

Language Access Program

The Language Access Program provides City agencies with technical assistance and guidance to more effectively serve New Yorkers who have limited English proficiency.

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Start Date</i>	<i>Number Served per year</i>	<i>CEO Budget (City FY 08)</i>	<i>Total Budget (City FY 08)</i>
The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs	February 2007	Up to 600,000 Limited English Proficient Individuals (LEPs)	\$80,000	\$80,000

Problem Statement

Research demonstrates that in the United States there is a clear link between limited English proficiency (LEP) and the occurrence of poverty.¹ Of the 1.8 million LEP New Yorkers, one-third lives below the poverty line.²

Research and Evidence

Limited English proficiency creates barriers for low-income New Yorkers in a variety of ways.

Access to Social Services

In 2004, the Center for New York City Affairs at the Milano Graduate School (The New School) reported that language barriers prevent LEP New Yorkers from accessing Food Stamps.³ Another study found that 50% of low-income immigrants erroneously believed that their immigration status would be jeopardized if they or their citizen children were to receive government benefits.⁴

Access to Education

Fifty-three percent of school children in New York City come from homes where languages other than English are spoken.⁵ A survey conducted by Advocates for Children of New York and the New York Immigration Coalition in 2004 found that 51% of survey respondents -- parents whose primary language is not English, and students from immigrant families -- never or rarely received translated materials in their native language. In addition, 41% of survey participants reported that parents have used their children as interpreters to speak to school personnel. Almost half of the population surveyed also felt that families are hurt by lack of language access services.⁶

Lack of Jobs/Job Training for LEP New Yorkers

According to the Mayor's Office of Adult Education, there are few workforce development or training programs created specifically for LEP individuals. Promising practices from across the nation, however, demonstrate that vocational ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes and bilingual job training are effective ways to help LEP low-wage workers get on a career ladder.⁷

Access to Affordable Housing/Housing Services

Neighborhoods in NYC with higher rates of linguistic isolation (where all members of a household age 14 and above have difficulty speaking English) have more housing deficiencies.⁸ A 2007 report by CUNY Center for Urban Research and Communities for Housing Equity found that, although poor LEP communities are more likely to have substandard housing, they are less likely to report these conditions to 311.⁹

Access to Food

Immigrants experience hunger and food security issues at a rate of three times that of the general population; moreover, 33% of children living in immigrant-led households are food insecure (meaning they do not always have enough to eat). According to a study by the Urban Institute, lack of English proficiency results in a 50% increase of food insecurity for non-English speaking immigrants when compared with English proficient immigrants.¹⁰

Program Description

Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs Language Access Program (MOIALAP)

The goal of MOIALAP is to provide City agencies with technical assistance and guidance on language access issues. With this type of assistance, the initiative aims to improve LEP access to public services in compliance with Local Law 73, and privacy laws established by Executive Order 41. MOIALAP increases the capacity of participating agency staff by helping them to better serve persons with limited English. Technical assistance includes staff training, translation and interpretation, quality assurance, data collection, outreach and plain language communication strategies. (Plain language is the practice of communicating in simple, clear language and also helps engage persons with low-literacy skills).

Target Population

The Language Access program serves City agencies, as well as the 600,000 Limited English Proficient New Yorkers who live below the poverty line. The initiative operates citywide.

Expected Outcomes

Short-Term:

- Assess the linguistic and cultural capacity of City agencies
- Provide technical assistance on the language access needs of agencies working on issues affecting low-income New Yorkers
- Provide introductory language access workshops
- Provide trainings on plain language

Long-Term:

- Enhance cultural competency of agency programs serving and reaching out to immigrant populations
- Improve access to City services for limited English proficient speakers
- Increase use of 311 by LEP New Yorkers
- Increase uptake of health and human services through 311 by LEP New Yorkers

¹ Colton, Tara. “Lost in Translation.” Center for an Urban Future, November 2006.

² White, Andrew, Sharon Lerner, Mia Lipsit and Coco McPherson. “Hardship in Many Languages: Immigrant Families and Children in NYC.” Center for New York City Affairs, Robert J. Milano Graduate School of Management and Urban Policy, January 2004.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Greenberg, Mark and Hedieh Rahmanou. “Commentary 1” *Children of Immigrant Families*. The Future of Children, Volume 14, Number 2, Summer 2004.

⁵ *Denied at the Door: Language Barriers Block Immigrant Parents from School Involvement*, Advocates for Children of New York and New York Immigration Coalition, February 19, 2004.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Wrigley, Heide Spruck, Elise Richer, Karin Martinson, Hitomi Kubo, and Julie Strawn. “The Language of Opportunity.” Center for Law and Social Policy, Workforce Development Series, Brief No. 2, August 2003

⁸ *Living in Isolation: Issues of access of City housing services among Immigrant New Yorkers*. CUNY Center for Urban Research and Communities for Housing Equity, March 5, 2007.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Referenced in White et al., 2004.