

Program to Expand Outreach to Limited and Non-English Speaking Customers

The Bureau of Development Services has been working diligently to educate the public about the need for and value of obtaining building and zoning permits for construction work and bureau services and programs that exist to help our customers successfully complete their projects. An emphasis on providing consistently excellent customer service and an extensive outreach campaign aimed at increasing public awareness has proven extremely successful at reaching various business and community groups and sectors of the public-at-large.

However, based on information gathered at outreach appearances and staff and customer feedback, we have found that a more comprehensive strategy is needed to improve communication with and service to our limited and non-English speaking customers.

Program Goal

The goal of the Expanded Outreach Program is to reach our limited and non-English speaking customers with information about the need for and value of permits, how to avoid common building and zoning code issues, and programs and services that the bureau offers to assist customers with their projects. This outreach will be accomplished through specific steps to improve communication, awareness and education.

Program Implementation

The Bureau of Development Services has contracted with the IRCO (Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization) International Language Bank to provide interpretation, translation and consultation services to assist the bureau implement specific action items aimed at improving outreach and communication to our limited and non-English speaking customers.

In addition to providing interpretation and consultation services, their full-service translation section offers a broad range of services in over 50 languages and specializes in "community translation"; that is, the translation of documentation intended for the limited-English speaking populations of Oregon.

Action Item #1 – Publication Translation

BDS has identified Spanish, Russian and Vietnamese as the top three non-English languages that our customers speak *. IRCO will begin work in December 2005 to translate six of our most widely distributed publications in these three languages, which will be made available to customers in the Development Services Center and on the BDS website.

*Based on 2000 United States census data for Multnomah County, Oregon

The six brochures include:

- Do I Need A Permit For My Project?
- Do I Need An Electrical Permit?
- Do I Need A Plumbing Permit?
- Do I Need A Building Permit?
- Do I Need A Mechanical Permit?
- Do I Need A Zoning Permit?

After the successful translation of these publications, the bureau will identify and prioritize the translation of additional material.

Action Item #2 – Development Service Center Signage

Signage is needed in the Development Services Center to alert non-English speaking customers in their language that publications are available in Spanish, Russian and Vietnamese and interpretation services are available upon request.

IRCO and BDS will begin work in January 2006 to identify appropriate placement and verbiage for the signage. IRCO is also available to attend Development Services Center staff meetings to train staff on cultural communication and awareness in conjunction with the new signage.

Action Item #3 – Outreach Presentations

BDS frequently receives requests from various community and business groups for presentations on relevant bureau topics. The bureau seeks to expand our speaking engagements and event appearances to include members of ethnic populations that are not being served as part of our current outreach activities.

IRCO's mission is to assist refugees, immigrants and multi-ethnic communities to develop self-sufficiency and cultural awareness while affirming and preserving each culture within an ever-changing global environment. As part of their mission to serve multi-ethnic communities, IRCO will partner with BDS to cultivate contacts with various ethnic-group representatives who may be interested in having BDS present to their group(s). IRCO will also assist BDS prepare presentations and provide interpretation services as needed.

Action Item #4 – Language Classes for BDS Staff

Some BDS staff have requested language classes to improve their communication abilities with customers in the field. IRCO has the ability to link BDS to skilled instructors who will provide staff with short-term, intensive language training tailored to their specific work needs.

Conclusion

With the implementation of this program, the bureau expects to see improved communication with and service to our limited and non-English speaking customers and advance our goal to educate the public about the need and value of permitting construction work and the programs and services the bureau has to offer.