

## City of Seattle Top Tier Languages

Updated 11/14/2020

Below are data points from the America Community Survey (ACS), Seattle Public Schools (SPS), Public Health-Seattle & King County, Seattle Police Department, and Seattle Municipal Court Interpreter Services on most commonly spoken non-English languages by City residents. Based on the data, the City of Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) suggests the following languages as Seattle’s top tier languages for communicating **city-wide programs and services**. These languages are broken into three tiers. We prioritize languages that are used by larger populations, residents with limited English proficiency, and recent immigrants and refugees. In partnership with the City’s Demographer, OIRA will update the data and recommendation once every three years.

Languages are listed in order of increasing to decreasing prevalence within Seattle city boundaries:

- **TIER 1** -Include: **Traditional Chinese\***, **Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Amharic, Korean, Tagalog**
- **TIER 2** - If feasible, include: **Tigrinya, Oromo, Japanese, Russian**
- **TIER 3** - Consider including **Arabic, Khmer, Thai, Laotian**

*\*There are two primary Chinese writing systems: Traditional and Simplified Chinese. The two systems are mutually intelligible. Considering the composition of Seattle’s Chinese language users and their English proficiency, we recommend translating into Traditional Chinese for written materials. For oral interpretation, we should include both Cantonese and Mandarin.*

For **neighborhood-specific or sector-based community outreach**, you may need to prioritize a different set of languages. For example, when you are communicating to families with school-aged children, you should prioritize top languages that are highlighted in the SPS data. Please contact OIRA’s Language Access Program and Policy Specialist, Peggy Liao, at [peggy.liao@seattle.gov](mailto:peggy.liao@seattle.gov) with any language access related questions.

Most Commonly Listed Non-English Languages by Frequency for Each Data Source							
Languages are shown in order of frequency with most frequent first							
	American Community Survey (ACS)		Seattle Public Schools (SPS) Home Language Survey	Public Health-Seattle & King County (PHSKC)		Seattle Police Department (SPD) Communications Center	Seattle Municipal Court (SMC) Interpreter Services
	Language Spoken at Home* 2014-2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates Number and Percent of Seattle Population Age 5 and Older Broad estimates: Total population age 5 and older: 673,638 (denominator) Speak languages other than English: 142,498 (22.2%) Speak English “less than very well:” 53,946 (8.0%)		Preferred Language of Parent/Guardian for Communicating with School** (Pre-K to 12) 2019-2020 School Year	Public Health Patient Visits Requiring Language Assistance*** 2019		Language Requests 911 Calls**** 2019	Requests Received for Interpretation***** 2018-2019  (% estimates refer to share of total requests for interpretation)
	ACS Language Spoken at Home	ACS Language Spoken at Home by Persons Speaking English Less Than "Very Well"		PHSKC - Columbia Public Health Clinic and Downtown Public Health Clinic	PHSKC - Refugee Screening Clinic Operating out of Downtown Public Health Clinic		
1	Chinese (including Mandarin, Cantonese) ~27,459 (4.1%)	Chinese ~14,215 (2.1%)	Spanish – 2,858	Spanish – 4,096	Ukrainian – 683	Spanish	Spanish – 38%
2	Spanish ~27,184 (4.0%)	Spanish ~9,873 (1.5%)	Somali – 1,452	Somali – 1,222	Dari – 610	Vietnamese	Vietnamese – 13%
3	Amharic, Somali, or other Afro-Asiatic languages ~11,482 (1.7%)	Vietnamese ~6,290 (0.9%)	Vietnamese – 1,149	Vietnamese – 279	Russian – 167	Mandarin	Somali – 8%
4	Vietnamese ~10,496 (1.6%)	Amharic, Somali, or other Afro-Asiatic languages ~5,859 (0.9%)	Chinese-Cantonese – 787	Amharic – 170	Tigrinya – 94	Somali	Amharic – 6%
5	Tagalog ~8,171 (1.2%)	Tagalog ~3,241 (0.5%)	Amharic – 595	Tigrinya – 122	Swahili – 71	Oromo	Mandarin – 5%
6	Japanese ~5,119 (0.8%)	Korean ~1,922 (0.3%)	Tigrinya – 431	Oromo – 80	Burmese – 58	Cantonese	Tigrinya – 4%

**Most Commonly Listed Non-English Languages by Frequency for Each Data Source**

Languages are shown in order of frequency with most frequent first

	<b>American Community Survey (ACS)</b> <b>Language Spoken at Home*</b> 2014-2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates <b>Number and Percent of Seattle Population Age 5 and Older</b> Broad estimates: Total population age 5 and older: 673,638 (denominator) Speak languages other than English: 142,498 (22.2%) Speak English "less than very well:" 53,946 (8.0%)		<b>Seattle Public Schools (SPS)</b> <b>Home Language Survey</b>  <b>Preferred Language of Parent/Guardian for Communicating with School**</b> <b>(Pre-K to 12)</b> 2019-2020 School Year	<b>Public Health-Seattle &amp; King County (PHSKC)</b>  <b>Public Health Patient Visits Requiring Language Assistance***</b> 2019		<b>Seattle Police Department (SPD) Communications Center</b>  <b>Language Requests 911 Calls****</b> 2019	<b>Seattle Municipal Court (SMC) Interpreter Services</b>  <b>Requests Received for Interpretation*****</b> 2018-2019  (% estimates refer to share of total requests for interpretation)
	<b>ACS Language Spoken at Home</b>	<b>ACS Language Spoken at Home by Persons Speaking English Less Than "Very Well"</b>		<b>PHSKC - Columbia Public Health Clinic and Downtown Public Health Clinic</b>	<b>PHSKC - Refugee Screening Clinic Operating out of Downtown Public Health Clinic</b>		
7	Korean ~4,905 (0.7%)	Japanese ~1,757 (0.3%)	Oromo – 417	Chinese-Mandarin – 43	Farsi – 49	Arabic	Arabic – 2%
8	French (incl. Cajun) ~4,743 (0.7%)	Ilocano, Samoan, Hawaiian, or other Austronesian languages ~1,220 (0.2%)	Tagalog – 349	Tagalog – 40	French – 43	Tigrigna	Russian – 2%
9	Hindi ~4,151 (0.6%)	Russian ~1,199 (0.2%)	Arabic – 247	French – 39	Arabic – 34	Amharic	
10	German ~3,872 (0.6%)	Thai, Lao, or other Tai-Kadai languages ~1,143 (0.2%)	Taishanese – 219	Chinese-Cantonese – 26	Pacho/Pachtu – 24	Russian	
11	Ilocano, Samoan, Hawaiian, or other Austronesian languages ~3,634 (0.5%)	Arabic ~1,098 (0.2%)	Chinese-Mandarin – 209	Thai – 22	Spanish – 16		
12	Russian ~3,173 (0.5%)	Other languages of Asia ~995 (0.1%)	Japanese – 127	Mongolian – 20	Kinyarwanda – 15		
13	Arabic ~3,022 (0.4%)	Khmer ~703 (0.1%)	Russian – 99	Swahili – 15			
14	Other Indo-European languages ~2,854 (0.4%)	Hindi ~417 (0.1%)	Soninke – 92	Kinyarwanda – 15			
15	Thai, Lao, or other Tai-Kadai languages ~2,276 (0.3%)	Swahili or other languages of Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa ~366 (0.1%)	French – 78				

Notes: Table prepared September 22, 2020 by Diana Canzoneri, City Demographer, OPCD and Peggy Liao, Language Access Program and Policy Specialist, OIRA.

\*Based on ACS detail table B16001 from U.S. Census Bureau. Estimates shown are for the combination of Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) because this table is not available at the city level for five-year estimates. These PUMAs exclude small numbers of residents in census tracts only partially in Seattle. ACS estimates are rough estimates; they carry very substantial margins or error for small population and language groups. (Number speaking following languages less than very well: French ~358, and "other Indo-European: ~317, and German ~219.)

\*\* SPS records of preferred contact language for parents/guardians who specified a language other than English with most commonly-specified languages shown. SPS records show a total of 10,265 of 49,675 families preferring a non-English language for communicating with school. Obtained from Data Analyst with SPS ELL and International Programs.

\*\*\* The two PHSKC Public Health clinics in Seattle are the Downtown Public Health Clinic in Belltown and Columbia Public Health Clinic in Rainier Valley. Figures for refugee screening clinic are presented separately (and are not included with other two clinics). The refugee screening clinic primarily sees clients living in south King County; these clients typically establish healthcare in South King County and come to the Belltown clinic once (for refugee health screening) or twice (for follow up immunizations after the initial health screening visit). Data provided by Epidemiologist in PHSKC Assessment, Policy Development &amp; Evaluation.

\*\*\*\*Per Police Communications Analyst, 9-1-1 Communications Center.

\*\*\*\*\*Data provided by Strategic Advisor II in Seattle Municipal Court Interpreter Services.