



**ENSURING LANGUAGE ACCESS AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION DURING RESPONSE AND RECOVERY:
A CHECKLIST FOR EMERGENCY RESPONDERS**

As an emergency responder, it is critical for you to be prepared to effectively reach all members of the community during emergency response and recovery efforts. Survivors may include individuals with access and functional needs, such as persons with limited English proficiency (LEP) and persons with disabilities. Access to federally funded emergency response and recovery services must be provided to persons with LEP and persons with disabilities in accordance with federal civil rights laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.¹ These services may include providing language access services² to provide meaningful access and auxiliary aids and services to ensure effective communication.

Who is a person with limited English proficiency (LEP)? A person who does not speak English as their primary language and who has a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English well.	Who is a person with a disability? A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Note that persons with cognitive, vision, hearing, and speech impairments may have specific communication needs.
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The following **recommendations**, **action steps**, and **effective practices for working with interpreters** can assist emergency responders in addressing the needs of persons with LEP and persons with disabilities regarding language access and effective communication:³

RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTION STEPS	✓
Supporting LEP Individuals and Persons with Disabilities		
Identify specific languages/dialects spoken by each major LEP and deaf/hard-of-hearing group in your area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access state and local demographic data, available through the U.S. Census Bureau, or interactive maps through the Department of Education. • Identify public gathering spaces that serve persons with LEP, such as schools or local libraries that offer internet access or language access resources. • Identify the type of Sign Language spoken in your area (i.e., American Sign Language, Spanish Sign Language, etc.). 	
Identify persons with disabilities who may need communication support, such as persons with vision, hearing, speech, or cognitive impairments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to Centers for Independent Living (CILs), your state Developmental Disabilities Council, your state’s Protection and Advocacy Agency, as well as organizations serving deaf/hard of hearing or blind/low vision populations. 	
Identify local partners that connect with and serve persons with LEP and persons with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to hospitals and other health care facilities, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, legal services. • Connect with Refugee Resettlement and English as a Second Language programs. 	
Coordinate with media in TV, print, radio, and online platforms to share emergency information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare emergency messaging that is in plain language, short, culturally appropriate, in languages prevalent in the area, and in multiple formats, such as audio, large print, and captioning. See HHS’ tips on using plain language. 	

¹ Other relevant federal laws, Executive Orders, and guidance that address the needs of persons with disabilities and/or persons with LEP include the Public Health Service Act, the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, Executive Orders 13166 and 13347, the National Response Framework, and the National Disaster Recovery Framework.

² There are two ways to provide language services: oral interpretation and written translation.

³ This guidance document is not a final agency action, does not legally bind persons or entities outside the Federal government, and may be rescinded or modified in the Department’s discretion. Noncompliance with any voluntary standards (e.g., recommended practices) contained in this document will not, in itself, result in any enforcement action.



RECOMMENDATIONS	ACTION STEPS	✓
Supporting LEP Individuals and Persons with Disabilities		
Provide appropriate and effective language assistance services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure ready access to qualified interpreters for persons with LEP and people who are deaf or hard of hearing. • Translate printed materials into braille and commonly spoken languages by LEP populations in your area. • Provide auxiliary aids and services to ensure effective communication.⁴ • Identify bilingual responders and volunteers with verified language skills who are competent in assisting persons with LEP and persons with disabilities during a disaster. 	

Effective Practices for Working with Interpreters	✓
Before the Interpretation	
Identify the target language and, if possible, the appropriate dialect.	
Whenever possible, use a qualified interpreter who can interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially. <u>Note:</u> Use of a family member, friend, or minor is strongly discouraged due to potential issues regarding competency, confidentiality, or conflict of interest.	
Document the interpreter’s name and contact information.	
Describe to the interpreter the purpose of your conversation and information you are planning to convey.	
Share notes, outlines, handouts, and other relevant materials with the interpreter to provide context.	
Allocate at least double the time of a regular interview.	
During the Interpretation	
Look at and speak directly in the first person to the LEP individual or person with a disability, not the interpreter. For example, “Hello, my name is Jane,” not “Tell him my name is Jane.”	
Speak in short sentences, pausing after each phrase, and at a slower rate than your normal pace.	
Where possible, avoid the use of idioms, acronyms, and double-negatives. For example, “The predicted floods will cause damage,” not “the predicted floods will be a recipe for disaster.”	
Use plain language. Be prepared to clarify information (i.e., technical terms) by describing it in a different or more detailed manner. For example, the term “response” has multiple meanings. In the context of a disaster, you may clarify the term “response” to mean, “actions taken before, during, or immediately after a disaster to ensure public safety and meet the needs of the affected community.”	
Monitor the quality of the interpretation and proficiency of the interpreter. Red flags include extreme hesitation, repeated clarifications, excessive usage of English terms, and overly long or overly short interpretations compared to the statements being interpreted.	

For more resources and information:

- [HHS ASPR ABC General Resource Library](#)
- [HHS CDC Defining, Locating, and Reaching At-Risk Populations in Emergency](#)
- [DOJ FCS Tips and Tools to Reach LEP Community](#)
- [Show Me: A Communication Tool for Emergency Shelters](#)
- [HHS OCR Emergency Preparedness Resources](#)
- [HHS OMH Cultural Competency Curriculum for Disaster Preparedness and Crisis Response](#)
- [DHS Tips for Effectively Communicating with the Whole Community in Disasters](#)
- [LEP.Gov Resources](#)
- [HHS OCR Laws and Regulations](#)
- [HHS OMH Guidance for Integrating Culturally Diverse Communities into Emergencies](#)
- [Census Bureau - Detailed Languages Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English](#)
- [ASPR TRACIE Access and Functional Needs Topic Collection](#)

⁴ Examples of auxiliary aids may include braille or large print versions of materials; USB flash drives; qualified interpreters or readers; telecommunications devices for deaf persons (TDDs); captioning of video; use of amplified telephones; phones that display text; amplified listening devices for people with hearing loss; magnifiers for people with vision loss; written materials; and other methods of making information accessible.