

LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

Mayor's Office of Small and Minority Business Advocacy &
Development

September 2024



For questions specific to the Mayor's Office of Small and Minority Business Advocacy & Development's Language Access Plan, contact:

Elroy Byam

elroy.byam@baltimorecity.gov

443-902-0881

For general questions related to language access in Baltimore City, contact:

Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

language.access@baltimorecity.gov

410-396-8056

Introduction

Vision Statement

The Mayor's Office of Small and Minority Business Advocacy and Development (SMBA&D) is working to ensure equitable opportunities for all small and minority businesses within our Baltimore City Market Area, regardless of English being a barrier to them in any way. Part of building that equity is providing language access services that bridges any gaps of communication between our agency and LEP individuals that reach out to us for assistance.

Definitions

Limited English Proficient (LEP): Individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.

Meaningful access: Language assistance provided to LEP individuals that is accurate, timely, and effective.

Translation: The conversion of **written** materials from one language to another.

Interpretation: The conversion of **oral** interactions from one language to another.

"Ad hoc" interpreter: A person who provides interpretation services when necessary or needed, for whom interpretation is not part of their job responsibilities.

Vital Documents: Any form, permit, record, or other document that individuals applying for services or benefits from an agency must understand, respond to or complete, to access the services/benefits or continue to receive those services or benefits.

Vital Programs or Services: Those services or programs of such importance that an individual or requestor would experience serious consequences if language barriers prevented access to these services or programs.

SMBA&D: The Mayor's Office of Small and Minority Business Advocacy & Development.

MBE: A minority business enterprise. Owned and controlled by an African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, or Native American.

WBE: A women business enterprise. Owned and controlled by a woman, which includes non-minority females as well as a woman who is a part of any of the above-mentioned minority groups.

Prime: A primary contractor on a project.

Sub: A subcontractor on a project.

Baltimore City Market Area: The areas that SMBA&D currently serves, which are currently:

- Baltimore City
- Baltimore County
- Anne Arundel County
- Carroll County
- Harford County
- Howard County
- Queen Anne’s County

LEP Demographics

Baltimore City is home to almost 57,000 individuals (10.3% of the City’s population) who speak a language other than English at home, and nearly 20,000 of those individuals speak English less than very well (3.7% of the population).¹ These individuals are *Limited English Proficient* (LEP), meaning that they do not speak English as their primary language and have limited ability to speak, write, or understand English.² Currently, the top five languages spoken by LEP individuals in Baltimore are: Spanish or Spanish Creole (8,837), Arabic (1,581), Chinese (1,356), French (1,065), and Korean (839).

Baltimore is also committed to welcoming its refugee population. Since 2015, over 2,500 refugees have come to call Baltimore home. Specifically in 2017, the International Rescue Committee (known as “IRC”, Baltimore’s local resettlement agency) resettled 587 refugees, and the languages most frequently spoken by those resettled that year were Arabic (12), Tigrinya (47), and Kiswahili (35). In 2018, the IRC resettled 338 refugees, with the languages spoken most frequently by those resettled being Kiswahili (58), Kibembe (37), and Dari (27).

Baltimore’s immigrant & refugee populations benefit from language access services in the City of Baltimore, as these services enable New Americans to better navigate and access the City of Baltimore’s programs & services.

Languages most frequently encountered by the Mayor’s Office of Small and Minority Business Advocacy & Development: Drawing upon data collected by our respective departments, which include the frequency of LEP individual encounters based on language, documents translated and language service expenditures, SMBA&D most often engages with LEP individuals speaking the following languages: Spanish. This data informs our strategic approach to effectively address the language access needs of our diverse community.

¹ [American Community Survey 2021 5-yr estimates](#)

² Definition from [LEP.gov](#)

Legal Framework

The legal precedent for Language Access originates from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. National origin has been interpreted to include language, and thereby, programs receiving federal funds cannot impede access to individuals who speak a language other than English.

Title VI was strengthened by Executive Order 13166, signed by Bill Clinton in 2000, which mandates certain language assistance in federal and federally funded programs. Thus, language access is particularly important for Baltimore City agencies that leverage receive federal funds for programming.

The Baltimore City Chief Administrative Officer's (CAO) directive, effective April 1, 2024, requires certain City Agencies that provide constituent-facing services to take steps to provide LEP persons with meaningful access to services and programs in their primary language, as well as to inform the public of the availability of language access services to assist them in obtaining and utilizing services.

Contact with LEP Individuals

The Mayor's Office of Small and Minority Business Advocacy & Development has various points of contact with the public:

1. Call-ins. SMBA&D's office receives several calls throughout the week regarding our services.
2. Webinars. SMBA&D's Small Business Resource Center holds 2-3 virtual business development webinars a week through partnerships with other organizations like the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and Truist Bank.
3. Investigations. SMBA&D's investigation officers travel to various destinations within our service area to ensure businesses remain in compliance of their contracts.

Language Access Services

- Service – there are currently no language access services available from SMBA&D.
- Protocols and Procedures – due to the low number of LEP interactions with our agency, we currently do not have protocols or procedures in place but are working to establish them for future interactions with LEP individuals. SMBA&D intends to create and provide those services for LEP individuals that reach out to our agency for support. While there are currently no plans for proactive engagement with our LEP business community, our team will plan to meet over the next 3 months to discuss ways to increase engagement.

- Services to be provided in the future – SMBA&D plans to use LanguageLine for language interpretation services via the phone no later than the start of Q4 2024.

Oral Interpretation Services

- There are currently no oral interpretation services available from SMBA&D, however, there are plans to provide services through telephonic interpretation like LanguageLine. Protocols for this will also be established no later than the start of Q4 2024.

Protocol

SMBA&D will work to provide an interpreter over the phone at no cost to LEP individuals based on this protocol:

An LEP individual approaches an agency employee at The Small Business Resource Center and is looking for help, but has difficulty communicating their needs

Procedure

- If there are bilingual speakers present, available, and speaks the LEP's primary language, the agency employee will connect them with the LEP to better identify their needs
- If there are no bilingual staff available to speak the LEP's primary language, the agency employee will contact LanguageLine for telephonic interpretation services

An LEP individual approaches an agency employee in the field (outside of the Small Business Resource Center) and is looking for help, but has difficulty communicating their needs

Procedure

- The agency employee will use the LanguageLine mobile app to best assist the LEP individual or connect them with 311

Future Plans

- SMBA&D will work to ensure that LEPs who connect with our agency employees offsite will have access to telephonic interpretation
- SMBA&D will use social media to inform LEPs about the availability of Language Access Services along with directing them to MIMA for additional information
- As LEP interactions with primes, subs, and community members increase in our agency, SMBA&D will consider prioritizing bilingual hires to meet their needs. Data collection with LEPs will be documented through our Baltimore Sourcelink software.

Translation

SMBA&D currently provides vital documents in the following languages: Spanish, Arabic, French, Chinese, and Korean. Vital Documents currently translated are:

- Post Award Statement of Intent
- Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) Flier
- SMBA&D M/WBE Certification FAQ
- Sourcelink Postcard
- Baltimore City SMBA&D Outreach Flyer
- SMBA&D Palm Card

Vital Documents to be Translated:

- Baltimore Main Streets Flyer (translated by 10/31 via MIMA)
- Small Business Resource Center Flyer (translated by 10/31 via MIMA)

Bilingual Staff Capacity

The language spoken by the staff at SMBA&D is English. We currently have two bilingual staff members (one speaks Spanish and works with our Baltimore Main Streets program, the other speaks Amharic and works in program compliance). Due to the nature of their roles, they may not always be available for ad-hoc translation services.

Future Plans

SMBA&D intends to increase in-house language capacity by:

- Including language skills as a “desirable” qualification in job postings a year from now

Public Notice of the Right to Language Access

The success of language access services is based on how well the agency communicates these services to the LEP community (i.e., public signage, notices, social media, etc). To increase public awareness of these services, SMBA&D will work to provide the following resources:

1. Agency notices and flyers that will include information about the availability of language access services.
2. Posters and signage that notifies LEP individuals of their right to services in their native language. These will be displayed at the front desk area of The Small Business Resource Center.
3. Messaging on our agency website will inform LEP individuals that free translation and interpretation services are available to them along with online translation in the City’s major languages.
4. Periodic reminders on social media of their right to Language Access Services

Staff Training

1. Training Protocol

- a. The agency's Language Access Plan will be included in the staff handbook and provided as a hard copy to all current and future staff members.
- b. An electronic copy will be made available on an agency shared drive for staff to have access and remain aware of LEP policies and procedures.
- c. All staff will be required to take the Language Access 101 and 102 trainings in Workday (also a requirement for new hires) annually.
- d. The Language Access 101 & 102 trainings (via MIMA's training on Workday) will include information on the following topics:
 - i. Legal obligation to provide language assistance
 - ii. Overview of the LEP community in Baltimore
 - iii. Summary of Language Access policies
 - iv. Identifying and responding appropriately to LEP individuals
 - v. Access interpreters (over-the-phone), and
 - vi. Using and working with interpreters
- e. The agency will circulate this language access policy to all staff within 10 days after adoption. Every two years, the agency will circulate the revised policy and protocols to all staff after the revised policy is adopted.
- f. Orientation for New Staff– New staff will be provided training on the agency's Language Access Plan at the time of the onboarding process, to ensure they are aware of language assistance protocols.
- g. The following departments, offices, teams, or other components will require language access training:
 - i. Compliance (by 1/31/25)
 - ii. PR (completed)
 - iii. Marketing and Event Planning (by 12/31/24)
 - iv. Investigations (by 12/31/24)
 - v. Front desk (by 10/31/24)
 - vi. The Small Business Resource Center (by 12/31/24)
 - vii. Minority Business Development Agency (by 12/31/24)
 - viii. Baltimore Main Streets (by 11/29/24)
 - ix. SMBA&D Director and Deputy Director (by 12/31/24)

2. Future Training Plans

- a. SMBA&D understands that as the need arises, staff can reach to MIMA for support to identify specialized trainings on cultural competency and language access topics for different divisions.

Contracts

In instances where SMBA&D uses federal funds to contract or subcontract services to a third party, and those services may impact LEP individuals, SMBA&D ensures that the relevant third party acknowledges and affirms federal language access mandates.

Monitoring Plan & Compliance

SMBA&D will begin implementation of this language access plan as of 09/30/2024. Compliance with this plan will be demonstrated through:

- Language Access Liaison attendance at bimonthly, cross-agency liaison meetings convened by MIMA (MIMA will monitor attendance.)
- Posting this plan to your Agency's website <https://smba-d.baltimorecity.gov/> and cross-posting to MIMA's website <https://mima.baltimorecity.gov/>
- Updating this plan by 09/30/2026 *and* resubmitting it to MIMA for review
- Responding to and resolving any complaints with the direction and support of MIMA
- Submission of an annual report to MIMA by October 31 of each year that will include the following information:
 - Number of LEP Encounters (By Language)
 - Type of Language Services Provided to LEP Individuals
 - Number of Documents Translated
 - Language Services Expenditures
 - Number of Bilingual Staff
 - Number of Staff Trained in Language Access
 - Data on Services Offered to LEP Individuals
 - Evidence of Outreach to LEP Communities
 - List of Contracts that included the language access clause as described in the previous "Contracts" section.

Timeline

Below is a timeline of events regarding implementation of the language access plan. The timeline will be adjusted as needed:

- **2024**
 - 9.30 – Start of implementation of the language access plan

- 10.24 – Language Access Plan printed and given to all SMBA&D team members as a hard copy (plan will also be delivered via email)
- 11.8 – Deadline for implementation of MIMA-designed notices
- 12.31 – Deadline for Workday training for primary SMBA&D team members (program compliance members notwithstanding)
- 2025
 - 1.31 – Deadline for Workday training for SMBA&D program compliance members
 - 1.31 – Deadline for team meeting regarding proactive LEP engagement ideas
 - 1.31 – Deadline for LanguageLine mobile app downloads and training for all agency employees

Complaint Procedure

You may file a Language Access complaint if you believe you have been wrongly denied the benefits or services of this program due to language barriers. To file a complaint, you can contact 311 to file a “Language Access Complaint”. When describing the nature of your complaint or concern, include the name of the agency, the employee (if known), the date of the incident, and a description of the incident.

To contact 311:

- Dial 311
- Submit a Language Access Complaint online at <https://balt311.baltimorecity.gov/citizen/s/>.

Data Collection

Agencies are required to collect the following information and submit as part of an annual report to MIMA:

- (1) Number of LEP Encounters (By Language) To collect these data, the agency includes information on language preference in all intake forms and case notes.
- (2) Type of Language Services Provided to LEP Customers – To collect these data, the agency includes information in case notes on the language services provided to LEP customers.
- (3) Number of Documents Translated – MIMA’s Language Access team will provide a summary of document translations that were facilitated by MIMA. The agency will also include documents that were translated internally or by a professional vendor, apart from projects facilitated by MIMA.
- (4) Language Services Expenditures – To collect this information, the Agency Fiscal Officer reviews information on expenditures for the following translation and interpretation vendors: Ad Astra Inc. and Language Line Solutions. MIMA’s Language Access team

additionally provides information on expenditures for these services that were paid for by the City's centralized translation and interpretation accounts.

To report on the number of bilingual staff in the agency and the number of staff trained in language access, the agency's human resources manager will provide the requested information.