



City of Austin

Communications and Public Information Office

301 W. Second St., Austin, TX 78701

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor & City Council

FROM: Doug Matthews, Chief Communications Director

RE: CIUR 1129 – Translation Service Protocol

DATE: March 27, 2014

On October 17, the City Council approved resolution 20131017-038, directing the City Manager to develop a plan for a universal translation service protocol to serve those with limited English proficiency. The Communications and Public Information Office (CPIO) has been engaged with city departments, leadership and members of the community on fulfilling the intent of the resolution.

After examining best practices from around the country, along with current contracts and practices within the City, CPIO is recommending both a short-term and longer-term approach to translation services protocols. This will allow a more thorough evaluation of potential fiscal and operational impacts of a broader universal policy, while allowing for near-term implementation of some provisions that should improve the quality of translated materials intended for the public.

Following are four items CPIO intends to address in a new Administrative Bulletin:

- 1) **Certification requirements:** While the original Council Resolution specifically mentions certification by the American Translators Association, CPIO would like to explore alternatives to this requirement. We have learned from discussions with the community, and with individuals currently providing translation services, that ATA applies a “one size fits all” certification, meaning that certified translators may be technically competent, but may not have contextual knowledge of the Spanish language as it is spoken in Central Texas. In addition, ATA does not currently provide any certification in three of the four Asian languages most prevalent in Austin – Korean, Vietnamese or Hindi.
- 2) **Prequalification list:** CPIO is working with Purchasing and Law on the best approach to creating a centralized list of prequalified translation professionals. This will improve accessibility to departments who may need to secure translation services. This list will be published on the CPIO Intranet as a citywide resource.



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- 3) **Translation bank:** CPIO will develop and maintain an online repository of commonly used terminology and departmental/divisional names, along with an approved Spanish translation for each. The translation bank will also include any existing translated documents and forms that may be relevant to the public.
- 4) **Emergency notification:** The new alert system cooperatively purchased through CAMPO provides more flexibility to provide messages in additional languages. The policy will include a requirement that all outgoing “reverse 911” messages include an option to receive information in Spanish.

While the above policies are put in to place, CPIO is taking a broader look at how and when the City may require that documents and notifications must be translated. We are also working with HRD to evaluate how the City may better utilize the skills of employees that receive a bilingual stipend as part of a broader policy on translation and interpretation. Because both of these items may have more significant fiscal and operational impacts, we would like to address them separately as part of a longer-term strategy. We anticipate being in a better position to make proposals on each of those items in the fall.

Each of these proposals has been reviewed for feedback by department leadership and public information staff throughout the City, as well as leadership within the Hispanic and Asian-American communities. In all cases, the direction has been well-received and seen as a positive direction for future engagement with the community.

We will present these items for discussion on April 10, but please let me know if you have any questions in the interim.

Cc:

Marc Ott, City Manager

Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager