

option when there is no regular need for a particular language skill. In addition to commercial and other private providers, many community-based organizations and mutual assistance associations provide interpretation services for particular languages. Contracting with and providing training regarding the recipient's programs and processes to these organizations can be a cost-effective option for providing language services to LEP persons from those language groups.

*Using Telephone Interpreter Lines.* Telephone interpreter service lines often offer speedy interpreting assistance in many different languages. They may be particularly appropriate where the mode of communicating with an English proficient person would also be over the phone. Although telephonic interpretation services are useful in many situations it is important to ensure that, when using such services, the interpreters used are competent to interpret any technical, medical, or legal terms specific to the program that may be important parts of the conversation. Nuances in language and non-verbal communication can often assist an interpreter and cannot be recognized over the phone. Video teleconferencing may sometimes help to resolve this issue where necessary. In addition, where documents are being discussed, it is important to give telephonic interpreters adequate opportunity to review the document prior to the discussion and any logistical problems should be addressed. Depending on the facts, sometimes it may be necessary and reasonable to provide on-site interpreters to provide accurate and meaningful communication with an LEP person.

*Using Community Volunteers.* In addition to consideration of bilingual staff, staff interpreters, or contract interpreters (either in-person or by telephone) as options to ensure meaningful access by LEP persons, use of recipient-coordinated community volunteers, working with, for instance, community-based organizations may provide a cost-effective supplemental language assistance strategy under appropriate circumstances. They may be particularly useful in providing language access for recipients' less critical programs and activities. To the extent the recipient relies on community volunteers, it is often best to use volunteers who are trained in the information or services of the program and can communicate directly with LEP persons in their language. Just as with all interpreters, community volunteers used to interpret between English speakers and LEP persons, or to orally

translate documents, should be competent in the skill of interpreting applicable confidentiality and impartiality rules.

*Use of Family Members or Friends as Interpreters.* Although recipients should not plan to rely on an LEP person's family members, friends, or other informal interpreters to provide meaningful access to important programs and activities, where LEP persons so desire, they should be permitted to use, at their own expense, an interpreter of their own choosing (whether a professional interpreter, family member, or friend) in place of or as a supplement to the free language services expressly offered by the recipient. LEP persons may feel more comfortable when a trusted family member or friend acts as an interpreter. In addition, in exigent circumstances that are not reasonably foreseeable, temporary use of interpreters not provided by the recipient may be necessary. However, with proper planning and implementation, recipients should be able to avoid most such situations.

Recipients, however, should take special care to ensure that family legal guardians, caretakers, and other informal interpreters are appropriate in light of the circumstances and subject matter of the program, service or activity, including protection of the recipient's own administrative interest in accurate interpretation. In many circumstances, family members (especially children), or friends are not competent to provide quality and accurate interpretations. Issues of confidentiality, privacy, or conflict of interests may also arise. LEP individuals may feel uncomfortable revealing or describing sensitive, confidential, or potentially embarrassing medical, mental health, family, or financial information to a family member, friend, or member of the local community. In addition, such informal interpreters may have a personal connection to the LEP person or an undisclosed conflict of interest. For these reasons, when oral language services are necessary, recipients should generally offer competent interpreter services free of cost to the LEP person. For VA recipient programs and activities, this is particularly true in situations in which health, safety, or access to important benefits and services are at stake, or when credibility and accuracy are important to protect an individual's rights and access to important services.

An example of such a case is when an LEP person seeks medical care from a VA funded recipient. In such a case, use of family members or neighbors to

interpret for the LEP patient may raise serious issues of competency, confidentiality, and conflict of interest and be inappropriate. While issues of competency, confidentiality, and conflicts of interest in the use of family members (especially children), or friends often make their use inappropriate, the use of these individuals as interpreters may be an appropriate option where proper application of the four factors would lead to a conclusion that recipient-provided services are not necessary.

An example of this is a voluntary educational tour of a VA facility offered to the public. There, the importance and nature of the activity may be relatively low and unlikely to implicate issues of confidentiality, conflict of interest, or the need for accuracy. In addition, the resources needed and costs of providing language services may be high. In such a setting, a LEP person's use of family, friends, or others may be appropriate.

If the LEP person voluntarily chooses to provide his or her own interpreter, a recipient should consider whether a record of that choice and of the recipient's offer of assistance is appropriate. Where precise, complete, and accurate interpretations or translations of information and/or testimony are critical for adjudicatory, medical, administrative, or other reasons, or where the competency of the LEP person's interpreter is not established, a recipient might decide to provide its own, independent interpreter, even if an LEP person wants to use his or her own interpreter as well. Extra caution should be exercised when the LEP person chooses to use a minor as the interpreter. While the LEP person's decision should be respected, there may be additional issues of competency, confidentiality, or conflict of interest when the choice involves using children as interpreters. The recipient should take extra care to ensure that the LEP person's choice is voluntary that the LEP person is aware of the possible problems if the preferred interpreter is a minor child, and that the LEP person knows that a competent interpreter could be provided by the recipient at no cost.

*Written Language Services (Translation)* Translation is the replacement of a written text from one language (source language) into an equivalent written text in another language (target language).

*What Documents Should be Translated?* After applying the four-factor analysis, recipients may determine that an effective LEP plan ensures that certain vital written materials are translated into the