



ASIAN AMERICANS
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 8, 2018

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New reports address need, offer solutions for improved language access for voters

WASHINGTON, DC – With just three months until Election Day, voting rights groups are releasing new language assistance reports with hopes that election officials, policymakers, and community leaders will be ready to assist voters from different language backgrounds. Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, Fair Elections Center and the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund collaborated on the three “[Guides to Language Access](#)” which were released today.

In the United States, more than 62 million people speak a language other than English at home. Of this population, over 40% are limited-English proficient. Almost 15% of voting-age citizens speak a language other than English at home and of those, almost a third are limited-English proficient.

Because large populations of voters speak another language at home, election officials and policymakers could do more to better ensure these Americans are able to vote. Community organizations also play an important role in helping to meet their communities’ language access needs. Various sections of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) prohibit voting practices and procedures that discriminate against those who speak another language in a minority group and protect the right to assistance for those who need it because of blindness, disability or inability to read or write. Some jurisdictions, based on population and literacy requirements, must provide live voting assistance and any election-related information they make available in English in the covered languages, and officials may always go beyond legal minimum requirements to offer better service to their voters. When properly implemented and effectively provided, language assistance can increase voter participation.

The “Guides to Language Access” clarify these requirements and opportunities to provide assistance and background on the issue, and outline best practices beyond the minimum requirements of the federal law and concrete examples for three audiences: election officials, policymakers, and community leaders. Each audience plays a crucial role in reaching and helping language minority communities participate in our elections.

“Every eligible citizen, regardless of their language background, should have access to the materials they need to understand the voting process so they can make their voice heard,” said Michelle Kanter Cohen, Counsel at Fair Elections Center. “This series of reports offers real tools, solutions and examples for community leaders, policymakers, and election officials to improve the voter experience for citizens who face language barriers. We look forward to using these tools to engage with a variety of different audiences around this important issue.”

“Latino voters, a significant number of whom are more fluent in Spanish than English, account for 12 percent of the nation’s electorate, and their numbers are rapidly growing,” stated Erin Hustings, NALEO Educational Fund legislative counsel. “The present and future health of our democratic system depends upon our ability to engage Latinos and all Americans, regardless of their language background, to ensure that they are able to vote. These guidelines provide quality language assistance, which serves this critical interest and professionalizes election administration in our nation, guaranteeing that our voting process is worthy of our status as the world’s leading democracy.”

“As the fastest growing population with a majority speaking a language other than English at home, it is important for Asian Americans to have access to materials that allow them to exercise their right to vote,” said Terry Ao Minnis, director of census and voting rights at Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC. “Voting is a right of all citizens, not a ‘privilege’ earned by speaking English – this series of reports helps to bridge the language access divide, allowing limited-English proficient voters to fully participate in our democracy.”

[The reports for each audience and a summary of those reports can be found here.](#)

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[Asian Americans Advancing Justice](#) | AAJC has a mission to advance the civil and human rights for Asian Americans and to build and promote a fair and equitable society for all. Advancing Justice | AAJC is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1991 in Washington, D.C.

[Fair Elections Center](#) is a national, nonpartisan voting rights and election reform organization which works to remove barriers to registration and voting for traditionally underrepresented constituencies. The Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, founded in 2017 to continue the work of the Fair Elections Legal Network.

[NALEO Educational Fund](#) is the leading non-profit, non-partisan organization that facilitates full Latino participation in the American political process, from citizenship to public service.