

Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) Language Access, Cultural Competence, & Disability Access Policy

The Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) ensures equitable access to and participation in its activities for all NJ families, with special attention paid to ensuring access for the most underserved families due to poverty, disability, race, color, language, ethnicity, immigrant status or national origin, gender, or age. SPAN's mission embodies a focus on families of children with special needs, particularly underserved families and children at greatest risk: "The mission of the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network is to empower families and inform and involve professionals and other individuals interested in the healthy development and educational rights of children and youth. SPAN's foremost commitment is to children and youth with the greatest need due to disability, poverty, discrimination based on race, sex, or language, immigrant or foster care status, geographic location, or other special circumstances." SPAN locates our offices and services in northern, central, and southern areas of the state, and in urban, suburban, and rural communities, collaborating with schools, community-based organizations, hospitals, and local, state, and federal agencies. Our main office is in Newark (NJ's largest district), with regional offices in Trenton and Paterson (all districts with significant numbers of underserved families), and community resource centers in urban, rural, and suburban communities throughout the state housed in churches, disability organizations, family resource centers, military bases, hospitals, county Special Child Health Services Case Management Units, and other sites where diverse families who have children are typically found.

SPAN collaborates with a multitude of government and community-based agencies in communities housing high concentrations of traditionally underrepresented families. Our diverse staff, which is representative of NJ's population, has the capacity to reach and engage families from all communities throughout NJ. Parents are encouraged and supported to participate regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, age, disability, religion, or language. Trainings and materials are provided in multiple languages, including simultaneous translation to ensure equal participation in multiple languages, including sign language. All project activities are located in accessible buildings and in areas that can be reached by public transportation. Focus groups of mothers and fathers from diverse backgrounds are conducted periodically to identify effective strategies to encourage the participation of men, women, and people from diverse racial, socio-economic, immigrant, and language backgrounds.

In particular, SPAN ensures access by conducting the following activities:

- Identifying and using materials that are user-friendly for families with low-literacy; translating them into multiple languages¹ and making them available in varied formats; piloting them with diverse families to ensure understandability and usefulness; and revising them as appropriate based on parent feedback;
- Operating a website that has information in multiple languages and that can be accessed by families and professionals who are blind or visually impaired;

¹ SPAN translates all materials into Spanish and selected materials into other languages as appropriate.

- Conducting workshops in multiple languages including sign language as needed, including monolingual workshops in Spanish and workshops using simultaneous translation, and advertising availability of interpretation services on all outreach materials;
- Conducting activities in locations accessible by public transportation and that have disability-accessibility, and providing support to enable low-income families to access services;
- Hiring staff who are representative of the diverse communities we serve (consistent with our current hiring and staffing patterns, which reflect NJ's diversity), including staff who are bilingual or trilingual, fluent in sign language, and/or who have disabilities;
- Conducting cultural competence workshops for our staff, parent volunteers, and professionals participating in activities to ensure that they are able to work with diverse families, and informing them at least annually of SPAN's language, culture, and disability access policies;
- Working with community and faith-based organizations with experience and expertise in working with and serving diverse communities, including organizations such as the NJ Immigration Policy Network, Hispanic Directors Association, El Club de Padres Multilingual Center, and organizations that have expertise in working with individuals with disabilities, such as the Centers for Independent Living and county Offices on Disability, and others;
- Facilitating focus groups with diverse families, including men and women, to obtain their input and recommendations regarding strategies to ensure that SPAN activities meet the needs of the full range of NJ families, who speak languages other than English, are racially or ethnically diverse, or who have disabilities themselves, as well as the needs of mothers, fathers, and male and female professionals, and using recommendations to improve services;
- Continually monitoring the impact of services, including the diversity of participants, to ensure that families and professionals who participate in SPAN activities reflect the full diversity of NJ, as well as the extent to which various categories of participants indicate that project services are of high quality, are useful, and meet their needs, and using information from surveys, focus groups, evaluations, and interviews to improve appropriateness and effectiveness of the project for diverse families and professionals;
- Targeting intensive services to families who are most underrepresented and in greatest need, and in geographic areas where underrepresented families live, taking into consideration that families who face barriers to equitable participation often require more intensive, focused, and targeted services to ensure they understand and can use information and skills;
- Conducting outreach about project services in ethnic media and via community- and faith-based organizations that serve the most underrepresented families;
- Making information available in multiple formats and through multiple mechanisms, including the web, hard copy of information, easy-to-read versions of information, and trainings that can be varied to meet participant needs (for example, conducting a basic rights in special education or an IDEA/NCLB workshop over several sessions for families with limited literacy, limited English skills, or limited cognitive abilities, or conducting workshops in the evening, during the weekday, and on weekends, or conducting workshops via teleconference or the web for parents with limited transportation or who have physical disabilities that limit their travel);
- Conducting activities at multiple times, such as in the evening, during the weekday (for example, lunch hour and evening "after children's bedtime" tele-seminars that fathers and working mothers may find easier to participate in), or weekends (including Saturdays and Sundays to respect diverse religious beliefs and practices);
- Using research-based practices that have been proven effective with diverse populations;

- Asking diverse families and professionals themselves how they can most easily and effectively access services, and varying services to meet those expressed needs; and
- Ensuring that SPAN subcontractors have language, culture, and disability access policies.

Responsible Parties:

SPAN's Executive Co-Directors, under the direction of the SPAN Board of Trustees, are responsible for implementation and monitoring of SPAN's language, culture, and disability access policies, including ensuring that SPAN staff are aware of and compliant with these policies. SPAN's Director of Culturally Appropriate Outreach and Support oversees activities with diverse families to identify effectiveness of approaches, activities and materials, as well as SPAN's use and dissemination of the Traducelo Ahora web-based Spanish language website and email translation program. SPAN's Legal and TA Director ensures language access to SPAN's technical assistance activities, including ensuring that staff are aware of how to use the Language Line when needed. SPAN's Director of Parent and Professional Development ensures that workshop and support materials are translated into needed languages and that workshops are available in multiple languages as needed. SPAN's Office Systems Manager maintains the contract with the Language Line. SPAN's webmaster maintains the website connections to web-based language translation programs to ensure that SPAN's website is accessible in multiple languages. SPAN's Project Directors are responsible for ensuring that products developed by their project staff are translated at least into Spanish, and for considering the need to translate those products into other languages.

LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN OBJECTIVES & ACTIVITIES

OBJECTIVE 1:

To assess family language access needs and SPAN capacities on an ongoing basis.

Activity 1.1: SPAN collects unduplicated data by “language spoken” each year by October 30. Collected data is reviewed by SPAN’s Co-Directors and Management team for planning, budgeting, and development and implementation of annual Language Access plans.

Activity 1.2: SPAN facilitates a cultural and linguistic competence self-assessment using the National Center for Cultural Competence’s Cultural and Linguistic Competence Family Organization Self-Assessment tool every three years, involving the entire staff, to assess the knowledge base of staff around cultural and linguistic competence and the effectiveness of the language access plan.

Activity 1.3: SPAN solicits the feedback of LEP families regarding the effectiveness of its training and technical assistance for LEP families on an annual basis by ensuring that LEP families are part of the pool of families contacted for follow-up surveys.

OBJECTIVE 2:

To translate vital documents into the LEP languages largely served by SPAN within 2 months of their development. A “vital document” is defined as outreach and educational materials published by SPAN that inform families about their rights or available training, technical assistance, and support services. This provision also applies to all contractors/vendors that SPPAN funds to carry out services to our constituency.

Activity 2.1: SPAN routinely surveys all existing English language forms, outreach and educational materials (including fact sheets, resources guides, and powerpoint presentations), and other resources to identify documents that should be translated because they convey critical information. SPAN’s Project Directors discuss the highest priority documents and timelines for translation.

Activity 2.2: SPAN contracts with bilingual staff with expertise in written translation to translate materials. For language for which SPAN does not have bilingual staff with the qualifications or capacity to translate written materials, SPAN contracts with community-based organizations with expertise in written translation to translate materials. SPAN has bilingual staff “proof” the translated documents, and then conducts focus groups with families when materials have been translated to assess quality of translation, provide effective quality controls, and involve LEP families in the process.

Activity 2.3: SPAN makes translated materials available to the public through multiple agency points of contact, including our website (where on-line translation resources such as Traducelo Ahora-Spanish, and multiple other languages, are featured on the website just below the website masthead); main, satellite, and county offices, staffed by SPAN staff speaking 9 language; and

telephone technical assistance through our 800 toll-free number. A series of recorded teleconferences on education and health rights and resources in Spanish, with accompanying powerpoint presentations and resource materials, are archived on the SPAN website.

Activity 2.4: SPAN responds to correspondence written in a non-English language by soliciting the assistance of our staff, who speak 8 languages, and through collaboration with community-based organizations for languages other than those spoken by SPAN staff. SPAN responds to email correspondence from Spanish-speaking families using Spanish-speaking staff, and/or the Traducelo Ahora web-based Spanish language translation program, that allows parents and professionals to communicate with each other bi-directionally (family sends email in Spanish, professional receives it in English and Spanish; professional sends email to family in English, family receives it in English and Spanish).

OBJECTIVE 3:

To provide oral language services through a diverse bilingual workforce, partnerships with immigrant and community-based agencies, and the language line, on an ongoing basis. “Oral language services” means the provision of oral information necessary to enable limited or no-English proficiency families to access or participate in programs or services offered by SPAN.

Activity 3.1: SPAN services include placement of bilingual staff in public contact positions; the provision of experienced and trained staff interpreters; contracting with telephone interpreter programs (the Language Line); contracting with private interpreter services as needed; and using interpreters made available through community services organizations that are publicly funded for that purpose.

Activity 3.2: SPAN will include this provision in contracts/subcontracts with all contractors/vendors that SPAN funds to carry out services to its public.

Activity 3.3: SPAN will ensure that all staff are aware of its policy that use of family members as interpreters is prohibited unless all other mechanisms have been exhausted (for a very low incidence language), and then only with the consent of the parent. Use of children as interpreters is absolutely prohibited.

Activity 3.4: SPAN has a bilingual (Spanish) Administrative Assistant who is available to answer phone calls from Spanish-speaking families. Parent Center also has bilingual family information and support staff speaking 8 languages available to speak to non-English speaking families, and prioritizes hiring of bilingual staff and placing them in communities with high numbers of LEP families. SPAN also contracts with the Language Line for families who speak languages other than the languages spoken by SPAN staff. SPAN works with community-based and immigrant-serving organizations to assist in communicating with non-English speaking families. SPAN pays bilingual staff for utilization of their oral and written language translation skills.

Activity 3.5: SPAN informs LEP families of the availability of language assistance via its website as well as a recorded message in Spanish on its answering machine attached to its toll-free number.

Activity 3.6: SPAN informs LEP families that they may access simultaneous translation at workshops, mini-conferences, and statewide conferences, and contracts with qualified, trained interpreters to translate oral presentations simultaneously with the English language presentation using simultaneous translation equipment that SPAN has purchased.

OBJECTIVE 4:

To enhance the capacity of SPAN staff to effectively provide language access to and serve LEP families.

Activity 4.1: SPAN will conduct one linguistic or cultural competence professional development to SPAN staff each year. This professional development will include its policies and procedures for language assistance activities/resources, including how to use SPAN's telephonic interpretation services and how to request translation of SPAN written materials and access such written materials to share with families.

Activity 4.2: SPAN has an on-going Cultural Competence and Language Access workgroup that will oversee implementation and assessment of the Action Plan. The workgroup is facilitated by a bilingual SPAN project director.

OBJECTIVE 5:

To conduct outreach activities that target LEP populations served or encountered by SPAN on services and programs offered by SPAN on an ongoing basis. These activities include providing LEP communities with information about SPAN's benefits and services and language access plans.

Activity 5.1: SPAN organizes events in LEP communities including fairs, community meetings, educational workshops, etc., in collaboration with community-based organizations, including at least one parent leadership development training series in Spanish each year.

Activity 5.2: SPAN disseminates information through LEP media outlets including LEP TV, newspapers, and radio.

Activity 5.3: SPAN routinely distributes flyers, brochures, and other printed material, including DOE/EI documents, in non-English languages, particularly Spanish, including by having materials available at community-based organizations serving LEP families such as immigrant organizations and Family Success Centers.

Activity 5.4: SPAN partners with immigrant and community-based organizations on key projects including having them host parent workshops focused on the rights of families across child- and family-serving systems as well as the rights of LEP families to language access for services offered by government and other non-profit agencies. SPA also contracts with El Club de Padres/Multilingual Center to provide information and training to non-English speaking families.

Activity 5.5: SPAN disseminates information through its own and partner websites.

Activity 5.6: SPAN sponsors/co-sponsors and participates in educational, informational, cultural and social events in LEP communities on an ongoing basis, including collaborating with the state immigrant advocacy organization in providing workshops to LEP families on their language access rights and advocacy strategies to secure language access.

Certification of Language Access Plan Approval for Parent Center

SPAN's language access plan meets the standards and criteria outlined in the following checklist:

APPROVAL CHECKLIST

A successful Language Access Plan aligns the overall furnished information or rendered services, programs or activities to improvement objectives with the following three criteria. To qualify as an approved Language Access Plan for a specific covered entity, the plan must meet these criteria. It is critical that Language Access planning not be viewed or treated as a separate exercise. There must be strong connections between the proposed program, services, or activities of the covered entity and the plan improvements.

____ The plan establishes clear goals and a realistic strategy for the covered entity to provide public services, programs, and activities State residents with limited or no-English proficiency.

____ The plan provides for a sufficient budget to acquire and maintain the public services, programs, and activities that will be needed to implement the strategy for improved data collection, oral language services and written language services.

____ The plan includes an evaluation process that enables Parent Center's Board, Director, and the Cultural and Linguistic Competence Outreach and Support Director to track and monitor progress toward the specified goals and make mid-course corrections in response to new developments and opportunities as they arise.

Approved by:

Parent Center Board President: _____ Date: _____

Parent Center Director: _____ Date: _____

Cultural/Linguistic Competence Director: _____ Date: _____