

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY RVAMPO Demographic Profile



FY 2004-2005

Introduction

Staff of the Roanoke Valley – Alleghany Regional Commission (RVARC), the lead staffing agency of the Roanoke Valley Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (RVAMPO), is in the process of generating a series of demographic profiles to identify special needs populations in the region. One such special needs group is the Limited-English-Proficiency (LEP) population¹.

Before delving into statistical figures, some background information is in order. Federal non-discrimination authorities provide for the protection of several special needs populations from either intentional or unintentional discrimination by any federal agency or recipient/sub-recipient of federal funds. Specifically, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations prohibit recipients of federal financial assistance from discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

Why worry, then, about LEP populations, one might ask? In certain circumstances, failure to provide meaningful access to LEP persons is national origin discrimination. In order to ensure that transportation services and programs are non-discriminatory, recipients and sub-recipients of federal transportation funds must ensure that they take reasonable steps to provide meaningful access to the programs, services, and information those recipients provide, free of charge.

That prompts the obvious question, “What, then, is a reasonable accommodation?” The US Department of Justice, which is the lead federal agency on Civil Rights, non-discrimination matters, states that “[w]hat constitutes reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access will be contingent on a number of factors. Among the factors to be considered are the number or proportion of LEP persons in the eligible service population, the frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the program, the importance of the service provided by the program, and the resources available to the recipient.”

However, the US Department of Transportation encourages even those recipients whose programs or activities affect very few LEP persons on an infrequent basis to consider reasonable steps for involvement of LEP persons and to plan for situations in which LEP persons will be affected under the program or activity in question. This plan need not be intricate; it may be as simple as having certain public notices translated into a language other than English, providing an interpreter under certain conditions, or making available technological solutions such as a telephone language line.

¹ According to the US Department of Transportation LEP policies and guidelines, LEP persons are individuals with a primary or home language other than English who must, due to the limited fluency in English, communicate in that primary or home language if the individuals are to have an equal opportunity to participate effectively in or benefit from any aid, service, or benefit provided by the federal recipient or sub-recipient.

What does this mean to the RVAMPO?

The answer to this question depends largely upon the size of any potential LEP population in the RVAMPO region. The US Bureau of the Census collected, through its long-form, data on nativity, language spoken at home, and English proficiency.² When completing the long form question on English proficiency, the respondent is asked whether he/she speaks English ‘Very Well’, ‘Well’, ‘Not Well’, or ‘Not at All’. Since the LEP definition states that a person is LEP if they have a primary language other than English and must communicate in this language as a result of limited proficiency in English, an LEP individual is defined here, for statistical purposes, as someone who stated that he or she speaks English ‘Not Well’ or ‘Not at All’. It is assumed that an individual who answered that he or she speaks English ‘Well’ is therefore able to communicate in English and is not LEP.

The US Bureau of the Census data on language has been compiled for the RVAMPO region and is summarized in tables below.

Table 1: LEP Population - Percent of Total Population RVAMPO Region

Spanish	0.35%
Other Indo-European	0.15%
Asian and Pacific Island	0.19%
Other	0.03%
Total LEP	0.71%

In Table 1, it is clear that the entire Limited-English-Proficiency group makes up a very small proportion of the RVAMPO service area’s population. The largest LEP group is made up of Spanish speakers, and it is a minute proportion of the total RVAMPO population. Approximately .35% of the RVAMPO population speaks Spanish primarily and has limited proficiency in English.

**Table 2
RVAMPO Study Area
LEP Population Breakdown by Language Cluster**

Spanish	48.8%
Other Indo-European	20.4%
Asian and Pacific Island	26.2%
Other	4.6%
Total LEP	100%

² Please note that this data is from the Census Bureau’s long form. Practically, this means that the resulting data is subject to sampling error, as the long form is not made available to every citizen in the Census process. This is still, however, the most accurate source of data on LEP populations in the United States. In the future this data will be collected through the US Census Bureau’s new American Community Survey (ACS) program.

Table 2 shows that among the LEP population, Spanish speakers make up nearly half. It has thus been demonstrated that, proportionally, the LEP population within the RVAMPO service area is extremely small. This does not mean that no attempt at accommodation should be made, whatsoever. For instance, the US Department of Transportation writes that regardless of the size of the LEP population, a federal recipients' transportation plans should identify how the needs of LEP persons will be met where a significant number of such persons can be reasonably expected to need transportation services.

Therefore, plans should discuss such measures as special bilingual transit signage in certain ethnic neighborhoods where pockets of LEP persons may be found, for example. Additionally, if a given plan is known to significantly impact an LEP neighborhood, special consideration should be given to publishing the document in another language prior to a public hearing and providing some form of translation at such a hearing.

Map 1, in the Appendix, identifies certain Census tracts where LEP groups are concentrated. The Williamson Road area in the City of Roanoke, a northern section of Roanoke County south of Peters Creek Road, surrounding Route 11/Williamson Road, and the South Jefferson area in the City of Roanoke are the three most significant LEP pockets in the RVAMPO region, according to the Census. The Spanish-speaking population is concentrated in the same three areas according to Map 2, also in the Appendix.

It is the recommendation of the MPO staff that the MPO contract out with a telephone translation service so that, if an LEP person should request data or technical assistance services, the staff could understand and assist that person. The RVARC currently has two staff members who are proficient in Spanish as a second language, so providing translation services to the majority of the LEP population at public hearings on major transportation plans (such as the CLRP and TIP) and other such events should not present a problem. Furthermore, internet-based machine translation can be utilized at no cost to the MPO to translate policy documents, plans, and/or studies if such translations are requested or deemed proper given the nature of the study area for any given document. Decisions on whether to publish public ads in another language will be made based on the size and population characteristics of a given document's study area.

With these measures, the MPO should not only be in compliance with Title VI provisions dealing with national origin, but also will be ensuring that all regional citizens are getting their fair chance to voice their opinions and have input into the transportation planning process.

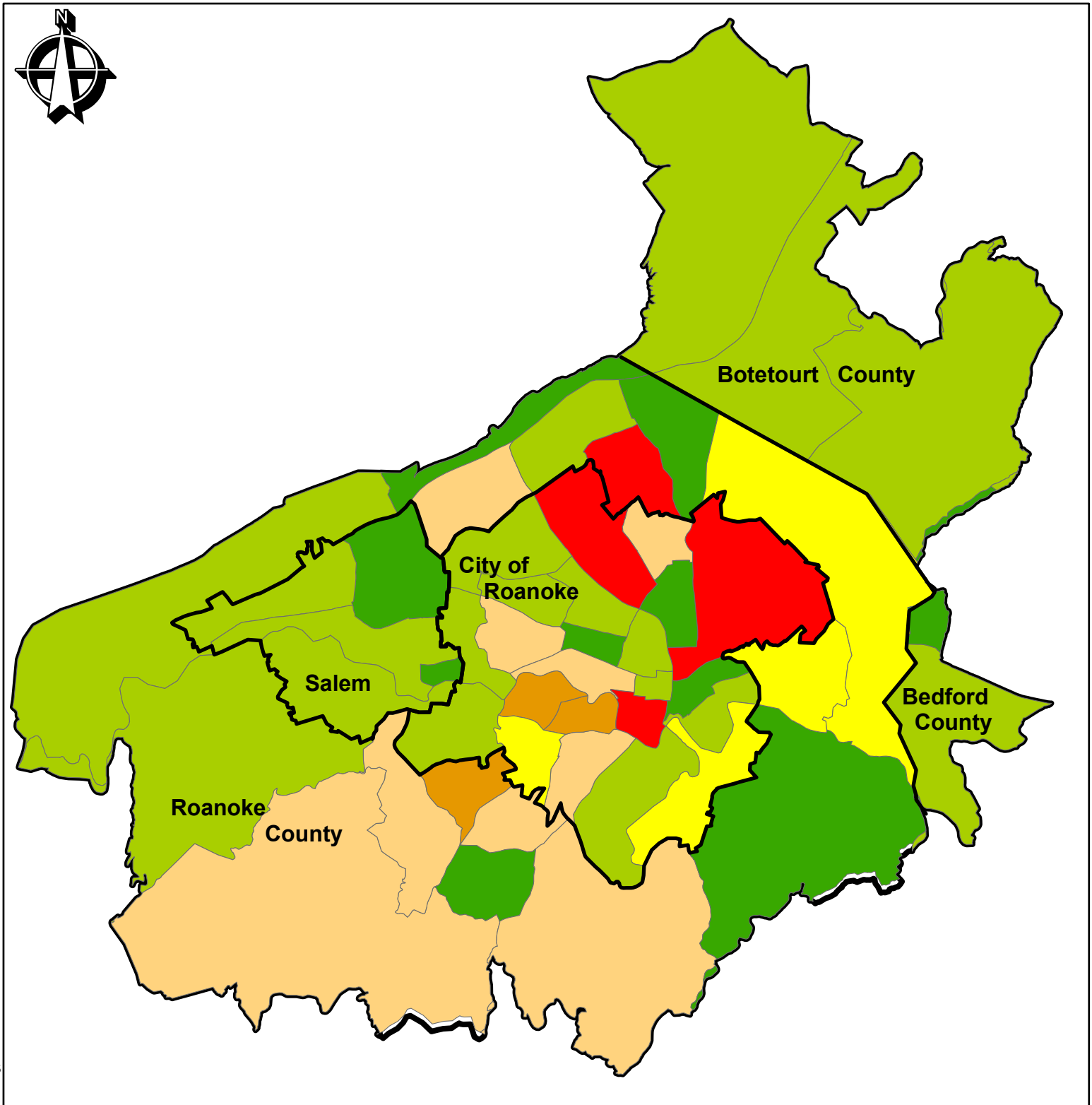
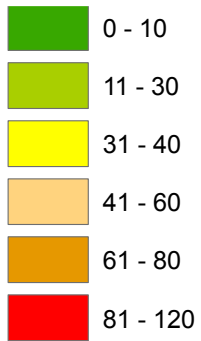
APPENDIX

Demographic Profile



Map 1
LEP Persons
Within MPO
2025 Study Area
By Census Tract

Number of LEP



Demographic Profile

Map 2
Spanish Speaking
LEP Persons
Within MPO
2025 Study Area
By Census Tract



Numb. of Span-Speaking LEP

