

assistance should be timely. While there is no single definition for "timely" applicable to all types of interactions at all times by all types of recipients, one clear guide is that the language assistance should be provided at a time and place that avoids the effective denial of the service, benefit, or right at issue or the imposition of an undue burden on or delay in important rights, benefits, or services to the LEP person. Conversely, where access to or exercise of a service, benefit, or right is not effectively precluded by a reasonable delay, language assistance can likely be delayed for a reasonable period.

- *Hiring Bilingual Staff.* When particular languages are encountered often, hiring bilingual staff offers one of the best, and often most economical, options. Recipients and subrecipients can, for example, fill public contact positions with staff who are bilingual and competent to communicate directly with LEP persons in their language and at the appropriate level of competency. If bilingual staff are also used to interpret between English speakers and LEP persons, or to orally interpret written documents from English into another language, they should be competent in the skill of interpreting. Being bilingual does not necessarily mean that a person has the ability to interpret. In addition, there may be times when the role of the bilingual employee may conflict with the role of an interpreter (for instance, a bilingual member of a formal review panel adjudicating allegations of program or fiscal noncompliance would probably not be able to perform effectively the role of interpreter and adjudicator at the same time, even if the bilingual employee were a qualified interpreter). Effective management strategies, including any appropriate adjustments in assignments and protocols for using bilingual staff, can ensure that bilingual staff are fully and appropriately utilized. When bilingual staff cannot meet all of the language service obligations of the recipient, the recipient should turn to other options.

- *Hiring Staff Interpreters.* Hiring interpreters may be most helpful where there is a frequent need for interpreting services in one or more languages. 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.

- *Contracting for Interpreters.* Contract interpreters may be a cost-effective 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.* While of limited value for live performances or museum exhibits, telephone interpreter service lines often offer speedy interpreting assistance in many different languages in other public-contract situations. 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 terms specific to a particular program that may be important parts of the conversation. Nuances in languages and non-verbal communication can often assist an interpreter and cannot be recognized over the phone. Video conferencing may sometimes help 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.

- *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 a recipient's 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 and knowledgeable about applicable confidentiality and impartiality rules, if any. Recipients should consider formal

arrangements with community-based organizations that provide volunteers to address these concerns and to help ensure that services are available more regularly.

- *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 or enforcement interest in accurate. 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 interest may also arise. LEP individuals may feel uncomfortable revealing or describing sensitive, confidential, or potentially embarrassing 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.

While issues of competency, confidentiality, and conflict of interest in the use of family members 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. If the importance and nature of the activity is relatively low and unlikely to implicate issues of confidentiality, conflict of interest, or