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Navigating Workforce Hurdles for Adult Language Learners

Laura Ostrowski & Ahu Moser

Image of Office desktop with laptop and cup of coffee.

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Agenda

- Introductions / Poll
- Who are Adult English Language Learners?
- Who is Looking for a Job?
- Needs of Adult English Language Learners
- Challenges Facing Adult English Language Learners & Benefits of Diverse Staff
- Considering Employee Rights & Responsibilities with Adult English Language Learners
- Tips for Helping Non-Native English Speaking Adults

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Presenters

- Ahu Moser
- Laura Ostrowski

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Poll

Poll question regarding who is in the audience?

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Who Are Adult English Language Learners?

Adult language learners are goal oriented and direct their learning to fulfill particular needs or demands: to advance their studies, to progress up the career ladder, to follow business opportunities, to pass a driving test, to assist their children with homework, or simply to be successful users of the language. They usually require immediate value and relevance from their studies, and they often learn best when they are engaged in developing their own learning objectives.

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WIOA and Adult English Language Learners

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2013–2014) emphasizes the need to prepare all adults, including English language learners, for employment in high-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency. There is a direct correlation between educational attainment and the well-being of adult immigrants, refugees, and their families.

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Who is Looking for a Job?

Low-skilled Immigrants

- No schooling or limited schooling
- Little or no work experience
- Manual Jobs
- Limited English Proficient

Skilled Immigrants/Refugees

- Professional degrees

- Work-experience
- Advanced-degrees
- Limited-English Proficient

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Data

According to analyses of data for immigrants in the United States from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), a low skill level in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and digital technologies is correlated with low-skilled jobs. Furthermore, immigrants with soft skills in these areas are far less likely to access training programs (Batalova & Fix, 2015). These data speak to the power of education and the dire need to provide instruction that helps adult ELLs achieve their educational, professional, and personal goals.

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Needs of Adult English Language Learners

The need for English instruction and the need for occupational skills training- ELLs need the work-readiness skills to obtain and to retain employment and advance to jobs beyond the entry level.

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Challenges at work

- Speaking and Listening Skills
- Written Communication
- Technical Language and Vocabulary
- The Culture of Work and Training
- Stereotyping/Work Relationships (Leadership & Peers)
- Accent
- Academic Listening Comprehension Skills
- Conscious and Unconscious Bias

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Benefits of having diverse staff

- Inspire creativity and drive innovation
 - Helping to solve problems and unique customer needs in new ways
 - Diversity breeds out-of-the box thinking
 - Healthy competition to drive a team to be their best
- Higher quality and targeted marketing due to cultural sensitivity
- Greater productivity and performance

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Lessons from Healthcare

- **GUIDELINES:** Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (28 U.S.C 794), Section 1557 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (2010) and Executive Order 13166 requires persons with limited English proficiency (LEP) have “meaningful access” to healthcare services.
- **PROHIBITIONS:** Recipients of federal financial assistance are prohibited from discriminating based on a person’s primary (or preferred) language and must provide meaningful access to individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP).
- **COMMUNICATION:** Development of a language access plan that accommodates persons with LEP to ensure effective communication and meaningful access to participate in and benefit from healthcare services.

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Key Terms and Definitions

- A. **Effective Communication.** Communication sufficient to provide the individual with limited English proficiency with substantially the same level of services received by individuals who are not limited in English proficiency.
- B. **Interpretation.** Listening to a communication in one language (source language) and converting it to another language (target language) while retaining the same meaning.
- C. **LEP is the acronym for both “limited English proficiency” and “limited English proficient.”** The U.S. Census Bureau’s operational definition for LEP is a patient’s self-assessed ability to speak English less than “very well.”
- D. **Language Assistance Services.** Oral and written language services needed to assist individuals with LEP to communicate effectively with staff and to provide individuals with LEP meaningful access and equal opportunity to participate fully in the services, activities, or other programs.

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Language Limitations and Employer Roles

Limited English proficient (LEP) refers to individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. This definition includes individuals with sensory impairments, who are Deaf or hard of hearing and communicate using American Sign Language, have speech impairments, or that are blind or have visual impairments. LEP individuals may be entitled to language services or communication assistance for a service, benefit, or program that receives federal assistance.

Through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504, the protections apply equally to LEP individuals with disabilities or that are Deaf or hard of hearing (HOH). There are also many assistive technical (AT) devices that are available to LEP individuals with disabilities.

Entities covered by the provisions of Section 504 and the ADA must provide services and programs in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of qualified individuals with disabilities and make reasonable modifications in their policies, practices, and procedures to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability.

The importance of providing these basic rights to people with a limited English proficiency is vital to helping these people live ordinary lives. Imagine if you were unable to voice your problems clearly to someone that could potentially help. Unfortunately, this is a nightmare that some individuals live because of the lack of knowledge about what the ADA and Section 504 will provide for them. Allowing these individuals the ability to live normal, healthy lives with the assistance they need can only help our multicultural country continue to blossom.

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Reaching Persons with Limited English Proficiency

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d, et seq. and its implementing regulations provide that no person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin under any program or activity that receives federal financial assistance.

Language for LEP individuals can be a barrier to accessing important benefits or services, understanding and exercising important rights, complying with applicable responsibilities, or understanding other information provided by federally funded programs and activities.

In certain circumstances, failure to ensure that LEP persons can effectively participate in or benefit from federally assisted programs and activities may violate the prohibition under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d and Title VI regulations against national origin discrimination.

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Maryland Language Access Plan

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning (DWDAL) at the Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor) collaboratively developed this Language Access Plan (LAP) with input from MD Labor's Division of Unemployment Insurance (DUI), Local Areas, and MD Labor's Office of Fair Practices (OFP). This Plan identifies how DWDAL and the statewide network of American Job Centers (AJCs), as well as Maryland's DUI system, are working to ensure and improve service access for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals.

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Maryland Language Access Plan

The graphic below represents the eight identified non-English languages or language clusters spoken by 2 percent or more of LEP Marylanders. The "Other" category represents languages spoken by less than 2 percent of Maryland's LEP population. This includes Indic languages, Asian languages, Urdu, Persian, Portuguese, Gujarati, French Creole, Arabic, German, Hindi, Greek, Indo-European languages, Italian, Japanese, Thai, Slavic languages, Pacific Islander languages, Polish, Mon-Khmer, Hebrew, Serbo-Croatian, and Hungarian. These languages and language groups show a great deal of language diversity throughout Maryland.

Pie Chart Image: Primary Languages Spoken by LEP Individuals in Maryland

- Spanish 50%
- Chinese 8%
- Korean 6%
- Chinese 6%,
- African Languages 5%
- French 4%
- Vietnamese 4%
- Tagalog 3%
- Russian 2%
- Other 18%

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Tips for Employment Agencies & One-Stop Centers

- Tip 1: Oral Interpretation and Translation Services of all essential documents.
- Tip 2: Needs Analysis
- Tip 3: Training Employers in Cultural Awareness
- Tip 4: "I Speak" cards and/or posters, which allow LEP customers to self-select their preferred language
- Tip 5: Assistive Technology for those who are LEP that need accommodations (disability).

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Thank you!

Do you have any questions?

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