

# Forming a Community Legal Interpreter Bank: The Washington DC Experience

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“Ho'opono: Plan Implementation and Promising  
Practices”

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Irfana Anwer, Deputy Director  
Community Legal Interpreter Bank

# About Ayuda

- Founded in 1973: the leading non-profit legal services organization that protects the legal rights of low-income immigrants in the D.C. area
- Programs
  - Immigration legal services with a specialized project for immigrant children
  - Social and legal services to victims of domestic violence and human trafficking

# The Community Legal Interpreter Bank: A Public Model

- The Funding: A DC Council Appropriation administered by the DC Bar Foundation
- Provide trained live interpreters, telephonic interpretation, and translation services to all legal service providers in Washington DC
- Goal
  - Provide **equal access to justice** for Limited English Proficient and Deaf community members

# Development

- April 2004 – DC Language Access Act enacted
- March 2005 - Formation of DC Access to Justice Commission
- September 2005 - Consortium of Legal Services Providers' recommendations to the Commission
- November 2005 - Language Access Roundtable
- Spring 2006 - Funding request to DC Council
- Summer 2006 - Listening session
- March 2007 - Grant awarded to Ayuda to implement

# Initial Decision Point

- Who will be allowed to use the Bank?
- What is the scope of the Bank?
- Where will the Bank be housed?
- What should be included in the budget?
- How do you keep stakeholders engaged in the process?

# Needs/Challenges Identified by Legal Community

- Struggling to represent LEP community
- Breach of ethical duty to communicate
- Breach of confidentiality
- Use of unreliable and biased interpreters

## Why this model: Political Factors

- Strong legal community with national civil rights roots
- Support from law firms (large tax base)
- Strong coalition of community based organizations focused on needs of LEP population
- Language Access politically attractive and strategic during a booming economy
- Local government committed to language access

# Why this model: Practical Factors

- Interpreter programs and trainings already existed
- Community of trained interpreters
- Large number of bilingual professional, students
- Specialized services culture
  - Community/medical/legal interpreters
  - Specialized legal services as well
- Numerous legal service providers
- Potential for growth
  - Law firms and government

# Different Models: Similar Process

- Where is the need?
- Who is already spending good money on bad services?
- What are the certifications and trainings available?
- Who should be the administrator? Who is trusted by all?

# A Different Model: Different Resources and Needs: Alaska

- Public-Private partnership to address a wide range of language access challenges in Alaska
- Lack of trained and qualified interpreters
- Focus on basic interpreter training of bilingual people
- Comprehensive services for all sectors of society

# Pros and Cons

- The DC model
  - Struggling to sustain model
    - Public funding won't last forever
    - May need to shift to public/private partnership
  - Beholden to funders restrictions
    - Can only serve DC clients and/or DC cases
  - Strong initial funding allowed to move to full implementation faster
  - Time and resources to fully develop project without funding concerns