



# TRAINING BULLETIN

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Los Angeles Police Department

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## FOREIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS AND RESOURCES

The Los Angeles Police Department serves a City of diverse communities representing various cultures and languages from throughout the world. Add fear, anger, confusion, or disorientation to a situation and the potential for misunderstanding increases. The initial contact between an officer and individual sets the tone for the entire interaction. Taking time to acknowledge communication needs helps prevent misunderstanding while ensuring that community members are treated fairly, with dignity and respect in encounters with law enforcement.

Officers have a variety of options to help them communicate effectively, including over three thousand Department employees assigned throughout the City who can interpret over 35 languages. This Training Bulletin has been developed to provide resources and guidelines when interacting with non-English speaking individuals and to ensure the Department is providing the best service possible.

## FIELD SITUATIONS

Officers may encounter individuals who are unresponsive; that is, the individual does not respond to or may even be argumentative with an officer's lawful request or commands. Officers should be aware that someone who is unresponsive may not speak English. Using effective communication skills and attempting to overcome a language barrier enhances officer safety and helps to shape community perspective and builds trust.

Officers conducting an investigation in the field may use community members to provide immediate interpretation services to help interview individuals such as victims, witnesses, and found adults. However, the use of family members, young children, or neighbors should be avoided due to confidentiality issues or when the circumstances would be embarrassing to the involved parties. Officers may utilize translation applications (i.e., Google Translate, iTranslate) during the initial contact when encountering a language barrier. However, due to the inaccuracy or possible misinterpretations, they should not be relied on when conducting an investigative interview. Officers should consider whether seeking immediate communication

assistance impacts officer safety or endangers the community. For the most part, timely interpretation provides useful information that helps officers in the performance of their duties.

A key element to overcoming language barriers is to identify the language being spoken, and this can be accomplished by using the Language Identification Card published by Language Line Services. Once the language has been identified, officers should broadcast a request for a Department interpreter on the divisional frequency. If there is no response, officers should contact the Communications Division Watch Commander at (213) 978-6552 to locate an available Department interpreter. When a Department interpreter is not available in a reasonable period of time, Communications Division will connect the officer to an interpreter at Language Line Services.

**NOTE:** Officers should not call the Language Line directly and use a client identification number. When field personnel access the Language Line by utilizing the client ID number, the City of Los Angeles is billed, yet the calls have not been recorded or logged.

Once connected to the Language Line, officers should give a brief summary to the interpreter, ask two or three specific questions at a time and allow the interpreter time to interpret and respond. Be sure to confirm or clarify any needed details. The translation method, translator, and language should be documented in the appropriate report.

In arrest situations, officers should make a reasonable effort to communicate with the suspect in the field by seeking a Department interpreter over the air or through Communications Division. If a foreign language speaker is unavailable, the suspect should be transported to the station where Communications Division can be contacted for connection to the Language Line.

## **PROCEDURES FOR ANSWERING NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING TELEPHONE CALLS**

Desk officers periodically receive telephone calls from non-English speakers, and it may become necessary to access Language Line translation services.

After determining that the caller is a non-English speaker, utilize the following steps:

1. Establish a conference call. (Each Area must determine and utilize their telephone system's conference call procedures. This may be done by using the tap, flash, link, conference, or transfer button.)
2. If it can be determined that the nature of the call is an emergency, contact Communications Division at (213) 928-8206, or 9-1-1. For non-emergency calls, officers should call (213) 928-8223, (818) 734-2223, or (877) ASK LAPD.

3. State your name, division, and watch assignment, the foreign language required if known, and the nature of the call if known (if the language or the nature of the call is unknown, it will be handled as an emergency.) **Do not hang up.**
4. Once the Emergency Board Operator has the interpreter on the line, add the caller to the line by pushing down on the appropriate button.
5. **Continue to remain on the line.** Once the nature of the call is determined, there may be a need for a report, and your report writing skills will be needed. If there is no need for a report, the operator will release you from the call and you may hang up.

## **CONCLUSION**

Officers may encounter individuals who do not respond to or may even be argumentative with an officer's lawful request or commands. Officers should be aware that someone who is unresponsive may not speak English. Officers have a variety of options to help them communicate effectively and establish trust, including Department employees, Language Line Services, and translation applications. Using effective communication skills and attempting to overcome a language barrier enhances officer safety by ensuring the proper message is being understood, and it provides the opportunity to invest and enhance public trust.

**This Bulletin cancels and supersedes Volume XL, Issue 2, Foreign Language Interpreters and Resources, November 2008**

Field Training Services Unit  
Police Training and Education

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