

Creating Multilingual Phone Tree/Automated Messaging System

The Office of Human Rights (OHR) requires all District covered entities provide multilingual access to their telephone systems to serve constituents who are Limited English Proficient/Non-English Proficient (LEP/NEP). Pursuant to the Language Access Act (D.C Code § 2-1932(a)) and its implementing regulations (4 DCMR § 1205.5), “[e]ach covered entity shall provide oral language services to LEP/NEP individuals who seek to access or participate in the services, programs, or activities offered by the covered entity, as further described in this chapter.” To help comply with this requirement and provide more inclusive customer service, OHR has determined that a covered entity’s use of multilingual automated messaging systems, also known as multilingual phone trees, is a baseline policy and procedure, required by the Act.

Why do Automated Phone Menu/Tree need to be multilingual?

- The LEP/NEP community relies on telephone calls as a primary method of communication.
- Covered entities should be prepared to receive calls from customers with a wide variety of linguistic needs.
- Covered entities should be prepared to receive calls and multilingual messages from customers during and after the agency’s hours of operation.

I. Capacity Evaluation: What do I need to know and plan for with a multilingual phonesystem?

- a. Analyze your agency’s language needs
 - i. Identify the language(s) most encountered by your agency; target those phone messages first.
 - ii. OHR highly recommends establishing phone messages/phone tree options in all six of the Language most likely to be encountered: Spanish, Amharic, French, Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese,) Korean, and Vietnamese.
 - iii. Who is responsible for managing/operating the telephone system? Is it handled internally or with OCTO?
 - iv. Does your agency have in-house capacity to obtain the recorded messages? (Such as bilingual staff)
 - v. What are the current multilingual responses for call centers/automated telephone system?
 - vi. Are front desk/telephone operators trained to use LLS?
 1. Do they have language capabilities to act as staff language facilitators? Or are they bilingual? (Structure of the menu, how the call will be handled by bilingual staff or LLS)

II. Key personnel relevant to multilingual phone systems

- a. Agency’s Chief Technology Officer (CTO)
- b. OCTO Liaison (email DCNet Service Desk dcnet.voiceops@dc.gov with “attn to DCNet UCC Engineering” in subject line)
- c. Agency’s Public Information Officer (PIO)/Communications Team
- d. Agency’s Chief Operation Officer (to approve potential costs)
- e. Agency’s Front desk/customer-facing staff

III. Consideration: Cost to Develop

- a. Once you contact OCTO, please request an estimate from them. The cost may vary depending on the complexity (size of agency, current system, number of languages, etc.) of the service request.

IV. Steps to develop the Message System

- a. Confirm with your PIO/Communications Team that the current telephone message that is in English is up to date. If not, make the necessary changes to it before proceeding to translating the message into other languages.
- b. If the message is confirmed to be accurate and up to date, proceed with translating the messages into the languages identified by your agency.
- c. Record the voice message
 - i. The translated message can be read by a bilingual staff or interpretation vendor.
 - ii. The recording should be in an audio format that can be transferred to the CTO or OCTO liaison.
 - iii. Once the recordings have been collected, send the files to the CTO or OCTO (depending on the agency's structure)
- d. Test the telephone system by calling the agency's mainline
 - i. Ensure that the multilingual message is accurate (perform a test call with a bilingual staff or interpreter)
 1. Monitor periodically to make sure that the system is presenting accurate information and working as intended.
- e. Ensure that the agency's Front desk/customer-facing/telephone operating employee receives the calls and/or messages and is able to direct them to bilingual staff or utilize Language Line Solutions.

V. Suggested Structure

