

OVERVIEW: Los Angeles County enhances its translation and interpretation services beyond hiring bilingual staff. This program establishes in-house translation and interpretation protocols in land use planning services.

CHALLENGE: About 25 percent of the total Los Angeles County population is Spanish-speaking constituents who are not proficient in English. The County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning (DRP) needs to enhance translation and interpretation services this population beyond hiring bilingual staff.

- 1) **Technical Translation in Land Use Planning:** A good technical translator has a competent technical background, solid linguistic knowledge, and deep cultural understanding. Linguistic translations are inadequate in communicating policies and regulations that have legal consequence. Although at least 15 percent of DRP staff speaks Spanish, it is a constant struggle for bilingual staff to communicate land use planning concepts and terms to the Spanish-speaking constituents who are not proficient in English. For example, the word "setback" in Spanish only means "setback in life." In land use planning, "setback" can refer to the distance to the property line from which a structure can be placed. Also, "neighborhood" is frequently translated into the Spanish word "barrio" but in certain countries "barrio" could refer to gang-infested communities, akin to the word "ghetto," and thus offend many people.
- 2) **The Untranslatable Words:** Untranslatable words are words that have no direct corresponding words in the target language. American "Spanglish" often inadvertently allows for the usage of words that are not formally recognized or essentially incorrect in Spanish. For example, the word "yard" can be used to refer to a yard sale, front yards, as well as a measurement unit. In Spanish, "yarda" is only formally recognized as a measurement unit.

INNOVATIVE SOLUTION: In 2014, DRP initiated the Spanish Planning Program, which includes:

To provide planning services in Spanish goes beyond hiring Spanish-speaking staff, the staff formed a committee to go above and beyond their duties to tackle technical translation in land

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use planning. The Committee members are highly competent in land use planning, possess solid linguistic skills, and are culturally sensitive coming from six Spanish-speaking countries.

To maintain consistency in technical translation of land use planning information, the Committee first established a protocol for in-house language translation and interpretation services including vetting all Spanish materials thoroughly for accuracy and consistency prior to their publication. The first major product from the Program was the Spanish Planning Glossary, a database of technical planning terms in Spanish that will be used consistently in all aspects of DRP's planning operation. Very few resources similar to this Program currently exist in other planning agencies in the United States.

COST EFFECTIVENESS: In-house staff time only. The Glossary could be used by any jurisdiction right away. It could also be expanded to other languages.

RESULTS: The Glossary produced by the Program ensures that oral interpretation and written documents in Spanish are consistent and accurate. It benefits the Spanish-speaking constituents during walk-in consultations, at community meetings, and public hearings. The Glossary is particularly useful in producing accurate outreach materials for Spanish-speaking communities.

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