How to Identify Limited English Proficient Populations

- Start with the U.S. Census American Fact Finder site. Chose “Data sets” on the left, then chose “Decennial Census”. Click on “Summary file 3 data” (comprehensive sample data as opposed to select sample data in summary file 4)
- Chose “Custom Table”. On the next page, select “block group”. Then choose state and county. You will need to know the census tract(s) and block group(s) you want since the list will show all for that county. After choosing those, then chose “add”, then “next”.
- On the next page rather than using the "show all tables” tab, use the "by Keyword" tab. Then you can search for all statistics related to English, language, place of birth etc. Select a table. If you click on "What's this?" you can see the table template for the data produced for each question. If you chose “place of birth” you will see a list of counties, which can expand your list a lot if you choose all of them.
- Choose “Go”. Select one or more data elements from the table, then choose “Add”. You cannot choose more than 100 files for your table. Once you’re happy with your selections, choose “Next”. Choose “Show Result” to review your custom table. You can use the back arrows to return to previous pages if you still need to add or remove data elements.
- Once you find the statistics you want – copy them, i.e. SF3, PCT10. This saves a lot of time later. They should also be included in citations. To copy the statistics, select the “Print/Download” option while in “Show Result”. If Internet Explorer tries to block your download, click on the Internet Explorer message to tell it you really do want to download the file. Then try downloading again.

Knowing which demographic statistics are published for which geographic area (block is the smallest) is helpful. And which statistics to use, i.e. not imputation numbers which really only provide information on accuracy of data.

How detailed should the demographics be?

The amount of detail depends on use. The detail needs to be enough to determine any populations in the project area and what the effects could be. Generally, the smallest geographic unit for which data is available should be used. This would usually be the block or block group level. Since not all information is available at the block level, for consistency sake using block groups is usually best. However, block level data can give some valuable information so don't completely ignore it.

What level of census data should I use?

You may be tempted to do all your demographic analysis by census block because the minority information is available at this level. However income, language and other

statistics are not available. If you use only use block group data all your data will be comparable. Mixing and matching block and block group data can be confusing. It is best to try to report the language info by age group leaving out the youngest groups.

The best analysis will involve several groups of statistics, such as:

SF3, P19 - age by language spoken at home by ability to speak English for the population 5+ years (but exclude 5-17 years)
SF3, P20 - household language linguistic isolation (but limited use since only 4 categories of language groups)
SF3, PCT12 - nativity by language spoken at home by ability to speak English for pop 5+ years (similar to P19, adds foreign born)
SF3, PCT19 - place of birth for the foreign-born population (gives specific country)

This last file is very useful to locate immigrants, who may have different cultures. They may be difficult to reach with standard public involvement practices. It can also help isolate specific languages for groups such as Indo-European or Asian.

How do I find more detail than is available from census data?

Supplement the census data with information you have obtained from local social service agencies, libraries, churches and schools. This will help to identify the highest 3-5 languages spoken at home in that community. It can also help you to figure out strategy for reaching specific cultures. This supplemental data is especially helpful to identify changes in the community, i.e. since the last census was published. Washington state demographics have changed quite a bit since our last census primarily due to immigration. You may find that census data doesn't indicate a need for compliance with LEP but after checking with school data and social service agencies, the numbers are much higher.

School data can vary quite a bit depending on district policies. Some schools are very cooperative about sharing data. You may find that others are much more hesitant. It may help to reassure them that only aggregate information will be used. Many schools have English language learner programs and can tell you which languages students speak. Also, check resources such as the National Center for Education Statistics, "How to Engage Low Literacy and Limited English Proficiency Populations in Transportation Decision Making" and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The latter publishes a report each year that provides some statewide statistics on LEP as well as the districts that have the highest numbers of bilingual students.