



Best Practices for Language Assistance

To aid staff with providing language assistance to limited English proficient (LEP)* noncitizens in ICE custody, ERO has identified several best practices for consideration. While not all are required by ICE Standards, these tips help ensure better identification of, and effective communication with, LEP noncitizens.

Utilize and Promote Language Assistance Resources

- Draft policy/standard operating procedures for providing language assistance and train staff on how and when to access language services via available language line(s).
- Post notices or issue language pocket cards for staff promoting available language line(s), including contact information, any required PIN/ID, and hours of operation.
- Ensure housing unit officers have access to telephone(s) (analog, portable, cellular, or otherwise) in the unit that can be readily used to contact available language line(s).
- Ensure any electronic machine translation device (handheld or otherwise) operates in line with all privacy and confidentiality rules and is only used by staff during informal communication (i.e., not legal or medical).
- Document language assistance provided (including via language line or bilingual staff) in noncitizen's detention file or separate log, including date, A number, and language requested.
- Post/distribute multi-lingual signage or orientation materials informing noncitizens about availability of free language services for medical and detention/ICE related matters and how to request assistance.
- Employ bilingual staff who speak Spanish and other frequently encountered languages.
- Limit use of noncitizens for interpretation, other than in true emergencies, and even then, only for that period before language services can be secured.

Identify, Record, and Track Primary Languages

- Post and utilize language identification tools, such as *I Speak* posters/booklets, to determine noncitizen's primary language. When necessary, use language line to assist with determining noncitizen's primary language.
- Record noncitizen's primary language in facility electronic data system and/or on facility noncitizen identification cards/tags.
- Regularly analyze noncitizen primary language or Country of Citizenship data, to track languages spoken by significant segments of the detained population at the facility.

Identify and Translate Vital Documents*

- Regularly translate vital documents (e.g., local handbook) into Spanish and other languages spoken by significant segments of the detained population at the facility. Be sure to review the [ICE Forms Library](#) (on inSight) for available translations of ICE/ERO forms signed by noncitizens.
- If tablets and/or videos are used to communicate information to noncitizens, ensure instructions and/or video scripts are translated into Spanish and other languages spoken by significant segments of the detained population at the facility.
- Provide oral interpretation where written material is not translated into noncitizen's primary language or noncitizen is illiterate. Document language assistance in noncitizen's detention file or separate log, including date, A number, and language requested.

*Definitions

Limited English Proficiency (LEP): A person who does not speak English as their primary language and who has a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.

- *May be competent in English for certain types or levels of communication (e.g., basic questions), but still be LEP for other purposes (e.g., medical matters).*

Vital Documents: Contain information that is critical for obtaining federal services and benefits or is required by law.

- *Include: forms; notices of rights and disciplinary actions; handbooks; grievance procedures; forms, and responses; protocol or procedures for emergency response; medical/mental health treatment information; and letters or notices that require a response or signature from LEP persons.*

Responsibility

- *Provide LEP noncitizens with meaningful access to programs and activities via language assistance through bilingual staff or professional interpretation and translation services.*
- *Translate written materials into languages spoken by significant segments of the detained population at the facility.*
- *Provide professional oral interpretation to any LEP noncitizen who speaks a language in which written material has not been translated or who is illiterate.*

For additional information or questions, please contact the ERO Headquarters language access team at (b)(7)(E) @ICE.DHS.GOV. Facility staff should first reach out to their local ERO Field Office Point of Contact.