



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:19-6461

Agenda Item Number: 4.

Agenda Date: 8/28/2019

In Control: Governance Committee

DEPARTMENT: Government & Public Affairs

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Jeff Coyle

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT:

Briefing and discussion related to a CCR from Councilmember Gonzales regarding a language access plan and process (LAPP).

SUMMARY:

A Council Consideration Request (CCR) was sponsored by Councilmember Gonzales on June 25, 2019, to review and discuss the creation of a language access plan and process to ensure the City provides high quality language services to individuals with sensory disabilities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Councilmember Gonzales' CCR states that according to the American Community Survey of 2017 the total San Antonio population with a disability is 207,109 - or 14.3% of the City's total population. Sensory disabilities and limited English proficiency often limit the ease of accessibility of services offered by the City of San Antonio. The City of San Antonio works toward a universally designed environment that makes it easy for all people to participate fully in community life primarily through the Disability Access Office and the Office of Equity.

The following federal laws are relevant to this CCR:

1. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act mandates that recipients of federal funds, such as the City, provide individuals with limited English proficiency with meaningful access to federally conducted and federally funded programs and activities; and
2. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires a public entity shall take appropriate steps to ensure that communications with applicants, participants, members of the public, and companions with disabilities are as effective as communications with others. This means any public entity is required to provide appropriate auxiliary aids and services where necessary to make sure that individuals with speech, hearing and vision disabilities understand what is said or written and can communicate effectively.

The CCR provides the City with an opportunity to study and/or craft a LAPP for individuals with limited English proficiency and to assess ways to provide individuals with sensory disabilities with accommodations that meet or exceed the reasonable accommodation standards in federal law. The City has continuously reviewed and implemented initiatives to improve the accessibility of City services and public meetings. Recent steps have included:

Spanish Language Services: An internal review of all City departments and Spanish engagement efforts began in 2017. Findings showed the level of engagement with Spanish-speaking residents varies from department to department. Based on conversations with various departments and understanding the differences in need of engagement Government and Public Affairs made several communications recommendations to improve engagement with the Spanish Speaking population of San Antonio in order to increase participation in City government and events. Some of these recommendations resulted in contracting with six Spanish language service vendors that continue to work with GPA in FY 2019 and going forward into FY 2020.

Spanish Language Liaison: A Public Engagement Officer in was hired in 2017 who is fluent in the Spanish language to help with translation of important documents for external communications. For large projects such as the translation of the City's published budget book, staff coordinates with a contracted Spanish language services vendor to translate the document for the Office of Management and Budget.

Spanish Language Communications Methods: The City contracts with a Spanish language services firm to provide on-site simultaneous interpreter services for City Council “A” and “B” sessions, City Council Ceremonials, Citizens to be Heard, Special City Council Sessions, Special City Council Public Meetings, other select City Department meetings and news conferences. All City Council meeting agendas are available in Spanish on the City’s agendas page. City departments work to ensure that they translate all public input documents to Spanish and that they provide interpreter services at all public input meetings. Additionally the City began broadcasting A/B session meetings in Spanish using Second Audio Program (SAP) on KGSA-TV (City’s non-Cable channel) and the Public Access channel.

ASL Services: The City of San Antonio is committed to engaging all residents with disabilities, and breaking down communications barriers facing this population to ensure participation in City government and City-related business, and receipt of City emergency information. Through a City contract with ASL vendors, the City’s Disability Access Office (DAO) manages the hiring of qualified on-site sign language interpreters at City Council and department meetings. Spanish and American Sign Language (ASL) language access services are available for all City Council meetings and Boards & Commission meetings with a two day advanced notice.

Any City department may utilize the contract to hire an ASL interpreter for on-site sign language interpreters at City emergency information news conferences and department meetings and events. The City also contracts with an ASL firm to provide ASL post-meeting produced videos of City Council “A” and “B” sessions, and City Council Ceremonials. These videos are uploaded weekly to the City’s website.

Closed Captioning Services: The City provides Closed Captioning services for the thirty-six City Council Meetings and other Budget-related meetings, conducted in the Council Chambers. These services are provided for community members with hearing difficulties that view City Council meetings on the City’s channel, TVSA.

The Department began airing all City Council Committee meetings in August of FY 2019 on the City’s Government Access channel, TVSA and web streaming some Boards and Commissions meetings. Upon request, Spanish language and ASL interpreters are available for the City Council Committee meetings. Spanish language interpreters are available at all Board and Commission meetings through the Development Services Department.

ISSUE:

The Governance Committee will consider the creation of a language access plan and process, to include community input, to continue the City's efforts to improve the accessibility of City services.

ALTERNATIVES:

City Council could choose not to make a recommendation to develop a language access plan and process.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this item at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the continuation of a multi-departmental working group already in progress that includes the Disability Access Office, Office of Equity, Government and Public Affairs, City Attorney's Office to assess needs and develop an action plan to improve accessibility to City services.