# TIPS ON BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE STAFF LANGUAGE SERVICE PROGRAM

## ARE YOU PLANNING TO USE STAFF TO PROVIDE LANGUAGE SERVICES?

### KNOW YOUR LANGUAGE SERVICE NEEDS:

➔ Does your organization interact directly with LEP individuals?

➔ If so, in what capacity? In person? Online? By phone?

➔ What are the most common languages spoken by limited English proficient (LEP) individuals in your community? To find out, check out the Language Map App at www.lep.gov/maps

### BEFORE USING MULTILINGUAL PERSONNEL:

➔ Do not assume that being a native speaker qualifies someone to interpret conversations or translate written documents. Interpretation, translation, and other in-language tasks often require the use of industry-specific terminology, specialized skills, and experience.

➔ Competency requires more than self-identification as bilingual. The most accurate way to validate language proficiency is through an independently-administered language assessment and periodic reassessment.

➔ Consider creating and disseminating standard policies and procedures to assess and track the language proficiency of multilingual personnel. The policy could include who has the authority to access the agency's list of multilingual personnel and who may use multilingual personnel for certain language tasks.

### KNOW YOUR LANGUAGE SERVICE RESOURCES:

➔ Does your organization employ capable, qualified multilingual personnel?

→ What languages do your multilingual personnel speak?

→ What language tasks do your multilingual personnel perform?

→ Does your organization assess the competency of multilingual personnel?

→ Do your linguists receive additional language-skill training?

→ Does your organization pay or provide bonuses for in-language assistance?

➔ Do you hire people who interpret or translate for your organization?

➔ How much funding is available for paying interpreters, translators, or multilingual staff?

➔ Do you or your staff know where to go if you need language services in an unfamiliar language?

For additional information on the certification and assessment of linguists, see our TIPS tool: What Does it Mean to be a Certified Linguist?

**For information on the recruitment, hiring, retention, and assessment of linguists, continue on to the next page.**

For additional copies or technical assistance in language access matters, contact the Federal Coordination and Compliance Section at LEP@usdoj.gov

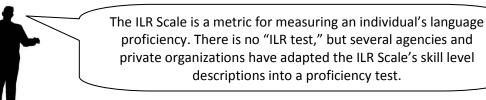## RECRUITING, HIRING, AND RETAINING MULTILINGUAL PERSONNEL:

In the process of recruiting, hiring, compensating, and retaining qualified multilingual personnel, consider the following:

### RECRUITING MULTILINGUAL PERSONNEL:

➔ Could your organization reach out to local language communities in order to solicit suggestions for hiring qualified speakers of that language?

➔ Are there recruitment sources and networks your organization can work with to promote your hiring needs and attract qualified linguists?

### HIRING AND RETAINING MULTILINGUAL PERSONNEL:

➔ Will language proficiency be a requirement or just an ability that would make an applicant more appealing? Does the job analysis support language proficiency and will it be documented in the position description?

➔ Will in-house language tasks be part of an employee's performance plan or are they collateral duties?

➔ Will staff linguists receive pay differentials, workload adjustments, or other incentives intended to recruit and retain multilingual personnel?

➔ A multilingual employee hired for a non-language specific task (e.g., accountant) may be inundated with requests for language assistance. How will management ensure the employee's personal career growth while continuing to be responsive to in-house language requests?

➔ Could you exchange, share, and review sample job descriptions with others in your industry to maintain consistency regarding language proficiency skills?

➔ Could labor unions or other bargaining units affect your agency's decision to recruit, hire, assess, or retain multilingual employees?

The ILR Scale is a metric for measuring an individual's language proficiency. There is no "ILR test," but several agencies and private organizations have adapted the ILR Scale's skill level descriptions into a proficiency test.

## HOW DO I ASSESS THE LANGUAGE SKILLS OF MY MULTILINGUAL PERSONNEL:?

To ensure effective communication between multilingual employees and LEP persons, agencies should assess the oral and/or written proficiencies of multilingual employees. There are many forms of assessment, and many considerations such as time, cost, efficiency, accuracy, and consistency.

### STRUCTURED TESTING AND ASSESSMENT:

**Effective testing and assessment** often involves either (1) an independently administered test, or (2) a structured in-language interview conducted by a linguist qualified to assess language proficiency.

Independent verification is the most accurate way to determine whether a linguist is proficient. Independent assessments also tend to be quite rigorous, independently testing and scoring individual language skills such as reading, speaking, listening, writing, interpreting, and translating. The federal government uses the Interagency Language Roundtable scale as its metric for measuring language skill and proficiency (see, www.govtilr.org).

Periodically reassess your multilingual employees because, if not used, language skills may erode over time.

### UNVERIFIABLE ASSESSMENT:

Occasionally, organizations employ other methods to verify linguistic qualifications, for example reviewing translated work samples, administering a self-assessment language questionnaire, or reviewing educational linguistic background or credentials.

It is important to note that these methods may not provide an organization with an independent or verifiable baseline of an employee's language skill.