

# Sonoma County Community Development Commission Language Access Plan

Effective Date: November 2019

## Language Access Obligations

### Purpose

The purpose of this Language Access Plan is to make reasonable efforts to eliminate or reduce limited English proficiency as a barrier to accessing Sonoma County Community Development Commission (Commission) programs or activities. This Plan establishes guidelines in accordance with Executive Order 13166 (2000), "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency," which directs Federal agencies to examine the services it provides and to develop and implement a system by which Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons can meaningfully access those services. LEP persons are defined as persons who do not speak English as their primary language and who have limited ability to read, write, speak or understand English. Federal agencies are required to assess and address the needs of eligible persons seeking access to Federal programs that, because of their limited English, cannot fully and equally participate in or benefit from those programs or activities.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq. (Title VI), and its implementing regulations provide that no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that receives Federal financial assistance.

In 2003, guidance designed to assist housing authorities to comply with Title VI was published by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In 2007, HUD published final guidance to recipients of federal funding regarding the Title VI prohibition against discrimination toward LEP persons.

### Commitment to Access

The Sonoma County Community Development Commission (Commission) is committed to opening doors to permanent housing and opportunity for all residents of Sonoma County. The Commission recognizes that in order to accomplish this, it must provide meaningful access to translation or interpreter services for persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and those who are deaf and hard of hearing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deaf and hard of hearing individuals are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) rather than Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, however, they have been included in this plan insofar as they relate to our policy of access to justice and equal protection under the law.

## Language Access Needs: The Four-Factor Framework

In order to determine the level of access needed by LEP persons, the Commission will balance the following four factors:

- (1) the number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be applying for program services without barriers;
- (2) the frequency with which LEP persons utilize these programs and services;
- (3) the nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided; and
- (4) the benefits from providing LEP services, and the resources available and costs to the Commission for those services.

Balancing these four factors will ensure meaningful access by LEP persons to critical services while not imposing undue burdens on the Commission.

### 1. Proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served

The Commission has identified that Spanish is the predominant language spoken in our community by LEP persons. This aligns with the high level of interaction with Spanish-speaking clients or members of the community seeking information from the Commission.

### Race and Hispanic Origin

United States Census Bureau, Population Estimates, July 2018

Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Population	Approximate # of People
White (not Hispanic/Latinx)	63.1%	315,463
Hispanic or Latinx	27.2%	131,612
Asian	4.6%	22,997
American Indian and Alaska Native	2.2%	10,999
Black or African American	2.1%	10,499

Information drawn from English Learners in Public Schools and cross-referenced with Department of Education data<sup>2</sup> indicate that the next most common LEP languages to Spanish are Vietnamese, Mandarin (Putonghua), French, and Khmer (Cambodian).

Language	Total EL Students in Sonoma County Schools 2018-19
Spanish	13,059
Vietnamese	130
Mandarin (Putonghua)	65
French	64
Khmer (Cambodian)	63

<sup>2</sup> Data from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/fileselsch.asp> Other sources of data on Sonoma County spoken languages did not break down further than “Indo-European” or “Asian” languages, each of which is too broad a category to define household languages most commonly spoken.

While the most of the county's minority populations are English-proficient, about 11.26%<sup>3</sup> are "linguistically isolated," which means they speak English less than "very well" and live in households where no English is spoken. According to the 2019 Sonoma County Latino Scorecard, linguistic isolation is found in approximately 30% of the Latinx population.

## 2. Frequency with which LEP persons utilize services

Most LEP persons come in to contact with Commission staff in the Rental Assistance and Housing and Neighborhood Investments programs and services. All citizen participation activities are open to the general public.

Roughly 24% of those served through all Federally-Funded Commission programs identify as Hispanic/Latinx<sup>4</sup>, and about 20% of those served by the Housing Choice Voucher program are Hispanic/Latinx. Furthermore, many of the priority development areas for current and future projects are located where there are higher concentrations of Latinx, and robust community engagement processes are critical to these efforts. Therefore, all key program and service marketing, public noticing and application documents should be translated into Spanish.

Additionally, staff with direct client interaction have reported some, albeit limited, interaction each year with LEP clients that speak the above-listed languages as well as Tagalog, Russian and American Sign Language. According to staff, interaction with LEP persons other than Spanish amounts to approximately 4 to 6 interactions per year.

The analysis of the general population and population served by our agency reveals that the Commission needs to build immediate capacity to provide meaningful access for our Spanish-speaking population. Contact with the next largest LEP group happens significantly fewer times, however, staff recognizes that the lack of public materials available in languages other than English and Spanish may serve as a deterrent for other LEP populations to apply for Commission programs. Because of this, the Commission will offer translation and interpretation services upon request in these languages, but does not have the resources to ensure translation of all vital documents.

## 3. The Nature and Importance of Commission Programs

Commission-funded programs provide critical services to low-moderate income (LMI) persons in Sonoma County. One of the goals set by the Commission's Five-Year Strategic Plan is to create better pathways to permanent, stable and supported housing for those who need it. Rental assistance is one of the best practices in homelessness prevention and is one of the key services offered by the Commission to low income residents. Housing rehabilitation is one of the most efficient methods of preserving affordable housing stock. The Commission also works

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<sup>3</sup> Sonoma County Department of Health Services, Health Needs Assessment, 2016  
<http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/Health/Public-Reports/Health-Need-Assessments/Demographics/>

<sup>4</sup> Taken from race/ethnicity data from 2018-2019 Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report, which only reports Federally-funded programs.

with developers and homeless service providers to create more inroads to housing for low and extremely low income households and has programs for First-Time Homebuyers to access low-interest homeowner loans.

#### 4. The Resources and Cost to the Recipient

The Commission has several employees who speak both English and Spanish, including some positions that are designated for bilingual English/Spanish speakers only. Internal staff who are bilingual are often asked to translate documents and communicate with LEP individuals who call or walk in to the office. Spanish-speaking clients that are part of the rental assistance program are assigned to bilingual staff for annual check-ins and oversight of case files as part of the Commission's regular practice.

In the event of a hearing or meeting where items of significant public interest are discussed, the Commission has contracts through the County of Sonoma with Language People and Communique to offer interpreting and translating services.

## Language Access Policy

### Section 1: Definitions

**Language access:** the rights of individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) to receive meaningful access to federally funded state and Federal programs

**Limited English Proficient (LEP):** refers to individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English

**Interpretation:** involves conveying information orally from one language to another (e.g., interpreting during an interview)

**Translation:** involves conveying information in writing from one language to another (e.g., translating documents)

**Vital documents** are critical for accessing federally funded services or benefits or required by law. For the purposes of the Commission's services to clients and other constituents the following are deemed vital documents:

1. Any and all housing or homeless services-related brochures generated by the Commission for use by clients
2. Community education materials generated by the Commission for distribution
3. Referral information to other economic or rental assistance resources
4. Intake forms, confidentiality waivers, funding applications, loan servicing applications etc.

## Section 2: Policies

### General Policy Statement:

1. The Commission will never turn anyone away because they do not speak English. Furthermore, the Commission will work to improve our capacity to provide meaningful access to individuals with limited English proficiency every year.
2. The Commission’s primary focus is to provide access to housing and opportunity for low-income residents of Sonoma County in a way that is equitable and upholds the dignity of each person. Therefore, the Commission will develop and secure sustainable language resources as needed in both oral and written form so that no one in need of assistance will be denied access to information or services.

It is the policy of this agency to provide timely meaningful access for persons with LEP to all agency programs and activities. All personnel shall provide free language assistance services to individuals with LEP whom they encounter or whenever a person requests language assistance services. All personnel will inform members of the public that language assistance services are available free of charge to persons with LEP and that the agency will provide these services to them.

3. The Commission’s goal is, whenever practicable, to offer and provide the same high quality service to all program and meeting participants, regardless of their language and communication abilities. The Program Compliance Manager is responsible for implementing the Community Development Commission’s policy for assisting clients with limited English proficiency.

## Section 3: Limited English Proficiency Access Strategies

The Commission has identified several strategies for creating meaningful access to language services:

Service	Language Access Strategies
<b>Rental Assistance program</b>	Add “Preferred Language” categories to intake form to improve screening and evaluation. Assign Spanish-speaking clients to Spanish-speaking occupancy specialists.
<b>Program Marketing and Outreach</b>	Include a line on vital program marketing and outreach as appropriate: “Language Services Available upon Request” line in Spanish, and Vietnamese, and/or Mandarin if appropriate for the geographic service area. Translate marketing for key programs and services into Spanish.
<b>General Inquiries</b>	
<b>Public Hearings</b>	Enlist the services of a language services company offering oral interpretation services if requested by a member of the public.

D. Funding:

Immediate funding needs include: printing costs for “I Speak” cards, translation for public noticing documents and marketing flyers will be paid from Community Development Block Grant, Housing Choice Voucher Administrative funds and existing contracts with the County for interpretation and translation services.

Long-term funding needs include: interpreter costs for public hearings, translation services for longer Commission documents

Section 4: Practices

A. Language Assistance Measures:

1. The Commission expects staff to familiarize themselves with the language access practices and resources outlined below. Staff should work directly with supervisors with questions, concerns, or to report difficulties in accessing the indicated resources.

Point of Contact	Expectations of Staff	Tools and Resources
<b>Front Desk</b>	Identify language spoken. Connect with bilingual staff, interpreter, etc.	-Bilingual staff -I Speak cards -Language Rights poster
<b>One-on-one Participant Meetings (Annual Eligibility Check, Case Planning, etc.)</b>	Ensure that an interpreter is available in advance if the language spoken is not English or Spanish. Follow best practices for ensuring safety for participant by securing the name of the interpreter in advance, requiring an interpreter confidentiality agreement, etc.	-In-Person or telephone Interpreting Agency Interpreter Confidentiality Agreement
<b>Community-Based Services</b>	Meet with other agencies and provide information about LEP plan and resources so that they may assist in informing LEP individuals of language assistance services available.	-Flyers -I Speak cards -Brochures in LEP languages
<b>Community Events</b>	Identify language spoken. Connect with language line to assess safety concerns and requests.	-I Speak cards -Bilingual staff -Language Service Agency
<b>Written materials</b>	Vital documents are available in Spanish. Other LEP clients may request an interpreter to help review, translate or fill out vital documents during intake.	-Additional translations can be arranged through selected translation agency.

<b>Website</b>	Material on the website can be translated using the Google Translate tool. Vital documents that must be downloaded will be available in English and Spanish.	-Google Translate -Bilingual staff
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2. The Commission is committed to ensuring quality services to all residents and toward that goal we have developed a plan to provide meaningful access to our services for clients with LEP through bilingual staff, and, if necessary, an interpreter either in person or over the phone. These services will be provided at no charge to the client.
3. When Commission staff members who are working directly with a client are not fluent in the client’s language, the Commission will use the services of a local interpreter service, which uses trained and tested interpreters. To the extent possible, the interpretation will be conducted in person but, if necessary, it may be conducted by phone. If no local interpreter service is available, The Commission will use an over-the-phone interpreter service.

**B. Notification of Language Assistance Services:**

1. Posters notifying clients with LEP of their language service rights are displayed in areas where intakes are conducted. These posters contain a simple message - such as ‘Free Interpreter services are available. Please ask for assistance’, and are in English as well as the principal languages spoken in the service area.
2. All Commission staff with regular client interaction and at the front desk have “I Speak” cards in the languages most prevalent in our community. Front desk staff have a laminated sheet with contact information for County-contracted language service providers.
3. On public materials such as agendas for Committee meetings or pertinent public notices, the Commission includes a “Language Services Available upon Request” line in English and in the principal languages spoken in the service area.

**C. Staff Compliance:**

1. Commission staff will initiate an offer for language assistance to constituents who have difficulty communicating in English.
2. All personnel will inform members of the public that language assistance services are available free of charge to persons with LEP and that the agency will provide these services for all services offered.

**E. Additional Language Access Policies:**

Bilingual Staff Policy

1. The Commission has a preference for utilizing bilingual/bicultural staff members whenever possible to work directly with individuals with limited English proficiency. Bilingual/bicultural staff qualify for a salary differential based on language proficiency and amount of time spent using bilingual skills on the job (see [Sonoma County Memorandum of Understanding Article 9: Bilingual Pay](#)). The Commission shall always have at least one designated position for a Spanish-speaking bilingual Office Assistant, at least two designated positions for Spanish-speaking bilingual Occupancy Specialists, and at least one designated position for a Spanish-speaking bilingual position in Affordable Housing financing.
2. The Commission shall consider second language proficiency, in a language commonly spoken by the Commission's clients or potential clients, as a preferred quality when hiring new staff for positions that are client-centric or public facing. The Commission's employee recruiting materials will clearly state that second language proficiency will be viewed favorably in the Commission's hiring decisions for these positions.

Interpreter Policy

1. Where LEP persons desire, they will be permitted to use, at their own expense, an interpreter of their own choosing, in place of or as a supplement to the free language services offered by the Commission or provided by an outside vendor.
2. An interpreter may not be less than 18 years of age, but may be a family member or friend of the LEP client.
3. In cases where a significant number of Spanish-speaking LEP residents are expected to attend public hearings or meetings in connection with Commission business, the Commission will supply a Spanish-speaking interpreter. Other language interpretation services must be requested. The Commission will publish contact information where LEP persons with other language needs may request special accommodations.

**F. Training:**

Staff Training

1. Each manager will ensure their staff has received and been trained on the LEP plan. A current electronic copy will also be available so all staff will be able to access LEP policies and procedures easily. One staff person may be appointed to monitor implementation of the plan and conduct staff training as needed.



- All staff providing technical assistance, training or receiving in-bound calls will receive annual LEP training, or training upon employment, and then annually.
  - LEP plan information will be incorporated into the employee handbook.
  - LEP training will include information on the following topics:
    - Legal obligation to provide language assistance;
    - LEP plan and procedures;
    - Responding to LEP individuals;
    - Obtaining interpreters (in-person and over-the-phone);
    - Using and working with interpreters (in-person and over-the-phone);
    - Translating procedures; and
    - Documenting language requests
2. The Commission will circulate this policy to all staff within 10 days after its adoption. Every year, the Commission will circulate the revised policy to all staff after its adoption.

Within two months of the adoption of this policy, the Commission will provide cultural competency training, including training in regard to this policy and the appropriate use of interpreters and translators, to all staff who have regular interaction with clients. All new staff members will receive cultural competency training within six months of the beginning of their employment with the Commission. After their initial training, refresher trainings in cultural competency and language access will be made available every two years.

3. In order to establish meaningful access to information and services for clients with LEP, staff that regularly interact with the public, and those who will serve as translators or interpreters, will be trained on the Commission’s LEP policies and procedures. Training will ensure that staff members are effectively able to work in person and/or by telephone with clients with LEP. Management staff will be included in this training, even if they do not interact regularly with survivors with LEP, to ensure that they fully understand the plan, so they can reinforce its importance and ensure its implementation by staff.<sup>5</sup>

## Section 5: Monitoring and Staff Responsible for Monitoring

### Plan to Monitor Effectiveness:

1. The Commission will conduct an evaluation of its LEP plan every year to determine its overall effectiveness, review the progress of stated goals and identify new goals or strategies for serving clients and members of the public with LEP. The Federal Funding

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from the MARC plan available at <http://marc.org/Transportation/Equity-Considerations/pdf/LimitedEnglishProficiencyPlan.aspx>

Administrator will lead the evaluation with the assistance of designated staff. The evaluation will include the following:

- Assessment of the number of persons with LEP in our services area
  - Assessment of the number and types of language requests during the past year: how many were met and with which strategies, how many were not met and why.
  - Assessment of whether clients with LEP are satisfied with existing language assistance services and that the services are meeting their needs
  - Assessment of whether staff members understand the LEP plan and procedures, how to carry them out, and whether language assistance resources and arrangements for those resources are up-to-date and remain accessible.
2. Commission intake personnel will record each person's language of choice on the intake application. If the individual has limited English proficiency, the person's language of choice will be clearly marked on the file. The Federal Funding Administrator or Designee will be responsible for tracking data on the number of LEP language requests and the level of response each year. This information, broken down by program and team, will be considered as part of the annual Language Access Plan review.
3. The Commission will monitor changing population levels and the language needs of individuals with LEP in the region by referring to updates to the Assessment of Fair Housing Report and review of data from the American Community Survey, Department of Education and other relevant sources. Evaluation results and recommended changes will be shared with the Commission's management team as well as the Community Development Committee advisory body. The Federal Funding Administrator or Designee will also keep a record of any language access services provided and will make this information available during the annual review process. In connection with updates to this Language Access Plan, the Commission may use some of the following tools to conduct further assessment:
- a) Conduct surveys or focus groups in conjunction with existing efforts
  - b) Develop an evaluation process to assess LEP service provision
  - c) Establish a tracking system to collect primary-language data for individuals that participate in programs and activities

## Implementation Timeline

Language Access Strategy	Implementation Timeline	Person Responsible
Distribute LAP to all staff,	November 2019	Federal Funding Administrator
Have “I Speak” cards and a Right to Interpreter Poster with at least the languages of all major LEP language groups available to assist LEP individuals in identifying their language access needs at all locations where Commission clients are expected to interact with the Commission on a regular basis.	December 2019	Administrative Services Officer
Train all staff on interacting with LEP clients, collecting data, and connecting to Language services if needed	January 2020	Program Compliance Manager
Include a “Language Services Available upon Request” line on public-facing documents in Spanish, Vietnamese, and Mandarin to invite contact from more LEP groups	November 2020	Program Compliance Manager
Add “Preferred Language” categories to intake form to improve screening and evaluation	January 2020	Housing Authority Manager
First quarter analysis of language access needs completed. Goal of 80% completion of the new category on the intake in the first quarter.	April 2020	Program Compliance Manager
First Annual review and LAP update	December 2020	Program Compliance Manager

### Proposed Outcomes

- Staff training evaluations will assess for comprehension and ability to implement language access strategies. Target: 95% staff will be able to successfully implement language access strategies by February 1, 2020.
- Data tracking systems that record how many interactions with LEP persons happen, which programs serve the most LEP clients and which strategies or methods worked best

### Section 6: Community Outreach and Collaboration

1. The Commission will share the Language Access Plan with existing and future partner organizations in contract to provide services to ensure that clients have seamless access to the same language resources across all Commission-sponsored programs.
2. The Commission will share its LEP Policy and the documents and knowledge it develops in regard to LEP resources on its website and any other not-for-profit organization that requests the information.

## Appendix

1. Community Development Commission Website:  
(707) 565-7500  
TDD: (707) 565-7555  
<http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/CDC>
2. Communique Interpreting (sign language interpreting),  
Phone: (707) 546-6869  
Deaf Callers: (707) 623-1638  
Communiqueinterpreting.com
3. Language People Interpretation & Translation Services,  
(707) 538-8900;  
<https://www.languagepeople.com/>