

Language access checklist

Start by identifying the languages people need and the vital documents that require translation and human review. Make a qualified interpreter available at first contact, and make each request specific about language, dialect, requested gender match, and meeting format.

Why it matters

The wrong dialect, an unreviewed translation, or an English-only exception process can keep people from receiving meaningful access.

Content

Languages: use current contact data for the people your program serves. Record the language and dialect each person requests rather than relying on an agencywide list.

Vital documents: notices of action, applications, consent forms, appeal rights, and anything a person must understand to get or keep a service. Follow the current language-access requirements for translation and qualified human review before release.

Interpreters: use qualified professional interpreters rather than family members, children, or bilingual staff pulled away from their own work. Bilingual colleagues should not be expected to serve as on-demand interpreters.

Requests: write the language and dialect, such as Standard Somali or Maay, White Hmong or Green Hmong, or S'gaw or Pwo Karen. Also note any requested interpreter gender and whether the meeting is in person, by phone, or by video.

Point of contact: a person should reach an interpreter at the first contact, not after a failed attempt in English.

Written material: plain language first; then translation. A dense English notice becomes a dense translated notice.

Follow current DHS policy before using machine translation. Treat any permitted use as a draft, and have a qualified person review every vital document before it is released.

Next steps

- **Learn how to work with a spoken-language interpreter** — program page [/library/lm-interpreter](#)
- **Plain language and accessible documents checklist** — program page [/library/ja-plain-language](#)
- **Open the community brief for the household's language** — program page [/minnesota-communities](#)

Practice paths this supports

- Policy, form, or notice change
- Community engagement or co-design effort