

CITY OF THIBODAUX

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

I. Introduction

The City of Thibodaux's (COT) Department of Housing and Community Development is committed to improving the accessibility of its programs and services to eligible non-English speakers and limited English proficient (LEP) persons. COT prepared this Language Access Plan (LAP) to reduce barriers and ensure access to services, programs and activities.

This is the first LAP prepared by COT. The plan is posted on the City's website. The plan will be reviewed and updated as necessary. COT is committed to ensuring continued responsiveness to community needs and federal laws.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this LAP is to ensure meaningful access to agency services, programs and activities by persons who have limited English proficiency.

COT is committed to this Language Access Plan as an appropriate response to meeting the needs of LEP individuals and families who participate in services, programs or activities of COT.

A LEP person is someone who is not able to speak, read, write or understand the English language at a level that allows him/her to interact effectively with COT Department. Any person who self-identifies as an LEP person will be given the benefit of the language protocols described in this LAP.

COT notes that this Language Access Plan is intended as guidance and does not create individual rights or entitlements or establish COT duties or process beyond what is required under applicable law.

III. Department of Housing and Community Development

COT's mission is to provide safe, decent and sanitary housing conditions for very low-income families and to manage resources efficiently. The department promotes personal, economic and social upward mobility to provide families with the opportunity to make a transition from subsidized to non-subsidized housing. Through a variety of programs, COT provides leadership, professional assistance and financial resources to promote housing opportunities, economic vitality of communities, and sound municipal management.

COT provides operates two federally funded programs:

- Housing
 - Housing Choice Voucher (HCV)
 - VASH
 - Mainstream Voucher Program
- Community Development Block Grant
 - Entitlement Grant
 - Special Funding Grants (LCDBG-HVAC)

The COT has evaluated its language services to meet program and client needs.

IV. Language Access Plan

Approach: This Language Access Plan represents COT's administrative blueprint to providing meaningful access to services, programs and activities to LEP individuals. It outlines the implemented tasks to meet this objective, subject to the availability of resources.

COT will evaluate the circumstances and language access needs, including the **four factors** mentioned below, to determine the tasks COT will undertake to provide meaningful access to COT services, programs and activities to LEP individuals. .

(1) Language Access Coordination:

COT will coordinate language access planning and responses to language access needs through a language access committee that includes the employees of the Department of Housing and Community Development.

(2) Language Access Needs Assessment:

Factors taken into consideration by Administrative Bulletin # 16 and federal guidance provide that LAPs should be premised on the following factors:

- 1. The number and proportion of non-English speakers and LEP persons served by the agency in its services, programs and activities;*
- 2. The frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the service, program or activity;*
- 3. The nature and importance of the service, program or activity provided by the agency;*
- 4. The fiscal resources available to the agency and/or costs incurred by the agency.*

Many of the programs offered by COT are aimed at low-income households. Income guidelines are defined by HUD Income Limits. COT will utilize existing data on applicants and participants with LEP. If adequate data doesn't exist, COT will use information collected from the most recent federal decennial census and the American Community Survey (ACS).

Language Makeup of Program Participants and Applicants

The population served by the COT is primarily made of low-income participants of programs including low-income renters in privately owned housing receiving federal rental assistance. Special populations served include persons with disabilities, elderly and veterans. The language makeup of program participants and applicants is primarily English speaking households.

Points of Contact with Program Participants

COT Department of Housing and Community Development is located at 112 St. Mary Street, Thibodaux, LA 70301, and its main telephone number is 985-446-7217. The general COT website is available at <http://www.ci.thibodaux.la.us>.

(3) Language Resources Assessment:

Existing Staff. Department of Housing and Community Development is a small department with limited staff and limited funding. All staff are only English speaking and the department relies on contractual services for LEP clients.

The municipality as a whole is surveyed from time to time to determine what languages are spoken and whether staff members will volunteer to provide translation. Based on the most recent survey, COT is unable to provide internal interpretation for languages other than English. COT will update the survey of existing staff periodically for changes

Community resources – COT contracts with community providers when interpretation needs are identified.

Financial Resources – Administrative funding is allocated each budgetary year for the use of interpretive services.

(4) Language Service Protocols:

For the COT Department of Housing and Community Development main office:

- The staff are trained on how to provide language services to persons with LEP who appear at the office needing language assistance.
- The staff are provided with resources online and print (such as “I speak” interpretation cards)

Residents are provided with instructions via the website on contacting the office if LEP services are needed.

(5) Vital Document Translation

The COT computer software system used to process HUD required documentation has the capability to print in languages other than English. Basic free online services can also be accessed for any additional documents.

(6) Stakeholder Consultations

COT has working relationships with many stakeholder groups, including advocates, legislators, developers, municipal officials, housing and redevelopment authority boards, tenants organizations, professional associations, and groups that are particularly focused on or represent persons with LEP. On an on-going basis, COT will take comments from any stakeholder groups or from the general public regarding this Language Access Plan, and will continue to update the plan as appropriate.

(7) Staff Training

The COT is committed to training and educating all staff on regulations, policies and practices. Staff is routinely educated on revisions to policy, revised initiatives, and best practices regarding the provision of language assistance services.

(8) Notice to Public

The COT Language Access Plan is posted on its website to notify the public that language assistance services are available, as needed, to meaningfully access COT services, programs and activities. During COVID, HUD established that website publication is adequate versus newspaper publications.

(9) Agency Monitoring

On an on-going basis, COT will monitor the effectiveness of its LAP and evaluate areas for improvement of its policies, procedures, protocols and training.

(10) Complaints

Complaints about this Language Access Plan or services provided to clients in accordance with this LAP may be filed with COT's Director of Housing and Community Development.