



Language Access Coalition, Louisiana

Mission Statement:

The Language Access Coalition promotes full and meaningful participation in public life, without barriers based on language, for all people.

Goals, Objectives and Strategies:

- Promote public policy on language access for limited English proficient (LEP) people.
- Increase capacity of public agencies and community organizations to serve LEP people.
- Create responsive public services that are sensitive to the needs of LEP people.
- Promote an inclusionary environment for all people.

Brief History & Accomplishments:

The Language Access Coalition (LAC) of New Orleans began as an organization formed as a response to many concerns identified at the Latino Forum of New Orleans, after Hurricane Katrina in 2006. The coalition was formed to bring together community members of the New Orleans Metro area from the Hispanic and Spanish speaking, Vietnamese and Vietnamese speaking and Brazilian and Portuguese speaking people to address language access issues in public policy, public agencies, community organizations, public services for the Limited English Proficient populations. LAC has focused in the areas of health care, criminal and civil justice and education as these areas affect Limited English Proficient populations in service delivery and rights as provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Language Access Coalition was formally recognized by the New Orleans City Council in 2007 and has worked on the proposal and draft of City Act to address the three areas of concentration on the city and state level of government.

Spectrum of Language:

The Language Access Coalition has as a part of its initiatives to promote understanding and cultural sensitivity to populations of Limited English Proficiency. There are many factors that must be considered when addressing the LEP community and population. These factors include age, level of education, SES (Socio Economic Status), country of origin, length of time in the U.S., and availability of English as Second Language education.

English is also considered one of the more difficult languages to acquire due to its linguistic nature and Germanic language roots. Although, Standard English is nationally accepted, it is in itself a dialect in origin and can vary by region and accentuation adding a higher level of difficulty for language acquisition. The acquisition of the English language is highly regarded among immigrant communities as a part of their acculturation. The level of acquisition and language preference increases exponentially as it relates with length of stay and date of original migration. It is also changed generationally as the 2nd and 3rd generation of a particular group assimilates into the regional culture. The spectrum and level of acquisition will vary from person to person depended on the factors that are particular to the individual. Language acquisition regardless of the type of language can be challenging to any person and the acquisition of the English language should be considered as such in level of difficulty.

English proficiency can be arbitrary and gauged in a subjective way by the receiving end of a conversation or interaction. Because many of our community members can fall anywhere in the spectrum of language acquisition it is critical to provide for those who fall on the farther end of gradient. Language access does not propose to change the official language but to advocate on behalf of the ability to provide services and rights guaranteed by Title VI. Furthermore, it serves to include those community members that are deprived of and unable to ensure for themselves due process, access to health care and education due to their level of English proficiency. The Language Access Coalition asks that the spectrum and level of language be considered in planning and extending services. Cultural sensitivity must also be considered as part of all actions dealing with the LEP community as they go hand in hand.

Future Plans:

Currently the Language Access Coalition is focusing specifically on the proposal to state legislation and provision that address interpretation needs in the state court system. Other projects include a focus on interpretation in healthcare delivery, specifically in emergency rooms to provide for and meet the federal mandate. The Language Access Coalition will continue to advocate for LEPs during the transition of mayor and leadership in the City of New Orleans.