



TOWN OF
CHAPEL HILL

Language Access Plan

JUNE 2026



Pictured above are some of our staff interpreters: Hser Ku, Mary Liu, Manal Alhussein, and Naseem Alshugaa (L to R).

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Executive Summary

Background & Context

To truly achieve our mission of learning, serving, and working together to build a community where everyone can thrive, we must reduce barriers to public participation and provide meaningful access to Town information and services, regardless of what language residents speak.

Created in 2019, our Language Access Plan (LAP) establishes policies and procedures that ensure access to Town resources and services for culturally and linguistically diverse residents. The plan is a key aspect of our Equitable Engagement Strategy, as speakers of languages other than English are one of our under-engaged populations.

For this update, we updated the needs assessment, gathered information from residents, community partners, and Town staff, and comprehensively reviewed our language assistance services.

Primary & Secondary Languages

- **The Town's primary languages continue to be Burmese, Karen, Mandarin Chinese, and Spanish.** Because these languages are commonly spoken and highly requested, we prioritize them for language services.
- **The Town's secondary languages are Arabic, French, Japanese, Korean, Kinyarwanda, Pashto, Rohingya, and Swahili.** Because Public Housing, Police, and our community partners provide services in these languages consistently, we prioritize them for language services as needed.

Key Findings & Takeaways

We have implemented all aspects of the original plan, including creating a Language Access Coordinator position, hiring staff interpreters, and creating a Language Pay Incentive policy.

Many residents who speak another language may not be literate in that language. Providing spoken, audio, or video communication is best.

Trusted community organizations serve as key bridges between residents and the Town, helping to determine acceptable communication channels and to encourage individuals to communicate feedback.

Important communication channels include, but are not limited to, door-to-door outreach, multilingual staff, WhatsApp groups, WeChat, Facebook, and phone trees.

Introduction

Why Does Chapel Hill Need Language Access?

To truly achieve our mission of learning, serving, and working together to build a community where *everyone* can thrive, we must reduce barriers to public participation and provide meaningful access to Town information and services, regardless of what language residents speak.

Our Language Access Plan helps us bridge the communication gap with residents who speak languages other than English. Through extensive community engagement during our [Building Integrated Communities Initiative](#) (BIC)², immigrant and refugee residents identified language access as key for the Town to communicate with them effectively. If we want Chapel Hill to be inclusive and welcoming to all, we must create and sustain accessible communications and engagement with these community members.

In addition to the BIC Initiative, our Language Access work is shaped by previous research and engagement, including our Community Engagement Study and the International Association of Public Participation’s framework. Our commitment to Language Access dovetails with our commitment to Equitable Engagement, with a goal of authentically including under-engaged populations in Town decision-making processes.

While Language Access reflects our local community values, it’s also a requirement for organizations that receive federal funding and must comply with federal laws such as [Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)³ and the [1987 Civil Rights Restoration Act](#)⁴. These laws ensure that no person – on the grounds of race, color, or national origin – is excluded from, denied benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any services receiving federal financial assistance. Appendix A offers more details on legal compliance and requirements.

Purpose of the Plan

The Town of Chapel Hill’s Language Access Plan (LAP):

Establishes policies and procedures that ensure access to Town resources and services for culturally and linguistically diverse communities

Applies to all Town programs and services, unless otherwise indicated

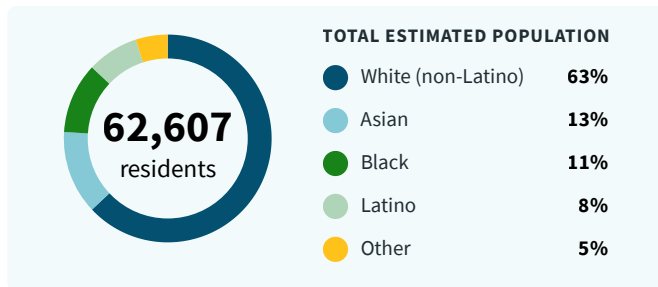
Guides the Town towards language justice

We will monitor and update this LAP to better serve residents’ needs and improve access to services. This includes moving towards policies and procedures that support the right of all residents to communicate with the Town in the language they prefer.

Demographics

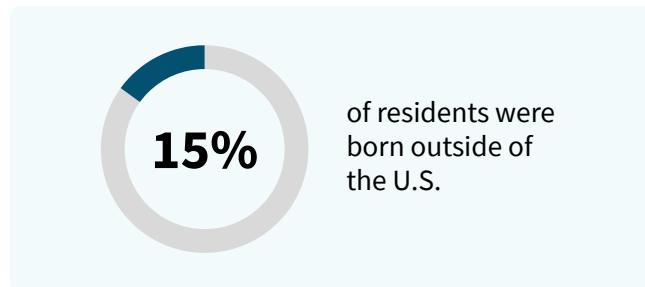
Chapel Hill is diverse.

Our estimated population is 62,607 residents. Our racial and ethnic make-up is 63% white (non-Latino), 13% Asian, 11% Black, and 8% Latino.⁵



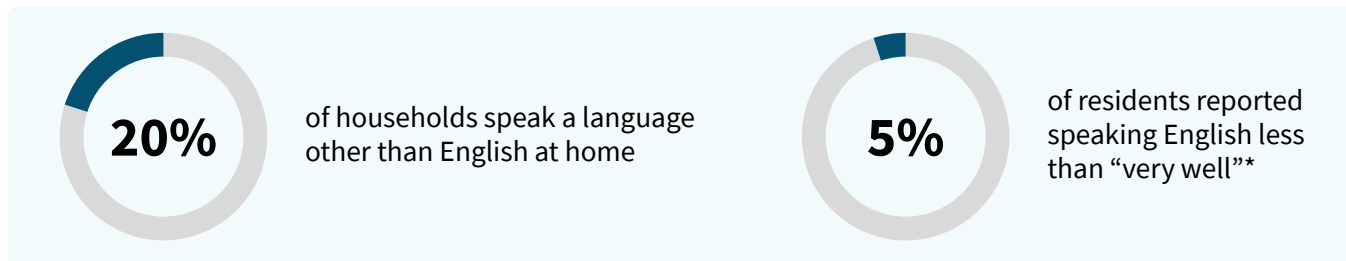
Chapel Hill is global.

15% of our residents were born outside of the U.S.⁶



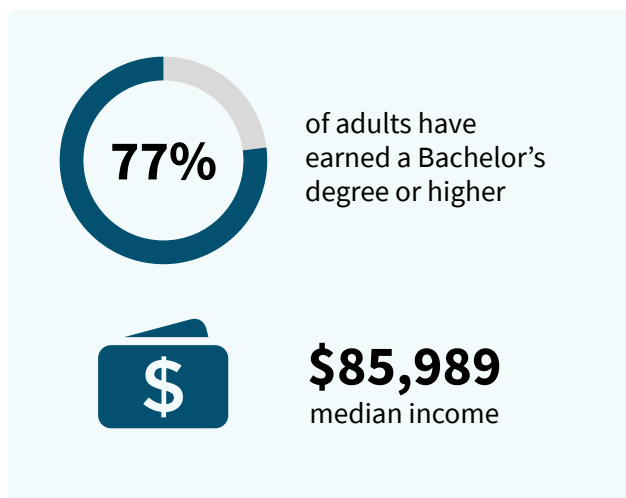
Chapel Hill is multilingual.

20% of households speak a language other than English at home. 5% of our residents reported speaking English less than “very well.”^{7*}



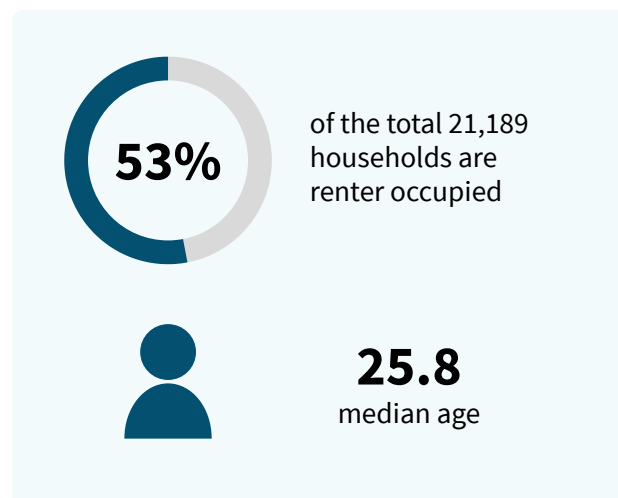
Chapel Hill is highly educated.

77% of Chapel Hill adults have earned a Bachelor's degree or higher.⁸ The median income is \$85,989.⁹



Chapel Hill is a place where many folks are young renters.

53% of the total 21,189 households are renter occupied.¹⁰ The median age is 25.8 years old.¹¹



*According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a Limited English Proficient (LEP) individual is anyone above the age of 5 who reported speaking English less than “very well.” The Census Bureau’s classifications are “very well”, “well”, “not well”, and “not at all.”

Developing and Updating the Language Access Plan

In 2019, Town staff did the following to **develop** the LAP:

- Completed a needs assessment
- Gathered information from stakeholder groups
- Reviewed language assistance services

In 2026, Town staff did the following to **update** the LAP:

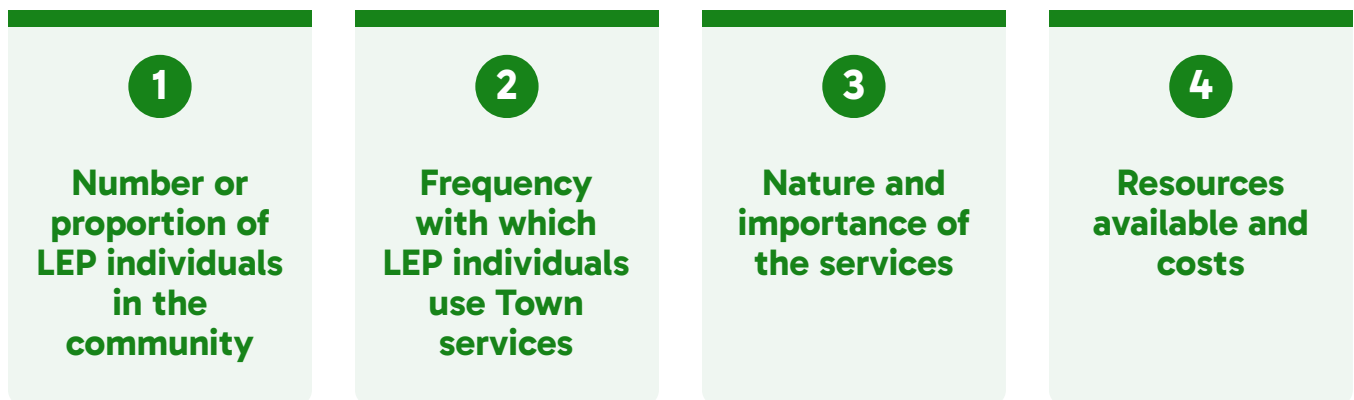
- Updated the needs assessment
- Gathered information from stakeholder groups, including residents, community partners, and Town staff
- Reviewed language assistance services' data

We developed the 2026 LAP update using 2022-2026 data. See our LAP update process outlined below.

2026 Needs Assessment: Completing a Four-Factor Analysis

As part of the LAP, the U.S. Department of Justice recommends a [Four-Factor Analysis](#).¹² Since we're referencing a federal template, this section uses the federally defined term "Limited English Proficient" or "LEP" to describe a person's ability to communicate in English.

The Four-Factor Analysis helps the Town plan and provide language access based on:



These factors help us identify community needs, such as translation and interpretation, and where we need resources to meet those needs. The more LEP people there are in Chapel Hill, the more frequently they will interact with Town services. The more important the Town service is, the more likely the Town will need language services. Over time, community demographics may change and shift findings. We'll regularly collect and analyze community demographics to assess Town staff's capacity to provide language services.

Factor 1: Number or proportion of LEP individuals in the community

To interact with our residents effectively, we need to know what languages they speak. With this information, we can consider how best to communicate and engage with them.

5% of Chapel Hill residents identify as LEP. These residents reported speaking English less than “very well,” and 20% of Chapel Hill residents speak a language other than English.

Table 1. Language Spoken at home by Chapel Hill residents

Languages	Population Estimate	Percent
Total Population	59,764	--
Speak only English	47,835	80.04%
Speak language other than English	11,929	19.96%
Speak English less than “very well”	3,117	5.22%

Source: ACS 2024 (5 Year Estimates), Table B16005

Residents speaking Asian and Pacific Islander languages are Chapel Hill’s largest LEP group. The U.S. Census groups several languages into subgroups outlined below. Examples of Asian and Pacific Islander languages include Chinese, Vietnamese, Hmong, Korean, Burmese, and Karen. Examples of “other” Indo-European languages spoken (besides Spanish) include French, Haitian, Portuguese, Hindi, Russian, and German.

Table 2. Language and English-speaking ability of Chapel Hill residents

Language and English-speaking ability	Population Estimate	Percent
Speak Spanish	3,755	6.28%
Speak English “very well”	2,841	4.75%
Speak English less than “very well”	914	1.53%
Speak other Indo-European languages	2593	5.58%
Speak English “very well”	2,163	4.34%
Speak English less than “very well”	430	0.72%
Speak Asian and Pacific Islander languages	5,101	8.54%
Speak English “very well”	3,373	5.64%
Speak English less than “very well”	1,728	2.89%
Speak other languages	480	0.80%
Speak English “very well”	435	0.73%
Speak English less than “very well”	19	0.03%

Source: ACS 2024 (5 Year Estimates), Table B16005

We also identified the most common non-English languages spoken by LEP Orange County residents. The languages with the largest number of LEP residents are Spanish, Chinese, and Korean. The languages that have over 50% of LEP speakers are Korean, Japanese, Burmese, and Karen. (See Table 3 below.)

Table 3. Languages spoken by LEP Orange County residents

Language	LEP population estimate	Percentage of language speakers that are LEP
Spanish	3,812	34%
Chinese	867	34%
Korean	535	77%
Japanese	273	64%
Burmese	231	83%
Karen	203	60%
French	143	16%
Mandarin	141	27%
Arabic	122	21%
German	118	37%

Source: ACS 2023 (5-year estimates); PUMA 3701400 Orange County—Town of Chapel Hill, NC

Refugee arrival data and community partner interactions further inform our understanding of the most common languages spoken in Chapel Hill. Since 2005, **1,371 refugees** have arrived in Orange County (See Table 4). **Burma** (Myanmar) is the most common arrival country. Our community partners interact often with refugee residents from Burma that speak Burmese or Karen.

Table 4. Total number of refugee arrivals in Orange County by country from 2005-2025

Fiscal Year (July 1-June 30)	Refugee Arrivals	Countries of Origin
2005-2006	19	Burma, Cuba, Iran
2006-2007	55	Burma, Cuba, Iran
2007-2008	255	Burma, Iran, Colombia
2008-2009	194	Burma, Bhutan, Iran, Iraq
2009-2010	57	Burma, DRC (Congo), Haiti
2010-2011	86	Burma, Laos
2011-2012	53	Burma
2012-2013	83	Burma, DRC, Iraq
2013-2014	80	Burma, Iran, Cameroon
2014-2015	54	Burma, Iraq, Iran, DRC
2015-2016	83	DRC, Burma, Iraq, Russia
2016-2017	102	Burma, Syria, DRC, El Salvador
2017-2018	22	Burma, DRC, Nepal
2018-2019	34	Burma, DRC, El Salvador, Thailand, Syria
2019-2020	7	Burma, DRC, Ethiopia, Guatemala
2020-2021	2	Burma, DRC
2021-2022	45	Burma, Afghanistan, DRC
2022-2023	41	Ukraine, Burma, Syria, Afghanistan
2023-2024	54	Syria, Burma, Haiti, DRC, Afghanistan, Ukraine, El Salvador, Honduras
2024-2025	45	Syria, Burma, DRC, Venezuela

2005-2025 Total Arrivals	1,371
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Data provided by the Orange County Health Department in February 2026.

*NOTE: Unable to measure in- and out-migration. These data reflect direct arrivals to Orange County, NC.

Factor 2: Frequency of contact

Across all departments, Town staff interact with residents for a wide range of reasons and needs. Regardless of the point of contact or the resident’s preferred language, our goal is to meet their needs and deliver excellent customer service.

According to a 2026 staff survey*, frontline staff encounter Spanish the most frequently followed by Mandarin Chinese. These staff also encounter the following languages less frequently: Arabic, Burmese, Japanese, and Korean. We define frontline staff as those who interact with the public often as a part of their job duties, such as Parks & Recreation desk staff, Library staff, Police Crisis Unit, and Public Housing staff.

Department	Language encountered “Very Frequently”	Language encountered “Frequently”		
Building and Development Services	Spanish	Mandarin Chinese		
Business Management	N/A**	Burmese	Karen	Spanish
Human Resource Development	N/A	N/A		
Library	Korean Mandarin Chinese Spanish	Japanese Karen	Mandarin Chinese Other (French)	Spanish
Police	Spanish	Burmese	Karen	Mandarin Chinese
Parks and Recreation	Burmese Karen Mandarin Chinese Spanish	Arabic Burmese Karen	Korean Mandarin Chinese	Other (Thai) Spanish
Transit	Other (Hindi)	Spanish		Mandarin Chinese

*Survey included the following response options: "Very Frequently"; "Frequently"; "Not frequently"; "Never."

**“N/A” indicates that the respondent did not encounter any languages other than English with the level of frequency indicated in the chart.

In addition to languages encountered across Town departments, we also included our Public Housing residents’ languages. **About 30% of Public Housing households have a preferred language other than English.** The top preferred language other than English is Karen, with 13% of the 249 total public housing households (See Table 5 below.) To learn more about Town services and language access, refer to Appendix C for the 2026 Language Access Staff Survey Report.

Language	Number	x% of Total
English	178	70%
Karen	34	13%
Burmese	21	8%
Arabic	11	4%
Spanish	5	2%
Kinyarwanda	2	1%
Chin	1	0.5%
French	1	0.5%
Mandarin	1	0.5%
Total Households	254	--
Total Households that prefer languages other than English	76	30%

Source: Chapel Hill Public Housing

From Fiscal Years 2021 – 2025, we received 909 **interpretation** requests. **The top three requested languages for interpretation are: Karen, Spanish, and Burmese.**

Interpretation Requests	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	Town Interpreter Requests FY25	Total
Karen	3	12	3	40	139	17	214
Spanish	6	10	42	62	89	0	209
Burmese	1	31	15	28	86	21	182
Arabic	--	8	8	29	71	42	158
Mandarin	--	4	--	11	60	37	112
Kinyarwanda	--	2	--	5	3	--	10
Swahili	--	2	1	--	3	--	6
Korean	--	--	--	--	5	--	5
Pashto	--	--	--	1	1	--	2
Dari	--	--	1	--	--	--	1
Farsi	--	--	1	--	--	--	1
Russian	--	--	1	--	--	--	1
Japanese	--	--	--	1	--	--	1
Vietnamese	--	--	--	1	--	--	1
French	--	--	--	1	--	--	1
Hakha Chin	--	--	--	1	--	--	1
Portuguese	--	--	--	1	--	--	1
Bangla	--	--	--	--	1	--	1
Cantonese	--	--	--	1	--	--	1
Kayah	--	--	--	--	1	--	1
Total Interpretation Requests							909

Note: We did not hire Spanish-speaking Town interpreters until FY26

From Fiscal Years 2021 – 2025, we received 925 **translation** requests. **The top three requested languages for translation are: Spanish, Karen, and Burmese.**

Translation Requests	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	Totals
Spanish	32	23	73	49	42	219
Karen	32	18	64	56	42	212
Burmese	29	16	62	54	42	203
Arabic	5	7	46	43	37	138
Mandarin	20	13	28	38	28	127
Swahili	7	--	--	--	1	8
Kinyarwanda	1	1	1	--	3	6
Russian	--	--	2	2	--	4
Ukrainian	--	--	2	--	--	2
French	--	--	--	--	2	2
Hindi	--	1	--	--	--	1
Japanese	--	--	--	1	--	1
Vietnamese	--	--	--	1	--	1
Hakha Chin	--	--	--	--	1	1
Total Translation Requests						925

Factor 3: Nature and importance of the services

We offer many services and programs where communication with residents is critical for effective service delivery, safety, and quality of life. These services and programs include, but are not limited to, public housing, affordable housing, fire, police, and transit.

Some departments have more frequent contact with culturally and linguistically diverse communities than others. From fiscal year 2021 – 2025, **the three departments that requested languages services the most were: Housing & Community Development, Town Manager’s Office, and Parks & Recreation.**

Dept	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY21-25
Housing & Community Development (Public Housing)	1	61	61	115	300	538
Housing & Community Development	19	18	71	32	45	185
Manager's Office	1	4	6	6	43	60
Parks & Recreation	4	2	11	10	14	41
Planning	0	3	16	12	8	39
Police	1	0	7	21	5	34
Library	8	0	0	13	9	30
Transit	5	2	1	5	4	17
Communications & Public Affairs	8	2	2	2	0	14
Library (Arts & Culture Division)	0	0	0	3	11	14
Fire	0	1	0	3	8	12
Public Works	0	2	0	6	3	11
Building & Development Services	0	0	0	0	3	3
Human Resource Development	0	0	0	1	0	1
Economic Development	0	0	0	1	0	1
Mayor/Council	1	0	0	0	0	1

Factor 4: Resources available and costs

We continually assess the interpretation and translation resources available by:

- Identifying appropriate documents for translation
- Developing contracts with local language service organizations
- Hiring part-time Town staff as interpreters and/or translators

Existing resources:

- Town website’s translation tool
- 24/7 telephonic interpreter line available to all employees and printed on employee badges
- Resident request line to access Town services with interpretation
- Language Access Coordinator position

The Town of Chapel Hill covers the costs associated with providing language services to the public. For professional interpretation, the cost is hourly and rates can vary by language, turnaround times, and specialized content. For professional translation, the cost is per-word and rates can vary by language, turnaround times, and specialized content.

Stakeholder Engagement

To develop this updated 2026 Language Access plan, we incorporated the robust engagement and community input that we received from the following comprehensive projects:

2019-2025
Building Integrated
Communities (BIC)
Initiative

2022
Town Council's
Equity & Inclusion
goals

2023
Gap Analysis
& Engagement
Study

Our ongoing stakeholder engagement builds upon the Town studies and plans mentioned above.

In 2022, we hired our first Language Access Coordinator to do the following:

Collaborate with Town staff from all departments to design, plan, and implement multilingual engagement initiatives and events.

Partner with community organizations to incorporate language access into programs and projects.

Build relationships with residents of manufactured home communities with recurring meetings.

As a result, Town staff regularly engage with residents about Town projects and plans, make them aware of key services, and solicit their feedback.

From January to May 2026, we partnered with the UNC BIC team and Refugee Community Partnership to:

Update the Language Access Plan, including updated demographic data.

Conduct a Town Staff Survey.

Build capacity to communicate with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, particularly in preparation and response to local emergencies and disasters.

We coordinated with Orange County and the Town of Carrboro to update data, compare service approaches, and share communications resources. Refugee Community Partnership continues to connect us with their members, who provide invaluable feedback on making the Town more accessible to residents who speak languages other than English.

This Spring 2026 project included the following key takeaways:

- Many residents who speak another language may not be literate in that language. Providing spoken, audio, or video communication is best.
- Trusted community organizations serve as key bridges between residents and the Town, helping to determine acceptable communication channels and encourage individuals to communicate feedback.
- Important communication channels include but are not limited to door-to-door outreach, multilingual staff, WhatsApp groups, WeChat, Facebook, and phone trees.

Over the last four years, stakeholder engagement has resulted in:

29 meetings facilitated in languages other than English.

34 multilingual employees receiving the Language Pay Incentive.

Three Peoples Academy sessions in Spanish and one in Mandarin.

One team of part-time Town interpreters and translators who speak Arabic, Burmese, Karen, Mandarin, or Spanish.

We will continue to work with the community to incorporate language justice and equity-centered practices into language services in an organized, iterative, and culturally responsive way.

Town’s Primary Languages

Our primary languages are Burmese, Karen, Mandarin Chinese, and Spanish. We identified these languages based on data from the Four-Factor Analysis Needs Assessment and Stakeholder engagement both detailed previously in this document. Because these languages are commonly spoken and highly requested, we prioritize them for language services.

Our secondary languages are Arabic, French, Japanese, Korean, Kinyarwanda, Pashto, Rohingya, and Swahili. Because Public Housing, Police Department, and our community partners provide services in these languages consistently, we prioritize them for language services as needed.

PRIMARY LANGUAGES

Burmese	မြန်မာ	Mandarin Chinese	简体中文
Karen	ကညီ	Spanish	Español

SECONDARY LANGUAGES

Arabic	عربي	Kinyarwanda	Kinyarwanda
French	français	Pashto	پښتو
Japanese	日本語	Rohingya	᠞᠞᠞᠞᠞᠞᠞᠞᠞
Korean	한국어	Swahili	Kiswahili

Language Access Policies and Procedures

This section outlines our policies and procedures to improve language access to Town programs, processes, and services. The following content informed our policy and procedures approach:

- Language Access Assessment and Planning Tool for Federally Conducted and Federally Assisted Programs¹³, a document prepared by the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division.
- The Needs Assessment in previous section
- A review of model LAPs from local governments across the nation (See Appendix G).

Policies – Language Services’ Availability Notice

- 1. We will notify the community of their right to language assistance services. This includes but is not limited to:**
 - a. Notifying speakers of languages other than English that they have the right to language services at no charge to themselves.
 - b. Translating written notices into our identified primary languages and including information about available language services.
 - c. Providing this notice in various formats including but not limited to:
 - i. Flyers or posters in our reception areas and other facilities’ entry points.
 - ii. On the Town website.
 - iii. Standard translated notice in our outreach content for public meetings.
 - iv. A telephone voicemail menu in our primary languages.
 - v. Notices in local media outlets in languages other than English, including radio and television stations.
 - vi. Working with cultural community organizations and other stakeholders to inform Chapel Hill residents of their right to language access services.

Policies – Interpretation & Translation

- 1. We will offer interpretation and translation for Town programs and services free of charge. This includes but is not limited to:**
 - a. Providing interpreters at no charge to the resident requesting interpretation for Town services or programs.
 - b. Providing translation of vital documents and emergency communications at no charge to the public.
 - c. Making the best effort to ensure timely access to interpretation and translation services.
- 2. We translate vital documents and emergency communications into the Town’s identified primary languages. This includes but is not limited to:**
 - a. Creating and maintaining an inventory of vital documents, which are necessary to use or receive Town services or programs.
 - b. Distributing key messages in the identified primary languages during emergency situations, such as natural disasters, wide-spread utility service outages, etc.
 - c. Using cost-effective language services to translate other Town communications and documents when possible.

- 3. All Town departments and staff work with the Language Access Coordinator (LAC) to help our culturally and linguistically diverse residents access Town services and programs. This includes but is not limited to:**
 - a. Requesting interpretation and translation services with advanced notice when possible so the LAC can book these services.
 - b. Receiving guidance from the LAC when staff need help determining specific language service needs.
- 4. On-demand interpretation will be available for public meetings, small groups, and one-on-one interactions.**
 - a. Community members with non-English Language preference may request interpretation for public meetings, small group meetings, or one-on-one interactions with Town staff. Such requests should be made at least 48 hours in advance to ensure adequate time to plan for interpreters.
 - b. Public meeting notices will include statements in the Town’s primary languages announcing on-demand interpretation for public meetings.
- 5. We will use competent, trained, and culturally sensitive interpreters and translators. This includes but is not limited to:**
 - a. Providing language services using professional interpreters and translators who abide by a code of ethics and professional practice standards and are trained in their field.
 - b. Refraining from using untrained interpreters and translators to assist with language services, such as residents’ family members or friends or people under the age of 18.
 - c. Evaluating interpretation and translated materials randomly for accuracy.
- 6. We offer a language stipend for employees who provide bilingual services for an identified primary or secondary language.**
 - a. For more information, please review the Language Pay Incentive Policy.

Policies – Town’s Accessibility Statement

We believe and commit that "no qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity," consistent with the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#)^{14 15}. To request ADA accommodations, including services for American Sign Language and braille, contact the Town’s ADA Coordinator, Wade Gullledge, via email at wgullledge@chapelhillnc.gov or phone 919-969-5118.

Procedures – How to Determine Language Assistance Needs

These procedures are an overview of how we implement LAP policies. The Town, along with community members who speak languages other than English, jointly designed the options for accessing and using language services. These options include but are not limited to:

- 1. When staff meet a person who speaks a language other than English**
 - a. Staff will make reasonable efforts to assess the language assistance need, including:
 - i. Noting when a non-English speaker self-identifies a language need.
 - ii. Using the Language ID Guide (Appendix E) to ask a non-English speaker what language they prefer if they self-identify a language need.
 - iii. Contacting the telephonic interpreter line to communicate with non-English speaker.

2. At public meetings

- a. We will advertise notices for free, demand-based interpretation for public meetings prior to the meeting. We will ask folks who speak languages other than English to give us 48-hour notice, so we have enough time to schedule interpreters for the meeting.
- b. If a non-English speaker arrives to a public meeting without giving notice to the Town, staff will make their best effort to provide language assistance. However, due to limited notice, service may not be available in such cases.
- c. If a Town department is planning an engagement activity that is relevant to culturally and linguistically diverse communities, staff will work with the LAC to book language services in advance. For these meetings, staff should advertise availability of language services in multilingual outreach materials.
- d. If the language requested is unavailable through a local language service, Town staff will use the telephonic interpreter line.
- e. To request interpretation for a public meeting, residents should call the Town at 919-969-5105 or email languageservices@chapelhillnc.gov.

3. For one-on-one and small group interactions

- a. We ask that people with non-English language preference give at least 48-hour notice to allow enough time to book interpreters for the requested meeting. If the language requested is not available through a local language service, Town staff will use the telephonic interpreter line.
- b. If a person with a non-English language preference does not provide at least 48-hour notice, Town staff will use the telephonic interpreter line.

Procedures – Scheduling Interpretation & Translation

1. How to request interpretation or translation services

- a. The LAC will help departments schedule interpretation & translation services as needed.
- b. We will use a variety of language services, including:
 - i. Professional interpretation and translation through contract services with local language service organizations
 - ii. Professional telephone interpreters
 - iii. Trained Town interpreters and translators
 - iv. Multilingual staff who are earning the Language Pay Incentive*
- c. Town staff request language services with as much advanced notice as possible.

***Note:** Multilingual staff may provide language assistance as needed in the course of their regular job duties and work schedule. However, we will work with trained and professional interpreters or translators in the following contexts:

- Interpreting technical concepts or confidential information, including medical or legal terminology.
- Interpreting or translating for a scheduled and extended period.
- Translating a binding document that has medical, legal, or governmental jargon.

2. How to prioritize the type of interpretation service

- a. We aim to use the following order of primary when scheduling interpreters:
 - i. First, use trained Town interpreters.
 - ii. If Town interpreters aren't available, we use trained, multilingual Town staff.
 - iii. If Town staff aren't available, look for an in-person contract interpreter.
 - iv. Lastly, if none of the above are available, use a telephone interpreter.

3. How to identify the type of interpretation needed

- a. There are two types of interpretation – simultaneous and consecutive. To determine which type of interpretation is needed consider the information below.
 - i. Consecutive language interpretation: Suitable for one-on-one or small group meetings in which the speaker/s will pause after each sentence to allow the interpreter to communicate their statement.
 - ii. Simultaneous language interpretation: Suitable for large group meetings in which the speaker does not pause for the interpreter. Typically, interpreters will use interpretation equipment (radio headsets) to communicate.

Procedures – Training

1. Town-wide Staff Training

- a. We will provide periodic training for all Town staff to familiarize departments with the LAP policies and procedures.
- b. Training may include, but is not limited to, topics such as:
 - i. Language access and services overview at new employee orientation.
 - ii. Tutorials on how to work with a phone interpreter, how to request language assistance services, etc.
 - iii. Language justice overview and multilingual engagement consultation.
- c. We will update language assistance training with the LAP based on changes in demographic and community data.

2. Additional Staff Training

- a. We may provide additional training for staff and employees who:
 - i. Have frequent interaction with the public or residents who speak languages other than English.
 - ii. Are multilingual staff receiving the Language Pay Incentive.
- b. These trainings may focus more on topics that will assist staff in effectively interacting with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Carrying Out the Language Access Plan

The Role of the Language Access Coordinator

The Town's Language Access Coordinator (LAC) helps us create inclusive government practices for immigrant and refugee communities. This includes:

Coordinating language service requests across all Town departments.

Consulting with Town staff on multi-lingual engagement for their community engagement projects.

Training all Town staff on the Language Access Plan and how the Plan relates to our equity values, including its policies and procedures.

Managing scheduling for Town interpreters.

Building relationships with community partners and members and collaborating on community projects as needed.

Tracking data and reporting on tasks above.

Monitoring and Updating the LAP

We will review the LAP every five years to assess its relevance and effectiveness. Staff review will include:

1. Data related to the number of residents who identify as LEP.
2. Reporting on language services usage, language assistance requests, Town employees' language skills and LAP training.
3. Feedback about LAP's effectiveness and Town's language services from residents who identify as LEP, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and community-based organizations and groups.
4. Updates to the Town's language vendor contracts and language access communications and engagement.

Resolving Complaints about Language-Based Services

Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act ensures that no person—on the ground of race, color, or national origin—be excluded from, denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any services receiving federal financial assistance.

Under Title VI, any person who believes they have been mistreated by an unlawful discriminatory practice has the right to file a complaint with the Town of Chapel Hill. The person or organization filing the complaint does not need to be the victim but may complain on behalf of another person or group.

We will follow the complaint procedures detailed below and document actions taken to resolve each complaint in a timely manner. There are four options for resolving complaints:

- 1. Discuss complaint with the Language Access Coordinator.** To schedule a meeting with the Language Access Coordinator, call 919-969-5105 or email languageservices@chapelhillnc.gov.
- 2. Discuss complaint with the Town of Chapel Hill Ombuds Office.** Before filing a formal complaint, you may want to talk to someone about your options. The Town Ombuds can informally discuss complaints and concerns without taking sides. Talking with the Ombuds is free and confidential. As an off-the-record resource, the Ombuds helps you explore options and answer questions before you decide on your next step. To schedule an appointment with the Ombuds, call 919-265-0806 or email ombuds@chapelhillnc.gov. For more information about the Ombuds Office, visit chapelhillnc.gov/ombuds.
- 3. File complaint with the Orange County Office of Civil Rights & Civic Life.** The complaint [form](#) is available online. See the Office's contact information below:
 - a. Phone: 919-245-2594
 - b. Email: civilrights@orangecountync.gov
 - c. Office Address: 306 Revere Road, Suite B, Hillsborough, NC 27278
- 4. File Title VI Complaint in writing or over the phone to the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division within 180 days following the alleged discrimination occurrence.** See their website for more details: justice.gov/crt/filing-complaint.

Folks may choose one or multiple options above to resolve their complaints.

Conclusion

Our Language Access Plan is an iterative document with a community-centered approach to language services. With the addition of the Language Access Coordinator position, we have centralized language services, associated vendor contracts, and staff training to increase service efficiency and improve service quality. From accessing the local library to applying for a construction permit, we provide language assistance in a variety of ways. We will continue to integrate language assistance into public touchpoints and support the Town's mission of learning, serving, and working together to build a community where everyone can thrive.

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Appendix A: Definitions

Interpretation

The relay of a spoken or signed message between 2 or more languages without adding, subtracting, or changing that message. The relay may happen either simultaneously or consecutively.

Language Access

A term the Federal government defines as providing non-English speakers "reasonable access" to the same services as English-speakers. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act requires all entities that receive federal funding, including the Town, comply with Title VI.

Language Access Coordinator (LAC)

Town staff person who oversees implementation of language access plan and provides technical assistance to all Town personnel.

Language Access Plan (LAP)

A set of policies and procedures established to provide services for those who speak languages other than English.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

Federally defined term that describe a person's ability to communicate in English. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a person who identifies as LEP is anyone above the age of 5 who reported speaking English less than "very well." The Census Bureau's classifications are "very well", "well", "not well", and "not at all." Instead of using the term "LEP," the Town uses strengths-based terms like:

- Speakers of languages other than English
- Non-English speakers
- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities

Language Justice

Grassroots framework that articulates the right for all people to communicate in the language they prefer.

Language Pay Incentive (LPI)

Policy that authorizes language differential pay for employees who provide bilingual services for an identified language of need.

Primary languages

Languages other than English that the Town prioritizes for language services because they are commonly spoken and highly requested. Currently, our primary languages are Burmese, Karen, Mandarin Chinese, and Spanish.

Secondary languages

Languages other than English that the Town prioritizes for language services as needed because Public Housing, Police Department, and our community partners provide services in these languages consistently. Currently, our secondary languages are Arabic, French, Japanese, Korean, Kinyarwanda, Pashto, Rohingya, and Swahili.

Translation

The relay of a written message between 2 or more languages without adding, subtracting, or changing that message content.

Vital Document

Document that is necessary or significant towards using or receiving any activity, service, program, or other resources offered by the Town.

Appendix B: Legal Information

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964¹¹

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C Section 2000d) states:
 - “No person in the United States 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.”
- Federal financial assistance means more than just money. It includes any aid that enhances the ability to improve or expand allocation of a recipient’s own resources. This can include: grants and loans, tax-exempt bonds, loan of personnel, property, tax incentives and tax-exempt status, technical assistance and other similar types of assistance, training of employees that permits better use of the employer, etc.
- Federally assisted recipients should make reasonable efforts to provide language assistance to ensure meaningful access for LEP persons to the recipient's programs and activities. To do this, the recipient should: conduct the four-factor analysis (described in a subsequent section), develop a Language Access Plan (LAP), and provide appropriate language assistance.
- The goal of Title VI is voluntary compliance. Recipients must be given opportunity to voluntarily comply when violations are found. But if this cannot be achieved federal financial assistance may be withdrawn.

1987 Civil Rights Restoration Act¹²

- This Act expanded the definition of “programs and activities” to include all programs and activities of federal aid recipients, sub-recipients or contractors, whether such programs and activities are federally assisted or not.¹⁴

HUD Safe Harbor Guidelines

- HUD has adopted "safe harbor" guidelines that provide starting point numbers for recipients to consider when translating written materials. The Four-Factor Analysis does not provide benchmark numbers, so this guidance can be helpful for some organizations in setting priorities. It is not required to follow these guidelines.
- To note, the HUD Safe Harbor Guidelines make a distinction between the eligible population (e.g. all of Chapel Hill) and the beneficiaries (e.g. occupants of, or applicants to public housing for instance). Failure to provide written translations under this guidance does not mean the recipient is in noncompliance.

The table below sets forth HUD’s safe harbors for written translations.

Size of Language Group	Recommended Provision of Written Language Assistance
1,000 or more in the eligible population in the market area or among current beneficiaries	Translated vital documents
More than 5% of the eligible population or beneficiaries and more than 50 in number	Translated vital documents
More than 5% of the eligible population or beneficiaries and 50 or less in number	Translated written notice of right to receive free oral interpretation of documents.
5% or less of the eligible population or beneficiaries and less than 1,000 in number	No written translation is required.

Appendix C: Additional Demographics

This appendix provides additional data on Chapel Hill residents, specifically data related to country of origin and language spoken at home.

1. County of Origin

Chapel Hill residents come from all over the world.

Table 1. Top 10 countries of origin for Chapel Hill residents born outside the U.S.

Country	Population Estimate	Percentage
China, excluding Hong Kong & Taiwan	2,109	22.70%
India	875	9.40%
Korea	678	7.30%
Mexico	612	6.60%
United Kingdom	409	4.40%
Canada	296	3.20%
Argentina	220	2.40%
Taiwan	216	2.30%
Germany	215	2.30%
Philippines	200	2.10%

Source: Orange County Health Department

2. Language Spoken at Home

The number of Chapel Hill residents speaking a language other than English at home and have increased over time. The number of LEP residents has decreased slightly.

Table 2. Language spoken at home other than English for Chapel Hill residents age 5+

Year	Population 5 years and over	# who speak a language other than English at home	% of population age 5+	# who are LEP	% of population who are LEP
2000	47,226	6,808	14.40%	2,163	4.60%
2010	52,892	9,229	17.40%	2,957	5.60%
2017	57,402	11,611	20.20%	3,465	6.00%
2024	59,764	11,929	19.96%	3,117	5.20%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (2000 Census SF3, Table DP-2);
ACS 2010 (5-year Estimates), DP02
ACS 2017 (5-year Estimates), DP02
ACS 2024 (5 Year Estimates), Table B16005

Table 3. Language spoken at home and ability to speak English for Chapel Hill residents age 5+

Native Residents	Estimate
Total Population (age 5+)	59,764
Speak Only English	45,792
Speak Spanish	2,424
Speak English "very well"	2,322
Speak English less than "very well"	102
Speak other Indo-European languages	1,024
Speak English "very well"	1,002
Speak English less than "very well"	22
Speak Asian and Pacific Islander languages	1,097
Speak English "very well"	1,006
Speak English less than "very well"	91
Speak other languages	90
Speak English "very well"	90
Speak English less than "very well"	0

Foreign-Born Residents	Estimate
Total Population (age 5+)	9,337
Speak Only English	2,043
Speak Spanish	1,331
Speak English "very well"	519
Speak English less than "very well"	812
Speak other Indo-European languages	1,569
Speak English "very well"	1,161
Speak English less than "very well"	408
Speak Asian and Pacific Islander languages	4,004
Speak English "very well"	2,367
Speak English less than "very well"	1,637
Speak other languages	390
Speak English "very well"	345
Speak English less than "very well"	45

Source: ACS 2024 (5-Year Estimates) Table B16005

3. Town Services

The Public Housing Data below indicates Public Housing households' preferred languages in 2018 and 2026.

Table 4: Change in Chapel Hill Public Housing Residents' Preferred Language

Language	Oct 2018		Feb 2026		Change over time	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
English	199	68.90%	178	70.08%	-21	-11.80%
Arabic	1	0.30%	11	4.33%	10	1000%
Burmese	9	3.10%	21	8.27%	11	133%
Chin	0	0	1	0.39%	1	-
French	0	0	1	0.39%	1	-
Karen	72	24.90%	34	13.39%	-38	-52%
Kinyarwanda	0	0	2	0.79%	2	-
Mandarin Chinese	1	0.30%	1	0.39%	0	0%
Rohingya	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spanish	6	2.10%	5	1.97%	-1	16.70%
Swahili	1	0.30%			0	0%
Total	289		254			

Appendix D: Town Departmental Language Access Surveys

2026 Town of Chapel Hill Language Access Staff Survey Report

Between December 2025 and January 2026, the Town of Chapel Hill partnered with the Building Integrated Communities (BIC) Initiative at the Institute for the Study of the Americas at UNC-Chapel Hill to disseminate online surveys to Town employees. The surveys helped us learn about current needs and use of language access services by asking employees about:

- Their department’s policies and procedures for facilitating language access.
- Current language services are available to them.
- Current bilingual staff who use language skills as part of their job duties.

To capture the distinct needs and experiences of different departments’ experiences, we curated the survey differently for each of the following groups:

1. Frontline Staff.
2. Emergency Response Workers.
3. The Interdepartmental Engagement Team.

We designed each survey to reflect the specific language access contexts and responsibilities relevant to each group. Find a summary of key findings from each survey in the following sections.

1. Frontline Staff

The survey disseminated to frontline staff received 74 responses from seven Town departments. **Frontline staff encountered Spanish most frequently, with 62 respondents reporting encountering it “very frequently” or “frequently”, followed by Mandarin Chinese with 28 respondents encountering it “very frequently” or “frequently.”** These staff members encounter the following languages at a lesser frequency: Arabic, Burmese, Japanese, and Korean. Specifically, the Parks and Recreation department encounters the widest variety of the Town’s identified languages at a high frequency. Additionally, staff encountered these languages: French, German, Hindi, Russian, and Thai.

Department	Language encountered “Very Frequently”	Language encountered “Frequently”
Building and Development Services	Spanish	Mandarin Chinese
Business Management	N/A*	Burmese Karen Spanish
Human Resources	N/A	N/A
Library	Korean Mandarin Chinese Spanish	Japanese Karen Mandarin Chinese Other (French) Spanish
Police	Spanish	Burmese Karen Mandarin Chinese
Parks and Recreation	Burmese Karen Mandarin Chinese Spanish	Arabic Burmese Karen Korean Mandarin Chinese Other (Thai) Spanish
Transit	Other (Hindi) Spanish	Mandarin Chinese

*“N/A” indicates that the respondent did not encounter any languages other than English with the level of frequency indicated in the chart.

Determining Language Preferences

Departments use various methods to determine a client’s preferred language. Most respondents reported determining a client’s preferred language through direct interaction, primarily by asking the individual. Another common method reported by some departments included the use of cards or other visual tools to facilitate this process. The Library and Parks and Recreation departments primarily use the laminated cards that allow individuals to point to their preferred language.

Additional Comments

Several respondents emphasized the need for expanded translation resources. Youth and Family Enrichment requested more translated website pages beyond the library card signup page. Parks and Recreation's Aquatics program specifically requested translations of waiver and household forms in Chinese and Spanish. Building and Development Services noted that the permitting software (OpenGov) needs a language toggle feature to allow users to select their preferred language.

Multiple respondents expressed concerns about the limitations of current language assistance tools.

Parks and Recreation staff noted that the telephonic interpreter line is difficult to use for in-person interactions during programs or camps, especially with youth, and expressed interest in mobile device or app-based services that would enable real-time conversation between patrons and staff. One respondent preferred using translation apps for instant results rather than the current protocol. Police noted that regional dialects can complicate language line use and that Google Translate frequently has errors. Due to the nature of emergency response work requiring immediate two-way translation, Police employees often attempt to use Google Translate to communicate in the field, in addition to the language line.

Some respondents identified gaps in staff knowledge and training. One Police respondent noted uncertainty about what to do when someone speaking another language arrives and suggested better training. A Library respondent recommended more accessible signage and additional staff training on proactively assisting patrons who might not feel comfortable communicating in English, citing a helpful immersion exercise at another library where staff were tasked with navigating the library and attempting to accomplish specific goals with staff/signage/instructions only available in Spanish or another language besides English. Another Library respondent expressed interest in learning more about addressing non-English language needs of patrons.

Positive feedback and further recommendations were also provided. Business Management expressed appreciation for the Town's inclusive approach to language services. Another Parks and Recreation respondent noted liking the language line. Police confirmed having interpreters within the department and noted that several foreign language speakers are compensated for those skills, in addition to contracting with a vendor for 24/7 phone interpretation. Police also mentioned needing interpreters specifically during large community events such as back-to-school giveaways and the turkey distribution. Parking Services suggested hiring an Administrative Assistant/Customer Service position fluent in two or more languages.

2. Emergency Response Staff

We disseminated the survey to staff with job duties related to emergencies and disasters and received 36 responses from Fire, Transit, Streets & Construction, Police, and Public Works Departments. **Staff with emergency and disaster related job duties encountered Spanish most frequently, with 24 respondents reporting encountering it “very frequently” or “frequently”, followed by Mandarin Chinese with 9 respondents encountering it “very frequently” or “frequently.”** These staff also “frequently” encounter these languages: Arabic, Burmese, Japanese, Karen, and Korean.

Language Assistance Services During Emergency Situations

During emergencies, the telephonic interpreter line is staff's most frequently accessed form of language assistance, followed by bilingual staff members. Sometimes, staff work with staff interpreters or Google Translate. Two respondents reported being bilingual themselves and providing services in English and another language.

Emergency and Disaster Response Duties

Fire

Fire Department respondents reported engaging in a range of emergency duties including:

- urgent calls
- investigations
- preventive education
- call center management for the Emergency Operation Center (EOC)
- responding to fire incidents, medical incidents, hazardous materials incidents, motor vehicle collisions, rescue incidents, public service incidents, natural disasters, and acts of violence
- damage assessment

The Fire department mentioned the following formal partnerships during emergencies and disasters:

- Binkley Memorial Church
- coordination with Red Cross for small, temporary displacement situations
- reliance on town, county, or state emergency management for larger or longer-lasting events

Police

Police Department respondents reported overseeing and participating in the planning, coordination, and execution of emergency preparedness and response operations. This includes ensuring readiness for natural disasters, major incidents, special events, and critical emergencies by developing and maintaining emergency plans, coordinating with internal units and external partners, and leading response efforts when incidents occur. They also engage in crisis response and resource coordination in partnership with first responders and town/county partners. The Police Department mentioned the following formal partnerships during emergencies and disasters:

- Orange County Emergency Management (for coordinating disaster response and recovery)
- Orange County Department of Social Services and Health and Human Services (for assistance with sheltering, food assistance, behavioral health, and services for vulnerable populations)
- American Red Cross – Central North Carolina Region (for emergency sheltering, mass care, and recovery support)
- Inter-Faith Council for Social Service (IFC) (provides shelter, food, and crisis assistance)
- multiple community organizations serving unsheltered and at-risk populations, including local shelters and outreach providers

3. Interdepartmental Engagement Team

Seven responses were recorded from four departments across the Town. **Spanish and Mandarin are the most frequently encountered languages other than English, with six respondents reporting frequent interactions in both.** Staff also reported encountering Arabic, Korean, Karen, Burmese, and Japanese. Specifically, Library staff indicated a greater frequency of encountering Mandarin Chinese followed by Spanish and then Burmese and Karen.

Determining Language Preferences

Departments use various methods to determine a client’s preferred language. Three respondents from the Planning Department, Office of Sustainability and Resilience, and Manager’s Office noted either using language identification cards or working with the engagement team to determine the needs for interactions with non-English speaking patrons.

Materials in Languages Other than English

Six respondents (75%) noted their departments produce materials such as newsletters, signage, flyers, or videos in languages other than English, three of which were Library employees. Library employees reported discussing needs and target audiences with the Town language access team to figure out a coherent plan, while also having “language access interpretation cards” available at their service desks. Library employees indicated using interpretation services frequently at pop-ups, various programs, and service desks.

The Planning Department reported services being available upon request or anticipating language needs when designing outreach initiatives. Specifically, the Planning department offers materials on zoning, planning, and land use rules in Spanish, Arabic, Karen, Burmese, and Mandarin. The Manager’s Office reported services available upon request for written and verbal communication during general business engagement and keeping note of businesses where English is not their primary language.

Respondents were asked to select all language services their department provides during direct staff-community interactions. Their responses are displayed in the table below.

Resources available	Departments reporting service/method**
Telephonic interpreter line	Library Planning
Staff member(s) trained as an interpreter (verbal/spoken communications)	Library
Bilingual or multilingual staff members (not trained or not sure if trained as an interpreter or translator)	Library Planning
Interpretation or translation with a contract language service organization	Planning (Chicle) Library (Uses the Town’s Language Access Portal)

******The Manager’s Office respondent reported not providing any of these services while the Office of Sustainability and Resilience respondent reported coordinating with the engagement team to provide them when appropriate.

Federal Funding

Over 50% of departments have received or are currently receiving federal funding, including but not limited to: Fire, Housing & Community Development, Library, Planning, Police, Public Works, Town Manager’s Office, and Transit. In our 2026 survey, three departments, Library, the Office of Sustainability and Resilience, and Planning, reported receiving federal funding from the following sources:

- Library Services and Technology Act - Library
- Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Energy – Sustainability and Resilience
- Department of Transportation - Planning

About this Report


Building Integrated Communities Initiative staff at Institute for the Study of the Americas at UNC-Chapel Hill prepared this survey and report as part of the Spring 2026 Language Access Planning for Emergencies and Disasters program. To read more about language access efforts of the UNC Building Integrated Communities program and the Latin American Studies curriculum, visit migration.unc.edu/building-integrated-communities. For more information, contact staff at bic@isa.unc.edu.

2019 Town of Chapel Hill Departmental Language Access Survey

Refer to page 26-34 of the 2019 Language Access Plan.¹⁶

Appendix E: Language Identification Guide

The language identification (ID) guide is a visual communication tool used to determine someone’s preferred language. See Town of Chapel Hill’s language ID guide below.



**TOWN OF
CHAPEL HILL**


Language ID Guide

- 1


Resident points to a language.


- 2

Staff calls phone interpreter.


- 3

Staff communicates with resident with phone interpreter.



ARABIC	عربي
BURMESE	မြန်မာ
FRENCH	Français
JAPANESE	日本語
KAREN	ကဵု
KINYARWANDA	Kinyarwanda
KOREAN	한국어
MANDARIN CHINESE	简体中文
PASHTO	پښتو
SPANISH	Español
SWAHILI	Kiswahili

Appendix F: Vital Documents

We provide written translation of vital documents into the Town's primary languages: Burmese, Karen, Mandarin Chinese, and Spanish. Vital documents are those that are necessary for residents to use Town services or programs and to access Town information.

The Town creates and maintains an inventory of vital documents. Town staff develop policies and procedures to determine and update the vital documents' inventory consistently. General document guidelines for vital documents will include, but not be limited to:

- Consent forms
- Complaint/feedback forms
- Eligibility criteria for Town services (e.g. Public Housing, etc.)
- Applications to participate in programs or to receive benefits or services
- Notices of rights, denial, loss or decreases in benefits or services
- Notices of Eviction, Leases ("for information purposes only") and Tenant Rules
- Notices of free language assistance
- Emergency, fire, and public safety information
- Any form with the potential for significant community impact