



**BRIEF 3**

# WHAT: CREATE INCLUSIVE CONTENT

With local data, community connections and feedback in hand, you now have a firm understanding of local residents’ language preferences, perspectives, and experiences. The next step is to craft communications that will truly reflect and resonate with your community. This brief offers guidance on building accessible, inclusive messages, in the right language and the right format, and includes tips on engaging language translation providers and other communications partners.

## PRIORITIZE ACCESSIBILITY

Trust is the foundation of inclusive communications—and accessibility plays a key role in building that trust. When content is clearly written and easy to understand, it empowers community members to access and use important information. Producing well-written, readable text in one language—whether that’s English or any other language—also facilitates translation to accessible, resonant text in other languages.

“Plain language” is writing designed to help readers understand information quickly and easily. Plain language makes information more accessible



*Credit: Stefan Petrmichl*

by ensuring it can be easily understood by people with a wide range of literacy skills and language backgrounds. Accessibility is so critical that federal legislation, the [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#), requires that federal agencies offer clear communication that the public can understand and use. Consult [federal plain language guidelines](#) for tips on using accessible language in your communication, and see the [Resource Box](#) below.

**Resource**      **TIPS FOR PRODUCING ACCESSIBLE CONTENT**

- 1. Prioritize Important Information**
  - Lead with the most important points.
  - Use headers to break up content and make it easy to follow.
- 2. Use Simple and Direct Language**
  - Write in short sections and avoid long paragraphs.
  - Use bulleted lists and visuals to highlight key points.
- 3. Be Clear and Concise**
  - Stick to the point; avoid unnecessary details.
  - Use the active voice: Speak directly to your audience using “you.”
- 4. Avoid Jargon and Technical Terms**
  - Don’t use complicated language or abbreviations that could confuse people.
- 5. Follow Plain Language Guidelines**
  - Use accessible language that anyone can understand.
  - Test the readability of your documents to make sure they are easy to read.
  - Aim for a 6th to 8th grade reading level for broad accessibility.
- 6. Use Tools to Improve Readability**
  - Use readability checks in programs like Microsoft Word.
  - AI tools like ChatGPT can help simplify complicated language and evaluate your content’s readability.
  - Remember that while AI can assist in creating simple content, human input is still needed to ensure clarity.

Images, including photography and illustrations, are powerful tools for communication, and can complement plain language. Images illustrate the concepts being explained in written text, support readers’ comprehension, and in some cases, completely replace text.

It is important to note that images are not the same as icons or symbols, which are high-level abstractions that can carry different meanings across cultures. [The Resource Box below provides a checklist to ensure accessible design.](#) When developing content, test both text and images with your intended audience to ensure comprehension. [Refer to Brief 2](#) for tips on engaging community members in communications planning and content review.

**Resource**      **CHECKLIST FOR ACCESSIBLE DESIGN**      *This checklist is adapted from Picture Impact.*

**Does your content...**

- Communicate clearly to your intended audience?
- Explain or eliminate new terms, jargon, or technical phrases?
- Help readers absorb the information quickly?
- Visually explain each key message?
- Use illustrative images?
- Avoid icons and symbols?
- Avoid charts, grids, and graphs?

Picture Impact offers examples, checklists, and consultations to support organizations in designing for and with users with developing literacy skills. Visit this [resource page](#) for additional information.

## CREATE MULTILINGUAL MATERIALS

Sometimes, providing information in languages other than English is the most effective way to connect with your community. Producing multilingual content is especially important when local residents speak a language other than English at home, prefer to receive information in their primary language, or have shared that translated information helps them stay informed and engaged.

While the term “translation” is often used as an umbrella term to describe the process of translating text from one language to the other, the process is actually more nuanced. There are several options for creating multilingual communications:

- **Translated** information is put into another language, often by using a word-for-word approach.
- **Localized** information is translated with a local lens applied. The meaning stays the same, but the type of language used is adapted to the local context, including local dialects and expressions. Localization often requires working with translators who are familiar with your community.
- **Transcreation** is a process where information is adapted in a co-design or feedback process with local residents, [as described in Brief 2](#). Transcreation is not a direct translation from one language to another; it maintains the message’s intent, but adapts information to make it relevant and accessible.

These processes vary in terms of complexity and time—as well as impact. Direct translations may be the best approach when time and resources are limited, whereas localization and or transcreation may take more time, but ensure more comprehensible, relevant, and accessible communications. Consider your approach carefully, especially when communicating complex messages around urgent issues like public health or emergency management.

Once you have identified your priority languages and ideal process, the next step is to engage a translator. Your organization may already have a contract with a translation service or have trained translators on staff. If not, local immigrant—and refugee—serving organizations are often equipped to provide translation services and may be able to provide support or referrals. Using local, professionally trained translators is particularly important in localization and transcreation processes.



*Cards from the Gainesville Immigrant Neighbor Inclusion Initiative provide phrases in English and someone’s primary language.*

### Resource

### QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN HIRING A TRANSLATOR

Here is a list of questions that will help you identify a quality and reliable language access service provider:

- How long have they been in business?
- What kind of training do translators receive?
- Do translators have specific areas of expertise?
- How do they handle the confidentiality of sensitive customer information?
- Are there “hidden charges,” such as additional fees for prep time or charges for proofreading and graphics design?
- What are turnaround times for translations?
- Are there minimum fees or extra costs for “rush jobs” or emergency assignments?

The University of Minnesota’s National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants (NRC-RIM) has produced a “[Tips for Translating Materials](#)” guide that will help you work with translators to produce quality multilingual materials.

Organizations like the [American Translators Association](#) (ATA) offer a national database of individuals and companies that have been certified via an industry-recognized exam. Keep in mind that many qualified translators are not certified, and many certified professionals are not qualified for certain assignments. [The Resource Box below offers tips on hiring a translator.](#)

Given the complexity of translation processes, you may be tempted to use free, fast [machine translation](#) (MT) solutions, like Google Translate or Microsoft Bing Translator. MT can be a helpful tool to quickly “get the gist” of a message, but it’s important to note that machine-powered translations are based on probability instead of meaning. Final results may not reflect original context, language dialects, or nuance; your translated message may not make sense—or it may hold an entirely different meaning. Using human translators is the best way to ensure that messages are “[accurate, nuanced, and natural.](#)” [The Resource Box below offers additional tips on engaging translators and reviewers.](#)

## Resource

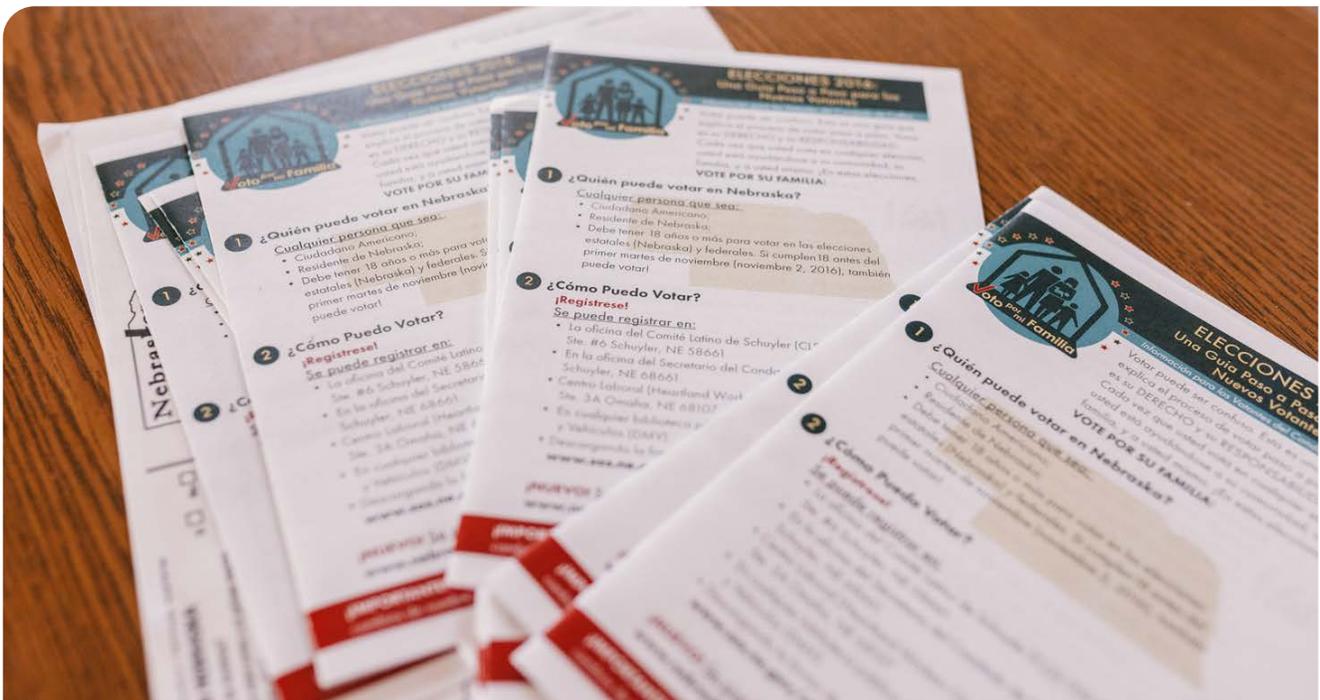
## CULTURAL VALIDATION AND TRANSLATION REVIEW

As is the case in producing any type of English-language communication, it is important to invest time and resources in editing and reviewing translated content.

Cultural Validation is the process of engaging multilingual, multicultural members of your target audience in reviewing and providing feedback on content, prior to translation, to confirm that materials have the intended framing, messaging, and approach to resonate with local residents.

Translation Review is the process of engaging a trained translator in reviewing a professionally translated document to ensure that it is accurate, understandable, and culturally appropriate.

These two processes can complement the co-design work you’ve already done with community members in building inclusive communications. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) had developed a “[Cultural Validation and Translation Review Toolkit](#)” to support organizations in navigating these two important processes.



## PRODUCE MULTIMEDIA CONTENT

While the processes described above focus on written communications, it's important to note that multimedia content—particularly radio and video segments—is one of the most effective methods to engage newcomer communities. Multimedia is an accessible format, especially for audiences with diverse literacy skills. Multimedia content could include:

- An interview with a local community member
- A recording of a panel event
- A demonstration of how to use community services or facilities
- A short clip of an event or function
- Simple images or animation with voiceover



Creating high-quality video and audio recordings can be a powerful way to connect with your community—and you don't need a big budget to do it. Many organizations successfully build multimedia content with footage captured by local residents. Since most people have a camera on their smartphones, with some simple guidance, you can produce a quality recording. Additionally, local colleges and universities often have students studying production and animation who can support projects with smaller budgets.

Interviews are often easiest to capture in-person, but remote recording is also a possibility. Video conferencing platforms, like Zoom or Google, allow you to record conversations. You can ask questions and react to what your interviewees say, which can help create engaging content. Subjects can also film themselves on their phones.

Once you've captured video, there are numerous online video editing platforms, like [Canva](#), [Vimeo](#), and [Animoto](#), that can help you add text, music, transitions, and images to produce a final cut. Most platforms allow you to add multilingual subtitles or closed captioning to videos; use the tips above to ensure high-quality, resonant translations.

## ENSURE REPRESENTATIVE, CULTURALLY RELEVANT DESIGN

Images and graphic design are powerful tools for communication—especially when content reflects and represents your audience. Online sources like [iStock](#) and [Unsplash](#) can provide a wide variety of visuals to use in videos, flyers, posters, and websites, but finding authentic images that represent the diverse backgrounds of people in your community can sometimes be a challenge. Many organizations solve this challenge by creating and curating image libraries featuring images of residents, gathered (with permission) at local events.

Once you have identified relevant images, professional designers and online design tools, like [Canva](#), can help you turn text and photos into eye-catching and informative resources like fliers, posters, websites, and more. Here too, understanding your audience's cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences is key to building inclusive design. The Resource Box below describes how colors, shapes, images, symbols, and icons can carry distinct meanings and associations across different cultures. Collaborate closely with local residents to get feedback on design.

It is important to review designed materials for accuracy—particularly when working in a translated language that may not be familiar to you. For example, when you cut and paste languages that read from [right to left](#) (like Arabic, Farsi, Hebrew, or Urdu, among others), characters can become misplaced. Engage community members or translators to check all translated material in context.

Color is an important element of design—and when designing materials for people from diverse backgrounds, it's important to understand that different colors can mean different things across cultures.



*Credit: Sophia Hernandez*

**Red** can communicate danger, urgency, and love in the U.S. In India, it's associated with purity. In Latin America, it can have religious connotations.



**Yellow** is seen as cheerful in the U.S., but in Egypt and many Latin American countries, it represents death and mourning. In Germany, it symbolizes envy and jealousy, and in some African countries, money and success.



*Credit: Ashley Franscell Detrick*

**Blue** often means safety and trust in the U.S. In Eastern cultures, it is tied to immortality and spirituality.

Eriksen Translations has compiled [additional information](#) on color and cultural associations. You'll want to reach out to residents for feedback especially when developing design elements that will be regularly used over long periods of time, like logos or campaign materials.

## PUTTING STRATEGY INTO PRACTICE

Prioritizing trust, access, and community engagement, Montgomery County, Maryland developed a thoughtful communications response to rising mental health needs amongst local Asian American youth. By partnering with local high school students, local leaders co-created a culturally resonant series of photonovels—an innovative and inclusive approach that helps raise awareness of local mental health resources.



Read Case Study:  
Montgomery County, MD



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