Improving the Usage of Language Services by the District's Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

Neel Saxena and Tina Huang

Neel Saxena is the Grant Manager and Program Coordinator at the Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs.

Tina Huang is a graduate student in the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland

The Language Access Survey 2011 on limited English proficient (LEP) persons in the District of Columbia (LAS 2011) is an individual based, face-to-face survey and a part of the Language Access Survey in the Language Access Program in the Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs. The purposes of LAS 2011 were: to identify the effect District Agencies outreach efforts have on language services to LEP persons in the District of Columbia and to promote the DC Language Access Act of 2004. The demographics of LEPs survied during this first part LAS 2011 were:

- Half of the Chinese LEPs are seniors age 61 and over; and half of the Chinese LEP seniors' English ability is poor to very poor;
- The majority of Chinese LEP seniors (86%) have no more than high school education; and their annual income is less than $10,000; and
- Younger Chinese LEPs (14% of the total Chinese LEP population) have better English ability, more educational attainment and higher incomes than the older generation.

Findings of LAS 2011 show that:

- Over half of Chinese LEPs know the Language Access Act of 2004, but the majority of them do not seek or obtain language services from the District agencies;
- Chinese LEPs who received language services rate such services from very helpful to helpful, and they believe telephone services are better than interpretation services provided by staff in the agency they visited;
- The strongest motivation for Chinese LEPs to actively seek language services from the District agencies is "free", rather than "efficiency/fast" or "offered by various channels."

OAPIA recommends the following:

- Promote the language services as "free." This is the strongest motivation for ALL Chinese LEPs to actually use the service.
- The telephone interpretation service seems an effective channel to provide such language services to Chinese LEPs in the District versus non-certified employees.
- Promote the accessibility of language services more than promote the Language Access Law of 2004.

Background

Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States, is by definition an international city. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) immigrants grew 38.6 percent between 2000 and 2010 in the District of Columbia (U.S. Census, 2010). Among them, 28 percent were identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons. Due to their language proficiency they have been held at bay from critical District government services. Providing them language services pays larger dividends to the community in the long run, by keeping the society safer, healthier, and more prosperous economically, educationally, and culturally.

Language access is a rights issue; Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits recipients of federal financial assistance from discriminating based on race, color, or national origin. The civil rights defined in Title VI include providing meaningful access to individuals who are LEP, because language is associated with national origin.

From many LEP persons' perspective, government services are crucial to becoming contributing, fully functioning members of the District's community. Some of these services include applying for business licenses and social programs, renewing identification cards, and visiting hospitals. Without these basic, yet crucial government services, LEP persons are unable to fully take advantage of the programs and services available to them.

Furthermore, while these government services are critical to all residents of the District, LEP persons have an even greater need for language services. Even though the government does provide various beneficial programs, LEP persons have to access the language service first in order to access other services. The language service is a "bottleneck" of all government supports to LEP persons. The District of Columbia sought to address this issue through groundbreaking legislation known as the Language Access Act of 2004.

On April 21, 2004 Mayor Anthony A. Williams of the District of Columbia enacted the Language Access Act of 2004 to provide greater access and participation in public services, programs and activities for residents of the District of Columbia with limited or no-English proficiency (LEP/NEP). By enacting this law, the District of Columbia claimed to be at the forefront of protecting human rights that are undeniably inherent to any person. These human rights include the right to proper communication in one's own language and the right to protect and preserve one's identity.

The DC Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OAPIA) coordinates

across District Government Agencies to ensure the delivery of information and services to the AAPI community, among other things. In order to do so, the Language Access Program (LAP), an important component of OAPIA, provides District Agencies with technical assistance and guidance on providing language assistance to AAPI constituents who are LEP. The technical assistance includes activities related to strategic planning, program implementation, and Human Resource consultancy. While providing the assistance and support, the Program also monitors the performance of these agencies in providing language services to help develop relevant programming and technical assistance to Agencies.

One of the channels that LAP is using to assess the performance of District Agencies is the Language Access Survey (LAS). In order to establish a complete process of the LAS project as a long-term effort, LAP conducted a trial run in 2009 (LAS 2009) and kicked off the LAS project in March 2011. This memo studies the LAS 2009, reports the implementation and findings of LAS 2011 on Chinese American LEP persons in the District of Columbia.

Language Access Survey of 2009

LAS 2009 had three goals: first, to monitor the performance of District Agencies on language services to AAPI LEP persons; second, to conduct a trial run for the long-term survey project the Program intended to establish and set standard procedures for the long-term survey project; third, to promote the DC Language Access Law 2004 with the distribution and education of the Know Your Rights cards. To achieve these goals, LAP focuses on Asian ethnic groups in the District of Columbia, adopts the face-to-face survey mode, chooses a survey frame of individual level, and designs a one-page survey with nine questions. Facilitated by the language ability of LAP's staff and volunteers, the LAS 2009 is presented in English, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese.

The duration from designing the survey to completing the data collection was roughly three months. Two staff from OAPIA worked on a daily basis and the three volunteers worked approximately two days per week on average.

LAS 2009 collected 118 samples from the targeted AAPI LEP population in the District of Columbia. Approximately 40 percent of the surveys were administered in three venues: the Asian Senior Center in Chinatown, the Chinatown Community Service Center and the Chinatown Cultural Center. All three locations hold activities such as free lunches, free immigration service classes and English classes, or seasonal celebrations. The remaining 60 percent of the surveys were filled individually, with one respondent a time.

During the collection process, surveyors also promoted the DC Language Access Law 2004. If the respondent indicated he or she did not know about the law, the surveyors would provide the respondent an in-language *Know Your Rights card* with simple facts of the law and how they could seek help. Each respondent received a pen as a token for taking the survey. For added assistance, OAPIA's address and phone number are printed on the pen.

Findings

The purposes of LAS 2009 were primarily for the establishment of the long-term LAS projects; therefore, the findings are also recommendations for the LAS 2011.

1. LAS projects are needed and feasible.
   The Office of Human Rights of DC (OHR) oversees the implementation of, and compliance with the DC Language Access Law of 2004 for all District Agencies. On the one hand, it provides necessary support to all District Agencies to provide language services. On the other hand, it oversees whether these agencies deliver satisfactory performances. This self-monitoring model may not be able to provide accurate information, and not be able to evaluate the Agencies' performance from the LEP person's perspective. A survey gathering feedback from LEP persons could serve as an effective tool to solve those two problems. Furthermore, it was feasible for the Language Access Program to conduct such a survey. The LAP could use an operational budget to cover the expense of staff and necessary tools for the trial run survey. Additionally, time constraint was not an issue because there was no administrative deadline. OAPIA recruited and managed the three unpaid surveyors.
2. The information source of LAS 2009 is adequate and suitable for LAS projects.
   The LAP benefits from OAPIA's knowledge on the demography of AAPI LEP persons in DC to access the survey's target group. The program sampled AAPI people through two channels: 1) random AAPI people in DC Chinatown, and 2) community activities such as Lunar New Year celebrations, free language classes or community get-togethers. Both channels provided randomized samples of AAPI LEP persons.
3. The sample size needs to be at least 500 and include five key ethnic groups as Japanese, Indian, Korean, and Vietnamese Americans.
   The survey collected 118 samples in total including at least four AAPI subgroups. Due to the relatively small sample size, the sampling error could be high. For the same reason, subgroup analysis is not possible, and the generalizability is poor.

Due to the capacity of the LAP and OAPIA in human resources and budget, the survey could provide the in-language survey to five key ethnic groups aforementioned as the first step.

4. In-language survey questionnaires are important.
   For AAPI LEP persons, English surveys do not make sense.
5. The face-to-face method is suitable for LAS projects. The non-response rate is low. But the data collections process did not fully use the face-to-face opportunity to interview respondents and collect anecdotes.
   This survey mode fits the need of the 2009 survey because of its ability to get a high response rate, target respondents, reach less educated persons, and probe and collect anecdotes. The face-to-face method also requires medium level of expertise, which matches the Program's volunteers' expertise.
6. The survey questions are clear and easy to understand. However, more questions should be added.
   The first part of the survey contains baseline questions to collect demographic information such as the respondent's language ability, age, income, and the number of years stayed in the United States. The second part of the survey asks about the outputs and outcomes of language services provided by District Agencies. The future survey should ask more questions about the quality of the services and respondents' motivation to use these services.
7. The data quality is very well assured. However, the technique is not suitable to larger scale surveys.

Language Access Survey of 2011

Unlike LAS 2009, LAS 2011 surveys AAPI ethnic groups separately. Therefore, the LAS 2011 project consists of five parts as the five suggested ethnic groups. Until May 2011, LAS 2011 finished the first part on the Chinese American LEP persons in the District of Columbia.

Despite this major change in sample stratification, LAS 2011 keeps most of the components of LAS 2009. LAS 2011 on Chinese American LEP persons also provides the in-language survey questionnaire and uses the face-to-face survey method. Its questionnaire contains two parts: baseline questions and outputs/outcomes questions. And its channels of data

collection are the same with LAS 2009. It collects 108 samples by one full time staff as the supervisor and two part-time interns in three months.

LAS 2011 develops from LAS 2009 primarily on sample size and survey questions. LAS 2011 will have a larger sample size of five times the 2009 sample size, which enables subgroup analysis and a lower error rate. LAS 2011 on Chinese American LEP persons provides preliminary findings and policy implications. Data of the Chinese American LEP persons will merge into the final sample that will include the Vietnamese and Korean populations. With respect to survey questions, LAS 2011 on Chinese American LEPs adds: Three more baseline questions:

- whether the respondent is a DC resident;
- what the respondent's education level is;
- how the respondent thinks of his or her English ability.
- The first question helps to identify who is using the services, while the second question reveals the impact of education on language ability to depict the profile of LEP persons, among other things. The third question further filters the ineligible respondents,
- One outcome question asking the quality of language services the respondent received from District Agencies,
- One question asking the motivation of the respondent to proactively seek language services from District Agencies, and
- One open question to collect anecdotes, suggestions, and any questions the respondent may have.

Process

LAS 2011 team constructed the LAS 2011 questionnaire based on the English version of the LAS 2009 questionnaire. The questionnaire design took two weeks and was finalized on a second version.

On March 15, 2011, LAS 2011 team (the team) conducted a trial run in DC Chinatown with merchants. A total of 17 three-page surveys were distributed and 11 were collected. The unit non-response rate was 54%. To lower the non-response rate, the team used smaller fonts and narrow margins to keep the questionnaire to one page. Also, different from the original concern of the cognitive burden, the updated version used the written rather than colloquial Chinese language because the face-to-face mode enabled interviewers to explain

the questions.

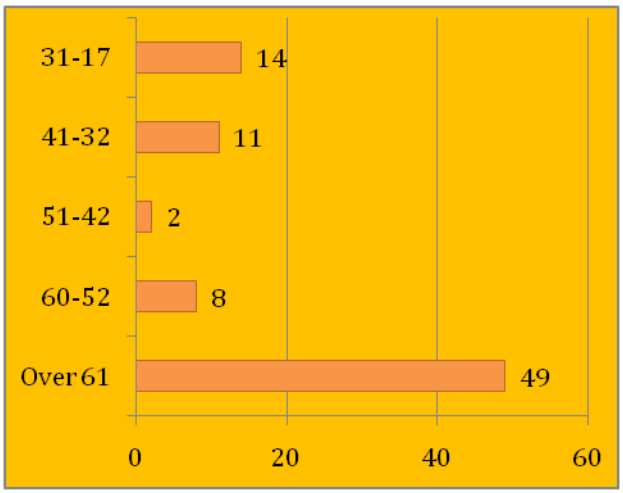
The changes were effective. On March 22, 2011, the team collected 14 samples from the Chinatown Service Center (CSC) with zero non-response rates. The 14 samples were drawn from CSC's students attending the English language classes and the immigration workshops. The team then collected 30 samples from the Chinatown Community Cultural Center (CCCC), also from attendees of various activities of CCCC. On April 5, 2011, the team collected almost half of the total sample with 42 samples from the Asian Senior Center (ASC) during the Center's lunch hour. The remaining 10 samples were collected among merchants in the District's Chinatown.

The data entry took only two working days because of an existing format from LAS 2009 on an excel spreadsheet. To facilitate data quality assurance, the coder assigned numbers on each anonymous survey, which enabled the supervisor to conduct selective checks during and after the data entry.

Findings

The findings show the demographic profile of the Chinese American LEP persons in the District of Columbia, the outputs and outcomes of the language services provided by District Agencies, the motivation of these LEP persons to actively seek language services, their anecdotes, and in the same time present a possible frame work for future presentations of future findings. Below is some demographic information of respondents.

1. Among the 108 respondents, 17 are non-DC resident, 3 of them left this question blank. Figure 1 shows the age distribution of the remaining valid samples. Among the 88 respondents, 49 are over 61 years old. More than half of the respondents are elderly, over the age of 61. The AAPI LEP persons who were seniors have relatively poor English abilities compared with other age groups, even though they had spent more years in the United States (among respondents age over 61, 41 percent spent more than 20 years in the United States, while 31 percent spent 10 to 20 years in the United States; among respondents age between 17 and 34, 99 percent spent less than 3 years in the United States). The English ability was also collected and the seniors had felt they had less English abilities compared to people in other age groups. Figure 2 shows the distribution of their self-reported language abilities.



Caption 1 X-axis shows the number of respondents (excluding 3 non-responses).
Figure 1 Distribution of the Age of Respondents

Age	Self-Reported English Ability				
	Very Good	Good	Not Very Good	Poor	Very Poor
17-31	7	35	20	14	0
32-41	27	9	18	36	9
42-51	0	0	50	50	0
52-60	12.5	12.5	12.5	50	12.5
Over 61	2	2	8	23	33

Caption 2 Due to nonresponse issue, the percentages do not add up to 100.
Figure 2 Percentage of English Ability Distribution among Age Groups

2.. Among the respondents age over 61, over half of them do not have a high school education, almost one third graduated from high school or attained other equivalent education, only 10 percent achieved a college education and only 2 percent attended graduate or professional school. The other age groups have relatively higher educational attainment on the college and graduate school levels. The respondents in age group 32 to 41 years old have the highest percentage of graduate school or professional school levels. However, except the age group of over 61 years old, other age groups all have sample sizes below 30. The results does not have statistical indications on these age groups.

Age	Educational Attainment				Income Levels			
	Less than High School	High School or Equivalent	College	Graduate/ Profes-sional School	<$10,000	$10,000-$24,000	$24,000-$50,000	>$50000
17-31	42.8	14.3	21.4	14.3	35.2	0	0	7.15
32-41	36.3	27.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	45.5	0	0
42-51	50	50	0	0	100	0	0	0
52-60	75	25	0	0	37.5	12.5	12.5	12.5
Over 61	57.1	28.6	10.2	2	85.7	8.2	4.1	0

Figure 3 Percentage of Educational Attainment and Income Levels Distribution Among Age Groups

The second part of the findings is the output and outcome indicators.

3. Among Do AAPI LEP persons know about the DC Language Access Law of 2004?

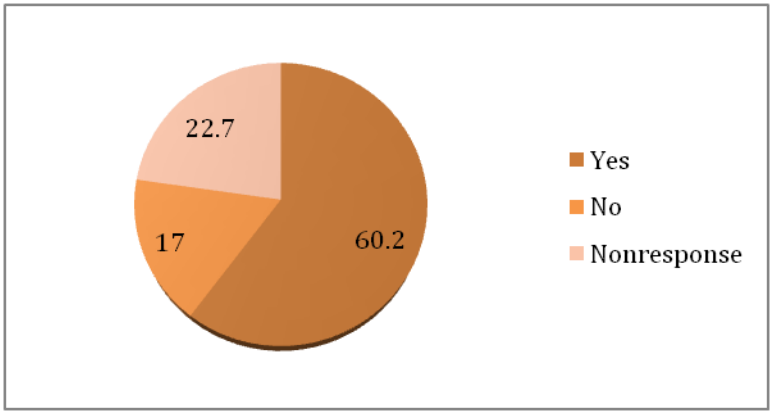


Figure 4 Percentage of Respondents' answer on the Language Law

Most of the respondents know the Language Law because of the LAS 2009 and OAPIA's outreach efforts. The 22.7 percent non-response can be treated as same as the answer "No" because the respondents learned the name of the law for the first time during LAS 2011. However, in front of the interviewers, respondents were unwilling to indicate they did not have the knowledge of a law. This kind of response is due to their desire to appear knowledgeable and thus perceived that they cannot be taken advantage of due to a lack of information/knowledge base.

4. How many Chinese LEPs used government services and received language services?

Among the 88 eligible samples, only 36 visited District Government Agencies during the last two years. And 23 respondents (63.9%) received some kind of language

service. However, during the FTF interviews, a significant number of respondents voluntarily revealed that they actually obtained interpretation services from OAPIA and since OAPIA is a District Agency, they answered "yes" to the question "Did you receive any type of interpretation service from that Agency?" Respondents confused OAPIA with the District Agency they visited because many times, they visit or call OAPIA first for help on language services. OAPIA would then provide such services by telephone or by sending a staff member to escort the respondent. The exact number of respondents reported obtaining language services through OAPIA is not recorded during the field interview. However, that the actual percentage of respondents who received language services through the agency they o visit for services (other than for language service from OAPIA) is lower than the reported 63.9 percent.

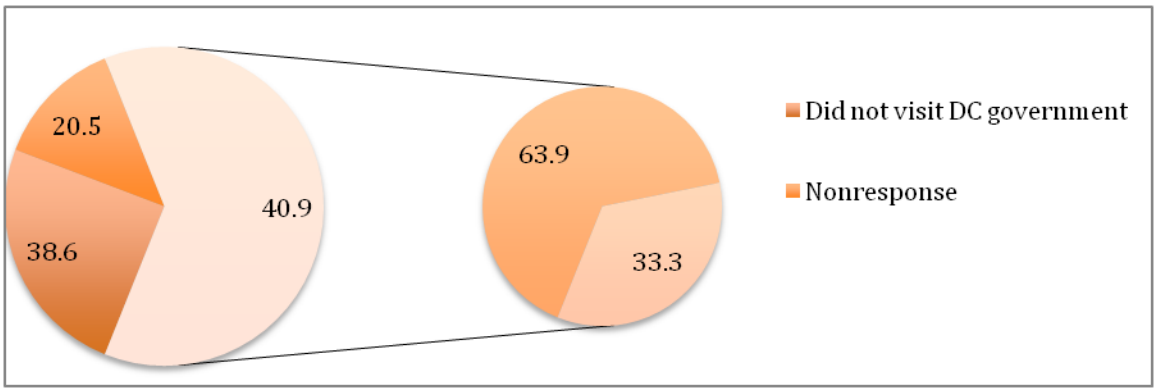


Figure 5 Percentage of Respondents Visited DC Government and Received Language Services

5. How Chinese LEPs receive language services from District Agencies?

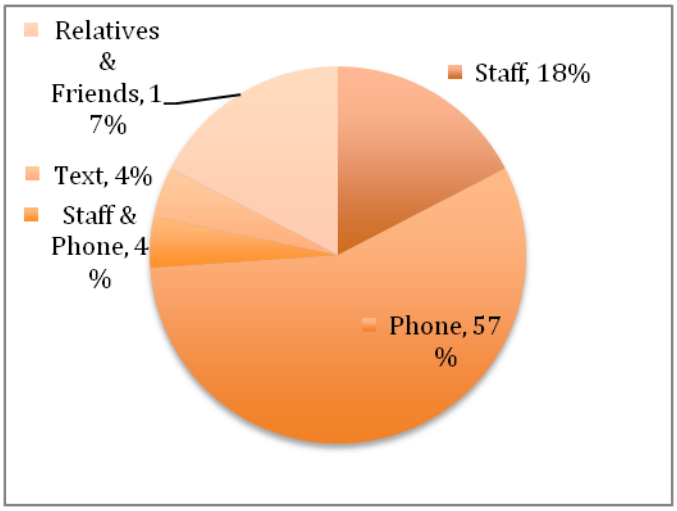


Figure 6 Percentage of Language Service Channels

District Agencies provide the language services through three major channels: telephone interpretation, in-language documentation, and face to face interpreters. Among them, telephone interpretation takes the largest portion with 57 percent, mostly because of its low cost to agencies as they contract out the language services to a vendor. On the contrary, hiring staff to serve as interpreters may not be financially feasible for all the agencies. Therefore services provided by staff working in the agencies take merely 18 percent. Despite the cost issue, the in-person interpretation service is the most ideal channel of interpretation services. Translated documentation takes only a trivial share for its limited effectiveness. Besides the services provided by District Agencies, Chinese LEPs' relatives and friends have met a significant 17 percent of the translation needs. Two factors probably cause the low translation rate: first, the absolute amount of language services is not sufficient to meet the law's threshold; second, while there may be translations the accessibility is poor. The accessibility problem would be able to mitigate the under-provision of language services. To sum up, the major channel of language services offered by District Agencies is the low-cost telephone translation; and the accessibility of language services is not high.

6. The quality of the language services rated by the respondents is an important performance measure. The Office of Human Rights of DC does not provide such performance measures in its annual reports. A little over half (56.52%) of the 23 respondents rated language services "very helpful"; while the rest (43.48%) of the respondents rate the services "helpful". None of the respondents thinks language services "not helpful" or "do not know." Figure 7 shows the detailed rating of each service channel. The result is in contradiction of common sense that the in-person translation services yield the best customer satisfaction. On the other hand, the phone translation services yield better customer rating.

Channels of Language Services	Very Helpful	Helpful
Phone	77.9%	23.1%
Staff working there	50%	50%
Text	0	100%

Figure 7 Percentage of Quality Rating by Channels

7. The strongest motivation for the Chinese LEPs to actively seek language services from the District agencies is that they are "free."

   Among all the 88 eligible respondents, 32 respondents rate "free" as the sole concern; 13 respondents chose "free" along with other options; 31 respondents chose "the service is offered by phone, text, or a staff" together with other options; only 9 respondents chose "good quality" together with other options. The option "free" is the "fundamental" concern for most of the Chinese LEPs as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8 Motivations for Chinese LEPs to Seek Language Services

8. The connection between "know the Language Access Law of 2004" and "use language services."

   Among the 88 respondents, 60% of them knew the Language Access Law of 2004. But only 37.7% received language services from District Agencies. The rest, 63.3%, either sought help from friends and relatives or did not have any translation services. That said, most of the respondents knew the language law still did not seek or obtain language services from District Agencies. The percentage of this group of

respondents is 44.4%, which is almost half. Therefore, combining the two findings related to the promotion of the Language Access Law of 2004 and the usage of language services, we conclude that the accessibility and other motivations such as "free" and "offered in various channels" are more important than promoting the law only, given other variants constant.

Policy Recommendations

This report builds on common themes found in research and the media around language access and providing services to the LEP population. Using the Chinese population, we can draw some conclusions to the entire AAPI population and should be used when working with the Chinese population. OAPIA recommends the following:

- District Agencies should improve the accessibility of language services since a significant share of Chinese LEPs seek such services from parties other than the government entity.
- District Agencies should promote the language services as "free." This is the strongest motivation for ALL Chinese LEPs to actually use the service. On the other hand, "efficient/fast" is not a motivation. Chinese LEPs value "free" as the foundation for the accessibility of language services. The second important motivation is "offered in various channels" and the third is "good quality."
- The telephone interpretation service seems an effective channel to provide such language services to Chinese LEPs in the District. District Agencies could consider augmenting the usage of this channel to provide effective and cost-efficient language services by looking at the cost of in-person interpretation versus telephone interpretation.
- District Agencies should promote the accessibility of language services more than promote the Language Access Law of 2004. Less than half of the Chinese LEPs who knew the Language Access Law of 2004 used language services provided by District Agencies. However, a significant amount of Chinese LEPs who did not know the language law used these services.

Acknowledgements

For questions about this research, please contact Neel Saxena, Grant Manager and Program Coordinator, Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, 441 4th Street, NW #721N, Washington, DC 20001 or by email at neel.saxena@dc.gov. The research included in this paper could not have occurred without the contributions of Tina Huang, Will Xu, Jenny Lai, and Peter Kim, Lawrence Liu, and Min Kim.

Appendices

English Survey

Are you a Washington DC resident? (Yes/No)

Which language is the most comfortable to use? (English/Chinese)

How do you think about your English:
- Very well
- Good
- Not very well
- Poor
- Very poor

When were you born?
- Before 1950
- 1950 - 1960
- 1960 - 1970
- 1980 - 1990
- 1980 – 1993

What is your annual income?
- Less then 10,000
- 10,000 - 24,000
- 24,000 - 50,000
- More then 50,000
- N/A

What is your education background?
- Less than high school
- High school or equivalent
- College
- Graduate school/Professional training (eg. Medical school)

How many years have you been in the United States?
- Less then 3 years
- 3 – 10 years
- 10 – 20 years
- More then 20 years

Have you ever contacted a DC government Agency in the last two years (including DC hospital and DMV)? (Y/N) (Yes, go to 9. No, go to 13)

Did you receive any type of interpretation service from that Agency? (Y/N) (Yes, go to 10; No, go to 13)

Who helped you interpret at that agency? Pick more than one if applicable:

- By phone
- By a staff working there
- By text on a paper

Appendix I

By your relative

Was the service you received helpful?
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not helpful at all
- Don't know

If the transaction required a follow up by the agency, was the follow up successfully conducted? (Y/N) If so, was it in your language? (Y/N)

Did you know the law in DC gives you the right to an interpreter when you visit an Agency? (Y/N) (Yes, go to 14; No, go to 15)

From where do you know it?
- Family and friends/Word of mouth
- Internet
- Flyers and brochures from the government
- Knew it when you visited the agency
- Other

What would motivate you to use the service?
- Free
- Good quality
- Efficient/Fast
- The service is offered by phone, text or a staff

What would make the service better? (Open question)

Chinese Survey

华盛顿特区亚太事务办公室语言服务问卷调查

请问您是华盛顿特区的居民吗？
（是 / 否）

您用哪种语言更方便？（英语 / 中文）

您的英文如何？
（ ）非常好
（ ）还行
（ ）一般
（ ）不好
（ ）很不好

请问您哪年出生呢？
（ ）1950年前
（ ）1950到1960年
（ ）1960到1970年
（ ）1970到1980年
（ ）1980到1993年

请问您的年收入在以下哪个范围内？
（ ）一万以下
（ ）一万到两万四千
（ ）两万四千到五万
（ ）五万以上
（ ）不便回答 / 没有收入

请问您的教育程度属于以下哪种？
（ ）高中以下
（ ）高中毕业，或者同等学历
（ ）本科毕业
（ ）研究生学历，或者同等程度的职业培训：例如医学院，律师

请问您在美国多久了？
（ ）三年以下
（ ）三年－十年
（ ）10年－20年
（ ）多于20年
您最近两年是否去过任何华盛顿特区政府部门（包括医院，DMV)？（是 / 否）（回答是，至第9题；否，至第13题）

您去的政府部门是否给您提供了翻译服务？（是 / 否）（是，至第10题；否，至第13题）

在此部门，谁帮您翻译的？（可多选）
（ ）电话翻译员
（ ）办公室里的翻译员
（ ）看翻译好的纸张文件
（ ）您的亲友

这些翻译服务有帮助吗？
（ ）非常有帮助

Appendix II

（ ）有帮助
（ ）没有帮助
（ ）不知道

您需要的服务政府部门跟进了吗？（是 / 否）如果是，是否提供了翻译服务？（是 / 否）

您是否知道您有权利要求华盛顿特区政府提供翻译服务？（是 / 否， 回答是，至第下题 ；回答否，至第15题）

您是从以下哪个途径知道您有要求翻译服务的权利？
（ ）亲戚朋友
（ ）网上
（ ）政府宣传资料
（ ）办事当天
（ ）其他
因为以下哪个因素，您会使用翻译服务（可多选）：
（ ）免费
（ ）服务质量
（ ）程序简单
（ ）方式多样（翻译员，电话，或中英文对照等）

若您还有其他建议，请写在下方。谢谢！