

Houston Language Bank

City of Houston Language Access Plan

Project Synopsis

RE: Executive Order JULY 31,2013

*The Houston Solution - Web Based Universal Communication
Vital Public Information*

ACSSC

BACKGROUND:

MARCH 2013	ACSSC Language Access Team proposes plan for universal communication of vital public information to Mayor
MAY	Mayor decides to provide COH vital information in 5 most needed languages
JUNE	ACSSC Team proposes Executive Order language for Mayor & COH Legal Dept.
JULY 31	Houston Language Access Plan Executive Order public announcement
SUMMER	ACSSC Team provides Language Access Plan development for Office of International Communities
OCTOBER	City Departments' Language Coordinators designated as per Executive Order
DECEMBER	Mayor commits FY 2015 funding to ACSSC Team for Language Access community engagement
JANUARY 2014	City Departments' Language Access Needs Assessment Reports submitted to Mayor as per Executive Order
FEBRUARY	ACSSC commences Houston Language Bank planning and networking for Stakeholders
MARCH- APRIL	Houston Language Bank Solutions introduced to City Departments

NEED:

Up to 1.5 million constituent taxpayers do not have equitable access to **Essential Public Information** in Houston, Texas. Conservative analyses estimate more than 550,000 Internationals, and that estimate exceeds 1.8M in City population when Spanish-speakers are counted.

Public Information Access Inequities - Access to **Essential Public Information** is critical, both for economic development and constituent service efficiencies. Among an increasing plurality of the tax base, there is a great and growing unmet need for communication of basic public information, *including, but not limited to:*

- ◆ Hurricane preparedness, emergency warnings, evacuation plans, Homeland Security communication
- ◆ Business licensing, filings, permits, inspections, fire safety
- ◆ Public health, food inspection, childhood immunization, disease control
- ◆ Robbery prevention, personal safety, police incident reporting, human trafficking, municipal courts information
- ◆ Recycling, water conservation, neighborhood variance notification

SOLUTION: **Houston Language Bank**

21st Century Web-Based Communication Solutions

Serving Houston's language constituencies, prior to the Internet, was cost-prohibitive; re printing / mailing / media / distribution. Accurately rendered translation work has been affordable- *often* donated, discounted or underwritten by contributing stakeholders for public service outcomes. Now, "in-language pages" can be embedded in, or hyperlinked to, existing websites, as was done so effectively by the 2010 Census.gov website. Ultimately, expensing the costs of translations, formatting and web attachment programming is well within the operating budgets of the public sector. It is merely a matter of solution awareness and the will to engage their constituencies.

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Cost Efficient Web-Based Information Delivery via Community Engagement

Critical public information is condensed to its English essentials, for cost efficiencies in both translations and bi-lingual web-based page formatting. As in-language content is posted on COH web pages, targeted awareness campaigns direct communities to those new info-pages. **Houston Language Bank** brokers Partnership commitments between public sector and diverse civic stakeholders, to support translations and partner in awareness; i.e., media, consulates, chambers of commerce, faith-based entities, professional & community organizations, student & senior groups, as well as service agencies.

Houston Language Bank Partners '*forward*' new translated info-content via their websites, driving their audiences to new in-language public sector sites and hyperlinks. This '*info-link forwarding*' generates viral communication extending information reach exponentially, expeditiously and cost effectively.

Houston Language Bank also customizes **Demographic & Communications Training** for public sector decision makers and City of Houston Language Coordinators, to embed professional staff development skill capacities for Language Access tasking within each City Department.

The goal here is to shift updated universal communication expertise & protocols to public agency staff in two (2) years.

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Project Team:

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Dr. Steve Murdock, Fmr. Director US Census, Hobby Center Study of Texas
Ms. Glenda Joe, Communications & Multilingual Specialist
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Ms. Sarah Craig, Digital Anthropology Scholar
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Project Advisors:

Mr. Jerry Wood, Regional Planning, Demographic Specialist
Mr. Michael Chou, Founder Asian Chamber of Commerce
The Honorable Judge Theresa Chang, Harris County Courts
Ms. Margaret Menger, Communications Training Specialist
Mr. Jim Murphy, Westchase District, Texas State Rep
Mr. Alan Nguyen, Esq. - Counsel of Record

Project Management:

Asian Community Support Services Center, Inc.

Addendum Notes

Levels of Need for Equal Language Access Among Houston Tax Base Constituencies

The levels of need for translated information access among today's culturally diverse population varies. These variables depend on immigrant / refugee status, English bilingual education background, and socio-economic status, among other determinants. Prioritizing translated public information is based on considerations of *both* raw population numbers and the language groups' arrival context and circumstance. Prioritizing specific language translations is based on needs assessment determined by City departments in concert with public input.

Beyond COH Designated Languages

The Mayor's Executive Order lists five (5) "most needed" languages designated for Houston's Language Access Plan. ACSSC recommendation:

1. Vietnamese
2. Chinese
3. Urdu
4. Arabic
5. French

Houston Language Bank supplements this COH designated list to include up to 46 languages most needed by refugee & immigrant language community taxpayers in Greater Houston.

ACSSC

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