


Thomas A. Golden, Jr.
City Manager

Ineabelle Dominguez
Administrative Assistant

MEMORANDUM

TO: Thomas A. Golden, Jr., City Manager 

FROM: Melissa Desroches, Executive Assistant to the City Manager; Diandra Silk, Asst. Director CASE – Marketing and Communications; Inneabelle Dominguez, Administrative Assistant to the City Manager

CC: Shawn Machado, Assistant City Manager; Conor Baldwin, Chief Financial Officer; Doreen Burgess, Assistant to the City Manager; Miran Fernandez, CIO

DATE: July 11, 2023

SUBJECT: MOTION RESPONSE: C. Nuon- 3/1/22– Req. City Mgr. Work With Appropriate Staff To Ensure That All Communications From The City Intended For Public Reading Be Presented in English, Khmer And Spanish

As part of a wider goal of increasing accessibility to information and services from the City of Lowell for everyone, language and communication access play a crucial role in supporting this effort. Language and communication access can bring numerous benefits to a city, enhancing inclusivity, efficiency, and overall quality of life. The City has made many advancements in providing language and communication access to more residents, and we intend to centralize and expand this effort to increase consistency and continue to promote a sense of belonging, integration, and inclusivity among our diverse community.

The City Manager’s Office has provided an iPad to the volunteer “Greeter” working at the information desk in the lobby of City Hall. The iPad allows the Greeter to use the Google Translate App with City Hall visitors, which has been helpful in making interactions with visitors more effective. The audio feature in particular enables translation of conversation in real time, which helps the Greeter direct visitors appropriately.

Various City Departments have made efforts to provide translations to their communications intended for public reading; however, these actions have been siloed and handled by each department as the need arises. In support of streamlining and centralizing this overall translation task, the City Manager’s Office and the Assistant Director of Communications and Marketing in CASE have been working to determine the best course of action. We reached out to the Finance and Purchasing Departments to gather information on securing a translation services vendor.



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Currently, the State of Massachusetts has a contract used specifically for translation and interpretation services. This contract is through the Operation Services Division (OSD), under the Professional Services section PRF75: Foreign Language Interpretation and Translation Services: [download \(mass.gov\)](https://www.mass.gov). The state contract provides a list of approved vendors and highlighted preferred partners. We intend to move forward securing a vendor that can be utilized for all future written translation services as it pertains to advisories to the public. Using the past five months as a benchmark, we have determined a baseline need and estimated cost for this partnership.

Translation services used in the past five months have pulled from an existing PO funded by ARPA money. In exploring vendor partnerships, we will develop a more detailed picture of what the partnership would look like and specific costs, so that we can understand feasibility, how long this fund will last, and when it will be necessary to allocate additional funding for translation services. In the FY24 budget, there is a line item for Communications, and this will provide an additional source of funding.

While the motion asks to ensure communication from the City intended for public reading be presented in English, Khmer, and Spanish, we recommend including Portuguese as well. Of the non-English languages spoken in Lowell, the three most predominant are Khmer (12% of total population), Spanish/Spanish Creole (11% of total population), and Portuguese (6% of total population). Other languages spoken in Lowell constitute 2% or less of the total population [source: DPD].

We agree wholeheartedly with the Council's sentiment of increasing accessibility to important information distributed on behalf of the City to its residents. We can continue to leverage technology and collaborate with partners to implement language and communication access effectively. Ultimately, we want to continue to foster an inclusive environment that caters to the diverse linguistic needs of our residents and visitors.



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Cost Outline

- Based on the highlighted vendors from the Chief Procurement Officer's list from the state contract, the average cost per word for translation services is about \$0.26 per word. For written translation services to Spanish, Khmer, and Portuguese, the combined rate per word for a routine (not expedited) translation is about \$0.78.
- Many partners offer volume discounts, but these only kick in at a quantity of 3,000+ words. Our advisory posts that have been translated in the past five months, for example the Water Utility Hydrant Turning or Cemetery Clean Up, numbered 220 words and 240 words respectively.
- Most advisories have 1+ weeks of lead time before they are shared out. Some are more time sensitive, and must be shared out immediately (for example, parking bans and delayed waste pickups). These may require an expedited turnaround. Expedited rates per word increase to an average of about \$0.36 per word.
- Based on 3 advisories per week, at a word count of 50 to 250 words, the weekly cost could range from \$120 to \$585 for routine (not expedited) translations.

Next Steps

- Reach out to vendors and assess capabilities in terms of languages offered and anticipated turnaround times. Select a partner.
- Refine cost estimate and open a requisition with appropriate funds to move forward.