

FAQ on Processing BHA Interpreter Requests (For BHA Staff Use Only)

How does a BHA staff make a request for an interpreter to the Language Access Team?

- Via the Interpreter Request Form (web form). Located on the BHA website:
<https://www.bostonhousing.org/en/Center-for-Community-Engagement/Language-Access-Division/Interpreter-Request-Form.aspx>
- Via telephone, but the person making the request must follow up by completing the Interpreter Request Form (web form).

To whom in the Language Access Team should the requests go?

Any requests should go to the Language Access Team staff at LanguageAccessTeam@bostonhousing.org. Please cc Vivian W. Lee, Director of Center for Community Engagement and Civil Rights, at Vivian.Lee@bostonhousing.org on all requests.

Who in the BHA may make the requests?

Any direct service department may request for interpretation services. The following is a partial listing of departments and staff who may request or have requested interpretation services.

- **Community Services** (Amory Street)
Director
- **Department of Grievances and Appeals** (9th Floor)
Receptionist and individual Hearing Officers
- **Department of Leased Housing** (1st, 4th & 5th Floors)
Individual Leasing Officers
- **Department of Occupancy** (3rd Floor)
Appointment Scheduling Staff Person
- **Department of Operations: Housing Development Management Offices**
Regional Directors of Property Management
Capital Construction (site meetings)
Project Managers
- **Department of Public Safety**
Chief or designee
- **Legal Department**
Administrative Assistant
- **Work Order Center** (Amory Street)
Director
- **56 Chauncy Street Customer Service Center**
Receptionist for Walk-In Clients

What are the commonly requested languages?

During 2010-2014, the most frequently requested languages are Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Haitian Creole, Cape Verdean, Vietnamese, Somali, Arabic, Amharic, Russian, Portuguese, Albanian, and French.

How does the BHA Language Access Team process an Interpreter Request?

Upon receiving a request, the BHA Language Access Team will:

Check to make sure the Request consists of all the info needed for processing.

For example, listing “Creole” as the needed language is too generic. The request should specify whether it is for Haitian Creole or Cape Verdean Creole.

Select a Date & Time to provide the interpreting service

If the date and time for service is not already determined by the BHA staff making the request, Sheyla Carew will pick a reasonable date and time which would allow sufficient time to arrange for a professional or volunteer interpreter. Sheyla will email the BHA staff making the request (and cc Vivian) to acknowledge her receipt of the request and to list the tentative date and time for the interpreter, and to state that confirmation will follow as soon as possible.

The standard operating procedure is to have 5 business days to process an interpreter request. For a non-emergency request with fewer than 5 business days of turnaround time (such timeframe is deemed aggressive and unreasonable for the “obscure” languages), the Language Access Team would try its best to arrange for an interpreter, but may also decline to honor the request. The team may advise the BHA staff making the request to use the Language Line service as an alternative.

Arrange for an Interpreter

Currently, there are three pools of interpreters to draw from: BHA In-house / Volunteers (BHA-VIP) / Vendors (firms or individual contractors).

For interpreters of Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), Vietnamese, and Haitian Creole languages, work with Sheyla Carew re: their availability in-house or via the BHA-VIP.

For languages which we cannot identify an in-house or BHA-VIP interpreter, we would use BHA or Commonwealth-approved vendors:

Interpreter Associates/Art Liebel

This vendor offers the best hourly rate and can avail interpreters of many hard-to-find languages in short notice. Requests to this vendor must be **at least** 48 hours in advance, and it charges a 2-hour minimum of service. Additional fees apply to special circumstances. Vendor uses a web-based application that streamlines the scheduling coordination between BHA and the firm.

Somali Development Center

This vendor offers interpreting services in Somali, Arabic and Amharic. Vendor prefers ample time to process BHA requests.

International Translation Company

This company specializes in Somali, Arabic, Amharic, Haitian Creole, Farsi, Bengali, Swahili, and Tigrinya, to name a few. Requests to this vendor must be **at least** 48 hours in advance, and a 2-hour minimum. Additional fees apply to special circumstances.

Individual Contractors

(Spanish, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Toisanese)

Confirm with Vendor and Notify the Dept of Interpreter Arrangement

Vivian or Sheyla will decide which channel would best accommodate the interpreter requests. Sheyla currently oversees all arrangements and verifies service delivery. As soon as Sheyla confirms the availability & finalizes the schedule in writing with the interpreter or the interpreting firm (i.e. date & time of service, BHA dept location, BHA client's name, name of BHA Officer/Contact), Sheyla will then notify **by email** the BHA staff making the interpreter request of the confirmation.

Important: Dept staff must notify Sheyla in writing 48 hours in advance of any cancellation of interpreter service, and follow up with Sheyla regarding re-scheduling. Vendors and individual contractors may charge BHA up to 2 hours of service if cancellation occurs fewer than 48 hours.

Verify Service Delivery & Maintain Records

The Language Access Team staff may make impromptu observation of an interpreter to verify whether service is rendered properly. After providing the interpreting service, the interpreter may ask either the Dept staff or the Language Access staff (Vivian or Sheyla or Shawn) to sign some type of Service Verification Form issued by his/her firm. BHA staff should review the accuracy of the info (hours of service) presented on the Form and after signing, please make a copy of the Service Verification Form and forward it to Vivian. BHA expects all interpreters to be punctual and would compensate interpreters for up to 15 minutes, for arriving at the meeting site earlier than his/her scheduled meeting time.

The Language Access Team staff would scan the Service Verification Form into PDF for future invoice audits. Staff will also notate the service delivery on the Interpreter Request Form for record and input the data into the VIP (Vendor/Volunteer Interpreters Project) database.

What quality assurance steps does the Language Access Team take to ensure timely and accurate processing?

The Language Access Team is highly organized and pays great attention to detail, to minimize any potential for error. Specifically, staff on the team:

Check with Dept staff making the request to ensure no miscommunication and no double request/double booking. On the other hand, some emails may contain multiple requests. The Language Access staff carefully review and respond to each request.

Communicate all related info in writing electronically for clarity, record keeping, auditing, and follow-up purposes, and at the same time, use technology as much as possible to minimize paper output.

Provide interpreters and vendors administrative details that would help them prepare (e.g. bringing a photo ID, full description of location and directions, do's and don'ts if any).

Consult Vivian re: the policy on canceling and rescheduling an interpreter for clients and vendors.

Strive to learn about our multilingual and multicultural housing clients, (e.g. be able to recognize common surnames of different cultures and nationalities; French is spoken in African countries; French and Haitian Creole are two different languages; Portuguese is spoken in Brazil; Portuguese and Cape Verdean are two different languages; there are many variations to the Spanish language, to Arabic, and to Chinese, etc.)