# TRANSLATION TIPS: A GUIDE FOR EMERGENCY MANAGERS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICERS

## STEP 1: UNDERSTAND THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Whenever possible, learn about the best way to reach a limited English speaking (LES) community by asking someone from the target audience (such as staff from an organization in that community) or looking up information about the community (see resources).

Written communication is not the only (nor always the best) mode of communication. For example, some languages have rich oral traditions, including East African languages such as Oromo. A word-of-mouth or video approach may work better in those language communities.

## STEP 2: PREPARING MATERIALS FOR TRANSLATION

### Time and cost estimates (non-rush)

Generally, simple translations (600 words or less, common vocabulary) take about a week and complex translations (more than 600 words, technical language) take a week and a half or more. Budget around 0.25-0.30 cents per word or $50/hour by a certified translator.

### Improve quality and accuracy: prepare the document for translation

Consider readability and use plain English.
- A complicated or poorly written English document is more likely to result in an awkward or confusing translation. Keep the information simple and concise.
- Use short sentences and avoid complicated sentence structure.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- It's acceptable for the English version you send to the translator to differ from the original English document.
- Try to write for an audience at a fourth-grade reading level. This will make it easier for people to understand the translated text. Online tools like readable.io can help. Or use Word's Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level (5th to 8th grade level) and Ease (70 or higher).

Check for cultural relevance.
- Imagine how it reads in another language. Would the content make sense to someone from another country?
- Avoid metaphors, idioms, colloquialisms, euphemisms, puns and other forms of language that require situational or U.S. cultural experience, for example, "open house" might be translated as "vacant house." A "hot line" might be translated literally as a line that is hot.
- Look for language, instructions or images that may not be culturally appropriate. For example, "swine flu vaccination" may be unintentionally distasteful to groups that

consider pork taboo. When using images, try to use ones that reflect the target community.
- When possible, ask a member of the target audience to review the document for cultural relevance.

<u>Prepare the document for the translator.</u>
- Send text as Word files.
- If you are translating text for a graphic file, you will need to include the native files and include that work in the estimate and review. Translated text often requires modified layout.
- Highlight certain words to flag to the translator and provide explanations of those terms, such as:
  - Names of organizations, programs and other proper nouns (specify if you want them translated or left in English)
  - Technical terms

- Request that the final document include the original English text and translated text together. This will make future use easier for English speakers, and provide English language learners with references.
- If you are translating web or application content, consider all design and action elements on the page that will need to be translated. Identify text you will use in the metatags for search engines and your web master.
- If are making a poster, flyer, or other material that will have design elements, check to see if the translation vendor can put the translated text into the layout. If not, use a format like the one shown below. You can insert the sentences or phrases put into one column in English and the translation agency can put the translations into the other column. This will help you copy and paste the translated text into the correct spot in your designs. See sample below:

## Translation Template Document

| | Language: | Project: |
|---|---|---|

**Instructions:** Please translate each row below and put your translated sentences on the right side.
<mark>Yellow</mark> highlighted words are to be kept in English or are to be included in parentheses.
<mark>Green</mark> highlighted words are technical terms that may need further thought regarding the translation.

| Cell | English | Translation |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | | |
| 2 | | |
| 3 | | |
| 4 | | |
| 5 | | |
| 6 | | |
| 7 | | |
| 8 | | |
| 9 | | |
| 10 | | |
| 11 | | |
| 12 | | |

### STEP 3: WORKING WITH A TRANSLATION VENDOR

- Email a translation vendor to request an estimate and attach the document.
- Clearly state:
  - What languages are needed. Ask for the translation in the dialect of the language that is used locally. Some language use is distinctly different in the U.S. than in the country of origin (such as Vietnamese) or there may be a dialect that is spoken more by the community in your area (such as Mexican Spanish vs. South American dialects).
  - Provide a specific file name for the vendor to use and bill to; e.g. Boil Water Advisory English/Spanish. Including both languages in the title will make future use easier.
  - Whether it is a rush job and the completion date and time needed
  - How the translation will be used (e.g., a news release, flyer, phone recording, etc.). This helps the translators determine the tone and style.
  - Let the agency know if you are getting a second review with another agency and ask if they have a process they prefer for comments and review.
- Accept the estimate to begin the translation.
- Encourage the translator to contact you if they have questions about the meaning of any of the content.

- Ask for a quality assurance review. This will be an additional cost, but provides a check on accuracy and quality. A quality assurance review will have a second translator check the work of the first.

## STEP 4: COMMUNITY OR PEER REVIEW

Even the best translation agencies may have differing levels of quality depending on which individual translator is doing the work. They may be stronger in some languages than others. As a result, it's possible to have a problematic translation on occasion from even the best vendors.

The best practice is to have a native speaker review the translation to make sure it is accurate and reads well. When possible, identify reviewers in advance. If the translation is long, consider providing some type of compensation for the time and expertise it takes to carefully review a document.

If the reviewer disagrees with the translation, provide the feedback to the translation agency. This may involve some back-and-forth with the translation agency as their team may not agree with the reviewer. In general, the professional translators are more experienced, so if you are uncertain about which version to use, go with the advice of the professional translators.

Consider your audience, where they are from, what common terms may be used by that group, or literacy levels in their language. For example, Spanish spoken in Mexico can differ from other Latin American countries.

## TRANSLATION IN THE MIDST OF AN EMERGENCY

When translating messages in an emergency, it may not be possible to do every step (such as Step 1: Understand the target audience). During emergencies, ask for rush translations from translation vendors (note: a rush job will cost more). You may also need to have a list of translation vendors from outside your region or state who are not impacted by the disaster. While translation by certified professionals is generally best practice, in an emergency, you may need to rely on alternative translation systems. Some partner organizations may have bilingual staff that may be able to help.

Potential options for emergency translation:

- Local school district
- County or city employee language bank
- Bilingual staff or volunteers at food banks or service agencies
- Municipal, regional or Superior courts
  - Language interpreters: www.courts.wa.gov/programs_orgs/pos_interpret/
  - Deaf interpreters: www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/odhh/certified-court-interpreters

- Police officers or first responders
- Social workers/medical interpreters at hospitals
- 9-1-1 centers who contract with Language Line or Voiance for telephonic interpretation
- Ethnic media may be able to translate emergency messages for publication or broadcast.
- Resources for deaf/hard of hearing: www.hsdc.org/services/interpreting-services/
  - Emergency sign language interpreter program (ESLIP)
  - Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) – not 24/7, must be pre-arranged
- Check with your city to find out if your jurisdiction can use the state of Washington's master contract for translation.

How to increase accuracy and clarity of translations done by non-professionals:

- **Not every person who speaks a language can translate.** Translation is a technical skill, and just as not every speaker of English is a good writer, not every speaker of a language is a good translator.
- **Keep messages simple for non-professional translators.** Try to only have simple, short messages translated by non-professional translators.
- **Community or peer review is very important** when using translations done by non-certified translators! A second set of eyes (whether a community member or another bilingual staff member) can catch problematic translations.
- **Build relationships with reviewers before emergencies happen.** You can speed up the translation process and still have quality translation work if you have good relationships with members of language communities who can quickly advise on and review your communications.

*Some content adapted from City of Seattle's Language Access Toolkit and Public Health-Seattle & King County's Translation Guide.*

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