



# LANGUAGE ACCESS PROGRAM

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

## Program Description

The Language Access Program is housed under the District of Columbia Office of Human Rights (OHR). It exists to eliminate language-based discrimination, enabling DC residents, workers, and visitors to receive equivalent information and services from the DC government, regardless of what language they speak. The Program's scope includes all District agencies that come into contact with the public, and it supports these agencies in providing translation and interpretation services for customers who are limited or non-English proficient (LEP/NEP). The Language Access Program organizes its work into four areas: enforcement, compliance monitoring, technical assistance, and community engagement.

- **Enforcement:** Individuals who believe their language access rights have been violated may file a complaint with OHR. The Program Director personally manages language access complaints and issues written findings after the investigations. The Program Director also works with agencies found in non-compliance to implement corrective actions.
- **Compliance Monitoring:** While the Program covers all District agencies that engage residents, workers, and visitors, it provides additional support to those agencies with major public contact (see "Laws and regulations" for more information on this distinction). With more potential exposure to the LEP/NEP population, agencies with major public contact have extensive language access responsibilities, which are reflected in the applicable laws and regulations. Program staff hold agencies accountable to these directives by monitoring each agency's compliance with them. Staff build agency capacity for compliance through the development of attainable two-year action plans known as Biennial Language Access Plans (BLAPs). Agencies report quarterly on their BLAPs' progress, and Program staff review these reports. Program staff summarize their findings at the end of each fiscal year in the Annual Compliance Report (see below for existing publications).
- **Technical Assistance:** Program staff support all District agencies that offer language access services as needed. In addition to responding to individual inquiries from agency members, Program staff regularly provide training on compliance requirements and cultural competency. Staff additionally engage in issue-specific consultations and perform supplemental functions as necessary.
- **Community Engagement:** To ensure that LEP/NEP residents, workers, and visitors are aware of their language access rights, the Language Access Program conducts outreach in conjunction



with community-based organizations that serve immigrant needs. In addition to tabling at events, Program staff regularly deliver “Know Your Rights” trainings. Staff also work closely with members of the DC Language Access Coalition as well as the Consultative Agencies (see below) to disseminate information about the Program and create platforms for feedback on the District’s translation and interpretation services. Staff also respond directly to inquiries from members of the public on matters related to language access.

- [What is the Language Access Coalition? \(PDF\)](#)
- [What are the Consultative Agencies? \(PDF\)](#)

## Laws and Regulations

DC’s Language Access Program began with the passage of the Language Access Act of 2004. This Act established the Program at the Office of Human Rights, identified covered entities and enumerated their responsibilities, stipulated requirements for meeting these responsibilities, and outlined mechanisms for compliance monitoring and enforcement. You can view the full text of the Language Access Act of 2004, as updated in 2014, below.

- [DC Language Access Act of 2004 in English](#)
- [Language Access Act Regulations](#)
- [በድንቋ ኣገልግሎት ማግኛ ፕሮግራም ድንጋጌ \(DC Language Access Act of 2004 in Amharic\)](#)
- [《哥倫比亞特區語言利用法》 \(DC Language Access Act of 2004 in Chinese\)](#)
- [Loi sur l’accès linguistique de 2004 \(DC Language Access Act of 2004 in French\)](#)
- [DC 언어 서비스 법 \(DC Language Access Act of 2004 in Korean\)](#)
- [La Ley de Acceso Linguístico de 2004 \(DC Language Access Act of 2004 in Spanish\)](#)
- [Luật Tiếp cận Ngôn ngữ của DC \(DC Language Access Act of 2004 in Vietnamese\)](#)

## Engagement and Awareness Campaigns

As part of its mission to eradicate discrimination in the District of Columbia, the Office of Human Rights (OHR) has launched numerous engagement and awareness campaigns aimed at preventing discrimination and encouraging people to report discrimination when it happens. Language access and related issues are featured in several of its campaigns.

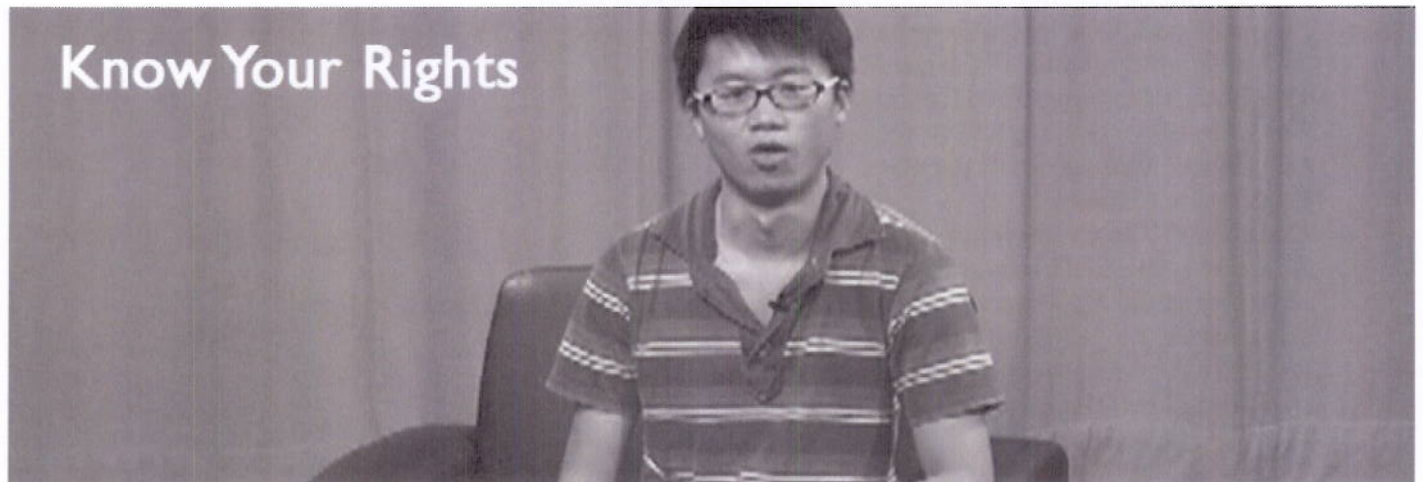
[DC Websites Speak Your Language Campaign](#) – In September 2014, OHR announced the completion of a yearlong initiative to provide critical service information in multiple languages on over 30 District government agency websites. To promote the new language-specific webpages, OHR placed advertisements in ethnic newspapers and posted them in community centers.



**Immigrants Contribute Campaign** – Launched in September 2013, this campaign features the stories of immigrants from around the globe. It highlights the contributions of immigrants to the District and discourages discrimination.



**Know Your Rights Campaign** – The latest wave of this campaign was launched in late August 2012. It aims to raise awareness among limited or non-English proficient residents about requesting an interpreter when accessing District government services and consists of three parts: the (1) "I Speak" cards, a tool to help those with limited or no English to access government services; the (2) television and print advertisements aimed at raising awareness in target communities; and (3) training and outreach to District agencies and direct service providers.



### **Contact information**

All District agencies, departments, and programs that come into contact with the public must designate at least one employee to manage Language Access matters. For agencies, departments, and programs that fall into the category of "major public contact," this employee is the Language Access Coordinator (LAC).

Download the [Language Access Coordinator Directory](#) with contact information (PDF).

The Language Access Act designates the following agencies as having major public contact:

1. Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration (ABRA)
2. Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)



3. Department of Behavioral Health (DOB)
4. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA)
5. Department of Corrections (DOC)
6. Department of Employment Services (DOES)
7. Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE)
8. Department of General Services (DGS)
9. Department of Health (DOH)
10. Department of Health Care Finance (DHCF)
11. Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
12. Department of Human Resources (DCHR)
13. Department of Human Services (DHS)
14. Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)
15. Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR)
16. Department of Public Works (DPW)
17. Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD)
18. Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS)
19. Department on Disability Services (DDS)
20. District Department of Transportation (DDOT)
21. District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA)
22. District of Columbia Lottery and Charitable Games Control Board (DCLB)
23. District of Columbia Office of Zoning (DCOZ)
24. District of Columbia Public Library (DCPL)
25. District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
26. Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (FEMS)
27. Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA)
28. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD)
29. Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH)
30. Office of Contracting and Procurement (OCP)
31. Office of Human Rights (OHR)
32. Office of Planning (OP)
33. Office of Tax and Revenue (OTR)
34. Office of Unified Communications (OUC)
35. Office of the Attorney General - Child Support Services Division (OAG - CSSD)
36. Office of the People's Counsel (OPC)
37. Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)
38. Office of the Tenant Advocate (OTA)
39. Office on Aging (DCOA)

**Related Content:**

[Language Access Information Portal](#)



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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

## Reference Guide: 16 Communication Tips for LEP/NEP Interactions



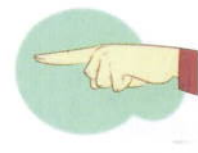
1. **Be friendly and patient.** Speaking a foreign language can be intimidating, so set a positive tone for the non-native English speakers you encounter.



2. **Try synonyms.** A listener may be familiar with different phrasing for what you are trying to say. If your listener does not seem to understand, find another way of saying it.



3. **Keep your mouth visible.** Seeing the way you form your words gives listeners context clues and helps them figure out what you are saying.



4. **Reinforce your words with gestures.** By pointing to something or demonstrating an action, you give listeners more ways to recognize your meaning.



5. **Keep it simple.** Complicated vocabulary is usually harder for a non-native English speaker to understand.



6. **Stick with standard pronunciations.** A non-native speaker may not recognize known words if you pronounce them in an unfamiliar way.



7. **Avoid baby talk.** Using baby talk will either make you harder to understand or come off as unprofessional.





8. **Pause between your words.** Non-native speakers of a language often struggle to distinguish where one word ends and the next one begins.



9. **Use straight-forward vocabulary.** Non-native speakers may get hung up on expressions they do not know, including fillers such as “um,” “like,” and “totally.” The same goes for abbreviations and slang.



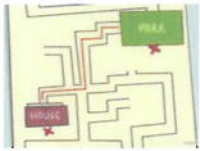
10. **Avoid contractions.** A non-native speaker may struggle to hear a contraction (consider “I can’t take you” versus “I can take you”). Using the long form (“I cannot take you”) provides maximum clarity.



11. **Be aware of different cultural standards.** Norms vary around the world for touching, eye contact, and personal space, so give someone the benefit of the doubt if they come off as rude.



12. **Avoid turning up the volume.** Yelling at someone does not make them understand you any better. Speaking louder is offensive and embarrassing rather than helpful because unless you are in a noisy place, volume is not the issue.



13. **Get visual.** When spoken language fails, a picture, map, or written words may be effective.



14. **Avoid excessive corrections.** Unless you need a clarification or have been asked for language advice, corrections slow down communication unnecessarily and may cause non-native speakers to feel self-conscious.



15. **Avoid jumping to conclusions.** To make sure you are responding with the right information, hear the person out before making a reply.



16. **Get help.** Sometimes good communication means knowing when you need outside assistance. In these cases, find a bilingual colleague or call a professional interpreter.

Adapted from: <http://www.wikihow.com/Communicate-with-a-Non-Native-English-Speaker>