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*Bridging Voices for a  
More Inclusive San Francisco*

**SAN FRANCISCO LANGUAGE ACCESS  
COMPLIANCE SUMMARY REPORT 2024**



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# ABOUT THE REPORT

**This report is dedicated to the many diverse immigrant communities that call San Francisco home and the languages that they speak.**

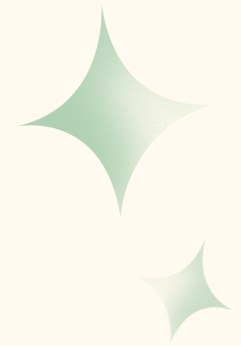
The annual Language Access Compliance Summary Report evaluates Citywide compliance and progress with the San Francisco Language Access Ordinance (LAO). As required by the LAO, the annual report is submitted to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and the San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission by February 1 of each year. This year's report covers Fiscal Year 2022-2023 (July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023).

In addition to overseeing compliance, the Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA) assists City departments to better meet the language needs of San Francisco's Limited English Proficient (LEP) residents and workers. These services include trainings, tools, resources, and technical assistance to increase capacity and provisioning for language access. On a limited basis, OCEIA's Language Access Unit also provides language assistance during public meetings to support the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and Immigrant Rights Commission.



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# INTRODUCTION

San Francisco is proud of our cultural diversity, our sanctuary policies, and our welcoming values. We believe that access to information and public services for all is fundamental to fostering an inclusive city, improving health and safety, and fueling economic growth. This year's Language Access Compliance Summary Report further demonstrates the importance of offering multilingual services and information, particularly in the context of San Francisco's post-public health emergency and changing newcomer dynamics.

San Francisco has a rich landscape of cultures and languages. In San Francisco, one in three residents is an immigrant and nearly 43% of our population over the age of 5 speaks a language other than English at home. Recognizing our diversity is fundamental to ensuring that public services cater to the needs of all residents. In our approach, we recognize that language should not be an obstacle to civic engagement, economic opportunities, access to information and services, or shaping public policy.

As the Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA), we are tasked with overseeing City departments' compliance with the Language Access Ordinance (LAO). Together with City leaders and agencies, the Immigrant Rights Commission, and community partners, we are working to advance language justice in San Francisco by ensuring that all San Franciscans have equal access to the resources they need to contribute and thrive.

As we face challenges in the year ahead, such as decreased government revenues, shifts in our newcomer and asylum seeker population, limited bilingual staff, and ongoing needs for accurate information and accessible public services, we remain committed to language access rights. In this

year's Language Access Compliance Summary Report, with 100% of required departments reporting, we note that budgeting shifts and planning for language services can impact access to vital information and services for Limited English Proficient (LEP) communities.

We also recognize that investing in staff training is crucial, and empowering our existing City staff with linguistic proficiency can enhance our ability to reach and serve diverse communities. In addition, centering the community and continuing to engage with residents and community-based organizations is key to understanding the needs of LEP communities, and ensuring that City outreach programs are successful in serving all San Franciscans.

As financial constraints tighten, the pressure to streamline and create efficiencies may inadvertently have negative impacts on non-English speakers. As a City, we must be even more intentional and strategic when budgeting and planning for service delivery, especially to our most vulnerable. This may include exploring innovative strategies for optimizing language services, such as leveraging emerging technology, and deepening collaborative partnerships with community-based organizations and language services providers.

Providing public services in multiple languages in San Francisco is not just a matter of cultural sensitivity; it is a strategic imperative. As the City grapples with the challenges of budget constraints, our commitment to linguistic diversity is a catalyst for our success.

**By overcoming language barriers, we can unlock the full potential of every resident, contributing to a more resilient, inclusive, and thriving San Francisco.**

**Jorge Rivas, Jr.**  
Executive Director

# REPORT SUMMARY

## Language Access Mandates and Local Ordinance Overview

Language justice in the United States is advanced through many intersecting federal, state, and local laws and policies. The Department of Justice has engaged in efforts over the past couple of years to remind agencies of their obligations to provide meaningful access to information and services for Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals and build upon the federal foundations of language access policy to support agencies in improving compliance.

## Federal Language Access Updates

The primary sources of federal language access protections are Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 13166. Title VI applies to federal agencies and agencies that receive federal funding; it prohibits discrimination in the protected categories of race, color, and national origin. In the landmark civil rights case *Lau v. Nichols*, the Supreme Court held in 1974 that “Title VI prohibits conduct that has a disproportionate effect on LEP persons because such conduct constitutes national-origin discrimination.”<sup>1</sup> Signed by President Clinton in 2000, Executive Order 13166 “requires Federal agencies to examine the services they provide, identify any need for services to those with limited English proficiency (LEP), and develop and implement a system to provide those services so LEP persons can have meaningful access to them.”<sup>2</sup> Over the years, the Department of Justice has issued a series of guidance memoranda to help federal agencies understand their responsibilities under Title VI and Executive Order 13166.

The federal government recently reached the one-year anniversary of the publication of a landmark Department of Justice memorandum reaffirming federal commitment to language access. On November 21, 2022, Attorney General Merrick Garland issued a memo urging federal agencies to strengthen their engagement with LEP individuals by reviewing their language access practices and policies.<sup>3</sup> Building on the requirements of Executive

<sup>1</sup> Policy Guidance to Federal Funding Recipients, “Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons,” issued on June 18, 2002 by the Department of Justice.

<sup>2</sup> Civil Rights Division, Department of Justice, “Overview of Executive Order 13166.”

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum for Heads of Federal Agencies, Heads of Civil Rights Offices, and General Counsels, “Strengthening the Federal Government’s Commitment to Language Access,” issued on November 21, 2022 by the Office of the Attorney General.

Order 13166,<sup>4</sup> this memorandum encourages federal agencies and federal funding recipients to evaluate the current accessibility of programs, resources, and information for LEP individuals and identify areas for improvement. It also recommends that agencies consider how to make their digital communications more welcoming to LEP community members.

On November 15, 2023, the federal government hosted a webinar commemorating the one-year anniversary of the memo's release and shared updates about language access activities conducted by agencies in response. Over the course of the year, 46 federal agencies committed to strengthening their language access plans and as of November 15, the Department of Justice had reviewed 35 plans.

Eighteen updated plans have been finalized and are available to view on the federal government website for language access at [lep.gov/language-access-plans](https://lep.gov/language-access-plans). Entities that updated their plans in 2023 included the Administrative Conference of the United States, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland

Security, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Justice, Department of Labor, Department of Transportation, Environmental Protection Agency, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Farm Credit Administration, Federal Mediation & Conciliation Service, Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Council on Disability, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, and U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Additional federal agencies are still updating their plans and will aim to publish them in 2024.

In addition to working with federal agencies on their language access plans, the Department of Justice has worked with stakeholders to strengthen language access in state courts. In October 2023, the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division published a new fact sheet on language access in the court system that can be viewed at [lep.gov/state-courts](https://lep.gov/state-courts). The division also hosted a webinar commemorating the past decade's language access activities in state courts and mapping the path forward to advance language access in the courts.

The Department of Justice has also continued leading another important project, the Law Enforcement Language

<sup>4</sup> Executive Order 13166, "[Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency](#)," signed on August 16, 2000.

Access Initiative, which was launched in December 2022. Key objectives of this initiative include: developing technical assistance resources and tools to assist law enforcement agencies in providing LEP individuals with meaningful language access in their jurisdictions, affirmatively engaging law enforcement agencies in updating their language access policies, plans, and training, leveraging collaboration with U.S. Attorneys' Offices to conduct training and encourage adoption of language access best practices, and strengthening engagement with LEP community stakeholders. On December 12, 2023, the Department of Justice published a letter to Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) reminding them of their responsibility to provide meaningful access to LEP persons. The Department of Justice also conducted a webinar to share best practices and resources with LEAs about training, grants, and other types of support for language access implementation. [Get more information about the project.](#)

## State Laws and Policies that Impact Language Access

Beyond the federal policy landscape, there are several state laws and policies in California that address language rights. These include the [Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act](#), the [Unruh Civil Rights Act](#), [Government Code § 11135](#), and more.

Enacted in 1973, the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act applies to state government agencies and was adopted to ensure that language barriers do not prevent individuals from accessing State of California services.<sup>5</sup> In 1999, the California State Auditor found that most of the 10 state agencies surveyed were not adequately monitoring compliance with the Act and could do more to ensure equal access to public services.<sup>6</sup> The State Auditor's 2010 review continued to identify implementation and monitoring gaps.<sup>7</sup> The Unruh Civil Rights Act applies to private businesses in California and addresses protection against discrimination based on the protected categories of age, ancestry, color, disability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and national origin.<sup>8</sup> Government Code § 11135 has requirements similar to Title VI and broadens them by including more protected categories and extending requirements to California state agencies.<sup>9</sup>

The Migration Policy Institute recently published a Practitioner's Corner blog post about the California state language access policy framework. [Read MPI's blog post.](#)

<sup>5</sup> California Department of Human Services, "[Bilingual Services.](#)"

<sup>8</sup> California Department of Rehabilitation, "[Unruh Civil Rights Act.](#)"

<sup>6</sup> California State Auditor, "[Report 99110 Summary.](#)" issued in November 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Joann Lee, "[Advancing Language Access Through State-Level Civil Rights Laws.](#)" Migration Policy Institute, published July 7, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> California State Auditor, "[Report 2010-106 Summary.](#)" issued in November 2010.

# San Francisco Language Access Ordinance

There are more than 40 language access laws in existence in 40 states and local jurisdictions across the United States.<sup>10</sup> San Franciscans have had a local language access law since 2001, when the City and County of San Francisco (the City) adopted its first language access policy as the Equal Access to Services Ordinance. The City amended the ordinance in 2009, renaming it the Language Access Ordinance (LAO) and designating the Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA) as the Department responsible for oversight of the City’s compliance with the policy. The LAO was amended again in 2015; this is the version of the ordinance that exists today.

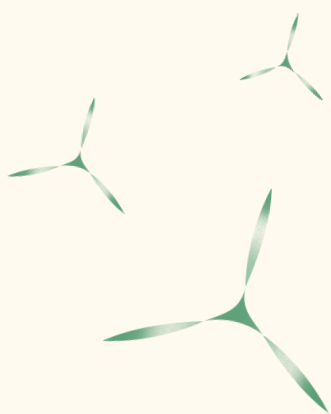
CITY DEPARTMENT RESPONSIBILITIES	OCEIA RESPONSIBILITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Designate a language access liaison</li><li>• Develop, adopt, and implement a Department-specific language access policy</li><li>• Submit annual language access activity data through compliance reporting<sup>11</sup></li><li>• Coordinate and provision for language services</li><li>• Determine and budget for Departmental language needs</li><li>• Comply with all requirements of the LAO</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Train Departments on LAO compliance and reporting requirements</li><li>• Develop guidance tools, style guides, and resources on best practices to assist Departments with implementation</li><li>• Identify language services vendors and coordinate Citywide contracting with the Office of Contract Administration</li><li>• Provide language access consultations and technical assistance to Departments</li><li>• Monitor and report compliance to the Immigrant Rights Commission and the Board of Supervisors</li></ul>

<sup>10</sup> Migration Policy Institute, “[A Framework for Language Access: Key Features of U.S. State and Local Language Access Laws and Policies](#),” published in October 2021.

<sup>11</sup> The LAO refers to the Department annual compliance report using the term “Annual Compliance Plan.”

The LAO requires that all public-serving City departments in San Francisco provide equal access to information and services for LEP individuals. This means that Departments must inform members of the public that they have the right to language assistance and must deliver the same quality of information and services to LEP individuals as they give to English speakers. In addition, Departments must track their language access activities and report compliance data on an annual basis. OCEIA staff members are available throughout the year to provide language access tools and guidance to Departments.

THRESHOLD LANGUAGES	EMERGING LANGUAGES
<p>Departments are required to translate vital information into the threshold languages.</p> <p><b>The three threshold languages are currently Spanish, Chinese, and Filipino.</b></p> <p>Under the LAO, a “threshold language” in San Francisco is a language population that has at least 10,000 or more Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons.<sup>12</sup></p>	<p>Departments are encouraged to translate information for Emerging Language Populations.</p> <p>The LAO defines “Emerging Language Populations” as language populations that comprise at least 2.5% but less than 5% of San Francisco’s population and use a Department’s services, or at least 5,000 but fewer than 10,000 city residents, who speak a shared language other than English.<sup>13</sup></p>



<sup>12</sup> San Francisco Administrative Code, Sec. 91.1(b)(7).

<sup>13</sup> San Francisco Administrative Code, Sec. 91.2.



Another source of language access policy in San Francisco is the [Digital Accessibility and Inclusion Standard](#). Departments have continued implementing the standard since its adoption on November 18, 2021. Translation is an important pillar of the standard, requiring that Departments provide human translation of vital information in the threshold languages defined by the LAO on all new City and County of San Francisco websites, online applications, and digital content.

## Department Compliance Reporting Process

**Departments must engage in language access activities throughout the year to comply with the LAO.**

- Spring/Summer: Language access liaisons attend the annual LAO compliance training.
- By September 1: The digital compliance report submission form is available.
- By October 1: Departments submit their compliance information online.
- By February 1: OCEIA publishes the Language Access Compliance Summary Report.

The annual compliance cycle begins in the late spring/summer, when Departments are required to send their language access liaisons to OCEIA's LAO compliance training. This training provides an overview of Departments' obligations under the LAO, recommendations for data collection and reporting, and links to language access tools and resources that Departments can use during their day-to-day operations. This training is also an opportunity to highlight current language access needs in the City and promote collaboration on language access strategies across Departments.

Departments submit their self-reported annual compliance data through an online form, available by September 1 of each year. Departments are asked to share information across multiple areas of activity relevant to language access.

### **This includes:**

- Whether they have an existing language access policy
- The number of bilingual staff employed by the Department
- The number of bilingual staff certified by the Department of Human Resources (DHR)
- The number of translations completed during the fiscal year
- The number of phone interpretations conducted during the fiscal year
- The number of in-person interpretations conducted during the fiscal year
- The quality of language services and the quality control methods used
- The total dollar amount the Department spent on language access during the fiscal year
- The total number of in-language interactions the Department conducted with the public during the fiscal year

Departments are required to submit their data by October 1 of each year. OCEIA staff members then analyze the results and identify Citywide language access compliance progress and trends. This information is included in the annual Language Access Compliance Summary Report, which is published by February 1 of each year.

## **Language Access Complaint Process**

People who believe their language access rights have been violated in San Francisco have the right to file a complaint about the involved City department. Filing a formal language access complaint initiates an OCEIA-led investigation process that seeks to identify the cause of the violation, resolve problems, and recommend solutions to Departments to address the issue.

OCEIA's investigation of the complaint involves working with the complainant and the Department to determine if there is a violation of the LAO, facilitating assistance for community members and resolution of the complaint, and advising Departments on improving language services and interactions with LEP community members. When filling out the complaint form, community members have the option of keeping their personal information confidential if they do not want it shared with the involved Department. As required by the LAO, OCEIA reports information about LAO complaints to the Immigrant Rights Commission (IRC) on a quarterly basis.

## When a community member files a complaint, OCEIA:

- Shares the complaint with the involved Department within 5 days;
- Requests additional details from the community member or assisting organization if needed;
- Reviews the complaint issue description with the LAO to determine if a violation has likely occurred;
- Communicates with the Department about the compliance issues highlighted by the complaint and shares language access best practices;
- Makes recommendations to the Department for resolving the complaint and preventing the language access barrier from arising again in the future; and
- Monitors remediation activities and requests confirmation that recommendations were followed.

**LAO complaint forms are available on OCEIA's website in English, Spanish, Chinese, Filipino, and Russian.**

To request additional languages:

Call 415-581-2360 or email [language.access@sfgov.org](mailto:language.access@sfgov.org).

**Individuals can submit a complaint via several different formats:**

- By using a digital complaint form;
- By filling out a complaint form and emailing it to OCEIA at [language.access@sfgov.org](mailto:language.access@sfgov.org);
- By filling out a paper complaint form and mailing or bringing it to OCEIA's offices at 1155 Market Street, 1st Floor;
- By calling OCEIA's offices at 415-581-2360 and sharing their information by phone;
- By visiting OCEIA's offices at 1155 Market Street, 1st Floor, and working with an OCEIA staff member to submit their complaint in person; or
- By getting support from a community-based organization to fill out and submit the form.

During FY 2022-2023, the complaints that community members filed highlighted multiple language access barriers experienced when seeking information and services from Departments in their languages. These included inadequate use of interpretation services and multilingual recorded message systems, lack of translated content in Department public notices, and insufficient communication about interpretation services at public meetings. OCEIA engaged Departments on these subjects by highlighting potential staff training gaps, discussing language services coordination best practices, and recommending more frequent communication with the public about the language services available.

## Report Preview

This report provides an overview of the language access activities that have taken place in San Francisco over the past fiscal year. This includes City departments' self-reported compliance data, activities conducted by language access community grantees, and efforts by OCEIA to improve language access and services across San Francisco. This report also includes recommendations on ways the City can improve the accessibility of Department programs and services, along with tools and resources to support Departments in their compliance work.

During the last fiscal year (July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023), Departments continued responding to and emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, adapting to hybrid remote/in-person services, and increasing the number of in-person events. Department compliance data showed increases in LEP client interactions, translated materials, in-person interpretations, and Departmental use of the intake method of data collection. Compliance data showed decreases in telephonic interpretations, the number of bilingual employees Citywide, and City budgeting expenditures for language services.

In addition to Departments' efforts, language access community grantees are vital partners in building language access capacity, services, and justice in San Francisco. Since 2012, OCEIA has provided grants to community-based organizations that work directly with LEP community members in San Francisco. Through these grants, community-based organizations educate community members about language rights, conduct translation

and interpretation projects, organize events and workshops, conduct spot checks of City services and departments,<sup>14</sup> assist community members in filing language access complaints, and more. This report describes the mission and vision of the grantees, the scope of their language access grants, and outcomes from their work during the past fiscal year. A multi-year analysis of spot check data is also included.

The recommendations section of this report consists of key takeaways and guidance on strategies that Departments can use to improve their compliance with the LAO in the year ahead. These recommendations take into consideration multiple sources of information about the current state of language access in San Francisco, such as: Departments' self-reported compliance data, feedback from community-based organizations shared as public testimony at Immigrant Rights Commission (IRC) special hearings and other public meetings, and supplemental data sources like language access complaints and spot check information. Subject matter areas that are addressed by this year's recommendations include improving internal training on language access policies and protocols, strengthening compliance data collection and reporting, hiring and retaining more bilingual staff, and increasing language services resources and budgets. These directives can help Departments strengthen public-facing staff awareness of best practices, increase the availability of qualified bilingual staff, and maintain sufficient budgets needed to ensure meaningful access to information and services.



<sup>14</sup> A spot check is a process through which individuals evaluate the language accessibility of Department programs, services, and information. They do this by navigating through City information systems and seeking services from Department offices in non-English languages as an LEP community member seeking services would.

# FINDINGS

## Introduction

This is the fourth Language Access Compliance Summary Report to cover the COVID-19 pandemic and includes the final eight months of the City's public health emergency declaration, which ended on February 28, 2023. City departments continued adjusting their operational norms during this period. OCEIA utilized updated data analysis methods when preparing compliance data for this year's report.

Several metrics show signs of rebound, such as the numbers of total Limited English Proficient (LEP) client interactions, translated materials, and in-person interpretations. The gap between bilingual City employees and certified bilingual City employees also has narrowed.

Categories that saw declining metrics included telephonic interpretations, which have fallen since Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-2020, and language services budgets, which have experienced wide fluctuations since FY 2019-2020.

## DEPARTMENT COMPLIANCE

53

Departments required to file reports

53

Departments filed reports

61

Departments attended OCEIA's LAO training

50

Departments have a written LAO policy

## LEP Client Interactions

Limited English Proficient (LEP) client interactions track the total number of LEP individuals who used a City department's services. A Department can use one of three methods to collect this information:

- **Intake Method** (Recommended): Collecting information during the Department's intake process for all clients (members of the public who are served by or interact with the Department), including appointments, walk-ins, public events, and outreach.
- **Survey Method**: Conducting an annual survey of all contacts with the public made by the Department during a period of at least two weeks.
- **Telephonic Interpretation Method**: Calculating the annual total number of requests for telephonic interpretation services.

Since FY 2014-2015, LEP client interactions across all languages generally have trended upwards, with the average number of annual client interactions estimated at 862,279. In the past fiscal year, City departments reported a total of 1,012,482 LEP client interactions, which is above the five-year average (FY 2017-2018 through FY 2021-2022) of 918,222 interactions.

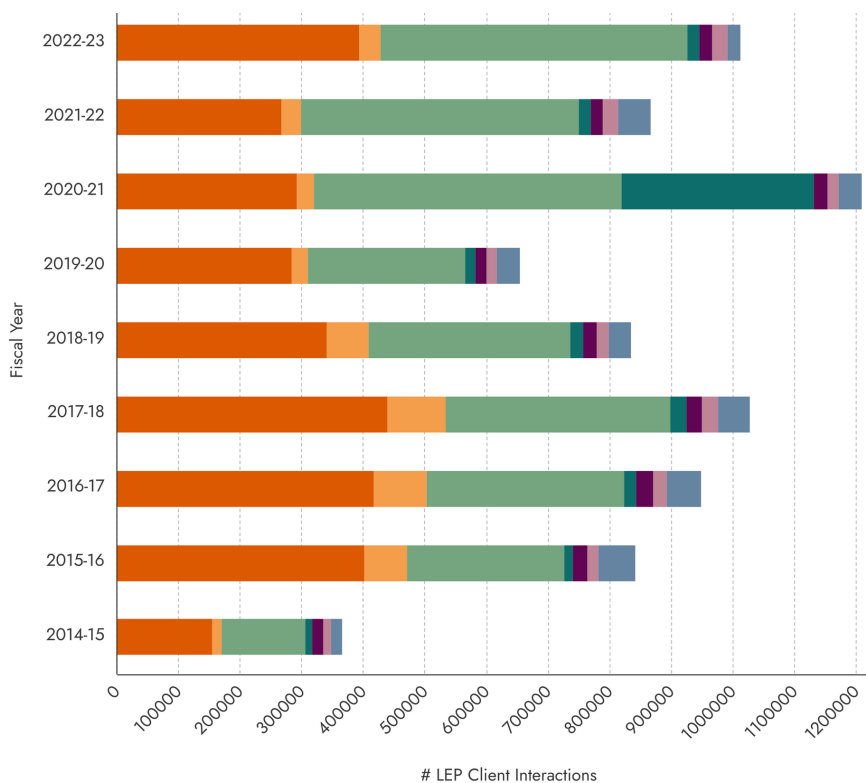
City departments' aggregate interactions with LEP clients increased by 16.70% from the previous fiscal year, from an estimated 867,574 interactions in FY 2021-2022 to 1,012,482 interactions in FY 2022-2023.



Cantonese LEP client interactions saw the largest increase, with about 394,627 interactions (a 47.30% increase from the previous fiscal year) followed by Spanish LEP client interactions, measuring 498,562 (a 10.55% increase). Languages that saw modest increases from the previous fiscal year included Russian, with 20,548 LEP client interactions (an 8.12% increase), Mandarin, with 33,543 LEP client interactions (a 4.24% increase), and Vietnamese, with 25,347 LEP client interactions (a 3.15% increase). Filipino LEP client interactions totaled 19,148, representing a slight decrease of 0.31% compared to the previous fiscal year.

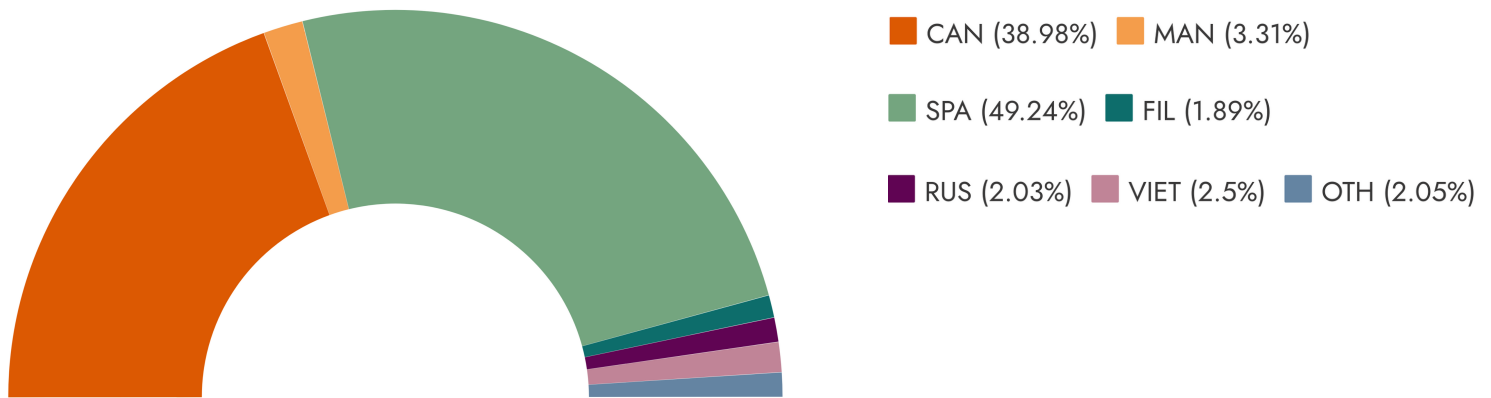
The Other Languages category (which includes, but is not limited to, Arabic, French, German, and Tigrinya) saw a steep decline of approximately 61.46% in aggregate count, with only 20,707 interactions. A likely driver of this decline compared to the previous year is adjustment in how some Departments track, collect, and report their LEP client interactions data. For example, the Department of Public Health (DPH) did not include a data point for the Other Languages category in their FY 2022-2023 compliance report, but reported 34,741 LEP client interactions in the Other Languages category for FY 2021-2022. DPH client interactions comprise a fairly high proportion of Citywide LEP client interactions, and the absence of the DPH Other Languages data point is the main source of the decrease seen in FY 2022-2023.

## Total LEP Client Interactions by Language, Over Time





## Total LEP Client Interactions by Language



Breaking down total interactions during FY 2022-2023 by individual language percentages, Spanish (49.24%) and Cantonese (38.98%) represent the majority of LEP client interactions, followed by Mandarin (3.31%), Vietnamese (2.50%), other languages (2.05%), Russian (2.03%), and Filipino (1.89%).

## Translated Materials

This data measure refers to the number of written materials that Departments translated during FY 2022-2023. As part of the compliance reporting process, Departments are asked to list the total number of materials translated and upload a record listing each translated document, the languages into which it has been translated, and the name of the person(s) who reviewed each translation for accuracy and appropriateness.

Translation reviewers can be bilingual staff members or employees who obtain quality checks from external individuals, such as translation vendors or bilingual staff from community-based organizations whose clients receive services from the Department. Translation reviews should focus on assessing a document's readability, meaning, and grammar.

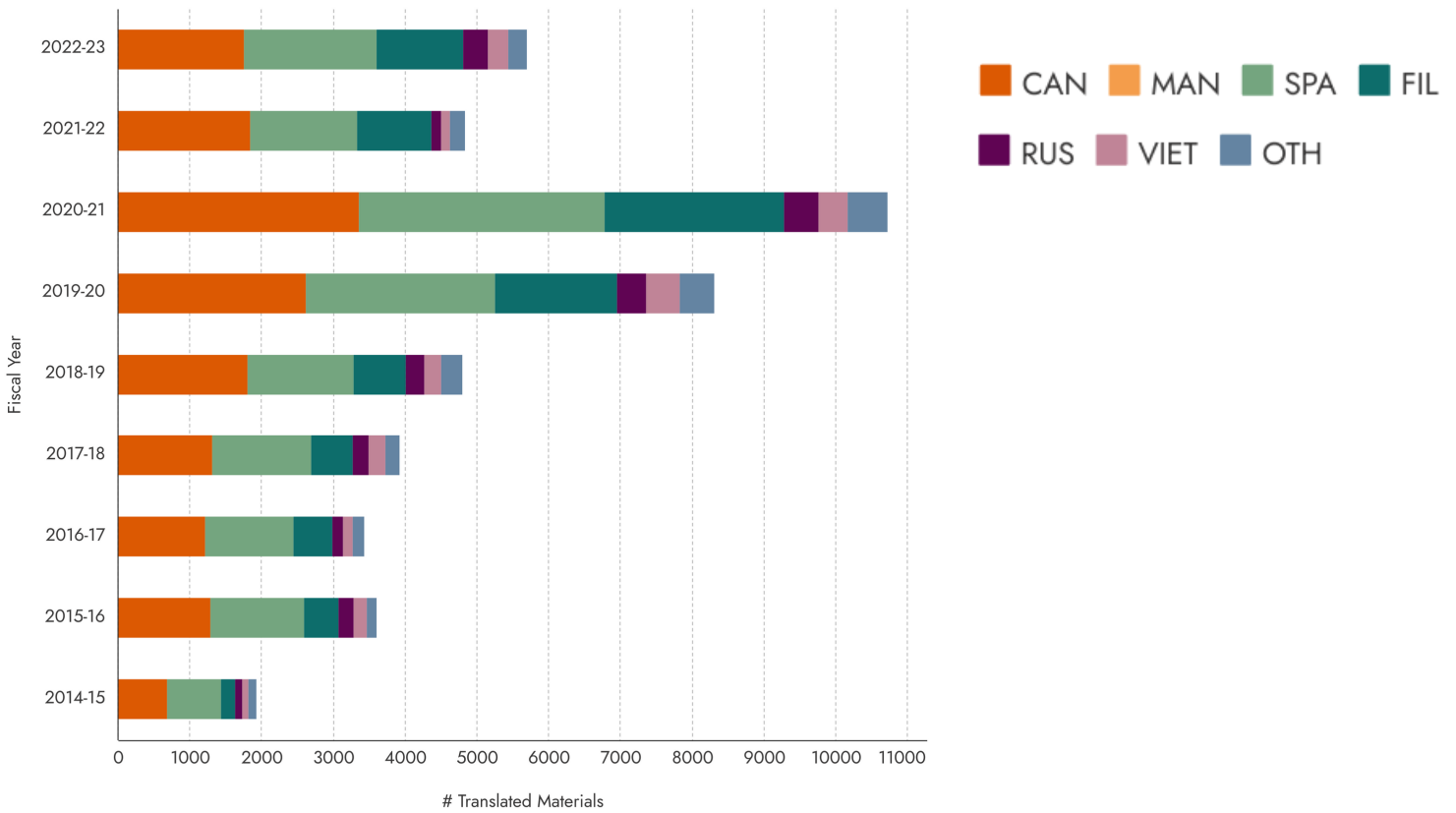
During FY 2022-2023, out of the 5,698 total translated materials Citywide, there were 1,846 (32.40%) in Spanish, 1,764 (30.96%) in Chinese, 1,204 (21.13%) in Filipino, 350 (6.14%) in Russian, 280 (4.91%) in Vietnamese, and 254 (4.46%) in other languages.

## Total Translated Materials by Language



The total number of translated materials increased by 18.68% from the previous fiscal year, from 4,801 to 5,698, which is below the five-year average (FY 2018-2022) of 6,482 translations. All languages, except for Chinese (which saw a 3.92% decline), made positive gains compared to the dramatic declines of translated materials in FY 2021-2022: Russian increased by 171.32%, Vietnamese increased by 112.12%, other languages increased by 27.64%, Spanish increased by 24.81%, and Filipino increased by 17.35% year over year. City departments saw an abnormal spike of written translated materials in FY 2019-2020 and FY 2020-2021 (8,296 translations and 10,703 translations, respectively) before returning closer to past levels. One possible explanation for this spike is the increased written translation efforts by many City departments to communicate new information and resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) has worked to provide print resources and other translated materials to low-income residents in a variety of languages including Arabic, Chinese, Filipino, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Samoan, in order to increase awareness and accessibility of their affordability programs.

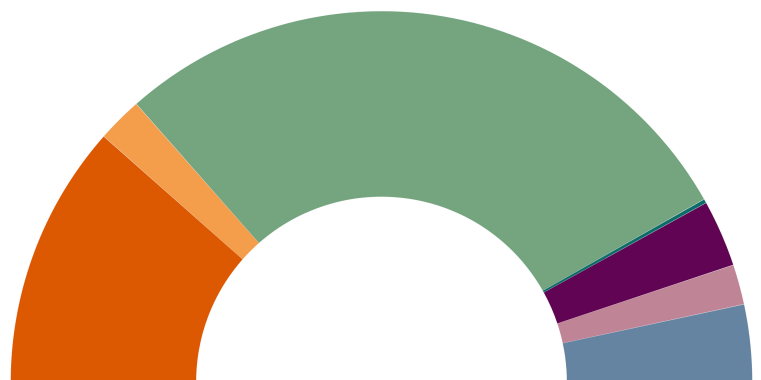
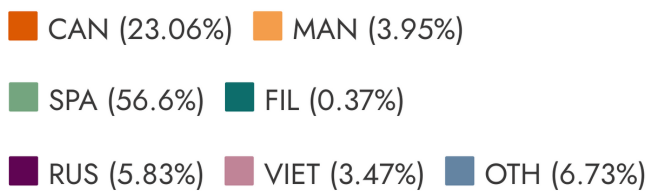
## Total Translated Materials by Language, Over Time



## Telephonic Interpretations

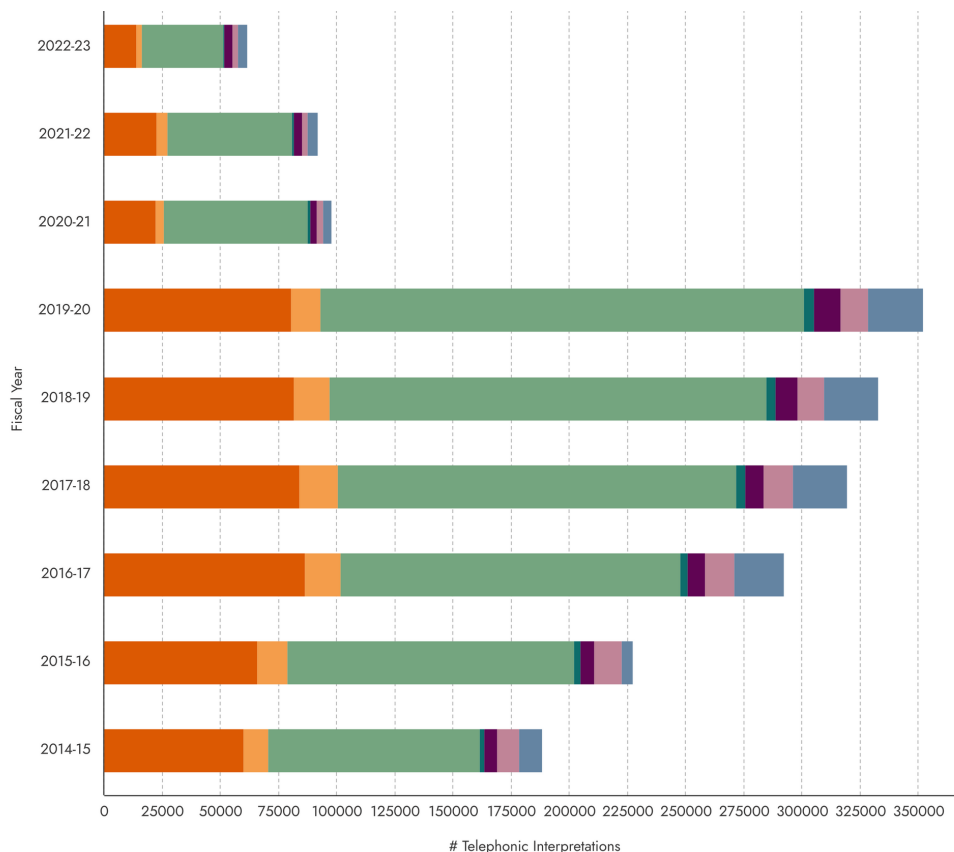
Departments are also asked to report the total estimated volume of LEP callers, call volume by language, and the names of all interpretation service providers used, such as bilingual staff or language services vendors.

## Total Telephonic Interpretations by Language



For FY 2022-2023, there were an estimated 61,841 total telephonic interpretations, 35,000 (56.60%) in Spanish, 14,258 (23.06%) in Cantonese, 4,161 (6.73%) in other languages, 3,604 (5.83%) in Russian, 2,442 (3.95%) in Mandarin, 2,148 (3.47%) in Vietnamese, and 228 (0.37%) in Filipino.

## Total Telephonic Interpretations by Language, Over Time



All threshold languages have declined in total estimated volume and are well below their respective five-year averages (FY 2018-2022). Following a steady increase through FY 2019-2020, the total number of telephonic interpretations dropped dramatically in FY 2020-2021 and has continued to decrease over the past two fiscal years. For non-threshold languages, telephonic interpretations are not yet returning to their average call volumes, though the call volumes for these languages have stabilized since FY 2020-2021. This decrease may be attributable to a range of factors. For example, many aspects of City services and information transitioned to being more accessible online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Implementation of the [San Francisco Digital Accessibility and Inclusion Standard](#) has also increased the amount of information and services that community members can access digitally.

Language	Telephonic Interpretations FY 2022-2023	Percentage Increase or Decrease Compared to FY 2021-2022	Telephonic Interpretations Five-Year Average (FY 2018-2022)
Cantonese	14,258	-37.60%	58,198
Spanish	35,000	-34.28%	136,298
Filipino	228	-75.03%	2,858
Mandarin	2,442	-48.83%	10,589
Russian	3,604	+1.61%	7,008
Vietnamese	2,148	-12.79%	8,206
<b>Other Languages</b> (Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Portuguese, Thai, Tigrinya, Ukrainian, and others)	4,161	-3.19%	15,555

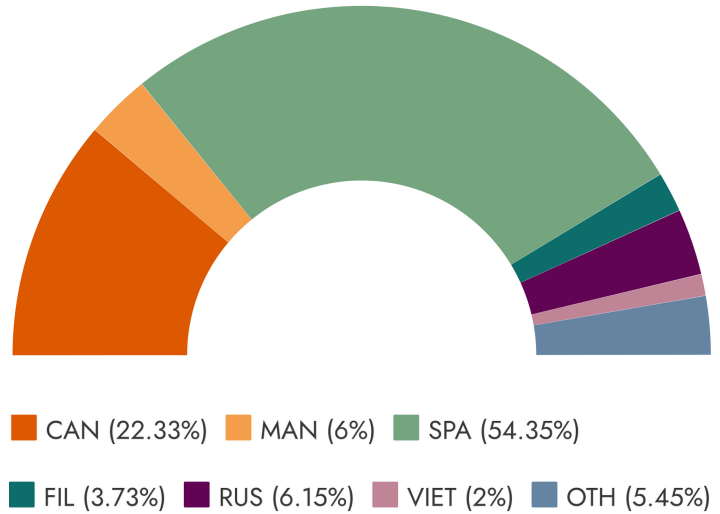
Although telephonic interpretations generally decreased, some City departments reported stable or increasing call volume in their telephonic interpretation. For example, the Human Services Agency (HSA) reported that its telephonic interpretation call volume increased from 17,151 calls in FY 2021-2022 to 18,096 (a 5.51% increase) due to increased caseloads.

# In-Person Interpretations

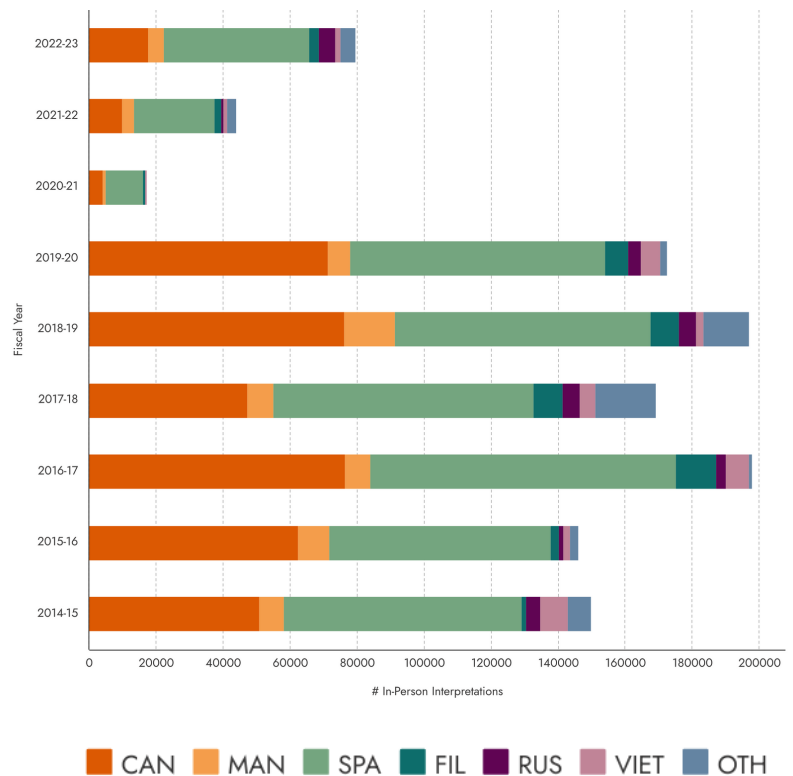
Departments are required to report the number of times their public-contact employees provide in-person interpretation or language assistance services in each language. Departments' compliance reporting shows that in-person interpretations are starting to recover and trend higher.

Of the 79,597 total estimated in-person interpretations, 43,261 (54.35%) were in Spanish, 17,772 (22.33%) were in Cantonese, 4,892 (6.15%) were in Russian, 4,777 (6.00%) were in Mandarin, 2,970 (3.73%) were in Filipino, 4,337 (5.45%) were in other languages, and 1,588 (2.00%) were in Vietnamese. These figures represent an 80.94% increase from approximately 43,990 to 79,597 in-person interpretations across all reporting City departments. In-person interpretations by City departments still fall below the five-year average (FY 2018-2022) of 119,401, but FY 2022-2023 compliance data indicates in-person interpretations are trending upward.

## Total In-Person Interpretations by Language



## Total In-Person Interpretations by Language, Over Time



Like telephonic interpretations, in-person interpretation services fell dramatically in FY 2020-2021. However, since this decrease, in-person interpretations have increased.

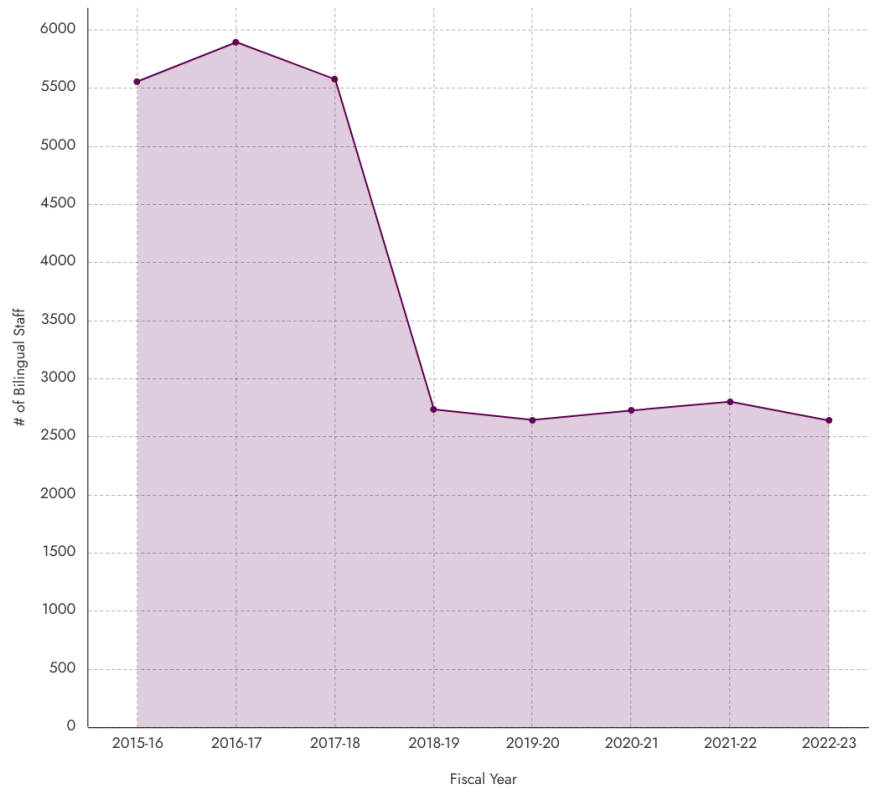
Language	In-Person Interpretations FY 2022-2023	Percentage Increase or Decrease Compared to FY 2021-2022	In-Person Interpretations Five-Year Average (FY 2018-2022)
Cantonese	17,772	+77.56%	41,360
Spanish	43,261	+80.36%	52,967
Filipino	2,970	+50.99%	5,261
Mandarin	4,777	+34.94%	6,752
Russian	4,892	+580.39%	2,995
Vietnamese	1,588	+47.04%	2,789
<b>Other Languages</b> (Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Portuguese, Thai, Tigrinya, Ukrainian, and others)	4,337	+61.29%	7,276

In-person interpretation is steadily increasing for all threshold languages, with Spanish in-person interpretation recovering the fastest. All non-threshold languages are beginning to show signs of recovery for in-person interpretation, but are below their respective five-year averages. Russian is the only language to surpass the five-year average.

# Bilingual Staffing

Departments also share information about their bilingual employees in the compliance reporting process. The reporting tool distinguishes between bilingual employees and certified bilingual employees who have passed a language proficiency test. This test may be administered by the Department of Human Resources (DHR). The total number of bilingual public contact employees includes those who are certified as well as those who are self-identified as fluent in a language other than English. It is important to remember that these are estimates of public contact staff and may not represent the full employee headcount of City departments.

## Total Bilingual Staff



The number of bilingual staff members has stabilized from the decline during the FY 2018-2019 time period; however, bilingual staffing in City departments is still below the five-year average (FY 2018-2022). In FY 2022-2023, City departments reported 2,638 bilingual employees, which is a 5.75% decline from the previous fiscal year measure of 2,799 bilingual employees. Both figures fall below the five-year average of 3,294 employees. City departments reported 2,191 bilingual City employees who have been certified by DHR, a 7.03% increase from the previous fiscal year's estimate of 2,047 and close to the five-year average of 2,395 employees. Based on these estimates, the gap between bilingual and certified bilingual City department employees is narrowing.



<b>Language</b>	<b>Bilingual Employees FY 2022-2023</b>	<b>Bilingual Employees Five-Year Average (FY 2018-2022)</b>	<b>Certified Bilingual Employees FY 2022-2023</b>	<b>Certified Bilingual Employees Five-Year Average (FY 2018-2022)</b>
<b>Cantonese</b>	724	844	701	712
<b>Spanish</b>	991	1,107	946	1,035
<b>Filipino</b>	245	342	132	160
<b>Mandarin</b>	307	365	230	260
<b>Russian</b>	73	88	63	76
<b>Vietnamese</b>	74	103	65	77
<b>Other Languages</b> (Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Portuguese, Thai, Tigrinya, Ukrainian, and others)	224	445	54	77

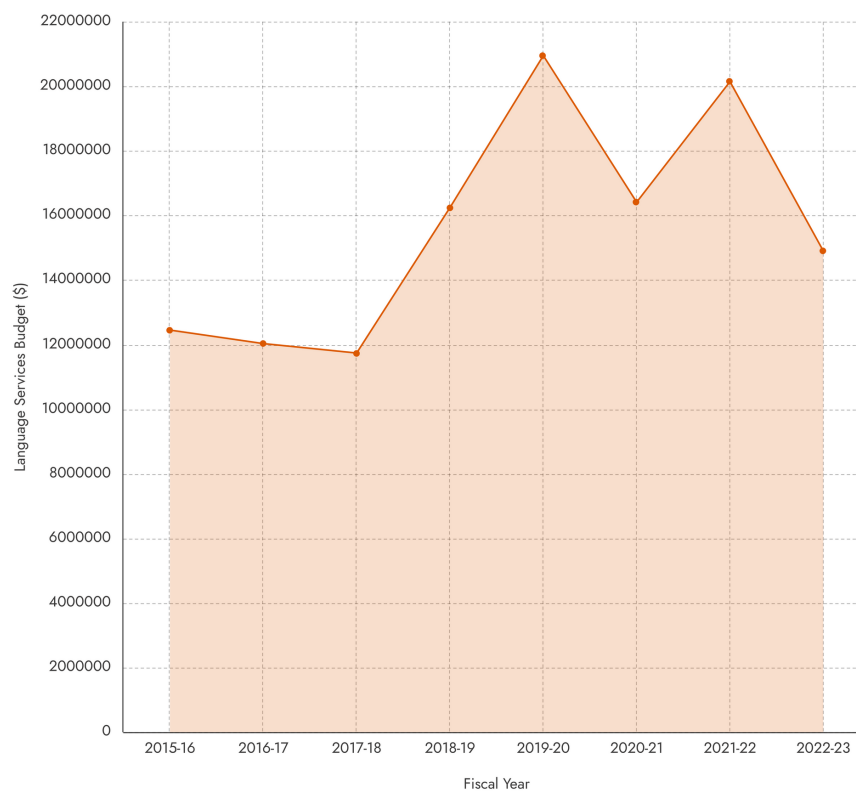


## Language Services Budgets

The amount of money City departments allocate to their language services decreased by 26.03% from the previous fiscal year, from approximately \$20.15 million in FY 2021-2022 to approximately \$14.91 million during FY 2022-2023. This figure is below the five-year average (FY 2018-2022) of \$17.10 million. Language services budgets have experienced wide fluctuations since FY 2019-2020. The decrease over the past fiscal year could be attributed to continued operational adjustments during the COVID-19 pandemic or a return to the five-year average.

One example of operational adjustments comes from the Department of Public Health (DPH). During the past fiscal year, DPH continued to adjust its staffing levels after previous deployment to temporary duty stations for COVID-19-related medical services, and worked to streamline processes into a newly created Department of Interpreter Services. This new single point of contact consolidates services such as telephone interpreting services for receptionists, customer service, in-the-field hearings, face-to-face interpreting services, and other functions related to communicating with LEP individuals. Another change was that DPH transitioned to using a new telephonic interpretation vendor. The Department of Elections also reported operational adjustments,

## Overall Language Services Budget



explaining that their language services budget allocation fluctuates with the number of elections conducted during the fiscal year and the related activities of outreach, document distribution, and updates to internal employee/poll worker training regarding interactions with LEP clients.

Despite the overall decrease in spending on language services, some Departments increased their language services budgets.

**The top five Departments that show the greatest language services budget increases are:**

<b>1</b>	<b>Environment Department</b>	The <b>Environment Department</b> increased its budget from \$21,527.19 in FY 2021-2022 to \$120,098.66 in FY 2022-2023, a <b>458% increase</b> .
<b>2</b>	<b>Recreation and Parks</b>	The <b>Recreation and Parks</b> Department increased its budget from \$24,973.00 in FY 2021-2022 to \$78,857.27 in FY 2022-2023, a <b>216% increase</b> .
<b>3</b>	<b>Arts Commission</b>	The <b>Arts Commission</b> increased its budget from \$6,815.99 in FY 2021-2022 to \$17,970.00 in FY 2022-2023, a <b>164% increase</b> .
<b>4</b>	<b>Office of the Chief Medical Examiner</b>	The <b>Office of the Chief Medical Examiner</b> increased its budget from \$1,035.06 in FY 2021-2022 to \$2,301.00 in FY 2022-2023, a <b>122% increase</b> .
<b>5</b>	<b>Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development</b>	The <b>Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development</b> increased its budget from \$7,004.00 in FY 2021-2022 to \$10,876.00 in FY 2022-2023, a <b>55% increase</b> .

# Snapshot of San Francisco

**1 in 3 San Francisco residents is an immigrant.**

With **33.9%** of its residents born outside of the U.S., San Francisco remains one of the most **culturally and linguistically diverse cities** in the country.

**851,036**

Total population\*

**33.9%**

Foreign-born residents

**18.9%**

Residents identify as LEP

**42.9%**

Residents (over age of 5) speak a language other than English at home

**40+**

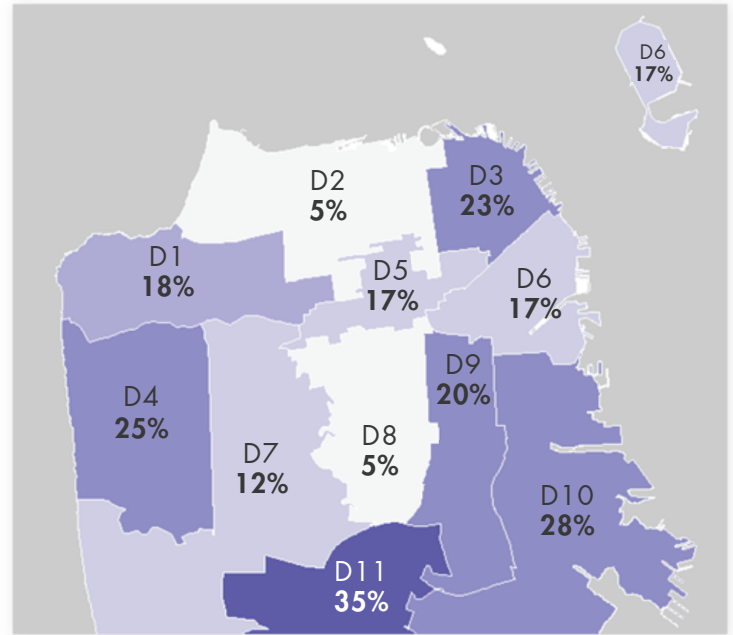
Languages spoken in San Francisco\*\*

\* United States Census Bureau's 2018-2022 American Community Survey

\*\* These estimated numbers represent a departure from previous reports due to a change in how the United States Census Bureau categorizes and codes language data. In 2016, the code list was revised to match the ISO-639-3 standard. The Census Bureau also [reports](#) that the ACS estimates are samples of the total population and there may be languages spoken that are not recorded. A detailed list and explanation of how the Census Bureau defines and uses language coding and tabulation are available [here](#).

# District Data

San Francisco's Supervisorial Districts, from the highest to lowest percent LEP population



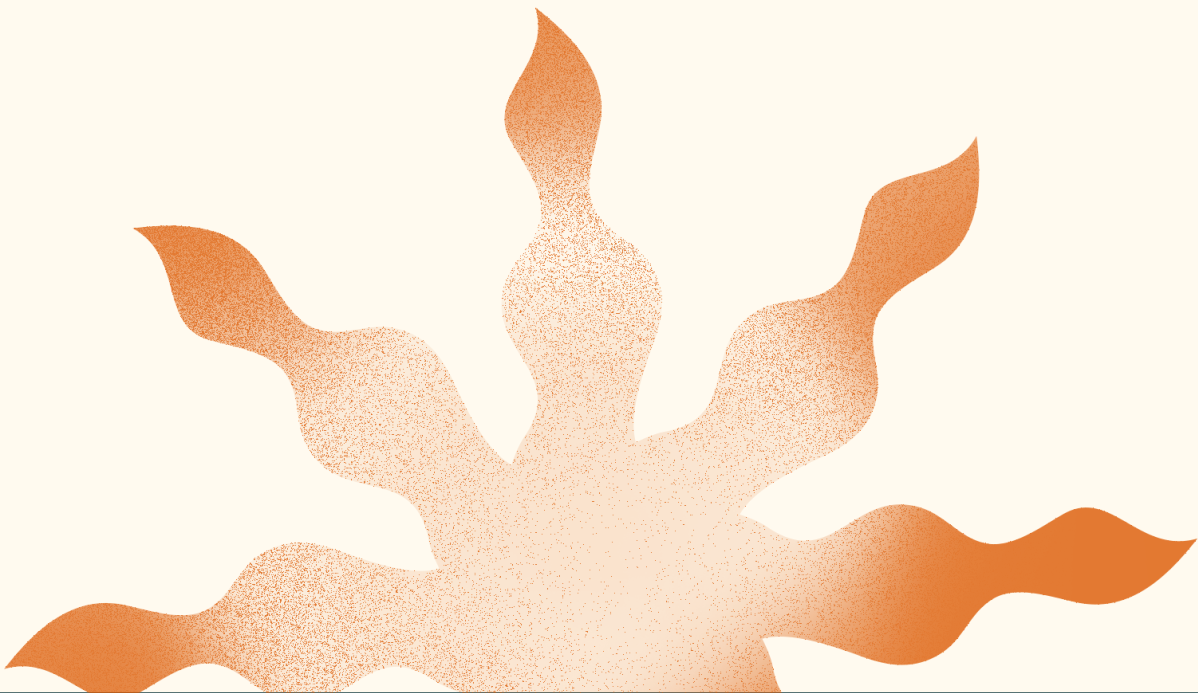
Source: United States Census Bureau's 2018-2022 American Community Survey

District	Total Population	LEP Population	% LEP
11	82,911	28,796	35%
10	71,994	19,972	28%
4	75,082	18,746	25%
3	73,064	16,917	23%
9	79,916	16,036	20%
1	72,305	12,942	18%
5	85,921	14,463	17%
6	59,037	9,961	17%
7	78,432	9,778	12%
2	62,541	2,990	5%
8	73,306	3,303	5%

# **LANGUAGE ACCESS SPOTLIGHTS**

**I. COMMUNITY GRANTS**

**II. DEPARTMENT SPOT CHECKS**



# LANGUAGE ACCESS COMMUNITY GRANTS

## Introduction

Since 2012, OCEIA has funded the Language Access Community Grants program as part of a strategic effort to partner with community-based organizations in order to advance language access rights. The grant program seeks to expand community knowledge and participation in Citywide efforts to improve language services.

Participating San Francisco organizations lead initiatives that increase local capacity to meet the language access needs of underserved immigrant communities in San Francisco. The organizations focus on three areas:

- Building community-based language access leadership through outreach and education;
- Working collaboratively to assess, evaluate, and document language access needs in the community and partnering with City departments that communicate with and deliver services to residents who speak languages other than English; and
- Building capacity to deliver community-based interpretation and translation services.

Grantees must demonstrate cultural and linguistic competence, a history of assisting and serving San Francisco communities, extensive knowledge of neighborhood services, issues and resources, and credibility and capacity to reach members of underserved Limited English Proficient (LEP) communities.

## Language Access Community Grantee Activities

During Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-2023, the language access community grantees educated a total of 8,705 individuals about their language rights. They distributed more than 7,363 educational written materials and organized a total of 155 events and workshops about language access. Grantees received 52 language access-related complaints about City departments for inadequate language services. In addition to their funded outreach programs, many organizations provided interpretation while helping people navigate services and programs.

The grantees completed approximately 1,285 hours of interpretation to help community members access City services and an additional 400 interpretation hours to assist them with other needs, resulting in 1,685 total interpretation hours.

## The FY 2022-2023 language access community grantees included:

### Asociación Mayab



The mission of the Asociación Mayab is to create the conditions that allow for the optimal development of the Yucatec Maya community in the San Francisco Bay Area. Asociación Mayab is a non-profit organization based in San Francisco that provides Maya immigrant families in the Bay Area with social services and emergency support, promotes Yucatec Maya cultural values, and serves as a bridge for communication between the community and local authorities, consulates and Mexican Yucatecan governments. Asociación Mayab receives a language access grant to strengthen local indigenous language services capacity by conducting community interpreter trainings for speakers of Mayan dialects.

## Language Access Network

Funded by OCEIA since 2012, the Language Access Network of San Francisco (LANSF) is a coalition of six community-based organizations that provide community education on language access and feedback to City departments on best practices in serving LEP communities.

LANSF assesses community access needs through conducting spot checks, collecting narratives, and identifying and sharing best practices. LANSF also supports City departments by participating in Language Access Advisory Committees, meeting with City departments to discuss language access needs and practices, and helping to address emergency language access situations.



Beyond the network’s community-facing work, LANSF is also available as a resource and thought partner to City agencies that are seeking to improve the accessibility of their programs and services.

**LANSF consists of the following organizations:**

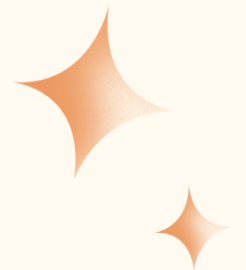


- **Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA)** - lead and fiscal agent
- **African Advocacy Network (AAN)**
- **Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC)**
- **Central American Resource Center of San Francisco (CARECEN SF)**
- **Filipino Community Center (FCC)**
- **People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights (PODER)**

**LANSF Department Spot Checks**

LANSF continued conducting spot checks during FY 2022-2023, which informs OCEIA about the current state of language access compliance in San Francisco. Through spot checks, advocates from LANSF community-based organizations navigate Department offices and information systems to evaluate the language accessibility of City programs, services, and information.

From July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023, LANSF conducted 60 spot checks. Five of the spot checks were completed in person and 55 were completed telephonically. More information about the data can be found in the spot check feature of this report.



## Self-Help for the Elderly



Self-Help for the Elderly (SHE) provides assistance and support to seniors in the San Francisco Bay Area. The organization first began serving seniors in San Francisco's Chinatown in 1966. Today, Self-Help for the Elderly serves over 40,000 older adults per year in San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Alameda, and Contra Costa Counties. Services include health care, home care, social services, cleaning, nutrition support, and housing. SHE receives a language access grant to explore models of community interpretation service delivery and addresses community needs through partnering with OCEIA on citizenship workshops.

## Southeast Asian Community Center



The Southeast Asian Community Center (SEACC) is a non-profit organization serving Southeast Asian communities locally and nationally. SEACC's programs support self-sufficiency, economic viability, advocacy, community empowerment, leadership development, acculturation, and cultural preservation. The organization also advises and finances small businesses in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area. SEACC receives a language access grant to strengthen Vietnamese language assistance in San Francisco through building the capacity of Vietnamese interpretation and translation services, community education and outreach, and assessment, evaluation and documentation of local Vietnamese language access needs.

## South of Market Community Action Network



The South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN) was formed in 2000 by community leaders from youth, senior, veteran, Filipino, and housing organizations to address growing gentrification and displacement issues in SoMa. SOMCAN provides culturally competent direct services across a range of issue areas – from tenants’ rights to Filipino language access. SOMCAN also uplifts the voices of immigrant, people-of-color, and low-income communities in local policy-making decisions so civic offices are accountable to their needs. SOMCAN receives a language access grant to strengthen Filipino language assistance in San Francisco through building the capacity of Filipino interpretation and translation services, community education and outreach, and assessment, evaluation and documentation of local Filipino language access needs.

## Conclusion

Language access community grantees made significant progress advancing language justice in San Francisco during the last fiscal year. By working directly with LEP community members, organizations played a key role in addressing gaps, ensuring San Franciscans could access the supportive services they needed, and strengthening local language access capacity through community interpreter trainings. Grantees also informed key stakeholders about community language needs through advice to City departments, engagement on LAO amendments discussions, and partnership with the Immigrant Rights Commission (IRC). Through the activities conducted, language access community grantees supported the City’s language infrastructure and helped ensure alignment between the City’s language access efforts and the needs of LEP communities.

# LANSF CITY DEPARTMENT SPOT CHECKS

## Background

LANSF uses spot checks to evaluate interactions with City departments through the lens of a Limited English Proficient (LEP) individual. This data has been collected from surveys conducted by LANSF members since Fiscal Year (FY) 2015-2016. After encountering a City department through a public contact point in their language, LANSF members fill out an OCEIA survey that helps to identify if City departments and their employees are complying with the San Francisco Language Access Ordinance (LAO) by providing adequate language access to City services and information. For example, individuals may seek a wide range of information related to a City department's services such as service changes to Municipal Transportation Agency bus routes, public benefits information from the Human Services Agency, or property tax information from the San Francisco Treasurer and Tax Collector. Whether through an in-person or telephonic interaction, survey respondents inquire about City information or services related to their situation and needs. Their experiences and insights provide crucial information about how well City departments are serving LEP individuals and how they can improve these services. OCEIA's analysis of spot check data over the years indicates that City departments are gradually improving access to vital information and services for LEP individuals, particularly for the LAO threshold languages of Chinese, Spanish, and Filipino. However, language services for non-threshold languages, such as Arabic, Russian, and Tigrinya, have not shown the same upward trend of improvement over time.

## Methods

The survey data is collected by LANSF members and their constituents through a "mystery shopper" method. The LANSF member attempts to access a City department through a public access point for a provided service or information in their language and records their experience during the encounter with the City department and its employees.

OCEIA analyzes the data and identifies trends from LANSF's survey results.

The surveys ask respondents a broad range of questions, such as:

### TELEPHONIC SURVEYS

- From the start of the phone call, what type of automated prompt was provided, and was there any ability to access the prompt in your language?
- Were you able to speak to a live person? If so, what was their response to your request when asked in your language?
- Was the City employee able to identify your language?
- What was the wait time to speak to a bilingual employee or interpreter?

### IN-PERSON SURVEYS

- Were you able to identify signs posted in your language?
- Were there any translated brochures or forms in your language?
- How did the employee respond to your request when asked in your preferred language?
- What was the overall quality of language and/or customer service?

The scope of the survey includes over 40 City departments covering a variety of services. The questions posed to survey respondents range from yes/no questions about physical signage or phone-trees in their preferred language to qualitative questions that ask respondents to rate their experiences based on their ability to receive applicable translated documents or interpretation. For example, survey respondents rate the overall quality of language services based on their ability to receive well-translated documents or effective interpretation from the City department on a scale ranging from very positive to very

negative. Survey respondents also rate the overall quality of customer service. This involves sharing their opinion about how the City employee conducted the interaction – for example, whether the Department employee was helpful, respectful, and/or attempted to resolve the issue even if the employee could not speak the language of the respondent. These data points are analyzed by OCEIA to provide insight into LEP individuals' experiences accessing City services and information.

## Possible Limitations of the Data

There are limits to how much information this survey data set can provide. Most surveys evaluate language access services in the three languages required by the LAO, which are Chinese, Spanish, and Filipino. Fewer surveys address services provided in languages that are not required, such as Arabic, Russian, and Vietnamese. Another limitation is that telephonic surveys comprise a higher proportion of completed surveys than in-person surveys. Some factors that may explain this include the ease of using the telephonic surveys and limited in-person operational capacity of City departments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

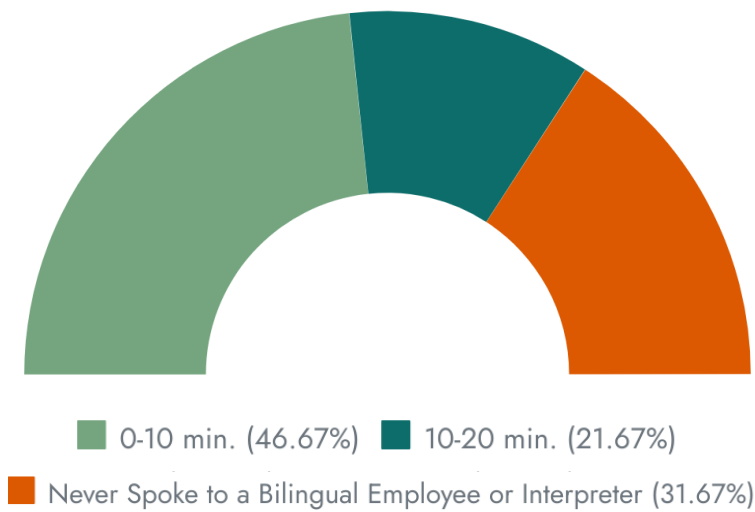
## Analysis of the Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Surveys

From July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023, LANSF conducted 60 spot checks. Of these spot checks, five were completed in person and 55 were completed telephonically. Non-threshold languages comprised a higher proportion of spot check surveys conducted in FY 2022-2023 than in previous years. This may be a contributing factor impacting the results. The spot checks were spread across 21 City departments and included the following languages: Amharic, Arabic, Filipino, Spanish, and Tigrinya.

### **Three important measures indicative of user experience in the surveys are:**

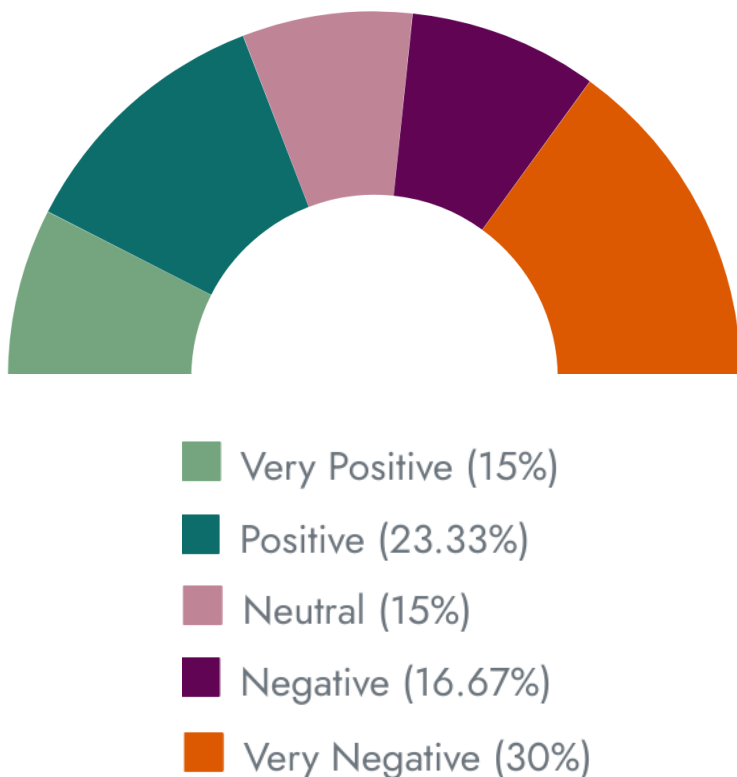
- 1) wait time to speak with a bilingual employee or interpreter,
- 2) overall quality of language services received, and
- 3) overall quality of customer service received.

## Wait Time for Bilingual Employee or Interpreter FY 2022-2023



When asked to measure the approximate wait time to speak to a bilingual employee or interpreter, approximately 46.67% of respondents indicated that their wait time was between 0-10 minutes, 21.67% of respondents reported that their wait time was between 10-20 minutes, and 31.76% of respondents said they never spoke to a bilingual employee or interpreter in their preferred language. No respondents indicated that their wait times were 20-30 minutes or more than 30 minutes.

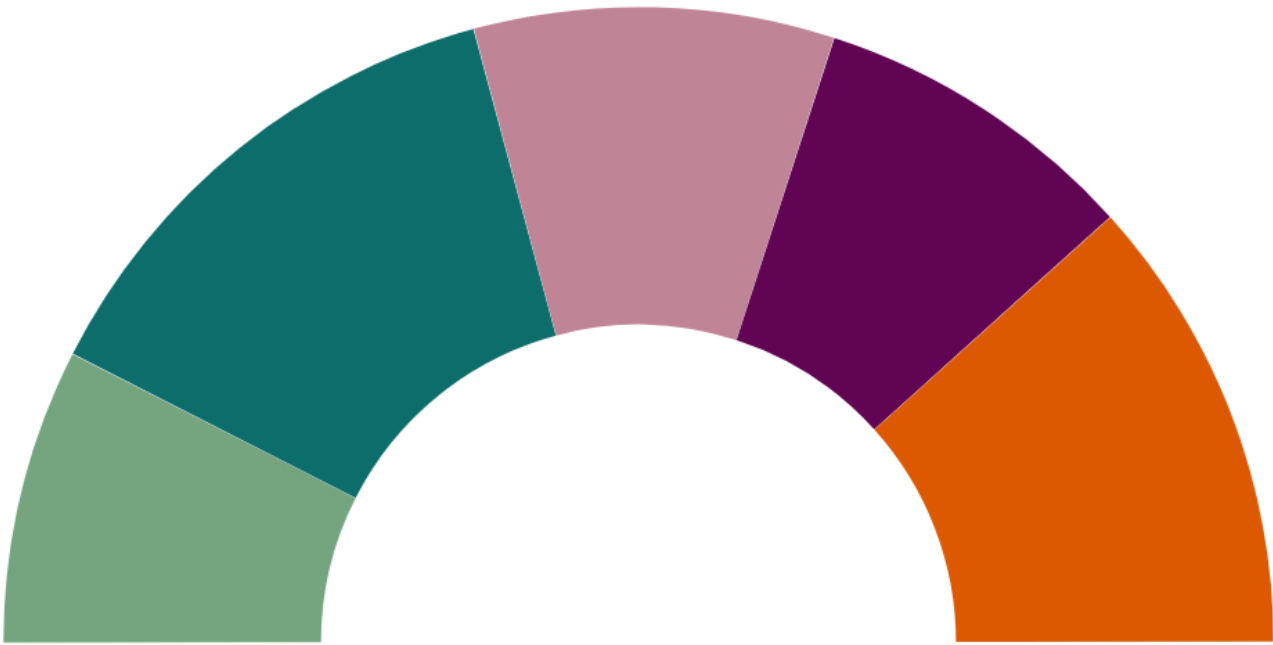
## Quality of Language Services FY 2022-2023



When asked to rate the overall quality of language services received, approximately 38.33% of respondents rated their interactions with City departments as positive or very positive, 15% of respondents as fair/neutral, and 46.67% of respondents gave negative or very negative ratings. The Spanish language responses rated the highest of all surveyed languages with 40% positive sentiment, 46.67% negative sentiment, and 13.33% neutral sentiment from survey participants. The Tigrinya language responses rated the lowest of all surveyed languages, with 29.41% positive sentiment, 52.94% negative sentiment, and 17.65% neutral sentiment from survey respondents.

# Overall Quality of Customer Service

## FY 2022-2023



Very Positive (15%)   Positive (26.67%)   Neutral (18.33%)  
Negative (16.67%)   Very Negative (23.33%)

In addition to language services, the survey asked respondents to evaluate the quality of the City department’s customer service. When rating the overall quality of customer service received, approximately 41.67% of respondents rated their interactions with City departments as positive or very positive, 18.33% of respondents as fair/neutral, and 40% of respondents gave negative or very negative ratings. Spanish-speaking respondents rated the City’s customer service highest with 44.83% positive sentiment, 44.83% negative sentiment, and 10.34% neutral sentiment from survey participants. Tigrinya-speaking respondents gave the City’s customer service the lowest ratings with 29.41% positive sentiment, 52.94% negative sentiment, and 17.65% neutral sentiment.



# Analysis Over the Years (September 2015 - June 2023)

Between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2023, LANSF organizations conducted 670 spot checks. Of these, 175 surveys were completed through an in-person visit and 495 were completed telephonically.

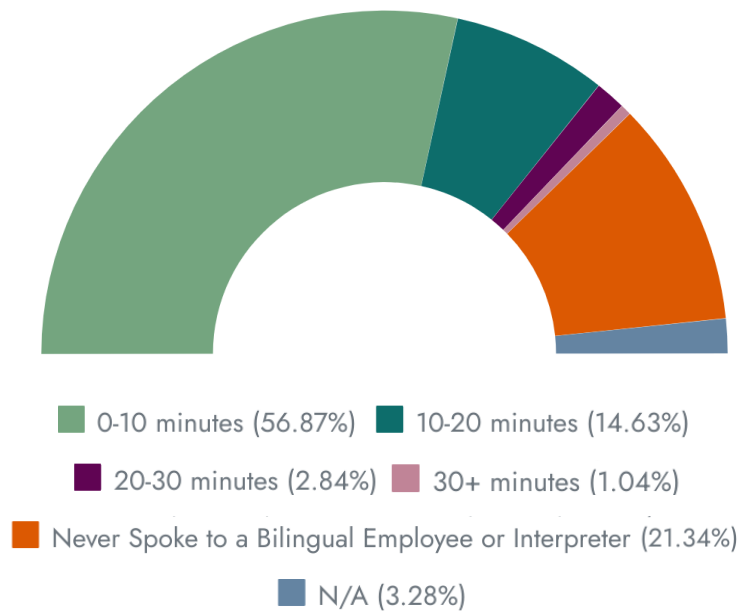
The spot checks were spread across 46 City departments and included the following languages:

Language	Number of Telephonic Surveys	Number of In-Person Surveys
Spanish	246	99
Chinese	154	57
Filipino	44	7
Tigrinya	25	0
Arabic	16	3
Vietnamese	5	5
Russian	2	4
Amharic	3	0

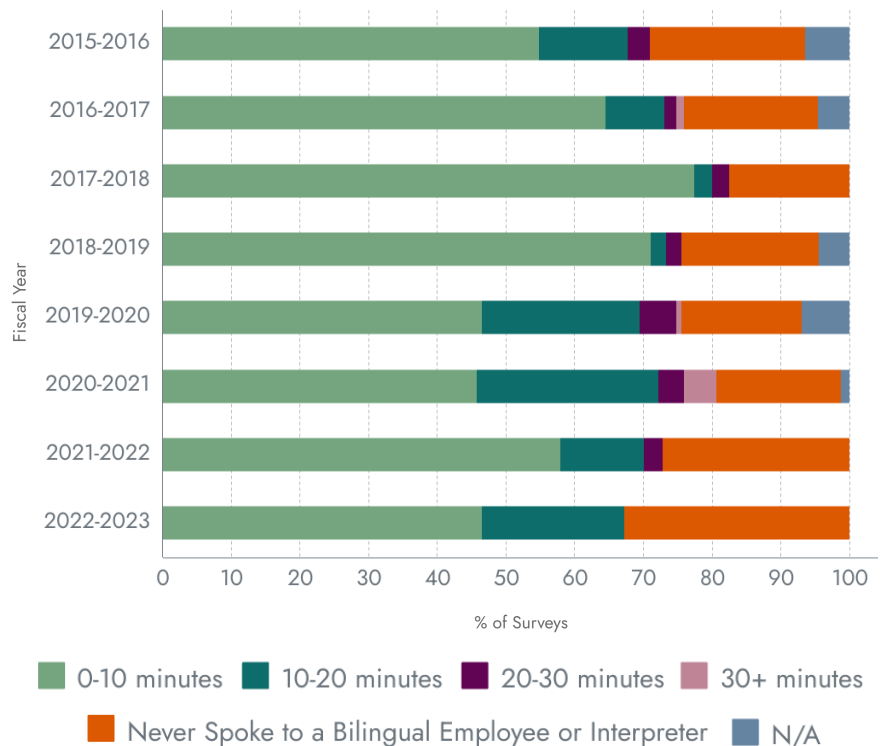
Since 2015, approximately 56.87% of respondents indicated that their wait time was between 0-10 minutes, 14.63% of respondents waited between 10-20 minutes, 2.84% of respondents waited between 20-30 minutes, 1.04% of respondents waited 30 minutes or more, and 21.34% of respondents indicated that they never spoke to a bilingual employee or interpreter in their preferred language. 3.28% of respondents did not answer the question.

Survey respondents reported a 0-10 minute wait time between 55% to 78% of the time for both telephonic and in-person surveys from FY 2016-2019. Reports of a 0-10 minute wait time decreased to a range between 46% to 57% during the range of FY 2020-2023.

## Wait Time For Bilingual Employee or Interpreter All Languages Aggregate Total FY 2015-2016 to FY 2022-2023

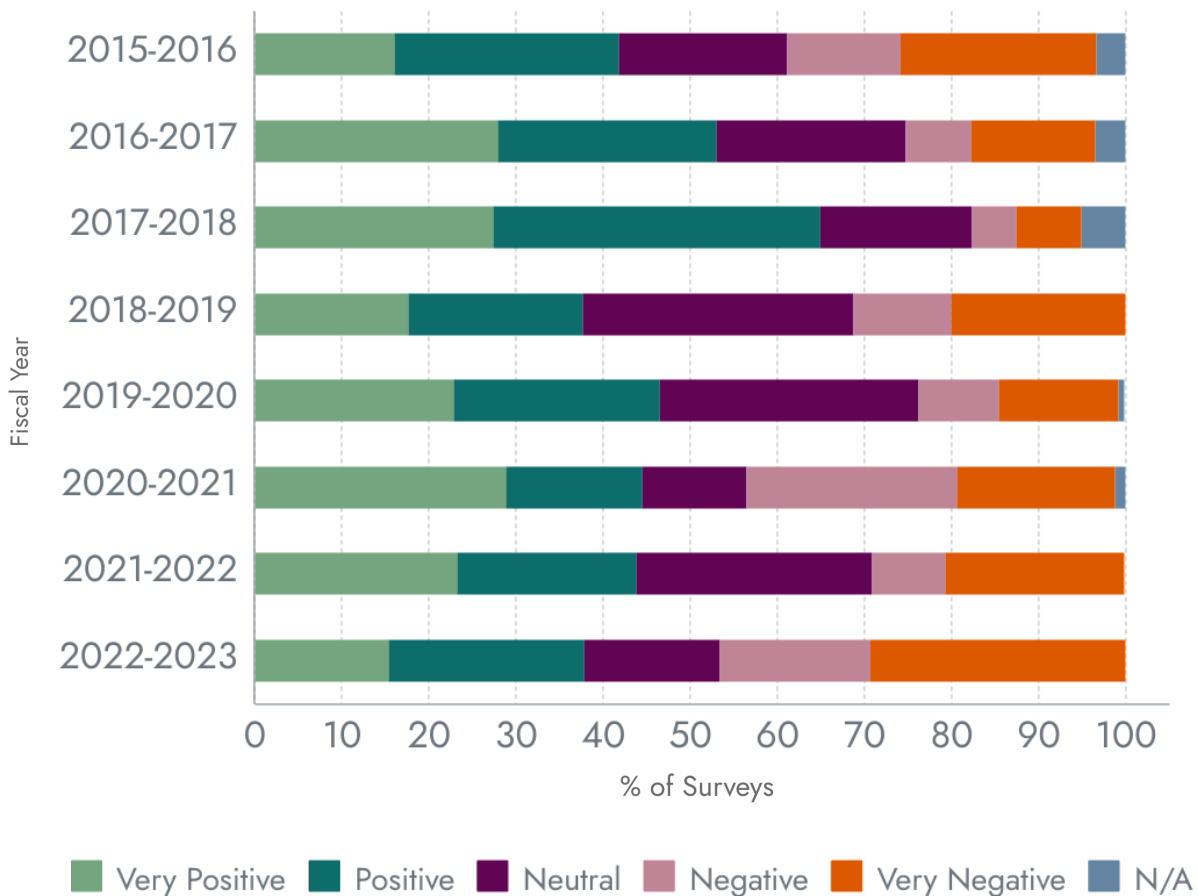


## Wait Time For Bilingual Employee or Interpreter All Languages Aggregate Total FY 2015-2016 to FY 2022-2023



## Quality of Language Services

All Languages Aggregate Total FY 2015-2016 to FY 2022-2023



When evaluating the overall quality of language services, approximately 47.16% of respondents rated their interactions with City departments as positive or very positive, 22.69% of respondents as fair/neutral, and 28.51% of respondents gave negative or very negative ratings. There were also 1.64% of respondents who did not answer the question. Respondents evaluating services in Chinese and Spanish reported higher rates of positive experiences, while those evaluating non-required languages such as Arabic, Amharic and Tigrinya reported higher rates of negative experiences.

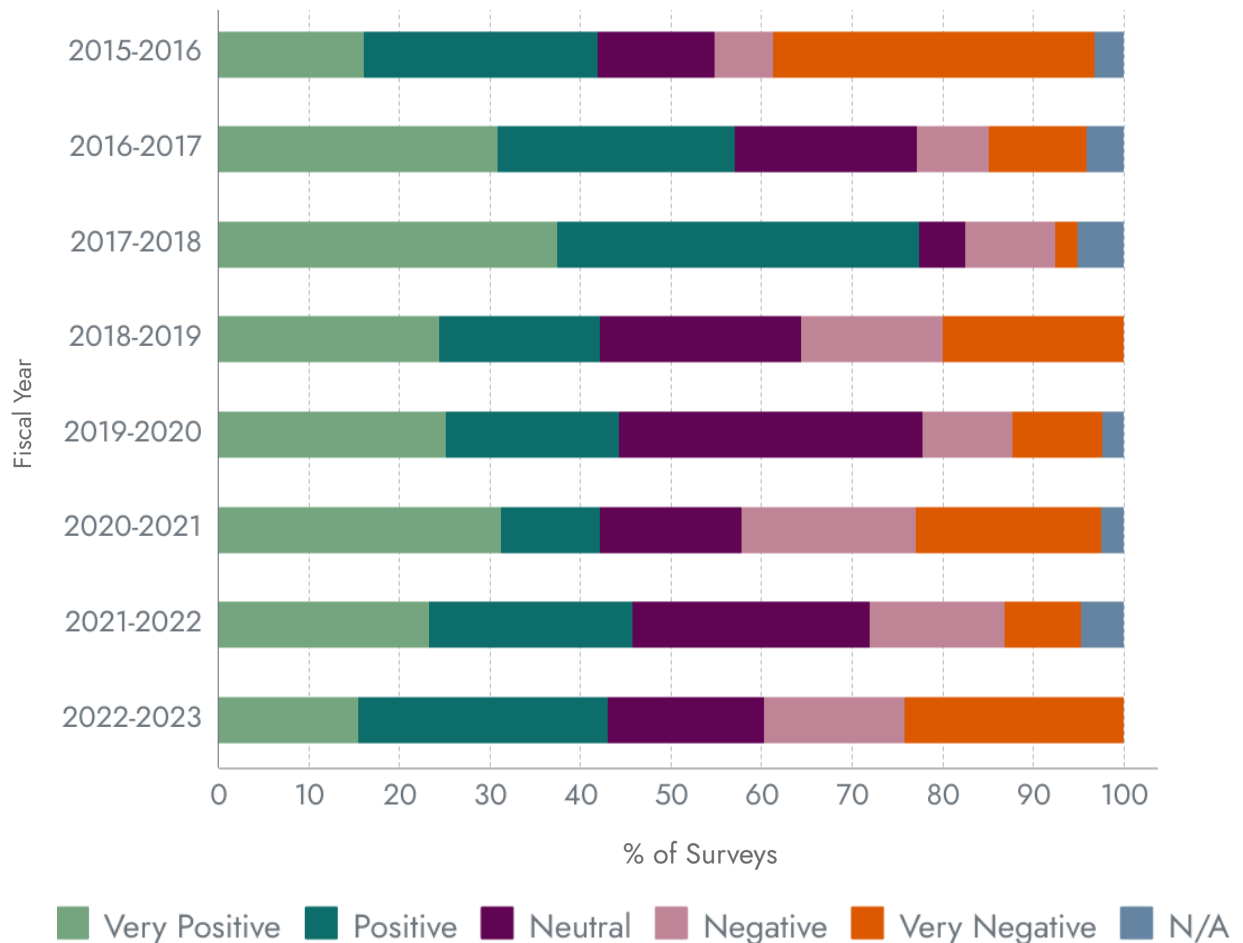
The general trend for the quality of language services across the years has remained relatively positive, ranging between 38% to 65% for both telephonic and in-person surveys. However, since FY 2019-2020, LANSF survey respondents have reported more negative experiences with the quality of language services they received.

When evaluating the overall quality of customer service, approximately 49.25% of respondents rated their interactions with City departments as positive or very positive, 21.79% of respondents as fair/neutral, and 25.97% of respondents gave a negative or very negative rating. There were also 2.99% of respondents who did not answer the question.

Similar to the rating of overall quality of language services, the overall quality of customer service experienced by LANSF members has trended upward over the years, but negative sentiment began to increase in FY 2019-2020. Respondents evaluating services in Chinese and Spanish generally reported higher rates of positive experiences relative to other languages. Respondents evaluating services in non-required languages such as Arabic, Amharic and Tigrinya reported higher rates of negative experiences with customer service encounters.

## Quality of Customer Service

### All Languages Aggregate Total FY 2015-2016 to FY 2022-2023



“Without language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry or savor their songs. I again realized that we were not different people with separate languages; we were one people, with different tongues.”

— **Nelson Mandela**  
*Long Walk to Freedom*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## LOOKING BACK

In last year's Language Access Compliance Summary Report, OCEIA recommended that City departments:

- Improve remote access to departmental information and services.
- Strengthen language access planning, coordination, and outreach.
- Promote thorough data collection practices and training.

Departmental data trends showed improvements in some of these areas during the last fiscal year. For example, Departments increased their use of the intake method as their primary data collection approach. Since intake is the most accurate of the three data collection methods that Departments can use, this may improve the accuracy of Department compliance data for future years. Another positive trend from Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-2023 was the increase in total Limited English Proficient (LEP) client interactions Citywide. Potential factors influencing this may be increases in the number of in-person events held during the fiscal year, increases in City department contact points with community members as pandemic restrictions have lifted, and/or expansion of in-language outreach initiatives conducted by City departments. Departments also increased the number of Citywide translated materials during FY 2022-2023.

Though Departments increased language access activities across several measures, the data also showed declines in Citywide bilingual staff, telephonic interpretations conducted, and language services expenditures. Departments can improve compliance with the Language Access Ordinance (LAO) by advancing their work in these areas during the upcoming fiscal year.

# LOOKING FORWARD

There are multiple approaches that the City can take to improve compliance with the LAO in FY 2023-2024. It will be important for Departments to prioritize language access in the context of the current economic outlook for the City and continued arrival of newcomers and asylum-seekers in San Francisco, many of whom need language support. This includes prioritizing City language access capacity-building, improving data collection and analysis methods, and strengthening City language access resources through budgeting.

## LANGUAGE ACCESS CAPACITY-BUILDING

### Training on Interpretation Coordination Protocols

- Increase the frequency of Department-specific language access instruction and training for public-facing City staff.

Customer wait time and connection to real-time in-language support were areas for improvement identified by OCEIA's analysis of spot checks this year. The 2022-2023 spot check results found that when asked to estimate approximate wait times for accessing information in their language, 21.67% of respondents indicated wait times of 10-20 minutes and 31.76% of respondents indicated they were never connected to a bilingual employee or vendor interpreter during the interaction.

Departments should regularly instruct public-contact staff members about Department-specific language access policies and protocols for arranging language services. Many Departments have experienced high levels of staff turnover since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Language access complaints from this fiscal year indicate a lack of consistency in public-contact staff training and awareness. Departments should prioritize regular instruction and training to ensure consistent awareness across public-facing staff of their responsibilities to implement the requirements of the LAO in their day-to-day work. This includes the step-by-step process for arranging interpretation after identifying a language need, whether

through contacting a qualified bilingual staff member or a language services vendor for telephonic or non-telephonic interpretation. In addition, Departments should emphasize the importance of using language services to efficiently and effectively communicate with the members of the public they are serving. Inclusion of language access protocols in onboarding and periodic refresher trainings for public-contact staff will help ensure consistent approaches to addressing language access needs across staff members. OCEIA is introducing two new technical assistance tools with the publication of this report to support Departments in disseminating language access best practices across teams.

## **RESOURCE PLANNING**

### **Hiring and Retention of Bilingual Staff**

- Hire and retain more bilingual staff to ensure sufficient internal resources for addressing the needs of LEP community members served by City departments.

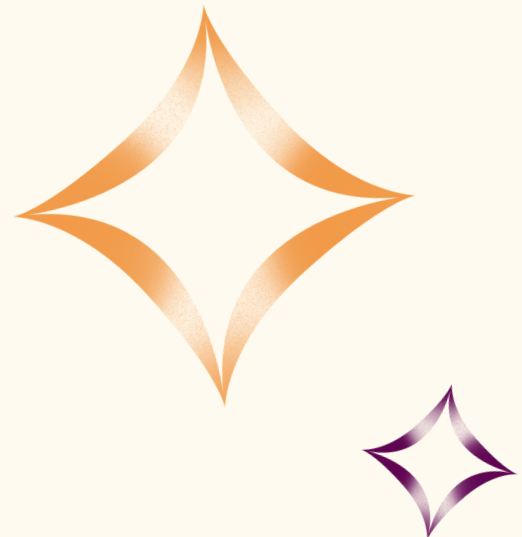
The FY 2022-2023 data showed a slight decline in bilingual staff Citywide, with a drop in both Department of Human Resources (DHR)-certified and total bilingual staff. Departments should prioritize recruitment, hiring, and retention of bilingual staff members. Bilingual staff are often the experts in a Department's programs, services, and terminology. Maintaining a robust roster of qualified bilingual staff members with fluency in the languages spoken by San Francisco community members will improve the accessibility of Department programs and services for LEP members of the public in future years.



## Leveraging Tools and Emerging Technologies

- Explore future opportunities to supplement language access activities with new tools and emerging technologies.

Though machine translation tools have existed for more than 10 years, accuracy issues have often prevented these tools from serving as viable options for successful, high-quality translation work. The Digital Accessibility and Inclusion Standard currently requires human translation of vital information for the required languages under the LAO. There have been continued advancements in the development of machine learning and Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the private sector over the past few years. In December 2023, the City published Generative AI Guidelines to provide City employees with guidance on best practices for the safe and responsible use of Generative AI in their day-to-day work. Other cities are also exploring ways that the use of Generative AI could improve access to City services. As Generative AI-driven interpretation and translation tools continue to evolve and improve, there may be future opportunities to explore integrating these tools into the City's language access services infrastructure composed of City bilingual staff, vendors, and community partners. OCEIA and other City stakeholders will continue to monitor the emerging technological landscape, centering the importance of accuracy and culturally competent communication, as developments progress in the months and years ahead.



## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

- Continue improvement of current compliance data collection processes, track language access activities consistently, and refine multiple data sources for a more diverse data landscape.

Multiple data sources inform the current status of language access compliance in San Francisco, including Departments' self-reported LAO compliance data, spot checks conducted by community-based organizations, and language access complaints. Departments' compliance reports showed some data collection improvements during the past fiscal year by showing higher use of the intake method of data collection and more thoroughly completed compliance reports. Multiple data collection approaches are listed on the annual reporting form, including: intake, annual survey, and number of telephonic interpretation requests. OCEIA typically recommends using the intake option so Departments can more easily capture and track LEP client interactions as they take place. In FY 2023-2024, Departments should utilize reliable internal data collection processes and thorough data reporting practices, both of which are important for monitoring LEP client needs and trends across years. This will help ensure that Departments submit accurate data in 2024 for total LEP client interactions, telephonic interpretations, in-person interpretations, translated documents, and other measures included in the LAO compliance reporting form.

Beyond working with Departments to improve their self-reported compliance data, OCEIA will also continue working with community-based organizations to increase the availability of robust spot check data and language access complaint information in FY 2023-2024. In June 2023, OCEIA introduced a new spot check form focused on websites and will continue collaborating with the Language Access Network of San Francisco (LANSF), Digital Services, and other stakeholders to learn more about language access compliance and gaps in accessibility for digital information in the months ahead.

# LANGUAGE SERVICES BUDGETING

## Prioritizing Language Services and LEP Community Support

- Increase Department language services budgets and support for community partners serving LEP individuals.

Departments' language services budgets fell by 25.3% in the past fiscal year. For several Departments, further research indicates that the FY 2022-2023 language services budget decreases were likely attributable to regular seasonal and operational fluctuations. That said, Departments should work to increase their spending and planning for language services costs as part of their annual budgeting process. A budget for language access activities includes: compensatory pay for certified bilingual staff, expenses for translated documents and telephonic interpretation, on-site language services vendor expenses, and other costs not covered in these categories. One approach that Departments can take in budget planning is to consider their annual LEP client interactions, translation and interpretation requests received, and the amount of documents they translated to develop budgets that are in alignment with community needs. In the context of the current City economic climate and budget constraints, it will be important for Departments to be intentional in partnering with City suppliers and community partners to bolster capacity for serving LEP individuals when delivering Department information and services.



# **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TOOLS**

**I. VITAL INFORMATION**

**II. TRANSLATION GUIDE**



# VITAL INFORMATION

## WHAT CITY DEPARTMENTS NEED TO KNOW

One key mandate of the Language Access Ordinance (LAO) is that Departments translate all vital information shared with the public. Understanding what counts as vital is important for complying with the LAO's translation directive.

The LAO addresses the meaning of "vital information" in Section 91.5, "Translation of Materials and Signage."

### Part (a) of Section 91.5 explains as follows:

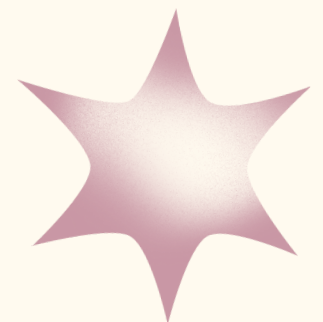
- "Except as provided in subsection 91.5(g), Departments shall translate the following written materials that provide vital information to the public about the Department's services or programs into the language(s) spoken by a Substantial Number of Limited English Speaking persons." (See table on next page.)

When training language access liaisons on the core LAO requirements, OCEIA encourages them to think about vital information as covering any Department written materials that affect the rights, benefits, duties, and/or privileges of the public.

### Part (c) of Section 91.5 gives the following additional guidance:

- "Departments shall prioritize the translation of written materials by giving highest priority to materials that affect public safety and critical services."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> San Francisco Administrative Code, Sec. 91.5.



# WHAT IS VITAL INFORMATION?

*As defined by LAO Section 91.5, "Translation of Materials and Signage," vital information includes:*

## **Applications or forms**

to participate in a Department's program or activity, receive its benefits or services, or file a complaint;

## **Written notices**

of rights to, determination of eligibility for, award of, denial of, loss of, or decreases in benefits or services, including the right to appeal any Department's decision;

## **Written tests**

that do not assess English language competency, but test competency for a particular license or skill for which knowledge of written English is not required;

## **Notices**

advising Limited English Speaking Persons of free language assistance;

## **Materials**

explaining a Department's services or programs, including publicly-posted documents; or

## **Other written documents**

related to direct services to the public that could impact the community or an individual seeking services from or participating in a program of a Department.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> San Francisco Administrative Code, Sec. 91.5.

# TRANSLATION GUIDE

This document contains best practices for bilingual staff tasked with the translation of documents and/or vital information. To learn more about what constitutes vital information, you can read section 91.5(a) of the [Language Access Ordinance \(LAO\)](#).

## 1. Read and analyze the text for the following:

- Formatting** Examine the document's formatting to see if it is too complex to copy or edit. If so, ask for a simple text version of the file. It can be helpful to organize content for translation by using a simple table or spreadsheet.
- Register** This is the level of formality deemed appropriate for the translation, taking into account the occasion, purpose, context, and intended audience. Here you will determine if you will address the reader using the formal or informal "you."
- Tone** This refers to the attitude that is conveyed in the message. For example, does it sound assertive, friendly, informative, persuasive, instructional, or cautionary?
- Meaning** Make sure that you fully understand the terms, concepts and processes conveyed in the text. When in doubt, ask for clarification from the requester.
- Difficulties in translation** It is important to translate for meaning, rather than literal word-for-word translation. Certain expressions may be difficult to translate into the target language, so aim to draft a text that sounds natural and conveys the same meaning. You may need to research new terms. Refer to the [Translation Style Guides](#) for more information.
- Terminology** Identify old and new terms. Refer to previously translated documents for guidance, if available. We highly encourage departments to develop glossaries of frequently used key terms to retain this institutional knowledge.
- Organization Names** If the document includes the names of City departments, businesses, and/or community-based organizations, check with the requester for any previously translated information. Refer to the [Department Names Glossary](#) as a resource for translated City department names.

## 2. Research the terms identified

- Look up the term's **definition** in an English dictionary.
- Look up the term's **equivalent** in a bilingual dictionary.
- Use a dictionary in the target language to look up the meaning of all equivalent terms.
- Identify the correct term by **confirming the meaning** that you found in the English dictionary.
- Make sure you use the proper equivalent term, particularly for specialized topics.

*In your glossary, make sure to add the terms, proper nouns, abbreviations and acronyms that are unique to this project to ensure consistency in future translations.*

## 3. Research difficult phrases

**For phrases or concepts that are difficult to translate, consider the following:**

- Reorganize the wording or sentence structure, if it sounds better in the target language.
- Look past the text to see if you need to expand the wording to arrive at the meaning implied.
- If you are using new or technical terms, make sure you use the corresponding terminology.
- Use online media resources in the target language to confirm the prevalence of the phrasing you choose. Be discerning and make sure to use reliable online sources for your research.

## 4. Write the first draft

After completing your research, write the first draft freely. Strive to let the words sound natural in the target language. If you have difficulties, make a note and return to the segment later, keeping in mind that you might have to do more research to find an alternative.



## 5. Edit for style and consistency

Editing goes beyond making sure there are no grammatical errors. The register and tone should be consistent throughout your translation. The wording and sentence structure should sound natural to the native speaker. Avoid translating word-for-word and sounding like a literal translation. Avoid using terms or expressions specific to a certain geographic region that are not relevant to the target audience. The goal is to write in a way that can be widely understood. The reader should walk away with the same facts and have a similar understanding and reaction to the content as the reader of the source text. It's often helpful to read the text aloud to listen for the same effect or impact.

Do not copy punctuation or capitalization that conflicts with your target language's punctuation rules. Refer to the [Translation Style Guides](#) for punctuation, stylistic, and grammatical inquiries.

## 6. Review for accuracy

Compare the source text sentence by sentence against the translated text to make sure nothing is missing, all information is conveyed clearly, and all actors, actions, places, and times are accurate.

## 7. Proofread and finalize

Read the entire document for comprehension and accuracy, looking for missing elements, incorrect word endings (gender and number), punctuation and numerical errors, incorrect capitalization, spelling mistakes, and formatting inconsistencies.

It is best practice to have someone else proofread your translation before finalizing it.

**For more in-depth information, please contact [language.access@sfgov.org](mailto:language.access@sfgov.org).**



# DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS

**All Department compliance data  
required by the LAO can be  
viewed online at:**



**[sf.gov/languageaccess](https://sf.gov/languageaccess)**

# DEPARTMENT LIST FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023

- Adult Probation
- Appeals, Board of
- Arts Commission
- Asian Art Museum
- Assessor-Recorder
- Building Inspection, Department of
- Children, Youth and Their Families, Department of
- Child Support Services
- District Attorney's Office
- Early Childhood, Department of
- Economic and Workforce Development, Office of
- Elections, Department of
- Emergency Management, Department of (911)
- Environment Department
- Ethics Commission
- Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
- Fire Department
- Homelessness and Supportive Housing, Department of
- Human Rights Commission
- Human Services Agency
- Juvenile Probation
- Mayor's Office
- Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development
- Municipal Transportation Agency
- Planning Department
- Police Accountability, Department of
- Police Department
- Port of San Francisco
- Public Defender's Office
- Public Health, Department of
- Public Library
- Public Utilities Commission
- Public Works, Department of
- Recreation and Parks
- Rent Board
- San Francisco Film Commission
- San Francisco International Airport
- San Francisco Zoo
- Sheriff, Office of
- Status of Women, Department on the
- Supervisors, Board of (Clerk)
- Treasurer and Tax Collector
- War Memorial



## City Administrator Departments

- 311 (Customer Service)
- Animal Care and Control
- City Administrator (Central Office)
- Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs, Office of
- County Clerk
- Labor Standards Enforcement, Office of
- Mayor's Office on Disability
- Medical Examiner, Office of the Chief
- Transgender Initiatives, Office of
- Treasure Island Development Authority

Department	 Total budget for language access	 Has a written policy	 Training for public contact staff	 Completed mandatory LAO training
Adult Probation	\$ 41,960			
Appeals, Board of	\$ 2,576			
Arts Commission	\$ 17,970			
Asian Art Museum	\$ 600			
Assessor-Recorder	\$ 18,774			
Building Inspection, Department of	\$ 3,095,234			
Children, Youth and Their Families, Department of	\$ 7,380			
Child Support Services	\$ 15,600			
District Attorney's Office	\$ 121,808			


<b>Department</b>	 Total budget for language access	 Has a written policy	 Training for public contact staff	 Completed mandatory LAO training
<b>Early Childhood, Department of</b>	<b>\$ 23,577</b>			
<b>Economic and Workforce Development, Office of</b>	<b>\$ 26,964</b>			
<b>Elections, Department of</b>	<b>\$ 2,817,596</b>			
<b>Emergency Management, Department of (911)</b>	<b>\$ 69,460</b>			
<b>Environment Department</b>	<b>\$ 120,098</b>			
<b>Ethics Commission</b>	<b>\$ 9,491</b>			
<b>Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco</b>	<b>\$ 16,650</b>			
<b>Fire Department</b>	<b>\$ 9,983</b>			
<b>Homelessness and Supportive Housing, Department of</b>	<b>\$ 116,045</b>			

Department	 Total budget for language access	 Has a written policy	 Training for public contact staff	 Completed mandatory LAO training
Human Rights Commission	\$ 12,975			
Human Services Agency	\$ 1,228,297			
Juvenile Probation	\$ 24,513			
Mayor's Office	\$ 0			
Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development	\$ 10,876			
Municipal Transportation Agency	\$ 1,307,342			
Planning Department	\$ 46,106			
Police Accountability, Department of	\$ 5,789			
Police Department	\$ 113,851			

















Department	 Total budget for language access	 Has a written policy	 Training for public contact staff	 Completed mandatory LAO training
Port of San Francisco	\$ 1,560			
Public Defender's Office	\$ 69,581			
Public Health, Department of	\$ 3,324,321			
Public Library	\$ 578,579			
Public Utilities Commission	\$ 167,217			
Public Works, Department of	\$6,000			
Recreation and Parks	\$ 78,857			
Rent Board	\$ 160,325			
San Francisco Film Commission	\$ 0			

<b>Department</b>	 Total budget for language access	 Has a written policy	 Training for public contact staff	 Completed mandatory LAO training
<b>San Francisco International Airport</b>	<b>\$ 14,394</b>			
<b>San Francisco Zoo</b>	<b>\$ 0</b>			
<b>Sheriff's Office</b>	<b>\$ 295,765</b>			
<b>Status of Women, Department on the</b>	<b>\$ 10,621</b>			
<b>Supervisors, Board of (Clerk)</b>	<b>\$ 45,333</b>			
<b>Treasurer and Tax Collector</b>	<b>\$ 80,884</b>			
<b>War Memorial</b>	<b>\$ 1,628</b>			



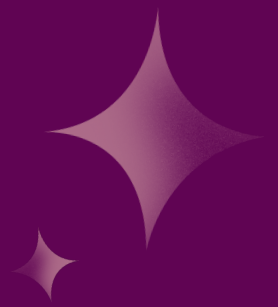
<b>City Administrator Department</b>	 Total budget for language access	 Has a written policy	 Training for public contact staff	 Completed mandatory LAO training
<b>311</b> (Customer Service)	<b>\$ 65,363</b>			
<b>Animal Care and Control</b>	<b>\$ 12,125</b>			
<b>City Administrator (Central Office)*</b>	<b>\$ 46,839</b>			
<b>Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs, Office of</b>	<b>\$ 771,495</b>			
<b>County Clerk</b>	<b>\$ 6,298</b>			
<b>Labor Standards Enforcement, Office of</b>	<b>\$ 11,400</b>			

*\* Reporting for City Administrator: Central Office, Real Estate Division, City Hall Events, Office of Cannabis, Digital Services, and Office of Resilience and Capital Planning.*

City Administrator Department	 Total budget for language access	 Has a written policy	 Training for public contact staff	 Completed mandatory LAO training
Mayor's Office on Disability	\$ 9,736			
Medical Examiner, Office of the Chief	\$ 2,301			
Transgender Initiatives, Office of	\$ 1,560			
Treasure Island Development Authority	\$ 300			

All Department compliance data required by the LAO can be viewed online at:

[sf.gov/languageaccess](https://sf.gov/languageaccess)



# About OCEIA

The Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA) is a policy, compliance, direct services, and grantmaking office.

OCEIA's innovative programs and initiatives focus on Civic Engagement, Community Safety, Immigrant Assistance, and Language Access. Core projects include: the Community Ambassadors Program (CAP), San Francisco Pathways to Citizenship Initiative, DreamSF Fellows, Community Interpreters Training, Immigrant Support Hub, and community assistance grants.

In addition to overseeing compliance, OCEIA assists City departments, the Mayor's Office, and the Board of Supervisors to better meet the needs of residents and workers for whom English is not a primary language. These services include trainings, tools, resources, and technical assistance to increase capacity and provisioning for language access services. On a limited basis, OCEIA's Language Access Unit also provides direct translation and interpretation assistance.

OCEIA

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**OCEIA**

SAN FRANCISCO OFFICE OF  
**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT  
& IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS**

