



U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION  
1335 East West Highway, Suite 4300  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

June 2, 2016

Contact: Bryan Whitener  
(301) 563-3961

## **EAC Summit Promotes Language Access for American Voters in 2016 Elections**

*Builds on Efforts to Improve Accessible Voting and Recruit More Election Workers*

[Access the Webcast Here](#)

**COLLEGE PARK, MD** – The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and Democracy Fund Action (DFA) jointly convened election officials, voting experts and language officials today to highlight methods to provide information to American voters whose primary language is other than English.

Nearly 250 jurisdictions across the country have voter language requirements other than English.

“The thoughts and ideas expressed at today’s summit were invigorating and insightful,” said EAC Chairman Thomas Hicks. “The summit reinforced our commitment at EAC to help develop and promote strategies for serving language minority voters in the 2016 election and beyond,” he said. “Our language glossary translations and election worker manual are but a few of the superb new examples from our BeReady16 resource tools that the election community can leverage to the benefit of voters across the nation immediately.”

“Americans speak many languages, and election officials are essential to ensuring the views and votes of minority-language speakers are a part of our political process. Of the 8,000 election jurisdictions nationwide, many face complicated challenges in meeting legal requirements and diverse voter needs. The Election Assistance Commission, election officials, and advocates all have a role to play in solving complex language issues such as ballot translation and bilingual poll worker training,” said Adam Ambrogio, Program Director, Democracy Fund Action.

Participants reviewed the various federal legal and statutory requirements for serving voters who speak alternate languages. Topics included which languages are covered, which voting materials can or must be translated, the logistical and cost considerations for translating and providing these materials to voters, along with guidelines for designing minority language ballots.

Panelists offered perspectives on the types of language issues that communities face and how these issues may vary by geographic region and by community. Panelists also explored the various methods, techniques and media outlets they are using to reach these voters.

Today's discussion was led by EAC Chairman Hicks and DFA Program Director Ambrogi. Moderating the panels were: Matthew Masterson, Vice Chair, EAC; Christy McCormick, Commissioner, EAC; Terry Ao Minnis, Senior Fellow, DFA; and Stacey Scholl, Program Associate, DFA.

Panelists considered various tools being used to serve voters who speak in languages other than English. Election officials and language experts offered insights and recommend resource materials to use when translating voting materials into multiple languages, when considering language differences by region or dialect and, and when working in a large or small voting jurisdictions.

The ideas and information shared in today's discussion were well received among the participants.

“In every community, we have to listen to the needs of all of the organizations, and we have to work together year-round, not just election time. That's how you are able to find poll workers, polling places and promote options like vote by mail and early voting.” - Lance Gough, Executive Director, Chicago Election Board.

“More than 13.1 million Latino voters are expected to cast ballots in 2016. While historic, we know millions more will stay at home on Election Day,” said Arturo Vargas, NALEO Educational Fund Executive Director. “As Election 2016 approaches without the full protections of the Voting Rights Act, it is critically important that election officials, advocates, and experts come together as they did today to share and amplify strategies for ensuring that every American enjoys full and equal access to the ballot, regardless of the languages he or she speaks.” - Erin Hustings, National Association of Latino Elected Officials.

“It was fantastic to hear from jurisdictions all over the country. I was struck by the fact that, despite the diversity of cultures, languages and communities, there was one common thread: consult the community first. Ask them about their needs and the best way to meet those needs.” - Natalie Landreth, Native American Rights Fund.

“Because language access is cultural access, this conversation among key leaders about authentically and intentionally employing all available tools to ensure that all voters can exercise their franchise is critical for our democracy.” - Mee Moua, President and Executive Director, Asian Americans Advancing Justice.

“Providing language assistance is the right thing to do. All voters have a right to vote independently and with dignity regardless of the type of assistance requested.” - Grace Wachlarowicz, City of Minneapolis, MN.

Today's event follows EAC's recent launch of a *National Competition for Best Practices for Recruiting, Training and Retaining Election Workers*, and panelists today explored specific techniques and successful practices for attracting more bilingual election workers. For more information about the competition, visit the [BeReady16 page for Election Worker Best Practices](#).

The event today also follows EAC's April 27 public hearing to explore ways to make voting more accessible for individuals with disabilities. The Commission is making resources available on its website for election officials to use to ensure polling places and other election services are accessible for all voters, including minority language populations as part of its [#BeReady16 effort](#).

For more information and to access the meeting agenda, list of participants and webcast, visit [Summit on Language Access in Elections](#).

*The EAC is an independent bipartisan commission created by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002. HAVA was passed by the U.S. Congress to make sweeping reforms to the nation's voting process, address improvements to voting systems and voter access that were identified following the 2000 election, and to provide federal funding to states for new voting equipment. HAVA mandates that the EAC test and certify voting equipment, maintain the National Voter Registration form, conduct research, and administer a national clearinghouse on elections that includes shared practices, information for voters and other resources to improve elections. More information is available at [EAC.gov](#).*