

NYC Emergency Management Language Access Policy

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I. Background and Mission

New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM) was created by Executive Order in 1996 and was subsequently elevated to departmental status by the City Charter in November 2001.

NYCEM's mission is to plan and prepare for emergencies; educate the public about preparedness; coordinate emergency response and recovery; collect and disseminate emergency information; and seek funding to support preparedness. This mission charges NYCEM to work with other City, state, federal and public/private partners. Emergencies in a city as large and complex as New York require a coordinated response. NYCEM works to ensure information gathering, decision making, and resource allocations are carried out efficiently.

NYCEM Programs

Emergency Preparedness Education

In response to New Yorkers' growing concerns about public safety, NYCEM launched the Ready New York campaign in July 2003. The Ready New York program educates New Yorkers about the hazards they may face and encourages residents to prepare for emergencies. Since its start, the campaign has grown to feature 10 [guides](#) to help New Yorkers prepare for emergencies. The majority of the preparedness guides are currently available in 13 languages online and are easily downloadable; guides can also be requested through 311. The guides are available in: English, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Italian, Korean, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Urdu, and Yiddish (all guides are printed in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Russian; all other languages are available as downloadable pdf files). Ready New York also has two preparedness videos available in English, Spanish, Mandarin, and Russian.

NYCEM has developed outreach strategies to work with community groups, social service providers, schools, and other agencies to promote and publicize the availability of emergency preparedness guides. Together with other agencies and community partners working with people with limited English proficiency, NYCEM has been utilizing proactive strategies to

disseminate translated materials. Targeted mailings, direct community outreach and media coverage to ethnic media outlets are just a few examples.

The NYCEM website is ADA compliant. Ready New York guides are also available in audio format. Guides can be accessed via nyc.gov/readynewyork.

Community Preparedness

NYCEM Community Preparedness works with local leaders to provide a direct connection to emergency planning resources and information. Throughout the year, NYCEM Community Preparedness hosts trainings and events, offers tools to help build local planning capacity, and connects New Yorkers to citywide preparedness initiatives through its weekly newsletter. The program takes a whole community approach to preparedness. Tools and programs are designed to be inclusive and address the diverse needs of New York City communities.

In an effort to prepare New York City's immigrant and communities with limited English proficiency, NYCEM Community Preparedness in collaboration with Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and City University of New York, produced "The Storm", the 10th installment of the Emmy award-winning We Are New York (WANY), now [We Speak NYC](#) series geared towards English-language learners. The 25-minute episode focuses on emergency preparedness and access to City resources during emergencies and can be used in conjunction with a [toolkit](#) of Ready New York preparedness tools and learning materials developed specifically for adult language learners. The toolkit is designed for use by English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors, community-based groups, and volunteer conversation group leaders interested in helping New Yorkers improve their English while learning how to plan, prepare, and get informed during emergencies. The WANY program offers an innovative approach to addressing barriers to preparedness education and information among linguistically isolated communities through incorporating various outreach and programmatic strategies, and leveraging local level community networks in building preparedness efforts.

NYC CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams)

NYCEM also manages the NYC CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) program. This program features over 50 community-based teams that are made up of local volunteers trained to engage their communities in disaster preparedness and emergency response. NYC CERT works to recruit a diverse group of residents that accurately represent the composition of their community. These volunteers are active in assisting their family, friends, neighbors, and

communities before, during, and after emergencies. The NYC CERT program works with the leadership of each team to improve the language capacity of their members by recruiting members that speak languages other than English. By having members that speak languages commonly found in their communities, the teams are better able to serve their communities.

The CERT program maintains a database of the language capacity of CERT members who are called to conduct Ready New York emergency preparedness presentations in languages other than English and assist emergency operations when there is a need for translation or interpretation services. CERT members also review the translations of NYCEM guides and other printed material to ensure cultural and linguistic consistency.

Notify NYC

Notify NYC is the City of New York's official source of information about emergencies. Non-English speaking subscribers have access to messages in 13 different languages, audio format, and American Sign Language (ASL). Notify NYC's multilingual messages span a variety of emergency situations, including pre-scripted mass transit alerts, fire department activity, public health and safety notifications, utility alerts, weather alerts, alternate side parking updates, and downed trees notifications.

Media and Ad Campaigns

NYC Emergency Management runs seasonal, general, and hazard-specific multi-lingual advertising to further promote emergency preparedness in New York City. Since 2009, the agency has worked with the Ad Council to produce general preparedness ads under the Ready New York banner for TV, radio, print, and outdoor media (available in English and Spanish). Additionally, NYC Emergency Management runs ads every September, or National Preparedness Month, to emphasize the importance of preparing for emergencies. NYC Emergency Management also runs the several multi-ethnic, multilingual advertising/marketing techniques and campaigns, including the "Know Your Zone" hurricane awareness campaign, which aims to reach the roughly three million New Yorkers living within the city's hurricane evacuation zones.

II. Language Access Goals

NYCEM is not a social service agency and as such does not provide direct services to New Yorkers.

During an emergency, NYCEM works to make certain that agencies involved in the emergency response provide a unified, accurate, and timely message to the public. Considering New York City's ethnic and linguistic diversity, NYCEM makes every effort to make the information available and accessible to all New Yorkers. While the capability of NYCEM's partner agencies to provide language assistance may vary, we work in tandem with these agencies to support language access to their clients whenever they provide emergency services. As an agency, NYCEM continually evaluates how it interacts with and supports communities in New York City, including populations with Limited English proficiency and other vulnerable populations.

In addition, as described in the Record Keeping section of the plan, NYCEM tracks distribution of its emergency preparedness material, including number of guides distributed in languages other than English, through its event management database.

III. People with Limited English Proficiency Assessment

As a coordinating agency, NYCEM works with the lead agency in any emergency to ensure that language needs are identified and that language translation and interpretation assistance is provided to the degree possible.

NYCEM is not a direct service agency, but supports other City agencies by conducting a demographic assessment through its GIS unit for each incident NYCEM coordinates at the time of the event. The information is then shared with agencies responsible for providing services during and after the incident. Services are provided in the languages of the affected community. These languages vary and may be different than the languages listed in Local Law 30. Since emergencies are unpredictable in nature and frequency, assessing the language access needs of affected populations is possible only after the emergency occurs. NYCEM is operational 24/7, so conducting demographic assessments after an emergency is one of the first steps NYCEM takes, by obtaining information from the field and pre-existing GIS databases. Language Access is coordinated among City agencies participating in the emergency response as described in the Citywide Language Access Protocol.

IV. Provision of Language Access Services

NYCEM regularly provides language access services for its emergency preparedness events as described in the Ready New York section of this protocol.

During an emergency, should service centers be activated, the leading service agency is responsible to provide language assistance through professional services. In addition, each agency providing services at a service center is responsible for providing language assistance for their clients. Signage at service centers, flyers and necessary informational materials are translated into the languages of affected communities and made available for distribution at the centers as public information becomes available.

NYCEM emergency plans address the need for language assistance at service centers and lead agencies are identified for providing services to affected residents. The lead agency assumes the responsibility for language assistance based on Local Law 73 and Local Law 30. Updated information is provided to 311 operators on a regular basis, and 311 services are available in more than 160 languages. The need for language assistance and the provision of language services is monitored by members of the External Affairs and Human Services units, and an Interagency Language Access Task Force can be activated if the needs of the affected populations exceed the capacity of the responding agency. NYCEM's Language Access Coordinator maintains a list of bilingual/multilingual staff and volunteers that can conduct emergency preparedness presentations in languages other than English and assist emergency operations when translation and interpretation services are needed. In addition, NYCEM contracts with language vendors for the provision of:

- Translations
- In-person interpretation
- Telephonic interpretation in over 100 languages
- Sign Language in-person interpretation
- American Sign Language Video Remote Interpretation (VRI)
- Communication Access Real-Time Captioning (CART)

To meet language access needs that arise during emergencies, NYCEM contracts only with vendors who are available to provide services 365 days/year, 24/7 with a two-hour advance notice.

As a coordinating agency, NYCEM works with lead agencies in each incident to make sure that multilingual signage is available. In addition, NYCEM's Logistics unit maintains multilingual signage kits for coastal storm shelters and service centers. Each coastal storm sheltering kit contains "I Speak: Free Interpretation Available" signs, in addition to the NYCEM -created picture communication boards and other translated signage. In coordination with the Language

Access Task Force, additional signage is translated during emergencies that is specific to each incident and reflects the languages of the affected community.

In addition, NYCEM has been expanding the Notify NYC program with pre-translated emergency alerts in compliance with Local Law 31.

NYC Emergency Management staff work together to review all documents for consistency, accuracy, and to guarantee the information includes common, everyday words whenever possible. All outreach materials, such as the Ready New York guides, go through several levels of review before being published. Staff responsible for the development of these documents have received plain language training. Documents are reviewed for clarity before translation and edits are made when necessary. All NYC Emergency Management outreach materials use plain language principles:

- Content is written in short sentences.
- Content is broken down with lists and headers.
- Content is written in the active voice.
- Content does not contain jargons.

V. Training

In 2016, NYC Emergency Management launched an updated mandatory language access online training that employees can take at their desks. The training describes NYCEM's language access policies and procedures for each unit, and the Citywide Interagency Language Access Protocol. This training was updated again in March, 2018 to include Local Law 30 and Local Law 31.

Members of NYCEM's Language Access cabinet train response staff in the use of the protocol and how to access translation and interpretation contracts annually. External Affairs staff, responsible for language access during emergencies, is continuously trained on language access policies during External Affairs meetings that occur every three weeks.

NYCEM also conducts Cultural Awareness training for its staff, volunteers, City agency and community partners. The training was launched in 2016 for emergency management professionals to increase workplace effectiveness by increasing levels of cultural competency. The training guides participants to challenge biases and assumptions through self-reflection,

apply cultural awareness to NYCEM practices, identify culturally appropriate vocabulary, and acquire strategies to use in cross-cultural situations.

NYCEM's Training and Exercise division tracks staff who has taken the online language access training and the classroom Cultural Awareness training, and provides a report to NYCEM's language access cabinet annually.

VI. Record Keeping and Evaluation

The Ready New York program maintains an event management database where all community events that require interpretation and/or distribution of material in languages other than English are tracked. Ready New York conducts 750 – 1,000 emergency preparedness events annually; roughly, a quarter of those events are for people with limited English proficiency and immigrant communities. These events are conducted either by staff or volunteers who speak the language of the community or with a professional interpreter. After each event, the organizer receives a survey to provide feedback about the event. Concerns raised by the organizer are addressed as soon as they're received by Ready New York staff.

During emergencies, NYCEM works with the incident lead agency and NYCEM GIS unit to get accurate information about language access needs in the field. NYCEM does not collect any personal information of people requesting language access services. NYCEM maintains situational awareness of language needs that arise in the field and coordinates with responsible service agencies to meet those needs. In addition, after every incident, NYCEM conducts a hot wash with staff where all operations, including language access, are discussed and gaps of services are identified. Then, an after action report is written and distributed to NYCEM staff and other City agencies involved in responding to the incident. The after action report contains recommendations and corrective actions for each incident. NYCEM maintains an internal corrective action tracker where all incident recommendations and corrective actions are tracked along with staff responsible for executing each recommendation.

Ultimately, it is up to the lead service agency, or the Interagency Language Access Task Force, if activated, to keep records of language access services provided during each incident.

VII. Resource Analysis and Planning

As described above, NYCEM maintains contracts with various language vendors and leverages its staff and volunteers to provide language access services when appropriate. NYCEM follows

the Interagency Citywide Language Access Protocol to coordinate language access operations during emergencies that require interagency coordination.

VIII. Outreach and Public Awareness of Language Access Services

As NYCEM is not a social service agency, it does not provide direct language assistance services. NYCEM's emergency preparedness guides and materials are available in 12 languages in addition to English on NYCEM's website and are also accessible through 311. These guides and materials are distributed through NYCEM's programs described in this plan, and outreach events across the five boroughs. NYCEM has a dedicated Cross-Cultural Outreach Coordinator who works closely with immigrant communities in New York City. The Cross-Cultural Outreach Coordinator schedules and conducts emergency preparedness events for people with limited English proficiency and distributes translated material in these communities.

IX. Language Access Complaints

Language access complaints can be filed by emailing languageaccess@oem.nyc.gov or calling 311. Complaints are monitored by NYCEM's language access cabinet and as with any other correspondence, members of NYCEM's language access cabinet respond to complaints within 14 calendar days of receipt.

X. Implementation Plan Logistics

NYCEM does not issue any licenses, permits or registrations and does not provide any direct social services. As a coordinating agency for the City of New York, NYCEM staff has limited engagement with the public, which is primarily through NYCEM's emergency preparedness programs. Ready New York guides are already translated into 12 languages in addition to English. NYCEM signage kits contain multilingual posters informing New Yorkers that they can request free interpretation. The majority of all other signage and Notify NYC alerts are also pre-translated. As such, NYCEM is already in compliance with Local Law 30.

During time of emergency, the City will set up a Language Access Task Force responsible for helping direct and support language access services across the city. This Task Force has the responsibility to ensure that language access protocols are followed. NYCEM works directly

with the Task Force leads and supports language access operations through the City's Emergency Operations Center.

The NYCEM Language Access Implementation Protocol shall be reviewed and revised annually, or as necessary. Members of the Language Access cabinet will be responsible for the review and revision of the protocol.