

Nevada Department of Veterans Services Language Access Plan 2024

Section 1: Purpose and Authority

The purpose of this plan is to establish an effective plan and protocol for the Nevada Department of Veterans Services (NDVS) personnel to follow when providing services to, or interacting with, individuals who have Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

It is NDVS's mission to serve Nevada veterans by honoring their remarkable legacy and connecting them to earned benefits, resources and services. Through our seven major lines of effort we:

- Professionally assist veterans and their families obtain federal and state veterans' benefits.
- Provide quality skilled nursing care at our State Veterans Homes.
- Provide dignified burial support at our State Veterans Memorial Cemeteries.
- Manage effective programs addressing the needs of at-risk veterans.
- Successfully integrate returning servicemembers and veterans into Nevada communities.
- Honor the service and sacrifice of all Nevada's veterans and their families through ceremonies and information campaigns.
- Assist and coordinate the efforts of service organizations and individuals insofar as their activities benefit Nevada veterans, servicemembers and their families.

While speaking English is a requirement for military service in the United States, spouses, significant others, as well as family members of veterans or military members may not be English proficient. To fulfill our mission, it is a priority for us to be able to communicate and share information effectively with all of those we serve. This plan and its implementation will help us fulfill our mission and better serve our public

Nevada's Senate Bill 318 (SB318) and the federal guidance on Title VI both agree that language should not be a barrier to accessing governmental programs and services. As SB318 puts it, "Persons with limited English proficiency require and deserve meaningful, timely access to government services in their preferred language." Moreover, it makes it clear that it is the responsibility of government to provide that access: "*State and local agencies and entities that receive public money have an obligation to provide meaningful, timely access for persons with limited English proficiency to the programs and services of those agencies and entities.*"

As a federal aid recipient, NDVS is committed to compliance with Nevada Senate Bill 318 and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 2 C.S. § 561 et seq. (Act 172 of 2006) in ensuring meaningful access to State services and programs for individuals with limited English proficiency.

Section 2: Acronyms and Definitions

For the purposes of this plan please reference this section to understand how the following acronyms, terms and corresponding definitions are used within NDVS' Language Access Plan.

Acronym	Term	Definition
	Bilingual Fluency	The ability to speak and understand two languages easily and accurately. Bilingual fluency does not always mean that a person can serve as an interpreter or translator.
	Certified Interpreter	An interpreter who has passed a valid and reliable certification exam administered by an independent entity.
	Certified Translator	Certified translators are linguists who have passed some kind of exam which assesses their ability to accurately translate from one language into another. The exam is usually given by a professional association such as the American Translators Association or by a state or local government.
	Dual-role Interpreter	A multilingual employee that has been tested for language skills and trained as an interpreter; and is engaged in interpreting as part of their job duties.
	Language Access	Effective strategies to engage and communicate with people acknowledging that language is not a barrier.
LAP	Language Access Plan	A document that identifies how to effectively provide services to LEP individuals.
LEP	Limited English Proficiency	A person with limited English proficiency is unable to speak, read, write, or understand the English language at a level that permits them to interact effectively with NDOW staff, or engage in NDOW programs or services. Individuals who communicate through American Sign Language are included in this definition.
	Meaningful Access	When language assistance provided is accurate, timely, and effective at no cost to the LEP individual. It is also the ability of an LEP individual to access, apply for, and receive resources without significant restrictions from language barriers.
NDVS	Nevada Department of Veterans Services	The State of Nevada department whose mission it is to honor the remarkable legacy of Nevada's veterans and connect them to earned benefits, resources and services.
	NDVS Language Facilitator	NDOW staff that have been delegated the responsibility of developing and implementing language access strategies as identified in the Language Access Plan.
NRS	Nevada Revised Statutes	Current codified laws of the State of Nevada.
	Vital Documents	Documents that provide essential information. Examples include applications, consent, notice of rights, notice of activities, notices of advising of the availability of free language assistance.

Section 3: General Policy

NDVS recognizes we serve the public, including LEP individuals. It is the policy of NDVS to ensure meaningful access to the services we provide to LEP individuals.

It is Nevada's policy to make services or programs accessible to every person regardless of their ability to speak, understand, read, or write English. NDVS intends to take all necessary steps to provide LEP individuals with meaningful access to its services and programs. NDVS seeks to reduce barriers by increasing its capacity to deliver services and benefits to people in their preferred languages.

To best serve LEP individuals, NDVS endorses the following policies:

- NDVS is committed to equity and will take all steps required to provide limited English proficient (LEP) individuals with meaningful access to all its services, programs, and activities.
- The department, rather than the LEP individual, bears the responsibility for providing appropriate language services, regardless of the LEP individual's preferred language, at no cost to the LEP individual.
- Staff make every effort to attain and record individuals' language needs.
- Staff will not encourage individuals to use informal interpreters.
- No staff may suggest or require that an LEP individual provide an interpreter to receive NDVS services.

NDVS Language Access Facilitator(s):

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Language Access Facilitators (LAFs) will work with staff, with the help of supervisors and administrators to develop and implement NDVS's Language Access Plan (LAP). The NDVS LAFs work at the discretion and appointment of the NDVS director. Currently, NDVS does not have the staff capacity to dedicate a full-time employee to develop and implement NDVS's LAP. Until additional staff capacity increases are realized, NDVS LAFs are being asked to take on additional duties as the department's LAF in addition to their regular duties.

Section 4: Profile of NDVS's LEP Clients

NDVS is committed to tracking the languages preferred for communication among our limited English proficient (LEP) clients so that we can better provide meaningful, timely access to our services and programs without regard to any language impediments.

NDVS does not currently have a digitally based tracking system in place to identify and track the total LEP clients served and/or the services/programs these groups of individuals are accessing as identified in SB 318. To effectively track, collect and maintain the categorical information cited, NDVS will need to acquire the resources necessary to contract the development of a new client tracking system. Until the time that NDVS can do so we will begin using survey tools and a variety of other resources and means to understand the needs of the public we serve.

- **Veterans Information System (VIS) – Online Survey**
 - This is a voluntary tool for veterans so NDVS can better connect them to the resources, benefits and programs they identify as pertinent to their needs. On or before August 30, 2024, NDVS to add a series of questions to assess language preference needs and track information and requests

Section 5: NDVS Language Access Services and Procedures

NDVS Vital Documents and Website

Vital documents provide essential information. Examples include applications, consent, notice of rights, notice of activities, and notices advising of the availability of free language assistance.

Identified vital documents include the following:

- **Public Signage/Office Signage:** i.e. at offices housing Veterans Service Officers located in Reno, North Las Vegas, Carson City, Fallon, Mesquite, Pahrump, Elko, Winnemucca; Nevada State Veterans Memorial Cemetery offices located in Fernley, Boulder City; Nevada State Veterans Homes located in Boulder City, Sparks.

Per NRS Chapter 449A, the Nevada State Veterans Homes are required to have policies in place that outline processes and procedures to provide LEPs with translation services. Both the Northern and Southern Nevada State Veterans Homes are in compliance with these requirements. Additionally, there is signage at both State Veterans Homes providing the phone number and contact information for a translator or translator assistance.

- **Website:** NDVS is beginning the approval/planning phase of a complete redesign of its website. The integration of multi- languages within the new design is included within the scope of this project. Currently, the NDVS website contains a prominent “Change Language” button that is on all pages, at the top in a bold yellow box that connects to Google Translate.

- **NDVS Digital Publications, Brochures:** The website redesign project will contain digital forms of the following publications below so they may be viewed through Google Translate.
 - Patriot Employer Program
 - Women Veterans Resource Guide
 - Nevada Veterans Advocacy Course
 - Northern Nevada State Veterans Home
 - State Benefits for Veterans
 - Caregivers & Survivors Guide
 - Northern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery
 - Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery
 - Southern Nevada State Veterans Home

Currently, requests for translation assistance, including translation of physical brochures, pamphlets, etc., are minimal and handled on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, the only means for the department to have physical documents translated for LEP individuals is to request translation.

Oral/Sign Language Services

When oral/sign language services are requested, the Department utilizes state approved contractors that specialize in interpretation and translation services. The State of Nevada vets and approves of contractors for them to become state approved contractors to ensure that they are fully capable of providing the services requested.

Written Language Services

When written language services are requested, the department utilizes state approved contractors that specialize in written translation services. The State of Nevada vets and approves of contractors for them to become state approved contractors to ensure that they are fully capable of providing the services requested.

Community Outreach and Engagement

Beginning June 1, 2024, NDVS began requesting public input regarding the department LAP through its social media channels Facebook and Twitter. In the later part of the month, NDVS began highly profiling requests for LAP public input through its June and July newsletters and on the carousel portion of its website's home page. The campaigns ran consistently through July 31, 2024. **There were zero responses with zero social media engagements.**

Still, NDVS is committed to ensuring that the larger LEP community is aware of and able to access all available language services. As part of the department's LAP, NDVS will be exploring a variety of options to better publicize improved language services in the community.

The department will be looking for additional opportunities to better engage LEP individuals by increasing staff capacity to meaningfully engage the LEP community, this will include continued social media and website campaigns, newsletter communications, as well as discussions with our customer-facing staff members to include our Veterans Service Officers, Outreach Program Specialists, as well as staff at our State Veterans Homes and Cemeteries.

Providing Notice of Language Assistance Services

NDVS will provide notification of the language services it provides at all relevant points of contact including but not limited to regional field offices, department headquarters, and on the NDVS website.

Language Access Procedures

Identifying language needs and preferred language:

The following procedures should be adhered to when interacting with LEP individuals. 1

- Interact appropriately with LEP clients.
- Determine clients' preferred language.
- Inform clients of the availability of language services.
- Record and track LEP client language preferences so that the data will follow them throughout their interactions with NDVS.
- If no there are no competent bilingual staff or professional translation services available at the time of the request, staff must make a sincere effort to accommodate customers as quickly as possible to make sure LEP individuals are provided meaningful, timely access the services NDVS provides.
- Use this [LINK](#) to find State-approved translation services

Section 6: Evaluation of and Recommendations for NDVS' Language Access Plan

NDVS is committed to monitoring the performance of the above policies, procedures, and resources to ensure that its LAP is responsive to the needs of both the department and the public it serves. At a minimum, NDVS will review, evaluate, and update its LAP biennially.

Parties Responsible for LAP Maintenance:

The Language Access Coordinators will work with Department Leadership as well as staff across all divisions to ensure the Language Access Plan is reviewed on a biennial basis and updated as needed.

Criteria and Methods for LAP Evaluation:

On or before August 31, 2024, NDVS will begin the following:

- Better tracking and monitoring of how often translation services are utilized, where utilized, language preferences, and services utilized.

- Identify staff members with bilingual skills who are willing and able to assist in advancing the NDVS LAP.
- Continue outreach seeking public comments/input to make necessary revisions to this LAP.