



# City of Austin

## Communications and Public Information Office

301 W. Second St., Austin, TX 78701

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Doug Matthews, Chief Communications Director

**DATE:** September 7, 2017

**SUBJECT:** Council Resolution No. 20161103-052 – Progress Report #3

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Pursuant to Council Resolution 20161103-2016 (related to the City's Language Access Program), we are pleased to provide you a third update on the project. As a reminder, the Resolution included three core requests and/or desired outcomes of the City Manager:

1. City departments comply with language access guidance issued by federal agencies.
2. Create a stakeholder team to develop a "Language Access Implementation Plan" and collaborate with other local public agencies to achieve efficiencies in the provision of language access services.
3. Develop "Language Access Procedures" for each City department that interacts with the public and prioritize departments that most frequently come into direct contact with the public.

In addition to the resolution, the Office of the City Auditor released an audit report on the City's language access efforts in June 2016. The report found that while efforts had been made to provide language assistance services to Austin residents, the City may not be meeting the needs of all residents. As we indicated in the staff response to that audit, we agree and have been working diligently to improve the City's performance in regard to language access.

#### **Progress Update**

Staff continues to build upon the work documented in the May 3, 2017 Progress Report. This includes continued work with City departments, City leadership, and community members to identify and improve service delivery.



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### *Language Access Planning Guidance*

In order to support efficient and effective allocation of language access resources, staff met with language access coordinators from 21 departments which most frequently come into direct contact with the public. These meetings have resulted in detailed knowledge of key departments' current language access procedures and internal resources. They have also strengthened prioritization and assessment efforts by offering opportunities for comparison or cross-fertilization of ideas across departments.

Staff also organized a meeting of City department Language Access Coordinators, Public Information Officers, and departmental leadership that promoted best practices and supported the development of Language Access plans. Forty-three City staff members from 26 departments attended the meeting. Final plans are due on September 30, 2017.

### *Staff Training*

The City also partnered with the Multicultural Refugee Coalition to provide a community interpreter training pilot program for bilingual City employees called "Shared Voices." The MRC is a social enterprise with a mission to connect refugees to livelihood opportunities and strengthen local language access options by training professional interpreters. The purpose of the training is to introduce bilingual staff to the goals and code of ethics of the community interpreter. To date, 33 bilingual City staff members from 12 departments have been trained in three languages (French, Spanish, and Vietnamese). Graduates have expressed interest in contributing to interpretation and translation needs during emergency situations. Preliminary meetings have taken place with Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) and Human Resources Department (HRD) to support this initiative. A third training is scheduled for October and November. Employees who completed the training were a vital resource in our language coordination and service provision last week during initial response to Hurricane Harvey.

### *Contracts for Service*

**Interpretation**—Staff conducted a review of all existing City contracts for over-the-phone interpretation. This review will inform a future citywide solicitation process for over-the-phone interpretation.

**Translation**—Working with Financial Services, Communications and Public Information (CPIO) has developed a Request for Qualifications (RFQS) for purchasing translations in at least seven languages. The scope of services incorporates best practices for translation procurement, including translation localization. The RFQS will qualify multiple vendors across multiple languages and provide a list of pre-approved translation agencies for departments seeking those services.



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### *Translation of Critical Documents*

As staff works to define best practices in procurement for a city of our size and diversity, CPIO continues to assist in translation of critical documents. Sixteen departments have requested translation of documents into fifteen languages with a projected total of over 800 translated documents identified as critical for language access. CPIO is also meeting with Innovation Office staff to build translation considerations into the redesign of the City of Austin web site. Staff has met individually with departments requesting critical translations to promote efficiencies in translation requests and appropriately manage translation costs.

### *Language Identification Procedures*

As part of its participation in the Language Access Working Group of the Community Advancement Network (CAN), City staff led the development of a two-part a language identification system called “iSpeak Austin” that will facilitate easy access for limited English speakers at points of contact with the public. The system includes language identification placards that are customized for 76 languages spoken in Austin and placed in areas where public contact/interaction is common. These placards are intended to help public-facing employees identify the language of a Limited English Proficient (LEP) member of the public before contacting an over-the-phone interpreter.

The second part of the iSpeak Austin system is the iSpeak card carried by LEP persons to quickly help staffers identify their language. To accompany the rollout of the iSpeak system, CPIO will establish a brief training curriculum that will promote best practices in working with the LEP public and over-the-phone interpreters to promote cost savings and better customer services. These cards were produced and distributed as part of Hurricane Harvey response as an advance pilot ahead of community-wide distribution.

### *Community Interpretation*

CPIO partnered with Austin Public Health’s Health Equity Unit (HEU) to provide document translation and on-site interpretation services at a HEU job fair in the Rundberg area. Language services were provided in Arabic, Mandarin, Vietnamese, and Spanish. The job fair was attended by 109 participants, approximately 17% of which were LEP. CPIO is promoting this partnership to showcase the use of outreach, translation, and interpretation as a means of producing successful services for the LEP community. HEU received written positive feedback from community partners such as Refugee Services of Texas indicating that participants successfully scheduled interviews at the fair.

*The City of Austin is committed to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Reasonable modifications and equal access to communications will be provided upon request.*



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Over the next few months, CPIO will receive completed language access plans and provide feedback to departments that most frequently come into direct contact with the public to ensure that departments conform to the expectations set out in the Resolution and Audit. Additionally, we will lay the groundwork for training City staff on best practices in using the iSpeak Austin language identification system to efficiently utilize over-the-phone interpretation.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

**CC:** Elaine Hart, Interim City Manager  
Ray Baray, Chief of Staff  
Brion Oaks, Chief Equity Officer