



Highlights of [GAO-10-91](#), a report to congressional requesters

### Why GAO Did This Study

Executive Order 13166 (August 11, 2000) directs each federal agency to improve access to federal programs and services for persons with limited English proficiency (LEP). Using guidance issued by DOJ, agencies are generally required to develop recipient guidance and/or an LEP plan outlining steps for ensuring that LEP persons can access federal services and programs. As requested, GAO (1) determined which agencies have completed their recipient guidance and LEP plan, (2) assessed the extent to which the selected agencies have implemented the Executive Order consistent with DOJ's guidance, and (3) examined DOJ's and the three selected agencies' efforts to enhance collaboration. GAO analyzed the Executive Order and agencies' recipient guidance and plans posted on LEP.gov; selected the IRS, FEMA, and SBA for this review because of the amount and significance of their interaction with LEP persons; and reviewed documentation of agencies' collaborative efforts to provide access to federal services.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOJ, DHS, FEMA, IRS, and SBA take a variety of steps to ensure that LEP persons can access federal services and programs. All five agencies agreed with our recommendations and provided technical changes that have been incorporated into this report, as appropriate.

To view the Spanish translation of this highlights page, please see <http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d10685high.pdf>.

View [GAO-10-91](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-6806 or [goldenkoffr@gao.gov](mailto:goldenkoffr@gao.gov).

## LANGUAGE ACCESS

### Selected Agencies Can Improve Services to Limited English Proficient Persons

#### What GAO Found

As of February 2010, 22 agencies have completed their recipient guidance. Additionally, DOJ has reported receiving LEP plans from 58 federal agencies. However, the total number of agencies required to complete recipient guidance and an LEP plan cannot be determined because the Executive Order makes agencies responsible for determining the need for guidance and a plan based on their interaction with LEP persons and does not require agencies to report on the results of their determination. Consequently, some agencies may determine that drafting a recipient guidance or an LEP plan is not necessary. Further, although the Executive Order requires agencies to make recipient guidance public, the same requirement does not exist for plans. DOJ's guidance contains four elements for improving access to federal programs and services by LEP persons. IRS has fully addressed each of these elements, while FEMA and SBA have made less progress, as shown in the table below.

**Elements for Improving LEP Access Addressed by the Selected Agencies**

Element	Description	IRS	FEMA	SBA
1. Agency commitment	Issuance and implementation of agencywide LEP plan and issuance of guidance to funding recipients, as well as integrating services into strategic planning, processes, and resource allocation.	●	●	●
2. Needs assessment	Collection of data on size of LEP customer base, frequency of contact, and the level of service provision needed.	●	●	○
3. Service delivery	Systematic and strategic provision of services and outreach provided through internal resources, technology, and partner organizations.	●	●	●
4. Monitoring	Stakeholder feedback, ongoing measurement of resources used and program outputs and outcomes, and compliance with civil rights requirements.	●	●	●

● Fully implemented ● Partially implemented ○ Not implemented

Source: GAO analysis of Executive Order 13166 and DOJ guidance.

IRS has centralized its language access services within one office, overseen by an agencywide executive council. Additionally, IRS regularly identifies the LEP populations it serves, administers a variety of targeted language access services, and monitors these services for potential improvements. FEMA has demonstrated agency commitment, identified LEP populations, and delivered services during disasters, but it lacks a structured approach to monitor these services. While SBA is continuing to draft its LEP plan, the agency does not conduct a needs assessment, and provides limited monitoring of services to LEP populations.

Among the three agencies GAO reviewed, FEMA collaborates with SBA and IRS to provide LEP persons a centralized location for receiving assistance during a declared disaster. Additionally, these agencies (along with 21 other federal agencies), participate in an Interagency Working Group on LEP issues. GAO identified a potential shared services approach agencies could use for translation and interpretive services.