



Language Access Principles

Language access is crucial to racial justice and is essential to providing effective and fair pro bono advocacy. Language barriers can significantly hinder the ability of clients and attorneys to effectively communicate with one another. Law firms should adhere to language access principles to better serve clients and ensure a more just and equitable legal system.



The Association of Pro Bono Counsel



Public Interest Pro Bono Coalition



The Language Access Principles provide core principles to ensure equal access for Limited English Proficient and Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals seeking pro bono services.

[DOWNLOAD THE LANGUAGE ACCESS PRINCIPLES](#)

Law Firm Pro Bono Language Access Principles

We represent a coalition of pro bono professionals overseeing pro bono programs at law firms and public interest law organizations across the country. Set forth below are our core principles for providing equal access to **Limited English Proficient (LEP)** and **Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HOH)** individuals seeking or receiving pro bono services. We recognize that meeting these principles requires planning, staffing, and other resources. Despite the economic constraints faced by legal services organizations (LSOs), most have language access policies and practices consistent with the principles set forth here. Law firms can as well. We collectively recognize language access as a fundamental component of equal access to justice for all pro bono partners. Our goal is to work collaboratively toward fairer and better pro bono services for LEP and Deaf and HOH clients.

Language Access Is Key to Racial Justice and Essential to Providing Pro Bono Legal Services

Racial Justice. Language access has significant racial justice implications with disproportionate impacts on people of color. Inequitable access to legal services based on language needs reinforces the same systemic barriers that marginalize communities of color.

Equity. LEP and Deaf and HOH individuals deserve equal access to pro bono legal services. LEP and Deaf and HOH clients should not face additional barriers when seeking or receiving pro bono help, in the same way that services should not be declined or limited based on an individual's race, national origin, disability, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or other identities.

LAW FIRM PRO BONO Language Access Principles

Law Firm Consideration and Acceptance of Pro Bono Clients Who Communicate in Languages other than English, Including Spoken and Sign Languages

Equal Access to Pro Bono. Law firms should provide equal access to clients regardless of language, from case acceptance through the life of the representation.

Language Access Plan. Law firms should establish a plan for working with LEP and Deaf and HOH clients to ensure equal access to services for all individuals.

Point Person. Law firms should identify a point person(s) to oversee their language access efforts.

Ensuring Meaningful and Competent Interpretation on Law Firm Pro Bono Matters

Ask Clients. Law firms should ask clients if they want an interpreter (and explain that it will be free).

Secure Interpretation. Law firms are responsible for arranging competent and timely language services to ensure effective communication with their clients. Clients should never have to arrange for (or pay for) interpretation or translation. Law firms, not LSOs, are expected to arrange for interpreters, or pay fees associated with interpretation.

Don't Use Family or Friends. Law firms should make every effort to avoid using a client's family or friends as interpreters.

Ensure Quality. Interpretation should be the highest quality possible but need not be from professional interpreters.

- Interpreters should participate in regular trainings on interpretation and cultural humility.
- Interpreters should attend legal trainings provided by the LSO to learn relevant law and cultural competency alongside the lawyers on the case.
- Lawyers should be trained on how to work effectively with interpreters.

• Throughout the representation, law firms should continue to evaluate the sufficiency of any interpretation and make corrections when needed.

What are the Language Access Principles? A 3-Minute Overview



Language Access Curriculum



Public Interest Pro Bono Coalition
Public interest pro bono professionals that specializes in partnering with large law firms and corporations.

Video: “Language Justice is Racial Justice” Webinar - November 15, 2023. Featuring Christina Yang (General Counsel and Pro Bono Director at AJSOCAL), Paul Lee (Pro Bono Partner at Steptoe), and Alejandra Oliva (Author, Translator, Immigrant Justice Advocate).

Law Firm Language Access Policy Sample

This sample document is intended to be used as a starting point for law firms considering creating a responsive and effective language access policy that prioritizes serving clients and working productively with legal services organizations.

Video: Law Firm Interpretation Basics - For Interpreters ([access slides here](#))

Best Practices for Working With Interpreters - Top Ten Tips

A quick reference guide gathered from experience and discussion with interpreters. These best practices are meant to assist attorneys who will be working with interpreters with the goal of helping pro bono clients most effectively.

Video: Best Practices for Working With Interpreters - For Attorneys ([access slides here](#))



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