NRC-RIM
National Resource Center for
Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants

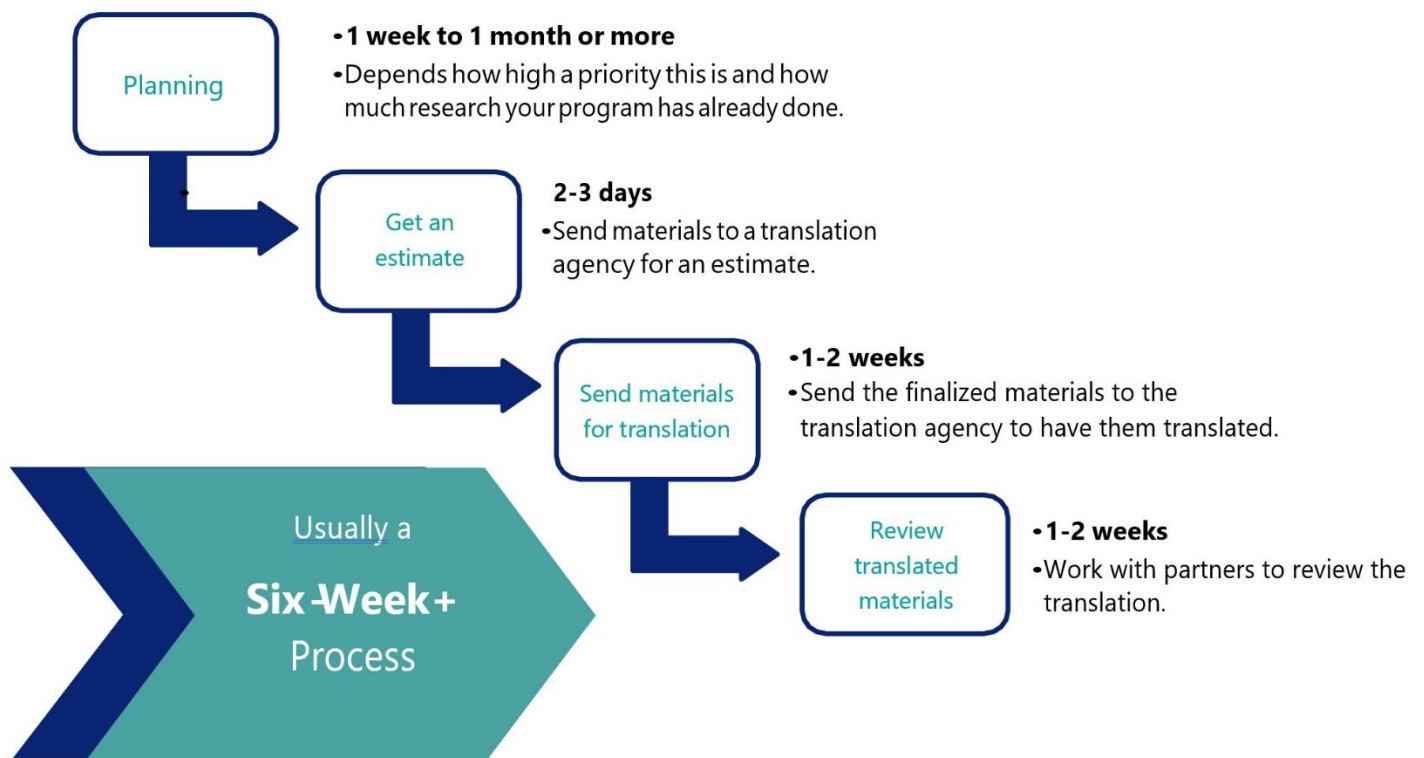# Toolkit for Written Translation

Updated February 2021

Introduction

This toolkit provides resources and best practices for to consider when having materials translated into other languages. A good translation involves more than just putting the text into another language. The document should be assessed for plain language and health literacy to make sure it will be understood in any language. Staff should also take time to plan for what languages a document is translated into based on their target audience and overall communication goals.

Acknowledgement

This guide is a product of the Minnesota Department of Health English Proficiency (LEP) Communications Workgroup and has been adapted for a broader audience through the National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants (NRC-RIM).

Please send questions, comments, and suggestions to NRC-RIM (nrcrim@umn.edu) who can then connect you with the LEP Communications Workgroup.

General Translation Timeline

Planning
- **1 week to 1 month or more**
- Depends how high a priority this is and how much research your program has already done.

Get an estimate
- **2-3 days**
- Send materials to a translation agency for an estimate.

Send materials for translation
- **1-2 weeks**
- Send the finalized materials to the translation agency to have them translated.

Review translated materials
- **1-2 weeks**
- Work with partners to review the translation.

Usually a **Six-Week+** Process

Recommendations for Translation

Assess whether written translation is appropriate

- **Identify your target audience**. Be as specific as possible when defining your target audience. Things to consider are:

  o Age (e.g. Elders? Youth?)

  o Where they live

  o Size of group

  o What languages they speak

  o Literacy level

- **Find community partner or contacts.** Is there someone who could provide advice on the best way to reach their community based on your topic?

- **Assess how critical translation may be.**

- **Determine if written translation is the best way to reach your audience.** Consider the following:

  o How recently did the target population arrive to the U.S.? More recent arrivals may have more of a need for translated documents

  o What is your target population's literacy level?

    ▪ [UNESCO data—Literacy rate](#)

  o Think about your target audience. Are you trying to reach an entire community, or a particular subset? (e.g., reaching elders in a particular community might require a different strategy than trying to reach the entire community)

  o Would another communications platform (such as video or radio) be more appropriate than print? Consider this option if:

    ▪ Literacy is low in a particular community and/or oral tradition is preferred

    ▪ You are not sure how you would effectively disseminate the flyer/brochure

    ▪ There are potential radio or television partners already serving that community

- You can pay to air PSAs, or print an ad, but also speak with the media vendor about if there are ways to educate in addition to the paid service, for example including an article along with the purchased print ad, or scheduling an on-air interview along with the purchase of PSAs.

- **Determine if your message could be delivered through images alone**. Maybe you do not have to translate anything. Icons, symbols, and photos and provide a lot of information.

- **Investigate if there are existing materials that you could use to deliver your message.**

  o [Translated Materials Library](#)

  o [NIH Health Reach](#)

  o [CDC Translated Materials (look up by topic)](#)

  o [Multilingual Health Exchange](#)

  o [Medline Plus](#)

- **Decide what languages to translate materials into.**

Prepare the Budget

- Decide on the type of translation services your program can afford. Talk with your supervisor or program leader to find out what type of budget is available for translation. This will inform what type of translation services to request.

  o If you have ample budget:

    ▪ $ Community Review: The translation company will have an additional bilingual individual double check the translation.

    ▪ $$ Back Translation: The translation company would have a different translator take the translated document and translate it back into English to see if the messages have remained intact. This is the highest form of quality check.

- If you have limited budget:

  o Is there community partner that can provide additional review?

  o Check the list of your organization's staff willing to provide assistance in another language.

o If you are sending out a mass mailing in English, consider having your key messages translated into the top main non-English languages used in your location.

- If you have little to no budget:

  o See if you can use or adapt existing materials.

    ▪ [Translated Materials Library](#)

    ▪ [NIH Health Reach](#)

    ▪ [CDC Translated Materials (look up by topic)](#)

    ▪ [Multilingual Health Exchange](#)

    ▪ [Medline Plus](#)

  o If you are sending out a mass mailing in English, consider:

    ▪ Include an offer to provide translation upon request.

  o Use a common message block at the end of your letter to invite non-English readers to call in and get the information using Language Line.

  o Consider just using icons or images to portray the information. See below for an example of this approach:

Figure 1: Example from the MDH Food, Pools, and Lodging Services Section.

- **Get an estimate:** Send the material you want translated to any of the state contracted translation vendors to get an estimate of the cost. You can send to as many or as few vendors as you like.

- **If you need to justify translation expenses**, here are some ideas and resources:

  o **Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act:** Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any program or activity that receives Federal

The National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants (NRC- RIM) is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support state and local health departments working with RIM communities. Learn more at nrcrim.umn.edu. Last update: 03/01/2021.

5

funds or other Federal financial assistance. Persons with limited English proficiency must be afforded a meaningful opportunity to participate in programs that receive Federal funds. (See Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 [https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI-Overview])

o **CLAS Standards:** "The National CLAS Standards are a set of 15 action steps intended to advance health equity, improve quality, and help eliminate health care disparities by providing a blueprint for individuals and health and health care organizations to implement culturally and linguistically appropriate services." (See Culturally and   Linguistically Appropriate Services [https://www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/clas]).

o **Prior lawsuits** in which healthcare or governmental agencies did not meet linguistic access. See International Medical Interpreters Association: Lawsuits (https://www.imiaweb.org/resources/legal.asp).

Prepare your message and document(s)

- **Use plain language** for the English version. This will make the translation more accurate. Below are some general goals for plain language:

  o Aim for a [Flesch Reading Ease](#) score above 60.

  o Aim for a [Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level](#) test rate at or below 8.0 (this is scored on a U.S. school grade level).

    ▪ Use images/icons when possible

- **Include images and icons:** Use images and icons to portray the message if possible. Be sure to use photos that resonate with and represent your target audience. Images of the target community will help the message resonate with community members.

- **Leave extra space** in the event the translated version will take up more space than the English version. For example,

  o Have about 1.5 times as much space available when translating into Somali or Hmong.

  o Have about 1.4 times as much space available when translating into Spanish.

- **Decide on the layout.** Here are some ideas:

  o English and the target language could be side-by-side.

  o English could be on one side of the document and the target language on the other.

- **Consider combining projects** if a document does not meet the minimum word count, which is the minimum number of words you will pay for. For example, if you send a document with 150 words in it, and the minimum word count for the translation agency is 400 words, you will pay for 400 words of translation.

> Helpful tools
>
> - [Health Literacy Tool Shed](#)

Contracting with a translator

- Questions to ask potential vendor contractors.

  - What is their process for translation?

  - Who will translate the materials? What is that person's specialty topical area?

  - Where is their company located?

  - How many people review the translated material?

  - Does the vendor contractor involve community vetting?

  - Does the vendor have a minimum word count per language? You may be able to add more text at no cost.

  - How long does the vendor need to translate the materials?

  - What's the cost? Do you have different costs based on the language?

  - What file formats can your translators work in?

  - What is the typical turnaround time for a project like ours?

- **Decide which vendor contractor to use**.

- **Provide the vendor contractor with clear instructions and expectations** for the translated materials. Suggestions for instructions include:

  - Would you like the vendor to insert the translated text into a template for an ad, brochure, or other final product? This will add to the overall cost but can reduce issues for staff to deal with different fonts and formatting when trying to layout the translated version.

  - Would you like to pay for a community review?

o   Would you like it to be back translated to assess the initial translation?

o   Do you have a glossary of key terms to help the translator make sure they use the translations you have already established as gold standards? For example, when you have worked with community partners in the past to decide on the correct term or phrase for something.

Do you have a few paragraphs of background and intent of the document for the translator? It may help the translator make the most accurate translation.

Post-translation

- **Quality check** translation for any errors. Check out the helpful tools for this section help.

- **Have materials** reviewed independently for accuracy and clarity.

- Ensure **community** vetting is involved.

- **Actively disseminate** materials.

- **Utilize partners**.

> ### Helpful tools
>
> - Quality Assessment Worksheet (see Appendix A).
>
> - Manual for Non-English Written Materials & Translations (PDF)
>
>   - The Arizona Health Disparities Center developed this resource. This document includes a "Quality Assessment Worksheet" that helps focus on specific aspects of the materials to ensure they meet the needs of the target audience.

Evaluate

- Determine the **effectiveness** of the material.

- Make sure the **community** is involved at all points of the process.

- **Receive input** through different mechanisms including advisory groups, committees, task forces, and partner organizations.

Appendices

Appendix A: Quality Assessment Worksheet

Appendix A: Quality Assessment Worksheet[1]

The translation coordinator should complete the shaded portion of this page prior to

submitting this form with the source and target documents to the independent reader from the target community for proofreading and comments.

Translator or translation agency: _____

Date: _____   Document Title: _____

Please check the appropriate box as you evaluate the attached document:

Category	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Integrity: The translated text and the English text convey the same message and tone to the reader.					
Accuracy: The translated text is an accurate, correct translation from the English text.					
Neutrality: The translated text can be easily understood by its intended audience.					
Grammar: The translated text is free of grammatical and punctuation errors, missing accents, diacritics, etc.					
Appropriateness: The translated text and visual elements are appropriate and inoffensive to the intended audience.					

How do you rate this translation overall?

Excellent   Good   Average   Below   Average
Unacceptable

Other comments: _____

Reader's Name: _____

Reader's Signature: _____

_____

[1] Modified from the Arizona Health Disparities Center's Manual for Non-English Written Materials & Translation.