



2024 Taking Action Together (TAT) Summit: Language Justice Better Practices for Participants

"Language is personal, visceral, and powerful; it is tied to our lands and to our bodies. Every time we open our mouths to speak in our accents and dialects, we identify ourselves and bring all these things with us. When we come together to have the hard conversations, it is important that we are able to express ourselves in the language that most fully conveys the depth and nuance of our hopes and our frustrations." - Highlander Center Interpreting for Social Justice Curriculum

TAT organizers have an intentional commitment to language justice within all of our work. We believe that language justice practices can support and strengthen the work of HIV service providers, advocates, and People Living with HIV. Language justice works alongside racial, economic, queer, and gender justice to build collective power and liberation.

One way we are implementing language justice at TAT is by decentering English as the only language of knowledge and expertise and by creating multilingual spaces throughout our panels and sessions. We acknowledge and welcome the many languages that will be present at TAT, including the languages of our ancestors and of the indigenous stewards of what we now refer to as the Houston area: the Karankawa, Sana, Akokisa, Esto'k Gna, and Coahuiltecan.

Based on participant input and team capacity, we are able to offer facilitation, interpretation, and translation in written and spoken English and Spanish. We will have English<=>Spanish simultaneous interpreters and bilingual team members available to ensure we can all communicate, understand, and be understood. This document includes some principles and better practices you can incorporate as a presenter to implement language justice and help co-create equitable multilingual spaces at TAT.

What do we mean by language justice¹?

Language justice is an ever-evolving framework and set of practices that ensure that people can **communicate, participate, and lead fully in institutions and communities, regardless of the languages or linguistic variants they use.** It can include strategies like interpretation, translation, and use of plain (non-technical), affirming, and destigmatizing language paired with an analysis of how power operates through language.

¹ Definitions adapted from tilde language justice cooperative and Right to the City Alliance

Language justice affirms:

- The right that we all have to communicate in the language(s) in which we feel most powerful and articulate, to understand, and to be understood. (These languages may be signed, spoken or involve other ways of communicating).
- The right that we have to express ourselves in all of the different ways that we communicate even when we are using the “same” language.
- The right of people with disabilities and neurodiverse people to lead and participate fully in our movements, accessing all of our spaces and materials.
- The right to preserve our languages and the acknowledgement of the loss of our languages because of colonization and imperialism.
- A collective orientation and practice of creating equitable spaces in which no language dominates another.
- The rights of bilingual workers, interpreters and translators to fair pay and good working conditions

How can you practice language justice as a participant?

A variety of people from the US South will attend and present at TAT, including a diversity of ages, abilities, ethnicities, languages used, lived experiences, role(s) within Meaningful Involvement of People with HIV/AIDS (MIPA) work and more.

Consider the following during your time at TAT:

- **Share your experiences:** if you feel able and comfortable doing so, we encourage you to share your experiences during TAT sessions using the language you most feel comfortable in. Use “I” statements to speak from your own experiences.
- **Being curious and open to others’ viewpoints and use of language:** Though we may not speak or sign in the same way, we recognize that there are multiple ways to use language. There may be a variety of ways how something is described, which may differ from how you would say it. We encourage you to seek understanding and hold a curious mindset, especially if there are differences in how you and someone else uses language.
- **People-first language:** building off of the fundamental groundwork of the activists who created [The Denver Principles of 1983](#), using people-first language as you connect with other participants is important to center human beings first, rather than their condition and/or experiences. *When in doubt, check in with participants and honor the ways they would like to be referred to/addressed.*
- **Plain language:** consider using [plain language](#) when talking with others. Plain language that is easily understandable and avoids jargon helps audiences of all ages, skills levels and backgrounds better understand and engage with your content.

- **Gender inclusive language:** in the spirit of affirming and uplifting all of the ways we may outwardly express and inwardly identify ourselves, we encourage all participants to use [gender inclusive language](#) at TAT. Always ask about and honor participant names and pronouns.
- ◆ **Gender inclusive language in Spanish:** TAT organizers and interpretation and translation teams are using [gender inclusive Spanish](#) in all TAT materials and while interpreting during the summit. Some examples of what this can sound/look like are:
 - Using -e at the end of gendered words referring to people when their gender is unknown or there is more than one gender in a group (instead of defaulting to the masculine -o)
 - Using "Le damos la bienvenida" instead of "Bienvenido" or "Bienvenida"
- **Audio/Visual Access:** if there are any issues hearing presenters or reading materials during sessions, please let the presenters or a TAT staff member know immediately so they can try to address the issue. We want everyone to understand what is being shared and to participate to their fullest ability.
- **Don't suffer in silence:** if you need additional support in order to understand and participate fully during the summit, please let a TAT team member know! Creating inclusive multilingual spaces is a collective and ongoing process.

What can I expect in terms of interpretation at TAT?

All main sessions and some breakout sessions will be interpreted and available in English and Spanish. **A critical piece of language justice is challenging the belief that only people who don't speak English need interpretation.** Interpretation is for anyone who doesn't feel comfortable in **both** English and Spanish during a session (this includes English speakers who don't speak Spanish). **Here's what you can expect at TAT:**

- **Interpreters will be using simultaneous interpretation equipment** (radio transmitters and receivers) that they will bring with them and pass out to all participants as they enter a space.
- **The interpreter team will make a language justice [announcement](#)** at the very beginning of your session to help everyone understand that the session is an interpreted space and to share interpretation equipment guidelines and interpretation hand signals to slow down or to speak up. Feel free to ask questions if there's something you don't understand, and let us know immediately if your interpretation equipment isn't working.
- **Presentations and discussion may switch back and forth between English and Spanish.** Hold on to your equipment even when you understand what is being said so that you are ready to put it on when someone starts speaking in

another language. You can hang the headphones over your ears or on your shoulders when not in use.

- **Remember to speak at a moderate pace, loudly, and clearly** (use mics when available).
- **Pay attention to the interpreters making signs to speak slower or louder** (and make sure the speaker is aware).
- **Switching from one language to another in between phrases can be difficult to interpret.** If you will be switching between languages, you can help interpreters by taking a pause or saying: “I’m going to speak in [language] now”.
 - ◆ We value, honor and welcome Spanglish and other language variants being used at TAT. In the context of interpretation and multilingual spaces, please keep in mind that Spanglish may be difficult to interpret and also difficult to understand for people who don't speak both English and Spanish.

Remember that language justice is a process and it is not about perfection. We all have our own level of experience and familiarity with language justice tools and practices but we are committed to supporting each other with generosity, curiosity and grace.

If you have any questions or additional feedback regarding language justice at TAT, please reach out to the Tecolotl team at info@tecolotl.org. For immediate needs during the summit, you can also find us at the interpretation table on the second floor of the hotel, next to the main banquet room.

For more tools and resources about language justice, check out this [resource list](#).