Translating Vital Documents: A Practical Approach

Kleber Palma, Director
Translation & Interpretation Unit
NYC Department of Education

September 2016

Vital Documents

vi-tal
/vɪˈtəl/ [adjective] absolutely necessary or important; essential

doc-u-ment
/dəˈkʌmənt/ [noun] an official paper that gives information about something

Identification of Vital Documents

- Poll all divisions within agency:
  - To identify documents that are meant for service users
    - User-prompted documents
    - Agency-prompted documents
  - To identify location and owners of source files
  - To address any version control issues
Identification of Vital Documents

- To prepare for potential translation needs, also identify:
  - Length of documents (pages and words)
  - Whether translations already exist and into which languages
  - Whether source files exist and, if so, in which file format

Vital Document Report (sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Doc.</th>
<th>Page Count</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>Revision Date</th>
<th>Owner of Doc.</th>
<th>Existing Translations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration Form</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1/2016</td>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>2 Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome Sign</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9/2016</td>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>1 Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>5/2010</td>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What gets translated first?

- Consider **frequency** document comes in contact with LEP service users
  - Forms
  - Flyers
  - Information brochures
- Consider documents linked to **pre-established deadlines**
  - Periodic or seasonal communications
  - Communications connected to calendared events

What gets translated first?

- Consider **most-visible** communications
  - Signage at sites where service users may frequent
  - Website
- Consider documents by **size**
  - Documents with lesser word counts are cheaper and less time consuming
- Consider documents that drive **policy**
  - Mandates, regulations that detail policy affecting service users
Priority Report (sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Doc.</th>
<th>Page Count</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>Revision Date</th>
<th>Priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration Form</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1/2016</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome Sign</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9/2016</td>
<td>Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>5/2010</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cost/Resources

• Remember…

Translating vital documents is an on-going process.

Tracking & Archiving

• Why?
  • Allows for easy listing of agency’s translated documents
  • Identifies the source/owner of document
  • Identifies who did the translation
  • Identifies date of translation
  • Allows for quick retrieval of translated documents
  • Expedites the translation of documents that have been updated
  • Reduces translation costs

• How?
  • A tracking tool or mechanism is required
    • Database (e.g., Microsoft Access)
    • Spreadsheet (e.g., Microsoft Excel)
  • Required fields should include, at a minimum:
    • Contact information (e.g., name, office, number, email)
    • Document information (e.g., name, length)
    • Provider of services (e.g., internal/external, cost)
    • Tracking or job number
  • Archiving requires a file naming convention and location
    • Example: 201_Invite_for_Winter_Meeting_SP_1_22.15
Tracking & Archiving

- Who?
  - Anyone or all involved in the coordination of getting documents translated
  - If your agency doesn’t yet translate documents, this is a good place to start

Bonus step!

- Ensure vital documents are language access ready
  - Read your document from the lens of a LEP service user
  - Additions/subtractions of text could make document more practical

Flyer vs. Translation ready flyer

Join us next week to learn more about our program
Guest Speaker: Jane Smith
Date: January 1, 2015
Time: 6:00 p.m.
Location: Library
For more information or to register for the event, visit anywebsite.com

Join us next week to learn more about our program
Guest Speaker: Jane Smith
Date: January 1, 2015
Time: 6:00 p.m.
Location: Library
For more information or to register for the event, visit anywebsite.com (English only)
or call 111-222-3333
Interpretation services will be available.

Letter vs. Translation ready Letter

<January 22, 2015>
Dear <Jane Smith>,
This is regarding your child, <Joe Smith>.
Please contact us at 111-222-3333.
Thank you.

January 2015
Dear Parent,
This is regarding your child,
Please contact us at 111-222-3333. Interpretation services will be available.
Thank you.
Getting the word out!

- Steps taken so far:
  - Identified vital documents
  - Categorized and prioritized documents
  - Created a tracking and archiving system
  - Made documents "language access" ready
  - Translated documents
- Final step: Ensure that all of this work reaps benefits

Dissemination of translated documents

- Hard copy delivery (i.e., print version)
  - Send all language versions of the communication along with the English
  - Send English only with foreign-language reference to where/when translation can be obtained
  - Use data (if available) to pre-identify need and send appropriate language
  - If applicable, post online

- Soft copy delivery (i.e., email)
  - Send English communication, along with translated versions as attachments
  - Send English communication, with a reference to when or where online translation can be obtained
  - Post online
Dissemination of translated documents

- Online access to translations (i.e., website)
- Consider developing two interfaces online
  - Public facing interface (user-prompted documents)
  - Internal interface (agency-prompted documents)
- One-stop shop for accessing translations