

Survey Translation Tip Sheet

Why is it important to translate surveys?

Those for whom English is a second language may prefer to answer surveys in the language they are most comfortable with. This ensures they understand the questions, which leads to better quality data. Translation is also important because it helps make survey data collection inclusive and representative of the youth being surveyed.

How should surveys be translated?

A best practice for translating a survey is the **TRAPD model: Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pre-testing, and Documentation** (Harkness, 2004). This team-based approach has the following key steps:

- **Translation.** As a first step, surveys (such as the SRAE participant entry and exit surveys) and any related materials (such as assent or consent forms) are translated from the source language to the target language. The translated materials should define concepts identical to those in the source language while being culturally appropriate to the population using the translated version. Translators must have as much information as possible about the intended youth population to account for different dialects and decide the right level of formality to use. Ideally, the translators are native speakers of the target language who can understand the cultural context of the survey content. Best practice is to have at least two people translate the materials independently of each other.
- **Review.** As a second step, someone other than the original translator(s) who is fluent in the target language should review the translated materials against the source content. The reviewer notes any questions or issues to resolve in the translated materials.
- **Adjudication.** During adjudication, a third translator (or fourth translator, depending on whether a second translator is used) finalizes and approves the translated materials. The adjudicator is someone other than the initial reviewer who ideally is also fluent in the target language and understands the source content and its purpose.
- **Pre-test.** Once approved by an adjudicator, the translated materials should be tested with people with characteristics similar to those of the intended population (such as SRAE participants who speak the target language). This testing could include focus groups, respondent interviews, or a small-scale pilot test to check understanding and variations between dialects. The pre-test should also involve checking that the structure, format, and length of the translated materials roughly match the original versions. Any issues identified during the pre-test should be discussed by the translation team, with the adjudicator approving any changes.

- **Document.** Be sure to save copies of the initial translations, the reviewer’s comments, the adjudicator’s decisions, and any changes resulting from the pre-test. These records serve as documentation of the translation process in case questions later arise or grant recipients need to revisit any decisions.

Can a staff member translate surveys?

Many SRAE grant recipients have staff who are multilingual and may wish to lead the translation of survey materials. However, individual staff members should not translate materials on their own. If several staff members speak the same language, they can use the TRAPD model to work as a team to translate materials. Staff translators should work with the program evaluator to understand the study design, purpose of the survey, and intended audience.

How can grant recipients find a translator if they don’t have one available?

Grant recipients that need translation support can identify potential vendors through their local evaluator, academic or community partners, or online searches. When selecting a vendor, grant recipients should ask about their knowledge of the intended population and any of its specific dialects, and the quality assurance procedures the vendor uses. In some instances, grant recipients may need to supplement vendors’ translation and quality assurance reviews with adjudication or pre-testing with the grant recipient’s intended youth population.

How much does it cost to use an external vendor for translation?

Translation costs vary depending on the number and length of materials that need translation (for example, if there are assent or consent forms in addition to surveys). Most vendors start by providing a per-word price—for example, 10 or 20 cents per word. For a survey like the SRAE entry survey (1,402 words) or the SRAE exit survey (1,631 words), those prices would equal a total cost for both surveys ranging from \$303 (at 10 cents per word) to \$606 (at 20 cents per word). Vendors will then request a final version of the documents before providing an exact quote. The quote could be higher than the base per-word price if the vendor includes additional time for quality assurance review or if the request is expedited, a complex document, or a unique language or dialect. Grant recipients will need to contact the vendor to request a quote for the specific translation. These estimates are based on direct translation and do not include quality assurance review, adjudication, or pre-testing.¹

¹ SRAE grant recipients should talk to their project officers before using grant funds to cover translation services. SRAE funds may be used to cover translation services for relevant project materials as part of ensuring equity. However, before using translation services, grant recipients should talk to their project officers to explain their need for such services and plan for incorporating them into their project workplans and budgets.

How long does a translation take?

Translation can take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks, depending on the number of materials, complexity of the materials, and the amount of time needed to review, adjudicate, and pre-test. When a grant recipient requests a quote, the vendor should be able to provide an estimate for the turnaround time for the initial translation. Plan additional time for review, adjudication, and pre-testing.

Can a staff member verbally translate for youth on the spot as they take the survey?

Translating the survey on the spot is not recommended. Even if a staff member is proficient in another language, subtle differences in interpretation can depart from the intended meaning of survey questions. It's better to make sure the translations and method of survey administration are consistent across sites and have been well tested for accuracy.

Can SRAE grant recipients use computer software or mobile phone applications for translation?

No. Although computer software or mobile phone applications can be fast with initial translations, they are not always accurate in accounting for local dialects or the context of the subject matter, such as survey questions.

What are the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements when using translated instruments?

Grant recipients should check with their IRB since requirements for using translated surveys and other materials can vary across IRBs. For data collections that need IRB approval, grant recipients must inform the IRB of their intent to use translated surveys. Many IRBs will ask for a copy of the translations and details about how they were translated. Some IRBs may require grant recipients to use a certified translator and provide proof of their certification. Not all translators are certified, so grant recipients should confirm whether their IRB requires it. Even if a grant recipient has an exemption from their IRB, it is a good idea to let the IRB know if they're using a translated survey.

References

Harkness, Janet, Beth-Ellen Pennell, and Alisú Schoua-Glusberg. "Survey Questionnaire Translation and Assessment." In *Methods for Testing and Evaluating Survey Questionnaires*, edited by Stanley Presser, Jennifer M. Rothgeb, Mick P. Couper, Judith T. Lessler, Elizabeth Martin, Jean Martin, and Eleanor Singer. Wiley, 2004.

Additional information about the Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) performance measures is available at www.sraepas.com. For further support, contact the Mathematica SRAE performance measures technical team at www.sraepas.com/contact.