



**U.S. Department of Homeland
Security
Office of Public Affairs
Language Access Plan
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I. Introduction

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Public Affairs (OPA) developed this plan to strengthen language access in its programs and activities pursuant to Executive Order 13166, *Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency* (August 11, 2000) (EO 13166 or EO). EO 13166 requires, among other things, that each federal department and agency “examine the services it provides to Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons and develop and implement a system by which LEP persons have meaningful access to those services without unduly burdening the fundamental mission of the agency.”

In November 2023, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued its updated Language Access Plan. Among other things, the plan provides policy and guiding principles for DHS in meeting the requirements of EO 13166. The DHS Language Access Plan applies to all DHS Component employees and contractors who interact with members of the public via any medium, including, but not limited to, websites, email, phone, and in-person and online contact.

The Office of Public Affairs supports DHS components and offices in a number of ways, including through the posting of information on the DHS webpage and issuances of press releases. OPA is committed to working with components and offices to support meaningful access for persons who are LEP.

II. OPA Overview

OPA is responsible for oversight and management of all external and internal communications for DHS. OPA assists the Secretary on all communications matters, both internal and external. OPA also provides oversight, coordination, and guidance to all DHS component public affairs offices.

OPA is the primary point of contact for news media, organizations, and the general public seeking information about the Department’s programs, policies, procedures, statistics, and services.

In the event of a national emergency, OPA serves as the federal government’s lead public information office. During emergencies, OPA provides potentially life-saving information to the public in a timely and accessible manner.

OPA has a complement of communications specialties, described briefly below.

- Communicate the Department’s operational and policy successes to the American people.

- Provide strategic counsel to senior leadership using best practices for communication of public information;
- Educate and empower residents of the United States to prepare for and respond to emergencies, including natural disasters and terrorist or domestic violence attacks;
- Foster employee communications and build commitment to the Department's mission among all employees;
- Manage the daily operations of the headquarters website to provide a consolidated resource for priority topics in a unified voice.
- Provide governance policy direction and management oversight of the agency's enterprise public websites and social media accounts.
- Regularly provide current/updated subject matter expertise and communication materials to key stakeholders and non-government partners necessary in supporting DHS' mission objectives.
- Create, produce, and disseminate high-quality and accessible video productions to clearly communicate messages to an intended audience.
- Provides access to DHS and its component agencies to multimedia studios/networks/productions.

Detailed information about OPA is available at: [Office of Public Affairs | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#).

III. Key Terms

1. **Bilingual Persons:** Persons who are bilingual are fluent in two languages and are able to conduct the business of the workplace in either of those languages. This is to be distinguished from proficiency in more than one language. An individual who is proficient in a language may, for example, be able to greet an individual who is LEP in their language, but not conduct agency business in that language. Interpretation and translation require the interpreter to be bilingual, and also require additional specific skills.
2. **Direct in-Language Communication:** Monolingual communication in a language other than English between a bilingual or multilingual staff person and person who is LEP (e.g., Korean to Korean).
3. **Interpretation and translation:** Interpretation involves oral communication whereas translation involves written communication. Interpretation involves the immediate communication of meaning from one language into another. An interpreter conveys meaning orally, as a result, interpretation requires skills different from those needed for translation. Interpreting is a complex task that combines several abilities beyond language competence in order to enable delivery of an effective professional interpretation in a given setting. From the standpoint of the user, a

successful interpretation is one that faithfully and accurately conveys the meaning of the source language orally, reflecting the style, register, and cultural context of the source message, without omissions, additions, or embellishments on the part of the interpreter.

Professional interpreters are subject to specific codes of conduct and should be trained in interpretive skills, ethics, and subject-matter language. Translation also involves specific skills, experience, and training and may require official certification depending on the context and need of the Component.

If bilingual staff are asked to interpret or translate, they should be qualified to do so. Assessment of language ability, training on interpreter ethics and standards, and clear policies that delineate appropriate use of bilingual staff will help ensure the quality of language services and the integrity of DHS programs and services delivery.

4. **Meaningful Access:** Meaningful access is the provision of language assistance services that results in accurate, timely, and effective communication at no cost to the person who is LEP. For individuals who are LEP, meaningful access denotes access that is not significantly restricted, delayed, or inferior as compared to programs or activities provided to English proficient individuals.
5. **Persons who are Limited English Proficient:** Persons who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. Individuals who are LEP may be competent in English for certain types of communication (e.g., speaking or understanding), but have limited proficiency in English in other areas (e.g., reading or writing). LEP designations are also context-specific; an individual may possess sufficient English language skills to function in one setting, but these skills may be insufficient in other settings.
6. **Tagline:** Taglines are short statements written in non-English languages that indicate the availability of language assistance services free of charge.
7. **Vital Document:** A vital document is a document that contains information that is critical for obtaining any aid, benefit, or services or is required by law. Vital documents can include: applications; consent and other forms that require signatures; complaint forms; notices of rights; notices on the availability of free language assistance; and letters or notices that require a response from the beneficiary, customer, or noncitizen.

IV. Policy

OPA adopts the policy on language access in the 2023 DHS Language Access Plan: It is the policy of DHS to provide meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency to operations, services, activities, and programs that support each Homeland Security mission area by providing quality language assistance services in a timely manner. DHS Components, therefore, should incorporate language access considerations into their routine strategic and business planning, identify and translate vital documents into the most frequently encountered languages, provide interpretive services where appropriate, and educate personnel about language access responsibilities and how to utilize available language access resources. See, [Updated DHS Language Access Plan](#) (November 2023)

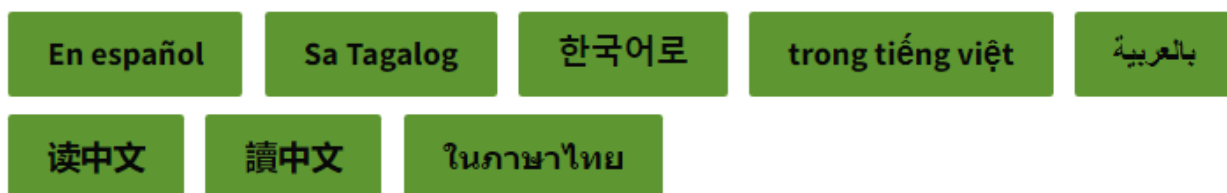
V. OPA Support for DHS Components and Offices

At the request of DHS Components, OPA posts and/or disseminates information to the public. When receiving request to post and/or disseminate information, OPA will request that Components provide translations of vital documents to be posted or disseminated by OPA, as appropriate, keeping in mind the purpose and length of the document e.g., is the document geared toward a certain region or population? Is the document lengthy and technical (in which case translations of the summary may be most appropriate). As needed, OPA will coordinate with Components and the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) about translations of a specific document to be posted on DHS.gov or otherwise disseminated to the public.

OPA has created translated tiles to indicate to the public when translations of a document or information on a webpage are available in other languages.

Each tile reads “In English” in the respective language.

Sample:



OPA also follows federal Section 508 [accessibility](#) and [plain language guidelines](#) when developing and disseminating materials that are intended for the public.

The use of plain language enhances accessibility and understanding for persons who speak English and helps to ensure that translated materials convey information in a clear and concise manner.

VI. Responsible Staff

OPA's Chief of Staff is responsible for implementation of this language access plan across OPA. The Chief of Staff consults and coordinates with the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties when needed to obtain guidance on the provision of meaningful access for persons with limited English proficiency.

VII. Language Access Activities FY 24-26

OPA intends to carry out the following actions in Fiscal Years 2024-26:

- Integrate language access considerations in the DHS Public Web Strategic Plan;
- Regularly ask Components whether they will be providing translations of vital documents they would like OPA to post or disseminate, as appropriate;
- Ensure that all OPA staff have received the OPA Language Access Plan and have access to available training on federal language access requirements and DHS resources on the DHS Language Access webpage, [Language Access | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#); and,
- Continue to coordinate and consult with the DHS Chief Technology Officer and Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties on any potential or proposed use of machine translation.

VIII. Contact Information

Media inquiries: Department of Homeland Security
Office of Public Affairs, mediainquiry@hq.dhs.gov, 202-282-8010.
Questions about language access (other than media inquiries): crcl@dhs.gov.