TOOL – LANGUAGE ACCESS & PLAIN TALK

Language access is key to achieve equity and have meaningful engagement with the communities we serve. When organizations welcome input and make room for multiple languages and community voices, we all benefit from a diversity of perspectives, experiences, and knowledge rooted in culture.

Two main types of language access services are:

1. **Interpretation:** the oral process of rendering a spoken message from one language into another.
2. **Translation**: the process of rendering a written document from one language to another.

The Department of Enterprise Services manages statewide Language Access Contracts so all agencies have the tools they need to provide interpretation and translation services. Agencies are required to use the statewide contract to procure these services. If the services needed are not available to serve your community, some exceptions apply to the mandatory use of statewide contract. See DES Language Access website (linked above) to find out more about the available language contracts and acceptable causes for exception.

Meaningful commitment to support language access is continuous and responsive to changing needs. Support and resources for language access must be integrated throughout your organization's planning, budgeting, and communications. Your organization may already have a language access policy or strategic plan that can help guide your efforts when deciding what documents and in what languages to translate.

MULTILINGUAL REPRESENTATION ON GOVERNMENT WORKGROUPS

For workgroups to be representative of diverse communities, it is crucial to reach out to community members in their languages of preference.

- Use different methods to attract multilingual candidates: messaging through community organizations, electronic and printed in-language flyers, social media invitations, radio announcements, etc.
- Have the application form and instructions in the languages you identified as being commonly spoken among the target population during your landscape analysis.
- Remove barriers for participation. For example, plan for interpretation during meetings, budget for translation of agendas, meeting notes, and other materials, and allow for sufficient time for the translation process.
- Engage multilingual workgroup members during the meetings so they can truly bring their voices to the table. Retention is dependent on participation being welcomed and encouraged.

*For removing participation barriers related to economic circumstances, consult our Community Compensation Guidelines.

PLANNING YOUR WORKGROUP MEETING WITH LANGUAGE ACCESS IN MIND

Whether your event is virtual or in-person, one of the goals is to build a participatory space for speakers of languages other than English. This means to plan for language access early in the process and to support the work at every stage. Here are basic considerations that we continue to review and improve with community input.

- Start outreach early so you'll have time to reach out to communities and potential interpreters.
- Have flyers, agendas, and other written materials translated into the languages you identified and include time for translation revisions.
- Plan for your registration form to be available in those languages or to have a way for interested people to contact your organization and request assistance in their language of preference to complete the registration process.
- Provide materials to interpreters ahead of time. This allows interpreters to be familiar with the topics, to review relevant vocabulary, and get acquainted with your agency's mission and vision.
- Build interpretation into the agenda. Consider the time needed for explaining the process for simultaneous interpretation*, distributing equipment, and answering questions. Also consider time to switch interpreters so they can rest and avoid interpreter fatigue.
- Advise presenters to speak at a moderate pace, not too fast, so interpreters have enough time to compose their thoughts.
- Check in and provide support to interpreters by helping to test and distribute equipment, introduce the interpretation services to the audience, and answer questions throughout the event.
- If your meeting is in-person, consider setting up an interpreter station, where interpreters can stop by for water, coffee and snacks.
- Consider organizing in-language events where the content is presented in language and the interpreters are needed for English speakers.

*Simultaneous interpretation: when interpretation and speech occur at the same time. It requires special audio equipment. Some agencies and/or interpretation vendors may already have this equipment; check with your team to determine if this is something you need or can rent or purchase.

PLAIN LANGUAGE AND WRITING FOR TRANSLATION

Writing in plain language is not only a best practice, but it is also mandated by Executive Order 23-02. Plain language refers to writing that is clear, straightforward, and easy to understand. Its primary goal is

to communicate information in a way that is accessible to as many people as possible, regardless of their education level or familiarity with the topic.

Plain language allows everyone, including people with disabilities and English learners, to better understand complex information.

Writing documents in plain language is especially important when translating into other languages. Sentences with a clear structure help to reduce ambiguity and translators do not need to check with the authors as often to do their job. This means that the translation process is easier and even less expensive and time consuming.

Plain language principles that help **everyone** understand your message include:

- Creating short sentences.
- Using simple words and avoiding both jargon and acronyms
- Using the active voice so the reader knows who does what.
- Focusing on concrete information rather than abstract concepts.
- Avoiding or clearly explaining acronyms so they can be accurately translated into other languages.

Other benefits to using plain language principles in materials for translation include:

- Consistent, easier to understand texts ensure accurate translation.
- Clear content in the source language reduces risk of errors in the target language.
- Plain language makes content accessible to a wider audience. When translated materials follow the same principles, the message is more inclusive of people with diverse educational backgrounds in any language.

Check out the Washington State plain language guidelines and learn more about plain language on the Governor's Plain Language Resources page.