

# Effectively Communicating with Diverse Populations in Connecticut

## Background and Purpose

The work we do at the state is incredibly important to all of our residents, and it's our responsibility to ensure that every resident, in every community, knows what resources the state has available to them, and how they can get help if they need it.

This is even more important now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, but remains a priority during times of routine operations.

Most state agencies have been working hard to ensure that important information is translated into Spanish – but there is room for improvement, and to more regularly include additional languages that tens of thousands of residents of our state speak and write.

This document is meant to serve you as communications professionals to ensure you are effectively communicating with the entire community. These practices have been compiled from discussions with state and local partners including state agency public information officers, municipal outreach coordinators, as well as municipal associations and community members. We thank all participants for their contributions and we look forward toward continued discussions.

### *Connecticut's Diversity*

- Connecticut is home to many cultures and many spoken and written languages: the most common are Spanish (over 500 thousand, and many in dual language households), Polish (over 30,000), and Portuguese (over 10,000 in Danbury alone, and more than 30,000 statewide).
- There are a wide variety of other, primarily geographically isolated languages spoken in the state: Italian, Hindi, Urdu, Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, French, French Creole, Thai, and others spoken in smaller communities.
- It is important to remember that it is not just the translation of individual words, but the ability to address the individual cultural references as well.

### *The Undocumented Community*

- As with other community members, undocumented residents of Connecticut are deeply affected by this pandemic. It is important that all community members have access to accurate information about their rights to health care, social service assistance, housing and education.

## Resources and Tools

### *Locating Vendors for Translation and Interpretation*

- First, check with your agency fiscal office in case the agency already has a contract or Purchase Order (PO) in place for these services.
- If you work for a state agency and you don't have a contract for translation services, interpretation services, or technology you require to effectively communicate with communities you serve, you should contact the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) at 860-713-5095.
- DAS Procurement staff will guide you on finding the contracted companies who provide these services.

- Organizations looking for support finding translation or interpretation services (including Sign Language interpreters), may call 2-1-1 or visit [www.ct211.org](http://www.ct211.org). If your organization already has video or telephone remote interpreting at your testing location you can continue to use those existing services.

#### *Live Online Meetings*

- A number of agencies have worked with vendors, and within their existing resources to have online meetings in languages other than English, or have live interpretation.
- Agencies are encouraged to make live virtual conversations available in multiple languages whether they be via dual livestreams or separate sessions.
- Zoom offers dual streams that can be used for language interpretation, but most vendors can work out a solution for your needs if you contact them.

#### *Ethnic Media and Community-Based Organizations*

- Every agency is encouraged to ensure that ethnic media, and community-based organization contacts are included in their press distribution list.
- ESF-15 has updated a list of ethnic media, and local community-based organizations that continues to be updated in collaboration with stakeholders. For a copy, please email Eric Scoville at [Eric.Scoville@ct.gov](mailto:Eric.Scoville@ct.gov).

#### *Newsletters*

- If state agencies have not taken advantage online newsletter platforms (such as Campaign Monitor) that can support them with opt-in newsletter services – they may wish to in order to reach a broader audience. This way, anyone can opt-in to receive communication from you, including your press releases.
- Whether you're using campaign monitor, or a different service, it can be helpful to organize lists of contacts by what information they prefer to receive, and even what language they prefer to receive information in if you translate your communications regularly.

#### *Grant Funding*

- Grant funding is often available for expenses related to specific projects, including disaster and crises communications. Often, grant funding that's available for public awareness campaigns containing information that is crucially important to underserved communities, and agencies are encouraged to make sure they are included in any campaign they develop. Check with your fiscal office to determine what funding sources may be available to support your communications plans.
- In some instances, such as disaster scenarios, 75% partial reimbursement for disaster related communications may be available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
  - To discuss potential funding programs from FEMA, State agencies should contact the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection's (DESPP) Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) in coordination with their fiscal officer.
  - Municipalities should contact their [DEMHS Regional Coordinator](#).

### **Best Practices**

In conversations with a number of state agencies, organizations, and municipalities, ESF-15 has identified a number of best practices that may assist in your efforts to reach all communities in Connecticut. While this list is by no means complete, we hope it will support your agency or organization as you move forward with your plans.

### *Translation*

- Google translate doesn't get us all the way there when it comes to making sure we communicate accurately, but it can get us part of the way there. One organization shared with us that when they were translating on a budget, they were able to pay their vendor to "fix" the Google Translation version of their writing, which took less time, and cost less money.

### *Interpretation*

- While many of our staff may be monolingual, and using translation services like Language Line to support their work, it may be helpful to teach staff a few key phrases in the languages you receive calls from most (including phrases like "thank you for your patience, I am going to call an interpreter who speaks \_\_\_\_").
- It's best to ensure a policy is in place to include a sign-language interpreter at all disaster related, or major press conferences where protective actions and crisis communications are disseminated. *If an interpreter is not available on short notice, you can ensure videos of event are available in closed captioning.*

### *Website*

- If your website uses any translation tools, you may wish to include instructions for use in multiple web browsers. Most popular web browsers have instructions in multiple languages you can link to in order to support your users.
- While most of our websites have one button available for language and accessibility options, some cities have created separate buttons to access information in languages spoken by a large number of their residents, or have even enabled separate widgets for accessibility options.

### *Outreach*

- Maintaining consistent relationships with community-based organizations that serve diverse populations throughout your city, the state, or area you serve is incredibly important. When you stay in constant contact, it makes it easier to coordinate, ensuring residents have the information they need.
- Most outreach networks include senior centers, clergy, food banks, chambers of commerce and local businesses, ethnic media outlets, public service providers, advocacy groups, and other grassroots organizations.
- It's helpful to designate an outreach officer at the municipal, or regional level whose main role is to maintain community-government relationships.
- Hold press conferences and events within the affected communities and invite community leaders and influencers to participate and engage community members.
- Participate in media interviews with local ethnic media; invite local public officials and subject matter experts involved in the response efforts.

## **Contact Information**

If you have broader ideas you would like to share with the ESF-15, or would like to participate in our Diverse Communities Work Groups, please get in touch. [Disaster planning](#) is ongoing before, during and after disasters, your feedback is important to our future planning efforts.

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