

Translation of Documents: Best Practices for Your Staff



As we navigate onboarding and retention best practices for foreign-born talent, let's review some information to better prepare you for the translation of documents.

What is Translation?

The act of converting **written** text in one language into the written text of another language.

While Google Translate may be convenient and free, professional translators perform translations *for meaning* in a culturally appropriate way. Google Translate, in contrast, performs a literal translation, which means that many of the cultural nuances of the messages may be lost in the translation.

How to prepare a document for translation into another language

- Review the English text carefully
- Avoid terms or concepts that require a lot of explanation or cultural adaptation
- Will the target audience be familiar with the topic?
- Avoid the use of idioms or informal figures of speech
- Choose the simplest word when there's more than one good choice
- Avoid acronyms
- Allow space for text expansion: translated text will likely require more space than the original English text. Allow extra room when you do your plan of design.

What documents should I translate?

You'll want to consider translating your internal documents that provide your staff with limited English proficiency with "meaningful access" to your programs, benefits, and services. This can include documents such as:

- Applications
- Employee handbooks
- Policies and procedures
- Safety guides and updates
- Notices and correspondence related to job benefits
- Complaint forms
- Documents that require a signature from the individual
- Information related to rights and services
- Documents that require a signature or response from the qualified individual, applicant, qualified employer, qualified employee, or enrollee.

Best practice recommendation

Once you know the languages most commonly spoken among your staff, you can provide your staff the ability to notify you, in their primary language, when they would like to have certain materials translated into another language. For example, you can have the following sentence translated into several of the most commonly spoken languages among your staff: "If you would like this document translated into another language, please contact [name and contact information]."

How do I contact a translation services company?

There are many companies in Maine that provide translations of written documents. Below is a non-exhaustive list of several Maine-based vendors, which is not an explicit recommendation of any particular vendor:

- House of Languages
- Catholic Charities Maine Language Partners: Translation Services
- Ideas from the Maine Department of Education

What languages should I translate documents into?

It is unrealistic to translate written materials into dozens of languages. Consider translating the document into the most frequently encountered languages in your area and perhaps set goals for continued translations into other languages over time.

- Sometimes you won't have ready access to this information but can translate it into a requested language.
- Look at any available data of commonly spoken languages by your staff
- Have ready access to translation services companies that can assist

Use of visual aids

In many instances, clear visual images of tasks may be helpful in many production and manufacturing environments where tasks, for example, can be visually broken down into visual steps for employees to follow.

**Please note that this document is not intended to provide legal advice. If you have any questions as to whether your internal policies and procedures are compliant with local, state, or federal law, we encourage you to seek legal advice.*