# Overcoming Language Barriers

The number of immigrants living in the United States continues to grow, increasing the cultural and linguistic diversity of communities across the country. Telecommunicators may therefore encounter unfamiliar languages while handling emergency calls, creating additional challenges in situations where communication must occur quickly and accurately. This course examines the growth and linguistic diversity of the U.S. immigrant population, the impact of language barriers on telecommunicators and emergency responders, and the services and strategies PSAPs can use to effectively assist callers with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

## Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, learners will be able to:

1. Explain the growing number of cultural and linguistic differences that exist in the U.S.
2. Identify the impact of language barriers on telecommunicators and first responders.
3. Describe the types of translation services and solutions available to call centers.
4. Discuss best practices used by telecommunicators when handling a call from a Limited English Proficient individual.

# Module 1: The Diverse Population of the U.S.

This module examines the growth and changing composition of the immigrant population in the United States and the resulting diversity of languages spoken in communities. Learners explore immigration trends, countries of origin, geographic settlement patterns, and the prevalence of Limited English Proficiency to better understand the language needs PSAPs may encounter.

**Module Objectives**

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Describe recent trends in the size and population share of immigrants in the United States.
2. Identify major countries and regions of origin represented among U.S. immigrants.
3. Explain where immigrant populations are concentrated and how settlement patterns are changing.
4. Describe the linguistic diversity present in U.S. households.
5. Explain the significance of Limited English Proficiency for PSAPs and emergency communications.

**Content/Activities**

- Recent Immigration Statistics
- U.S.-Born vs. Foreign-Born Population
- U.S. Immigrants: Countries of Origin
- Where Immigrants Live in the U.S.
- Metropolitan, Suburban, Small-Town, and Rural Settlement Trends
- Diversity in Language
- Limited English Proficiency Statistics

# Module 2: Understanding Language Barriers

This module introduces the concept of a language barrier and explains how differences in language, dialect, pronunciation, informal speech, and physical communication abilities can interfere with effective communication. Learners examine several types of barriers telecommunicators may encounter when interacting with callers.

**Module Objectives**

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Define a language barrier and explain its impact on verbal communication.
2. Distinguish among foreign-language differences, dialects, pidgin, accents, and slang.
3. Explain how regional and cultural differences can affect understanding between callers and telecommunicators.
4. Identify language disabilities that may create communication barriers.
5. Recognize how both verbal and non-verbal communication influence understanding.

**Content/Activities**

- What Is a Language Barrier?
- Foreign Languages
- Dialects and Pidgin
- Accents
- Slang
- Language Disabilities
- Communication Through Verbal and Non-Verbal Forms

# Module 3: The Challenges of Language Barriers

This module explores the challenges language barriers create during emergency calls and examines the responsibilities of PSAPs when serving LEP individuals. Learners review federal language-access requirements, the effects of communication delays and misunderstandings, and the importance of ensuring that all community members perceive 911 as an accessible service.

**Module Objectives**

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Explain how language barriers can affect emergency call processing and responder dispatch.
2. Describe the challenges LEP individuals may experience when accessing 911 and other emergency services.
3. Summarize key federal requirements related to language access and effective communication.
4. Explain how language barriers may affect crime reporting, suspect descriptions, and evidence gathering.
5. Discuss how community perceptions of language access can influence whether individuals seek emergency assistance.

**Content/Activities**

- Video: Emergency Responders Dealing with Language Barrier
- Government Regulations
- Executive Order 13166
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- ADA Title II
- Challenges for Limited English Proficiency Individuals
- The Importance of Perception

# Module 4: Tips and Tools for Telecommunicators

This module focuses on practical strategies PSAPs and telecommunicators can use to prepare for and manage calls involving LEP individuals. Learners examine community demographics, planning and training, translation options, and specific best practices for communicating effectively during emergency calls.

**Module Objectives**

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Use community demographic information to anticipate local language-access needs.
2. Explain the importance of written policies, procedures, and training for handling LEP calls.
3. Compare bilingual staffing and third-party interpretation services as language-access solutions.
4. Apply best practices for communicating with LEP callers and interpreters during emergency calls.
5. Identify strategies for supporting responders and maintaining communication when language barriers delay or complicate a call.

**Content/Activities**

- Understanding Community Demographics and U.S. Census Data
- Prepare and Plan: Policies, Procedures, and Training
- Translation Options: Bilingual Staff and Third-Party Services
- LanguageLine Solutions and Voiance/CryaCom
- Best Practices for Working with LEP Callers
- Call History, Key Emergency Words, and Responder Notification
- Department of Justice Recommendations
- Strategies for Holds, Delays, Hang-Ups, and Callbacks

# Module 5: Knowledge Check

This module provides learners with an opportunity to assess their understanding of the major concepts presented throughout the course. The knowledge check addresses immigration trends, language diversity, types of language barriers, legal requirements, challenges faced by LEP callers, community demographics, and telecommunicator practices.

**Module Objectives**

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Recall key facts regarding U.S. immigrant and language demographics.
2. Differentiate among common types of language barriers.
3. Identify legal requirements related to access for LEP individuals.
4. Recognize resources and strategies PSAPs can use to address language needs.
5. Apply course concepts to questions involving communication with LEP callers.

**Content/Activities**

- 10-Question Knowledge Check
- Immigration and Settlement Trends Questions
- Language Diversity and Dialect Questions
- Government Regulation Questions
- LEP Communication Challenges Questions
- Community Demographic Resource Questions
- Telecommunicator Best-Practice Questions

# Module 6: Conclusion

This module summarizes the major concepts presented throughout the course. Learners revisit the continued growth and linguistic diversity of the U.S. immigrant population, the effects of language barriers on emergency communications, and the services and strategies PSAPs can use to engage Limited English Proficiency callers effectively.

**Module Objectives**

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Summarize the relationship between population diversity and language-access needs in emergency communications.
2. Explain the primary effects of language barriers on telecommunicators, responders, and callers.
3. Identify language-access services available to PSAPs.
4. Recall key strategies for communicating effectively with LEP callers.
5. Recognize the importance of preparing PSAP personnel and resources to serve linguistically diverse communities.

**Content/Activities**

- Course Summary
- Review of U.S. Population and Language Diversity
- Review of Language-Barrier Impacts
- Review of Translation Services and Strategies
- Review of LEP Caller Best Practices
- Course References

# Course Completion Criteria

To successfully complete this course and earn continuing education hours, learners must achieve a minimum score of 75%. The quiz must be completed within 30 minutes.

- CE hours awarded: 1
- Certificate duration: 12 Months

## Technical Requirements

- Desktop, laptop, or mobile device
- Speakers or headphones
- High-speed Internet access
- A current web browser