



Policy Type: Board

Category: Administrative Practices

Policy Name: Language Access - Board Policy 3.58

Policy Owner: County Executive

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3.58 Language Access (Adopted 3-24-15)

Santa Clara County is a linguistically diverse community, with its residents speaking more than 100 distinct languages from across the globe. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Santa Clara County has the highest percentage of foreign-born residents in the State and more than half of its residents speak a language other than English at home. Additionally, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 5.7 percent of U.S. adults are deaf or have serious difficulty hearing and 4.9 percent of U.S. adults have a vision disability with blindness or serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses.

Language access services are critical to serving Santa Clara County residents. To effectively serve its diverse community, the County of Santa Clara seeks to ensure that every resident has meaningful access to County services, programs, benefits, and information. To further this goal, the County strives to meet the language access needs of residents to help them obtain County information and reduce barriers to meaningful engagement. In general, the County's threshold languages based on 2020 Census data include English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog. Departments and agencies may have different threshold languages based on applicable Federal or State laws and/or data specific to the languages spoken by the members of the public that the department or agency serves.



The County reaffirmed its commitment to addressing language access needs by establishing the Language Access Unit in the County's Division of Equity and Social Justice. The Language Access Unit connects, provides, and promotes high-quality and culturally appropriate language services to County departments and agencies that interact with individuals with limited English proficiency and those who have language access needs related to a disability. The Language Access Unit partners with County departments and agencies to lead more systemic efforts to expand the provision of language services, as well as procure and manage County-wide language access services through authorized vendors. The Language Access Unit seeks to ensure all residents, regardless of their language background or ability, can access the critical information, benefits, and services offered by the County.

In furtherance of this goal, the County is committed to the following:

- (A) Every County department and agency shall ensure that members of the public who are limited English proficient are provided language interpretation services including sign language at no cost to ensure meaningful access to County public information, benefits, and services. Language interpretation services shall be available as provided in the County's Language Access Guidelines and Procedures to those attending County functions and meetings, visiting County facilities, and participating in public County programs and services. Interpretation services may be provided in person, over the phone, or via videoconferencing.
- (B) Every County department and agency shall at minimum translate into the County's threshold languages all client or public-facing vital documents, including any client or public-facing materials that are necessary for applying for or explaining services available to the public. Departments and agencies must identify the categories of documents that are considered vital documents as provided in the County's Language Access Guidelines and Procedures.



- (C) In consultation with the Language Access Unit, every client or public-facing County department and agency shall identify public areas in which to post notices regarding the availability of interpretation services in at least the County's threshold languages. Examples of public areas departments should consider include front lobbies and other areas of departmental facilities where members of the public regularly interact with staff, as well as websites and social media (if applicable). Notices should communicate that interpretation service(s) and other language access services are available at no cost to the public and the languages for which interpretation service(s) are available. In addition, client or public-facing facilities should work to ensure that signage and wayfinding notices incorporate universal symbols and are posted in public locations. The Language Access Unit may provide template notices upon request; departments and agencies must customize the templates to their unique needs, including to comply with any legal requirements applicable to the particular department or agency.
- (D) The County values bilingualism and the ability of bilingual employees to communicate directly with members of the public who are limited English proficient. Consistent with the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act, the Language Access Unit, in collaboration with the Employee Services Agency, shall support County departments and agencies in staffing a sufficient number of qualified bilingual persons who regularly interact with members of the public as part of their job duties. Qualified bilingual employees who regularly interact with the public may communicate directly, in their certified language, with the public about services and programs related to their roles. However, as a reminder, qualified bilingual employees may or may not be qualified to serve as interpreters or translators. Therefore, County departments and agencies are reminded to confirm that qualified bilingual employees are trained or certified in interpretation or translation before relying on the employees to offer such services.



- (E) When planning for and responding to crisis, emergency, and public safety situations, all County departments and agencies involved shall prioritize language access services and work with the Language Access Unit to the extent feasible to ensure the appropriate staff are present and available to assist individuals with limited English proficiency and other language access needs as necessary. If the crisis, emergency, or public safety situation requires the posting of warning signs, the departments and agencies shall if feasible translate those signs to, at a minimum, the threshold languages as soon as practicable.
- (F) Client or public-facing County departments and agencies will consult with the Language Access Unit and the Office of the County Counsel to determine whether a Language Access Plan should be developed, as provided in the County's Language Access Guidelines and Procedures, which will be updated to reflect the updates made to this Policy.
- (G) Client or public-facing County departments and agencies in partnership with the Language Access Unit shall make reasonable efforts to gather and retain information relating to the language access needs of the members of the public served by the County department or agency, as well as the provision of language access services by the department or agency, as provided in the County's Language Access Guidelines and Procedures.

The above requirements and guidance are in addition to, and do not supersede, any requirements under Federal or State law that may apply to the County or certain departments or agencies within the County. To the extent requirements in any applicable laws or regulations differ from the requirements set forth in this Language Access Policy, County departments or agencies should consult with the Office of the County Counsel.

While this Policy is not intended to address the supports and services required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and its implementing guidelines and regulations, or any other legal requirements related to



supports and services for individuals with disabilities, the County is committed to supporting language access for people with disabilities. Language supports for those with disabilities include services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and communicate using sign language, or who are blind or have low vision.

This section of the Board Policy Manual, in its original format, can be found at <http://www.sccgov.org/sites/bos/Legislation/BOS-Policy-Manual/Documents/BOSPolicyCHAP3.pdf>.

Related Policies

None.

Related Forms and Information

- **Language Access Unit** - <https://sccconnect.sharepoint.com/sites/lau>
- **Board Policy Amendment - Language Access** - <http://sccgov.iqm2.com/Citizens/FileOpen.pdf?Type=4&ID=238166>
- **Board Policy Resolution - Language Access** - [\[url\]/sites/policies/FormsrelatedtoPolicies/Board-Resolution-Language-Access.pdf](#)
- **Board of Supervisors Addendum to Language Access Policy** - [\[url\]/sites/policies/FormsrelatedtoPolicies/Language-Access-BOS-Addendum.pdf](#)
- **County Sign Standards** - <https://saecommon.sccgov.org/countypolicy/County-Sign-Standards.pdf>



- **Language Access Guidelines and Procedures -**
[\[url\]/sites/policies/FormsrelatedtoPolicies/Language-Access-Guidelines-and-Procedures.pdf](#)
- **Sign Standards Program - Interior -**
[\[url\]/sites/policies/FormsrelatedtoPolicies/Sign-Standards-Program-Interior.pdf](#)
- **Sign Standards Program – Exterior -**
[\[url\]/sites/policies/FormsrelatedtoPolicies/Sign-Standards-Program-Exterior.pdfv](#)

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History

Date	Changes Made
6/6/2023	Policy Amended View legislative file . (Javier (Francisco) Jimenez)
1/19/2023	Revisions made. (Javier (Francisco) Jimenez)
8/23/2018	Language Access Resource Link Added.
4/30/2015	Training Documents Uploaded. (John Myers)
4/28/2015	Policy Uploaded. (John Myers)
3/24/2015	Policy Adopted. View legislative file .