

Lessons Learned: Community-Vetted Translations of Orange County Marine Protected Area (MPA) Messaging



The Orange County Marine Protected Area Council (OCMPAC) is the state's oldest MPA Collaborative, started in 1999. OCMPAC is a collaboration of city and county officials, institutional representatives, environmental advocates, academic faculty, and nonprofit organization members. OCMPAC seeks to provide beach visitors with consistent marine protected area related information throughout the county. For over two decades, the organization has accomplished this by developing regional interpretive signage and regional brochures, and holding docent trainings. OCMPAC's

accomplishments also include county-wide signage, enforcement trainings, education programs, research & monitoring, and teacher workshops. Based on their success, OCMPAC was used as a model for the development of the statewide network of collaboratives. In addition to establishing programs for docent education, public outreach, and consistent enforcement, OCMPAC is actively engaged in a range of community science projects that monitor the health of Orange County's MPAs. Since its inception, OCMPAC has served a key role in coordinating organizations to support MPA management in Orange County.

Background

Through the Orange County MPA Collaborative (OCMPAC)'s 2019 [Community Compliance Workshop](#), community members shared that translating materials and vetting those translations from native speakers was a top priority. The goals of this pilot project described below were to establish a community identified process for translation and messaging review, to evaluate marine protected area (MPA) related translations, messaging, and materials locally, and to develop a pathway for California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) review and approval.

This pilot project included 10 working group meetings and seven broader public scoping meetings. Our original proposed structure included two focus groups of all languages combined and with at least 10 participants. Our approach evolved significantly during the grant period due to feedback from the working group and from participants at our initial public scoping meeting in March 2022. Ultimately, we hosted a focus group for each of five languages (Mandarin, Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, and Tagalog), and an additional one for Mandarin speakers (Traditional Chinese translation), with one to three participants per focus group for a

total of 14 participants. These five languages were identified as top priority languages as a starting place during the Compliance Workshops/Forums, in particular for South Coast collaboratives, and for collaboratives statewide. Crystal Cove Conservancy also worked with Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples, another OCMFAC member, to coordinate meetings and listening sessions and to leverage existing meetings with Acjachemen and Tongva tribal partners with a total of 10 participants.

There are state agency requirements for translations. Under standard contracting practices, state agencies like the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), which is the lead managing agency for MPAs, are required to have a public bidding process and receive bids on translation services from multiple businesses. [Inline Translation Services, Inc.](#) had previously translated Good Tidepooler Rules/Harry the Crab signs, regulatory signs (No Fishing/No Collecting), and the OCMFAC Tidepool brochure (see the [OCMFAC webpage](#) for these resources) into the above five languages identified during the Compliance Workshops/Forums statewide, as requested by the Collaborative Network (CN) before understanding the limitations of state agencies to complete translations in a state-approved way. More recently, [Lazar Translating & Interpreting](#) was selected to translate materials for this project through a bid process with partners at California State Parks and in partnership with CDFW. Lazar is translating a shareable text bank of key terms for ocean resource management and MPAs. Lazar is also working with the CDFW to translate regional MPA 1-pagers and has translated them into Spanish thus far; Traditional Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog translations are forthcoming. To date, these translations have not been vetted by CDFW as they do not have in-house capacity to do so and can only approve translations if the translation service or other vendors meet their standards through bidding for a state contract. Thus, our processes of translating and community vetting of translated materials was separate from that of CDFW for the time being.

OCMFAC's pilot project focused on how these contractor-translated materials could be best vetted by the bilingual community, consequently creating meaningful partnership with diverse local communities and developing a set of lessons from the process. The pilot project was created in response to community requests for information on how to incorporate justice, equity, diversion, and inclusion, especially through linguistics, translations of printed materials, and culturally inclusive messaging around MPA guidance and regulations, into coastal resource management and stewardship and overall ocean health.

Key Lessons

Through this process, we have learned many lessons on how best to engage with bilingual communities and to work collaboratively to review existing materials in a way that improves access and inclusion.

Some general takeaways are listed below:

- Community member involvement in translations is key. In particular, languages with several dialects (e.g., Spanish, Mandarin) should include people with a variety of backgrounds and cultures in the translation process, although other languages might require less input due to fewer regional differences and dialects (e.g., Vietnamese, Korean, Tagalog). According to participants, translations to Tagalog, Korean, and Vietnamese were more straightforward, but sometimes there was still a better way to translate these MPA messages in a way that was less awkward or cumbersome. Ambiguity in language is important to note, and some of the translations vetted came across as machine-generated due to a literal or direct translation. Site-specific language was also challenging to translate: for example, the OCMPAC brochure also contained a lot of ocean-specific language and species that are local to Orange County, which often had no direct terminology in the five languages (as these species are not found in all parts of the world).
- During focus group meetings, it was important to allow space for participants to discuss and not to drive the discussion. Instead, pose open-ended questions (e.g., if you had to choose one printed material to translate to other languages, which would you choose and why?) and prompts after briefly providing context. Listening, taking notes, and only interjecting to answer participant clarifying questions to the hosts to avoid shaping ideas allowed for the most open and honest feedback.
- It is advantageous to hold meetings to review translations through a virtual format. Due to the influence of the pandemic on experience with a remote meeting style, leadership decided on using a Zoom format for the working group and focus group meetings. This may have had the added benefit of making it easier for more participants to join and creating lower pressure engagement. Additionally, recording was easier using Zoom in contrast to in person, and many participants used the chat function to write in other languages and engage in the meeting.
- There are many contextual nuances to translating materials. Text, font style, accents, and formatting, etc. are important to keep in mind (e.g., Vietnamese). Generally, translations from English to another language increase the number of words so this is important to keep in mind so printed materials do not get overcrowded and hard to read.

- There is also interest from the Acjachemen and Tongva communities in improving representation of tribal voices and perspectives in MPA messaging. Suggestions included incorporating a land acknowledgement, working with the Tongva and Acjachemen language groups to translate key MPA phrases or vocabulary into tribal languages, and exploring culturally-inclusive compliance messaging that centered Indigenous perspectives (such as being a good guest while on Acjachemen and Tongva lands and waters). OCMPPAC will continue to explore how best to partner with our Indigenous community members through future projects.
- It is important to ensure funding is adequate to compensate appropriately for engagement and expertise. OCMPPAC decided on a \$250 stipend, using W-9 forms and check disbursement through the fiscal sponsor (OneOC) as a mechanism for payment, or through Crystal Cove Conservancy for the Tribal stipends due to the short time frame for Tribal participation, for contributions based on the estimated time to dedicate to reviewing translations during and outside of the 90-minute meeting. The CN and OCMPPAC are both learning how to provide appropriate honoraria based on tasks and hours anticipated, and we pay everyone equally for the same services. Relationship building is the cornerstone of our work and requires just compensation.

Recruiting for Focus Groups

Lesson: Engaging with existing connections is the most effective and cold calling is far less effective at recruiting bilingual participants for focus groups.

Context: Most focus group participants were recruited through existing OCMPPAC members. Although the project's coordinators and working group members attempted to reach out to some new organizations, university and local clubs, and utilized social media to get involvement, only one new organization, VietRISE, responded and they did not have the capacity to be a part of this process. When we held a public meeting in March, newcomers to the meeting were all invited in through existing connections by OCMPPAC members, namely from Crystal Cove Conservancy and the University of California, Irvine; each affiliation represents the two current OCMPPAC co-chairs and both organizations have greater diversity in staff and students than other OCMPPAC members. Korean was the most difficult language to find connections to during this process. Conversely, Spanish and Mandarin speakers were more prevalent with the existing connections. This speaks to the integral nature of building relationships with organizations that represent diverse constituencies.

Lesson: It is important to be thoughtful about the necessary knowledge and linguistic diversity needed for potential participants when recruiting.

Context: We considered different types of diverse backgrounds when recruiting for the focus groups. It was a priority to have some people with a background in marine ecology and MPAs, and some people who were less familiar with the coast. Species and contextual knowledge (e.g., about tidepooling etiquette) was also useful, as there are many nuances to the English language and with words like “tidepool” that lack a direct analog. Also, tidepool was used as both a noun and verb in the materials (e.g., “Tidepool Responsibly” in a Harry the Crab sign). Words that can be nouns or verbs are a unique feature of the English language and may cause some confusion in translating and/or in comprehension. On the whole, participants in the OCMPAC community-vetted translations process were somewhat knowledgeable to very knowledgeable about MPAs and tidepool ecology because they were already engaged with OCMPAC members as staff, students, members, or volunteers.

It is also worth considering in advance which dialects are spoken locally, and taking steps to ensure that the participants in the translation focus groups represent those dialects. For example, it would help to know where the Spanish language speakers are from ahead of time in forming the working group/team.

Diversity in age was also important, particularly for Mandarin speakers, since Mandarin speakers might read Simplified and/or Traditional Chinese characters. The difference relates to those who immigrated from China or were born after a certain year (younger generation) and spent their entire life in the US. This process included participants of a variety of ages.

While engaging with the Tribal partners, they confirmed that it felt most appropriate and comfortable for OCMPAC’s Indigenous members to lead the outreach. As OCMPAC found with the bilingual communities involved in this project, it was also important to include a diversity of ages and perspectives in the discussions. Care needed to be particularly taken to ensure that Tribal Elders from both tribal nations were represented. In the case of Orange County, both the Acjachemen and the Tongva also have active language communities. In the future, OCMPAC plans to build stronger bonds with these communities and learn from them how they want to appropriately incorporate the Acjachemen and Tongva languages into MPA messaging and outreach.

Structure and Format of Focus Groups

Lesson: Providing community members with translated materials to review before the meetings limited the impact on their time and allowed them to jump into discussion.

Context: OCMPAC's process was to have participants review translated materials individually, meet to discuss, then place comments on drafts of the materials asynchronously. The English versions were only shared after the fact, and it would have been better to share them before the focus group meeting. Participants shared that having an English version to refer to would have helped them decipher what was trying to be communicated when reviewing translations. In a more ideal scenario, following pre-work by the group, the group would then present the vetted and refined translation to the project leadership and would share about word choice, sentence structure, and more. Translations are not a one-size-fits-all process and direct translations often come across as unprofessional, awkward, and missing the intended meaning. For example, if consistency in wording is of high importance, the quality of the translation might decline due to a prioritization of the English version. Participants also shared the need to be forward thinking and to simplify when developing materials that might get translated in the future. For example, English tends to be verbose in contrast to the other languages included in our project, thus reducing extraneous words is necessary.

As a note, one participant with a background in linguistics suggested that community-led translations, where the community group would translate the entire document from scratch, would be more effective and community-driven than OCMPAC's process of having community members review provided material that was pre-translated by a company. However, other focus group members felt that this would have been burdensome on the team. One participant reported spending about 30 to 45 minutes reviewing and writing notes ahead of the call, and preferred having a pre-translated document as this saved time, since the group agreed that developing the whole translation from scratch may have taken one to two days. Depending on the people involved and the compensation provided, it may be worth considering which approach is more effective.

Lesson: During the focus group meetings, it is helpful to include at least three participants and plan for about 90 minutes.

Context: From OCMPAC's experience, at least three people for each language is sufficient if recruited well. More participants might be ideal for some languages, especially if there are many diverse dialects spoken locally in the area where the materials will be shared

The 90-minute focus group timing worked well for the three participants, but when there were one or two participants, the meeting ended early. Of the focus groups, the Spanish focus group was especially effective and notable because it included participants who had lived in Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela, giving the participants insights into different dialects of Spanish spoken locally in Orange County. Additionally, one Spanish speaker has a linguistics background which proved invaluable. The participants spent time both before and after the 90-minute Zoom call to review the translated materials.

Developing an Approval Process with CDFW

Lesson: Understanding the concerns of CDFW when it comes to translations, as lead managing agency for MPAs, is crucial in effective and efficient project completion.

Context: At the start of this project, there was no CDFW-approved process for vetting and approving official translated materials separate from the bidding process with approved translations service companies. OCMPPAC and the CN learned that at the onset of this project, there was no one in-house at CDFW who could do translations and that they were contracting outside to translate CDFW developed materials (i.e., northern, north-central, central, south coast, and statewide brochures). CDFW conveyed that they (and other state agencies like California State Parks) required a bidding process to contract a state-approved translation service. Our original intent to use an independently contracted translation service (Inline Translation Services, Inc.) did not meet their requirements. For this particular project, the translations were completed by Inline prior to the grant period and before the idea and development of the pilot project to have community-vetted translations. As OCMPPAC is not a state agency, there is no requirement to undergo the full bid process. Overall, this meant that, if printed as is, these MPA materials would not be able to keep the CDFW shield (logo) according to the most recent guidance from CDFW.

Since beginning this project, there has been a movement for more access to information to communities that are not native English speakers. CDFW and CSP have hired a contractor to do select translations, including 400 MPA terms in a glossary that can be shared going forward, with “fast-tracked” approvals for translated materials. The ability of OCMPPAC and the CN to request permission to access SP’s growing glossary and translation memory directly for other California MPA-related translation projects is a big step in the right direction and speaks to the power of collaboration and partnerships. Future efforts should start with identifying state partner limitations to use time, funds, and expertise efficiently for translated materials.

As a result of this project, CDFW and Resources Legacy Fund are currently working together to incorporate this process of community vetted Spanish translations to review a Spanish transcript for the CDFW video: [The California MPA Network: Safeguarding an Underwater Wilderness](#). OCMFAC and the CN plan to continue applying these lessons to future efforts to translate materials as it is important for language justice efforts that a translation service alone not complete these translations.

Acknowledgements

This project is part of the MPA Collaborative Networks' multi-year MPA Compliance Initiative and was entirely driven by local input through the Community Compliance Workshop held in 2019 and subsequent collaborative meetings. It was made possible by a grant made through the Once-Through Cooling program of Resources Legacy Fund, on behalf of the Once-Through Cooling Interim Mitigation Program of the Ocean Protection Council.