

Toolkit for Written Translation

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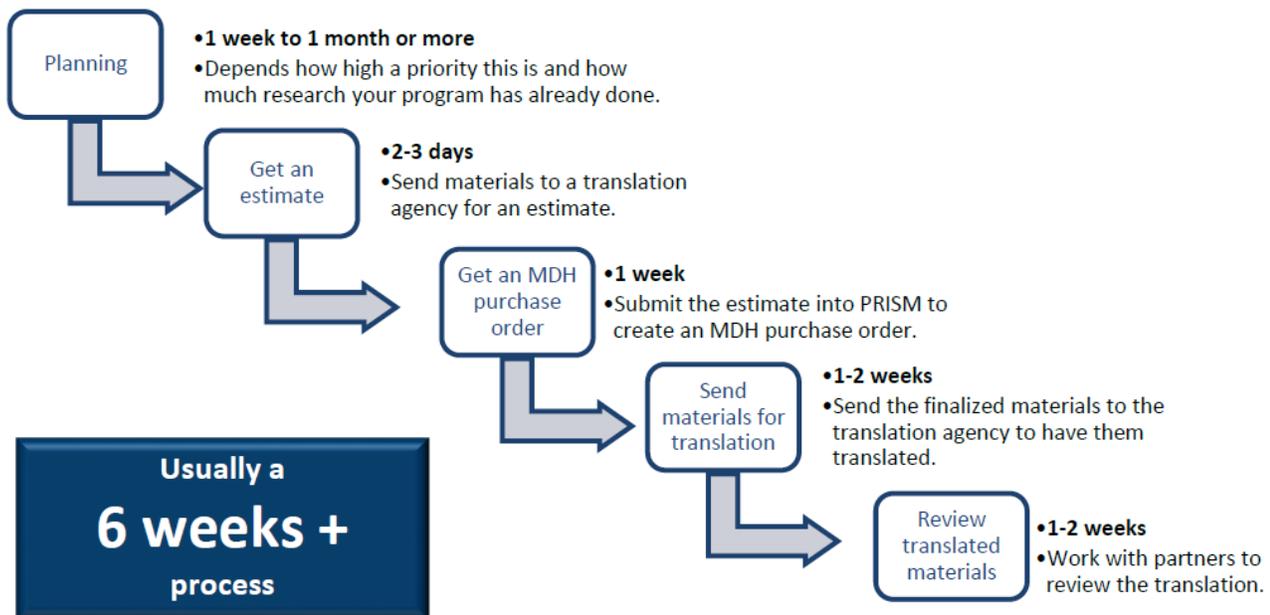
Introduction

This toolkit provides resources and best practices for MDH staff 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.

This guide is a product of the MDH Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Communications Workgroup. Special thanks to Genelle Lamont for the Modified Suitability Assessment of Materials (SAM) tool and Cara Weston for her priority translation tool.

Please send questions, comments, and suggestions to the co-chairs of the LEP Communications Workgroup: Danushka Wanduragala (danushka.wanduragala@state.mn.us) and Frieda vonQualen at (frieda.vonqualen@state.mn.us).

General Translation Timeline



Translation Checklist

Below is a simple checklist to follow when translating written materials. See [Recommendations for Translation](#) for more detail.

Assess whether translation is appropriate

- Identify target audience.
- Find community partner or contacts.
- Assess how critical translation is.
- Determine if written translation is the best way to reach your audience.
- Determine if your message could be delivered through just images.
- Investigate if there are existing materials that you could use to deliver your message.
- Decide what languages to translate materials into.

Prepare the budget

- Decide on the type of translation services your program can afford.
- Get a cost estimate.
- Justify translation expenses (if necessary).

Prepare your message and documents

- Use plain language.
- Include images and icons.
- Leave extra space.
- Decide on the layout.
- Consider combining projects.

Contract with a translator

- Decide which vendor to use.
- Give the vendor clear instructions and expectations.

Review and share materials

- Quality check translation.
- Have materials reviewed independently for accuracy and clarity.
- Actively share the materials.
- Work with partners.

Evaluate

- Determine the effectiveness of the material.
- Get feedback from the community.
- Report exceptional or unsatisfactory service.

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:
 - Age (e.g. Elders? Youth?)
 - Where they live
 - Size of group
 - What languages they speak
 - 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? If not, reach out to the following programs for ideas:
 - The MDH Center for Health Equity
 - The MDH Refugee and International Health Program
 - Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Communications Workgroup

- **Assess how critical translation may be.** Review the MDH [Guide to Translation Considerations](https://fyi.health.state.mn.us/guide-to-translation-considerations) (<https://fyi.health.state.mn.us/guide-to-translation-considerations>) to help assess whether there is a big enough need to focus on translation.

- **Determine if written translation is the best way to reach your audience.** Consider the following:
 - How recently did the target population arrive to the U.S.? More recent arrivals may have more of a need for translated documents
 - [Culture Care Connection](http://www.culturecareconnection.org/) (<http://www.culturecareconnection.org/>).
 - The MDH Refugee and International Health Program
 - What is your target population's literacy level?
 - UNESCO data—[Literacy rate](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/se.adt.litr.zs) (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/se.adt.litr.zs>)
 - 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)
 - 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.**
 - NIH Health Reach (<https://healthreach.nlm.nih.gov/>)
 - CDC Translated Materials (look up by topic) (<https://www.cdc.gov/>)
 - Multilingual Health Exchange (<http://health-exchange.net/>)
 - Medline Plus (<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/languages.html>)
- **Decide what languages to translate materials into.** You can find sources for language data on the MDH LEP Communicators Workgroup SharePoint site, including the following:
 - Top 15 Languages in MN (PDF)
(https://mn365.sharepoint.com/teams/MDH/permanent/comm_proj/english/Shared%20Documents/OCR%20for%20ACA%20states_top-15-languages-list.pdf)--from DHS and the U.S. Census.
 - MDH Refugee and International Health Language Grid (Contact Danushka).
 - MDE Language Data for households with school-aged children
(<http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/DataTopic.jsp?TOPICID=2>)

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.
 - 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:
 - Is there community partner that can provide additional review?
 - Check the list of MDH staff willing to provide assistance in another language.
 - 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 MN.
 - If you have **little to no** budget:
 - See if you can use or adapt existing materials.
 - NIH Health Reach (<https://healthreach.nlm.nih.gov/>)
 - CDC Translated Materials (look up by topic) (<https://www.cdc.gov/>)
 - If you are sending out a mass mailing in English, consider:
 - Include an offer to provide translation upon request.

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- Use a common message block at the end of your letter to invite non-English readers to call in and get the information from an MDH staff person using Language Line.
- One version is available on the LEP Communications Workgroup SharePoint site: “If you are unable to understand this document and would like assistance, please call ___-___-_____ and ask for an interpreter.” (See [LEP Workgroup](https://mn365.sharepoint.com/teams/MDH/permanent/comm_proj/english/SitePages/LEP_Workgroup.aspx) (https://mn365.sharepoint.com/teams/MDH/permanent/comm_proj/english/SitePages/LEP_Workgroup.aspx)).
- 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:
 - **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 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) [<https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI-Overview>])
 - **Public Health Accreditation Board standards:** For MDH to maintain its PHAB accreditation, it must “Provide information on public health issues and public health functions through multiple methods to a variety of audiences (Standard 3.2). Measure 3.2.6 A is “Accessible, accurate, actionable, and current information provided in culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate formats for target populations served by the health department.” (See [PHAB: Advancing public health performance](https://www.phaboard.org/standards-and-measures-for-initial-accreditation/) [<https://www.phaboard.org/standards-and-measures-for-initial-accreditation/>])
 - **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>]).
- **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>).
- **Remaining questions?** Consult the MDH Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Communications Workgroup. We meet on the second Monday of the month from 11 AM to 12:30 PM. Email Danushka Wanduragala (danushka.wanduragala@state.mn.us) or Frieda von Qualen (frieda.vonqualen@state.mn.us) to receive workgroup updates and meeting appointments to get connected.

Helpful tools

- **Hiring Professional Print Translation Services** (<https://fyi.health.state.mn.us/hiring-professional-print-translation-services>) includes names and contact information for approved translation vendors.

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:
 - Aim for a Flesch Reading Ease score above 60.
 - 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,
 - Have about 1.5 times as much space available when translating into Somali or Hmong.
 - Have about 1.4 times as much space available when translating into Spanish.
- **Decide on the layout.** Here are some ideas:
 - English and the target language could be side-by-side.
 - 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 amount 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 (<http://healthliteracy.bu.edu/>)
 - Modified Suitability Assessment of Materials (SAM) Tool (PDF) (https://mn365.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/teams/MDH/permanent/comm_proj/english/Shared%20Documents/SAMS_MDHFormat_20190412.docx?d=w84dfa80193fc4f7da3e9946222a1)

1a8c&csf=1&e=pPLiRp).

- MDH standards and guidelines for [Design and Branding](https://fyi.health.state.mn.us/design-branding) (<https://fyi.health.state.mn.us/design-branding>).

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?
- **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 MDH staff to deal with different fonts and formatting when trying to layout the translated version.
 - Would you like to pay for a community review?
 - Would you like it to be back translated to assess the initial translation?
 - 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.

Helpful tools

- [Hiring Professional Print Translation Services](https://fyi.health.state.mn.us/hiring-professional-print-translation-services) (<https://fyi.health.state.mn.us/hiring-professional-print-translation-services>) includes names and contact information for approved translation vendors.
- [Translation Vendor Information \(Vendor Bid Sheet\)](https://mn365.sharepoint.com/teams/MDH/permanent/comm_proj/english/Shared%20Documents/TranslationVendorInformation.docx) (https://mn365.sharepoint.com/teams/MDH/permanent/comm_proj/english/Shared%20Documents/TranslationVendorInformation.docx).

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.
- Get the resource on the MDH list of translated materials (instructions to come soon).
- Utilize partners.

Helpful tools

- Quality Assessment Worksheet (see appendices).
- Manual for Non-English Written Materials & Translations (PDF) (<https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/prevention/tobacco-chronic-disease/health-disparities/clas-manual-non-english-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.
- Report exceptional or unsatisfactory service from a translation company to the Minnesota Department of Administration through a Vendor Performance Report (PDF) (<http://www.mmd.admin.state.mn.us/pdf/perform.pdf>).

Appendices

- Translation Decision-Making Tool
- Information about the Modified Suitability Assessment of Materials (SAM) Tool
- Vendor Bid Sheet
- Quality Assessment Worksheet

Translation Decision-Making Tool

If you have questions or feedback about this tool, please contact Cara Weston (cara.weston@state.mn.us).

So you or your program have reached a point where you're asking the question, "What should we translate?" Narrow down the scope of potential translations by considering:

- When you need the translations done – is this urgent?
 - Some translation companies have an emergency turnaround of less than two hours.
 - For non-urgent projects, plan for at least a month from start to finish.
- How much money do you have in your budget for translations? (Rule of thumb for general cost: "A 300-word fact sheet might cost between \$x and \$x depending on the language")
- What level of translation do you need? This will affect how long the process takes.
 - Simple translation
 - Translation with community review
 - Translation with back translation (English is translated and then, separately, the translated version is translated back into English to see how well it works.)
- Are any of these documents available translated through other government agencies or organizations. (examples, resources for searching – data portal?)

Use this tool to help guide discussion and decision-making.

Part A: Preparation

1. List all the documents that may need to be translated for the program or project at this time.

Considerations:

- Make sure all text is in plain language and is accessible in English first. Simplify!
 - Can some information be communicated via graphics with fewer written words?
 - Layout: different languages and texts take up different amount of space for the same sentence. Some companies will also adjust the layout of the document for you when they translate and some won't. This may also affect the format they request the document(s) be sent in.
 - Consult a health educator and/or the communications department if needed.
2. List all the languages for which you may need translation.
 - Top languages in Minnesota: Spanish, Somali, Hmong
 - Review the resources compiled by the LEP Communicators Workgroup to better understand the languages that may be needed: [Data-Cultural Profiles](https://mn365.sharepoint.com/teams/MDH/permanent/comm_proj/english/SitePages/Data_CulturalProfiles.aspx) (https://mn365.sharepoint.com/teams/MDH/permanent/comm_proj/english/SitePages/Data_CulturalProfiles.aspx)
 3. Assign a shorthand for each document/language pairing:

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Document/Language	Spanish	Hmong	Somali	Arabic	Swahili
Brochure	Sp-B	H-B	So-B	A-B	Sw-B
Parent Letter	Sp-P	H-P	So-P	A-P	Sw-P
Fact Sheet	Sp-F	H-F	So-F	A-F	Sw-F
				Total:	12

4. Take each pairing through the Decision-Making Tool and plot it on the quadrant graph.

Part B: Decision-Making Tool

1. **Urgency:** How important is it for people who speak this language to receive this resource in their language?

|_____||_____||_____||_____||_____||_____||

Not urgent Urgent

Set the boundaries of the scale here. Consider things like the literacy of the population that speaks this language and who will distribute the document to that population. Will it be on the website only? Are providers/specialists asking for this? Does it address something that threatens life, enhances life, or makes life more convenient?

2. **Reach:** How many people will this resource in this language potentially reach?

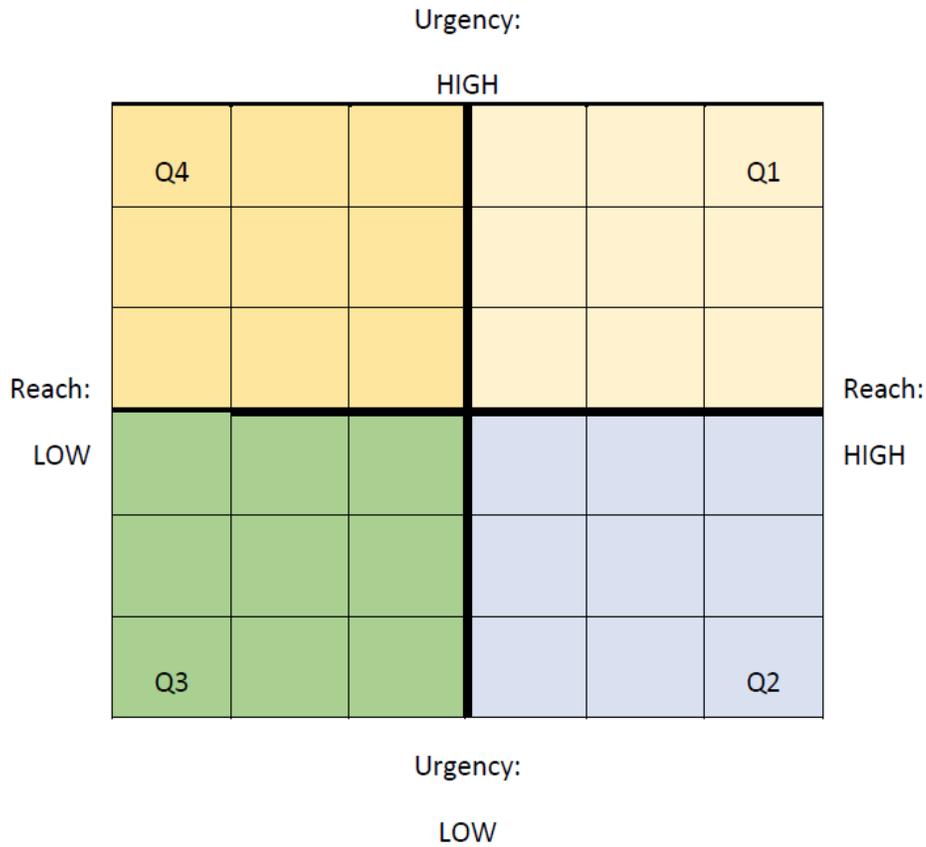
|_____||_____||_____||_____||_____||_____||

Small #

Large #

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Set the boundaries of the scale here. Consider how this population may be changing in Minnesota in the future. Also consider literacy of the population. The central number should be a cutoff for helping your program decide what to translate.



Part C: Recommendations

Q1: More Urgent + Greater Reach

Recommendations:

- Proceed with translation.
 - If there is not sufficient funding for translation, contact:
 - Your program supervisor, manager, or division director to explore other funding streams
 - LEP Communicators Workgroup – this group may know of resources to help
 - Communications Department
- Consider other ways of communicating urgent information, such as video or audio messaging, in addition to translating documents.
- Consider providing the document(s) in scenarios where a trained interpreter will be present, such as the point of diagnosis with a healthcare provider or over the phone with a language line interpreter participating.

Q2: Less Urgent + Greater Reach

Recommendations:

- Get quotes from at least two different translation services. This will help determine if translation is feasible according to the budget.
- If not, plan the next fiscal year's budget to allow for translation(s).
- Notify the LEP Communicators Workgroup of the need and the group will contact your program if/when there's room on a translation contract to add the amount of text you need without increasing costs.

Q3: Less Urgent + Lower Reach

Recommendations:

- Language Line is always available for individual instances of need.
- Put documents on a list for translation consideration for future fiscal years.

Q4: More Urgent + Lower Reach

Recommendations:

- Proceed with getting quotes from at least two different translation services. If the urgency is high enough to remove doubt, proceed with translation immediately.
- Compare translation cost with live interpretation cost, either in-person or over the phone, depending on the situation. Live interpretation may be a better approach depending on the cultural needs, complexity of the situation, potential for important follow-up questions, etc.

Modified Suitability Assessment of Materials (SAM) Tool

Use this tool to determine how suitable your materials are for your target audience. The tool will help you assess whether your target audience can read and understand your materials and where you should make changes. [Access the tool at Modified Suitability Assessment of Materials \(SAM\) Tool](https://mn365.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/teams/MDH/permanent/comm_proj/english/Shared%20Documents/SAMS_MDHFormat_20190412.docx?d=w84dfa80193fc4f7da3e9946222a11a8c&csf=1&e=pPLiRp)

(https://mn365.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/teams/MDH/permanent/comm_proj/english/Shared%20Documents/SAMS_MDHFormat_20190412.docx?d=w84dfa80193fc4f7da3e9946222a11a8c&csf=1&e=pPLiRp).

Vendor Bid Sheet

Use this tool to help find the right vendor for your translation needs. Adapted with permission from the MDH Environmental Health Communicators Group.

Vendor information:

Translation agency	Name of agency contact person	Phone #
Address	City	State/Zip
Email	Federal Employer ID#	MN Tax ID#

Project information:

Project lead	Translation document title
Target languages	
Other information	

Proposed project work plan:

- Estimate the amount of time required to complete the following translation tasks.
- Schedule and complete a pre-translation meeting (if needed): _____
- Submit a draft translation(s) to MDH in all requested languages: _____
- Conduct community review(s) and incorporate reviewer comments (if requested): _____
- Conduct a back translation (if requested): _____
- Complete first inspection of MDH formatted document(s): _____
- Evaluate translation process: Bid evaluation criteria: _____

Can vendor meet the project's language requirements as specified above?

Yes _____ No _____

Explain:

Can vendor meet the project deadline as specified above?

Yes _____ No _____

Explain:

Project cost estimate

Translation: _____ (Community review cost and back translation cost)

Other Costs: _____

Total Cost: _____

Other comments: _____

Quality Assessment Worksheet¹

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.

Date: _____ Document Title: _____

Translator or translation agency: _____

Language: _____

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

Category	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Agree
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

Comments:

Reader's name: _____

Readers' signature: _____

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