

CITY OF GASTONIA

Language Access Plan

I. PLAN STATEMENT

The City of Gastonia has adopted this plan to provide meaningful access to its programs and activities by persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). In accordance with Federal guidelines, the City of Gastonia will make reasonable efforts to provide or arrange for free language assistance for its LEP clients, including applicants, recipients and/or persons eligible for Community Development Block Grant, HOME Investment Partnership program funds and other Community Development programs – Federal, State or Local.

The purpose of this Policy and Plan is to ensure compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and other applicable federal and state laws and their implementing regulations with respect to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on the ground of races, color or national origin by any entity receiving federal financial assistance. Administrative methods or procedures, which have the effect of subjecting individuals to discrimination or defeating the objectives of these regulations, are prohibited.

This policy and plan is effective August 16, 2011 for four (4) years.

II. MEANINGFUL ACCESS: FOUR-FACTOR ANALYSIS

Meaningful access is free language assistance in accordance with Federal guidelines. The Housing & Neighborhoods (H&N) Division will periodically assess and update this plan using following four-factor analysis:

1. The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the Housing & Neighborhoods Division.
2. The frequency with which LEP persons using a particular language come into contact with the Housing & Neighborhoods Division.
3. The nature and importance of the H&N program, activity or service to the person's life.

4. The Housing & Neighborhoods Division resources and the cost of providing meaningful access. Reasonable steps may cease to be reasonable where the costs imposed substantially exceed the benefits.

III. LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE

1. A person who does not speak English as their primary language and who has a limited ability to read, write, speak or understand English may be a Limited English Proficient person and may be entitled to language assistance with respect to H&N programs and activities.
2. Language assistance includes interpretation, which means oral or spoken transfer of a message from one language into another language and/or translation, which means the written transfer of a message from one language into another language. The H&N Division will determine when interpretation and/or translation are needed and are reasonable.
3. H&N staff will take reasonable steps to provide the opportunity for meaningful access to LEP clients who have difficulty communicating in English. If a client asks for language assistance and the H&N Division determines that the client is an LEP person and that language assistance is necessary to provide meaningful access, the H&N staff will make reasonable efforts to provide free language assistance. If reasonably possible, the H&N Division will provide the language assistance in the LEP client's preferred language.

The H&N staff has the discretion to determine whether language assistance is needed, and if so, the type of language assistance necessary to provide meaningful access.

The H&N Division will periodically assess client needs for language assistance based on requests for interpreters and/or translation, as well as the literacy skills of the clients.

IV. TRANSLATION OF DOCUMENTS

1. The H&N staff will weigh the cost and benefits of translating documents for potential LEP groups, considering the expense of translating the documents, the barriers to meaningful translation or interpretation of technical housing information, the likelihood of frequent changes in documents, the existence of multiple dialects within a single language group, the apparent literacy rate in a LEP group and other relevant factors. The H&N Division will undertake this examination when an eligible

LEP group constitutes five percent of an eligible client group (for example, five percent of households applying for program assistance).

2. If the H&N Division determines that translation is necessary and appropriate, the H&N staff will arrange to translate the program application and selected mailings and documents of vital importance into that language.
3. The H&N Division will consider technological aids such as Internet-based translation services, which may provide helpful, although perhaps not authoritative, translation of written materials

V. FORMAL INTERPRETERS

1. When necessary to provide meaningful access for LEP clients, the Housing & Neighborhoods (H&N) office will provide qualified interpreters, including City of Gastonia bilingual staff and contract vendors, if available. At important stages that require one-on-one contact, written translation and verbal interpretation services will be provided consistent with the four-factor analysis used earlier.

To be qualified, the bilingual staff and contract vendors will be screened to ensure that the following standards are met before being used for interpreter services:

- a. Can fluently and effectively communicate in both English and the primary language of the LEP individual.
 - b. Can accurately and impartially interpret to and from such languages and English.
 - c. Has a basic knowledge of specialized terms and concepts used frequently in the provision of the agency's services.
 - d. Demonstrates cultural competency.
 - e. Understands the obligation to maintain confidentiality.
 - f. Understands the roles of interpreters and the ethics associated with being an interpreter.
2. The H&N office may require a formal interpreter to certify to the following:
 - a. The interpreter understood the matter communicated and rendered a competent interpretation.
 - b. The interpreter will not disclose non-public data without written authorization from the client.
 3. Formal interpreters shall be used at the following:

- a. Formal hearings concerning Housing & Neighborhoods Grievance Procedures. City staff will not be utilized as interpreters in any instance where such use would constitute a conflict of interest.
- b. If Bilingual City employees not can provide assistance to H&N staff and LEP clients as part of their regular job duties, and the H&N Division determines that no other reasonable option is available.

VI. *INFORMAL INTERPRETERS*

1. Informal interpreters may include the family members, friends, legal guardians, service representatives or advocates of the LEP client. H&N staff will determine whether it is appropriate to rely on informal interpreters, depending upon the circumstances and subject matter of the communication. However, in many circumstances, informal interpreters, especially children, are not competent to provide quality and accurate interpretations. There may be issues of confidentiality, competency, or conflict of interest.
2. An LEP person may use an informal interpreter of his or her own choosing and at their expense, either in place of or as a supplement to the free language assistance offered by the H&N office. If possible, the H&N office should accommodate an LEP client's request to use an informal interpreter in place of a formal interpreter.
3. If an LEP client prefers an informal interpreter, after the H&N office has offered free interpreter services, the informal interpreter may interpret. H&N Staff should insure that the LEP person's choice is voluntary, that the LEP person is aware of the possible problems if the preferred interpreter is a minor child and that the LEP person knows that the H&N office will provide a competent interpreter at no cost to the LEP person. In these cases, the client and interpreter should sign a waiver of free interpreter services.
4. If an LEP client wants to use his or her own informal interpreter, the H&N office reserves the right to also have a formal interpreter present.

VII. *OUTSIDE RESOURCES*

1. Outside resources may include community volunteers and organizations.

2. Outside resources may be used for interpreting services at public or informal meetings or events if a timely request has been made. If community volunteers and organizations are utilized, H&N staff will insure that such outside resources are competent in interpreting and knowledgeable about the applicable confidentiality and impartiality rules.

VIII. MONITORING AND REPORTING

1. The H&N office staff will complete a self-monitoring report on a quarterly basis using a standardized reporting system and will be provided as needed to funding agencies. The H&N office will review this LEP Plan at a minimum of every four years. The review will include:
 - a. Reports from the Hansen System on the number of clients who are LEP, to the extent that the software and staff data entry can provide such information. Such reports may be supplemented by staff observations.
 - b. Reports from the Hansen System and other sources listing the languages used by LEP clients.
 - c. A determination as to whether five percent from the H&N client group speak a specific language which triggers consideration of document translation needs as described above.
 - d. Analysis of staff requests for contract interpreters: number of requests, languages requested costs, etc.
 - e. The Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) will be asked to review the LEP Plan annually as part of updating the Citizen Participation Plan.
2. The H&N office will complete an annual compliance report and provided it to funding agencies as requested and assist with monitoring of the LEP plan by funding agencies.

IX. Applicant/Recipient Complaints of Discriminatory Treatment

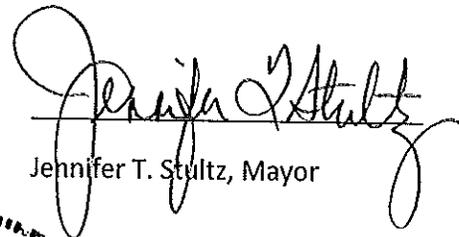
1. Complaints
 - a. The H&N office will provide assistance to LEP individuals who do not speak or write in English if they indicate that they would like to file a complaint. A complaint will be filed in writing, contain the name and address of the person filing it or his/her designee and briefly describe the alleged violation of this policy.

- b. The H&N office will maintain records of any complaints filed, the date of filing, actions taken and resolution.
 - c. The H&N staff will notify the appropriate agency of complaints filed, the date of filing, actions taken and resolution. This information will be provided within 30 days of resolution.
2. Resolution of Matters
- a. If the matter cannot be resolved by informal means, then the individual will be informed of his or her right to appeal further to the appropriate funding agency. This notice will be provided in the primary language of the individual with Limited English Proficiency.

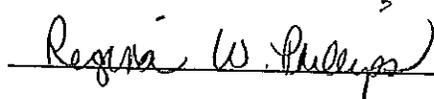
IX. LAP PLAN DISTRIBUTION AND TRAINING

1. The LAP Plan will be:
- a. Distributed to all H&N staff.
 - b. Available at the Housing & Neighborhoods Division Administrative Office at 150 S. York Street, Gastonia, North Carolina – Suite 239.
 - c. Posted on the Housing & Neighborhood Division website, www.cityofgastonia.com
 - d. Explained in training sessions for supervisors and other staff who need to communicate with LEP clients, which training sessions will be provided at least annually.

Approved by City Council on August 16, 2011.


Jennifer T. Stultz, Mayor

ATTEST:



(Deputy) City Clerk

