

Date: October 20, 2021
 To: Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

Subject: Update on the Language Access Program

The City’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated an unprecedented volume of public communication to share information about testing, vaccine clinics, health information and orders, closures, and more. Fewer in-person meetings and more virtual engagements have also required the City to use innovative strategies to ensure that non-English speaking residents have access to both information and opportunities to participate in community engagement activities.

As reflected in Table 1, in FY 19 the Language Access Program (LAP) fulfilled 236 requests for document translation. In FY 20, the volume of requests related to COVID-19 and its impact on City services, resulted in a 179 percent increase in document translation requests compared to the prior fiscal year. In FY 21, LAP fulfilled 866 document translation requests, a 32 percent increase from FY 20.

Table 1. Total Document Translation Requests	
Fiscal Year	Total Requests
2019	236
2020	658
2021	866

As Table 2 indicates, the most requested languages for document translation are Spanish, Khmer, and Tagalog.

Table 2. FY 21 Translation Requests by Language			
	Spanish	Khmer	Tagalog
FY 21 COVID Translation Requests*	461	481	438
FY 21 Non-COVID Translation Requests	296	270	222
Total	757	751	660

**All LAP services related to COVID-19, including the costs of bilingual staff time for translation, are eligible for reimbursement by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for pandemic response.*

As shown in Table 3, the frequency of in-person meeting interpretation requests dropped significantly in FY 20 during the height of the pandemic due to Public Health Emergency Order (Heath Order). In FY 21, the City resumed meeting both in-person and virtually, many of which provide language interpretation. The following table does not include the number of interpretation requests at City Council meetings as those are handled directly by the Office of the City Clerk.

Fiscal Year	Total Requests
2019	205
2020	12
2021	147

Over-the-phone assistance in another language is most frequently provided by bilingual City staff. However, if bilingual staff are not available when an individual needs immediate interpretation services, the City contracts with Language Line to provide over-the-phone interpretation in more than 240 languages. The frequency for each language is outlined in Table 4.

Spanish	Khmer	Vietnamese	Mandarin	Tagalog	Other*	Total
893	108	20	7	6	29	1063

**Other languages included Korean, Japanese, Russian, Hungarian, Arabic, Indonesian, Thai, Bengali, Punjabi, Farsi, French, Samoan*

Language Access at City Council Meetings

As of September 1, 2020, the City Clerk’s Office has provided Spanish interpretation at all City Council meetings as requested by City Council during the FY 21 budget process. This interpretation has been provided by a vendor who typically assigns the same interpreters for all meetings to ensure consistency, accuracy, and high quality interpretation. Spanish interpretation is also provided as a separate WebEx event (Spanish line) and the dial-in information is published on the City Clerk’s website prior to each City Council meeting. The City Clerk’s office also collected data on the usage of the service for the first six months that interpretation was provided. This data was collected by verifying the number of callers who joined each Spanish WebEx Event and the duration of their call.

Seventeen (17) virtual City Council meetings were held between September 1, 2020 and March 2, 2021. During that time, a total of five callers dialed the Spanish line and stayed on the call for an average duration of 38 minutes. Within the same time frame, a total of 20 telephonic public comments were provided in Spanish.

Language Access in Citywide Recovery Efforts

During the COVID-19 response, the LAP Program Coordinator and bilingual staff were embedded in the Joint Information Center (JIC) to support rapid information translation. This provided an opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of having in-house translation support, which resulted in faster turnaround times, greater flexibility, and cost-effectiveness. As a result, the Health Department elected to utilize federal Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC) funding to hire Language Access Specialists for Spanish, Khmer and Tagalog who primarily focus on COVID-19 translations.

Upon transitioning the LAP from the Health Department to the City Manager’s office at the beginning of FY 21, the LAP Coordinator position was converted to a full time position to meet the increased demand for services. In FY 22, Long Beach Recovery Act (LBRA) funding will support one additional full-time coordinator, two full time translation positions (Spanish and Khmer) and two part time translation positions (Spanish and Tagalog) which have been requested to implement the following priorities:

1. Provide oral Spanish interpretation at City Council meetings
2. Provide oral interpretation at other City-led community meetings
3. Translate vital documents including LBRA information
4. Support other LBRA multilingual outreach activities as needed

Additionally, the Office of Equity will develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to fund outreach and education focused on improving residents’ access to City services in the language they speak.

Strengthening Citywide Language Access Implementation

The Office of Equity has been working to implement many of the recommendations from the [Language Access Program Annual Report and Comprehensive Update](#) submitted to City Council in March 2019. On March 29, 2021, the LAP team reconvened the Citywide Language Access Steering Committee which works to ensure community members can access high quality City services and fully participate in local decision-making processes regardless of the language they speak. The Committee is an interdepartmental effort to support full implementation of the LAP throughout the City, identify and communicate needs across City departments and share best practices and resources for language accessibility in various settings. City staff who are interested in joining the committee may email LanguageAccess@longbeach.gov with supervisor approval. The Committee will continue to meet quarterly and provide input to strengthen policy implementation.

A key point of discussion in the Steering Committee has been around the language needs of our culturally diverse community. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, the data below demonstrate languages spoken in Long Beach with communities of over 1,000 speakers. Taken as a whole, speakers of languages other than English, Spanish, Khmer and Tagalog make up approximately 6.7% of Long Beach’s total population.

Language	Total #
Spanish	192,580
Khmer	18,754
Tagalog	13,336
Korean	3,315
Vietnamese	3,178
Arabic	2,373

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Chinese	1,757
Filipino	1,691
Japanese	1,647
French	1,514
Bengali	1,406
Hebrew	1,281
Tongan	1,211
Cantonese	1,182
Farsi	1,057
Indonesian	1,032
Other languages	9,648

Additionally, [research on indigenous communities](#) in Los Angeles County conducted by Comunidades Indígenas en Liderazgo (*Indigenous Communities in Leadership* or CIELO) indicates that more than 400 people in Long Beach speak Chinanteco, a group of languages spoken by indigenous people from Oaxaca and Veracruz in Mexico. The Office of Equity will continue to collaborate with community members and City staff to ensure that language access services are responsive to the needs of all community members.

As an early adopter of a Language Access Policy, City staff continue to learn best practices from other jurisdictions, including more detailed guidelines, implementation structures, and complaint processes. The Office of Equity is currently drafting an Administrative Regulation that will provide further direction to City staff around the implementation of LAP.

If you have any questions regarding the Language Access Program, please contact Teresa.Chandler@longbeach.gov.

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