

Language and cultural access planning aid for a program or contact point

Plan language, format, messenger, communication mode, and program design together, using the CLAS standards as a frame: who the program reaches, which languages and formats they need, how an interpreter is available at first contact, which documents are vital, and who reviews translations.

Why it matters

Language access decided one document at a time produces gaps at the first phone call. Planning at the program level puts interpreter availability, translation, and trusted messengers where people actually arrive.

Content

Who the program reaches. Use the data owner's information and community partners to name the languages and communities, and note what the data does not show.

First contact. How does a person who does not use English reach a human, in their language, on the first try? Phone, front desk, web, and mail each need an answer.

Vital documents. Identify documents that affect eligibility, rights, benefits, or safety. These need translation and human review before release. Machine translation alone is not enough for vital documents.

Formats. Plain language, large print, accessible electronic documents, audio, and in-person explanation. Ask which formats people use, not which are easiest to produce.

Trusted messengers. Who do people in each community already trust for information? Partner with them and compensate the work.

Cultural responsiveness. Use community material as questions. Check assumptions about family roles, health beliefs, and literacy with the community, not from a guide.

Review and owners. Name who owns the plan, who reviews translations, and when the plan is checked again.

The CLAS standards and DHS language access practice are the authority for these decisions. Check current guidance with your language access coordinator.

Next steps

- **Language access checklist** — program page </library/ja-language-access-checklist>

- **CLAS standards reference** — program page [/library/ext-clas](#)
- **Working with an interpreter** — program page [/library/lm-interpreter](#)

Practice paths this supports

- New program or service concept
- Policy, form, or notice change