

Connect2 Community Network Accessibility Assessment

When the Connect2 Community Network (Connect2) created the 2020 work plan, the team identified the need to conduct an accessibility assessment, with a focus on language access and disability justice. The team chose these focus areas based on input gathered during 2020 Network Partner Workgroup meetings. The assessment's purpose is to:

- Reflect on the current state of Connect2 when it comes to enabling the participation of organizational partners and community members with language access and disability justice needs in the design of Connect2
- Reflect on the current state of Connect2 when it comes to connecting community members with language access and disability justice needs with services
- Identify gaps that prevent organizational partners and community members with language access and disability justice needs from fully participating in the design of Connect2
- Identify gaps that prevent the network from connecting community members with language access and disability justice needs with services
- Sketch an initial roadmap to address these gaps

Language Access

Over the course of 2021, Connect2 has engaged in the following activities to assess the current state of Connect2 as it relates to language access:

- Engage [API Chaya](#) for an introduction to language access and an initial discussion on existing workstreams where language access needs are present
- Outline workstreams and identify how language access could be integrated into them
- Assess current practices by reflecting on questions adapted from the [Communities Creating Healthy Environments Language Access Toolkit](#)
- Host a Network Partner Workgroup peer learning session on language access to gather partner input on language access opportunities
- Host a language access session in partnership with the Veterans, Seniors, and Human Services Levy (VSHSL) to learn about organizations' experiences connecting community members who speak a language other than English with services

Connect2 Workstreams

The Connect2 team identified the following workstreams where language access practices must be implemented to enable the full participation of organizational partners and community members:

Meeting Spaces

Connect2 hosts a variety of spaces where partners come together to shape the design and implementation of the network. These include:

- Network Partner Workgroup
- Legal-Data-Tech Workgroup
- Unite Washington Workgroup
- Focused, time-limited committees, on topics such as evaluation, RFP selection, and privacy framework review

To date, meetings and their related materials have been available in English only. In 2020, Connect2 shared that interpretation is available upon request. HealthierHere's existing process for providing meeting interpretation consists of advertising that these services are available upon request, consulting with requestors to determine whether they have a preferred interpreter whose fees HealthierHere would cover, and if not securing a separate interpreter.

No such requests for interpretation have been made so far. To create a space that is welcoming to participants who speak languages other than English, Connect2 must create a process to proactively offer these services and conduct outreach to people who may need it. Our vision for a multilingual space looks like the [world built on language justice described by Antena](#).

Governance

Connect2 is governed by the Advisory Group (AG), a 20-30 seat decision-making body with seats reserved for members representing different sectors. The AG launched in March 2020, after an open call for applications and a selection process led by Network Partners.

The application materials were made available in English, and applications were to be submitted in English. The opportunity was announced through HealthierHere communications channels in English, to an audience primarily made up of English-speakers. As a result, all current AG members are proficient in English.

To extend the opportunity to serve on the AG to community members who do not speak English, Connect2 must reimagine a multilingual application and selection process. To create a space where participants who speak different languages can fully engage, Connect2 must offer interpretation and translation services for these meetings.

Technology

Connect2 is meant to enable data sharing and collaboration between organizations in the health, behavioral health, and social services sectors. To reap the benefits of data sharing for all partners and community members, Connect2 must determine how this data will be made available to partners who speak languages other than English.

Privacy and consent are crucial to the success of Connect2. As the privacy framework was developed, partners stressed the importance of having these documents available in multiple languages. Client-facing privacy agreements will be developed in multiple languages. As technologies are integrated into Connect2, policies must be put in place for client-facing information pertaining the different technologies to be available in multiple languages.

Connect2 is currently generating and refining use cases, which are activities focused on solving a specific problem or improving an experience. As use cases are developed, Connect2 may consider developing use cases that address the need for linguistically appropriate services. Connect2 must also examine what language access practices must be put in place for each use case that is developed to ensure it serves community members who speak different languages.

As the technology infrastructure is put in place and new technologies are integrated, Connect2 will benefit from learning about the language access practices of other community information exchanges (CIEs), and even looking outside the realm of CIEs and into other spaces where language access may be more advanced.

Network Monitoring

Connect2 provides support to organizations using the technologies that are part of the network. This includes providing technical assistance as well as identifying any gaps in the services the network offers. For example, partners have identified a great need in the community for food assistance, so Connect2 must work on bringing additional food assistance resources into the network. Network data also has the power to provide insights into language access priorities for community members.

Connect2 must examine how support is provided, and whether tangible resources exist to provide support in preferred languages. To begin, Connect2 may develop a workflow to document partner language preferences.

Linguistically Relevant Services

Network Partners have shared that clients' ability to navigate physical and behavioral health and social services if they are not provided in their preferred language presents a challenge to using the network. Many of our partners who serve immigrant and refugee populations and those community members themselves describe long waits for interpreters and barriers to receiving services because of language barriers.

As Connect2 continues to collectively identify and address structural barriers to care coordination, opportunities to address language justice in provision of services are critical. One opportunity to explore how to address language barriers may arise through the community-prioritized use cases that will be explored in 2021 and implemented in 2022.

Outreach

Connect2 grows stronger as organizations that offer different services and serve different populations join the network. As such, outreach is a key activity to bringing new organizations into the network. Connect2 must determine how to reach organizations that primarily speak a language other than English. Additionally, Connect2 would benefit from finding ways to learn about the work these organizations are already doing and engage in it in appropriate and respectful ways.

Consumer Engagement

In 2021, Connect2 is working with six partner organizations to gather community input on the network. For this initial round of consumer engagement, the partner organizations who are engaging community members serve immigrants and refugees, seniors, veterans, Indigenous people, and people with substance use disorder. As part of the engagement, partners will ask community members which language(s) they feel most comfortable speaking, how they would like to be involved in long-term Connect2 efforts, and what support they would need to participate in these efforts.

Language data from this first round of consumer engagement will help guide future language-specific efforts. The data will determine if further information must be collected from a specific language population, or if future efforts should specifically focus on community members who do not speak English.

Initial findings indicate that community members are interested in participating in long-term efforts, and that immigrant and refugee communities need interpretation and translation services in order to participate in these efforts.

Partners were selected for the current consumer engagement effort based on their self-expressed interest in participating in these activities. Connect2 worked closely with partners to develop the methodology for gathering consumer input and identify any supports partners required to carry out the work. Only one partner proactively raised the possibility of conducting a focus group in a language other than English. In the future, language support must be explicitly addressed at this stage of consumer engagement efforts.

Network Partner Language Access Session

On September 8, 2021, Connect2 hosted a language access peer learning session for the Network Partner Workgroup. During the session, representatives from Association of Zambians in Seattle, Washington (AZISWA) and International Community Health Services (ICHS) shared their expertise and experience serving a multilingual community. Network Partners then had a chance to ask questions. The following themes emerged from the session:

Trust and relationships

Serving a multilingual community goes beyond offering services and information in multiple languages. Even when information is available in a community member's language, the community member may be hesitant to access services based on their lived experience. For example, AZISWA representatives shared that certain hardships, like substance use disorder and homelessness, carry stigma in the community, and community members may decline referrals for services without a strong foundation of trust.

Panelists observed that community members may be more open to sharing when they feel that they are speaking to someone who is part of their community. All panelists shared that being part of the community they serve is one of their motivations to do this work, and their prior professional and lived experiences helped them forge ties and therefore trust with the community. Through these experiences, they've also gained an understanding of what community members who do not speak English are going through, even when they are not part of the same community, and this helps them build trust more effectively. This theme points to the need to allocate resources to organizations who have built trust and relationships to expand their reach in the community, and for organizations to prioritize including people who shared lived experiences with the community in their staff.

Creating multilingual materials

Organizations like ICHS with a strong track record of serving community members across multiple languages have developed a robust library of multilingual materials and processes to develop these materials. Network Partners expressed interest in developing multilingual materials of their own, yet felt uncertain of how to proceed with this process if none of their staff speak the languages that they would like to develop materials in.

ICHS representatives advised that when it comes to lengthy and complex materials, the organization hires translators for this work. The organization only internally translates very brief materials with little text. Organizations who are interested in developing multilingual materials must think through what resources they need to put in place to accomplish their goals – for example, what budget and staffing capacity are needed to complete this work.

Language data

Network Partners are interested in collecting language data for the community they serve. Many organizations are in the early stages of establishing processes to collect this information. ICHS shared that the organization collects demographic information including language during intake.

During the meeting, Connect2 polled Network Partners to receive input on the languages they would prioritize for language access services in the network. After the meeting, the poll was shared with the broader Connect2 mailing list. Through this input, Spanish and Somali emerged as the top two languages partners would choose to prioritize.

Language Access Session

On October 27, Connect2 hosted a language access session in partnership with VSHSL. Fifteen partners joined the session and shared their experience connecting community members who do not speak English with services, as well as support and resources that would improve the experience. The following themes emerged from the session.

Access to 24/7 interpretation services

Organizations rely on interpretation phone lines to offer linguistically appropriate services to community members, such as Voiance, The Language Exchange, Language Link, and Universal Language Services. VSHSL is able to cover interpretation services for certain organizations that are funded by the levy, and Medicaid covers Universal Language Services. However, not all organizations have the financial resources to avail themselves of 24/7 interpretation services. Finding ways to expand access to these services would help ensure community members are able to receive linguistically appropriate support.

Multilingual staff and community members

Many organizations rely on multilingual staff to offer linguistically appropriate services. These staff offer valuable skills, and their job descriptions and compensation must reflect any interpretation and translation tasks that are expected of them. Placing the burden of interpretation and translation on staff when these contributions are not adequately recognized and compensated is inequitable.

The idea of creating a group of community members who are paid for translation and interpretation services was raised, with one organization naming that as their current approach. Participants named that paying community members a fair rate for these services is critical to ensuring this is an equitable practice. Participants also named that translation and interpretation are skillsets that go beyond knowing how to speak a language. To deliver quality services to community members, training on best practices should be delivered to any community members who will be offering these services.

Working with community members offers the benefit of ensuring cultural understanding, and at times deepening trust when folks feel more comfortable knowing that they are interacting with someone who is part of their community. Privacy safeguards are important when working with community interpreters, as community members may have concerns that gossip about their situation may spread in the community. For that reason, it's important to ensure that community members are not assigned an interpreter who is a family member or close friend, or someone who they do not feel comfortable with.

Intersections of disability and language

Language is only one component of communication. Having supports in place to enable community members with disabilities to receive information and communicate is also crucial. Closed captioning,

hearing devices such as pocket talkers, and sign language interpretation create access for community members who are Deaf or hard of hearing, and written communications in Braille create access for community members who are blind.

Literacy

Written communications must be created with the appropriate literacy level in mind. At times, organizations have had documents translated only to find that the translation needed to be adjusted for the appropriate literacy level. Other organizations have encountered situations where community members do not know how to read in their native language, so written communications are not appropriate to convey information. Creating recorded messages is a possible alternative when a community member cannot read a document.

Cultural nuance

Direct translation and interpretation do not always capture cultural nuance. The purpose of translation and interpretation should be to convey meaning, so it is important for translators and interpreters to understand cultural nuance to accurately relay messages. This includes being aware of stigma and belief systems that may emerge in communication. Trainings on cultural humility can help organizations better serve community members who do not speak English.

Funding and advocacy

Offering linguistically appropriate services requires funding and resources. Participants shared that at times, they have faced the choice between procuring interpretation and translation services and paying for staff salaries. Adequate funding would be able to cover both expenses, since both play a role in helping community members access the services they need.

King County is a linguistically and culturally diverse community, and therefore the needs in the community are vast. Participants touched on the topic of advocacy for greater funding and posed questions around what an advocacy strategy may look like to meet these vast needs. Further strategizing on the topic is needed.

Assessment of Current Practices

Connect2 answered a series of reflection questions to clearly document the current state of the network as it relates to language access. The following questions have been adapted from the [Communities Creating Healthy Environments Language Access Toolkit](#).

Community and Language

1. What languages does your community speak?

In King County, an approximate 506,000 community members speak a language other than English, according to 2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate. After English, the most spoken languages in the community are Spanish, Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese), Vietnamese, Afro-Asiatic languages (Amharic, Somali, etc.), and Hindi. The proportion of these communities that speaks English less than “very well” varies.

2. Where do they participate in the Connect2 Community Network?

At the moment, community members are primarily able to participate in Connect2 activities if they are proficient in English. Workgroup meetings are conducted in English; opportunities to participate in the

Advisory Group or to respond to funding opportunities are in English; outreach to potential partners is conducted in English. However, organizations that serve community members who speak languages other than English are part of Connect2, meaning that these community members' data will potentially be shared through the network. These community members must be part of the design and implementation of Connect2.

3. Where do you hope they will participate?

We hope these community members will be able to participate in the majority of the workstreams described in the prior section: Workgroups, governance, technology, outreach, and community engagement.

4. How can their participation strengthen the goals of the Connect2 Community Network?

The Connect2 Community Network's ultimate goal is to meet the needs of community members and advance health equity. We need the input and leadership of community members who experience hardships accessing the care and services they need, including people who speak languages other than English. Only by having these perspectives at the table can we create a Connect2 Community Network that equitable serves the whole community.

5. Who is not involved because of the language barriers?

Community members who are unable to communicate in English have largely been unable to participate in the Connect2 workstreams identified above. Any participation that has been possible has been mediated by an English-speaking partner. For example, preliminary consumer engagement results show that community members who feel most comfortable speaking a language other than English participated in interviews with partners. However, these interviews were designed solely in English, therefore the experience was not designed with their needs in mind.

6. How would multilingual spaces change their participation?

Multilingual spaces would vastly increase opportunities for participation. Community members would be able to directly engage with Connect2 and directly share their ideas and insights, rather than only being able to do so through a partner.

Organizational spaces and resources

7. Where are both meeting spaces and communication spaces (including websites, newsletters, blogs, outreach) that would work better if different languages were interpreted or translated?

Consumer engagement efforts would need to provide interpretation and translation services to ensure community members who speak languages other than English are able to participate. Language access needs should be baked into the next phases on consumer engagement that involve long-term relationships with community members.

Workgroup meetings and Advisory Group meetings would benefit from additional perspectives if interpretation services were offered. Beyond offering interpretation services at the meeting, the entire experience would need to be redesigned to invite community members who speak other languages into the space. This would require translation services to make information available in multiple languages.

As Connect2 reaches out to potential partners, outreach practices that enable engagement with organizations that speak languages other than English will be necessary. As these organizations join Connect2, the team will need to develop translation and interpretation process to facilitate their participation in all sorts of meetings, from one-on-one conversations to special committees to workgroup meetings.

8. Where are documents kept that have been translated?

No documents have been translated so far.

Interpretation and Translation Services

9. What interpretation/translation vendors does the Connect2 Community Network work with?

Connect2 has not procured services from interpretation/translation vendors thus far. HealthierHere offers to work with the interpreters that community members prefer when interpretation requests are made. HealthierHere has not developed a pool of interpreters and translators to draw from if community members do not have a referral.

Connect2 will need to identify and engage additional interpretation and translation vendors to address language access needs.

10. What is the process to procure interpretation/translation services?

Connect2 has not procured services from interpretation/translation vendors thus far. HealthierHere offers to work with the interpreters that community members prefer when interpretation requests are made. HealthierHere has not developed a pool of interpreters and translators to draw from if community members do not have a referral.

11. Are funds available for paying interpreters/translators or renting equipment?

The 2021 budget did not include funds for interpretation and translation services. The 2022 budget will include funds for interpretation and translation services – the amount is to be determined based on the work plan.

12. How can funds dedicated to interpretation/translation stay in the community?

As Connect2 seeks to engage interpretation and translation vendors, the team should prioritize community-based resources over corporate vendors. For example, API Chaya is building a Multilingual Natural Helpers Program that trains community members to offer interpretation services.

Connect2 may also seek to help community-based organizations that are interested in building interpretation and translation capacity resource this work.

13. What can be done to raise funds for interpretation and translation? Who can do the fundraising?

As HealthierHere seeks new revenue streams to support the Connect2 Community Network, the funding required to support language access needs must be built into all fundraising efforts. For example, if

HealthierHere pursues a grant to fund Connect2, the team must consider how the funds will be allocated to include multilingual efforts.

Leadership and support

14. Is there support from people in leadership positions for language justice?

HealthierHere’s Chief Operating Officer is Connect2’s executive sponsor, and they support putting a language access plan in place for Connect2. The adoption of an organization-wide language access policy will require further discussion with organizational leadership.

15. Who else supports this work throughout the organization?

The Equity and Engagement team is dedicated to supporting community-based organizations and community members, who often have language access needs. This team understands the importance of creating inclusive spaces where community members and partners can fully participate.

Community Resources and Collaboration

16. What other individual, groups or agencies are integrating interpretation and translation?

Connect2 brings together partners that serve a variety of populations, including those who specialize in serving communities who speak languages other than English. VSHSL partners also include organizations that serve communities who speak languages other than English. These organizations may offer Connect2 valuable insights on how to serve a multilingual community.

17. How can Connect2 engage these individuals, groups or agencies to uncover opportunities for collaboration?

Connect2 hosted a peer learning session on language access and invited partners with experience in delivering services to community members who speak languages other than English to share their insights and advice. Connect2 is co-hosted a language session with VSHSL partners that serve community members who speak languages other than English to learn about their experiences and challenges delivering linguistically appropriate services. Key takeaways from these sessions were outlined in prior sections of this document.

These activities shed light on the gaps partners experience when it comes to delivering services to community members who speak languages other than English. The network’s ability to serve all community members will be strengthened as organizations build capacity to serve multilingual community members.

Next Steps

To incorporate language access practices, Connect2 will engage in the following activities:

Activity	Estimated Timing
<p><i>Establish language access policy</i></p> <p>Connect2 will articulate in writing the language access standards that the network will strive to adhere to. This will include what language services are made available for meetings and what</p>	<p>April 30, 2022</p>

<p>written communications will be available in multiple languages. The policy will need to be approved by the Advisory Group.</p>	
<p><i>Establish relationships with vendors</i></p> <p>Contact and learn about organizations/individuals that offer translation and interpretation services. Initial languages suggested by Network Partners at the September language access session are Spanish, Amharic, and Somali.</p>	<p>June 30, 2022</p>
<p><i>Roll out multilingual activities</i></p> <p>Identify opportunities to embed language access into consumer engagement, partner engagement, and community-prioritized use cases. Pursue 1-2 opportunities to align these activities with language access policy.</p>	<p>December 31, 2022</p>
<p><i>Establish processes to assess language access services</i></p> <p>Establish processes to gather input from community members and partners to understand whether language access services provide them the support they need for meaningful participation.</p>	<p>December 31, 2022</p>