



Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies

Houmma Garba - CPIO

David Alcorta – HSEM

Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies: **Background**

The City Auditor conducted two audits: one in 2016 and another in 2021, involving language access services provided by the City, which culminated in a special report and staff response.

The audits found that the City may not be meeting the needs of all non-English speaking Austinites because written policies did not align with actual practice. Additionally, the Auditor found that the City did not effectively communicate with community members before and during Winter Storm Uri in 2021, especially in language other than English.

Because of this, limited English proficiency (LEP) Austinites may not have had the same access to important information and may have been disproportionately impacted.





Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies: **Language Access**



Definitions

Translation:

The conversion of written communication from one language to another in a written form. An accurate translation is one that conveys the intent and essential meaning of the original text.

Interpretation:

The oral rendition of a spoken message from one language to another, preserving the intent and meaning of the original message.

Threshold Language:

The most common spoken languages in Austin other than English. Based on this data, and data on the percentage of people who identify as not speaking English “very well” is how HSEM determined the languages to provide translation and interpretation for.

Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies: **Limited English Proficiency**

What does Limited English Proficiency mean?

Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

A person with limited English proficiency (LEP) cannot speak, read, write or understand the English language at a level that permits him or her to interact effectively with City staff.

Individuals who communicate with American Sign Language are covered in this definition, although other Federal laws and regulations such as the Americans with Disabilities Act apply and should be considered separately.

Hello!

¡Hola!

你好!

안녕하세요!

Xin chào! नमस्ते!

မင်္ဂလာပါ!





Collaborative Partners

In 2022, CPIO, HSEM and a collaboration of the City's departmental Language Access team members established an Emergency Language Access working group.

- Communications and Public Information Office
- Homeland Security & Emergency Management
- Austin Energy
- Austin Water
- Austin Public Health
- And review by numerous community organizations.

The Working Group planning activities included:

- Gathering LEP relevant data about existing City services and the communities the City serves.
- A review of current emergency language access processes and post-emergency documentation at the City of Austin.
- A review of emergency language access plans from various cities around the country with existing plans.
- Consultations with emergency communications subject matter experts from various cities.
- A review of contracted language access services and existing emergency language access services processes, including ASL, translations and interpretation services.
- Developing the City of Austin Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies.





Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies: **Purpose and Function**

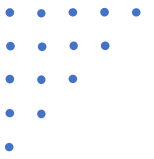
Purpose

- The purpose of this plan is to establish a citywide language access protocol to promote meaningful access to programs, activities, services, and information (PASIs) during preparation, emergency response, and recovery phases in an activation, specifically for individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) and people who have accessible communications needs (ACN) such as individuals who are Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard-of-Hearing (HoH).

Function

- This plan establishes **roles, responsibilities, and guidelines** to ensure the dissemination of accurate and timely information to LEP and Deaf/DeafBlind/HoH individuals.





Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies: **Importance Assessment**

Importance Assessment Table

Critical - Information of crucial importance to public safety.

Vital - Important information that may have a direct impact on public safety.

Moderate - Information that should be made widely available to the public.

Optional – Useful public information that doesn’t directly impact public safety.

HSEM Standard:

All Ready Central Texas trainings & preparedness events include Spanish & ASL Interpreters.

Programs, Activities, Service & Info	Priority Level	Languages Provided
Alerts	Critical	All threshold languages
Annual Emergency Plan Public Meeting & Preparedness Events	Moderate	English, Spanish, ASL, others as requested via 311
Basic Emergency Operations Plan	Optional	English
Community Mtgs. & Presentations	Optional	English and others as requested via 311
Social Media	Vital	English, Spanish
Warn Central Texas	Critical	English, Spanish



Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies: Translation

Translation Services During an Emergency

- According to the City's language access policy (AB 22-02), emergency response messages and services are considered critical and vital information, and qualified vendors must translate these messages and documents into the City's threshold languages.
- The City acknowledges that due to the nature of translation services, a time gap may exist following the release of emergency messages in English; as such, the City will make reasonable effort and use various strategies to ensure translated messages are disseminated as soon as possible.
- Homeland Security & Emergency Management (HSEM) maintains a bank of pre-written, translated emergency messages for the most common emergencies experienced in Austin. Those pre-written, translated emergency messages will be issued simultaneously with messages in English to maximize the timely release of both English and translated messages.



Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies: Interpretation

Interpretation Services During an Emergency

- The City of Austin will take reasonable steps to ensure that interpretation services are provided at public meetings, public promotions, public announcements, press conferences (both in-person and virtual), hotline, service centers and other in-person and virtual engagements with the public that involve emergency officials, and the provision of services.
- Considering that Accessible Communications Needs (ACN) populations and users of American Sign Language (ASL) are among the most at risk when emergencies strike, CPIO will work to provide ASL simultaneous interpretation for all press conferences related to the crisis.
- Departments likely to be on the front lines of emergency response (health, water, energy, EMS, etc.) will have written procedures regarding how to hire or set-up the services listed below in the context of an emergency response:
 - In-person and Virtual Interpretation
 - Over-the-Phone Interpretation (OPI)
 - Simultaneous Interpretation at Public Meetings



Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies: AHAS

Accessible Hazard Alert System (AHAS)

- The City of Austin has partnered with Deaf Link to provide emergency alerts in ASL via the Accessible Hazard Alert System (AHAS). The system is linked directly from our alerts webpage and includes all alerts in videos featuring someone signing the message in ASL.
- AHAS also posts the transcription of the video for individuals who utilize screen readers.
- We are currently working on producing additional emergency preparedness videos to be posted permanently on AHAS to better serve Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard-of-Hearing Austinites.
- Deaf Link uses Austin/Travis County AHAS as a model for other municipalities around Texas.



AUSTIN / TRAVIS COUNTY Accessible Hazard Alert System



City of Austin and Travis County

On behalf of Austin and Travis County and the Office of Emergency Management, I would like to share some valuable information with you about Accessible Alerts.

Austin and Travis County are partnering with Deaf Link to provide the Accessible Hazard Alert System (AHAS) which will send accessible alert messages to registered residents who are Deaf, Blind, Hard of Hearing, or Deaf/Blind before, during, and after an emergency or disaster in Austin and Travis County.



Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies: **How to sign up for AHAS**

Accessible Hazard Alert System (AHAS)

- **Option 1:** For quick SMS Registration text **AHAS** to **(737) 241-3710**.
- **Option 2:** Visit <https://atc.ahasalerts.com/>





Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies: **How it Improves Quality of Life**

Better Emergency Preparedness

- This plan allows the City to promote emergency preparedness to even more Austinites so they can better prepare their homes and communities for a wide array of potential emergencies.

Improved City Staff Readiness

- This plan improves City staff's readiness to provide language access services by creating a common standard for emergency language access services.

Life Safety

- Emergencies require fast and reliable communications to keep our community as safe as possible. This plan ensures that LEP Austinites will receive the same vital life-safety information that English-speaking members of our community receive.





Language Access Plan for Citywide Emergencies: **Implementation**

Monthly Preparedness Pop-ups & Annual Fair

- HSEM's monthly Preparedness Pop-Ups and our annual Preparedness Fair have on-site Spanish and ASL interpreters. Video Remote Interpretation (VRI) also available in all other languages via HSEM iPads.

Neighborhood Preparedness Guide

- HSEM's primary printed resource for emergency preparedness information is now available in English, Spanish, Simplified Chinese, and Vietnamese with Arabic and Korean coming soon.

Ready Together Preparedness Trainings


- Ready Together Preparedness Trainings are HSEM's most in-depth training provided to the public. Simultaneous interpretation is offered in Spanish and ASL. Any additional language requested by attendees ahead of time is also available.

Four Steps to Preparedness Trainings

- HSEM's more succinct presentation on the four step to preparedness is offered with simultaneous interpretation in Spanish and Pashto.

Alerts Webpage

- Vital information on active citywide emergencies is found on the webpage. The alerts webpage is currently offered in ASL and all threshold languages (14 total).

 **Building a Kit: Suggested Items**

Communication and Information: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Map(s) of the areaFamily and emergency contact info (phone and email)Battery-powered or hand-crank radio (NOAA Weather Radio, if possible)Cell phone and charger(s)	Medical Supplies: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Basic first aid kit7-day supply of medications/medical items
Personal Essentials: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Extra cash (in small bills)Spare change of clothesSpare car/home keyCopies of personal documents in a water-tight bag	Pet Essentials: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Pet supplies (collar, leash, tags, food, bowl)
Food and Water: <ul style="list-style-type: none">1 gallon of water per person, per day (7-day supply)7-day supply of non-perishable foodCan opener	Tools and Equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Flashlight and extra batteriesWrench or plierOther tools or equipment you may need
	Hygiene and Comfort: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Sanitation and personal hygiene itemsBlanketsGames for kidsComfort snacks

HSEM Ready Together Training with ASL & Spanish interpretation. (April 2025)



Thank You!

David.Alcorta2@austintexas.gov
Houmma.Garba@austintexas.gov