

Federal Election Commission

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Access Plan

Summary

Executive Order (EO)13166, and subsequent guidance from the Department of Justice (DOJ), requires all agencies that provide federal financial assistance to issue guidance on how Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 applies to recipients of that assistance in their contact with persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). If an agency does not grant any federal financial assistance, it is not required to issue a recipient guidance document. It must, however, still design and implement a plan to ensure that the agency takes reasonable steps to comply with the intent of Title VI by providing meaningful access to all of its federally conducted programs and activities for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) was created in 1975 as an independent regulatory agency to strengthen the integrity of the federal campaign finance process under the *Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971*, as amended (“FECA” or “the Act”). The Commission is also responsible for administering the public funding program for Presidential campaigns and nominating conventions under the *Presidential Election Campaign Fund Act* and the *Presidential Primary Matching Payment Account Act*.

The FEC has jurisdiction over the financing of campaigns for the U.S. House, the U.S. Senate, the Presidency and the Vice Presidency. Since most individuals who run for Federal office, and the political committees that support them, are English-proficient, the LEP population seeking FEC services is very small. In fact, the FEC has handled very few matters involving LEP individuals. On those rare occasions, bilingual staff have interpreted or translated the pertinent information.

Please note that the FEC does not grant federal financial assistance within the meaning of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. We are, however, taking steps to ensure that our programs are accessible to members of the LEP community and will continue to improve access to services accordingly.

Introduction

Since the issuance of EO 13166, “Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency,” (dated August 11, 2000 - 65 Fed. Reg. 50121, Aug. 16, 2000), federal agencies have been required to assess and address the needs of those (otherwise eligible) individuals, who, due to limited English proficiency, cannot fully and equally participate in federally conducted programs and activities. Guidance from the EO, supplemented by DOJ over the years, has advised each federal agency to “take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to the information and services they provide.” One of the first measures provided by the DOJ guidance instructed agencies to consider four factors in developing LEP guidance for their own recipients:

- the number of LEP persons in the eligible service population or likely to be encountered in recipient activities and programs;
- the frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with the program;

- the importance of the service or information provided by the program; and
- the resources available to the recipient of the federal funds.

Analysis of Factors at the FEC

Factor 1: Number or Proportion of LEP Individuals in the Eligible Population [1]

The strategic objectives of the FEC are: 1) to inform the public about how federal campaigns and committees are financed; 2) to promote voluntary compliance through educational outreach and to enforce campaign finance laws effectively and fairly; 3) to interpret the FECA and related statutes, providing timely guidance to the public regarding the requirements of the law; and 4) to foster a culture of high performance in order to ensure that the agency accomplishes its mission efficiently and effectively.

The majority of the population regulated by the Commission is composed of individuals running for federal office and the various political committees that support them. Since FY 2021, over 14,000 active filers have maintained contact with the FEC via phone calls, emails, its website and/or other means. Historically, members of this group (the regulated community) have been proficient in speaking English, so that LEP services are not typically required. This has also been the case for most members of the general public who have contacted the Commission, with any exceptions being addressed through our volunteer “language bank” as described later.

Factor 2: Frequency of Contact with the Program [2]

Day-to-day contacts with the FEC are made to its office headquarters in Washington, DC. The FEC has no field offices. These contacts are made through telephone calls (via an FEC toll free line as well as direct lines to specific offices), traditional mail, e-mail, in-person meetings and interaction with the agency’s website. During FY 2018, the agency’s website was redesigned to address external feedback regarding its ease of use, overall efficiency and to adopt public user preferences. It is estimated that few (< 10) LEP contacts occur at the agency on an annual basis. However, as each contact is important, the FEC continues to look for ways to leverage available technologies to create and disseminate dynamic, up-to-date educational materials through its website, as well as maintain its longstanding commitment to use plain language in its publications and other documents.

Factor 3: Nature and Importance of the Program [3]

The FEC discloses the flow of money in political campaigns for federal office, enforces limitations on the amounts and sources of that money, and administers the public financing of Presidential campaigns. The agency provides important services to the public through these programs, which also serve to dispel the appearance of corruption in our political process and thus aids in holding some measure of confidence in the Government. While our programs serve a necessary and meaningful public purpose, they do not rise to the level of matters having life or death implications (e.g., the provision of services to children, medical care, food, housing).

Factor 4: Resources Available [4]

Recognizing the occasional need to handle contacts in languages other than English, the FEC maintains a list of staff volunteers with fluency in languages other than English. Through the efforts of these volunteers, we are able to assist callers, visitors and/or external correspondents who are more comfortable speaking with staff in languages other than English. Volunteers fluent in the languages of our LEP customers are asked to deal with them directly when responding to inquiries. Subject matter experts are called upon as necessary in order to assist volunteers in providing technical information to satisfy an inquiry. Since the assistance needed occurs on such an infrequent basis, the FEC's use of using bilingual staff volunteers is currently a more efficient and effective use of resources than contracting services for each LEP contact.

In past years, the FEC had made a few of the publications on its website available in Spanish; these included:

- “The FEC and the Federal Election Campaign Finance Law”
- “Contributions” and
- “Volunteer Activities”

However, a more robust approach is now under consideration to ensure that members of the LEP and other underserved communities gain efficient access to agency resources. Accordingly, the FEC has begun exploring ways to support web pages that are fully translated into languages other than English, through the collaborative efforts of its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) Council and Information Technology web team/staff, with input regarding external contacts provided by the LEP Coordinator and/or LEP Work Group (described below).

Plan for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency who contact the FEC

Since the filing of our initial plan (2002), the FEC has maintained an in-house “language bank” of volunteers, to ensure efficient, on-demand service for LEP individuals who have contact with the Commission onsite or via phone. Current language capabilities of this resource include Chinese, Czech, Dutch, French, French Creole, German, Italian, Russian, Slovak and Spanish. More specifically, experienced staff that are fluent in these languages agree (self-rating on the ILR scale) to serve as impromptu interpreters on an “as needed basis” for those infrequent occasions when an LEP individual contacts the FEC. In such cases, the appropriate subject matter expert coordinates with the volunteer interpreter to address the LEP individual's particular concern or request. To date, the only languages other than English that have been utilized to accomplish this goal are Russian and Spanish. To facilitate this process going forward, FEC staff are resurveyed for volunteers periodically in order to build the membership of the language bank.

The FEC is committed to the integrity and openness of the federal election campaign finance process; a fair and inclusive system, accessible to the entire elections community, the academia, the public, and the media; and staff training and development so that we can provide our client groups with the highest possible level of service. To that end, FEC managers will be reminded

of those staff available to interpret or translate various languages and will facilitate assistance for LEP contacts as appropriate. Further, the FEC will obtain interpreter and translation services, as needed, through the General Services Administration or other contracted sources, as applicable.

Additionally, the FEC has established an LEP Work Group, for the purpose of monitoring contacts with the LEP community, suggesting appropriate changes to the LEP plan or its implementation and reporting any other related issues or concerns regarding the effectiveness of the LEP program. The LEP Work Group consists of the LEP Coordinator (Director of the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity) and six (6) other agency officials from public-facing offices with the greatest potential to interact with LEP contacts on a regular basis. The LEP Coordinator reports to the FEC's Staff Director, who serves as the administrative head of the agency. The other LEP Work Group members hold the following positions within the agency:

Office of Communications - responsible for the Commission's public outreach, public education, public disclosure, media relations, Congressional and legislative affairs functions.

- Office of Congressional, Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs - Deputy Director (1)
- Information Division - Assistant Staff Director, Deputy Assistant Staff Director for Outreach (2)
- Public Disclosure & Media Relations Division - Assistant Staff Director, Deputy Assistant Staff Director (2)

Office of Compliance - provides leadership to the Commission's disclosure and compliance programs. The Office is responsible for monitoring and overseeing the operations of the Audit Division, Reports Analysis Division, Office of Administrative Review, and Alternate Dispute Resolution Office.

- Reports Analysis Division - Assistant Staff Director (1)

The FEC's LEP Work Group members will note the number of external LEP contacts on a monthly basis in their respective areas and report the results to the Coordinator on a quarterly basis. Specifically, the group will make qualitative determinations regarding the types and frequency of contacts, the language(s) most often used and how the contacts were handled. This information will be used to further determine whether any additional program efforts are needed.

While the season of service at the FEC is continuous, it typically reaches its peak near the end of the election cycle (in the fall of even-numbered years). Therefore, any major revisions of the LEP plan will be evaluated on a biennial basis after that time - - *beginning* in mid-November of the election year. Minor revisions will be incorporated in this document on an ongoing basis (see revision date above); however, any major updates to this plan will be submitted to the Federal Coordination and Compliance Section as they are made.

[1] According to the Policy Guidance Document issued by the U.S. Department of Justice entitled “Enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964-National Origin Discrimination Against Persons With Limited English Proficiency, issued August 16, 2000, “[T]hose who serve very few LEP persons on an infrequent basis should utilize this balancing analysis to determine whether reasonable steps are possible and, if so, have a plan of what to do if a LEP individual seeks service under the program in question. This plan need not be intricate; it may be as simple as being prepared to use one of the commercially available language lines to obtain immediate interpreter services.”

[2] According to the DOJ Policy Guidance, “... if LEP individuals must access the [agency’s] program or activity on a daily basis ... [an agency] has greater duties than if such contact is unpredictable or infrequent. [Agencies] ... should have the flexibility to tailor their services to those needs.”

[3] “More affirmative steps must be taken in programs where the denial or delay of access may have life or death implications than in programs that are not as crucial to one’s day-to-day existence. ... A decision by a Federal, state, or local entity to make an activity compulsory ... serves as strong evidence of the program’s importance.” *Ibid.*

[4] “[A] small [agency] with limited resources may not have to take the same steps as a larger [agency] to provide LEP assistance in programs that have a limited number of eligible LEP individuals, where contact is infrequent, where the total cost of providing language services is relatively high, and/or where the program is not crucial to an individual’s day-to-day existence.” *Ibid.*

Limited English Proficiency - Overview

Affirming

The Federal Government and those receiving assistance from the Federal Government must take reasonable steps to ensure that LEP persons have meaningful access to the programs, services, and information those entities provide. This will require agencies to develop creative solutions to address the needs of this ever-growing population of individuals whose primary language is not English.

Limited English Proficiency - LEP

Who is a Limited English Proficient Person?

Persons who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write or understand English can be limited English proficient, or "LEP." These individuals may be entitled to language assistance with respect to a particular type of service, benefit, or encounter.

Who Must Comply and Who Can be Found in Violation?

All programs and operations of entities that receive assistance from the Federal Government (i.e. recipients), including:

- ✓ State agencies;
- ✓ Local agencies;
- ✓ Private and nonprofit entities; and
- ✓ Sub-recipients (entities that receive federal funding from one of the recipients listed above) also must comply.

All programs and operations of the Federal Government also must comply.

Legal Authority

Recipients

Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act

“No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” 42 U.S.C. § 2000d.

The United States Supreme Court in *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974) stated that one type of national origin discrimination is discrimination based on a person’s inability to speak, read, write, or understand English.

Recipients and Federal Government

Executive Order 13166

On August 2000, this Order "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency" was issued and directed federal agencies to:

- ✓ Publish guidance on how their recipients can provide access to LEP persons
- ✓ Improve the language accessibility of their own programs
- ✓ Break down language barriers by implementing consistent standards of language assistance across federal agencies and amongst all recipients of federal financial assistance.

The Order covers all federal and federally assisted programs and activities.

Obligations

Four-Factor-Analysis

Recipients of federal financial assistance have an obligation to reduce language barriers that can preclude meaningful access by LEP persons to important government services. (The Federal Government has the same obligations as a result of Executive Order 13166.) The starting point is an individualized assessment that balances the following four factors:

1. The number or proportion of LEP individuals eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or grantee/recipient;
2. The frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the program;
3. The nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program to people's lives; and
4. The resources available to the grantee/recipient and costs.

Elements of an Effective LEP Policy

Elements which may be helpful in designing an LEP policy or plan:

- Identifying LEP individuals who need language assistance
- Identifying ways in which language assistance will be provided
- Training staff
- Providing notice to LEP individuals
- Monitoring and updating LEP policy

Language Assistance Services

- Oral interpretation services
- Bilingual staff
- Telephone interpreter lines
- Written language services
- Community volunteers

For more information and detailed agency-specific guidance, go to <http://www.LEP.gov/>

Interagency Working Group on LEP and www.LEP.gov

Mission:

To build awareness of the need and methods to ensure that limited English proficient (LEP) persons have meaningful access to important federal and federally assisted programs, and to

ensure implementation of language access, requirements under Title VI, the Title VI regulations, and Executive Order 13166 in a consistent and effective manner across agencies.

Focus:

- Creation and expansion of a one-stop website on LEP issues
- Creation of tools to assist recipients and beneficiaries in understanding and applying recipient guidance documents

Collaboration amongst agencies in making federally conducted activities meaningfully accessible to LEP individuals

For more information:

U.S. Department of Justice (<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor>)
Civil Rights Division
Federal Coordination and Compliance Section - NWB
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20530

Title VI Hotline: 1-888-TITLE-06 (1-888-848-5306) (Voice / TDD)