



CRIMSONBRIDGE — FOUNDATION —

Entrepreneurial Philanthropy for Breakthrough Impact

LOST IN TRANSLATION?

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE
TRANSLATION WORK





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Building organizational capacity is critical to every nonprofit organization. The [Crimsonbridge Foundation's Bridges Program](#) works with nonprofits to build their capacity to execute communication strategies that effectively reach and engage Spanish speakers in our community. For many multi-generational and multi-lingual households, information in Spanish serves as a means for families to participate in and access essential services, programs, and educational opportunities. An important part of the Foundation's capacity-building work is to support nonprofit organizations in translating accurate and professional Spanish language web content; designing Spanish language microsites¹; and creating bilingual videos. Based on our work and lessons learned with nonprofits, we share some tips that can facilitate translation efforts to reach Latino Spanish-speaking families.

Create a Strategic Plan for Your Translations

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. This will influence the translation work that you do.

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 regions of Latin America and the Caribbean can be familiar with different words and phrases. It is important that you are aware of those language differences in your translations.¹

What is the purpose of the translation? For example, is it to provide general information or to help the community access or apply for services? Which content is most important to translate? What type of content needs to be accessible in the translation? Is the information highly technical and specialized or very general? Knowing the objective of your translation will give you a good 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.



¹"A Microsite is a website, distinct and separate from an organization's main site, that delivers more focused, relevant content about a specific topic or to a targeted audience [Spanish speakers] or even just requiring a defined action," <https://www.microsite.com/microsites>

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. The translator may need to have expertise in the subject matter to do an accurate translation. The more technical the subject matter, the more your translator needs to possess a good understanding of the material.

Machine or Human for Your Translations

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 or a human translation may depend on the content of the information you want to translate.

A machine translation may not be accurate for certain information, 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, can provide an immediate, free translation which is accessible and appealing for consumers and organizations alike. The quality of automatic translation has also recently improved.

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 (see Box for Video Translations). 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. ⁱⁱ

If you decide to use your own bilingual staff for your translations, consider what needs to be translated. Someone who is fluent in both languages doesn't necessarily mean that they 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.

Caution About Video

When you use different languages (determined by the YouTube settings for the organization posting the video). You may want to disable the automatic translation until you post videos online, such as on YouTube, the viewer can select closed captions in u 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.

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



Rates are typically based on a per word cost or an hourly rate, calculated for an average output # of words/hour (example: \$75/hour, with output usually around 150 words/hour). 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, make sure that you have finalized your text BEFORE sending it out for translation. You don't want to pay for text to be translated and then have to send it back for more work because you weren't working with final copy.

Whether you're working with professional translators, a machine, or a co-worker, 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 we provide some resources to get more information about translations and some of the translating services that Crimsonbridge Foundation grantees have used.

- [MAGA Creative Services, LLC](#)
- [Multilingual Solutions](#)

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](#)

ⁱ [Reaching and Engaging with Hispanic Communities: A Research-Informed Communication Guide for Nonprofits, Policymakers, and Funders](#)

ⁱⁱ https://www.atanet.org/clients/what_is_machine_translation.php