

Background

In May 8, 2001 the City of Oakland, California, became the first city in the nation to pass an Equal Access to Services Ordinance (EAO) with the purpose of removing language barriers that limited-English speakers may have in accessing City services.

Overcoming language barriers is particularly important given the nation's continued trend to a more multi-ethnic, multilingual population.

Full access to government is a fundamental mechanism to promote equal opportunities in America's diverse community, in so doing Oakland strengthens a healthier society.

Languages

According to the 1990 U.S. Census Report data, 30% of Oakland residents reported speaking a non-English language at home.

There are more than 150 languages spoken in the City of Oakland.

The EAO targets languages that have 10,000 or more Oakland residents that are limited English speakers.

Based on the most current U.S. Census report (1990), Chinese (both Cantonese and Mandarin) and Spanish meet this standard.

With the final U.S. Census Report upcoming in September 2002, the City of Oakland expects additional languages to meet the set standard.

City Agencies Departments and Divisions providing Equal Access

Community and Economic Development Agency (CEDA)
Financial Services Agency
Fire Services Agency
Life Enrichment Agency (LEA)
Police Services Agency (OPD)
Public Works Agency
Office of Retirement and Risk Assessment
Office of Personnel Resource Management
Office of Information Technology (OIT)
Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs
Office of the City Attorney
Office of the City Auditor
Office of the City Clerk
Office of the City Council
Office of the City Manager (CMO)
Office of the Mayor
Port of Oakland

Agency Compliance Requirements

City departments are required to translate the following materials into the required languages by a certified translator:

- Applications or forms to participate in a Department's program/activity or to receive its benefits/services.
- Written notices of rights, determinations of eligibility, award, denial, loss or decreases in benefits/services, including the right to appeal any Department's decision.
- Posted notices advising limited English speakers of free language assistance through availability of

bilingual staff and translated materials.

- Materials explaining a Department's services or programs.
- Complaint forms.
- Recorded telephone messages (reception areas and CityLine) that include basic information about the Department's operation.
- Written tests that don't assess English language competency, but test competency for a particular license or skill for which knowledge of written English is not required.
- Any other written documents that are publicly posted or that have the potential for important consequences for an individual seeking services from or participating in a program of a City Department.
- Include language options in City Web Pages and translated downloadable materials.

The Equal Access Office

The Equal Access Office is responsible for monitoring and facilitating City Agencies' compliance with the EAO.

The Office developed language guidelines for translation quality control to guarantee that all translated materials are appropriate to the target audience before they are distributed.

The Office created a centralized inventory system to make certain that all translated materials are filed adequately for future in-house adjustments.

The Office is also in charge of assessing each City Agency to recommend specific numbers of bilingual personnel needed at their public contact areas.

The Office oversees recruitment and hiring efforts of qualified bilingual individuals thus assuring that current City employees are not terminated, demoted or transferred in order to carry out the EAO.

The Office works with Departments and complainants to resolve disputes arising under the EAO.

The Equal Access Office Annual City Compliance Report

The EAO requires an annual departmental compliance report to the City Manager and City Council at the end of each fiscal year. The report will present implementation efforts and results from each City Agency that will include the following information:

- Number of public contact positions per Agency, including where they are located, which are currently filled by bilingual staff and/or how many are vacant.
- Number of written outreach materials translated into Chinese and Spanish.
- Complaint procedure for limited English speakers.

Complaint Procedure to any Violation of the EAO by any City Department

Complaints regarding material translation, provision of bilingual assistance or any other violation of the EAO can be made to the responsible City Department by telephone or by completing a complaint form provided by the Equal Access Office.

A copy of the complaint form will be forwarded to the Equal Access Office within 30 days of its receipt by the City Department where the responsible division shall document actions that will resolve the complaint.

Every six months, the Equal Access Office will report to City Manager and City Council information regarding the number, nature and status of language access complaints.

To obtain an EAO Complaint Form please call the Oaklander's Assistance Center at (510) 444-2489.

General Information

If you have any questions about the EAO, you can contact the City Manager's Equal Access Office at **(510) 238-2368**.

Mission Statement City of Oakland

The City of Oakland is committed to the delivery of effective, courteous, and responsive services. Citizens and employees are treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.

Civic and employee pride are accomplished through constant pursuit of excellence and a work force that values and reflects the diversity of the Oakland community.

EQUAL ACCESS ORDINANCE

City of Oakland Equal Access Office

Removing Language Barriers –
Enhancing Communication

Serving Limited English Speaking Individuals