



DC MAYOR'S OFFICE ON ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Language Access Services

Summaries, findings, comparisons, and
recommendations

Prepared by
Steven M. Lee
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In effort to generate recommendations to the District of Columbia Department of Employment Services, the Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs has visited three different DOES locations throughout the District and other local jurisdictions on multiple occasions. Meetings were held, both formal and informal, to scope out the local governments' existing programs. From these meetings and visits, we have found following key differences between the District, and Fairfax and Arlington Counties' elements. In addition, information was gathered from State of Hawaii, City of San Francisco, County of Los Angeles, and County of Queens (New York) to generate further differences.

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Rationale for the Study

Since the implantation of the DC Language Access Act of 2004 (the Act), the Mayor's Executive Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OAPIA), the Office on Latino Affairs (OLA), and the Office on African Affairs (OAA) have been working for their respective immigrant community to be more active and engaging in the District of Columbia.

Our current mayor, Vincent C. Gray, has taken the office back in January and his top priority during his term is to get the residents back in the workforce by enhancing the quality of the services given by the Department of Employment Services (DOES).

The DOES serves not only the mainstream residents but also all of the District's immigrant communities. The immigrant population is all inclusive in Mayor Gray's "One City" plan, the OAPIA felt the necessity to bridge the gap between the mainstream population and the immigrant population in effort to gain employment, hence the study.

The study was conducted in the following manners

- Planned visits to the DOES "DC Works!" Centers serving Northeast, Northwest, and Southeast
- Visited each center twice, using the assessment form that is attached to this report
- In addition to the report, overall impression of each center was recorded separately
- Each report and visit was generated by one person to ensure consistency
- Meetings, both formal and informal, were planned and held with County of Fairfax Child and Family Services and County of Arlington Department of Human Services
- Each prospective service center was visited
- Emails were exchanged with officials from State of Hawaii, City of San Francisco, County of Los Angeles, and County of Queens to scope out the similarities and differences

It was our initial hope that this research could be used as a tool for recommendation to the DOES to further their excellence in customer service not only for Americans but also for all immigrant population. However, since this research paper only focuses on what the OAPIA thought to be most important findings for the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities whom may need language assistance.

Findings of DC DOES Locations

Headquarters (4058 Minnesota Ave, NE)

The service center was very easy to access from the Minnesota Avenue Metro Station. Generally, the area was clean and the building was a new building, giving good impression of the service center. However, for those who are new to the area and the building, seeking employment assistance, may find some difficulties locating the actual service center because the service center had its own entrance, instead of the main entrance of the building. The main lobby of the building had a sign directing the visitors to the service center, but it was not very easy to find. The lobby area had two signs in total, one on the X-ray machine and one on the information desk.

Once you walk down the sidewalk, “DC Works!” can be found to the right with its own security personnel, checking bags and visitors. However, no language sign could be found at the very initial contact point, in this case, the security area. Additionally, there was not a phone available for interpretation services, so even if the security personnel was trained for language access, he or she could not have utilized the Language Line.

After the security check, you are to check in at the information desk. It had a wall sign posted on the front of the desk, along with a stand up sign. Behind the receptionist, a rack full of “I Speak” cards can be seen, but they were in a less conspicuous location. It would be easy for limited-English proficient (LEP) and non-English proficient (NEP) visitors to access these cards if they were on the front side of the information desk. When the receptionist was asked what the predominant immigrant population that comes to the location for assistance is, she stated that a lot of African-Americans come in but there is a sizeable Latino population that comes in for help. The sign in sheet at the information tried to gather language information of the visitors. The receptionist was then asked a question leading for her awareness of the Language Line, and she demonstrated her awareness.

The wait area was very clean and well-maintained. There was a computer workstation, but it did not have a language sign either on the wall or next to the computers. It is recommended to place either or both signs in and around the workstation area.

Recommendation for the Location

The building and the service center were generally very well-maintained. Please place a language sign at the entrance of the service center, behind the security checkpoint, and please place the “I Speak” card rack where people can access easily.

Northwest Center (2000 14th St, 3rd Floor, NW)

2000 14th Street government building was located three blocks from the U Street Metro Station, enabling easy access from public transportation. The building was fairly new and it was very well-maintained. Upon entering the building, all visitors are subjected to security searches. In the security area, no language sign could be found. However, once you pass the security checkpoint, you can find a wall sign, posted on the wall of the information desk. At the time of the visit, no one was at the desk. The interior of the building was modern and up-to-date with art works. There was no building directory in the lobby area, which was difficult for first-time visitors to locate where the offices were.

The service center was located on the third floor. Once you enter the visitors will walk through a foyer. The foyer had a desk and a stand up language sign with no employee present. Both times of the visits, there was no employee present at the foyer desk, but there were signs of people working at the desk so when I asked the receptionist who works at that desk, she answered that an SYEP student works at that desk. During the first visit, the receptionist was a Spanish-speaking bilingual staff, but not the second time. The first staff member was aware of the language line but the second staff member gave a wishy-washy answer in terms of her awareness of the language line. The receptionist's desk did not have a language sign either on or near it.

The wait area and computer workstation were clean and cool. A wall sign was posted on the wall of the workstation, but no other signs could be found throughout the service center. There were a number of Spanish documents but no Asian documents were available.

Recommendation for the Location

Security checkpoint could use a standup sign and working with the security company is highly recommended. It is important to have someone at the information desk at the lobby of building at all times because not only it will benefit the LEP and NEPs, but also other visitors.

It is very critical that placing an SYEP student at the initial point of contact without previous knowledge on how to utilize language line and about the various services that "DC Works!" gives out. Please refrain from employing an SYEP student at the foyer desk, or train them as if DOES would train each staff member.

Please place more signs throughout the service center. A sign is needed on or around the receptionist's desk and the computers could use more signs. Please consider translating the website into at least the six primary languages, if not a few more other languages on a need-base.

Northeast Center (5171 South Dakota Ave, NE)

From Fort Totten Metro Station, it was not a long walk to the service center. However, it was very difficult for a first-time visitor to locate the building. There was no visible sign walking down from the Metro Station. After a while, it was realized that the service center was a part of Community College of District of Columbia. A flag indicating that "DC Works!" was located around the building, past the parking lot. During the second visit, the flag was crooked, making it extremely hard to see. Overall, the location was confusing. The parking lot was small and full.

There was a security checkpoint, without a security personnel present. However, a security was present during the second visit. There was no language sign on or around the security desk. A wall sign was posted once you turn towards the service center.

The service center was rather very small. There were three standup language signs on the receptionists' desks, one missing Amharic sticker. The receptionist was aware of the language line in case of an LEP or NEP visits the location.

Recommendation for the Location

Location was generally inconvenient and hard to find, especially with lacking signage around the building. Walking down from the Metro Station, one might expect a sign, directing him or her to the service center along the wall of CCDC, but there was only one sign posted furthest away from the Metro Station. Please consider placing a sign at the intersection of South Dakota Avenue and the street leading up to the Metro Station.

The sign that was posted was crooked and hard to see even for walkers. Please ensure that either sturdier sign is utilized or the sign is straight at all times.

The façade of the building was unappealing. It could use some renovation.

Please make sure a security guard is present at his or her desk at all times, and undergoes the same language access training that the rest of DOES employees do, in order to ensure quality service for LEP and NEPs. Please place a sign on or around the security guard.

It was very nice to see that the wait area was clean and nicely kept. However, please update the language signs as one was missing the Amharic sticker.

Local Jurisdictions' Findings

County of Fairfax – SkillSource Center, Falls Church, VA

Currently, State of Virginia does not have a specific language law as DC does. Each County agency is responsible for the cost of language services necessary to provide quality customer service. The Office of Human Rights and Equity Programs (OHREP), composed of the Human Rights Division (HRD) and the Equity Programs Division (EPD) promotes equal opportunity and access to public assistance, which protects and respects diversity, Merni Fitzgerald, County of Fairfax, states in an email.

SkillSource Center is DC-equivalent of “DC Works!” which is located on Leesburg Pike, Falls Church. SkillSource Center is considered as a one-stop location, where a visitor can retain and gather various information from English Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) classes to building skills for employer-employee interviews. They often have seminars and offer employment-related programs in Spanish, and easily can provide an interpreter for non-Spanish speakers. The center was Metro accessible from East Falls Church Metro Station, however, not as Metro accessible as most DC government buildings. The traffic was a hindering factor to the visit. At the meeting with Lori Epp a few weeks prior to the visit, she had mentioned that there is a predominant Vietnamese and Latino population in the area.

County of Fairfax is composed of 16.6% APIs; 2.7% Koreans, 2.1% Vietnamese, 1.6% Chinese, and 1.4% Persians (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing). On the side note, there is 10.6% Spanish-speaking population within the County of Fairfax.

The building was older than other DOES buildings visited. However, there was no security checkpoint at the building entrance and a bilingual directory of the building in Spanish was posted in the elevator area.

The service center on the third floor was very well kept with modern interior. The interior was also very colorful, giving a very welcoming impression. Unlike DC centers, no language sign was located at the time of the visit, and Ms. Epp and Ms. Montgomery stated that it was because the receptionists know how to intake LEP and NEP visitors without such signs. Most staff members, including the receptionist, were bilingual.

Ms. Epp has informed us that outside interpretation services are rarely utilized because the staffing of the Department of Family Services is very diverse, so it would not be a hassle to receive language assistance from employees from different parts within the department. In addition to most positions holding “bilingual preferred,” staff members are very flexible in where they work, so it is quite a norm for an employee to move from one location to the other. These transfers are made based on needs of the corresponding communities. Because the staffing is so

diverse, most documents are translated internally, without using other sources. These documents also had pictures of residents corresponding to the language which the document translated into. Language training for each staff member takes place every quarter.

County of Arlington

County of Arlington, too, has its own policy for language access service, and more specifically, each department and agency has its own policy for such services. Department of Human Services operates Employment Service Center, equivalent to “DC Works!” a form of one-stop service center.

The service center was Metro accessible via Arlington Transit (ART) from Ballston-MU Metro Station—so it was not as Metro accessible as most DC government buildings. However, one thing that was very noticeable was that the building was very new, professional-looking, and the surrounding areas were very clean.

Upon entering the main entrance, the Customer Service Center can be located to the right, where visitors will get referrals to correct service centers and departments. The absence of the security checkpoint also stands out in County of Arlington, like County of Fairfax, which gave a more welcoming environment. The Customer Service Center was neatly organized with an area for children. As for organization, each translated material was paired up with corresponding English version of the document in the same brochure holder, which made it user-friendly.

There was a separate door for the Employment Service Center. The service center was designed very professionally, differing from an ordinary public sector’s service center. It was apparent that the service center was utilizing the same language line interpretation services as what DC government uses. However, Howard, from County of Arlington, stated that most employees are bilingual and are very mobile, so they can be moved around based on needs. Most interpretation needs are met within the department, without the use of outside interpretation services, but such services can be used if they are necessary.

Non-Local Jurisdictions’ Findings

State of Hawaii

Current Language Access Law of Hawaii requires that 25 state agencies to provide language access services for LEP and NEP constituents to access public services; provide oral interpretation services in a timely manner; translate vital documents in languages which immigrant population constitute 5% or 1,000, whichever is less; and provide language access plans to the Office of Language Access (OLA), which oversees the overall operation of the language access services and compliances.

However, due to the recent budget cut, the OLA has one staff member with interns and volunteers. Current OLA’s annual budget is stated to be \$300,000. This budget cut limits outreach activities to let residents know of the Language Access Law.

City of San Francisco

State of California has a law called *Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act*, which is similar to the DC Language Access Act of 2004, but it is more generalized and broader. However, City of San Francisco has taken this Act to formalize and form specific language access programs within the city and the county. The DC Act was, in fact, modeled off of the San Francisco Law.

The Law mandates all County and City agencies to provide quality language services to LEP and NEP constituents to receive equal public services and access to such services. The Law creates two tiers of departments—the first tier defines which departments require comprehensive translation and the second tier defines which departments require bare necessity translation. Also, the Law specifies the quality control, and the roles of the language access coordinators. The Law creates and gives the ultimate power for language access operations to the Immigrant Rights Commission. It is seen as a separate entity for enforcement of the Law, and a separate entity than the Office of Human Rights—however, the Commission reports incidents and issues not resolvable to the OHR.

County of Los Angeles

County of Los Angeles, like City of San Francisco, took the initiatives to provide better quality services to LEP and NEPs, on top of a State-wide law.

In an email conversation with a staff member from the County of Los Angeles Department of Human Rights, the DHR utilizes diverse staff members who are fluent in different languages. The DHR is also in the process of having their websites to be more LEP/NEP user-friendly by translating different web pages into a number of various languages.

County of Queens

The New York City Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) submitted a form of language access law in order to ensure LEP and NEPs' access to public services. The CCHR not only enforces the basic human rights law in the New York City, but also oversees the operations of the language access services provided by each department. The CCHR uses the US Department of Justice "Four Factor Analysis" to determine what documents to be translated and into what languages.

The CCHR strives to make interpretation services more readily available through in-house employees' assistance. In addition to these in-house interpretation services, language line and "I Speak" cards can be utilized based on needs.

Limitations

Non-local jurisdictions' information was rather more difficult to gather because of their distances and the only way of communication was done through email conversations. Because interns were not full-time employees who can devote their time at work, only researching the best practices and visiting service centers on a regular basis to seek improvements, data from visits were limited.

Executive Recommendations based on Non/Local Jurisdictions' Findings

- Language access service should be in each department's interest, not because of the Act
- Staff members should be more diverse. Diverse staffing will reduce costs in a long run for translation needs and the translations will be done very effectively as they will have previous knowledge of what the department does
- Staff members should be more mobile. Mobility gives the department and agency to meet their different districts' needs
- Vital documents should be translated and should be placed along with its corresponding English version—this is costless, but very helpful for LEP and NEPs
- Each translated documents should have
- More colorful interior design and signage can be very appealing from a visitor's perspective
- Each department should review the needs to have security checkpoint. Eliminating security checkpoint not only will allow each department to have higher budget, and it will eliminate the psychological barrier between immigrants, some undocumented, and the authority
- Quarterly training should be held to ensure highest quality customer service
- Different departments should work as a team in sharing information and translated documents

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