

2026 City of Seattle – Most Commonly Spoken Languages

Recommended Languages

We recommend the following **priority languages** for communications about **citywide programs and services**. Our recommendations are based on surveys and records of in-language interactions with local agencies. We used several data sources to identify languages spoken by large Seattle communities, especially people with limited English proficiency and recent refugees and immigrants. You can find the data we used at the end of this report. Every three years, we work with the City Demographer to update this report and our recommendations.

#	2026 Most Commonly Spoken Languages
1	Spanish
2	Chinese*
3	Vietnamese
4	Somali
5	Amharic
6	Tagalog
7	Korean
8	Tigrinya
9	Oromo
10	Japanese
11	Russian
12	Persian (including Farsi, Dari)**
13	Arabic
14	Portuguese
15	French

* Chinese has two written forms: Traditional and Simplified. Most people who read one can also understand the other. For written materials, we recommend translating into Traditional Chinese. This choice fits Seattle's Chinese-language community and their English skills. For spoken communication (interpretation), we recommend offering both Mandarin and Cantonese.

** Farsi (Iranian Persian) and Dari (Afghan Persian) are similar when written, so readers of one can usually understand the other. When spoken, the two are less similar because of differences in pronunciation, grammar and regional vocabulary. For spoken communication (interpretation), we recommend pairing Farsi speakers from Iran with a Farsi interpreter and Dari speakers from Afghanistan with a Dari interpreter. For written materials, we recommend translating into Dari or Farsi, but for City department communications it usually isn't necessary to translate into both languages.

Tips for collecting additional language data. In addition to the citywide data provided in this report, departments need more specific data to tailor their outreach and engagement. Here are some suggestions to track relevant information about languages and language services:

- Ask about language preferences in intake forms, applications, and surveys by including questions like “What language do you speak most often at home?” or “What is your preferred spoken language?”. To address mistrust, consider adding a statement like “We collect information about languages to better understand who we are serving and improve our services. Your answers will be kept confidential.”
- Gather requests for language assistance when you tell participants that translation and interpretation services are available. For translation, include a question like “In what language would you prefer to receive written information?” For interpretation, include a question like “Do you need an interpreter for phone calls, meetings, and events?”
- Set up a system to track preferred language data in a shared departmental database. Ideally, you will track the languages you encounter, number of encounters per language, requests for language assistance, and type of language assistance provided (or reason for not providing the requested assistance).
- Offer a way for community members to share feedback, such as a feedback form or a listening session.
- Talk with community-based organizations, Department of Neighborhoods Community Liaisons, and other community partners to better understand what your audiences need and prefer.
- Review language preference data, language assistance data, and community feedback regularly, and adjust your language access approach as needed.

Importance of planning and budgeting ahead. Departments should use this report, as well as any language preference data they collect, to plan for interpretation and translation needs at the start of each project. Based on available resources and project goals, departments should decide which languages to support and how to tell participants about available language services. When resources are limited, we recommend supporting a smaller set of languages consistently throughout an entire project. Spreading resources too thin tends to weaken overall language support and may damage trust with communities.

Communicating with newly arrived refugees and immigrants. To support newly arrived refugees and immigrants, we recommend prioritizing languages shown in Public Health-Seattle & King County’s Refugee Screening Clinic data (see the Multisource Language Data Table below) or in data from the [WA State Department of Social and Health Services \(DSHS\) Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance](#).

Neighborhood-specific or sector-based community outreach and engagement. Departments may need to prioritize different languages when working in specific neighborhoods or sectors. For example, when reaching out to families who have school-aged children, pay attention to Seattle Public Schools’ language data (see the Multisource Language Data Table below). If your program’s participants mostly live in certain Seattle neighborhoods, use these links to see the most common languages in those neighborhoods:

- [OPCD Neighborhood Snapshots](#)
- [ACS Neighborhood Profile Builder](#)

Data Sources

This report is based on data from eight sources:

- The American Community Survey (ACS) conducted by the United States Census Bureau
- Seattle Public Schools (SPS)
- Public Health-Seattle & King County (PHSKC)
- Seattle Immigration Court (SIC)
- Seattle Housing Authority (SHA)
- Seattle Municipal Court (SMC)

- LanguageLine
- CiviForm

The Multisource Language Data Table below (pages 5-8) presents data from these sources in detail.

Analysis

We took the following steps to identify the priority languages for communicating citywide programs and services:

1. We standardized some categories of languages across all data sources, following conventions in the ACS.

- a. Chinese spoken languages such as Mandarin, Cantonese, and Taishanese were grouped under “Chinese.”
- b. Instances of Cambodian and Khmer were grouped under “Khmer.”
- c. Instances of Farsi and Dari were grouped under “Persian.”
- d. Instances of Tagalog and Filipino were grouped under “Tagalog.”

2. We disaggregated some ACS language groups using available data.

Context: This report draws on data from ACS Table B16001, which lists languages spoken at home by people aged 5 years and older, grouped by their ability to speak English. From this table, we gathered the 2019-2024 five-year estimates of people who speak a language other than English *and* speak English less than “very well.” Table B16001 provides the most detailed spoken language data of all ACS data tables that the Census Bureau publishes using the full sample of ACS data. However, some languages that are common in the City of Seattle or King County are not shown separately in ACS Table B16001. Instead, they are grouped into broader language categories, which we disaggregated.

- a. We used 5-year [ACS Public Use Microdata Sample \(PUMS\)](#) data from 2019-2024, obtained from [IPUMS USA](#), to distribute estimates for some language groups across individual languages. ACS PUMS estimates are based on a subset of the original sample and therefore can be unreliable for small population groups. To obtain more reliable estimates, we included data from both Seattle and King County and averaged the two. This report assumes that the proportional distribution in Seattle of people speaking English less than “very well” in each language group can be reasonably compared to the corresponding distribution in King County.

Using ACS PUMS estimates, we distributed the following language groups as described below:

- i. “Ukrainian or other Slavic languages” (not including Russian, Polish, and Serbo-Croatian languages, which are reported individually): Ukrainian 71.1%, Bulgarian 16.7%, Czech 12.0%, with the remainder comprised of other Slavic languages less commonly spoken in our area.
 - ii. “Ilocano, Samoan, Hawaiian, or other Austronesian languages” (not including Tagalog, which is reported individually): Ilocano 33.0%, Indonesian 21.4%, Samoan 17.3%, with the remainder comprised of other Austronesian languages less commonly spoken in our area.
 - iii. “Thai, Lao, or other tai-Kadai languages”: Thai 73.5%, Lao 26.5%.
- b. The distribution of estimates across individual languages in the “Amharic, Somali, or other Afro-Asiatic languages” category required a different method because IPUMS USA does not provide sufficiently disaggregated data for this language group. For these languages, we used the proportional distribution of the languages found in the Seattle Public Schools’ Home Language Survey to distribute the category as follows: Somali 37.7%, Amharic 25.0%, Oromo 21.5%, Tigrinya 16.3%, with the remainder comprised of other Afro-Asiatic languages less commonly spoken in our area.

3. We divided the data sets into two types: (1) data sets that count people and (2) data sets that count interactions with public programs in Seattle or services received from these programs.

The ACS and SPS surveys are language surveys counting individual speakers of languages, while the other data sets reflect records of events and situations in which language assistance played a role. We chose to separate the two types of data and weigh them differently, assuming there would be duplication, aggregation, and gaps in the data sets counting interactions. For example, a Seattle resident might have an interpreted phone call with a City department once, more than once, or not at all.

4. For the two data sets that count people, we calculated each data set's relative size:

Data Source	Number of People	Percentage of Total
ACS Language Spoken at Home by Persons Speaking English Less Than "Very Well"	51,703	81.1%
Seattle Public Schools Home Language Survey	12,074	18.9%
Total	63,777	100.0%

5. For the six data sets that count interactions or services received, we assigned equal weight to every set.

6. We combined the two types of data sets by assigning 80% of the total weight to the two data sets that count people and 20% of the total weight to the six data sets that count interactions or services received.

We maintained the size ratio of ACS data to SPS data in this step, so 81.1% of the 80%, or 64.9%, went to ACS. Similarly, 18.9% of the 80%, or 15.1%, went to SPS. The six data sets that count interactions or services each received 3.3% for a total of $6 \times 3.3\% = 20\%$.

Data Source	Individual Sources	Sources grouped by type
ACS Language Spoken at Home by Persons Speaking English Less Than "Very Well"	64.9%	80%
Seattle Public Schools Home Language Survey	15.1%	
Public Health-Seattle and King County – Patient Visits Requiring Language Assistance	3.3%	20%
Seattle Immigration Court – Pending Cases by Language	3.3%	
Seattle Housing Authority – Households Residing in SHA Units by Language	3.3%	
Seattle Municipal Court – Requests for Interpretation	3.3%	
LanguageLine – Interpreted Calls for all City of Seattle Departments	3.3%	
CiviForm – Preferred Language in Applications to City of Seattle Programs	3.3%	
Total	100%	100%

7. We applied these percentages across all data sources to find weighted counts for each language.

8. Finally, we used the weighted counts to determine the priority languages for communicating citywide programs and services.

For questions and more information:

Please contact OIRA’s Language Access Program at IMR_LanguageAccess@seattle.gov with any language access-related questions and for more information about this report.

MULTISOURCE LANGUAGE DATA TABLE*

American Community Survey (ACS)			Seattle Public Schools (SPS)	Public Health-Seattle & King County (PHSKC)		Seattle Immigration Court	Seattle Housing Authority (SHA)	Seattle Municipal Court	LanguageLine	CiviForm
Language Spoken at Home and English Proficiency				Patient Visits Requiring Language Assistance		Pending Cases by Language	Households Residing in SHA Units by Language	Requests for Interpretation	Interpreted Calls for all City of Seattle Departments	Preferred Language in Applications to City of Seattle Programs
2019-2024 Five-Year Estimates			Primary Language – Language Student First Learned (Pre-K to 12)	2023-2025		2026	2026	(Percentages only) 2024-2026	2025-2026	2023-2026
(Numbers and percentages shown are for Seattle residents aged five and older)										
Broad estimates:			2025-2026 School Year							
- Total population aged five and older: 722,198 - Speak languages other than English: 170,795 (23.6%) - Speak English “less than very well:” 51,703 (7.2%)										
	ACS Language Spoken at Home**	ACS Language Spoken at Home by Persons Speaking English Less Than "Very Well"		PHSKC – Columbia and Downtown Clinics (Excluding Refugee Screening)	PHSKC – Refugee Screening Clinic					
1	Chinese (including Mandarin,	Chinese (including Mandarin,	Spanish – 3,907 (7.3%)	Spanish – 12,855 (68.6%)	Dari – 4,295 (54.8%)	Spanish –31,725 (69.6%)	Somali – 662 (10.4%)	Spanish (52.1%)	Spanish – 23,705 (63.2%)	Traditional Chinese – 2,639 (5.9%)

	Cantonese) ~36,036 (5.0%)	Cantonese) ~14,861 (2.1%)								
2	Spanish ~34,234 (4.7%)	Spanish ~9,500 (1.3%)	Somali – 903 (1.7%)	Lingala – 816 (4.4%)	Pashto – 1,250 (16.0%)	Russian – 2,605 (5.7%)	Vietnamese – 492 (7.7%)	Russian (5.8%)	Vietnamese – 2,270 (6.1%)	Spanish – 1,216 (2.7%)
3	Vietnamese ~11,311 (1.6%)	Vietnamese ~ 6,752 (0.9%)	Vietnamese – 804 (1.5%)	Somali – 743 (4.0%)	Ukrainian – 451 (5.8%)	Punjabi – 1,181 (2.6%)	Tigrinya –290 (4.5%)	Chuukese (4.4%)	Cantonese – 1,481 (3.9%)	Vietnamese – 1,137 (2.5%)
4	Amharic, Somali, or other Afro- Asiatic languages ~11,122 (1.5%)	Amharic, Somali, or other Afro-Asiatic languages ~5,092 (0.7%)	Amharic – 594 (1.1%)	Tigrinya – 618 (3.3%)	Arabic – 358 (4.6%)	Portuguese – 1,031 (2.3%)	Cantonese – 280 (4.4%)	Mandarin (3.6%)	Mandarin – 1,428 (3.8%)	Amharic – 357 (0.8%)
5	Hindi ~9,478 (1.3%)	Tagalog (incl. Filipino) ~ 2,173 (0.3%)	Cantonese – 587 (1.1%)	Amharic – 580 (3.1%)	Tigrinya – 292 (3.7%)	Mandarin – 782 (1.7%)	Amharic – 274 (4.3%)	Vietnamese (2.8%)	Tigrinya – 1,246 (3.3%)	Simplified Chinese – 319 (0.7%)
6	Tagalog (incl. Filipino) ~7,318 (1.0%)	Korean ~1,881 (0.3%)	Mandarin – 520 (1.0%)	French – 496 (2.6%)	Farsi – 252 (3.2%)	Lingala – 699 (1.5%)	Oromo – 187 (2.9%)	Arabic (2.0%)	Amharic – 1,094 (2.9%)	Tigrinya – 247 (0.6%)
7	Korean ~6,059 (0.8%)	Japanese ~1,424 (0.2%)	Oromo – 486 (0.9%)	Portuguese – 282 (1.5%)	Spanish – 237 (3.0%)	Somali – 533 (1.2%)	Spanish – 171 (2.7%)	Marshallese (1.9%)	Somali – 1,091 (2.9%)	Somali – 205 (0.5%)
8	French (incl. Cajun) ~5,164 (0.7%)	Ilocano, Samoan, Hawaiian, or other Austronesian languages ~933 (0.1%)	Tigrinya – 392 (0.7%)	Dari – 153 (0.8%)	Somali – 201 (2.6%)	Hindi – 511 (1.1%)	Mandarin – 106 (1.7%)	Punjabi (1.9%)	Dari – 750 (2.0%)	Russian – 168 (0.4%)
9	Japanese ~5,089 (0.7%)	Thai, Lao, or other Tai-Kadai languages ~910 (0.1%)	Japanese – 282 (0.5%)	Mandarin – 145 (0.8%)	Swahili – 183 (2.3%)	French – 492 (1.1%)	Russian – 79 (1.2%)	Ukrainian (1.6%)	Russian – 651 (1.7%)	Oromo – 98 (0.2%)
10	German ~4,274 (0.6%)	Russian ~768 (0.1%)	Arabic – 233 (0.4%)	Arabic – 142 (0.8%)	Russian – 181 (2.3%)	Wolof – 449 (1.0%)	Khmer –63 (1.0%)	Mam (1.6%)	Arabic – 469 (1.3%)	Tagalog – 86 (0.2%)

11	Russian ~3,799 (0.5%)	Ukrainian or other Slavic languages ~718 (0.1%)	Dari – 230 (0.4%)	Russian – 138 (0.7%)	Burmese – 69 (0.9%)	Haitian Creole – 429 (0.9%)	Arabic – 53 (0.8%)	Somali (1.5%)	French – 391 (1.0%)	Korean – 81 (0.2%)
12	Other Indo- European languages ~2,871 (0.4%)	Hindi ~629 (0.1%)	Portuguese – 212 (0.4%)	Vietnamese – 120 (0.6%)	Oromo – 67 (0.9%)	Tigrinya – 232 (0.5%)	Korean – 33 (0.5%)	Amharic (1.3%)	Portuguese – 352 (0.9%)	Arabic – 62 (0.1%)
13	Ilocano, Samoan, Hawaiian, or other Austronesian languages ~2,806 (0.4%)	Portuguese ~547 (0.1%)	Russian – 195 (0.4%)	Oromo – 117 (0.6%)		Turkish – 232 (0.5%)	Lao – 25 (0.4%)	Korean (1.2%)	Korean – 316 (0.8%)	Khmer – 58 (0.1%)
14	Portuguese ~2,232 (0.3%)	Yoruba, Twi, Igbo, or other languages of Western Africa ~ 534 (0.1%)	Tagalog – 175 (0.3%)	Marshallese – 71 (0.4%)		Arabic – 228 (0.5%)	Farsi – 24 (0.4%)	Samoan (1.1%)	Oromo – 299 (0.8%)	Japanese – 43 (0.1%)
15	Telugu ~2,172 (0.3%)	Arabic ~533 (0.1%)	Soninke – 145 (0.3%)	Pashto –44 (0.2%)		Mam – 228 (0.5%)	Taishanese – 24 (0.4%)	Swahili (1.0%)	Pashto – 173 (0.5%)	Farsi – 15 (less than 0.1%)
16	Persian (incl. Farsi, Dari) ~1,962 (0.3%)	Persian (incl. Farsi, Dari) ~ 521 (0.1%)	Taishanese – 139 (0.3%)	K'iche' – 41 (0.2%)		Ukrainian – 213 (0.5%)	Tagalog – 22 (0.3%)	Farsi (0.9%)	Punjabi – 166 (0.4%)	Thai – 15 (less than 0.1%)
17	Arabic ~1,875 (0.3%)	French (incl. Cajun) ~464 (0.1%)	French – 135 (0.3%)			Dari – 199 (0.4%)	French – 10 (0.2%)	Portuguese (0.9%)	Khmer – 163 (0.4%)	Lao – 14 (less than 0.1%)
18	Ukrainian or other Slavic languages ~1,805 (0.2%)	Khmer ~420 (0.1%)	Unspecified Chinese – 103 (0.2%)			Amharic – 192 (0.4%)		Cantonese (0.9%)	Lingala – 157 (0.4%)	
19	Thai, Lao, or other Tai-	Other languages of Asia ~414	Pashto – 81 (0.2%)			Vietnamese – 148 (0.3%)		French (0.8%)	Farsi – 145 (0.4%)	



	Kadai languages ~1,714 (0.2%)	(0.1%)								
20	Swahili or other languages of Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa ~1,706 (0.2%)	Swahili or other languages of Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa ~369 (0.1%)	Korean – 81 (0.2%)			Kanjobal – 131 (0.3%)		Tigrinya (0.8%)	Ukrainian – 137 (0.4%)	
Notes: *This table focuses on languages other than English, so English is not listed among the languages. However, the <i>percentages</i> provided throughout the table are based on totals that, where applicable, include English language data. **We provide the ACS-derived data on overall population speaking the language at home for reference, but we only use the subset who speak English less than “very well” in calculations to identify priority languages for communicating citywide programs and services. ACS estimates carry margins of error which can be substantial for small populations. We use the “~” symbol next to the ACS estimates as a reminder that they are approximations. The multisource table shows ACS language groups and languages with the largest numbers. For the full set of estimates, consult ACS Table B16001.										