

# Language Access Symposium

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Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Mayor's Office of Operations

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## Message from the Mayor's Office

In 2008, Mayor Bloomberg signed the City's first Language Access Executive Order (EO 120), thereby establishing a uniform policy and set of standards for language services. Building on the premise that accessible government is both good and effective government, the Mayor's Office has worked to ensure that all New Yorkers, including those who have yet to master the English language, have access to the vital services provided by New York City.

With an estimated 180 foreign languages spoken in New York City, communication between City residents and government officials can be challenging. The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and the Mayor's Office of Operations have worked together to ensure the successful implementation of Executive Order 120 in order to meet these challenges.

The Mayor's Office has been encouraged by the progress made by our City agencies. While there is certainly more to be done, since the inception of Executive Order 120, we have proven that we can improve the way we support the needs of the 1.8 million limited English proficient customers of this city. We have worked hard to create tools and mechanisms for agencies to use and will continue to encourage agencies to actively improve their service offerings for all of their customers.

We appreciate the support and guidance from our colleagues in city agencies and in the greater public sector community as we work to reduce the linguistic divide. We will continue to engage with various stakeholders and work together to improve service delivery, create greater accountability, and help sustain language service programs.

We thank you for your commitment and continue to welcome your ideas.

Sincerely,



Fatima Shama, Commissioner  
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs



Elizabeth Weinstein, Director  
Mayor's Office of Operations

## Introduction

### Background

With more than three million foreign-born residents from more than 200 countries, New York City is home to one of the most diverse populations in the world. Nearly half of all New Yorkers speak a language other than English, and a quarter of the population is considered limited English proficient (LEP).

In July 2008, Mayor Bloomberg signed Executive Order 120, creating a centralized language access policy for New York City. Executive Order 120 mandates that all City agencies that provide direct public services offer access in additional languages.

### “Language Access 2.0: Sharing Best Practices, Improving Services, and Setting Future Goals”

On Tuesday, March 29, 2011, the Mayor’s Office hosted a symposium to help frame the future of language access in New York City. This half-day forum brought approximately 65 high-level federal, state, and City agency representatives and other key stakeholders together to discuss the future of language assistance services in New York City. The forum was a learning, idea sharing, and training opportunity to discuss and introduce innovative new approaches to responding to the language needs of New Yorkers, and it resulted in the development of this report, which articulates the city’s Language Access 2.0 agenda.

### About the Report

This paper summarizes the findings and comments that came from the forum and highlights the key recommendations that emerged from the discussions. The report is intended to serve as a guide for the Mayor’s Office and City agencies to continue improve communication, strengthen awareness, and develop systems that will have a long-term impact on ensuring the future of language access for the City’s LEP population.

Additional material regarding the March 29<sup>th</sup> forum, including the agenda, list of attendees, and list of recommendations, can be found in the Appendices and on [nyc.gov](http://nyc.gov).

## **Language Access Symposium**

A critical aspect of the Language Access Symposium included breakout sessions where participants were asked to take part in conversations around seven themes. Participants were asked to discuss current best practices, explore the challenges immigrant and LEP communities face, and formulate recommendations to help address the needs of this special population. Forum participants had an opportunity to learn, exchange ideas, and introduce innovative new approaches to responding to the language needs of New Yorkers. The information on the following pages summarizes the recommendations presented at the forum by the breakout groups.

### **Summary of Findings and Recommendations**

From the breakout group discussions, short-term and long-term objectives were identified to enhance access and service delivery. Short-term recommendations include ideas that can be implemented during the Bloomberg Administration. These types of recommendations will become the work plan for the Mayor's Office language access team going forward. It is important to note that many ideas that cannot be implemented during this Administration due to budget and time restrictions were also introduced during the symposium. These long-term objectives are not included in the White Paper; however, we will work to ensure their continued prioritization following the end of the Mayor's final term in office.

The table on the following pages summarizes the proposals presented, which have been grouped into four main objectives, as listed below. Each objective articulates specific goals, and is accompanied by specific action plans for achieving these goals. These objectives surfaced at the symposium and reflect the collaborative thinking of a variety of government and community stakeholders. Together, they form the City's agenda to improve language access.

- 1 Expand communication and increase awareness of the City’s language access policy and City services.
- 2 Enhance the delivery of language assistance services across agencies to ensure that LEP individuals receive information, benefits and services in a timely and efficient manner.
- 3 Improve performance measures, standards, and accountability for City agencies that are mandated to provide language assistance services.
- 4 Develop or enhance systems and operations to strengthen the citywide policy on language access and delivery of services.

## Conclusion

The Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs and the Mayor’s Office of Operations are enthusiastic about the development of these recommendations and the continued effort by City agencies to increase access to services by all New Yorkers, regardless of their proficiency in English. We appreciate the input of every stakeholder that made this report possible and feel strongly that the action steps presented here provide a clear path to ensuring greater compliance with Executive Order 120. We look forward to providing additional guidance and support as we endeavor to meet these ambitious goals, and we welcome your feedback as challenges arise. Thank you for continuing to make New York City the most immigrant-friendly city in the country.

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**Expand Communication and Increase Awareness of the City’s Language Access Policy and City Services**

Recommendations	Action Plans	Timeline
<p>1. Increase awareness of the availability of free language assistance services and the types of services provided by the City</p>	<p>a. <b>Disseminate key messages through ethnic media.</b> The Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs and the CUNY School of Journalism will arrange press briefings with members of the ethnic media to disseminate key messages to the immigrant and LEP communities.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>
	<p>b. <b>Increase the effectiveness of the Language Gateway.</b> The Language Gateway is a web portal that provides essential city resources translated into the most commonly spoken languages in NYC. The City will take inventory of the most commonly requested and/or used materials and increase the number of documents available on the site by 20%.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>
	<p>c. <b>Create an educational video program with multilingual subtitles.</b> Identify key topic areas or existing "how to" videos about city services and have them subtitled into various languages. These videos can be played in waiting areas or other public areas.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>
<p>2. Increase interagency collaboration and agency outreach strategies</p>	<p>a. <b>Create a Language Access portal for Agency partners.</b> Develop a Cityshare intranet page with announcements, best practices, and toolkits. (Same as 11a)</p>	<p>Short-term</p>
	<p>b. <b>Convene the community affairs units across agencies.</b> Hold training about effective communication strategies for engaging immigrant and LEP communities. These meetings will allow stakeholders to share best practices, brainstorm approaches for LEP engagement, and build networks.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>
<p>3. Increase awareness about emergency preparedness within the immigrant and LEP community</p>	<p>a. <b>Create resource guides.</b> Guides will list services that are offered in citywide plans during emergencies and will include a list of primary community-based organizations that are familiar with affected neighborhoods and populations, and their language capacity.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>
	<p>b. <b>Offer training to lead agencies in emergency response.</b> Training will describe the role each agency plays in ensuring meaningful access for LEP populations using the newly developed Language Access Protocol and the agency specific plans (e.g., vacate, DASC, etc.). Developed by OEM, the Language Access Protocol coordinates the City’s provision of essential translation and interpretation services during an emergency.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>
<p>4. Increase the level of awareness of language access across City agencies</p>	<p>a. <b>Include language access training in new hire orientation.</b> Ensure that every front-line staff member in every agency is trained on the City’s language access policy and their specific agency’s practice and protocol. Ensure that all new hire orientations have a component on language access.</p>	<p>Short-term</p>

## 2

## Enhance the Delivery of Language Assistance Services across Agencies

Recommendations	Action Plans	Timeline
5. Enhance the quality of language assistance services	a. <b>Develop an e-learning module for City employees.</b> The training will help employees to become familiar with the citywide EO, key policies and practices in the delivery of services, and how to use existing technological tools, including telephone, translation service, and use of dual handsets.	Short-term
6. Ensure high quality language services provided by volunteers	a. <b>Obtain tools to aid in volunteer translations.</b> Purchase multilingual keyboard stickers and other support tools for agencies.	Short-term
	b. <b>Add a column within the Volunteer Language Bank that specifies the dialect (Dominican Spanish, French or Haitian Creole).</b>	Short-term
	c. <b>Conduct an annual citywide recognition ceremony.</b> During the ceremony NYCertified interpreters and translators will be recognized for their volunteer work.	Short-term
	d. <b>Promote the NYCertified program.</b> Encourage employees that speak additional languages to enroll in the Volunteer Language Bank and get tested and trained in providing interpretation and translation services through the NYCertified program.	Short-term
	e. <b>Create a network of NYCertified volunteers.</b> Volunteers will meet regularly to discuss best practices and share resources.	Short-term
	f. <b>Have Agency Heads send letters of appreciation to active volunteers.</b>	Short-term
7. Increase the pool of volunteers with language skills to serve during an emergency	a. <b>Offer emergency training to NYCertified volunteers.</b> Bi- or multi-lingual individuals that are available to volunteer during emergencies and have gone through the NYCertified testing and training program can get additional training at OEM. Training will include working in the field, psychological first aid, how the emergency response framework works, and examples of the kinds of environments in which they might be called to interpret.	Short-term
	b. <b>Test and train CERT members proficient in English and another language.</b> Bi- or multi-lingual individuals serving as Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members will be recruited to participate in the NYCertified testing and training program. They will be tested in their proficiency in a second language and then trained on interpretation.	Short-term



### 3 Improve Performance Measures, Standards, and Accountability

Recommendations	Action Plans	Timeline
8. Make language access a basic customer service necessity	<p><b>a. Create friendly first encounters.</b> Train security guards on how to approach an LEP client.</p>	Short-term
	<p><b>b. Gain commitment from leadership.</b> Commissioners will be asked to send letters to all staff reminding them of their agency’s language access policy. Leadership will proactively speak about language services at their agencies.</p>	Short-term
9. Enhance existing tools to measure progress in the implementation of language assistance services across agencies	<p><b>a. Develop and implement an annual reporting system.</b> All affected agencies will be required to submit reports to the Mayor’s Office on their language access progress and accomplishments and will also be required to set benchmarks for the next year.</p>	Short-term
10. Ensure greater consistency in the translation of City-generated documents	<p><b>a. Create a citywide glossary of terms.</b> This glossary will help ensure that the most commonly used citywide terms are translated consistently. The glossary will be distributed to city agencies and language services vendors.</p>	Short-term
	<p><b>b. Create a citywide style guide.</b> The guide will contain information on grammar and style issues to standardize the translation of government documents.</p>	Short-term
11. Develop resources to help create plain language documents	<p><b>a. Create an online web portal.</b> To provide a space for agencies to share resources, best practices, tips and tools, and example documents. (same as 2a)</p>	Short-term
12. Improve processes for document development that integrate plain language principles	<p><b>a. Create agency internal committees to identify "essential documents."</b> These working groups will then prioritize the translation of these documents into the top LEP languages.</p>	Short-term

4

**Develop or Enhance Systems and Operations to Strengthen the Citywide Policy on Language Access**

Recommendations	Action Plans	Timeline
13. Ensure efficient and cost-effective City operations	<p><b>a. Reduce cost by bundling several agencies in vendor procurement contracts.</b> Develop a citywide contract which includes translation, in-person interpretation, and over-the-phone interpretation services. Vendors will be able to submit proposals for each of these services separately. Creating a citywide contract for all these services will increase the availability and consistent delivery of language services and will offer these contracted services to agencies at a reduced rate.</p>	Short-term
14. Utilize the City's diverse language skills in and beyond City government	<p><b>a. Create a crowdsourcing forum to engage the community and obtain volunteer translation services.</b> Pilot a platform where internal and/or external stakeholders can provide their input on translated materials generated by the City.</p>	Short-term
15. Continue to build relationships between community-based organizations within immigrant rich neighborhoods and agencies involved in emergency response	<p><b>a. Train external and internal partners.</b> Trainings for volunteers will include communicating across cultures, working with diverse populations, and effectively interpreting at disaster service centers and on-scene. Trainings for community-based organizations will include the following: emergency preparedness information for individuals, staff, and organizations; information on Citizen Corps Council projects and how to get involved; and Community Emergency Response Team and other disaster volunteer recruitment information.</p>	Short-term
	<p><b>b. Build and maintain relationships between community-based organizations and City agencies</b> so that resources can be more effectively shared when an emergency occurs. Continue to utilize forums already in place to network (such as VOAD, Citizen Corps Council, Language Access Council, Immigration Task Force, regular outreach efforts, MOIA events, etc). Develop new connections between City agency staff responsible for community outreach.</p>	Short-term

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Agenda

#### **Language Access 2.0: Sharing Best Practices, Improving Services, and Setting Future Goals**

*March 29, 2011*

- 8:00 am – 9:00 am     **Breakfast and Check-in**
- 9:00 am – 9:15 am     **Greetings and Welcome**  
Carol Robles-Roman, Deputy Mayor for Legal Affairs  
Fatima Shama, Commissioner, Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs  
Elizabeth Weinstein, Director, Mayor’s Office of Operations
- 9:15am – 9:35 am     **The Limited English Proficient (LEP) Customer Experience**  
Javier Valdes, Deputy Director, Make the Road New York
- 9:35 am – 9:45 am     **Break**
- 9:45 am – 9:55 am     **Preamble**  
Fatima Shama, Commissioner, Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs
- 9:55 am – 11:15 am   **Breakout Session**
- Effective Outreach Strategies and Building Community Partnerships: Getting your message out to the immigrant and LEP communities
- Innovations and New Technologies: How to make language access easier and more effective through the use of new technologies
- Raising Agency Awareness: Exploring best practices in increasing agency awareness of the City’s language access policy and protocol
- Data Collection, Record Keeping, and Quality Assurance: Best practices in capturing critical information and mechanisms to better monitor the quality of language assistance services
- Plain Talk: Discuss effective ways agencies can adopt plain language principles and convey information clearly and in easy-to-understand language
- Emergency Preparedness: Explore best practices in effectively communicating with the City’s affected LEP population during an emergency response
- Use of Bilingual City Employees: Explore the current role of bilingual City employees and best practices in recruitment and retention
- 11:15 am – 12:25 pm   **Wrap Up/Q&A**
- 12:25 pm – 12:30 pm   **Closing Remarks and Next Steps**

*Sponsored by the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs and the Mayor’s Office of Operations  
Hosted by the New York City Economic Development Corporation*

## Appendix B: Breakout Sessions

### **1. Effective Outreach Strategies and Building Community Partnerships: Getting your message out to the immigrant and LEP communities**

Immigrants and Limited English proficient (LEP) New Yorkers encounter challenges in understanding the services and benefits available, and knowing how to navigate the City system. Recognizing the importance of reaching out to immigrant communities and establishing good working relationships, this breakout session will explore new ideas and successful models that local government can incorporate to build community partnerships and effectively disseminate agency and programmatic initiatives to the immigrant and LEP communities.

### **2. Innovations and New Technologies: Making language access easier and more effective through the use of new technologies**

The purpose of this discussion group is to determine approaches new and old that will allow us to increase the quality and availability of translated documents via technological solutions (ideally at a lower cost, but certainly at a higher value).

### **3. Raising Agency Awareness: Exploring best practices in increasing agency awareness of the City's language access policy and protocol**

The best way to guarantee that language access services are available to LEP clients is for agency employees to be familiar with the City's language access policy, as well as agency specific procedures and practices in delivering language assistance service. The breakout session will explore best practices and recommend strategies for increasing agency awareness of the City's language access policy and agency procedures related to the delivery of language assistance services.

### **4. Data Collection, Record Keeping, and Quality Assurance: Capturing critical information and mechanisms to better monitor the quality of language assistance services**

The best way to guarantee that language access services are available to LEP clients is for agency employees to be familiar with the City's language access policy and agency specific procedures and practices in delivering language assistance service. The breakout session will explore best practices and recommend strategies to increasing agency awareness of the City's language access policy and agency procedures related to the delivery of language assistance services.

## **5. Plain Talk: Adopting plain language principles and conveying information clearly and in easy-to-understand language**

Description and purpose of discussion: “Plain language” is often thought to be the effort to use simpler words to replace jargon and legalese in agency documents, and it is, but “plain language” is also much more than that. “Plain language” is a name for all the efforts needed to make our written documents usable by our constituents to access the services they need. Not only does this include changes on the page, it also includes changes in policy, changes in process, and changes in perspective. This break-out session will examine in detail these many facets of “plain language.”

## **6. Emergency Preparedness: Effectively communicating with the City’s affected LEP population during an emergency response**

New York City’s 8.4 million residents are susceptible to various types of natural disasters (e.g., snow storms, hurricanes, etc.) and public health emergencies. The City’s estimated 3 million immigrant New Yorkers, of which 1.8 million are limited English proficient (LEP), are especially vulnerable across a broad spectrum of events. The complexities of language and cultural differences pose serious barriers to first responders and emergency providers in reaching these communities. This breakout session will discuss current best practices, explore the challenges that immigrant and LEP communities face, and formulate recommendations to help address the needs of the immigrant and LEP population in disaster/emergency situations.

## **7. Use of Bilingual City Employees: Exploring the current role of bilingual City employees and best practices in recruitment and retention**

Currently, agencies rely on Language Line and bilingual city employees to fulfill interpretation and translation needs. This breakout session will explore the current role of bilingual city employees and best practices in motivating volunteer employees. We will also discuss the use of Selective Certification and multilingual civil service titles in the City. We will facilitate idea sharing across agencies to garner best practices and useful strategies.

## Appendix C: List of participants

Michael Abel	New York City Housing Preservation and Development	Ellen Lee	Department of Citywide Administrative Services
Nisha Abesamis-Mendoza	Coalition for Asian American Children and Families	Irene Lee	Annie E. Casey Foundation
Nisha Agarwal	New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Inc.	Mark Lewis*	Administration for Children Services
Martha Alfaro	New York City Law Department	Lisa Lewis	New York City Department of Buildings
Yvette Andino	New York City Housing Authority	Tamiru Mammo*	Mayor's Office, Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services
Christina Baal	New York Immigration Coalition	Amina Masood	Mayor's Office of Operations
Jacque Baertschi	New York City Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications	Anne Montesano	New York City Human Resources Administration
Julene E. Beckford	Office of Speaker Christine Quinn	Michael Mulé	Civil Rights Division, U.S. Department of Justice
Desiree Bushing	Mayor's Office of Labor Relations	Molly Murphy	Office of Speaker Christine Quinn
Kathleen Carlson	New York City Human Resources Administration	Mark Neal	New York City Department of Homeless Services
Christine Chang	Office of the Manhattan Borough President	Kleber Palma*	New York City Department of Education
Wellington Chen	Chinatown Partnership	Hilary Papineau	Office of the New York City Comptroller
William Colegrove	Office of Council Member Gale A. Brewer	Nazli Parvizi	Mayor's Office, Community Affairs
Lisette M. Colón-Collins	New York City Department of Education	Kavita Pawria	New York City Human Resources Administration
Tara Colton	Mayor's Office of Adult Education	Kate Pielemeier*	New York City Human Resources Administration
Maria Cornelio	Hunter College of the City University of New York	Kenneth Quick	New York City Police Department
Kristina Corvin	New York City Office of Emergency Management	Robert Richardson*	Mayor's Office of Correspondence
George DeStefano	New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene	Carol Robles-Roman	Deputy Mayor for Legal Affairs
Joan Dworetzky	New York City Human Resources Administration	Matilde Roman	Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
Simo Essayoufi	Administration for Children Services	Saad Saeed	Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York

Eric Feldman	Mayor's Office, Information Technology	Aleksandra Sas-Shea	New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation
Andrew Friedman	Make the Road New York	Reshma Saujani	Office of the New York City Public Advocate
Triscia Gill	Department of Buildings	Herman Schaffer*	New York City Office of Emergency Management
Seth Golbey	American Red Cross	Scott Schweitzberg*	Deputy Mayor for Governmental Affairs
Hunter Goldman	New York City Economic Development Corporation	Marisa Senigo	Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings/Environmental Control Board
Seth Grossman	Office of Speaker Christine Quinn	Fatima Shama	Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
Ayleen Guzman	Administration for Children Services	Sharon R. Stanley	Office of Council Member Daniel Dromm
Whitney Hampton	NYC Service	Mónica Tavares	Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
Annel Hernandez	New York City Center for Economic Opportunity	Javier Valdes	Make the Road New York
Angelica Infante	New York City Department of Education	Kathy Walcott	New York City Department of Transportation
Andrew Jones	New York Immigration Coalition	Elizabeth Weinstein	Mayor's Office of Operations
Azadeh Khalili	New York Immigration Coalition	Joshua Winter	New York City Economic Development Corporation
		Ed Zad	dotSUB LLC

\* Facilitator