

Houston International Network

*Delivering Vital Public Information
To Houston's Language Communities*

COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

*For: Welcoming Houston Strategic Plan
JANUARY 2017*

PREMISE: *Communication is the fundamental challenge for successful immigrant agency and civic integration. Effective communications is fundamental to all Welcoming Houston strategic recommendations.*

1 The Challenge: Houston's Communication Deficits - Vital Public Information Access

With the relentless paradigm shift in 21st century communications, with advanced digital technologies for packaging and delivery of vital public information, our City has not kept apace.

Basic market standards for consumer information access are not being met, nor planned for, by the Houston region's public sector. This is a challenge, not only for foreign language speakers, but also for English speakers.

Today's information consumers expect information on demand, quick-read on-point content specificity, easy information sharing and visual clarity in message formatting. Houston's vital public communication system fails these basic market standards.

Immigrant consumers of information are no different. While some may not have computers in the home, almost all have access to mobile devices in their households or businesses.

Public sector website pages with unnecessarily verbose narrative content, scores of color brochures and flyers posted in cumbersome PDF downloads and with poorly organized information retrieval navigation **make it difficult to impossible to access, share or deliver vital public information for all Houstonians.**

1A Current public information protocols are outdated and do not meet basic contemporary market standards in civic communication. Key failures include:

- 1) Deficits in clarity of vital information content
- 2) Deficits in information accessibility
- 3) Deficits in digital formats that facilitate 'sharing' / 'forwarding' vital information
- 4) Deficits in Easy-Read / Quick Read information content and formats
- 5) Deficits in content composition that fails to consider variable levels of reading literacy
<http://www.houstonlanguagebank.org/houstonlanguages.html#Englishproficienciasacquisition>
- 6) Deficits in download 'Printability' in cost efficient formats for grass roots delivery by nonprofits and front line public service providers

1B Deficits in access to vital public information access and on-demand information delivery stand as a general communications barrier for all residents.

In particular, these deficits serve as a systemic communications barrier for our region's diverse language communities. Systemic inequities in immigrant access to vital public information hinders the City's long-term economic growth and undermines constructive civic engagement for our language communities.

2 Houston's social and civic cohesion depends on the successful integration of all community groups.

One in four Houstonians are foreign born, with households that speak more than 100 languages.

[http://www.houstonlanguagebank.org/docs/RegionalandGreaterHoustonLanguagePopulationDemographics- LanguageProfile2015.pdf](http://www.houstonlanguagebank.org/docs/RegionalandGreaterHoustonLanguagePopulationDemographics-LanguageProfile2015.pdf)

<http://houstoninternationalnetwork.org/census/>

In 2011, our population baseline identified 24.5% of the City and 17.4% of the Metro region as Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

<http://www.houstonlanguagebank.org/docs/LanguageMapLanguageSpokenatHomeinHouston.pdf>

3 Houston's continued economic growth depends on immigrants and their enterprise energy. Immigrant businesses in the region accounted for \$47 billion in annual sales (2012). In 2014, immigrants in the region paid \$2.9 billion in state and local taxes.

<http://www.houstonlanguagebank.org/docs/EconomicDevelopmentSnapshotNewAmericanEconomy.pdf>

4 Current deficits in access and delivery of public sector vital information undermine public safety, public health and economic development.

These systemic communication deficits preclude effective 2-way communication channels between at-risk communities and vital service providers, like law enforcement and public health. These combined communication deficits are barriers to civic engagement for 'trust-building', especially and crucially with law enforcement.

Trust-Building Challenge - Diverse Communities, Law Enforcement and 2-Way Communications Response Feedback

4A EXAMPLE: Crime Victims Not Reporting (CVNR)

Houston crime statistics are reported at artificially low rates. Unreported crimes are not be statistically captured by law enforcement agencies.

- 1) Research indicates more than half of some crime victims in high-risk language communities do not report incidents to police. Fear of police, fear of criminal retaliation and inadequate understanding of the American justice system all account for this endemic failure to report criminal activity. Their failure to report crime creates a perpetual 'safe zone' for criminal perpetrators.
- 2) Currently, law enforcement entities do not appear to recognize these critical communication deficits and have no clear incentive to research and track crime victims not reporting.

CVNR - Crime Victims Not Reporting / Houston Language Bank
<http://www.houstonlanguagebank.org/crimevictimsnotreporting.html>

4B EXAMPLE: Reporting Suspicious Activity / Threats to Homeland Security

Currently, law enforcement entities have no plan for comprehensive 2-way grass roots communications with Houston's diverse communities to identify threat assessments.

Regional Homeland Security and Office of Emergency Management do not appear to recognize these critical communication deficits and have no clear plan for comprehensive reach into all diverse communities to promote safe reporting channels for residents who fear the police.

Current OEM plans for collaboration with specific faith-based groups are insufficient to identify and assess 'lone wolf' threats or need for intervention across all at-risk language /culture groups.

This limited assessment scope ignores critical grass roots intelligence gathering and sourcing opportunities from diverse communities.

"See Something, Say Something" / Houston Language Bank / Trust Building with Law Enforcement /<http://houstoninternationalnetwork.org/deep-reach/>

4C EXAMPLE: Houston's Top Down Communications Models Fail to Inform / Motivate Constituent Response

Houston's current communications system relies on a top-down one-way Communications Model. It is an outmoded communications strategy built upon an understanding of information sharing based on a 1980s public relations / media model. The current communication system does not meet the expectations of the modern information consumer, in English or in any other language.

5 Structural Communications Deficits - Vital Public Information**5A Comprehensive Communications Planning Deficit**

There is no comprehensive plan for ensuring vital public information is accessible to LEP Houstonians. Current City communication of vital public information is limited solely to the translation of existing narrative content, either posting it on its website or printing collateral to be distributed by public sector outreach staff. Translation alone is insufficient. It is only one small process step in effective communications. Effective delivery of vital information is not a planned or stated goal of the City's Language Access Plan.

For Houston's vital communication plan to be successful, its goal must be smart messaging formats and targeted delivery of streamlined information that consumers need, want and expect. **For Houston, vital communications planning must be outcomes driven.**

There are no planning initiatives to build a vital public information communications system to meet the language requirements of all LEP Houstonians. The City limits the number of languages in which vital public information is provided, based on language population size, as per federal mandates dictated for information access equity.
<http://www.houstonlanguagebank.org/houstonSMARTstart.html#AnyLanguageAsNeeded>

5A Comprehensive Communications Planning Deficit *(continued)*

Research indicates smaller language communities are more at-risk for public safety and public health challenges, specifically due to the unaddressed void in vital public information delivery in-language in Houston.

Whether diverse populations are large or small, the cost of service response for crime victims or victims of disease will continue to increase without access to in-language vital information.

Comprehensive communications planning will allow the City to progress beyond the structural deficits of our complacent 'check-the-box' for federal mandates approach to diverse communications of vital public information.

5B Information Access - Structural & Awareness Deficits

"Test the City Information System" - Locate Vital Information on COH Website
<http://www.houstontx.gov/>

Evaluate the accessibility of on-point vital public information by searching for Robbery Prevention or How to Report Suspicious Activity or Human Trafficking to OEM/ Homeland Security. If it takes more than 3-6 navigation clicks to locate the information, for an English speaker, it must be considered inaccessible for a foreign language speaker.

6 Public Awareness Deficits - COH Language Access & I-Speak

In targeted, market research with language communities, **no respondents could identify City of Houston programs that assist LEP Houstonians in interpretation.** This awareness deficit accounts for the low number of requests generated from residents for this LAP service.

Language population groups could not identify, nor were they aware of any translated vital public information or where to find such information. There was also near 100% lack of awareness of subject title and key word phrase coding for public safety, such as 'Ready Houston' or 'Safe Houston'.

6A Limitations of Public Sector Outreach Staffing

As our vital public communications delivery challenge has grown exponentially since 1980, public sector outreach staffing is no longer adequate to reach every Houstonian in need of information.

6B Recognizing the Deficits of Top-Down Communication Models

Houston's outdated 'trickle-down' approach to communications dissemination is no longer an effective strategy to deliver vital information into the hands of all Houstonians who need it. Effective communication networks used today no longer operate solely on a top-down information dissemination model of flyer handouts and brochure kiosks.

7 Immediate Communications Priorities - Status: Urgent

Communication is the fundamental challenge for successful immigrant civic integration and agency.

7A Delivery of Public Safety Crime Prevention Information

Houston robbery, burglary and assault rates are higher than most other US cities. These rates are even higher in SW Houston and other areas with concentration of language communities.

<http://www.areavibes.com/houston-tx/crime/>

<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2013/crime-in-the-u.s.-2013/tables/6tabledatadecpdf/table-6>

<https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/tx/houston/crime/>

Statistical rates of these crimes are even higher than reported due to crime victims not reporting to police in these language communities. Habitual criminal perpetrators specifically and routinely target these at-risk communities because they know their victims fear the police.

Delivery of vital information on robbery, burglary and assault prevention for individuals and for businesses is the number one priority for all Houstonians. The City's limited translated crime prevention information is not accessible to all Houstonians via their website or outreach staffs.

7B Need for Safe Reporting Systems - 2 Way Communications Loop

Immigrant communities do not communicate information about Human Trafficking or Homeland Security because we have not designed a safe reporting system. To engage immigrants in reporting, a broad-based public awareness campaign in-language can facilitate safe reporting channels to law enforcement.

7C Communications Delivery Planning - Crime Prevention

Strategic planning for updating information packaging and delivery in all Houston languages to grass roots communications network partnerships is ***an Immediate Priority with urgent status.***

8 Benefits to the City - Crime Prevention Communications

8A Crime Rates Reduction - Language communities are empowered to keep themselves safe through effective delivery of crime prevention information.

8B Trust-Building Opportunities with Law Enforcement- Language communities in which crime victims are not reporting to police can be identified and targeted for deep reach partnership opportunities. Law enforcement and language communities communicate to establish enduring collaboration partnerships to promote public safety.

<http://houstoninternationalnetwork.org/deep-reach/>

8C Service Response Cost Reductions to City - Fewer crimes equal fewer police service response calls resulting in reduced costs to the City over time.

9 Delivery of Vital Public Health Information - Disease Prevention

Foreign-born Houstonians comprise fully 25% of our population. Many are from culture groups that are unfamiliar with our health systems, disease screening & prevention, immunization schedules, wellness protocols, nutrition and mental health services.

<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ACB7A9B4B95ED39A8525723D006D6047-irsa-refugee-health-apr04.pdf>

Information access equity in disease prevention and mental health services are a communications delivery priority for our language community families.

9A Communications Delivery Planning - Health Issues

Health professionals, from both the public and private sector, in collaboration with immigrant and refugee service providers, are tasked to assess disease prevention and mental health information priorities targeting at-risk communities for communications delivery.

Grass roots communication network partners ensure effective delivery of public health messaging to language community households.

10 Benefits to the City - Disease Prevention & Mental Health Access Via Communications

10A Disease Rates Reduction - Well-informed residents act as civic partners for public health for the City. Well-informed families support family members in accessing effective disease prevention and wellness information.

10B Trust-Building Opportunities - Vital information for disease screening and mental health support for language communities reduce 'fear of the unknown' for families. Messaging clarity and culturally resonant information delivery are key factors in trust building between communities and their health providers. Information delivered via trusted grass roots communication networks reinforces response motivation for vital health information.

10C Service Response Cost Reductions to City - Healthier Houstonians are safer Houstonians. Unhealthy Houstonians are costly, both socially and economically.

11 Delivery of Vital Public Information for Economic Development & Immigration

For Houston, for decades, economic development and immigration have been intrinsically linked in our World City's prosperity and growth.

<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/MetroMonitor.pdf>

11A Communications Delivery Planning - Economic Development & Immigration Issues

Key communications challenges for business development and immigrant enterprise are identifying the basic information needed by language communities to understand the rules and regulations that allow participation in the system.

Basic information for business start-ups, assumed names, safe business operations, city inspections, etc. for our language communities supports business development and sustained economic productivity.

Basic information explaining immigration status issues, municipal IDs, support resources and fair employment protections for our language communities promote civic engagement and reduce the 'fear of the unknown' for our immigrant families.

12 Benefits to the City - Economic Development & Immigration Communications

- 12A City Tax Base Expansion-** Effective delivery of basic vital information in-language promotes new business start-ups and business expansion.
- 12B Trust-Building Optimization -** Vital information that serves to promote and protect employee rights supports an environment for good business practices by Houston companies. In-language information delivered via trusted grass roots communication networks supports safe reporting of labor law violations.
- 12C Service Response Cost Reductions to City -** Basic information to meet City inspections requirements, delivered in-language to immigrant businesses, improves compliance rates, reducing return visit frequency for service response by city inspectors.

13 Intermediate Communication Priorities**13A Delivery of Vital Public Information for Quality of Life, Community Awareness, Education & Youth****Social cohesion is fundamental to the City's goals for immigrant integration.**

Civic engagement is the keystone that engenders social cohesion and immigrant integration and agency in our diverse communities.

Civic engagement occurs on an organic, grass roots continuum for all Houstonians.

Key factors in civic engagement involve time to engage, access to vital information and specific concern levels about issues impacting their children, families, homes and businesses.

For immigrant communities, the civic engagement continuum is complicated by their intense focus on "making it" in a new homeland. The individual's perception is that there is little or no time for civic engagement. Immigrants are generally more focused on immediate issues- like starting or sustaining a business, caring for elders, supervising children in a new and challenging social and educational environment.

The delivery of highly pertinent on-point vital public information in-language that impacts their families is wholly absent in their trusted communication networks.

This is a communications deficit in planning with all public entities that plan for our City's future.

This communications deficit in civic engagement planning derives from: "We don't know what we don't know." These public entities have limited diverse communications expertise. Thus, they do not plan for communications delivery to Houston's language communities

13B Communications Delivery Planning

All vital civic engagement information developed and delivered in English by public entities is not currently transmitted in on-point content, in-language, to grass roots communication networks. This deficit hinders the broad based participation and input from the City's immigrant communities.

Diverse communications design and delivery are key training issues for public entities dependent on broad-based civic engagement for Houston.

14 Benefits to the City - Quality of Life, Community Awareness, Education & Youth

Broad-based civic engagement supports consensus and social cohesion that Houstonian's need for future development and economic prosperity.

Civic engagement in the business and education sectors, where immigrant communities are especially impacted, focuses and animates support for progress in all growth issues for the City.

15 Long Term Communications Priorities

15A Public Cost Savings

Our failure to share vital public information with all Houstonians is a cost factor and loss leader for public sector budgets now and moving forward. Budget line items for service response are unnecessarily bloated by our failure to share basic knowledge that supports public safety and public health.

Strategic comprehensive communications planning designed to equitably deliver vital public information to all Houstonians gives effective and self-protective agency to our language communities.

When Houston provides basic information about robbery prevention to all Houstonians, the incidence of robbery will be reduced. This common sense communications equation holds true for all other vital public information deficits in our currently outdated message delivery system.

15B *Census 2020 - Erasing Houston's Undercount*

The return of federal tax dollars to our region is allocated in direct correlation to the number of residents that respond to the decennial US Census. Houston chronically fails to count all Houstonians in the Census, and thereby loses access to billions of federal dollars that will benefit the region.

In 2010, our local communications planning innovation in grass roots in-language information delivery of vital public messaging, in collaboration with Houston Planning & Development, accounted for our City's first-ever response ranking-2nd nationally in increased response rates.

Per Planning & Development Deputy Director Margaret Wallace Brown, this 2010 communications innovation accounted for an increase of 66,000 census respondents from Houston resulting in "access to nearly \$1 billion in federal funding over the next ten years".

16 Goal: Vital Public Information Delivery to all Houstonians - Long Term Priorities

Communication is the fundamental challenge for successful immigrant civic integration.

Houston possesses the expertise and resources required to meet the goal of vital public information delivery to all Houstonians. Diverse communication nonprofits and grass roots service providers here have been delivering vital information in-language to immigrant and refugee communities on an ad hoc, crisis driven, volunteer basis since 1980.

Mobilizing the City's hands-on expertise capitalizes on resources that, to date, have been under-utilized. Engaging these human resources and their proven communication models optimizes and expedites productive outcomes for vital information delivery goals.

Meeting this goal requires city leadership to "connect the dots" between vital information needs, local expertise and experience in diverse communications delivery and specialists in advancing digital platform technologies.

<http://houstoninternationalnetwork.org/about-us/>

17 Road Map to Comprehensive Communications Planning & Execution**17A Engage Experienced Grass Roots Organizations**

- 1 Utilize proven expertise in diverse communications delivery across Houston's language communities.**
- 2 Engage grass roots diverse communications expertise with extensive partnership experience with City departments, i.e., HPD, Health Department, Planning & Development**
- 3 Partner with grass roots communications networks with performance-based track records of success in the region**

17B Public Sector Staff Training - Train to current market standards

- 1 Customized training modules in diverse communication & language community demographics:**
 - What languages are spoken?
 - Where are these language communities located in the City?
 - How do they access or receive information?
 - How can we partner with language community communication networks?
 - How can we use this demographic data to target specific vital information to improve public safety and public health?
- 2 LEP - English acquisition continuum model - RE vital information formats**
- 3 How can we build communications networks that facilitate language communities' response for 2020 Census?**

17C Communications Needs Assessments:

- 1 Input from Language Communities, Welcoming Houston Task Force & City Departments**
- 2 Pause LAP translation work until assessments are finalized**
- 3 Streamline vital information content for translation cost reductions**
- 4. Resist top-down approach communication strategies**
- 5 Stress language communities' input**

17 Road Map to Comprehensive Communications Planning & Execution *(continued)*

17D Information Technology (IT) Upgrade for Variable information Delivery Platforms

- 1 Digital Communications Delivery Working Group**
- 2 Identify current & future delivery expectation of diverse information consumers**
- 3 Task to develop open-ended design for information formats on multiple digital platforms**
- 4 Convene IT professionals, diverse social media, regional in-language media, communications technology specialists and diverse communication delivery experts**

17E Grass Roots Communications Network Partnerships

- 1 Formalize communication network partnerships for delivery of vital public information**
- 2 Design for partner expansion**
- 3 Design for 2-way communications loop between community and city departments**

17F Identify Priority / Urgent Vital Public Information Items

- 1 Package and deliver vital information via grass roots communication networks**
- 2 Design for performance-based measurements for perfecting delivery system**

17G Design Communications System for Trust Building Initiatives

- 1 Structured to be ongoing organic community feedback**
- 2 Designed for grass roots expansion for deep reach into language communities**

18 Vital Communications Delivery Funding

Communication is the fundamental challenge for successful immigrant civic integration.

18A City Funding - Immigrant Tax Base

Fully 25% of Houston's population is foreign-born. They account for a growing proportion of the City's tax base. Equitable access to vital public information for all Houstonians may be considered reasonable to fund in city communication budgets going forward. And, as the civic commitment to equitable access of vital public information engenders safer, healthier Houstonians, city budgets can realize savings over time.

18B Federal Funding - DOJ / COP & OEM / Homeland Security

Federal funding through Community Oriented Policing (COP) and Homeland Security (OEM) grants anticipate the need for related education, awareness and prevention initiatives. These federal grants would support delivery of relevant vital information delivery in-language to our communities.

18 Vital Communications Delivery Funding *(continued)***18C Foundation Funding - Public Philanthropy**

Local foundations have a long history of supporting initiatives promoting education, mental health, and the welfare of children and families. The effective delivery of vital public information is a fundamental factor in supporting initiatives that serve to promote safer, healthier Houstonians.

18D Corporate Funding

The goal of delivery of vital public information in-language is intrinsically tied to advanced digital technologies. Corporate support can be recruited around specific components in designing delivery formats, which would then serve as design testing for other language-rich metropolitan areas.

19 Long Term Revenue Benefit for City Budget - 2020 Census

Implementing effective delivery of vital information to all Houston language groups via trusted grass roots communication networks locks in increased response rates for Census 2020.

Prior in-language communications delivery partnerships with City Planning & Development for 2010 Census generated increased response rates. Houston's response rate increase was ranked 2nd nationally by the US Census Department, resulting in access to nearly \$1 billion in federal funding for the City over ten years.

Full Census 2020 participation by Houston's immigrant communities will potentially return well in excess of \$1 billion federal dollars to our region.

20 Houston Solutions - *Communication is the fundamental challenge for successful immigrant civic integration & agency.***Grass Roots Communications Innovation through Public-Private Sector Partnerships**

Effective communications strategies depend on targeted deep reach into all Houston language communities. The public sector cannot execute deep reach communications on its own. The public sector has neither the experienced expertise, nor the budget funding going forward to meet the City's vital information communications challenge for all Houstonians.

This challenge requires the City to discard its top-down communications approach to vital public information delivery to all Houstonians in-language. Local communications nonprofits, refugee resettlement agencies, immigration service providers and private sector partners have diligently delivered vital public information in-language in a crisis-by-crisis response for decades in this region. Long term communications solutions for immigrant integration depend on the City's ability to recognize its limitations in addressing long-standing vital information delivery deficits.

A pragmatic pivot to investing in sustainable public-private partnerships for communications delivery is the only solution to the City's challenge in comprehensive immigrant integration. Cutting-edge local models partner nonprofit communications with immigrant businesses, service providers, health providers, media, faith organizations, consulates and schools.

<http://houstoninternationalnetwork.org/>

The social cohesion engendered by these solutions-driven public-private partnership for communications can serve as a "Best practices" model for the rest of the nation and for other World Cities.

Targeted Timelines - Road Map to Communications Plan Implementation

Mid-FEB 2017

- Convene grass roots communication working group
- Identify Year-One priorities

MAR 2017

- Identify & secure start-up funding to support initial implementation steps
- Convene Diverse Communications Training: COH public information & outreach staff
- Convene IT Working Group: COH, Industry Experts, Communications Specialists

APR 2017

- Submit Execution Plan for Review: All Communications Partners
- Schedule information production by immediate & intermediate priority delivery

MAY 2017

- Begin production of Vital Information in updated formats for network delivery
- Engage communication partner networks
- Identify all languages needed
- Design communications feedback loop for performance measurement to perfect delivery precision

JUN 2017 - DEC 2017

- Vital information delivery in-language - Immediate Priority Messages
- Convene Trust-Building working groups and report next steps; implement road map actions

JAN 2018

- Test delivery performance of communication networks
- Vital information delivery in-language - Intermediate Priority Messages

APR 2018

- Begin system testing for 2020 Census response motivation rates
- Interface with City Planning & Development - Initialize Census response rate project
- Plug in COH IT for data gathering and plan for response rate tracking
- Vital information delivery in-language - Intermediate Priority Messages

JUN 2018 - FEB 2019

- Expand communications partners' networks
- Vital information delivery in-language - Immediate & Intermediate Priority Messages

MAR 2019

- Commence Census 2020 Awareness - Deep Reach in all Houston Language Communities
- Interface with US Census regional office staff & outreach personnel assigned to Houston

APR 2019 - APR 2020

- Implement Houston's Census 2020 Plan w/ Planning & development & US Census