

How to Overcome Language Barriers

Serving neighbors that use a different language can be difficult. Below are some tips and tricks to communicate with these neighbors and help make them feel welcome at your agency!

- The Interpretive Services Phone Number allows you to speak to an individual that can translate what the neighbor is saying. Simply call 1-800-225-5254, tell them you need a third-party dial-out using the customer code: 469521 for the Department of Agriculture and list the language you need translation services for.
- Using a translation app on your phone or device can be helpful. Try using the voice feature, so that the neighbor can speak in their native language, and you can read the translation in English. You can even turn on the “recognize the language” feature if you don’t know the language the neighbor is speaking.
- Having flyers and sign-in sheets in Spanish and other languages that are represented in your neighbors is helpful. You may even consider printing your flyers and forms two-sided, one side with English and the other side with Spanish.
- Remember to approach encounters with neighbors that don’t speak English with empathy and patience. If you both work together, you can figure out a solution together!
- Remember that some neighbors don’t know how to read and write in English or their native tongue and that you may have to get creative in order to communicate.
- Date of birth is ordered differently in different countries, For example, in central America they order the date with the day first, then the month and year, MM/DD/YYYY, the opposite of how we order it in the U.S. It is important to put in the correct date of birth in Link2Feed, using DD/MM/YYYY.
- It is common in many other cultures to have multiple last names. Make sure to put the neighbor’s full name into Link2Feed, including both last names, to avoid duplicates.
- Using Barcodes in Link2Feed can help eliminate communication barriers while searching for neighbors in the system.
- It could be helpful to offer basic Spanish classes for your volunteers, either taught by a bilingual volunteer or using an online course like Duolingo. It is also possible that your local community college might offer free Spanish classes, like at Trident Tech.

