

# LOST IN TRANSLATION?

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE TRANSLATION WORK



CRIMSONBRIDGE  
FOUNDATION

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## TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE TRANSLATION WORK

Building nonprofit organizations' capacity to implement best practices, stay current with technology and digital communications platforms, and build effective communication strategies to reach and engage the populations they serve, are fundamental for them to advance their work and fulfill their mission. The [Crimsonbridge Foundation's Bridges Program](#) works with nonprofits and schools to build their capacity to execute communication strategies that effectively reach and engage bilingual families in our communities, with an emphasis on Spanish speakers. For many multi-generational and multi-lingual households, information in Spanish serves as a means for families to participate more fully in and access essential services, programs, and educational opportunities. Accurate and professionally composed Spanish language materials, website content, microsites, and bilingual videos can be highly effective for increasing engagement. Based on the Foundation's work and lessons learned with nonprofit partners and schools since 2015, we share some tips that can facilitate translation efforts to reach Spanish-speaking families.

### Create a "Strategic Plan" for Your Translation Work

Keep in mind that "translating" information may not be word-for-word translation but the creation of original Spanish language text to provide their greatest accuracy. To save time and resources, it is important that you create a strategic plan to guide your translation efforts by first identifying your audience and what you want to communicate to them. Ask yourself the following questions and consider these factors when creating your plan:

#### Who is your intended audience? What is their level of education and literacy level in their native language?

The Latino population, just like the general population overall, varies in education and literacy. Make sure the translations are reading-level appropriate and in plain language, clearly and accessibly written. Short sentences, active voice, and simple vocabulary can help keep your translations appropriate for a range of reading and literacy levels.



#### Are there any regional variations in the language(s) that your audience speaks?

Know whether your Spanish-speaking clients are originally from different countries and regions. Just like Americans and the British have different words and phrases in English, families coming from different Spanish-speaking countries can be familiar with different words and phrases. It is important that you are aware of those language differences in your translations. A great way to do this is to convene a small group and learn directly from the community being reached.

#### What is the purpose of the translation? For example, is it to provide general information or to help the community access or apply for specific services? Which content is most important to translate? Is the information highly technical and specialized or very general?

Knowing the objective of your translation will give you the best idea of what is crucial to translate and the kind of translation your text needs. For example, if you are translating time or contact information, you may

need literal translations, but if you are translating words with different meanings, or idioms, you may want to translate the meaning of the text instead of doing a literal translation.

### What is the subject matter of the information you want to translate?

Know in advance the subject matter of the information you want to translate. It may be beneficial for the translator to have expertise in the subject matter to do an accurate translation. The more technical the subject matter, the more value there is in selecting a translator that possesses a good understanding of the material.

## Machine or Professional Human Translators

Once you know your audience and what you want to communicate, you need to decide how the translations will be made. Whether you use a machine (aka auto translation) or human translation may depend on the amount of content and the information you want to translate.

Machine translation will likely be less accurate, especially for creative texts, technical or specialized information, or text containing English idioms. Computers can't understand the different meanings of the words, they are only comparing the text to dictionaries and online algorithms. However, using a machine, or an online translation software, like Google Translate or WordFast Pro, can provide an immediate, free translation which is accessible and appealing for consumers and organizations alike.

While it is possible to get a very general idea of the content you are reading or hearing, the technology cannot be relied upon to provide a detailed and accurate translation. As the American Translators Association suggests, if you are using a machine translation for your communications products, there will need to be a second step in the process. Someone who is familiar with the messaging will need to review the translation, or a human translation service may still be needed for editing and corrections.

If you decide to use your own bilingual staff for translations, consider what needs to be translated. Someone who is fluent in both languages doesn't necessarily have the skills to do professional translation. However, they can be a great resource if they are familiar with your target audiences and know the content. To provide the most accurate version of staff-translated texts, assign at least two bilingual staff members to translation tasks so that a second member can review the translation.

## Working with Professional Human Translators

If you opt to hire a professional translator, it is important that your provider (whether a company or an independent translator), includes translation and editing/proofreading in their fees. Good translation providers always budget for a second person with similar skills and expertise in your field to perform a careful edit of the translation. Make sure the provider has professional translators available who are native speakers, including from the region that is representative of your target audience, and that they are also ideally living in the U.S. You may also want to work with the same individual for your job, not have it passed

### VIDEO TRANSLATION TIP

When you post videos online, such as on YouTube, the viewer can select closed captions in different languages (determined by the YouTube settings for the organization posting the video). You may want to disable the automatic translation until you can upload a good quality translation of the script. Automatic translation from audio will most likely be even less accurate than from written text and can detract from what could otherwise be a compelling video.

around to different translators based on who is available. Of course, ask for and check references for translation services!

Rates can vary based on a variety of factors, including location and source of translation. If an organization opts for in-house translation (preferably by a native Spanish speaker), a \$25-30/hour stipend is appropriate. If an organization chooses to work with a professional translation company, the contract typically includes a per-word cost based on the number of words selected for translation (example: \$.18/word). Translation providers should be able to provide a general estimate of costs and a timeline for the translation and editing once they are provided with a word count of the content, as well as guidance on the difficulty and substance of the document. The rates usually already include editing/proofreading of the translation, done by another translator/editor.



Rates may vary for web content and the estimate is usually only to translate the content. When the web content is sent back to be uploaded to your site, it is good to have the translator or editor check the text once it has been uploaded to make sure the formatting on the web pages hasn't distorted the text or resulted in incorrect hyphenation or line breaks.

Finally, to minimize costs, make sure that you have finalized your text before sending it out for translation.

Whether you're working with professional human translators, a machine such as a translation device, or an in-house option such as fluent, bilingual staff member, it is important that you develop a strategic plan before you begin translating information. The process of developing a strategic plan will help you identify your audience, the text you want to translate, and how you will be translating the information. In the long run, a strategic translation plan will save you time, resources, and challenges with your translations.

Below is a list of translation service providers that have been used by Crimsonbridge Foundation grantees. We recommend that you get estimates from more than one service as well as recommendations from peer organizations, if possible. We have also provided additional resources below for more information about translations.

- [Spanish Creative Services, LLC](#)
- [Multilingual Solutions](#)
- [ACSI Translations, LLC](#)

### Additional Resources

- [To Translate or Not to Translate: 5 Tips for knowing when you need professional translation](#)
- [Automation Doesn't Solve Everything](#)
- [Translation and Interpreting - Getting It Right](#)
- [Translation Buying Guide](#)
- [The High Cost of Cheap Translation](#)
- [Best Translation Tools in 2023: Top Free Online Software](#)