



***Fiscal Year 2022 – 23  
Social Security Administration  
Language Access Plan***

***Provide Access to Benefits and Services to Persons with  
Limited English Proficiency who Face Barriers to Service***

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## LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN OVERVIEW

### Vision Statement

At the Social Security Administration, we remove barriers to services and benefits for people with limited English proficiency.

### Mission Statement

We value the diversity of our customers and foster an equitable, inclusive, and accessible environment that respects individual differences. We ensure access to quality services and program benefits regardless of an individual's ability to communicate in English.

### Purpose Statement

1. Our limited English proficiency (LEP) policy and procedures align with the strategic goals described in our [Agency Strategic Plan](#). These goals are to:
  - Deliver Services Effectively.
  - Improve the Way We Do Business.
  - Ensure Stewardship.
2. We continually work to improve service delivery options for people with LEP.
3. We provide education and awareness to our employees, contractors, and federally funded program providers. This education supports their ability to take all reasonable steps to inform the public about our language accessibility services.
4. We ensure that the public has access to our programs and services, regardless of their English proficiency.

### Authority

- August 2000, [Executive Order 13166](#), Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency

## Guidance

- June 2002, United States Department of Justice, implementation standards given in [Federal Register/Vol. 67, No 117/Notices 41455](#), Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficiency Persons
- February 2011, United States Attorney General’s memorandum to heads of Federal agencies, [Language Access Obligations Under Executive Order 13166](#)
- May 2011, United States Department of Justice, [Language Access Assessment and Planning Tool for Federally Conducted and Federally Assisted Programs](#)

## Steering Committee Oversight

Social Security’s LEP Steering Committee conducts LEP oversight for the agency. The steering committee ensures that we integrate language access into our regular business processes and maintain our focus on these services.

Steering committee leadership meets biannually with representatives from the LEP advocacy community. As needed, we will schedule more meetings around special topics of immediate interest or concern.

## **SUMMARY OF OUR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY**

### **SERVICE DELIVERY STRUCTURE**

#### Service Delivery

We deliver services through a nationwide network of more than 1,500 offices that include:

- Regional offices.
- Local offices (includes Social Security card centers).
- Teleservice centers.
- Processing centers.
- Hearing offices (includes satellite offices, national hearing centers, and national case assistance centers).

- The Office of Appellate Operations.
- Our headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland.

Our local offices and card centers are the primary points of contact for in person support. Our teleservice centers handle telephone calls to our national 800 number. Employees in processing centers primarily handle Social Security retirement, survivors, and disability payments. They also answer national 800 number telephone calls.

We rely on state Disability Determination Services (DDS) in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico. DDS makes determinations on Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability claims. Our administrative law judges and administrative appeals judges make decisions on appeals of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and SSI claims. We provide quality service in more than 200 languages through our:

- Team of bilingual and multilingual employees.
- National telephone interpreter service.
- Translator service contracts.

These services also are available through the state DDS offices, which could or could not have their own bilingual and multilingual employees. In addition, DDS can use a state contracted interpreter service. People with limited English proficiency access our services in person, by telephone, online,<sup>1</sup> and through video service delivery.

### Technology & Data Driven Decisions

We take advantage of opportunities to identify and record our customers' language preferences. Our employees use this data to arrange for services in the person's preferred language. We firmly commit to ensure that our data accurately reflects our customers' language preferences.

To fulfill this commitment, constantly we:

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Public Information Materials.

- Review our business process for data collection.
- Emphasize the importance of language collection accuracy to our personnel.
- Conduct ongoing data reviews to ensure reliability.
- Invest resources to address data quality.

## Resource Allocations

We carefully consider the needs of people with LEP to determine our budgetary requirements for service delivery. We review language service usage regularly to help the agency prioritize workloads. We devise language access strategies to meet the needs of people who face barriers to services and benefits because of LEP.

- We establish policies, procedures, and guidelines to identify people with LEP.
- We identify the preferred language, both spoken and written, of people with LEP.
- We provide guidance to employees on how to use language services to assist customers in our:
  - Program Operations Manual System (POMS).
  - Hearings, Appeals, and Litigation Law (HALLEX) manual.
  - Teleservice Center Operating Guide (TSCOG).

## Interpreter Services

We provide an interpreter free of charge to any person who requests language assistance or whom we believe could benefit from an interpreter. To ensure quality interpretation, we encourage customers to use our free interpreter services. We do not require people who need language assistance to provide their own interpreters.

If a customer with LEP prefers to use their own interpreter, we must determine if the interpreter the customer prefers meets our interpreter requirements. A customer's own interpreter could be a family member, friend, or other third party. Given the nature and complexities of our business processes, we generally do not permit children under the age of 18 to serve as interpreters. Refer to *Qualified Interpreter* in the DEFINITION OF TERMS section of this document for our requirements. In some instances, we could deem it necessary

for customers to use Social Security interpreters to ensure adequate language access.

### Bilingual and Multilingual Staff

Our bilingual and multilingual public-contact employees help us provide quality customer service to people with LEP.<sup>2</sup>

We identify needs to hire bilingual or multilingual employees based on national trends in demographics and language preferences. We advertise bilingual-skilled positions to hire individuals with the language skills necessary to communicate with our customers with LEP.

We recognize that it often requires more time to conduct business in languages other than English. We encourage our managers to consider this factor when they assign work and assess employee productivity. The state DDS office could send a claimant to a medical examination when they develop a disability claim. Social Security policies encourage the DDS to use bilingual and multilingual medical examiners for the examinations, where available. (Social Security does not determine state DDS bilingual and multilingual needs.)

### Training

Our staff is required to know how to identify customers with LEP and the procedures to access our language assistance services. We train direct service personnel to ensure the effective implementation of our policies and procedures, which include services to our customers with LEP. We provide constant training to all Social Security and state DDS employees on:

- LEP services.
- Cultural diversity.
- Unconscious bias.

This training helps employees deliver effective and efficient language access services to our customers with LEP.

Our blended approach to training uses multiple communications methods, for example:

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<sup>2</sup> Our personnel in Puerto Rico are bilingual in Spanish and English. We provide services and access to benefits to people with LEP in Puerto Rico consistent with this document.



- Interactive video training.
- Video-on-demand.
- Various blended learning products (such as combination of video-on-demand, live presentations, other videos, and training aids and guides).

These and other LEP resources are accessible through Social Security’s internal Learning Management System. We design our training tools to:

- Enhance skills, which include employees’ language skills.
- Contribute to our goal to provide optimal service to customers with LEP.

We develop and review training materials. We also consider recommendations from advocates to maintain and constantly improve basic language access training. Some of our offerings include training on how to:

- Identify customers with LEP, take appropriate action, and use available resources to assist them effectively.
- Implement policies and procedures to provide effective language access services to people with LEP.
- Identify, assess, and record the language preferences of customers with LEP at the earliest point of contact.
- Access language assistance through multilingual services, which includes in-house bilingual interpreters, translators, and telephone interpreter services.
- Secure translations of non-English documents.
- Identify language needs in the communities we serve.

We use and maintain a centralized electronic repository, which contains all LEP policy and procedure references. These resources are available to our employees through the agency’s intranet.

### External Partnerships

When we provide [financial assistance to an entity](#) to assist our customers to access our programs, we require the recipient and any sub-recipients, to provide access to people with LEP. The entity must take reasonable steps to ensure that people with LEP have meaningful and

equitable access to its programs and activities. We ensure that all such entities adhere to our policies and defined expectations of meaningful and equitable language access for our customers. We monitor these entities to ensure compliance.

In addition, we maintain external partnerships with advocates and third-party organizations. These advocates and third parties assist people, who face barriers to our services, which include people with LEP. We conduct external outreach to promote the availability of Social Security training on the disability program. We provide training on disability claims to third-party organizations, who assist people who face barriers to our service.

### Written Communications and Translation of Documents

To make it easier to understand our programs and improve administrative efficiency, our authorized translators produce written communications in languages other than English. They also translate evidentiary and other documents received from the public to English.

We constantly identify materials that require translation. We identify the languages our customers with LEP use most frequently, develop a priority order for our translation workload, and allocate resources to translate the materials. We regularly reassess the materials that require translation to ensure that we maintain current and effective public information materials.

### Public Information Materials

Our [Multilanguage Gateway](#) includes detailed instructions in several languages to help people access our free interpreter services. This site includes links to publications in languages other than English.

In addition, these publications and instructions are available from the [SocialSecurity.gov](#) home page when you select the:

- “Languages” link at the top of the page; or
- “Publications” link from the *Menu* link at the top of the page.

*Note: All [SocialSecurity.gov](#) pages have a “Languages” link at the top of the page.*

We maintain a [Spanish language website](#) for people to conduct business with us in Spanish. You can view our website and all the publications with a computer, tablet, or smartphone.

## Outreach to Customers with Limited English Proficiency

We actively collaborate with a wide range of language access advocates and government entities. We gauge the needs of the LEP community and ensure that we have a broad perspective. We use this information to determine the best way to serve our customers with LEP.

The LEP Steering Committee hosts biannual meetings with national language advocacy groups. We obtain their feedback and perspectives about our language access service delivery. Our External Affairs Team maintains regular communications with advocates. We use these opportunities to hear from them and share updates about the needs of our customers with LEP.

We established cooperative relationships with diverse populations with LEP and their advocates, within our 10 regions. These relationships help us to consider whether we need any modifications to our policies and procedures.

## Oversight and Quality Assurance

Our oversight and quality assurance efforts help us monitor the efficiency of our language access services. Our efforts, relevant to language access services, include:

- The review of agency directives, procurement, and data quality.
- Customer satisfaction surveys.
- Advocate and customer feedback.

Our analysis of the feedback and data helps us enhance our LEP service delivery and training. Each Social Security office takes reasonable steps to ensure that employees and contractors who provide language access services follow our policy guidelines.

## Performance Measurement and Evaluation

The LEP Steering Committee re-examines priorities and assesses our language access services, policies, and procedures on an annual basis. We also review our language access policies periodically to ensure alignment with this document, our [Agency Strategic Plan](#), and the current needs of the public.

We conduct constant reviews of our language access services contracts to ensure that contractors provide quality LEP services. In our reviews, we ensure that our contracts and interagency agreements:

- Contain language that adequately describes our language needs, requirements, and quality expectations.
- Provide a means to assess whether our contractors' delivery of language access services meets our quality standards.
- Provide a means to hold our contractors accountable to meet our quality standards.

This framework allows us to respond quickly to any issues that could arise about language access services, policies, and procedures on an annual basis.

### Data Analytics and Reports

The LEP Steering Committee routinely reviews policies and business processes to ensure that this document remains current.

**Data Analytics** include monitoring for trends or areas that could benefit from improvement, more policies, or resources. We monitor:

- Frequently requested languages.
- Feedback from our employees.
- Customer surveys.
- Customer complaints.

**Reports** are part of our transparency efforts. We continue to expand our data transparency efforts and publish yearly and quarterly data for spoken language preferences. We post this data on our [Open Government](#) website.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Authorized Translator**<sup>3</sup> — A Social Security employee or contractor who meets all of the below criteria:

- Reads, writes, and demonstrates fluency in both English and another language.
- Has demonstrated competence to translate written text from one language to another.
- Has received authorization from their Social Security office or by contract with us to perform this function.

**Bilingual** — Ability to read, write, speak, and understand English and one other language fluently.

**Bilingual Employee** — A Social Security employee who reads, writes, speaks, and understands English and another language fluently. In addition, their Social Security office authorizes them to provide language support.

**Interpretation** — When a person listens to a communication in one language and orally converts it to another language, while keeping the same meaning.

**Interpreter** — A person who speaks English and another language fluently and facilitates communication between two people. They facilitate communication between the person who needs language assistance and the Social Security or DDS representative, who is not proficient in the person's preferred language. Other languages include sign language.

**Limited English Proficient (LEP) Persons** — Persons with limited or no ability to read, write, speak, or understand English.

**Multilanguage Gateway** — The Agency's [public internet site](#) with information in multiple languages about our programs and services.

**Multilanguage Resources** — The Agency's internal intranet site for employees who serve customers with limited English proficiency. This site is only available to state DDS employees and Agency employees.

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<sup>3</sup> For our translator policies and authorization criteria, see Hearings, Appeals, and Litigation Law Manual (HALLEX) I-2-5-76, [Obtaining Assistance in Processing Foreign Claims and Evidence](#); Program Operations Manual System (POMS) GN 00301.340, [Authorized Translators](#); POMS GN 00301.345, [Authorization of Social Security Translators](#); and POMS GN 00301.350, [Authorizing Non-Social Security Translators](#).

**Multilingual** — Ability to read, write, speak, and understand English and two or more languages fluently.

**Multilingual Employee** — A Social Security employee who reads, writes, speaks, and understands English, and at least two other languages fluently. In addition, their Social Security office authorizes them to provide language support.

**Qualified Interpreter**<sup>4</sup> — An authorized Social Security employee, Social Security contractor, or other individual whom we determined meets the below criteria.

- This person reads, speaks, understands, and demonstrates fluency in both English and another language.
- Demonstrates familiarity with basic Social Security terminology.
- Agrees to comply with our requirements about confidentiality and disclosure of information.
- Has no personal stake in the outcome of the customer’s Social Security business that would create a conflict of interest.
- Agrees to provide an accurate interpretation of both our questions and the customers responses.
- Does not assume or infer facts or dates that the customer does not provide.

**SSA** — The Social Security Administration.

**Telephone Interpreter Services (TIS)** – A contracted agency-wide service that provides interpreter services by phone in more than 200 languages and dialects.

**Translation** — Conversion of written text from one language to another that maintains the same meaning.

**Us** — The Social Security Administration.

**We** — The Social Security Administration.

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<sup>4</sup> For our interpreter qualification criteria, see HALLEX I-2-1-70, [Foreign Language Interpreters](#); POMS GN 00203.011, [Special Interviewing Situations: Limited English Proficiency \(LEP\) or Language Assistance Required](#) (only for internal Social Security use); and POMS DI 23040.001, [DDS: Interpreters for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency \(LEP\) or Individuals Requiring Language Assistance](#).

## CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have feedback or concerns about our language access services, you can email us at [LEP.Steering.Committee@ssa.gov](mailto:LEP.Steering.Committee@ssa.gov). Otherwise, you can write to the following address:

Office of Public Inquiries and Communications Support

Attention: Limited English Proficiency

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