



Language and Communication Access in Multilingual California

Commitment to Language and Communication Access

Language and communication access to limited English proficient individuals and people with disabilities are key steps towards inclusion and equity for all Californians. This Action Brief shares good practices and examples from our CBO partners.

Action Brief

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Good Practice Communication Tactics

- 1. Know your community.** Gather and use data to understand the diversity of the community including languages spoken, limited English proficiency, literacy levels, and people with disabilities. Identify language gaps in language coverage. Actively seek feedback from community members regarding the accessibility and effectiveness of your communication methods.
- 2. Partner with or hire people who understand the language and communication needs.** Trusted messengers often speak the language and understand cultural norms and values of their communities which can ensure that messages are respectful and relatable. Community groups and ethnic media may be able to cover gaps in language and communication coverage. Ensure all interpreted or translated materials are reviewed for cultural relevancy including context, tone, and non-verbal cues.
- 3. Use simple and accessible messaging.** Use plain language and everyday words, avoid policy and technical language. Considering varying literacy levels, write short sentences and minimize the number of words used on slides and flyers. Provide information in accessible formats such as ASL, braille, close captions and easy-to-read materials with large text and pictures or visual cues.
- 4. Represent the community in visuals.** Select pictures of people representing the community and people with disabilities in an empowering context. Show the people, not just tools they use. And show them doing a variety of things alongside friends, family members and colleagues.
- 5. Plan and budget.** Think of the needs of all people when planning a project. Budget for accessibility and special accommodations such as interpretation in programs and events.

This **Action Brief** is a product of the series "Trusted Messenger Learning Labs: From Discovery to Action." It is based on the fifth session, held on August 31, 2023, and features excerpts from a discussion with Susan Henderson (Executive Director, Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund), Laura Jimenez-Diecks (Senior Manager of Health Services, Canal Alliance), and Kazoua Heu (Director of Family Support Services, Lao Family Community Development, Inc.).

What Partners are Saying and Doing

What tactics have you used to provide language and communication access?

Laura: We have an after-school program, and the students are part of a community that speaks Mam (an indigenous Mayan spoken language native to Guatemala and Mexico). We geared the campaign toward the students where we created a COVID-19 pandemic experience assignment for them. Then, we have the students take it back to their families and report back to their teachers. This way we activated students who were native speakers of Mam. Immigrants tend to rely a lot on their children to connect with services and often bridge the communication gap.

Kazoua: Two-way communication is very, very important to our aging community, especially immigrants and refugees. They value dialogue to understand the information and give feedback to be a part of the conversation. For our older and aging population, we tend to have a longer dialogue which entails a greater time commitment.

Susan: People are born with a disability, or like me, acquire a disability sometime in their life. So, when we think about language, people in the disability community speak all languages. There are people in every community who may be deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or nonverbal. When we talk about language access, we're thinking about American Sign Language or different versions of sign language. We're thinking about captioning when we're showing videos and events and webinars and meetings. We're thinking about people who are accessing print material or written text on the Internet to make sure if you're blind that the text is accessible to you. For people who are nonverbal, we're making sure they have the space to communicate with augmentative and alternative devices that they can use.

What are lessons you've learned in providing language and communication access?

Kazoua: It's important to create an environment of trust. For our organization, we value and encourage dialogue because it allows us to redesign and readjust how we're marketing and promoting our programs to be attuned to community needs.

Laura: You must be an intentional listener to understand community needs. You can't just create something and give it to the people. You need to find the needs of the people then find a solution for that.

Susan: Make sure that any images you use in outreach materials reflect people with disabilities, so they know they are included in your messaging. We want every group to know that people with disabilities are a part of your community. Remember to use images that include people who have disabilities and their family members.

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Photo: A Canal Alliance community health worker conducts in-language outreach

The Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communications (OCPSC), housed within the Office of Planning and Research, initiates and executes campaigns related to the state's highest priority public awareness and community outreach efforts. The intent of a single state entity coordinating California's most important campaigns is so that the state can realize more inclusive and effective outcomes while preventing equity gaps in statewide outreach.