



Title: LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE POLICY		
Subject: GENERAL OPERATIONS	Page: 1 of 5	Policy Number: 5.40.00
Category: DISTRICTWIDE POLICY	Approval Date: 12/18/2023	Last Revised Date:

POLICY STATEMENT:

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County (the “District”) aims to provide accessible language services to the residents of Cook County. Cook County is the most culturally diverse county in Illinois and the District strives to foster an inclusive environment where individual differences, including language preferences, are respected and valued. The procedures laid out in this policy will ensure that the District upholds its values of equity and inclusion by providing meaningful language assistance service options. This language policy is inspired by Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and the Offices Under the President (OUP) Language Access Policy and has been modified to fit the District’s needs.

PURPOSE:

This policy will provide direction to staff on how to provide language assistance services and establish language accessibility requirements as well as other, upon-request services.

AFFECTED AREAS:

This policy covers the District’s public-facing communications which include District services, business, resources, and programs.

DEFINITIONS:

Accessible language: is communication that includes everyone (for example, people with visual impairments, lower reading levels, distractions or different language needs). Communicating content that is accessible helps remove barriers, so users, regardless of ability or circumstance, can get the information they need.

Bilingual Persons: Persons who are bilingual are fluent in two languages and can conduct the business of the workplace in either of those languages. This is to be distinguished from proficiency in more than one language. An individual who is proficient in a language may, for example, be able to greet an individual with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) in their language, but not conduct agency business in that language. Interpretation and translation require the interpreter to be fluently bilingual and require additional specific skills.

Interpretation: is conveying the meaning of a spoken word from one language to another.

Language access: means providing Limited English Proficient (LEP) people with reasonable access to the same services as English-speaking individuals.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP): describes individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.

Translation: is deciphering the meaning of the written word from one language to another.

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Racial, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI) Lens:

Language should not be a barrier to accessing the physical or digital world. That is why language accessibility is a practical and ethical imperative for governments of any size and background.

The United States does not have an official language, but some states like Illinois, list English as their official language. People in the United States speak or sign more than 350 languages. In Cook County, over 35.1% of residents speak a language other than English, and within that, 13.6% speak English very well (see appendix 1).

It is necessary to ensure that stakeholders have assistance to programs, resources, and educational opportunities. Providing language assistance services is one way in which the District can ensure all people who visit the forest preserves or utilize any District programs or services have access to information in languages other than English.

PROCEDURE/PROCESS:

1) **Action Steps for the District to provide Language Services:** The main goal of the District shall be to provide quality language assistance services to individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), in a timely manner, to ensure meaningful access to programs, services, and activities. The District will do so by:

- Conducting routine assessments of ongoing language access needs and the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the services being provided.
- Identifying gaps where language assistance services are inadequate to meet LEP needs. Identify and take specific steps at all District locations to enhance language assistance services.
- Using data resources, such as U.S. Census data (e.g., CMAP data), when program-specific data is unavailable, to evaluate the extent of need for language assistance services in particular languages or dialects at the national and regional level.
- Analyzing LEP data from customer satisfaction surveys and program reviews. This feedback will be considered when appending language need assessments to the Language Accessibility Policy.
- Researching new procedures and practices proven to enhance the provision of more efficient language assistance services and share such practices throughout the District.

See attachment 1 for a list of languages currently spoken in Cook County.

2) **Written Materials:** Recommended translation priorities for written materials include:

Outreach Materials for large or special events.

Essential Materials such as applications, forms, and materials related to benefits, services, and programs such as complaint forms or vacation benefits.

Public Safety and Critical Services Materials.

Language Assistance Notices shall be provided on agendas for public meetings providing information for non-English speakers and others on how to request translation services or other accommodations.

Translation of the following materials is also encouraged as resources allow:

- Reports.
- Press releases.
- Additional District service materials.

- 3) **On-Demand Phone or Video Interpretation Services:** When residents whose primary language is not English call or visit a District location, District staff may contact the District's language access vendor for over-the-phone or audio interpreters. No appointment scheduling is necessary for this service.
- 4) **Events and Outreach:** For events and outreach, the following steps should be taken to ensure accessibility:
- a. When planning a virtual event, District staff shall consider accessibility concerns such as captioning and interpreters.
 - b. For public facing events, information about how to request translation and interpretation services should be included in promotional and registration information. This could be incorporated into an accommodation statement such as the following:
Accommodations. *The event will be held inside the nature center which is an accessible building. To request translation or interpretation services or other accommodations, please send an email to <email address> at least five days prior to the event.*
 - c. To ensure District staff have time to respond to and meet accommodation requests, requests must be submitted with adequate advance notice (usually 3 to 5 business days prior to the event or meeting; this may vary depending upon the event).
 - d. District will do their best to accommodate request by securing accommodation resources with as much notice as possible, but no later than 1 full business day before the event.
- 5) **Requesting Language Accessibility Services:**
- a. **General Public:** Members of the general public requesting language accessibility services can contact the designated staff person for a specific event or program. General inquiries can be directed to fpdcc.reidi@cookcountyil.gov.
 - b. **District Staff:** Designated district staff shall contact the authorized language access vendor for file translation, general translation and interpretation requests and services as requested.
- 6) **Training District Staff:**
- a. Staff will be trained on how to identify LEP customers and the procedures for accessing language assistance services. The District will make training available to new and existing staff to ensure effective implementation of policies and procedures.
 - b. A train-the-trainer model of initial language access services training will occur for all necessary staff. This training will include a review of the Language Assistance Policy and procedures; how to utilize the authorized language access vendor services for translation of written materials; and utilizing interpreter services including sign language interpreters. Subsequent training of new or existing staff will be the responsibility of their manager/supervisor.
 - c. The District will continue to provide periodic training on LEP services, cultural diversity, and customer service to help staff deliver effective and efficient language access services to LEP clients. This training will be delivered via a blended approach, using a variety of tools, such as in-person classroom style training, video training, and on-line webinars designed to enhance skills, including the language skills of District staff.
 - d. Training on the delivery of services to LEP individuals will be provided to new hires and then annually to all staff.

RESPONSIBILITY:

Office of the General Superintendent: Accessibility Coordinator and Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Coordinator

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS:

Training for using authorized vendor language translation services.
Language Accessibility Policy Training

COMMUNICATION PLAN:

- 1) This policy should be distributed to all staff.
- 2) This policy should be added to the District's shared file system, intranet, and website.

REFERENCES:

[Cook County Offices Under the President Language Access Policy](#)
[CMAP Community Data Snapshot Cook County](#)

POLICY LEAD: [Raquel Garcia-Alvarez](#)
Policy and Sustainability Manager

APPROVAL: [Arnold Randall](#)
General Superintendent

POLICY HISTORY:

Approved: 12/18/2023

Revised: Revised

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions concerning District policies, please contact:

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Appendix 1: Languages Spoken in Cook County

Cook County, which includes Chicago, is one of the most culturally diverse counties in the United States. People from all over the world call this place home, contributing to a vibrant scene where many languages are spoken. This is highlighted through the survey results (below) published by American Community Survey (Census Data).

Language Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English, 2017-2021

	Cook County	
	Count	Percent
English Only	3,215,693	64.9
Spanish	1,020,049	20.6
Slavic Languages	212,400	4.3
Chinese	66,455	1.3
Tagalog	47,051	0.9
Arabic	48,750	1.0
Korean	26,946	0.5
Other Asian Languages	66,005	1.3
Other Indo-European Languages	203,120	4.1
Other/Unspecified Languages	46,521	0.9
TOTAL NON-ENGLISH	1,737,297	35.1
Speak English Less than "Very Well"*	673,502	13.6

Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

*For people who speak a language other than English at home, the ACS asks whether they speak English "very well," "well," "not well," or "not at all."