



**Department of  
Housing Preservation  
& Development**

**Department of Housing Preservation and Development**

**Division of Tenant Resources**

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**Language Access Plan**

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## I Division Mission and Background

The Division of Tenant Resources (“DTR” or “the Division”), in the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development’s (“HPD” or “the Agency”) Office of Management and Budget provides approximately 40,000 households with rental subsidies that allow families to afford a stable place to live. Of over 40 divisions in the Agency, DTR interacts most frequently with members of the public through its various programs.

## II Division Language Access Goals

The goal of DTR’s language access efforts is to ensure that all Limited English Proficient (“LEP”) persons have equitable access to the Division’s services and to comply with other goals outlined in the Agency’s Language Access Plan. These efforts include training front-line staff, identifying essential documents for translation into the most commonly spoken languages of the Division’s service population, and making interpreters and interpretation services available throughout the Division. The Division will, as part of an ongoing process, continue to identify documents for translation and provide interpretation services.

The Division’s Language Access Liaison will be primarily responsible for guiding the implementation of the Division’s Language Access Plan. The Language Access Liaison will work in conjunction with the Agency’s Human Resources Division, which is responsible for guiding implementation of HPD’s Language Access Plan, to guide the Division’s work towards this end. The Language Access Liaison will update the Division’s Plan once every two years, or upon significant changes to the Division’s operations or service population, to reflect the Division’s progress and next steps. The Language Access Liaison will report on matters relating to the Division’s Language Access Plan to DTR’s Assistant Commissioner.

## III LEP Population Assessment

### Factor 1: Number or proportion of LEP persons in the eligible service population

Both HPD and DTR’s service areas cover all five boroughs, in which the eligible service population includes all New York City residents. DTR will therefore adopt the LEP Population Assessment from HPD’s Language Access Plan, which in turn adopts the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs’ list of ten (10) citywide languages: **Spanish, Chinese (including Cantonese, Mandarin, Formosan), Russian, Korean, Bengali, Haitian Creole, Arabic, Urdu, French and Polish.**

In accordance with HUD’s Final Guidance regarding Title VI, recipients of federal financial assistance from HUD may also apply safe harbor thresholds to determine service languages. An analysis of American Community Survey data on the number and percent of individuals who speak English less than very well in New York City shows that a number of languages not included in the Mayor’s Office of

Immigrant Affairs list of ten (10) citywide languages meet safe harbor thresholds of either five (5) percent of the eligible population or 1,000 persons. These languages are as follows (the ten (10) citywide languages are highlighted in gray):

**Number of Individuals Who Speak English Less than Very Well in New York City**

Spanish	884,170
French, including Cajun	23,805
Haitian	36,676
Italian	22,454
Portuguese	5,262
German	2,568
Yiddish, Pennsylvania Dutch or other West Germanic languages	24,543
Greek	12,839
Russian	110,334
Polish	21,074
Serbo-Croatian	5,802
Ukrainian or other Slavic languages	7,165
Armenian	1,214
Persian, including Farsi and Dari	2,748
Gujarati	2,217
Hindi	13,137
Urdu	23,033
Punjabi	13,142
Bengali	65,102
Nepali, Marathi, or other Indic languages	6,103
Tamil	1,000
Malayalam, Kannada, or other Dravidian languages	2,409
Chinese, including Mandarin, Cantonese	373,308
Japanese	11,019
Korean	39,302
Vietnamese	7,014
Khmer	1,571
Thai, Lao, or other Tai-Kadai languages	3,198
Tagalog, including Filipino	16,090
Ilocano, Samoan, Hawaiian, or other Austronesian languages	3,442
Arabic	28,187
Hebrew	7,678
Amharic, Somali, or other Afro-Asiatic languages	1,784
Yoruba, Twi, Igbo, or other languages of Western Africa	22,496
Swahili or other languages of Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa	1,522

*Source: 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over.*

HUD Final Guidance notes that, “should written translation of a certain document(s) be so burdensome as to defeat the legitimate objectives of its program, translation of the written materials is not necessary.” Translating all documents most commonly distributed to the public that contain or elicit important and necessary information regarding the provision of services, as defined by Local Law 30, into just the ten (10) citywide languages, would be financially burdensome to the point of defeating the objectives of DTR’s program. The same is true, a fortiori, for translating those same documents into all 35 languages that meet the safe harbor threshold defined in the HUD Final Guidance.

HUD Final Guidance states that, “Other ways of providing meaningful access, such as effective oral interpretation of vital documents, might be acceptable under such circumstances.” DTR provides oral interpretation upon request in over 173 languages. The Division will also prioritize the translation of vital documents based on the availability of limited resources. As discussed in greater depth in Section IV, DTR will collect language preference data from program applications, initial briefings, and program mailings, and will translate and print vital documents for specific participants based on their stated language preference on a targeted basis.

## **Factor 2: Frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with DTR programs**

The Division of Tenant Resources interacts with LEP persons who have limited English proficiency multiple times per day. DTR will gather language preference data from program applications, initial briefings, and annual recertifications. The Division will use this data to target language access services and assess changes in the frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with DTR programs and to reflect those changes in updates to DTR’s Language Access Plan.

## **Factor 3: Importance of the benefit, service information or encounter of LEP individuals**

The Division of Tenant Resources administers rental assistance programs. DTR interacts with the public and LEP Persons multiple times per day in person, by phone, by email, and through mailings. These interactions often involve exchanging important or necessary information regarding the provision of services. As such, the importance of information and services that DTR provides to the LEP Population is high.

## **Factor 4: Resources designated by the Division for language assistance services**

The Division of Tenant Resources uses document translation and onsite and telephonic interpretation services provided by two Agency-wide, multi-year contracts. Interpretation services are offered in over 173 languages. A language preference form will accompany applications and annual recertification packages, and will be used at initial briefings to determine a participant’s need for services in a language other than English. Subsequent interactions with a participant who indicates a language preference other than English will be facilitated using DTR’s interpretation and translation service vendors.

## **IV Provision of Language Access Services**

The Division of Tenant Resources interacts with different members of the public in a variety of settings. These interactions may happen:

- In person at HPD offices
- In person during field interviews, inspections, public meetings and community events
- By phone
- By mail or email
- Through HPD's website and public-facing online systems

The Division will continue to rely on a combination of interpretation and translation services to meet the needs of LEP persons and ensure they have equal access to HPD's services. Some of these services will be provided by HPD employees and others by vendor contract. DTR staff will determine the appropriate type of language access service depending on the nature of the interaction, in accordance with federal and local guidelines, and in consultation with the Language Access Liaison and Language Access Coordinator.

### **Translation Services – Written Communication and Materials**

In accordance with HUD guidance and Chapter 11 of The New York City Administrative Code, the Division prioritizes vital and/ or commonly distributed documents for translation. A document will be considered vital if it contains information that is critical for accessing DTR's programs or activities, or is required by law. Vital documents will be prioritized for translation based on the availability of limited resources, as discussed in Section III. Vital documents may include:

- Documents that must be provided by law
- Complaint, consent, release or waiver forms
- Claim or application forms
- Conditions of settlement or resolution agreements
- Letters or notices pertaining to the reduction, denial, or termination of services or programs or that require a response from the LEP person
- Time-sensitive notices, including notice of hearing and investigation or litigation-related deadlines
- Form or written material related to individual rights
- Notice of rights, requirements, or responsibilities
- Notices regarding the availability of free language assistance services for LEP individuals

The Division's Language Access Working Group, whose members will be identified by the Assistant Commissioner, will facilitate a review of its programmatic notices to determine which may be considered vital (Section IX).

To ensure maximum accessibility of these documents, the Division will do the following:

## **Translate Written Documents**

A Language Preference Form containing choices for at least the top ten (10) citywide languages will accompany applications and annual recertification packages, and will be used at initial briefings to determine a household's need for services in a language other than English. Staff will electronically record language preference to inform the nature of language assistance offered during subsequent interactions. All future vital documents provided to the household will be in the preferred language indicated on the Form, resource-permitting. Non-vital documents may be mailed with a Language Assistance Form, which advertises the availability of free interpretation services, and how to access them by phone or in person.

The provision of translation services will take place in two stages.

*Stage 1:* Language Preference Forms will be used to gather language preference data for all households served by the Division over the course of one to two years. Language Assistance Forms will accompany other mailings.

*Stage 2:* Once DTR's mailing and scanning vendor operationalizes a Print And Scan program and all language preference data for all households has been collected, vital documents will automatically be generated and printed in a household's preferred language based on language preference data. Language Assistance Forms will accompany other mailings.

## **Consistently Conduct Quality Assurance Reviews**

To ensure the quality of the Division's communications, whenever possible, all translated documents will be reviewed by at least one employee who is fluent in the language used in the notice, and who was not involved in drafting the notice. The quality assurance review process will be managed by the Language Access Liaison to ensure consistency and quality.

## **Encourage Use of Plain Language**

The Division holds regular meetings to create and edit new notices, as well as to revise existing notices. Plain language principles are taken into consideration.

## **Communicate Online**

HPD's website is now accessible in 91 different languages through Google Translate.



## **Interpretation Services – In-Person Interpretation**

DTR employees interact with members of the public in person on a daily basis. This includes interactions at DTR’s office, on scheduled and emergency site visits, and in public meetings. Several types of in-person interpretation services will be made available:

### **Contract for professional interpretation**

HPD maintains a contract with The Big Word for in-person professional interpretation. Staff may submit a request to the Language Access Liaison for a professional interpreter. Depending on the nature of the request, the Language Access Liaison may request a professional interpreter with special legal or programmatic knowledge.

### **Bilingual employees**

When necessary, staff from HPD’s bilingual employee database may be requested to provide interpretation for LEP persons. The bilingual employee database will include the names and titles of staff willing and able to provide oral and written translation, languages spoken, services available (document translation, interpretation), contact information, and the days and hours of availability.

### **LEP person’s friend or relative**

When the LEP Person expresses a preference, DTR may permit them to use, at their own expense, a friend or relative to provide interpretation services. LEP Persons may feel more comfortable receiving interpretation services from a friend or relative. In addition, there might be circumstances in which the temporary use of interpreters not provided by DTR may be necessary. However, HPD’s bilingual employee database, in-person professional interpretation contract, and telephonic interpretation contract should, in most cases, obviate the need for a friend or relative to provide interpretation.

A number of issues may arise when friends or relatives provide interpretation services, including:

- **Competency:** Especially when using a minor child to interpret, and especially when interpretation involves programmatic or legal language
- **Confidentiality, privacy, and conflict of interest:** Including financial considerations, domestic violence, law enforcement records, or medical information

DTR staff will take these issues into consideration before relying solely on a LEP person’s friend or relative for interpretation services. Staff should consider whether a record of assistance is appropriate, and when a bilingual employee or professional interpreter should be present in addition to a friend or relative. Staff will take care to ensure that the LEP person’s choice of interpreter is voluntary, and that the LEP person is aware that the Division can provide competent interpretation services at no cost. The Division maintains that minors, under no circumstances, will be used to provide interpretation services, as their ability to understand issues related to program administration may be limited.

Staff should seek further guidance from the Language Access Liaison when a LEP person decides to use a friend or relative as an interpreter.

## **Telephonic Interpretation**

In addition to in-person interpretation, DTR employees will rely on telephonic interpretation provided through a HPD vendor. There are dual-headset telephones in DTR's Client Services office for use by employees who frequently interact with members of the public. The vendor provides interpretation services in over 173 languages in addition to any other languages the Agency may request.

## **Requesting In-person or Telephonic Interpretation**

Staff may request telephonic interpretation by using the dual-headset telephones in DTR's Client Services office that connect directly to HPD's telephonic interpretation vendor. Staff may also request in-person interpretation services by contacting a staff member listed on the bilingual staff database directly, or by requesting professional interpretation through the Language Access Liaison.

Interpretation will be provided for public hearings upon request. Meeting announcements will include instructions on how attendees can request translation services by contacting DTR.

DTR is currently translating its HCV voucher briefing presentation into multiple languages.

## **V Training**

The Division of Tenant Resources will, in coordination with HPD's Language Access Coordinator, develop a training curriculum for all new and existing applicable employees covering the tenets of good customer service, best practices for serving DTR's constituencies in regard to language access, and the content of the Division's LAP. The trainings will specifically familiarize staff with DTR's Language Access Plan and the requirements and availability of resources pertaining to language access and limited English proficiency and help DTR/ HPD standardize provisions and tracking of language access services. Trainings will be prioritized for staff in program areas that most significantly interact with the public and/ or produce materials for public communication. Trainings will be provided to all staff on a periodic basis. All general language access training will be conducted by the Human Resources Training and Development team. DTR-specific language access training will be conducted by members of the Policy Unit and/ or supervisory staff.

## **VI Record Keeping and Evaluation**

The Division of Tenant Resources will monitor language preference data provided by the public to track and analyze language needs. DTR will also monitor requests for language services from the roster of bilingual employees. This is in addition to HPD's using vendor portals to capture and analyze the language services provided across the Agency.

The Language Access Liaison will monitor client surveys, language access complaints received by 311, and the nature of inquiries made to HPD's Language Access Coordinator in regard to DTR's language access services as well as the nature of inquiries made to the Language Access Liaison. In addition, the Language Access Liaison will coordinate with HPD's Language Access Coordinator to seek feedback on the quality of language access services provided, including reviews of "Secret Shopper" scores. The Liaison will work with the Coordinator to make policy and operational recommendations.

## **VII Outreach and public awareness of language access services**

DTR will employ a multi-pronged approach to ensuring the public is aware of language access services. Outreach efforts will include signage in Client Services (posters and information on the TV monitor), website features, and incorporation into relevant programmatic materials and communications.

## **VIII Language Access Complaints**

Language access complaints from NYC 311 will be routed through the Executive Deputy Commissioner's office to the appropriate program area for response. The Language Access Liaison, in coordination with the Language Access Coordinator, will track, monitor and respond to language access complaints whether through 311 or internally, for the Division.

## **IX Implementation Logistics**

A DTR Language Access Working Group will coordinate the Division's implementation of its Language Access Plan. The Assistant Commissioner will appoint representatives to the working group. The Working Group will be convened from time to time by the Language Access Liaison.

The roles and responsibilities of the Working Group include:

- Maintaining and updating the Division's Plan at least every two years
- Overseeing the implementation and execution of the Plan

- Identifying vital documents
- Supporting HPD's Language Access Coordinator to
  - Standardize LEP policies, procedures, and staff training
  - Facilitate LEP data tracking, collection and analysis
  - Ensure awareness of language access resources, requirements and best-practice standards
  - Develop policy and resource recommendations as needed to better enable language access across all public-facing operations
  - Recruit additional volunteers for the NYC Volunteer Language Bank

The Language Access Liaison will sit on HPD's intra-agency language access working group in order to remain abreast of HPD's implementation of language access measures and to update HPD's working group of the steps DTR's working group is taking to comply with its Language Access Plan.

NYC Dept. of Housing Preservation and Development  
Division of Tenant Resources Language Access Plan August 20, 2019

The Division has prioritized the following goals for this Language Access Plan

	<b>Language Access Goal</b>	<b>Staff Responsible</b>
1	Post Language Coordinator's name and title on DTR's website	Language Access Liaison; Language Access Coordinator
2	Inventory all DTR notices	Language Access Liaison, Digital Documentation Production Committee
3	Create standard operating procedures for requesting in-person interpreters and document translation	Language Access Liaison
4	Finalize Language Preference Form	Language Access Liaison
5	Operationalize Language Preference Form	Language Access Liaison, Director of Program Strat. And Analytics, Initials, Continued Occupancy
6	Finalize Language Assistance Form	Language Access Liaison
7	Operationalize Language Assistance Form	Language Access Liaison, Director of Program Strat. And Analytics
8	Identify Vital Documents	DTR Language Access Working Group
9	Language access signage and aids rolled out in Client Services	Language Access Liaison, Language Access Coordinator; Director of Client Services
10	Post Final Interim LAP to DTR website	Language Access Liaison, Chief of Staff
11	Roll out DTR-specific language access training for front-line staff	Language Access Liaison, Language Access Coordinator, Policy
12	Increase use of plain language in essential public documents	Chief of Staff, Language Access Liaison
13	Include language access processes in DTR's Electronic Case Management system	Director of Program Strategy and Analytics, Digital Document Production Committee, Language Access Liaison
14	Introduce accordion language cards in Client Services	Language Access Coordinator

Contact

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