

NYC OEM Language Access Policy

Background and Mission

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

OEM'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 OEM 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. OEM works to ensure information gathering, decision making, and resource allocations are carried out efficiently.

Language Access Goals

During an emergency, OEM works to make certain that agencies involved in an emergency response provide a unified, accurate, and timely message to the public. Considering New York City's ethnic and linguistic diversity OEM makes every effort to make the information available and accessible to all New Yorkers. While the capability of OEM'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, OEM continually evaluates how it interacts with and supports communities in New York City, including the LEP and other vulnerable populations.

OEM Programs

Emergency Preparedness

In response to New Yorkers' growing concerns about public safety, OEM launched the Ready New York campaign in July 2003. Ready New York educates New Yorkers about the hazards they may face and encourages residents to prepare for emergencies. Over the past six years, the campaign has grown to feature ten guides that address specific hazards, such as extreme heat, hurricanes and flooding, as well as vulnerable populations, including seniors and people with disabilities, children and youth, and pet owners.

The preparedness guides are currently available in up to 14 languages online and are easily downloadable¹; guides are also available through 311. The OEM website is ADA compliant. The Ready New York Guide for Seniors and People with Disabilities is also available in Braille and on audio tape. Guides can be accessed via nyc.gov/readynewyork.

¹ English, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Urdu, and Yiddish. (Which languages each guide will be printed in are chosen by analyzing demographic information, as well as agency partners' recommendations.)

Community Programs

NYC Citizens Corps Council

The NYC Citizen Corps Council is part of the national initiative to bring together local leaders from community organizations, government agencies, local elected officials' offices, the private sector, and volunteer programs to promote community preparedness and volunteerism. The Citizen Corps Council's goal is to enable New Yorkers to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. The Citizen Corps Council also has four taskforces which work to prepare New York's vulnerable populations through public education and training opportunities, outreach and volunteer programs.

One of these taskforces focuses on immigrants and individuals with limited English proficiency. This task force's goal for 2009 is to identify and train individuals selected from the membership for additional outreach capacity. The goal is to hold up to 20 Ready New York presentations in languages other than English (Chinese, Haitian Creole, French, Russian and Spanish²) throughout the year.

CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams)

Another community program OEM spearheads is CERT: Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT). These teams are made up of neighborhood and community-based volunteers trained to engage their communities in disaster preparedness and emergency response. NYC CERT already 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 CERT program is working 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.

Community Outreach

OEM has developed outreach strategies to work with community groups, social service providers, schools and other agencies/entities to promote and publicize the availability of translated in-language material. Together with other agencies and community partners working with LEP residents, OEM 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.

Emergency Situations

During emergencies, once language needs are identified, OEM with first responder agencies work to provide language assistance to the degree practicable/possible.

² The non-English presentations are conducted by volunteers from Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), and Citizen Corps Council member agencies. OEM keeps a list of CERT volunteers with language skills.

During emergencies, should assistance/reception centers be activated, the leading service agency is responsible to provide language assistance through professional services. In addition, each agency providing services at an assistance or reception center is responsible for providing language assistance for the population, if necessary, to access their services

Signage at assistance/reception centers, flyers and necessary informational materials will be translated into the required languages and available for distribution at the centers.

OEM 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 the Executive Order 120 on Language Access.

Updated information is provided to 311 operators on a regular basis, and 311 services are available in excess of 160 languages.

The need for language assistance and the provision of language services is monitored by members of External Affairs and Human Services units. The NYC OEM Language Access Implementation Protocol shall be reviewed and revised annually, or as necessary. The agency's Language Access Coordinator / contact person shall be responsible for the review and revision of the protocol.