

Albuquerque Human Rights Office - NM Human Rights Coalition

Monolingual and LEP Consumer Access to City of Albuquerque Services

Page 1

I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on 1990 census data, the two largest non-English (and Limited English Proficient - LEP) speaking immigrant populations in the City of Albuquerque proved to be Spanish and Vietnamese.

Is the City providing adequate access to its services to these populations? What has been the experience of these two immigrant groups in accessing City services? To answer these questions, the Albuquerque Human Rights Office (AHRO) and the New Mexico Human Rights Coalition (NMHRC) conducted a survey with help from staff and students of the University of New Mexico (UNM) and interviewers. The ultimate goal of this survey was to provide the City administration with information that would assist the City in ensuring that it provides adequate and equal services to all of its consumers.

The first segment of the survey was meant to determine whether City agencies provide adequate services to monolingual/LEP Spanish and Vietnamese speakers. The survey also sought to determine whether the City agencies have a formal plan or process for non-English speakers, which materials/services are most requested in Spanish and/or Vietnamese and if they have these available, and how the agencies communicate with monolingual and LEP consumers. The second part of the survey was intended to measure the ability of these consumers to access City services and to determine if language is a barrier in accessing these services. In addition to these surveys, the HRO later conducted a telephone survey of the City's public information/hot line telephone numbers as well as a review of the City's Website to determine whether the information on City agencies' services provided through its public

Albuquerque Human Rights Office - NM Human Rights Coalition

Monolingual and LEP Consumer Access to City of Albuquerque Services

Page 2

I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

information/hot line services and web site are accessible to the two target populations.

During the planning stages of the survey, some initiatives occurred locally and nationally that had potential impact on Albuquerque City government and its immigrant populations. In 2000, President Clinton signed an Executive Order 13166, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency, mandating that all federal agencies and organizations in receipt of federal funding develop plans to ensure adequate services are rendered to this population. Later that year, the Albuquerque City Council passed Resolution R-151 declaring Albuquerque an immigrant friendly city.

With the support of Lawrence Rael, the City's former Chief Administrative Officer, City agencies that have the most direct contact with the consumer were encouraged to participate in the survey. Survey responses were tracked and the data were analyzed. A basic Consumer survey instrument was designed in English and subsequently translated by certified translators into Spanish and Vietnamese. 768 surveys were used for this survey, all of which were conducted entirely in the respondents' primary language.

Based on advice from the Consumer Survey Coordinator and several community consultants, flyers were designed and disseminated to these two target populations so that they would be aware of the survey and its purpose.

The overall conclusion in the City agencies' survey is that the City is not providing adequate or equal services to monolingual/LEP Spanish and Vietnamese speakers. The overall conclusion in the Consumer survey is that monolingual/LEP Spanish and Vietnamese speakers do not have adequate or equal access to City services.

Albuquerque Human Rights Office - NM Human Rights Coalition

Monolingual and LEP Consumer Access to City of Albuquerque Services

Page 3

I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The review of the Public Information/Hot line Telephone Service and the City's website also follow suit in that they are not adequately accessible to Spanish speakers and not accessible to Vietnamese speakers.

The City does not have a formal policy regarding the provision of services to monolingual/LEP consumers. While more than half of the City agencies surveyed have written materials in both English and Spanish and about 10% have them in Vietnamese, and while a majority of those who hold public meetings provide interpretive services at the meetings, data shows that these populations are not aware that these services are available. The City does not do any outreach to these consumers. In many instances, the agencies seek out bilingual employees to serve as interpreters. For these employees, this is an added duty to their regular responsibilities, with no added compensation. This obviously impacts the time they have to perform their own job duties. These same employees may also be asked to translate written documents without consideration of their qualifications to do so.

The majority of the Spanish-speaking consumers surveyed are from Mexico with a majority of the Spanish speakers claiming Spanish as their primary language. All of the Vietnamese-speaking consumers identified Vietnam as their country of origin with nearly all of them stating that they do not speak any English or do not speak English well. Almost 100% of the respondents prefer written materials in their primary languages. While almost half of the respondents say they have not had a need to contact a City agency, it is not clear whether this is due to a language barrier, their immigrant status or a lack of confidence in government given their experiences in their home countries.

The Albuquerque Police Department, Public Housing, Solid Waste and the Fire Department are among those agencies contacted by those who had a

Albuquerque Human Rights Office - NM Human Rights Coalition

Monolingual and LEP Consumer Access to City of Albuquerque Services

Page 4

I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

need to contact a City agency. Consumers frequently misidentified agencies they had contacted as City agencies. This suggests that these target populations are not familiar with services the City provides, thus confirming the need for the City to reach out to these communities.

The majority of the automated responses on the public information/hot line telephone numbers are English only. More than half of the employees who answered the public information/hot line numbers do not speak Spanish and many also indicated that they do not have anyone available who can speak Spanish. Of the employees who answered, they all indicated that there are no employees available who can speak Vietnamese. The City's website has a link to a web page in Spanish, however, the information on that page is seriously outdated, with very few contacts who could actually communicate with a Spanish speaker.

While it is important to compliment the City on its efforts to have a Spanish link on its website and written materials in Spanish and Vietnamese, it is clear that City services are not adequately accessible to Spanish monolingual and LEP consumers and not available to Vietnamese monolingual and LEP consumers. The City needs to develop and implement a comprehensive program that includes policies and procedures for identifying and assessing the language needs of these target populations and for ensuring equal access to City services to this population. Outreach efforts to inform and educate these populations about City services and how to access them are crucial. Monolingual and LEP speakers should be informed of the written materials available in their language and that interpretation is available for them to fully participate in public meetings.

Albuquerque Human Rights Office - NM Human Rights Coalition

Monolingual and LEP Consumer Access to City of Albuquerque Services

Page 5

I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Telephone answering devices that serve as the main point of contact to the public should have prompts in at least Spanish and Vietnamese. A determination should be made about vital documents in each department that should be subject to translation. Consumers should not be required to sign documents that they cannot read. The City needs to seek out trained interpreters and translators. Bilingual pay should be provided to those employees who have this skill and are required to use it for City services. The City should not require that monolingual/LEP consumers bring an interpreter with them in order to receive services they are entitled to receive.

The City can use the federal Executive Order 13166 as a guide in developing policies and procedures for identifying the language needs of its consumers and in ensuring that it is doing everything possible to ensure equal and adequate services to all Albuquerque consumers and adequate services to all Albuquerque consumers who are monolingual or LEP.

With the significant number of consumers in Albuquerque who are monolingual and LEP, and in keeping with the City's goal of providing equal and adequate services to all of its consumers, the City needs to realistically address the language barrier issue. The City's establishment of the Commission on Immigrant Affairs and Services demonstrates the City's commitment to the concerns and needs of immigrants. The City should further commit to establish a language assistance program and to dedicate adequate funding and resources to this effort.