46 Community Translators of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Who is a translator? What types of information do they value? Where do they find and share information?


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Part 1: High level summary

[Definition] Community Translators [noun]: Community members who take complex information and disseminate it to their communities in digestible ways. They are the leaders of schools, small businesses and workplaces, community groups, faith-based organizations, and myriad other unique roles, setting the tone for the audience they reach around COVID-19 practices and behaviors. Amid the noise, these translators can cut through information saturation; they are key to ensuring information is convenient and relevant for everyone — in particular for at-risk and vulnerable populations.

Executive Summary: Community translators are more likely to seek out COVID-19 information from government resources at all levels than an individual within the community, however, a one-size-fits-all outreach strategy misses the nuances within these groups. Governments and community organizations can strategically leverage relationships with translators to amplify and extend the reach of their messaging. By empowering them with consistent, bite-sized, and modular messaging that allows translators to adapt content to the unique needs of their communities, translators can ensure that messaging reaches communities’ specific needs in context.

Background: We are deep in the throes of another deadly COVID-19 surge in the United States, with mixed anticipation and dread of both the coming holidays and vaccine deployment. To better understand the role that translators can play in collecting and sharing information at such a crucial moment, we conducted research to address four questions: [1] Who is a translator? [2] What types of information do they value? [3] Where do they get their information? [4] How do they share it? This memo includes recommendations and actionable guidance derived from 46 Voices of COVID-19, a follow-on study of 39 Voices of COVID-19.

Methodology: Building on the traditional community engagement models in public health outreach, our approach also incorporates principles of design, human computer interaction, and user experience research, to yield concrete, actionable recommendations. There are three primary components to this research:
1. In-depth interviews - 46 one-on-one interviews with translators across 22 states to capture individual voices of the translators contextualizing and shaping information for communities throughout the country;
2. Field survey - an 18-question survey administered to 1,570 people to complement our qualitative findings and validate national trends; and
3. Interactive trasks - 3 exercises to further explore translator information needs

Key Recommendations:
• Recommendation #1: Focus COVID outreach on the translator audiences and prioritize support across different community needs — there is no one size fits all strategy.
• Recommendation #2: More tactically, share readable guidance that is platform agnostic, bite-sized, modular and scalable that is easily shared in a text message.
• Recommendation #3: Recognize and support translators. Encourage them to be consistent with local guidance, reduce misinformation and be transparent with information they know and do not know.
Part 2: Key Recommendations + How to take action

Recommendation #1: Focus COVID outreach on the translator audiences and prioritize support across different community needs — there is no one size fits all strategy.

- When creating websites or digital tools, think of translators as a primary audience and create features that support their unique needs. [3.1]
- There is no one size fits all strategy. Pay attention to who you’re reaching out to and use different strategies and incentives. [1.1]
- Prioritize and support across different needs. Even as priorities shift to the vaccine, governments need to demonstrate that they still are supporting everyday needs (e.g., prepare for vaccines, but still provide clear testing information.) [2.1]

How to take action:

- The homepage of your website should offer tools and content that make it easy for translators to deliver messages to their community. Additionally, your homepage should inspire people to share content. For example, the homepage of California’s COVID 19 website features a shareable PSA video followed by a prominent call to action to visit a toolkit that provides media assets for different platforms, age groups and languages that support people’s ability to share information with their communities.
- Community Translators is a general term and through our research [insert link to research] we identified several unique personas. Use these personas to help think through strategies and incentives tailored to different types of translators.
- Your website should make it clear what the most pressing issue is from a public health perspective, but it should not do this at the expense of meeting the ongoing daily needs that people have. For example, the “hero” space on the CDC website allows for a featured message based on CDC priorities (e.g. alerting people to rising cases) while still making evergreen resources prominent (e.g. vaccines, testing, etc.)
- Establish credibility through consistency. Publish only clear, defined guidance and be transparent about how decisions are made or why. Before publishing information, consider whether the information is consistent with neighboring communities, counties, or states, and how it might be perceived by communities living near a border. If you anticipate your community getting mixed messages from nearby communities, consider recommending they take the most precautionary measures of conflicting guidelines.

Recommendation #2: More tactically, share readable guidance that is platform agnostic, bite-sized, modular and scalable that is easily shared in a text message.

- Reduce the fatigue that results from having to make sense of information by following best practices for readability, clearly indicating that the information is up to date, and making information consistent. [1.3]
- Consider that some guidance and messaging be platform agnostic. Content should be bite-sized, modular and scalable. [4.2]
- Make content easily shareable via text and email to pass onto community members. For example, content should be easy to forward or copy and paste in a text message. [4.1]

How to take action:

- Modify and create content for brevity, navigability, and clear organization. Use these design principles to make it easier for your communities to find the information they’re actually looking for. [See: COVID Design Principles in Slide 7.]
- Create clear, concise, modular messages that are easily shareable and engaging. Recommended roles include: Content marketer, social media strategist, digital strategist. [See: existing resources to improve customer experience or help governments keep citizens engaged.]
- Include media that is reflective of your community and the diversity of the U.S. [See: Free stock photo options: Unsplash, The Gender Spectrum, Nappy]
- Usability test your existing website with members of your community. This can be done by a team member who bridges a community-facing role. If no user researchers, customer service roles for example, can be sufficient. See what stands out the most or least by sharing a screenshot of the website. [See: This guide of how to usability test existing websites and an example}
screenshot of what we used to provoke more insights from user interviews below.

- Make content easy for translators to translate, adapt or remix so they can tailor it to the needs of their community. For example, Advancing States created a toolkit for state agencies that trains volunteers who make phone calls to socially-isolated older people during COVID. The toolkit offers heuristics (actionable rules of thumb) that allow nonprofits to make customized training materials, from posters to “tip of the day” emails. COVID ActNow creates bit-size content by taking guidelines set by the White House Coronavirus Task Force, Harvard Global Health Institute, and the CDC and synthesize them into succinct statements that are easy to understand and share.

- Make it easy for people to share content on social media, email or through text messaging apps. For example, COVID ActNow allows people to generate graphics of data for every state, which can then be shared on social media or embedded onto a website.

**Recommendation #3: Recognize and support translators. Encourage them to be consistent with local guidance, reduce misinformation and be transparent with information they know and do not know.**

- Empower and train people to create their own tools and content. Get more people to move from “supportive” influencers to “creative” influencers. Recognize, encourage, reward, support. [1.2]
- Consistency and coordination is key. Enable reliable, and strategic updates on government websites, social media platforms, and email list servs will allow translators to easily ingest and proactively share information with communities to combat the proliferation of misinformation. [3.2]
- Work with “opinion-makers” (e.g. at-risk community leaders, social media influencers) to curb misinformation. Focus on empowering translators to shift to more active influencer roles. [2.3]
- Take advantage of this moment and build a story to address vaccine concerns and set expectations now, even to acknowledge what is still uncertain. [2.2]

**How to take action:**

- Focus on strategies to engage community members depending on the needs of translators in your community. [See: roundtables, listening sessions, grassroots advocacy programs, messaging toolkits, continuing education programs, community liaisons, digital organizing campaigns, allocated funding programs, community outreach teams, etc.]
- Create steady channels of regular updates where your organization will share information. [See: Mayor of Newton Massachusetts’ weekly email updates and public safety Twitter feeds]
- Keep people updated with information you know and information you don’t know. Share future contingency plans, a reminder that you will provide information as it comes, when you do not have information yet, etc. [See: The Rockefeller Foundation’s COVID-19 Testing Action Plan]
- Empower people to play the role of a translator by providing ideas, guidance or training on how to share information. For example, The COVID Tracking Project not only provides data and visualizations about COVID, it includes guides to help people create their own visualizations.
Part 3: Resources section: Tools, diagrams and frameworks to help with action plan

**Resource 1:** There is a spectrum of people in your community. We recommend that governments focus on a strategy to engage the “translator” audience. Note: This will ideally not be at the expense of other constituents (micro-influencers or other non-translators) who may also visit your site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share info w/ large audiences</th>
<th>Share info with a select handful</th>
<th>Don’t share info</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>539 Translators</td>
<td>483 Micro-Influencers</td>
<td>548 Non-Translators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares COVID info with 10+ people</td>
<td>Shares COVID info, but with less than 10 people</td>
<td>Do not proactively share information with any groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37% share with 100+</td>
<td>Nearly half only share with one type of audience: their family, friends, or neighbors</td>
<td>Least likely to value government information sources at any level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most (70%) have either 2 or 3 audience types, such as their workplace, community group, online following, patients, religious org, etc.</td>
<td>Most likely to share COVID information via text or in-person</td>
<td>Most likely to be the recipient of information from Translators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Resource 2: Translator personas: How to strategically parse community influencers by decision-making and style of influence**

![Translator Personas Diagram]

- The Pillars (Formal decision-makers)
  - School administration
  - School staff members
  - Community leaders: church leadership, housing director
  - Small business owners

- Opinion-makers (Pro-active influencers)
  - Servants of at-risk communities
  - Social media influencers
  - Teachers passionate about the community

- Role-Players (Decision implementers)
  - Workplace leadership
  - Community healthcare (grassroots)
  - Community healthcare official (hospital, ER)

- The Helpers (Passive influencers)
  - Community supporters and volunteers
  - Teachers who are doing their role

**Resource 3: COVID Guidance Design Principles aimed at improving how government agencies can better improve guidance websites and places where community translators can find information.**

- **Implement findable content**
  - Google / search engine
  - Internal website navigation
  - Through other links, referrals

- **Implement concise search features:**
  - Use short, clear titles and headings

- **Improve navigability through site architecture and effective links between pages**
  - Is it universal? Laws, regulations, etc. Make it available from all pages.
  - Is it specific? Link to any relevant guidance from the main page or from separate topic page
  - Write effective link names to ensure navigation between pages

- **Organize content in a way that is relevant to the amount and relevancy of information**
- Smaller list: Reverse chronological order with dates, bulleted list
- Larger list: Topical organization
- Call attention to new items ("new") icon

- **Review content on a regular, continual basis**
  - Regular review, corrections, updates
  - Delete documents that cannot be updated.

- **Use data to improve content**
  - Basic analytics (pageviews, time on page, traffic sources, click rates, search terms)

- **Incorporate trust & equity into guidance materials**
  - Make content accessible: 508 compliance
  - Ensure content is updated, reliable, state when info is unknown
  - Language and translation options

Note: These guidelines were derived from the Department of Education’s "Best Practices for Presenting Policy Guidance Online".

**Resource 4:** How translators recognize and respond to gaps in their own communities - This can be used to better understand the process that translators build habits and develop consistency through finding and aggregating sources of trusted information.

**Resource 5:** Levels of government reliance for information based on translator role: Translators rely on all levels of government in some capacity, but this map highlights particular translator roles that may be easiest for specific gov levels to partner with.