

FOOD WASTE INITIATIVE  
RESEARCH BRIEF SERIES



An Overview of Multilingual Outreach,  
Translation, and Language Justice Resources

JUNE 2022

## Acknowledgements

This document was prepared by the Environmental Law Institute (ELI). ELI Staff contributing to this research brief include Jordan Perry and Linda Breggin.

## About ELI

The Environmental Law Institute makes law work for people, places, and the planet. Since 1969, ELI has played a pivotal role in shaping the fields of environmental law, policy, and management, domestically and abroad. We are an internationally recognized, non-partisan publishing, research, and education center working to strengthen environmental protection by improving law and governance worldwide.

## ELI's Food Waste Initiative & Research Brief Series

ELI's Food Waste Initiative conducts research and works with stakeholders to prevent food waste, increase surplus food donation, and recycle the remaining food scraps. The Initiative aims to help stakeholders meet the U.S. food loss and waste goals by designing and implementing public policies and public-private initiatives to prevent food waste, increase donations of surplus food, and expand food scrap recycling. To learn more about the Initiative's work, visit: <https://www.eli.org/food-waste-initiative/food-waste-prevention-recovery-and-recycling>.

ELI's Food Waste Initiative is publishing a Research Brief Series to present takeaways from the Initiative's research, spanning a range of topics important to food waste prevention, recovery, and recycling. To access other research briefs in the series, visit: <https://www.eli.org/food-waste-initiative/publications>.



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## Introduction

Implementing environmental initiatives requires clear communication with affected communities—including those that speak languages other than English. While language barriers can present challenges, they are not insurmountable. This research brief highlights best practices for effective and inclusive multilingual outreach and document translation. To be most helpful to organizations with limited time and funds, these best practices are pulled from ready-to-use resources such as checklists and toolkits as opposed to academic literature, webinars and other sources.

In addition, this brief aims to help organizations further language justice more generally within their programming. “Language justice” covers a range of practices that help promote equity across race and language but does not have a universal definition.<sup>1</sup> It involves accounting for unequal power dynamics, recognizing the political and social aspects of language, and working towards language access as a fundamental right.<sup>2</sup> Language justice practices create space in decision-making for people who speak languages other than English. The provided language justice resources offer opportunities for deeper learning on this important topic.

This compilation of resources is not a comprehensive guide and is intended to be used as starting point. Resources are sorted into three sections: best practices for hosting multilingual events, best practices for translation, and language justice resources. Key practices across all three areas are:

- Ask communities what works best for them;
- Use professionally trained interpreters and translators;
- Focus on articulating the *meaning* of content in culturally appropriate ways instead of copying the English word-for-word; and
- Account for the additional time and funding needed for translation and/or interpretation at the outset of a project.

**Note:** To ensure these best practices preserve the authors’ intended meaning, the Environmental Law Institute pulled best practices from the cited resources and edited for length and/or clarity. Quotation marks indicate exact language from the source. ELI created this resource compilation as a means to disseminate the information published by the cited authors and does not take credit for any best practices articulated here. ELI recommends reading the entirety of a resource before implementing any of its suggested practices.

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<sup>1</sup> *Language Justice Toolkit*, COMMUNITIES CREATING HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS, 2 [https://nesfp.org/sites/default/files/resources/language\\_justice\\_toolkit.pdf](https://nesfp.org/sites/default/files/resources/language_justice_toolkit.pdf) (last visited June 2, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> *Language Justice and Access*, JUST COMMUNITIES, <https://www.just-communities.org/language> (last visited June 6, 2022); COMMUNITIES CREATING HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS, *supra* note 1, at 2.

# I. Best Practices for Hosting Multilingual Events

Planning multilingual events requires time and effort. Several questions should be discussed well in advance of the event. For example, how will participants interact with a speaker? These resources walk through how to approach this and other questions and outline best practices for hosting an inclusive multilingual event.

## Just Communities, [“Top 10” Best Practices for Inclusive Multilingual Events](#) (undated)<sup>3</sup>

Author: Just Communities is a non-profit offering cultural competency training for organizations, students, educators, and the general public in Southern California.

Resource Description: This one-page checklist describes best practices for hosting multilingual events that take steps to promote language equity.

### Inclusive Spaces

- Ensure that staff, speakers, and other participants speak directly to each other, not at the interpreters.
- Speak one at a time.
- “Speak loudly and clearly at a moderate pace.”
- Ensure there are multilingual staff members as people arrive at the event (e.g., registering participants or giving directions).
- “Set-up spaces to integrate groups who use different languages.”

### Outreach

- “Use outreach materials written in the primary languages of the target audiences.”
- State in the materials that interpretation will be provided.

### Staff/Volunteer Training

- Ensure people providing interpretation have specific training in interpretation skills, including training about ethics, standard techniques, and specialized vocabulary.

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<sup>3</sup> “Top 10” Best Practices for Inclusive Multilingual Events, JUST COMMUNITIES, <https://memberpower.ufcw.org/files/2014/12/10-best-practices.pdf> (last visited June 2, 2022).

## **Use of Interpreters**

- “Schedule interpreters as far in advance as possible.”
- Schedule more than one interpreter for events longer than one hour.
- “Consider skill levels and confidentiality concerns when selecting interpreters.”
- “Avoid dual roles and conflicts of interest for interpreters.”
- Make a plan for how the audience will interact with the speakers and other participants.
- Send interpreters the materials in advance of the event.
- Allot a few minutes at the beginning of an event to allow interpreters to introduce themselves, explain the interpretation process, and ensure everyone has a working headset.

## **Equipment**

- “Ensure adequate interpretation headsets are available.”
- “Test equipment in advance and have back-up batteries.”
- “Create an inclusive distribution plan for equipment” (e.g., offer it to all attendees in a central location).

## **Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, [Guide to Developing a Language Access Plan](#) (undated)<sup>4</sup>**

**Author:** The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services is a U.S. federal agency that works in partnership with state governments to manage Medicare and administer Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program.

**Resource Description:** This 11-page guide was created for entities that receive federal assistance from Medicare and outlines steps providers can use to assess their programs and develop a language access plan. A language access plan is a document that explicitly spells out an organization’s plans to ensure equitable access to programming for people who speak languages other than English. This document provides further details on the best practices listed below.

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<sup>4</sup> CENTERS FOR MEDICARE AND MEDICAID SERVICES, U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, GUIDE TO DEVELOPING A LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN, 6-10, <https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/OMH/Downloads/Language-Access-Plan-508.pdf> (last visited June 2, 2022).

## **Inclusive Spaces**

- Understand an organization's points of contact with the public and determine what kinds of language services would be most valuable.
- Solicit feedback from community-based organizations and other stakeholders before the plan is finalized.
- Use language identification cards to identify for the interpreter which languages are needed to effectively communicate.
  - Language identification cards contain text such as "I speak [insert from list of multiple languages]" so people can choose their preferred language.

## **Outreach**

- Use [language use data](#) from the U.S. Census to determine the top non-English languages spoken in a particular state or county.<sup>5</sup>
- Notify people that an interpreter will be available.
- Add taglines to printed or electronic materials that inform people of where to go for language assistance services.
  - Example tagline that would be written in Spanish: "If you speak Spanish, contact [insert staff member name] at 123-456-7890."

## **Staff/Volunteer Training**

- Designate a specific "language access" coordinator.
- Train staff to effectively and respectfully communicate with people who speak a language different from their own.
- Give staff clear procedures for providing language services.
- Ensure everyone knows where to find translated materials.

## **Use of Interpreters**

- Do not ask bilingual family members to interpret, especially when the discussion requires technical terminology.
- Outline clear requirements for the type and qualifications of interpreters which may vary under different scenarios.
- Check if states have licensing or certification programs to help find a qualified interpreter.

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<sup>5</sup> *Language Use Data*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/language-use/data.html> (last visited June 6, 2022).

## **Evaluation/Feedback**

- Ask users about their experiences with the organization’s language access policies and practices.
- Community demographics change and, therefore, it is important to keep current by engaging with public health agencies, school districts, and other local resources.
- Monitor utilization rates for different language access services.

## **Communities Creating Healthy Environments, [Language Justice Toolkit: Multilingual Strategies for Community Organizing](#) (Sections on Interpretation & Planning an Event) (undated)<sup>6</sup>**

Author: Communities Creating Healthy Environments is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that supports community-based organizations and tribal groups in their efforts to address the root causes of obesity.

Resource Description: This 44-page toolkit offers information on working with multilingual communities through a “language justice” framework. It includes a wide range of information on multilingual outreach, including hiring interpreters, assembling a translation team, planning events, and building organizational commitment. Although targeted at community organizations, this toolkit is also a resource for other organizations.

## **Inclusive Spaces**

- Make sure there are plans in place to have people participate (not just listen) in different languages.
- Build into the event’s agenda the additional time needed for interpretation.
- Provide signs in multiple languages.
- Identify local interpreters and groups that own interpretation equipment to develop a network for creating multilingual spaces.

## **Outreach**

- Use written materials, invitations, and outreach communications in the language of the invited community.
- Use the registration process to understand the language needs of the participants.

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<sup>6</sup> COMMUNITIES CREATING HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS, *supra* note 1, at 4-14, 22-25.

### **Staff/Volunteer Training**

- Make sure staff support interpreters by helping with equipment, introducing them at the event, and helping to orient them to the host organization.

### **Use of Interpreters**

- Have two interpreters available for each session so they can help each other.
- Assess the interpreters' qualifications, including through a reference check, to ensure they are trained in the type of interpretation needed.
- Send materials to the interpreters before the event and ensure they are aware of any vocabulary that is particularly important for the event.
- Aim to pay interpreters.

### **Equipment**

- If interpretation equipment is needed, look for rentals at least one month before the event.
- Test the equipment before the event.
- Make sure there are extra batteries.
- Designate someone to collect the equipment at the end.

### **Evaluation/Feedback**

- Ensure translations of any follow-up materials from an event.
- Solicit feedback from translators and interpreters.

## **II. Best Practices for Translation**

Translation is the process of changing written documents from one language to another. Most of the ready-to-use resources on translation identified were published by and include information specific to governmental health organizations, but their general guidelines can be applied in other contexts.



## U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, [Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear: Understanding and using the “Toolkit Guideline for Culturally Appropriate Translation”](#) (undated)<sup>7</sup>

Resource Description: This 48-page translation toolkit was written for government health agencies that have limited time and budgets. It lays out the importance of cultural sensitivity and clear and actionable steps for translating documents. Substantial additional information is available on the best practices listed below.

### **Avoiding Common Mistakes**

- Do not use literal translations without cultural adaptation, as they can be confusing or misleading.
- Avoid translators who do not have knowledge of the audience’s culture or language patterns.
- Test the readability of the materials, because translated text can be difficult to read.
- Check that the tone of the translation is appropriate for the intended audience. For some cultures and languages, it may be important to convey a more formal style.
- Check to ensure that the translation does not contain errors.

### **Ensuring Culturally Appropriate Translation**

- Ensure that materials have been translated for meaning in a culturally appropriate way instead of word-for-word from English.
- Check that the translated text sounds natural and easy to understand.
- Write translations independently in each language to help ensure cultural appropriateness.

### **Prepping Materials for Translation**

- Decide if creating a new written translation is the best method of conveying your information.
  - Does the intended audience prefer other methods of communication?
  - Are there existing translated materials that meet the same needs?
- Review the English text to make sure it is clear and ready for translation.

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, TOOLKIT FOR MAKING WRITTEN MATERIAL CLEAR AND EFFECTIVE: UNDERSTANDING AND USING THE “TOOLKIT GUIDELINES FOR CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE TRANSLATION,” 2-37, <https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Outreach/WrittenMaterialsToolkit/Downloads/ToolkitPart11.pdf> (last visited June 2, 2022).

### **Working with a Translator**

- Provide clear instructions and background information.
- Give guidance on how to translate complicated or niche concepts and terms.
- Use an independent editor and proofreader to review and finalize the translation.

### **Formatting the Translation**

- Allow extra space in the document for translated text, because many languages require more words as compared to English.
- Allot additional time for formatting documents in languages that read from right to left.
- Translated materials should include multilingual text to alert readers the document is available in other languages.
- Provide a label in English to identify the title, language, and date of translation, in order to help English-speakers share the correct materials.

### **Tripepi Smith, [Translation Best Practices for Local Government Agencies](#) (December 2021)<sup>8</sup>**

Author: Tripepi Smith is a marketing, technology, and public affairs consulting service.

Resource Description: This short blog post describes best translation practices for local governments.

### **Avoiding Common Mistakes**

- Do not use Google Translate. It cannot understand the context of what is being communicated and translates word-for-word using statistical algorithms.

### **Keys to Culturally Appropriate Translation**

- Hire a professional that has a sense for a language's idioms, specialized phrases, and humor.

### **Prepping Materials for Translation**

- Create a language-specific style guide that outlines everyday use of vocabulary and grammar, including organization-specific terms and the formats of dates, to help maintain consistency across communications.

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<sup>8</sup> *Translation Best Practices for Local Government Agencies*, TRIPEPI SMITH, (December 2021)  
<https://www.tripepismith.com/translation-best-practices/>.

### **Working with a Translator**

- “Test a variety of vendors and find one that meets all of your needs.”
- Ask for references and analyze reviews from past clients.

### **Massachusetts Office of Public Health Strategy and Communications, [Translation Toolkit: Foreign Language Guide \(October 2010\)](#)<sup>9</sup>**

Resource Description: This 23-page toolkit that describes the process for translating materials based on guidance developed by the former Office of Refugee and Immigrant Health and provides ready-to-go templates, such as a translation quality assurance form, to support best practices for translation. Its content was designed specifically for Massachusetts’ public health education materials but offers best practices that could be useful across disciplines.

### **Avoiding Common Mistakes**

- Do not use internet-based translation services.

### **Keys to Culturally Appropriate Translation**

- Use conceptual translation rather than word-for-word translation.
- Develop a project timeline that includes time for review and revisions.
- Discuss relevant information about your target audience with the translator such as appropriate reading level and purpose of the material.

### **Choosing a Translation Method**

- Translation costs should be included while developing materials.
- Use data from a variety of sources to determine translation languages.

### **Prepping Materials for Translation**

- Review the English materials for any mistakes.
- Field-test the English versions before having them translated.

### **Working with a Translator**

- Use one translator for the initial translation and another to review and edit.

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<sup>9</sup> MASS. OFF. OF PUB. HEALTH STRATEGY AND COMM’N, TRANSLATION TOOLKIT, 15-19 (revised October 2010)  
<https://www.mass.gov/doc/dph-translation-guidelines/download>.

- Use paid professional translators only, as they are responsible for their work.
- Request a detailed estimate of the cost of translation in writing from the translator.
- Encourage the translator to ask questions.
- If materials were created by a marketing company, provide a contact person for the translator in case of questions.

### **Formatting the Translation**

- Allow translators to judiciously use footnotes to explain complicated concepts.
- Highlight the availability of other language services in program contact information.
- If materials list other resources, place a disclaimer that these resources may only be available in English.

### **Communities Creating Healthy Environments, [Language Justice Toolkit: Multilingual Strategies for Community Organizing](#) (Section on Translation) (undated)<sup>10</sup>**

Author: Communities Creating Healthy Environments is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that supports community-based organizations and tribal groups in their efforts address the root causes of obesity.

Resource Description: This 44-page toolkit offers information on working with multilingual communities through a “language justice” framework. It includes a wide-range of information on multilingual outreach, including hiring interpreters, assembling a translation team, planning events, and building organizational commitment. Although targeted at community organizations, this toolkit is also a great resource for other organizations.

### **Avoiding Common Mistakes**

- Ensure all staff have access to existing translations of internal resources to reduce the chance of translating something that has already been translated.
- Only use online translation tools as an emergency resource.

### **Keys to Culturally Appropriate Translation**

- Conduct a needs assessment for the community and your organization (see pgs. 17 – 18 for strategies).
- Invest resources in translating outreach materials, as poorly translated materials can discourage participation.

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<sup>10</sup> COMMUNITIES CREATING HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT, *supra* note 1, at 15-21.

- Translate internal documents to encourage participation from members and staff who speak languages other than English.

### **Prepping for Translation**

- Discuss translation needs during budget and strategic planning meetings.
- Start with in-house resources.
  - “Include multilingual criteria when hiring and offering training to improve language skills.”
  - “Recruit and train volunteers for multilingual tasks.”
  - Evaluate potential interpreters’ language skills, especially if they are volunteers.
- “Never send drafts for translation.”

### **Working with a Translator**

- Review references from other employers.
- Give credit to the translator but be clear about organizational ownership of the translated text.

## **III. Language Justice**

While more robust community outreach and translation practices are valuable steps, they are only two of the many facets of language justice. Language justice focuses on systemic change by altering institutions to allow for full democratic participation across different languages.<sup>11</sup> The following resources take a deep dive into language justice and include action items for organizations that aim to implement language justice principles in their work.

### **Racial Equity Tools, [Language Justice Database](#) (undated)<sup>12</sup>**

Author: Racial Equity Tools is a website that curates tools, research, tips, and curricula to support racial justice work. It is voluntarily run by MP Associates, CAPD, and World Trust Educational Services.

This database offers a range of language justice resources in different formats, including curriculums, research, and webinars. It highlights resources that approach translation and

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<sup>11</sup> COMMUNITIES CREATING HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS, *supra* note 1, at 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Language Justice*, RACIAL EQUITY TOOLS, <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/plan/issues/language-justice> (last visited June 2, 2022).

interpretation from a starting point of justice. Starting with a language justice framework helps disrupt privilege and challenge English dominant communication and leadership.

**Communities Creating Healthy Environments, [Language Justice Toolkit: Multilingual Strategies for Community Organizing](#) (Section on Translation) (undated)<sup>13</sup>**

Author: Communities Creating Healthy Environments is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that supports community-based organizations and tribal groups in their efforts address the root causes of obesity.

This 44-page toolkit offers information on working with multilingual communities through a “language justice” framework. It includes a wide-range of information on multilingual outreach, including hiring interpreters, assembling a translation team, planning events, and building organizational commitment. Although targeted at community organizations, this toolkit can also serve as a resource for other organizations. The section on “Building Organizational Commitment” outlines ways that an organization can make an intentional and holistic effort to create an inclusive environment.

**County Health Rankings and Road Maps, [Creating Healthy Environments with Language Justice Webinar](#) (January 2021)<sup>14</sup>**

Author: County Health Rankings and Road Maps is a program of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute that provides resources to improve health equity.

This webinar features Diana Lieu, Praxis Project, and Eudelia Contreras, Lake County, Colorado, discussing their experiences with the intersection of language and equity. It highlights specific, practical strategies for building equitable multilingual spaces in sustainable ways. [Slides](#) and a [resource guide](#) are also available.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Language Justice Toolkit*, COMMUNITIES CREATING HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS, [https://nesfp.org/sites/default/files/resources/language\\_justice\\_toolkit.pdf](https://nesfp.org/sites/default/files/resources/language_justice_toolkit.pdf) (last visited June 2, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Eudelia Contreras & Diana Lieu, *Creating Healthy Environments with Language Justice*, COUNTY HEALTH RANKING AND ROADMAPS (January 26, 2021), <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/online-and-on-air/webinars/creating-healthy-environments-with-language-justice>.

<sup>15</sup> *Microsoft PowerPoint – Creating Healthy Environments with Language Justice*, COUNTY HEALTH RANKING AND ROADMAPS (January 26, 2021) [https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/sites/default/files/media/document/Creating%20Healthy%20Environments%20with%20Language%20Justice\\_Final.pdf](https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/sites/default/files/media/document/Creating%20Healthy%20Environments%20with%20Language%20Justice_Final.pdf); *Resource Guide – Creating Healthy Environments*



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[https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/sites/default/files/media/document/Resource%20Guide Language%20Justice\\_012621.pdf](https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/sites/default/files/media/document/Resource%20Guide%20Language%20Justice_012621.pdf).