



NYC Department of Finance

Language Access Plan

Implemented January 2009

Revised August 2015

Jacques Jiha, Ph.D.
Commissioner
New York City Department of Finance

A Message from the Commissioner

In July of 2008, Executive Order 120 was enacted, requiring all City agencies to develop a language access plan to ensure meaningful language access to all of the City's services. A Department of Finance team created a carefully thought-out, customer-focused plan to comply with the order. From time to time, we revise the plan as the needs of our population with limited English proficiency increase and evolve. We are very proud of this effort because providing great customer service means providing service to all New Yorkers, regardless of their primary language.

Our plan provides for interpretation and translation services in all units that interact with the general public — whether in person, online, by phone, email, or hard mail. These units include all five of our Borough Business Centers and the Adjudication Units within those centers, our Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption and Disability Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE/DRIE) Walk-In Center, the City Register, Personal Exemptions, the Sheriff's Office, and the Cash Bail Unit. We believe it is critically important to communicate clearly with the public and so we must be prepared to be responsive to our customers' language needs.

We continue to collect data on our most-requested languages and services to determine how best to use our resources. As the demand for language access shifts and demographics change, we stand committed to providing the best service possible to New York City residents with limited proficiency in English.

Sincerely,

Jacques Jiha, Ph.D.
Commissioner, New York City Department of Finance

About the Agency

The Department of Finance (DOF) collects more than \$33 billion in revenue for the City and values more than one million properties worth a total market value of \$988 billion. In addition, DOF does the following:

- Records property-related documents;
- Administers exemption and abatement programs;
- Adjudicates and collects parking tickets;
- Maintains the City's treasury;
- Participates on and provides administrative support for the NYC Banking Commission; and
- Acts as the City's chief civil law enforcement officer.

Through the Mayor's Office of Pensions and Investments, the Department of Finance also advises the Administration on the City's \$160 billion pension system and \$15 billion deferred compensation plan.

Direct Services Offered by DOF

The Department of Finance's operating divisions are supported by customer service staff that specializes in responding to public inquiries. These customer service areas focus on quickly and accurately responding to customers' needs, whether by providing a service or up-to-date information, answering questions, or resolving customer issues. The Department of Finance's primary points of public contact where customer service is provided are listed below.

DOF Business Centers

The Department of Finance has a Business Center in each of the five boroughs. At these offices, people can come to make payments for property taxes, business taxes, excise taxes and parking and camera violations. They can also obtain tow

releases. In addition, at our on-site parking courts, vehicle owners can have parking ticket or camera violation hearings to dispute these tickets in person.

Business Center locations:

The Bronx: 3030 Third Ave., 10455
Brooklyn: 210 Joralemon St., 11201
Manhattan: 66 John St., 10038
Queens: 144-06 94th Ave., 11435
Staten Island: 350 St. Marks Place, 10301

Correspondence Unit

The central correspondence unit within the Department of Finance oversees the handling of all public inquiries – 311 Service Requests, phone inquiries, webmail and hard mail.

Outreach Unit

The Outreach Unit responds to requests from elected officials, community organizations and community boards and constituents to assist in promoting, explaining and administering the various services and functions of the Department of Finance. These include lien sale events, property owner events, not-for-profit information events and Rent Freeze Program events. The unit also initiates, develops and implements all of the Department's outreach initiatives and programs.

City Register

The City Register records and maintains all official documents related to real estate, including deeds, mortgages and leases, and has offices in every borough except Staten Island, where the Office of the County Clerk provides these functions. All of the City Register's records back to 1966 are maintained online in the Automated City Register Information System (ACRIS). The City Register Division is also responsible for maintaining the official tax maps of New York City and collecting Real Property Transfer and Mortgage Recording Taxes when documents are submitted for recording.

SCRIE/DRIE Walk-In Center

The center, located at our Manhattan Business Center, provides assistance to people who participate in the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption and Disability Rent Increase Exemption programs (also known as the Rent Freeze Program) as well as those applying for SCRIE or DRIE. These programs provide a valuable housing benefit to seniors and disabled renters to help keep their rents affordable. Landlords and management agents also visit the center for assistance in administration and compliance with the programs.

Sheriff/Tax Enforcement

As the chief civil enforcement agency for the New York State Court System, the Office of the Sheriff enforces mandates, orders, warrants and decrees for the Courts. Enforcement tools include evictions, seizure of property, and the towing and booting of vehicles for unpaid judgment debt. Employees also conduct tax fraud investigations with a special focus on enforcement of cigarette tax regulations, enforce NYC traffic regulations, and conduct auctions for property they seize.

Treasury/Cash Bail

The Treasury Division administers the City's network of bank accounts and manages the City's cash flow. Treasury employees ensure that City funds are deposited only in approved banks with appropriate collateral, and manage the City's banking relationships. In addition, the Treasury Division holds all cash bail and court-ordered funds in trust until the courts direct release of the funds.

LANGUAGE ACCESS GOAL

The goal of the Department of Finance's Language Access Plan is to ensure that the public has access to our information, programs and services, regardless of their English proficiency. This goal is met through the following initiatives:

Identification and Assessment of Limited English Proficient (LEP) Communities

In the original 2009 LEP population assessment, the Department of Finance used five data sources that helped us determine the primary languages requested by our LEP population:

- U.S. Census Bureau's Census 2000 American Community Survey
- U.S. Census Bureau's Census 2007 American Community Survey
- The Department of Finance's Employee Survey on Language Access Needs
- DOF's Customer Survey on Language Preference
- 311 data on language access requests

We learned that Spanish, Chinese and Russian were the top three languages other than English spoken in the City. Of the limited-English proficient New Yorkers, 52.12% spoke Spanish, 12.46% spoke Chinese and 6.88% spoke Russian. Haitian Creole and Korean were the next two languages commonly spoken among our customers, but each was spoken by less than 3% of the total population.

To make sure that the Language Access Plan keeps pace with the needs of the community we serve, the Department of Finance continues to review the United States Census Bureau's American Community Surveys of total population of New York City. The latest survey, 2013, indicates that 14.8% of households have no one over the age of 14 that speak English only or speak English "very well" (http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_13_1YR_S1602&prodType=table.) In addition, our internal data, collected from requests for interpretation assistance for calendar year 2014, indicate that Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Bengali, Haitian Creole and Korean are the top six languages requested, representing 92.4% of all requests for language assistance. This data remains virtually unchanged from our 2013 findings, where the same six languages represented 92.6% of all languages requested.

Overall, language interpretation requests increased by 5.2% in the last two years. We expect the number of requests to increase as people become more aware of the services we provide.

We also collect and analyze website usage data. Visitors requested materials and web pages translated into their language of preference 171,367 times in calendar year 2014, an increase of more than 34% over calendar year 2013's total of 127,723 website "hits."

Analysis of this data has borne the same results as the Census Bureau's: Spanish, Chinese and Russian are the top three languages requested, accounting for more than 90% of the requests. In line with the Census data, the Department of Finance has noted a steep increase in the demand for Indic languages, from 1.43% in FY 10 to 4.92% in FY 13. We will continue to monitor this trend.

Service Provision

The Department of Finance provides language access services to our LEP community. Signs offering free interpretation assistance in more than 20 languages are prominently displayed in our public areas. "I speak..." cards are also available at these areas. These tools allow walk-in LEP customers to point to the language they prefer to speak and request language assistance. We have a number of staff members in-house who are able to provide customer service in languages other than English. In addition, customer service representatives at our in-person locations are trained to provide over-the-phone interpretation through our interpretation subcontractor. Once the language of preference is identified, our staff connects with an interpreter through a two-handset phone. The contracted service has the capability to provide interpretation assistance in more than 200 languages.

Units that do not regularly interact with the public face-to-face also have trained staff members who have access to over-the-phone interpretation assistance by dialing into the service on regular phones. This service is particularly valuable to persons with disabilities and our senior population.

The Department of Finance has more than 40 bilingual staff members who assist the LEP community in person and by phone. Additionally, we assist our hearing-impaired customers by contracting with a service that provides American Sign Language interpreters to our units by appointment.

Our newly designed website offers translations of the most frequently requested forms and applications into the six most-requested languages. The LEP community can download these documents from our website, or request them by phone, email, regular mail, or in person. We maintain an ample supply of these documents so that we can provide them quickly and easily when they are requested. We are constantly adding new translations of documents and materials to our website.

Visitors can also use the “Translate This Page” feature provided on many of our webpages. Pages can be translated into more than 90 languages.

The Department of Finance also serves the LEP population by utilizing the City’s Volunteer Language Bank for interpretation assistance, and translation and review of translated documents. The language bank provides a list of City employees from various agencies who donate their valuable time and skills to offer interpretation, translation and document review services in more than 65 languages. Currently 48 Department of Finance employees, representing 18 languages, are members of this valuable service. This is an increase of 15 volunteers from the last reporting period (February 2014), primarily due to a recruitment effort for the Volunteer Language Bank during the semi-annual new employee orientation sessions. Most of the volunteers are NYCertified in Interpretation, Translation or both, or are in the process of becoming certified. Requests for the services of the Volunteer Language Bank are made through the Language Access Coordinator, who acts as the liaison between the Department of Finance and the language bank. The Commissioner honors the most productive of these volunteers at an annual breakfast.

Training and Education

Staff at all of the Department of Finance’s public-interaction areas are educated to recognize LEP customers and have the tools and resources to assure that this growing and changing segment of the population is provided excellent customer service. The Language Access Coordinator routinely instructs public-facing staff on the usage of the over-the-phone interpretation system and trains supervisors on procedures for data collection.

During the DOF orientation process, new employees are introduced to the Language Access Plan. Our commitment to language access is reinforced at these meetings. The new employees are encouraged to join the Volunteer Language Bank if they are qualified. They, and all current employees, are also advised to review the complete Language Access Plan, which is available online and on the Department's intranet.

The Department's Language Access Coordinator is part of our Outreach team, which provides regular interaction with the general public, keeping the coordinator informed of the needs of the LEP community. Along with the collection and maintenance of data on requests for translation and interpretation services, the coordinator also interacts with elected officials, and community organizations, gleaned valuable information about the changing needs of the LEP community. The coordinator's presence at Outreach events provides a forum in which personal feedback is collected on the needs of the LEP community. These events provide excellent opportunities to gauge the shifting demographics and needs of the limited-English proficient population, and to inform the public of the resources available to the LEP community. All of the members of the Outreach Unit have been trained on over-the-phone interpretation services and can provide limited English speakers with assistance as needed. The Outreach unit also provides interpreters for events as needed.

Planning

The Department of Finance uses internally and externally collected data to monitor trends in the needs of the LEP community. We tailor the services we offer to these customers by determining target areas. We continue to increase the amount of available translated forms. By regularly communicating with the units providing language access services, the Language Access Coordinator determines which documents need to be translated and where more interpretation service, training and provision is required. Site surveys also help the Department of Finance to determine where translated signs at our public interaction areas should be posted.

The public-facing units all have posters that inform the limited-English proficient community on how to provide feedback on our customer service. This, along with

the regular 311 service requests, allows this community to inform the Department of where more and better resources may be required.

The Language Access coordinator is also part of the review and assessment process to evaluate service provision from the vendors that provide translation of documents and over-the-phone interpretation. The coordinator is the contact person for these vendors and provides them with feedback from the end users, which ultimately provides for better products and more efficient service.

The Language Access Coordinator attends regular meetings scheduled by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. At these meetings, language access coordinators from all of the various City agencies share ideas, discuss service contracting options, review survey findings, discuss policy and procedures, and make recommendations for changes and improvements in the provision of language access services.

The Department of Finance continues to be fully committed to providing excellent language access services to our LEP customers. We remain dedicated to serving the growing needs of this important and vital component of the population.