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## I. Introduction

Most individuals living in the United States read, write, speak and understand English. There are many individuals, however, for whom English is not their primary language. For instance, based on the 2000 census, over 26 million individuals speak Spanish and almost 7 million individuals speak an Asian or Pacific Island language at home. If these individuals have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English, they are limited English proficient, or "LEP." While detailed data from the 2000 census has not yet been released, 26% of all Spanish-speakers, 29.9% of all Chinese-speakers, and 28.2% of all Vietnamese-speakers reported that they spoke English "not well" or "not at all" in response to the 1990 census.

Language for LEP individuals can be a barrier to accessing important benefits or services, understanding and exercising important rights, complying with applicable responsibilities, or understanding other information provided by federally funded programs and activities. The Federal Government funds an array of services that can be made accessible to otherwise eligible LEP persons. The Federal Government is committed to improving the accessibility of these programs and activities to eligible LEP persons, a goal that reinforces its equally important commitment to promoting programs and activities designed to help individuals learn English. Recipients should not overlook the long-term positive impacts of incorporating or offering English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in parallel with language assistance services. ESL courses can serve as an important adjunct to a proper LEP plan. However, the fact that ESL classes are made available does not obviate the statutory requirement to provide meaningful access for those who are not yet English proficient. Recipients of federal financial assistance have an obligation to reduce language barriers that can preclude meaningful access by LEP persons to important government services.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Treasury recognizes that many recipients may have had language assistance programs in place prior to the issuance of Executive Order 13166. This policy guidance provides a uniform framework for a recipient to integrate, formalize, and assess the continued vitality of these existing and possibly additional reasonable efforts based on the nature of its program or activity, the current needs of the LEP

In certain circumstances, failure to ensure that LEP persons can effectively participate in or benefit from federally assisted programs and activities may violate the prohibition under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d. The purpose of this policy guidance is to assist recipients in fulfilling their responsibilities to provide meaningful access to LEP persons under existing law. This policy guidance clarifies existing legal requirements for LEP persons by providing a description of the factors recipients should consider in fulfilling their responsibilities to LEP persons.<sup>2</sup> These are the same criteria Treasury will use in evaluating whether recipients are in compliance with Title VI.

Before discussing these criteria in greater detail, it is important to note two basic underlying principles. First, we must ensure that federally-assisted programs aimed at the American public do not leave some behind simply because they face challenges communicating in English. This is of particular importance because, in many cases, LEP individuals form a substantial portion of those encountered in federally-assisted programs. Second, we must achieve this goal while finding constructive methods to reduce the costs of LEP requirements on small businesses, small local governments, or small non-profits that receive Federal financial assistance.

There are many productive steps that the Federal Government, either collectively or as individual grant agencies, can take to help recipients reduce the costs of language services without sacrificing meaningful access for LEP persons. Without these steps, certain smaller grantees may well choose not to participate in federally assisted programs, threatening the critical functions that the programs strive to provide. To that end, the Department of the Treasury, in conjunction with the Department of Justice (DOJ), plans to continue to provide assistance and guidance in this important area. In addition, Treasury plans to work with its recipients and LEP persons to identify and share model

populations it encounters, and its prior experience in providing language services in the community it serves.

<sup>2</sup> The policy guidance is not a regulation but rather a guide. Title VI requires that recipients take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access by LEP persons. This guidance provides an analytical framework that recipients may use to determine how best to comply with statutory and regulatory obligations to provide meaningful access to the benefits, services, information, and other important portions of their programs and activities for individuals who are limited English proficient.

plans, examples of best practices, and cost-saving approaches. Moreover, Treasury intends to explore how language assistance measures, resources and cost-containment approaches developed with respect to its own federally conducted programs and activities can be effectively shared or otherwise made available to recipients, particularly small businesses, small local governments, and small non-profits. An interagency working group on LEP has developed a Web Site, <http://www.lep.gov>, to assist in disseminating this information to recipients, Federal agencies, and the communities being served.

Many commentators have noted that some have interpreted the case of *Alexander v. Sandoval*, 532 U.S. 275 (2001), as impliedly striking down the regulations promulgated under Title VI that form the basis for the part of Executive Order 13166 that applies to federally assisted programs and activities. Treasury and Department of Justice have taken the position that this is not the case, and will continue to do so. Accordingly, we will strive to ensure that federally assisted programs and activities work in a way that is effective for all eligible beneficiaries, including those with limited English proficiency.

## II. Legal Authority

Section 601 of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d, provides that no person shall "on the ground of race, color or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." Section 602 authorizes and directs federal agencies that are empowered to extend federal financial assistance to any program or activity "to effectuate the provisions of (section 601) \* \* \* by issuing rules, regulations, or orders of general applicability." 42 U.S.C. 2000d-1.

Agency regulations promulgated pursuant to Section 602 of Title VI universally forbid recipients from "utiliz[ing] criteria or methods of administration which have the effect of subjecting individuals to discrimination because of their race, color, or national origin, or have the effect of defeating or substantially impairing accomplishment of the objectives of the program as respects individuals of a particular race, color, or national origin." See, e.g., 28 CFR 42.104(b)(2) (DOJ), 7 CFR 15.3(b)(2) (Department of Agriculture), 34 CFR 100.3(b)(2) (Department of Education), 45 CFR 80.3(b)(2) (Department of Health and Human Services), and 45 CFR 1110.3(b)(2) (National Endowment for