

**Guidance for Determining Language Assistance Options**

Should bilingual staff not be available to communicate directly with customers in their preferred language, face-to-face interpretation provided by trained contract or volunteer interpreters is an alternative. Telephone interpreter services should be used as a supplemental system when an interpreter is needed on short notice or when services are needed in an unusual or infrequently encountered language.

**Bilingual Staff** – Hiring bilingual staff for customer contact positions facilitates participation by LEP persons. However, where there is a wide variety of LEP language groups in a service area, this option may be insufficient to meet the needs of all LEP applicants and clients. In such cases, the LWIA must provide alternative, timely language assistance.

**Staff Interpreters** – Staff interpreters are especially appropriate where there is a frequent and/or regular need for interpreting services. These persons must be competent and readily available.

**Contract Interpreters** – Contract interpreters are an option for agencies or areas that have an infrequent need for interpreting services, have less common LEP language groups in their service areas, or need to supplement their in-house capabilities on an as-needed basis. Such contract interpreters must be readily available and proven competent.

**Community Volunteers** – Community volunteers may provide agencies with a cost-effective method for providing interpreter services. However, for community volunteers to be effective, agencies must ensure that formal arrangements for interpreting services are made with community organizations, so that these organizations are not subjected to ad hoc requests for assistance. In addition, agencies must ensure that these volunteers are competent as interpreters and understand their obligation to maintain client confidentiality.

**Telephone Interpreter Lines** - A telephone interpreter service line may be a useful option as a supplemental system or when an LWIA encounters a language that it cannot otherwise accommodate. Such a service often offers interpreting assistance in many different languages and usually can provide the service in quick response to a request. However, agencies should be aware that such services may not always have readily available interpreters who are familiar with the terminology peculiar to the particular program or service. It is important that an LWIA not offer this as the only language assistance option except where other language assistance options are unavailable (e.g., in a rural site visited by an LEP customer who speaks a language that is not usually encountered in the area). Should this option be adopted, each staff person must be trained on how to effectively communicate with an LEP client through the Language Line.