

Language Access Plan

Introduction

NMSU's Commitment to Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity

New Mexico State University is a proud and dedicated land-grant, space-grant, Hispanic-Serving, and Minority-Serving Institution, located in the borderlands and Tribal lands regions. With priorities centering on equity and inclusion, New Mexico State University is committed to practices that leverage the insight emerging from the intersectional diversity of our students, staff, faculty, and communities that we serve and support, through service, outreach and Extension, research, and teaching.

The New Mexico State University (NMSU) main campus is located in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and is approximately 50 miles from the El Paso, Texas-Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico border. NMSU's geographical location is important because as a land-grant, Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), and Minority-Serving Institution (MSI), NMSU is situated in a prime area to recruit, retain, and serve Latinx students from the Borderlands region. Unique also to NMSU is that three community colleges are part of the institution: Doña Ana Community College, NMSU-Alamogordo, and NMSU-Grants. New Mexico is also home to 23 Native American tribes, pueblos, and nations providing a great opportunity to recruit Indigenous students and to partner with and serve tribal communities. Systemwide, approximately 64% of the undergraduate student population identifies as Hispanic/Latinx/Latine, and approximately 73% are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color). NMSU also recognizes the diversity of our students' intersecting identities related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, military and veteran status, ability and disability, socio-economic class, religion, and more, acknowledging the unique experiences and perspectives they bring.

Additionally, the NMSU Cooperative Extension Service has a presence throughout the state of New Mexico, as represented in three districts: Northern, Eastern, and Southwest. The NMSU Agricultural Experiment Station also has a presence throughout the state with 12 Agricultural Science Centers located in key regions of the state.

While NMSU is required under various federal and state statutes to track demographic and contact hour data to ensure continued HSI and MSI status, and ensure the institution's compliance with various federal funding-requirements, we do so to inform services beyond compliance. A shift beyond a simple compliance approach is evident in the institution's strategic plan *NMSU LEADS 2025*. In July of 2023, the Board of Regents of New Mexico State University unanimously approved the addition of two new goals: Goal 5: Build an Online Global Campus, and Goal 6: Build, Elevate, and Strengthen Sustainable Systemwide Equity, Inclusion and Diversity (EID) Practices. Goal 6 was situated to stand alone as well as to inform the other five goals. The four initial goals that were part of NMSU LEADS 2025 include:

- Goal 1: Enhance Student Success and Social Mobility
- Goal 2: Elevate Research and Creativity
- Goal 3: Amplify Extension and Outreach
- Goal 4: Build a Robust University System

There are five-objectives associated with Goal 6, which include: 6.1 Embed equity, inclusion, diversity and intersectionality into the university system; 6.2. Increase representation and retention of underrepresented minoritized and marginalized faculty, staff, and administrators, 6.3 Increase sense of belonging for underrepresented minoritized and marginalized students; 6.4 Advance evaluation processes that ensure accountability and acknowledgement for the implementation of EID practices; 6.5 Cultivate a culture of respect that fosters a thriving inclusive community.

In objective 6.1, creating a Language Access Plan and convening a Language Access Task Force was identified in the actions and Key Performance Indicators. Initially, the need for a Language Access Plan was identified by the College of Agriculture, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES) to ensure compliance with NIFA requirements. The dean and associate Deans of ACES approached the Vice President for Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity (VPEID) to recommend that the Language Access Plan (LAP) be an institutional initiative. With the anticipation of the EID Goal 6, the VPEID agreed with the recommendation as it would be in alignment with the institution's commitment. In the fall of 2023, the Task Force met and began to identify steps forward to create the LAP. This proposal is the result of the Language Access Task Force work.

About Language Access Plans

Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) are protected from national origin discrimination. In accordance with this legal obligation and to provide a quality standard of services that should be offered to all individuals, many universities that receive federal funds have implemented Language Access Plans.

Importantly, a Language Access Plan ensures that universities are compliant with the law. NMSU takes seriously our responsibility to be compliant; however, we also create initiatives that go beyond compliance. For us, NMSU's Language Access Plan is informed not only by the federal regulations, but by NMSU's distinctive context as a land-grant, Hispanic Serving and Minority Serving Institution. NMSU will conduct periodic assessments from across the university system to learn about the need and ways to provide language assistance to LEP persons. The assessment, along with the four factors of analysis below, will provide guidance on what LAP services are needed:

1. Number or proportion of LEP individuals to be served or likely to be encountered.
2. Frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with NMSU offices/programs.
3. Nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program.
4. Resources available to meet with language access obligation.

This Language Access Plan is an expression of NMSU's ongoing effort to serve the linguistically and culturally diverse communities that interact with the entire NMSU system.

The survey provided the following information regarding existing LAP services at NMSU and will be used as guidance in creating this plan.

- This comprehensive survey garnered responses from various units across the NMSU system, with staff constituting approximately 60% of the participants. The language landscape revealed that Spanish is the most requested language over the past five years (54%), followed by Navajo (10%), and American Sign Language (9%). Notably, a significant portion of respondents reported daily and weekly exposure to these languages within their office environments.
- Regarding the identification of LEP individuals, 21% self-identify, 21% are identified through specific requests for language assistance, while 14% of offices have not identified LEP individuals. In terms of interaction methods with LEP persons, 57% prefer in-person interaction, 13% have not interacted, 11% opt for telephone and digital communication (internet, social media, email, text message).
- A significant finding is that 60% of offices have never assessed language data for their unit, with a lack of resource utilization. Conversely, 9% assess language data seasonally or each semester, and 5% conduct yearly assessments, drawing from diverse resources such as the U.S. Department of Education, community organizations, and state agencies.
- Concerning service requests, 35% of offices received requests for translational (written) services, and 40% for interpretation (spoken) services. In particular, 90% of survey respondents report staff/faculty's ability to verbally communicate with clientele, with 86% capable of written communication. Spanish remains the dominant language for communication (73%). Document translation encompasses publications, surveys, flyers, transcripts, and more, showcasing the varied language assistance services currently available, including notice of legal rights, extension publications, marketing information, consent forms, enrollment forms, and applications.
- Marketing-wise, 39% of offices provide information in languages other than English, with Spanish dominating at 81%. A mere 9% include a statement in their marketing materials highlighting the availability of free language assistance services for LEP individuals.
- When disseminating public notifications, popular tools include posters in public areas (28%), marketing fliers/brochures (18%), websites (17%), social media (13%), and email notifications (12%).

- Surprisingly, only 3% of office staff and volunteers, associations, and advisory committees receive periodic training on providing language assistance services to LEP individuals.
- In conclusion, the survey underscores the need for enhanced language services and training initiatives, as well as improved awareness regarding available resources to support linguistic diversity within the NMSU community.

NMSU has developed this Plan to help ensure that LEP individuals have meaningful and equal access to participate in NMSU programming, activities, and services and receive general information regarding educational, research, and/or outreach publications.

Language Service

Language Assistance is to interpret and/or translate key information to individuals not proficient in English. At a university, language services offer support and resources to students, faculty, and administrators to facilitate communication and collaboration, enhancing academic and research opportunities. **It is** important to make all NMSU programs and services accessible to individuals who are not proficient in English. Again, we need to ensure compliance with language access regulations and guidelines, particularly for institutions receiving federal funding, by providing language services as required by law.

Potential options for NMSU

Translation Services: Providing translation services for official documents, correspondence, policies, and announcements ensures that information is accessible to individuals who speak languages other than the primary language of the institution. Universities frequently collaborate with international institutions and partners. Offering translation services can facilitate communication and collaboration between these entities, enhancing academic and research opportunities. This includes translations for languages spoken by international students, faculty, staff, and community members.

Interpretation Services: Offering interpretation services for meetings, conferences, events, and other administrative functions enables effective communication between individuals who speak different languages. Interpretation can be provided in person, over the phone, or through video conferencing platforms.

Multilingual Reception and Customer Service: Employing multilingual staff or utilizing language interpretation services at reception desks, help desks, and customer service centers ensures that individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds receive assistance and information in their preferred language.

Documentation and Record-Keeping in Multiple Languages: Ensuring that administrative documents, forms, and records are available in multiple languages facilitates accessibility and compliance for individuals who speak languages other than the primary language of the institution. This includes enrollment forms, employment contracts, and campus policies.

Language Support for International Programs: Supporting international programs and partnerships by providing language services for administrative tasks such as correspondence, agreements, and program documentation. This ensures clear communication and effective collaboration with international partners and stakeholders.

Multilingual Website and Online Resources: Developing and maintaining a multilingual website and online resources allows individuals to access important information, services, and forms in multiple languages. This includes registration portals, academic calendars, financial aid information, and FAQs. Adding videos in addition to written materials would be responsive to the oracy traditions of Native American communities in NM.

Glossary of Terms

- **Language Assistance:** Interpreting and/or translating key information to individuals not proficient in English.
- **Language Access:** Efforts to make programs and services accessible to individuals not proficient in English.
- **Translation:** The written transfer of a message from one language into another language.
- **Interpretation:** Listening to communication in one language and orally converting it to another language while retaining the same meaning.

- LEP: “Limited English Proficiency” means not speaking English as a primary language and limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. Note: LEP is a term used by the US Federal Government, and not necessarily the term that should be used for non-English speaking members of the NMSU community, but it is used here for compliance purposes only.
- Qualified Interpreter: An individual who provides interpretation or translation services at a level of fluency, and comprehension, impartially, while maintaining confidentiality as appropriate, of the information at issue.

Notices

The NMSU system will make reasonable efforts to notify individuals with LEP who seek information on NMSU programs, services, and activities that language assistance services are available at no cost. NMSU will maintain information about the availability of language assistance on the most commonly used public websites. All notices should inform LEP persons that they are entitled to meaningful access to NMSU and may qualify to receive language assistance, how to access language assistance services, and how to make complaints. This information will be provided in English and translated into the most frequently used language(s), other than English, based on the population’s needs.

For more information about NMSU’s Language Access Plan, the public may contact the Office of Institutional Equity, at equity@nmsu.edu or 575-646-3635.

The designated Language Access Coordinator for each unit will assist in coordinating requests for translations and interpretations and keep track of these requests.

Complaints about language access in NMSU programs and activities may be filed with the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL). For more information about filing complaints with CRCL, see <https://www.dhs.gov/crcl>, or call CRCL at (202) 401-1474 or 1 (866) 644-8360. Complaints may be filed in any language.

Training

Training for Language Access

Implementing best practices and providing training for employees in the NMSU system regarding language access services for students, family members, and other community members served by NMSU system units who require assistance in any language (Spanish, American Sign Language, Navajo, etc.), is crucial for ensuring equitable access to education and all services provided. Training NMSU system departments to implement these best practices for language access services should be considered from two different perspectives: 1) training unit personnel on how to recognize, identify, and direct community members needing language access services to receive the appropriate equitable services and support needed, and 2) training unit personnel possessing language skills to become qualified language access professionals to enhance services provided by the unit.

✚-Training unit personnel to recognize, identify, and direct community members to appropriate language services. Ideally, this should take place as part of regular NMSU system employee training through Training Central. Alternatively, modules can be prepared in an on-demand format for units needing training as the need arises or when new staff are being on-boarded. This employee training should include, but not be limited to:

- Understanding the NMSU system LAP and related policies for providing language access services to all NMSU community members. This policy identifies the processes for requesting and providing language access services and how this policy can be adapted to individual unit needs.
- Ensuring that employees understand their responsibilities and the procedures to follow to provide language access services. Such procedures could include online portals to facilitate understanding of responsibilities and procedures for language assistance.

- Identifying language needs by noticing external cues like body language, hesitation in speech, attempts to communicate in non-dominant language or using another person (many times a child or adolescent) accompanying them to communicate. Asking community members to identify language preferences.
- Familiarizing employees with language assistance resources, such as: I-speak cards, language hotlines, existing translated materials in the appropriately identified language, trained multilingual staff members, possible interpretation services, and how to access all these services. Providing access to online translation tools or software that employees can use to translate written text or documents into different languages. Employees should be trained **in** how to use these tools effectively and understand their limitations.
- Educating employees about cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural communication in the workplace, especially helping them understand how language barriers can affect communication and interactive experiences. Also, educating employees on cultural responsiveness to understand language barriers and cultural backgrounds.
- Conducting regular role-playing exercises where employees practice identifying and assisting individuals with language needs. Additional practice can be provided using materials that include practical tips, case studies, and examples illustrating the importance of language access and how to effectively communicate.
- Encouraging employees to provide feedback on experiences gained as they provide language assistance and incorporate this feedback into future training sessions and for the development of additional language access materials.
- Emphasizing the importance of maintaining confidentiality and privacy when providing language assistance services.

Note: Consideration should be made to implementing all appropriate language access training materials as part of the NMSU system-required annual training. These training modules should also acknowledge these topics are found as obligations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Additional training opportunities can be provided via in-person and virtual workshops, group discussions, case studies, seminars, and/or conferences focused on language access and equity. Consideration for inviting guest speakers, subject matter experts, and representatives from community organizations to share their insights and experiences should also be of high priority.

Training unit personnel possessing language skills to become qualified language access professionals in order to enhance services provided by the unit. This training should include, but not be limited to:

- Identifying potential language access assistance providers already employed in the NMSU system by using established formal and informal language proficiency exams, degree/experience equivalencies, and other mechanisms to compile a database of current and potential participants.
- Assisting multilingual personnel to understand capacities and limitations of their training and skills in order to maximize language access services provided, but also avoiding situations that would bring legal issues into play. For example, providing language assistance in an office or meeting setting vs. translating official or legal documents like transcripts or contracts and agreements.
- Identifying appropriate services needed when language access services are not available through NMSU system personnel (i.e., certified translators/interpreters for official/legal events and documents, American Sign Language interpreters, etc.).
- Using current NMSU resources to provide training for language access purposes, ideally through an established Language Access Resource Center. This training would include public/community service and educational interpretation/translation services.
- Understanding appropriate translator/interpreter ethics and conduct, the roles and responsibilities of a translator/interpreter, modes of interpreting, strategies for intervention, cultural mediation and awareness, standard interpreting protocols, making decisions about language assistance provider role boundaries, following standards and practices, language access provider safety, and other necessary skills.

- Supporting training of NMSU personnel involved in the Language Access Resource Center to remain up to date via on-going training from reputable national and international programs that would then afford passing along current training to NMSU system members.
- Identifying and providing training to unit Language Access Coordinators whose responsibility would be to oversee language assistance efforts and ensure compliance with language access policies within each unit (e.g., one coordinator per college or department). Coordinators would serve as points of contact for members in their units who are seeking guidance on language access issues. Additionally, they would assist the Language Access Resource Center to continuously monitor and evaluate language access efforts, assessing their effectiveness, and identify areas for improvement.

Note: An important aspect of this component of the LAP is working with NMSU system units to identify specific job roles that should or should not include the use of bilingual employee skills. For example, if a bilingual employee was hired into a position that did not include the use of their bilingual skills as part of their job description or roles and they are later expected to include this skill as part of their job-related duties, this change should equitably be addressed, in consultation with HR, to provide appropriate support and compensation, as well as updating official job descriptions. As jobs are vacated or added, units should be encouraged to evaluate whether the position may require language access skills and plan appropriately either by indicating the requirement or to offer appropriate training for new hires.

By implementing comprehensive training and professional development programs that raise awareness about language access requirements and emphasize the importance of providing equitable services to all NMSU community members, NMSU can ensure that employees are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to effectively support all constituents coming from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Evaluation

NMSU will both monitor the LEP plan and evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to continuously improve actions to better meet the needs of the diverse populations of individuals served by the university. Updates on our efforts and new resource availability will be posted on the LEP website. To ensure continuous follow through on both implementation and assessment, each major unit will assign LEP coordinator duties to a responsible senior staff member.

Although additional efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of our LEP will unfold in real time with lessons learned during implementation, data will be collected to both document services provided and assess improvements in our LEP work:

- Ensure that information on LEP resources and expectations are included in the required annual HR SET Certification training to be completed annually by all NMSU faculty and staff:
- From automated web click counts, reports from service offices, and annual checks on unit websites, the LEP evaluation will also track:
 - the number of major unit web landing pages that include information on LEP services with links to central NMSU LEP resources,
 - the number of major unit web landing pages with links to information provided in languages beyond English,
 - the number and nature of requests made to individual units for LEP services,
 - the number of requests for translation or other LEP services made to the central NMSU LEP resource office, and
 - the number of complaints filed about LEP services to the Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity

Furthermore, to ensure that the changes in language assistance needs and services are being effectively assessed, a system-wide, semiannual survey will be administered. While individual units may adjust survey elements to better meet their service needs, all will share a core set of questions for consistency and continuity of assessment. This collection of data will be assessed centrally, with input from unit LEP coordinators, to evaluate how the need for language assistance is

changing, whether efforts are sufficient for the needs, and if resources or strategies need to be adjusted to ensure effectiveness.