

Advancing Meaningful Access for Limited English Proficient Persons

Providing accessible information and services to all individuals has long been a priority of the Obama Administration and many administrations before it. Whether in an emergency or in the course of routine business, the success of government efforts to communicate effectively with the public depends on accurate, timely, and vital information that is accessible to all. Executive Order 13166, “Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency” ([PDF](#)), issued in 2000, seeks to ensure that limited English proficient (LEP) individuals are able to receive information and services from federal agencies and that federal agencies are able to communicate with LEP persons in the course of their activities.

Executive Order 13166 requires federal agencies to provide LEP persons with meaningful access to federally conducted activities. This executive order also requires agencies to ensure that federally assisted activities—which recipients of federal financial assistance carry out—comply with the nondiscrimination prohibitions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations. Title VI prohibits national origin discrimination and, for this reason, obligates recipients to provide LEP individuals with meaningful access to their services, programs, and activities.

Federal agencies have made great progress over the last 15 years to improve in-language standards across government. Nevertheless, LEP individuals continue to face barriers to accessing important benefits and services. Agencies must continue to evaluate and enhance their language services, and help federal employees and those receiving federal financial assistance meet the needs of LEP persons and fulfill their missions. Below are some common approaches, forward-looking practices, and technological innovations that federal agencies have adopted in recent years to ensure that both federally conducted and federally assisted activities are accessible to LEP populations.

1. Improved Federal Response Through Best Practices Tools, Trainings, and Resources

One-stop shopping for agencies, advocates, and individuals. The U.S. Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Civil Rights Division maintains the [LEP.gov](#) website, which is a hub for agencies to provide resources, share standards and procedures, and house a variety of tips and updates for agencies, advocates, and individuals. The site also includes DOJ’s LEP guidance to federal agencies issued in [June 2002](#) as well as links to the Department’s [revised language access plan](#).

Consistent Interagency Trainings for Federal Employees. In 2015, DOJ’s Civil Rights Division led a federal interagency effort that included the Social Security Administration (SSA), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders that resulted in the creation of a [video](#)

[training series](#) for federal employees, focusing on how to identify an LEP person's language and provide meaningful language assistance across a wide array of real life situations.

Regional Employee Trainings. The General Services Administration (GSA) carried out a robust agency-wide campaign in 2014 and 2015, entitled “Don’t Turn Them Away,” with a series of blogs, emails, internal website postings, and on-site regional trainings for all GSA employees who interact with the public on how to provide language assistance services to LEP consumers.

Tools for Identifying Preferred Languages. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) created [“I Speak” guides and posters](#) to assist front-line personnel in identifying the language spoken by LEP persons encountered in screening and law enforcement operations and programs. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Office for Civil Rights’ Central Intake Office uses telephonic interpreter services with access to over 200 languages to identify and assist LEP customers in their preferred language.

2. Stronger Inter-and Intra-Agency Coordination

Institutionalized Efforts Within Agencies. Several agencies have coordinated to enhance language assistance efforts within their departments and divisions. For example, HHS established the HHS Language Access Steering Committee in 2013 to lead ongoing departmental efforts to fully implement Executive Order 13166 throughout HHS. In 2015, for example, the Steering Committee worked with HHS granting agencies to include civil rights compliance guidance and resources in all funding opportunity announcements.

Similarly, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently created an intra-agency Language Access Working Group to implement Executive Order 13166 and improve the delivery of language assistance to all of EPA’s LEP customers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also recently launched the Emergency Operations Center workgroup to increase the capacity of the CDC to address language access issues during disease outbreaks.

Tracking and Sharing Agency Policies. In 2014, SSA implemented the PolicyNet LEP Cluster, a centralized electronic intranet-based policy repository containing all LEP policies and procedures to assist the SSA nationwide network of over 1,400 offices.

LEP Coordinator. After Hurricane Katrina, FEMA hired a Limited English Proficiency/ Accessible Communication Needs Coordinator who is responsible for ensuring that the agency meets both routine and less frequently encountered interpreting and translation needs.

3. Leveraging Data and Technologies

Digital maps. Agencies have increasingly used existing federal data to create online tools to better understand the language needs of the country’s LEP population. DOJ’s Civil Rights Division recently launched [interactive and downloadable maps](#), using American Community Survey data that identify the concentration of LEP populations at the national, state, judicial

district, and county level. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), Census Bureau, launched a “[Language Mapper](#),” which provides accessible information in twelve languages regarding the location of language needs, information on languages used in various parts of the U.S., and an entry point into detailed language data from the annual American Community Survey. HHS’s Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement maintains a [map](#) where stakeholders can find contacts and resources for LEP refugees, asylees, certified trafficking victims, and other non-citizen populations.

Interactive Mobile App and Multilingual Website. In 2015, FEMA launched a mobile app in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) that contains tools, tips, and real-time weather-related alerts to keep persons safe before, during, and after disasters. FEMA also maintains a multilingual webpage, which contains materials in [over twenty languages](#). SSA also hosts a [Multi-language Gateway](#) with SSA information in eighteen languages, which includes updated publications and new non-English publication options on its mobile website. The IRS.gov website has portals in [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#), [Korean](#), [Vietnamese](#), and [Russian](#), and [Treasury.gov portal](#) provides information in Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, Tagalog and Arabic.

In-Language Social Media. The National Institutes of Health’s National Cancer Institute uses social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) to share Spanish-language cancer information and resources with LEP patients and caregivers, healthcare providers, and researchers.

4. Technical assistance and trainings for contractors and service providers

Online Trainings for Medical, Mental Health, and Other Providers. HHS’s Office of Minority Health launched the website [Think Cultural Health](#), which offers five free accredited, online language access and cultural competence training programs for physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers, community health workers, first responders, and oral health professionals. To date, over 170,000 individuals have registered for these e-learning programs.

LEP Patient Safety. HHS’s Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality expanded [the TeamSTEPPS LEP module](#), an evidence-based system to train hospital workers in teamwork and communication skills to improve LEP patient safety. It also contracted with the Boston University Medical Center to develop and test [the Re-Engineered Discharge Toolkit](#), a set of activities and materials for improving the hospital discharge process to reduce readmissions. The toolkit contains a new component to ascertain the need for and obtain language assistance, and has been proven to reduce hospital readmissions by 30 percent.

LEP Guidance in Education. In 2015, DOJ and the U.S. Department of Education issued [Joint Guidance](#) to ensure that state education agencies and school districts are equipped with tools and resources to meet their responsibilities to English Language Learner students and their parents, including an LEP parent-focused fact sheet that is available in [eleven languages](#).

5. Improving Agency Outreach, Education, and Communication with LEP Individuals

Population Survey. The DOC's Census Bureau provided several supporting activities to ensure the entire population, including LEP communities, participated in the Decennial Census. For example, it provided language assistance in five primary languages: Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Russian via telephone, mail, and on-site at [2010 Decennial Assistance Centers](#) across the country.

Avoiding Immigration Fraud. United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) launched [the Unauthorized Practice of Immigration Law Initiative](#) to educate the public about how to avoid potential immigration services scams through brochures, posters, and public service announcements in [Spanish](#) and [twelve other languages](#).

Construction and Safety Information in Multiple Languages. The U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration is translating print and web material related to its [811 hotline](#)—a toll-free hotline designed to prevent excavation-related incidents—in several languages, allowing LEP individuals to call prior to any residential or commercial construction project involving digging.

Property Protection and Enforcement. The DOC's Patent and Trademark Office's Global Intellectual Property Academy provides [online modules](#) about intellectual property protection and enforcement in four foreign languages: [Spanish](#), [French](#), [Arabic](#), and [Russian](#).

Translated Glossary of Terms. The IRS created translated versions of Publication 850 – Glossary of Words and Phrases, translating commonly used tax terminology from English into [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#), [Korean](#), [Vietnamese](#), and [Russian](#).

Continuous Stakeholder Engagement. SSA's LEP leadership team hosts quarterly meetings with national language advocacy groups to discuss language access topics, develop solutions and implement strategies to enhance its service delivery to LEP customers. In 2014, SSA also implemented a communications' feedback loop process that enables the public, advocates, and LEP individuals to share language access concerns and feedback.

Similarly, USCIS hosts quarterly Spanish events (*Enlace*), annual Chinese engagements (*Jiao liu*) in Mandarin and Cantonese, and an annual Vietnamese event (*Giao tiep*). Between 2012 and 2015, USCIS also held engagements in Haitian Creole, Korean, Arabic, and Urdu.

Providing meaningful access to the civil rights and civil liberties complaints processes. In 2011, DHS's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) [translated its complaint document in 10 languages](#), and notified the public that it accepts complaints in these and any other language.