

Providing Meaningful Communication with Persons with Limited English Proficiency

Language Access Plan of the County of Buncombe

The purpose of this Plan is to ensure compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and other applicable federal and state laws and their implementing regulations with respect to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on the ground of race, color or national origin by any entity receiving federal financial assistance. Administrative methods or procedures, which have the effect of subjecting individuals to discrimination or defeating the objectives of these regulations, are prohibited.

In order to avoid discrimination on the grounds of national origin, all programs or activities administered by the County of Buncombe will take reasonable steps to ensure that persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) have meaningful access and an equal opportunity to participate in benefits and services for which such persons qualify. This plan defines the responsibilities the County has to ensure LEP individuals can communicate effectively.

DEFINITIONS:

Limited English Proficient (LEP) individual – Any prospective, potential, or actual recipient of benefits or services from the agency who cannot speak, read, write or understand the English language at a level that permits them to interact effectively with health care providers and social service agencies.

Vital Documents – These forms include, but are not limited to, applications, consent forms, all compliance plans, bid documents, fair housing information, citizen participation plans, letters containing important information regarding participation in a program; notices pertaining to the reduction, denial, or termination of services or benefits, the right to appeal such actions, or that require a response from beneficiary notices advising LEP persons of the availability of free language assistance, and other outreach materials.

Title VI Compliance Officer: The person or persons responsible for administering compliance with the Title VI LEP policies.

Substantial number of LEP: 5% or 1,000 people, whichever is smaller, are potential applicants or recipients of the County and speak a primary language other than English and have limited English proficiency.

PROCEDURES:

1. IDENTIFYING LEP PERSONS AND THEIR LANGUAGE

The County of Buncombe will promptly identify the language and communication needs of the LEP person at the first point of entry. Staff will use a language identification card (or “I speak cards,” provided by the Rural Economic Development Division (REDD) or other grantors or service providers and LEP posters to determine the language. In addition, when records are kept of past interactions with individuals or family members, the language used to communicate with the LEP person will be included as part of the record when possible.

2. OBTAINING A QUALIFIED INTERPRETER

List the current name, office telephone number, office address and email address of the Title VI compliance officers:

Tammy A. Stewart
Compliance Officer
Legal & Risk
828-250-5603
200 College Street -1st floor
Asheville, NC 28801
tammy.stewart@buncombecounty.org

Check all methods that will be used:

- Maintaining an accurate and current list showing the language, phone number and hours of availability of bilingual staff (*provide the list*):
- Contacting the appropriate bilingual staff member to interpret, in the event that an interpreter is needed, if an employee who speaks the needed language is available and is qualified to interpret;
- Obtaining an outside interpreter if a bilingual staff or staff interpreter is not available or does not speak the needed language.

(Identify the agency(s) name(s) with whom you have contracted or made arrangements)

Countywide contracts are in place with Telelanguage and LanguageLine—both are services that provide qualified interpreter services via a variety of methods as well as translation services:

LanguageLine-Available 24/7 -1-866-374-3972
Telelanguage-Available 24/7 – 1-800-514-9237

Other (*describe*):

Each department will contract with (or employ) individual foreign language interpreters when deemed necessary to serve the identified LEP population that frequent their program(s). For example, Buncombe County Health and Human services which serves the public's economic, social services, and public health needs, among other activities, employs 2 full time Spanish interpreters, 1 full time Russian interpreter and several bilingual staff who are positioned in critical areas- including Call Center and Front Desk, Economic Services, Clinic and Social Work. The department also contracts with individual qualified Spanish interpreters, a Chinese interpreter, ASL interpreters and other companies that provide onsite and telephonic services as well as translation services.

All staff will be made aware of the Language Access Plan and the availability of resources. User guides around accessing services and effective communication techniques as well as tips on working with an interpreter are available to all staff on the County intranet.

Some LEP persons may prefer or request to use a family member or friend as an interpreter. However, family members or friends of the LEP person will not be used as interpreters unless specifically requested

by that individual and **after** the LEP person has understood that an offer of an interpreter at no charge to the person has been made by the facility. Such an offer and the response will be documented in the person's file. If the LEP person chooses to use a family member or friend as an interpreter, issues of competency of interpretation, confidentiality, privacy, and conflict of interest should be considered. If the family member or friend is not competent or appropriate for any of these reasons, competent interpreter services will be provided to the LEP person. In addition, some County programs may have requirements or policies that would not permit the use of family members as interpreters, and these circumstances must also be considered when serving the LEP population.

Children and other residents will **not** be used to interpret, in order to ensure confidentiality of information and accurate communication.

3. PROVIDING WRITTEN TRANSLATIONS

- i. The County of Buncombe will set benchmarks for translation of vital documents into additional languages.
- ii. When translation of vital documents is needed, the County of Buncombe will submit documents for translation into frequently-encountered languages.
- iii. Facilities will provide translation of other written materials, if needed, as well as written notice of the availability of translation, free of charge, for LEP individuals.

4. PROVIDING NOTICE TO LEP PERSONS

The County of Buncombe will inform LEP persons of the availability of language assistance, free of charge, by providing written notice in languages LEP persons will understand. Example: The notification will include, in the primary language of the applicant/recipient, the following language: **IMPORTANT: IF YOU NEED HELP IN READING THIS, ASK THE AGENCY FOR AN INTERPRETER TO HELP. AN INTERPRETER IS AVAILABLE FREE OF CHARGE.**

All interpreters, translators and other aids needed to comply with this plan shall be provided without cost to the person being served, and individuals and their families will be informed of the availability of such assistance free of charge.

At a minimum, notices and signs will be posted and provided in intake areas and other points of entry, including but not limited to the main lobbies, waiting rooms, etc.

Notices are posted and maintained at locations where services are provided, generally in lobbies and waiting areas, on department websites, and on department program brochures provided to the public. Signage informs applicants and beneficiaries of their right to free language assistance services.

5. MONITORING LANGUAGE NEEDS AND IMPLEMENTATION

On an ongoing basis, the County of Buncombe will assess changes in demographics, types of services or other needs that may require reevaluation of this plan and related procedures. In addition, the County of Buncombe will regularly assess the efficacy of these procedures, including but not limited to mechanisms for securing interpreter services, complaints filed by LEP persons, feedback from residents and community organizations, etc.

I. Compliance Procedures, Reporting and Monitoring

A. Reporting

The department administering the program will complete an annual compliance report and send this report to REDD based on format supplied by REDD.

B. Monitoring

The department administering the program will complete a self-monitoring report on a quarterly basis, using a standardized reporting system proposed by the local government. These reports will be delivered to and maintained and stored by the Title VI Compliance Officer and will be provided to the REDD upon request.

The agency will cooperate, when requested, with special review by the REDD.

II. Applicant/Recipient Complaints of Discriminatory Treatment

A. Complaints

All complaints related to Language Access are to be brought to the attention of the program or department leadership and forwarded to the Compliance Officer for immediate review. The Compliance Officer gathers information and relays the information to the oversight entity with jurisdiction for a determination on how the complaint will be handled based upon the type of complaint and the program delivery site.

The agency will provide assistance to LEP individuals who do not speak or write in English if they indicate that they would like to file a complaint.

For CDBG compliance, a complaint will be filed in writing, contain the name and address of the person filing it or his/her designee and briefly describe the alleged violation. The form can be found at <https://www.nccommerce.com/documents/cdbg-compliance-plans>.

The agency will maintain records of any complaints filed, the date of filing, actions taken and resolution.

The agency will notify the appropriate section within REDD of complaints filed, the date of filing, actions taken and resolution. This information will be provided within 30 days of resolution.

B. Resolution of Matter

If the matter cannot be resolved by informal means, the individual will be informed of his or her right to appeal further to REDD. This notice will be provided in the primary language of the individual with Limited English Proficiency.

The REDD Compliance Office will conduct an investigation of the allegations of the complaint. The investigation will afford all interested persons and their representatives, if any, an opportunity to submit evidence relevant to the complaint.

The investigation will not exceed 30 days, absent a 15-day extension for extenuating circumstances.

If the investigation indicates a failure to comply with the Act, the local unit of government, agency Director or his/her designee will so inform the recipient and the matter will be resolved by informal means whenever possible within 60 days.

If the matter cannot be resolved by informal means, then the individual will be informed of his or her right to appeal further to the Department of Justice. This notice will be provided in the primary language of the individual with Limited English Proficiency.

If not resolved by REDD, then complaint will be forwarded to Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Field Office.

SUBMITTED AND ADOPTED BY:

Name of Chairman of Board

Signature of Chairman of Board

Date