



**Cover page: IDEAS AWARD APPLICATION**

**Name of your state office/nominating Secretary of State:** Oregon Secretary of State

**Contact information for questions or follow-ups regarding the nomination:**

**Title of the project:** Translation Advisory Council

**Name of the project lead:** Nikki Fisher, Civic and Elections Education Director,  
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**Brief Description of the project:** (One paragraph or less)

Oregon provides every household in Oregon with a voter pamphlet. Historically, the voter pamphlet only was provided in English. Nationally, some efforts have been made to provide language access and ensure they are complying with the minimum requirements of the Voting Rights Act. Oregon census data does not trigger mandatory translations under the voting rights act, but Oregon decided to take action to help increase access to the ballot box by implementing the Translation Advisory Council (TAC). The TAC provides the voter pamphlet in languages other than English. The TAC also adopted a glossary of language and terminology. And the TAC helps with translation of our public service announcement and educational material. The TAC provides critical election resources for Oregon voters.

**General Subject of the nomination:** Elections

**Executive Summary: (History, Significance, Impact and Results)**

Background:

Voters' pamphlets for statewide elections in even years are mailed to every household in Oregon, but a persistent challenge has been to effectively meet the needs of Oregonians whose primary language is not English. Translating election materials is not a new concept. Since 2002, the Oregon Elections Division provides an abbreviated translated Spanish state general and primary election pamphlet online, but voters still encounter barriers to accessing local elections. Nationally, some efforts have been made to provide increased language access, but these efforts are often implemented to comply with the minimum

requirements of the [Voting Rights Act](#). While Oregon census data does not trigger mandatory translations under the VRA, the state is home to substantial voter populations from diverse ethnic backgrounds and political experiences in need of trusted election materials in their first language to promote both linguistic access and confidence in the U.S. elections system. Oregon immigrants hail from islands which were U.S. nuclear testing grounds, include Russian Old Believer communities escaping religious persecution, or come from countries with non-democratic experiences resulting in limited freedoms and human rights. It is critical to provide essential information in primary languages to build trust, combat mis or dis information, and help new Oregonians learn about democracy, voting, and our security measures.

#### Solution – Promoting Trust and Removing Barriers:

As a result of this inequality in the provision of voter information, in 2022, the Oregon Election Division began ambitious activities under Oregon House Bill 3021 (2021) to remove voting barriers through translated election materials which are validated by the communities served. The Election Division created a unique centralized translation program staffed with language access subject matter expertise and providing for translations uniformity throughout all counties which means that every county's translated materials or every PSA and every VP will always use the standardize translation terms determined by the Translation Advisory Council (example of standard language translations of “non-partisan” or the “pacific green party”) this helps voters get a consistent reading experience and comprehension of difficult elections terminology. We adopted rules to translate both state and county voters' pamphlets in fourteen languages in time for the November 2022 General Election and extended services to subsequent local, district, and special election voters' pamphlets. The initiative included a comprehensive program to vet professional translations within the intended community audiences for accuracy and cultural appropriateness. To fulfill the requirements of HB 3021, the Election Division established a 25-member [Translation Advisory Council](#) (Council) representing the most common languages spoken in each Oregon county: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Marshallese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. While language advisory committees exist elsewhere, they are typically limited to a single language, to bilingual elections staff, or a small number of members. The Council is further strengthened by representation of a diversity of ages, from a high school junior to retirees, and diverse country representation of origin such as Spanish speakers from Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and the United States and Chinese speakers from both mainland China and Taiwan.

The Council was recruited through a statewide outreach campaign, leveraging connections with more than 1,200 Oregon cultural and civic organizations, county commissioners, legislators, community leaders, translators, and supporters of language access. Applicants described life experiences supporting insights into the respective language communities, any paid or volunteer translation work, and voluntarily disclosed personal diversity such as tribal affiliations, ethnicity, gender, and race. Understanding that individuals might encounter barriers to participating, the Election Division established a volunteer stipend recognizing members' service and attendance at meetings, which could be used to cover childcare costs, early departures from a work shift, or other participatory expenses. Meetings were held primarily by video and outside of regular business hours to accommodate those living across the state. Recognizing that members are leaders in their cultural communities, the Election Division also offered an alternative option to donate their stipend(s) to their immigrant-serving non-profit organization(s). The Marshallese culture network, [MANIT](#), benefitted from this option, for example.

During the 2022 General Election, the Council reviewed more than 700,000 professionally translated words, began groundwork for Oregon-specific elections terminology glossaries in thirteen languages, ensured outreach material's graphic designs were culturally appropriate, and promoted the translated voters' pamphlets widely through their communities. Council members made appearances on elections related programming as interpreters or guests, including Slavic Family Radio and Voice of America, Ukraine. Daily views of online translated voters' pamphlets hit 5,000 to 7,000 views in the days before the voting deadline. Oregon has 3 million eligible voters in our state and the number of hits is impressive given the number of individuals who speak a language other than English.

A highlight of the 2022 General Election was the Council's involvement in a statewide campaign to educate voters through easy to understand, 30-second radio ads and videos. In collaboration with the Civic and Elections Education Director and the Communications team, the Council reviewed translated public service announcements (PSA) scripts in Cantonese, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The Elections Division was able to effectively reach a larger and engaged audience through the translated PSAs campaign. The Spanish translated videos garnered 3,200 link clicks and the PSAs found large audiences among Chinese and Russian speakers with click-through rates of 1.94% and 1.44% respectively. By comparison, the English videos had an average of .66% click-through rate. Click-through rates (CTR) are commonly used to measure the success of an online advertising campaigns. The CTR look at the number of times an ad or webpage is clicked on and then divide it by the number of impressions. Across the platforms for the educational campaign, there were 3 million impressions. Again, Spanish radio ads were effective, with a video completion rate of 98.2% as compared to the English version rate of .18%. It is evident through these exciting numbers of engagement that there is a need and desire for Council collaboration and real time educational materials. As a result, Oregon's Election Division is pursuing the addition of languages to both the voters' pamphlet translations and educational outreach campaigns.

The legislature was impressed, and happy with the success of the program and extended the translation in 2024 to incorporate additional languages. The success of the program has proved to be a model in expanding outreach and advocacy to community across Oregon. The Translation Advisory Council has created a glossary of terms related to voter engagement and registration and these tools have helped influence other work in the agency.

In short, the expansion of translations and the collaborative work of a Translation Advisory Council has created a cohort of elections partners promoting free and fair elections. In the voices of Council members via engagement and post-election surveys:

#### **Translation Advisory Council Quotes (Engagement and Post Election Surveys)**

*"I think the quality of the translations were great. Many community members really appreciated these translations."*

*"When I reviewed the translations, I was able to suggest multiple improvements. This made me think that my translation skills are quite strong."*

*"It is a true honor to be part of this important work. Thank you."*

*"This has been a great experience. It will be very rewarding if more people in my community will register for voting and actually vote. I have always been encouraging people in my community to play a more active part in the life of the larger community, and hope that promotion of materials translated into Russian will help to move the needle."*

*"Adding the culturally specific lens definitely contributed to improving the quality of the translations."*

*"I think overall the main objective was accomplished in a professional manner as it pertains to my language – Spanish. Congratulations to everyone involved! Given the newness of the Council, the time frame available after English pamphlets were completed and the amount of material, I think the Spanish translations were very good."*

*"I think the translation looks great and conveys well the content and tone of the English text."*

**Information about the Translation Advisory Council:**

- <https://www.oregon.gov/languages/pages/default.aspx>
- Glossary: <https://www.oregon.gov/languages/Pages/glossary.aspx>
- <https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Pages/Voters-Pamphlet.aspx>