

# Language Assistance Plan & Limited English Proficiency POLICY

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1 Goals of the Language Assistance Plan	1
Section 2 Individuals Who Need Language Assistance	1
Section 3 Types of Assistance Needed by LEP Persons	2
Section 4 Language Assistance to be Provided	2

## LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE PLAN & LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY POLICY

### SECTION 1.0 Goals of the Language Assistance Plan

The goals of HHA’s Language Assistance Plan include:

1. To ensure meaningful access to HHA’s public housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs by all eligible individuals regardless of primary language spoken.
2. To ensure that all LEP individuals are made aware that HHA will provide free oral interpretation services to facilitate their contacts with and participation in HHA programs.
3. To provide written translations of vital documents to LEP individuals in accordance with HUD’s “safe harbor” guidelines.
4. To ensure that HHA staff are aware of available language assistance services and how these services need to be used when serving LEP individuals.
5. To provide for periodic review and updating of language assistance plans and services in accordance with community needs.

### SECTION 2.0 LEP Individuals Who Need Language Assistance

Houston is an incredibly diverse community in which numerous LEP households reside. According to 2014 Census data, 46.9% of Houston’s almost 2 million residents over the age of 5 speak a language other than English, including over at least thirty-nine (39) languages. The most frequently spoken non-English languages are Spanish, Vietnamese and Chinese<sup>1</sup>.

The census data provides Poverty Status by language. The Poverty line is defined as those households who make \$24,230<sup>2</sup> for a family of four. The AMI in Houston is \$66,900 and the Poverty line is approximately 32% of AMI. Of those under the poverty level in Houston, 10.9% speak Spanish as seen in Table C16009. For the Houston MSA, 7.3% speak Spanish as highlighted in Table 1.

	Houston city, Texas		Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX Metro Area		
	2014 1 year estimate	2012 1 year estimate	Estimate	Percent of Total	
Total:	2,036,207		5,656,109		
Income in the past 12 months below poverty level:	432,645	21.2%	880,549	15.6%	Requires written translation and oral interpretation
Speak only English	171,038	8.4%	405,718	7.2%	
Speak Spanish	221,933	10.9%	412,693	7.3%	
Speak other Indo-European languages	13,023	0.6%	20,302	0.4%	Requires oral interpretation only
Speak Asian and Pacific Island languages	14,333	0.7%	30,058	0.5%	
Speak other languages	12,318	0.6%	11,778	0.2%	

**Table 1: Languages spoken by those under the poverty level in Houston and the Metro Area**

<sup>1</sup> Census ACS Table B16001: Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 years and over (2014 1 year estimate – Houston City).

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data\\_documentation/SubjectDefinitions/2010\\_ACSSubjectDefinitions.pdf](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/SubjectDefinitions/2010_ACSSubjectDefinitions.pdf)

**Source: Census ACS Table C16009:** Poverty status in the past 12 months by language spoken at home for the population 5 years and over - Universe: population 5 years and over for whom poverty status is determined.

### **SECTION 3.0 Types of Assistance Needed by LEP Persons**

The majority of contacts between HHA and LEP persons are meetings, written communications and phone calls where information is exchanged. Examples include interactions by applicants with HHA Housing Specialists and Property Managers during the application process leading up to housing in public housing or the Housing Choice Voucher program (HCV), as well as periodic contacts between residents and HHA Public Housing Operations staff related to management, maintenance and lease compliance issues. Oral interpretation services may be needed for these contacts.

Other contacts involve the exchange and review of printed materials, some of which may be considered “vital documents”. HUD’ Final Guidance defines vital documents as, “any document that is critical for ensuring meaningful access to the recipients’ major activities and programs by beneficiaries generally and LEP persons specifically”. The list of documents considered vital by HHA includes the following for public housing and HCV as applicable:

1. Language Identification Form
2. Initial and final application(s) for housing
3. Appointment notices
4. Consent forms
5. Lease including lease addenda
6. Lease compliance notices including notices to quit
7. Termination notices
8. Grievance and Conference hearing notices and procedures
9. Recertification related forms and notices
10. Inspection notices and results
11. Rent simplification notices and schedules
12. Rent change notices
13. Transfer policies and procedures
14. Section 8 family obligations

HHA will periodically review and update this list to reflect those documents which are considered vital to applicants and/or residents. With respect to these vital documents, HHA will maintain each in all three “threshold” languages.

### **SECTION 4.0 Language Assistance to be Provided**

In order to promote equal access to HHA programs and services by LEP individuals, HHA will implement the following array of language assistance services. Except where noted, all actions will be implemented by January 1, 2013:

1. Identification of LEP Persons and Notices  
Use of “I Speak Cards”: In order to help identify LEP individuals and determine the appropriate language assistance, HHA will post and make available I Speak Cards at its central office waiting room and HHA site based management offices. Applicants, public housing residents and HCV participants can use these cards to indicate their primary language. HHA staff at the point of entry will then make appropriate arrangements for interpretation services, generally using either a bi-lingual staff person or a telephone interpretation service.

Notices of Oral Interpretation Services: HHA will provide free access to either bi-lingual staff or telephone interpretation services for all contacts with LEP individuals. HHA will prominently post multi-lingual notices at

its central office and HHA site based management offices and on its website which indicate that free oral interpretation services are available upon request.

Language Preferences of Residents and Applicants: HHA will ask applicants and residents, through the use of its language identification form, to identify their primary language at initial application (for new applicants) and at recertification (for existing residents/participants), and to identify their language preference for receiving written communications. The language identification form will also ask the applicant, resident/participant if translations services are necessary. This information will be included in the paper files and in the electronic record.

## 2. Language Assistance Measures

- a. Oral Interpretation – Staff: Where feasible, bi-lingual HHA staff will be deployed to communicate with LEP individuals in their native languages and to assist them in reviewing HHA materials, answering questions about HHA programs, and responding to HHA forms and information requests. Currently, HHA employs staff members who speak Spanish and Vietnamese, which are the non-English languages spoken most frequently by eligible persons served by HHA.
- b. Oral Interpretation – Telephone Support: HHA will use the services of a professional telephone interpretation service whenever requested by an LEP individual and/or when an LEP person uses an I Speak card to signify that they speak a non-English language and a qualified staff person that speaks the appropriate language is unavailable. When these contacts involve review of HHA forms and procedures, HHA will schedule the call so that the telephone translator has the opportunity to first review the relevant form or procedure. HHA will only utilize interpretation services, which demonstrate a high degree of training and professionalization among the interpreter staff. HHA currently utilizes a service which provides 24/7 coverage, trained and certified interpreters, and coverage for 170 languages. HHA staff will be trained in how to access this service, which will be available as needed for LEP applicants, public housing residents or HCV participants.
- c. Oral Interpretation – In Person Assistance: In limited instances where telephone interpretation services or the use of bi-lingual HHA staff are determined insufficient to ensure meaningful access, HHA will provide qualified in-person interpretation services at no cost to the LEP individual(s) either through local Houston community organizations or through contracts with qualified and trained interpretations services. Examples of contacts where in person assistance is likely to be required includes termination hearings and evictions. Due to the considerable expense involved in providing in-person assistance, HHA will generally strive to use telephone assistance. If the LEP person does not wish to use the HHA free interpretation services, the LEP person may provide their own qualified interpreters at their own expense; however, see below regarding use of family and friends as interpreters.
- d. Oral Interpretation – Use of Other Interpreters not provided by HHA: As noted above, LEP individuals will be informed that HHA will provide them with free access to oral interpretation services via bilingual HHA staff or qualified, trained contractors as needed. If the LEP individual requests their own qualified, trained interpreter, this will be allowed at the individual's own expense. Use of family members and friends, especially minor children, as interpreters will generally be discouraged. Exceptions may be made where the contact with the LEP person is of a routine nature, one that does not involve confidential matters, or significant/complex matters impacting the applicant or resident's housing status, rent payments, or lease compliance issues and the LEP person signs a release that indicates alternative services were offered and waived. Staff will be advised to be alert to the potential for any conflict of interest or competency issues that may arise from the involvement of family or friends. If staff has questions about the appropriateness of allowing family and friends as interpreters, they will consult with HHA's LEP Coordinator for guidance.
- e. Written Translation: HHA will translate vital documents listed above into Spanish.
- f. Communication with LEP Telephone Callers: HHA will continue to provide English and Spanish options for its automated waiting list status line. For callers to HHA's office, recognizable languages including Spanish and Vietnamese will be transferred to bi-lingual HHA staff when available. If needed, HHA will attempt to

place a three-party call to the oral interpretation telephone service to determine if the service is able to identify the language spoken and provide an interpreter.

3. Staff Training and Coordination

HHA will provide training on the LEP policy and required assistance actions under the Language Assistance Plan for employees. This will include:

- a. Mandatory training: A mandatory training will be scheduled for all employees to review the Language Assistance Plan elements, review new procedures related to the LAP, and to inform staff of their responsibilities relative to LEP persons. On an ongoing basis, periodic refresher training will be provided to staff who regularly interact with HHA clients.
- b. Legal Compliance Officer: HHA's Legal Compliance Officer is responsible for ongoing updating of the LEP analysis, addressing staff and public questions and issues related to LEP matters, and providing ongoing LEP training.

4. Providing Notice to LEP Persons

To ensure that LEP persons are aware of the language services available to them, HHA will take the following actions:

- a. Post LEP notices in HHA's offices and on website: As described in paragraph V.B. above.
- b. Incorporate multi-lingual messages into HHA outreach documents: HHA will utilize standard messages in Spanish and Vietnamese on outreach materials and notices.
- c. Inform resident associations of language assistance services.

5. Monitoring and updating the Language Assistance Plan

Every year, as part of HHA annual plan process, the LAP will be reviewed and updated, if needed. The review will assess:

- a. Whether there have been any significant changes in the composition or language needs of the LEP population in Houston;
- b. A review to determine if additional vital documents require translation;
- c. A review of any issues or problems related to serving LEP persons which may have emerged during the past year; and,
- d. Identification of any recommended actions to provide more responsive and effective language services.

Since it will be part of the agency's overall annual plan process, the annual LAP review and update process will facilitate public review and comment. HHA will also continue to utilize its annual resident survey to query residents about their LEP needs.