunities will be provided to staff?
- What incentives will be offered for staff interested in being interpreters/translators?
- Will the CBO offer any financial reimbursement for training/ certifications?
- Who will lead language access implementation?

TIP: Staff training looks different for everybody based on the strengths of your team. Identify who from your team can benefit from a formal interpretation training and who will benefit from a more foundational language access training.

Budget Considerations

Interpretation

- How much money can be set aside for interpretation needs?
- Are current staff who work bilingually offered bilingual pay/salary or stipend?
- Are some activities low risk and/or appropriate for working with volunteer interpreters?
- Will you host events that may need a standing line item for a contractor to provide interpretation?

Translations

- How much money can be set aside for translation needs?
- Will your organization offer incentive for translation training and service to staff members?
- How much money can be set aside for printing translated material?
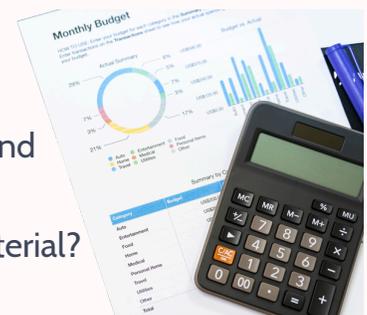
💡 **TIP**: Commit to including language access services, internal personnel or external contractors, into your program and grant budgets. Consider how else you need to fundraise or allocate budgets to ensure access to the funds needed to guarantee language access throughout services.

Policy and Procedure Considerations

- What policies or procedures need to be updated and/or created based on changes made to language access services?
    - What written policy permits (under what circumstances) a minor to interpret?
    - How do you assess whether the subject matter is inappropriate, sensitive, or legally complex for a child?
    - When is it appropriate to allow family members or friends to interpret?
    - How do you ensure informed consent when a client chooses an adult family member to interpret?
- How will these changes be communicated to all staff?

Evaluation

Goals

- Create three goals for your language access program (make them SMARTIE). Consider two types of goals: process and outcome. Outcome goals focus on the end result, whereas process goals focus on the activities needed to achieve those goals. An outcome goal may be to have all public facing resources translated into four languages, and a process goal may be to create an internal translation team.

*Figure 1 Example:

Goal Type	Goal	Milestone 1	Milestone 2
Process	Improve bilingual staff's capacity to provide interpretation in year 1	Identify interpreter training for staff in quarter 1.	2-3 staff complete interpreter training by quarter 3.
Process	Create an internal translation team in year 1.	Create translation team standard operating procedures by quarter 3.	Train remaining staff on how to request translation by quarter 4.
Outcome	80% of materials are translated by Y2	Identify the material needing to be translated including the number of total documents and number of languages	Select translation vendor(s) and hire translator(s)
Outcome	Interpretation provided for 80% of all community meetings where language support is needed.	Identify the material needing to be translated including the number of total documents and number of languages	Secure budget for interpretation services

Timeframe
- What is realistic for your team to accomplish in year 1?
    - Are there important milestones that need to be reached throughout the year? What are those?
    - How can each goal be broken down by quarter?
- What is realistic for your team to accomplish in year 2?
- How will you continue to monitor changes in service demographic and/or personnel after year 1?

Monitoring and Communication

- How will you monitor and track your progress towards your milestones? Your goals?
- Who will be responsible for monitoring and reporting progress?
- How frequently will you review your progress? How will you communicate your progress with your team? With your community?

💡 **TIP**: Reminder – Treat the first 6 to 12 months as a pilot phase. Build in a clear review or revision point after implementation. Pause to ask: Did this approach work as intended. Was a year enough time to determine whether your plan was feasible and effective? What needs to be adapted moving forward?

As you plan, be intentional about sequencing priorities. As seen in Figure 1 example, ask yourself, what goal had to come first? What could wait? Some early investments will need to continue, while others will evolve into new or expanded priorities in year two. Costs shift over time. Year 1 priorities may focus on foundational needs (capacity building for bilingual staff may be the most urgent need). Year 2 may build on those foundations (continued training may remain essential while new costs such as interpretation equipment, translated materials may be necessary additions).

Conclusion

The tool is the first step in developing a plan to address language access needs and better serve LEP community members needing your services. While every organization's plan may look different, thoughtful preparation and a clear understanding of the core components make meaningful progress possible.

Using these guiding questions and considerations to move from intention to action is a practical way for your organization to take important steps toward improving services while fostering dignity, trust, and equity.

Additional Resources

Enhancing Language Access: Assessing Bilingual Health Center Staff Competency

Guide to Developing a Language Access Plan

NCFH
National Center for Farmworker Health, Inc.

APPENDIX

FIGURE 1: COMMON SECTIONS OF A LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

Section	Items
NEEDS ASSESSMENT	Number of individuals with limited English proficiency Points of contact Level of interaction Stakeholder engagement
LANGUAGE SERVICES	Develop policies and procedures Interpretation services Translation services
NOTICES	"I speak" cards Patient rights Taglines Signage
TRAINING	Front-line staff Providers Leadership
EVALUATION	Monitor complaints or suggestions Keep current on community demographics Track utilization

Organizational Language Access Goals

Use this simple table template with goals, target dates, milestones and status.

Goal	Target Date	Key Milestones	Status
Outcome Goals			
Process Goals			

Click to download English goal template