



# Language Access: Starting Small in Order to Build

Room 108

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# What to expect during this session:

- Introduction to Language Access, what it is and what it isn't
- How Language Access is a vehicle for equitable community engagement
- Tools for starting small with language access in communities of all sizes and shapes

# Language Access in Massachusetts



Nearly 1 in 10 Massachusetts residents are considered limited English proficient



# MAPC's History with Language Access Work

2021: Established Translation & Interpretation Guide

2022: Need for Language Access Defined

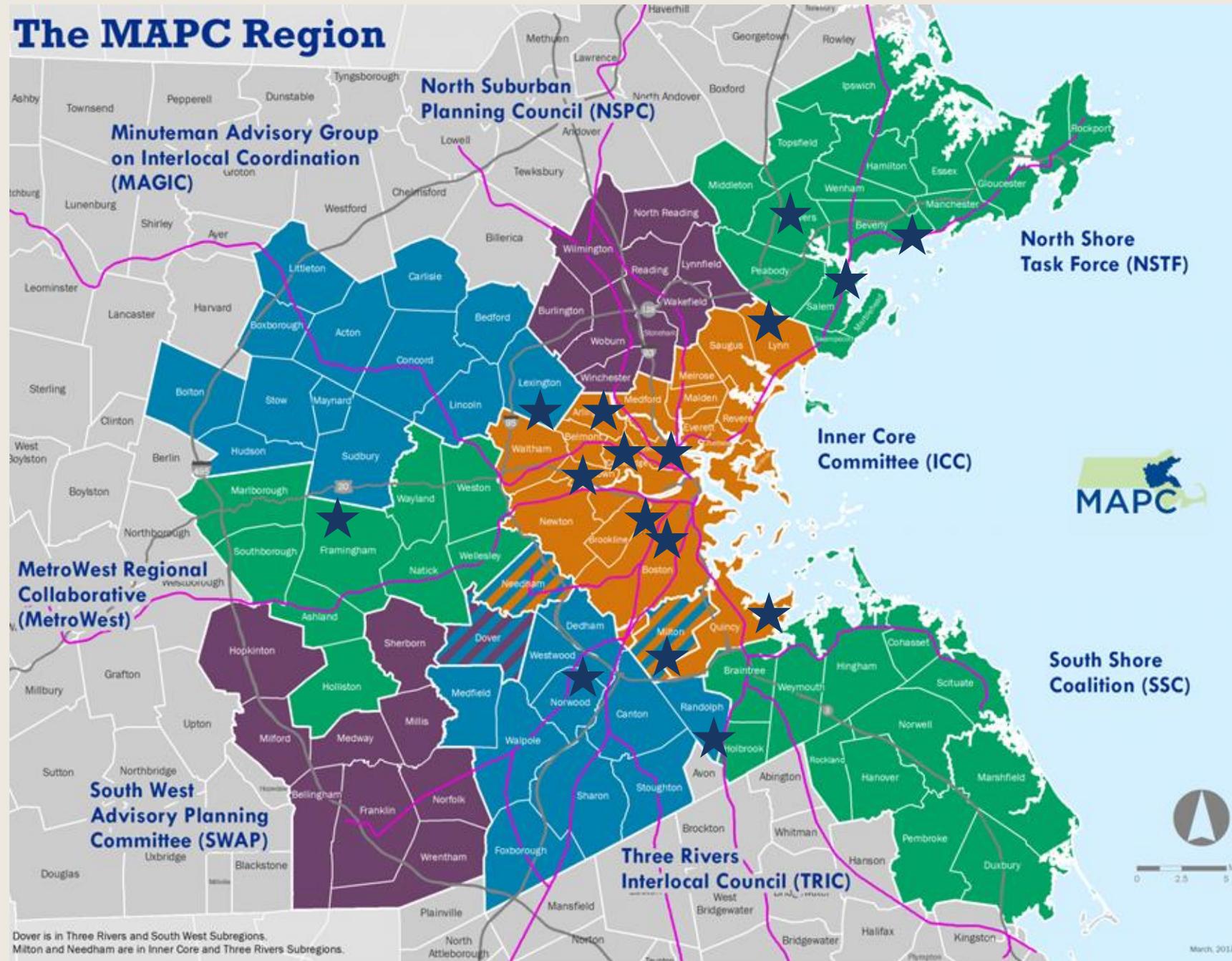
2022-2024: Language Access Project

2024: Language Access Guide

2024-2026:

- Regional Community Interpreter Project
- Establishing Thresholds Project
- Language Access Trainings
- MAPC Language Access Plan

# Language Access Network



## National Partners:

- Municipal Language Access Network

## State & Non-Profit Partners:

- MA Appleseed Coalition
- MA Office of Disability

# What is “Language Access”?

**Language Access** is the practice of designing public process, services and communication that:

- Are offered in plain language;
- Include multiple languages (translation, interpretation or in-language facilitation, multiple modes of access etc);
- Meet people’s access needs (closed captions, sign language interpretation, etc);
- Honor and celebrate people’s cultures.

# Language Access: Things To Remember

- **Language access impacts everyone and must consider all people, this includes:**
  - People with disabilities
  - People with varied literacy levels
  - People who speak different languages
  - People with varied cultural context (even within the same language)
- **Language Access is a moving target, that's why it is a practice, rather than a stagnant set of rules.**
  - This is something we are always working on.
- **Language Access requires a specialized skillset.**
  - This means hiring staff who have that skillset and providing them with support, and/or training staff to have that skillset.

# From Language Access to Language Justice

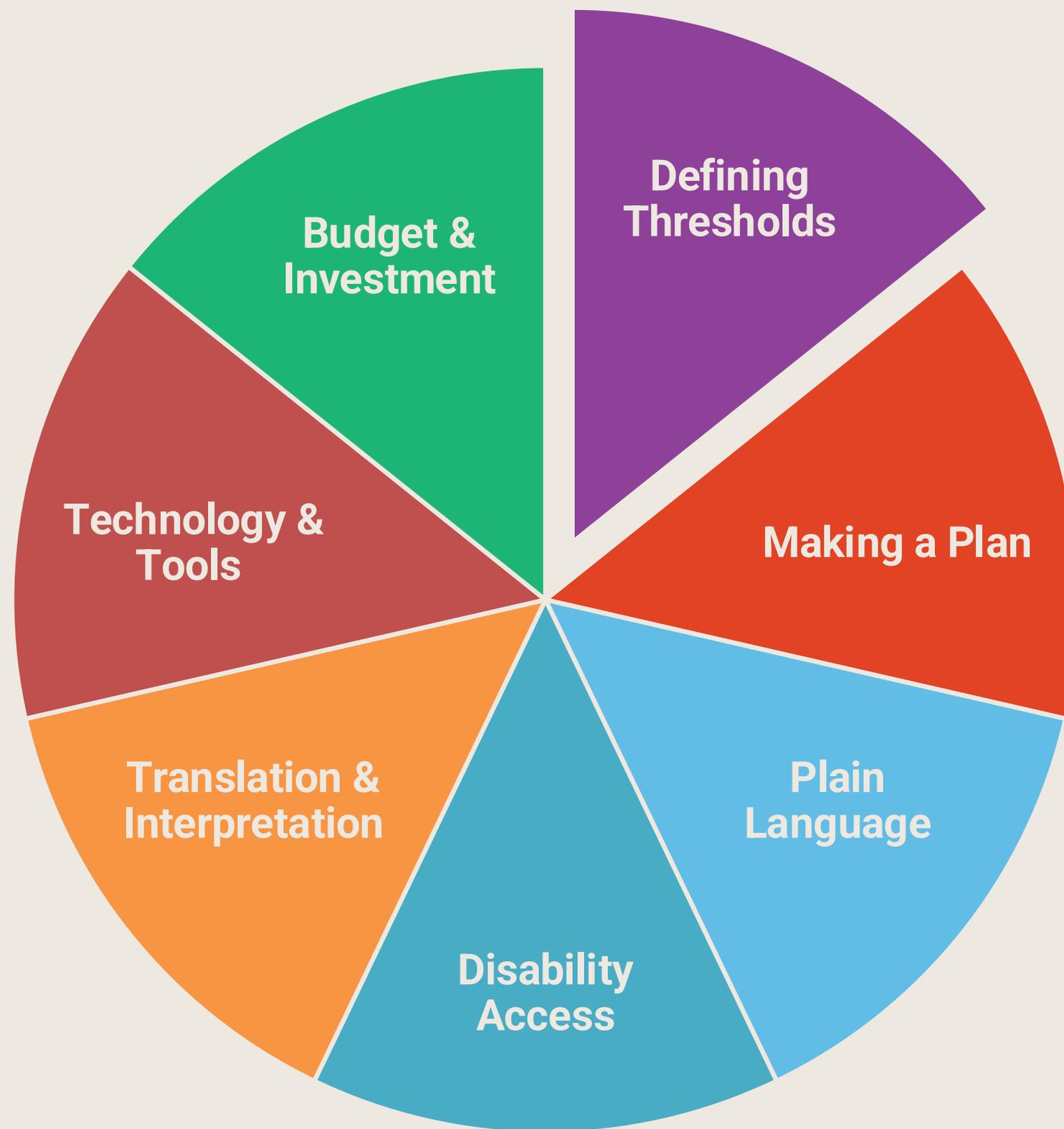
Language Access does not equal Language Justice

We recognize Language Access as a step towards Language Justice.

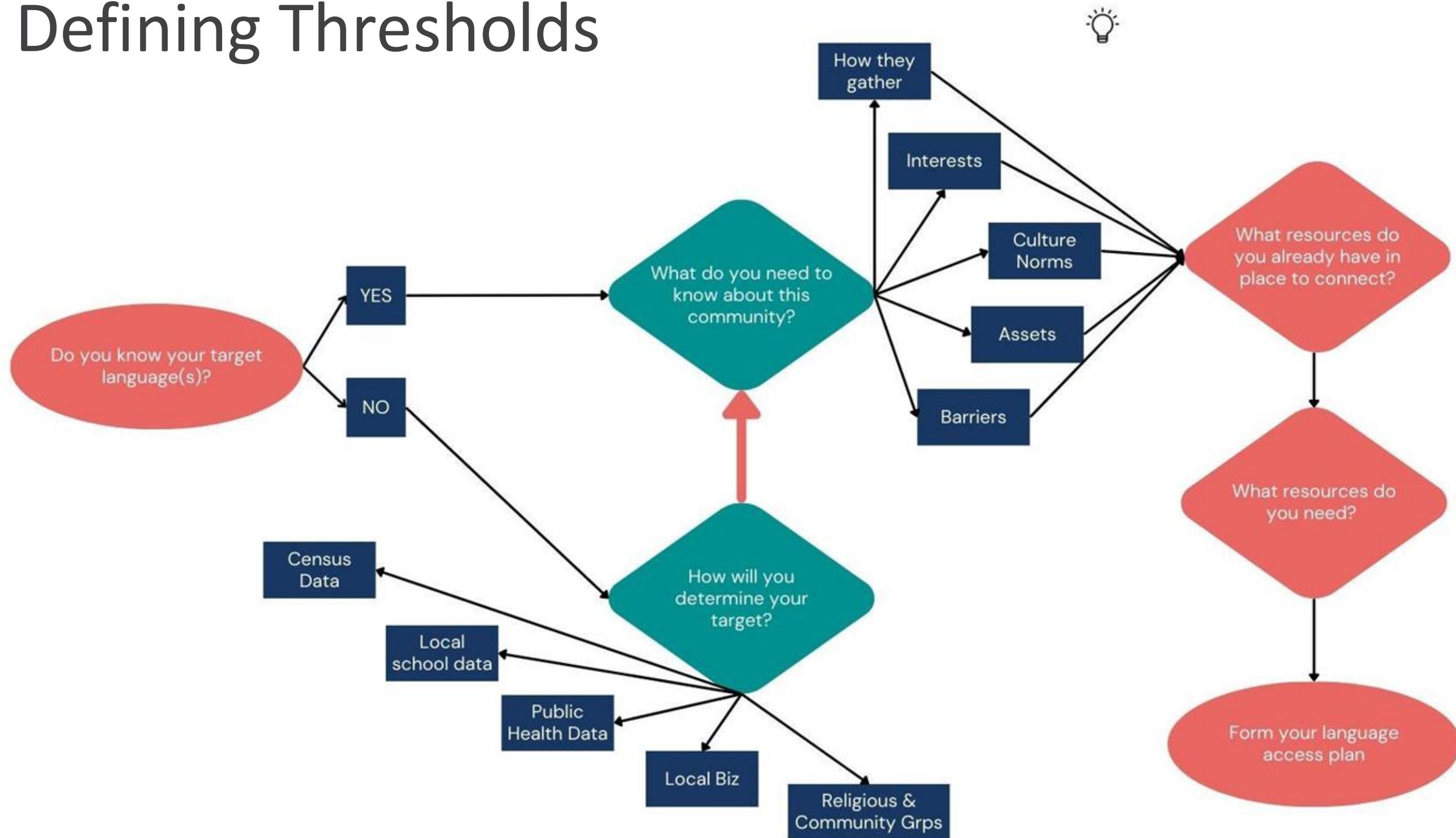
We consider Language Justice to mean:

- Every person can meaningfully take part in all aspects of daily life.
- Our systems and processes consistently adapt to people's needs.
- Every person can not only act but lead in their community in the language and format that works best for them.

# Elements of Language Access



# Defining Thresholds



# Making a Plan

## Within One Activity

- Set purpose of activity
- Identify goals within that purpose
- Determine who you're reaching
- Determine how to reach them (What will be effective?)
- Identify resources available
- Set timeline for coordination of language access
- Set evaluation metrics

## For a Process

- Policy that established foundational requirements
- Practices that staff abide by
- Process & standards for providing services
- Budget for training, tools, practices
- Metrics for evaluation & improvement

# Tools for Navigating Language Access

- Have a plan for community meetings
- Write in plain language
- Show your compassion by:
  - schedule additional time
  - speak directly to the community member
  - speak clearly at a measured pace
  - explain technical terms
  - explain confidentiality
  - demonstrate cultural humility

# Interpretation for Community Meetings

## Planning

### At least 6 weeks before

- Be sure to translate event materials for outreach.
- Provide enough notice to Language Access Manager ensure availability.
- Request simultaneous interpretation.
- If the meeting is longer than 1 hr., hire 2 interpreters per language.
- Ask interpreters to arrive at least 30 mins before the meeting and add 30 mins after the event for possible spillover time.

## Logistics

### 2 weeks before

Share the event agenda and handouts with interpreters, presentation, or speaking notes summarizing the important points.

### 1 week before

- Confirm interpreters have materials and information to attend the meeting.
- If the meeting is online, enable the chat function to allow interpreters to communicate with event organizers.

# How to Confirm Community Use

## Interpretation on Zoom

### Custom Registration Question

- Make sure this question is set to “optional” and is not required.

### Meeting Registration

**First Name\***  **Last Name\***

**Email Address\***

Need an interpreter? Request one by April 26. **Seleccione el idioma que necesita** | chwazi lang ou bezwen an | আপনার প্রয়োজনীয় ভাষা নির্বাচন করুন | ལྟོན་ལཱ་ལེན་གྱི་སྒོམ་ལུ་ | **selecione o idioma que você precisa** | 选择您需要的语言 | حدد اللغة التي تريدها

**Questions & Comments**

Information you provide when registering will be shared with the [account owner](#) and host and can be used and shared by them in accordance with their Terms and Privacy Policy.

[Register](#)

# Additional Ways to Confirm Use

## Outreach Materials

Add a Call to Action for community to use to address their needs.

“To request an interpreter for this event or for additional support accessing the materials or space, please contact. . .”

Please contact the Language Access Manager if you are going to list:

**[accesshelp@cambridgema.gov](mailto:accesshelp@cambridgema.gov)**



To register, please visit:

**[bit.ly/3vJP66T](https://bit.ly/3vJP66T)**

Registration is encouraged but not required.

## Pathway for Immigrant Workers is for employees and businesses

### Employees

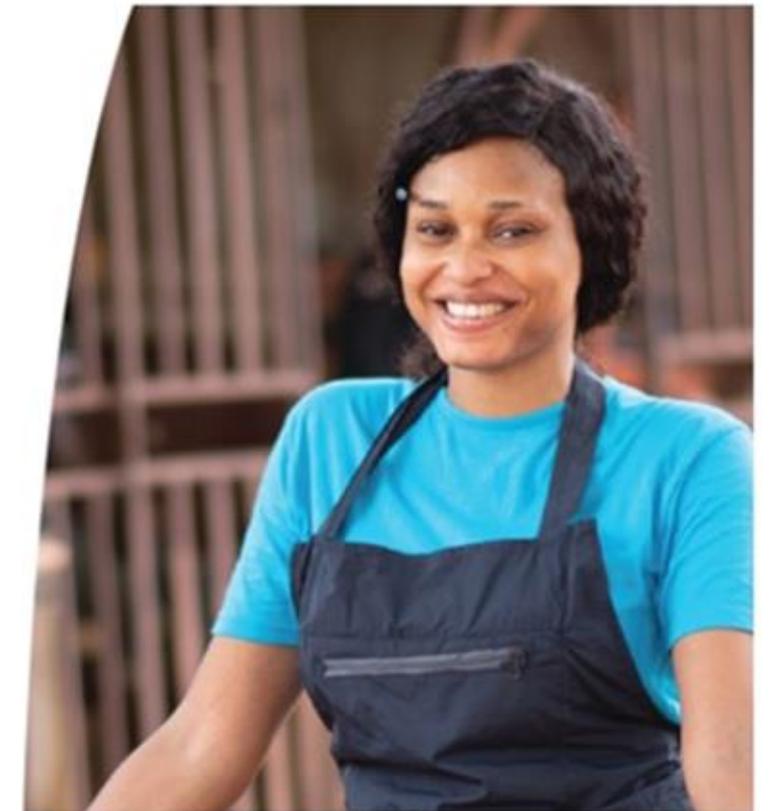
Pathway will help you assess your options for lawful permanent residence in the United States through sponsorship by your employer.

### Business owners

Pathway can provide you with pro bono legal services when you would not otherwise have the means to sponsor a lower-waged worker for a green card.

To request an interpreter for this event or for additional support accessing the materials or space, please contact **[sbinney@cambridgema.gov](mailto:sbinney@cambridgema.gov)**

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# Why is plain language important?

Plain Language is writing that is clear, concise, and well organized. It helps make information easy to understand the first time it is encountered.

Plain language benefits everyone, increases engagement, and saves money!

When we write in plain language, we help our audiences:

- Find the information they need
- Understand what they find
- Use what they find to meet their needs

# Resource: Hemingway Editor App

Free Website:

<https://hemingwayapp.com/>

Highlights wordy sentences in **yellow** and more problematic ones in **red**.

Clarifies writing by highlighting adverbs, passive voice, and complicated words.

**Tip:** More text = Broader range.

**Use smaller chunks of text to get an accurate reading level.**

# Resource: Writing for Busy Readers AI Prompt

“Edit this in the style of Todd Rogers and Jessica Lasky-Fink, who wrote the book Writing for Busy Readers. Here are the 6 principles from the book:

1. Use enough formatting, but no more
2. Design for navigation (everyone skims!)
3. Less is more
4. Make reading easy
5. Tell readers why they should care
6. Make responding easy

Describe how your edits reflect those 6 principles.”



# Questions to Guide Your Writing

- Will my readers find the main points easily?
- Is the message direct and concise?
- Can headers and vertical lists be used to improve skimming?
- What actions do my readers need to take next?

# Basic Steps for Improvement:

- Separate ideas per paragraph
- Reorganize information based on importance
- Prioritize ideas based on why the reader should care
- Make key information immediately visible with headers & bullet points
- Add headers that lead to instructional bullets.
- Use shorter sentences
- Remove unnecessary words to make the message more concise.
- Change tense to speak directly to the audience and make it relatable.
- Simplify paragraphs to improve readability and follow through.

# Hemingway Editor

## Score: Grade 12

### Our Panel Workshop Description

The screenshot shows the Hemingway Editor interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Hemingway Editor logo and several buttons: "File Plus", "Fix Grammar Plus", "Rewrite Plus", "Paragraph", "B", "I", and "Menu". Below the navigation bar, the text of the document is displayed. The text is highlighted in yellow, indicating readability issues. The text reads: "Language Access: Starting Small in Order to Build. Are all members of your community able to access the information and services they need, despite the language they speak? If you're unsure, it might be time to explore language access and re-evaluate your community engagement efforts. Join us for a conversation with experts who will take us through their language access journeys. This workshop will break down some of the barriers to equitable community engagement by highlighting language access best practices and ways that municipalities implement different means of communication to reach their community members. Getting started with language access can be daunting, but don't let the perfect be the enemy of good — you just have to start somewhere. Everyone can address language access. Join us to explore how you can contribute and get your municipality started."

On the right side of the interface, there is a sidebar with the following information:

- Buttons: "Write", "Edit", "Feedback"
- Readability: "Grade 12", "OK. Aim for 9."
- Words: "Words: 138", "Show more stats"
- Feedback items:
  - 1 of 8 sentences is very hard to read.
  - 4 of 8 sentences are hard to read.
  - Find grammar and spelling issues with Editor Plus. Upgrade
  - 1 weakener. View details
  - 3 words with simpler alternatives.

# Hemingway Editor Score: Grade 6

## Language Access: Start Small. Build Momentum.

**Can everyone in your community understand and use your services—no matter what language they speak?**

If you're not sure, you're not alone. Many municipalities want to improve language access but don't know where to start.

### Why this workshop matters

Language barriers limit who can participate in civic life. This session helps you:

- Identify gaps in how you share information
- Learn practical language access best practices
- See real examples from municipalities that started small—and made progress

### What you'll gain

- Clear, doable first steps (no perfection required)
- Insights from experts who've been there
- Ideas you can adapt to your community right away

**You don't have to fix everything at once.**

Progress starts with one action.



# THANK YOU!

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