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Language Accessibility Advisory Committee (LAAC)

Wednesday, May 15, 2024, 1:30 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome, Call to Order, Roll Call, and Declaration of Quorum

VAAC members present:

- Janet Bernabe
- Paul Burke
- Juan Pablo Cervantes
- Jacqueline Coto
- Pedro Hernandez
- Barbara Hurtado
- Val Jacobo
- Deanna Kitamura
- Alexander Neofitidis
- Armando Salud
- Voleck Taking
- Calvin Van
- Monica Villicana

Members of SOS:

- Jana Lean – Chief of Elections
- Rodney Rodriguez – IT Specialist - Office of Voting Systems Technology Assessment (OVSTA)
- Adam Quintana – Policy and Planning Manager - Voter's Choice Act (VCA)
- Mary Mooney – Attorney

Quorum was met.

2. Review the LAAC Purpose and Responsibilities

- Ryan reviewed the LAAC's purpose and responsibilities.
 - The Secretary of State (SOS) established the LAAC in 2016 as an advisory board to make recommendations to SOS on implementing federal and state requirements to provide language services for voters who speak a language other than English. The committee also explores possible improvements to existing efforts and provides feedback to SOS on the efficacy of those efforts.
- Ryan will be emailing documents explaining the LAAC's purpose and responsibilities to the committee after the meeting and will also post the information on the LAAC webpage.

3. LAAC Community Outreach Updates

- Pedro Hernandez
 - CA Common Cause has been working on their Election Protection Program in the aftermath of the March 2024 Presidential Primary and are focusing on county specific reports from the election.
- Val Jacobo
 - Updated on efforts of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community advocate groups, including EPIC's (Empowered Pacific Islander team) initiative to increase civil engagement within the community.
 - A report was issued by Project Respect, which focuses on improving civic engagement and youth outreach. They will also be holding a peace summit on October 12, 2024, in Long Beach.
- Abril Villaneuva
 - Announced that the city of Compton has produced their city charter in Spanish for the first time ever.
- Alexander Neofitidis
 - No updates.
- Armando Salud
 - Following an election observation report from Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Yolo County Elections will be using vendors to hire poll workers, including bilingual poll workers, after problems were reported about a lack of bilingual volunteers for the primary election.
- Barbara Hurtado
 - Barbara expressed her hope to learn from other counties about strategies for outreach efforts to alternative language communities.
- Calvin Van
 - OC Vote is working with the Orange County LAAC to develop a workshop for Vietnamese and Korean voters to increase registration numbers.
 - They are also working on senior and youth outreach in the county.
- Deanna Kitamura
 - Deanna asked if we could change the agenda title to something more than "outreach" since the updates go beyond outreach.
 - Asian Americans Advancing Justice monitored twenty counties during the primary and issued reports to each one on their compliance with federal and state language access requirements; most counties did very well with compliance issues and were offered suggestions for further improvement.
 - There is also a bill being considered currently by committees in the CA Senate called AB 884, which would increase the number of languages that election materials and services must be available in.

- Jacqueline Coto
 - Jacqueline also asked that the agenda title be changed to allow for updates besides those that cover outreach efforts.
 - NALEO Is also advocating for AB 884 in the Legislature. They are also working with the SOS Voter Choice Act advisory body to advise on language access issues.
- Janet Bernabe
 - The Riverside LAAC is working with the new Riverside ROV, who is advancing initiatives to address language access issues and increase outreach to voters.
- Juan Pablo Cervantes
 - No updates.
- Monica Villicana
 - Reported that she had reached out to LAAC members and to Ryan but had not received a response to her questions about her role on the LAAC. Monica asked how communication between members should work and whether it can be improved. She asked for some guidance about what her work should be and what her community outreach updates should entail, and Ryan responded that they should be focused on local activities and news about language access efforts and outreach in the community.
 - Ryan and Pedro also offered some guidance regarding communication between committee members, including the legal restrictions on those communications (such as not emailing a quorum of committee members since this would constitute a “meeting”).
 - Ryan mentioned that in addition to sending out a contact list to the LAAC members, he will also send guidance on how to comply with the Bagley-Keane Act, which regulates government meetings.
- Paul Burke
 - Recently attended the Ventura LAAC and is engaged in recruiting members and attendees for the meetings.
 - Published a paper on threats and defenses for absentee ballots, which is available on his website, votewell.net.

4. Review Committee Goals

- Committee Goal: Study the relationship between the geography of counties and the language services provided by the county Registrar of Voters.
 - Dean originally brought this up, but he is absent, so it may be revisited at the next meeting.
- Committee Goal: Review bilingual poll worker survey and provide an update.

- Jacqueline asked if SOS had any feedback on the recommendations that the subcommittee had provided to them last year regarding the survey. Ryan answered that SOS will review the recommendations and provide a response in the next meeting.
- There was a discussion about creating a subcommittee to engage with SOS, collect their feedback on the survey, and plan future activities.
- Alexander made a motion, which was seconded by Jacqueline.

Motion: To establish a subcommittee to review the bilingual poll worker survey and make further recommendations to SOS regarding the recruitment and training of bilingual poll workers. This will be a body of no more than four members.

- The motion passed, 14-0.
 - Pedro encouraged county election officials to volunteer for the subcommittee if they can in order to have some feedback from county ROVs.
 - Alexander, Jacqueline, Armando, and Calvin all volunteered to sit on the new subcommittee.
 - Pedro asked Ryan to facilitate communication between the members via email.
- Committee Goal: Explore best practices that can be recommended to SOS regarding issues that may be present during the November 5, 2024, General Election.
 - Deanna asked that any county election officials present offer their suggestions on the types of best practices they would find valuable.
 - Pedro asked if a subcommittee could be created to reach out to county election officials and ask them what areas they are looking to improve in so that the subcommittee can work on recommending best practices in those areas via SOS.
 - Deanna put forward a motion, which was seconded by Calvin.

Motion: To create a subcommittee to explore best practices for county ROVs that can be recommended to SOS regarding issues that may be present during the November 5, 2024, General Election.

- The motion passed, 14-0.
- Alexander asked if the co-chairs could be advisory members on all subcommittees since chairs normally do not vote in subcommittees. Pedro said that this is not a practice of the LAAC, but the committee can review its voting practices.
- There was a question as to why the subcommittees are limited to four members. Ryan clarified that the subcommittees could have more than four members, but it must stay below the LAAC quorum threshold.

- Pedro, Monica, Abril, Calvin, and Deanna all volunteered to sit on the subcommittee.
- Committee Goal: To discuss the potential payment of volunteer reviewers for their time reviewing the ballot labels, titles and summaries, and other translated materials.
 - Val explained how a subcommittee could review how volunteer reviewers could be compensated for their time and their work, particularly during holiday periods. This committee could also examine the timelines for translation reviews to see if they can be changed or improved.
 - Val brought forward a motion, which was seconded by Paul.
 - Jana Lean, the chief of Elections, stated that the timelines for Voter Information Guide translations are not created by SOS but are imposed by the election calendar and hinges on when the Attorney General provides the ballot language to SOS. This is the reason why translation work took place during a holiday for the primary election. She also reminded the LAAC that there will be a high number of ballot measures for the November General Election, which will impact our timelines.
 - Jana will provide the election calendar timelines to the LAAC so that they have this information as they are doing their review.
 - Finally, Jana mentioned that it would be difficult for SOS to fund compensation for reviewers since that funding source does not currently exist.
 - Val underscored the importance of creating the subcommittee to gather feedback from community reviewers despite what difficulties may exist in securing compensation for their work.
 - Alexander asked to make an amendment to the motion to strike the section that relates to possible compensation, since the committee may not be able to affect a change. The amendment was not taken up, with Val and Jacqueline expressing that it is valuable to explore this issue regardless of the committee's powers.

Motion: Create a subcommittee group to review the translation timelines that SOS is working on, to collect community translator feedback and recommendations, and to provide appropriate compensation to those community translators.

- The motion passed, 10-1, with two abstentions.
- The subcommittee will be comprised of Val, Voleck, Monica, Abril, and Pedro
- Val asked if a state elections official could sit on the committee, and Ryan stated that he will attend each subcommittee meeting.

5. SOS Updates

Office of Voting Systems Technology Assessment (OVSTA)

- Rodney Rodriguez from OVSTA offered an update on recent voting system testing:
 - Dominion Democracy Suite 5.19 Voting System is preparing for the testing phase.
 - Hart Verity Voting System are seeking an administrative approval to add ranked choice voting to the system.

Voter's Choice Act (VCA)

- Adam Quintana from SOS offered recent updates from the VCA team.
 - Eighteen of nineteen counties have submitted their EAPs, and they can be reviewed on the county websites as well as the SOS website.
 - The outstanding county, Santa Cruz, will be submitting their EAP soon.
 - SOS will be reinstating the VCA task force, which will make recommendations to the Secretary regarding elections that are administrated under the VCA. They are working on recruiting for this task force and Adam will provide future updates about the application process.

Legislative Updates

- Mary Mooney at SOS presented updates on current legislation.
- SB 1450 would re-establish the VCA task force which expired in 2022. This task force would report on elections and require vote centers to post notices on the availability of alternative language services. This bill is in suspense.
- AB 884 would expand the number of languages that election materials must be translated into. That bill is now in Senate hearings.
- AB 267 would create the Civic Learning Outreach and Engagement Fund that would require SOS to award grants to organizations that promote voter registration and civic engagement. This bill is on the suspense calendar and the Secretary has issued a letter of support for it.

6. Public Comments and Future Agenda Items

- Pedro asked that the LAAC table the agenda item to review feedback on the March 5, 2024, Presidential Primary until the next meeting.
- There were no public comments or suggested agenda items.
- Pedro asked the LAAC to recognize the contributions of Sarah O'Brien, an elections worker from San Mateo County Elections, who recently passed away.

- Pedro encouraged members to email Ryan if they have any agenda items to recommend.

7. Adjournment