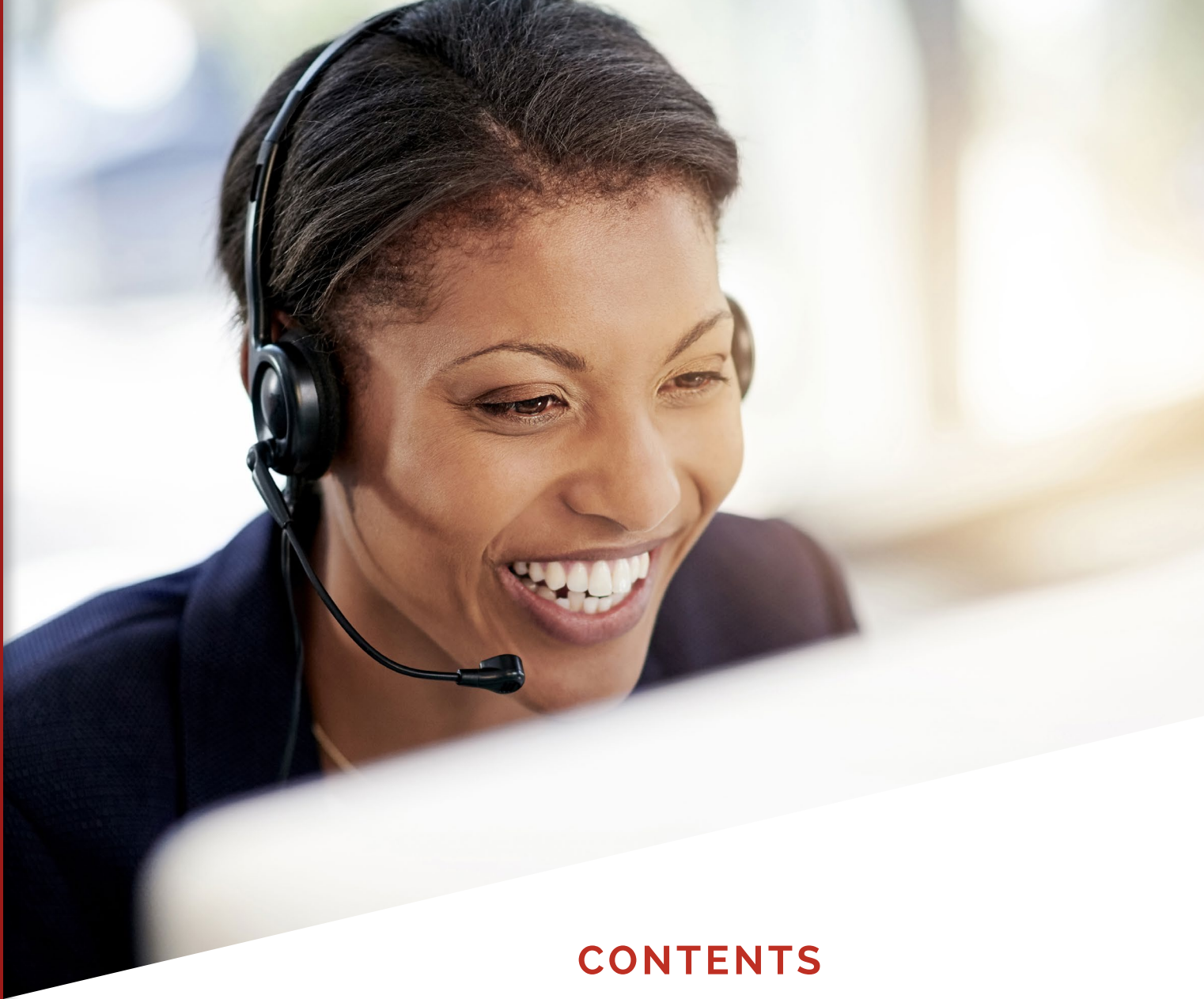


# Procurement Guide

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for Language Services Request for Proposals



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# What to Look For in a Language Services Provider

The quality of your language services can affect your customers' satisfaction. You need an interpretation and translation provider that approaches language services holistically as a one-stop shop for all your needs. When writing a Request for Proposals (RFP), structure your questions around three crucial elements:

## 1. Dedicated support team

Whether you have a question, need to resolve an issue, or want to review your data, you'll need to know who to contact. Your Language Services Provider (LSP) should supply an experienced, knowledgeable primary contact that simplifies access to the larger support team. Choose an LSP that assigns a dedicated account manager responsible for nurturing your partnership, ensuring all services work harmoniously, and overseeing that projects progress efficiently.

## 2. Quality remote interpretation

Quality phone and video interpretation require three key components:

**Trained interpreters:** Miscommunication between customers and agents may negatively impact your First Call Resolution and other KPIs. Using an LSP with consistent, trained, and culturally competent interpreters can help reduce the risk of repeat calls and unsatisfied customers.

**Reliable availability:** If the LSP relies heavily on independent contractors rather than employees, they aren't legally allowed to schedule interpreters and cannot reliably ensure interpreter availability and shorter wait times. Ask providers how they combat this issue.

**Information security:** Interpreters regularly handle sensitive customer information. You need detailed information about the LSP's security measures to protect your organization and customers from a data breach.

## 3. Cost-efficient translation

Translation and localization shouldn't start fresh when you need documents, videos, training courses, or websites in another language. Choose a partner that tracks past projects and doesn't charge you twice to translate the exact same words, paragraphs, or excerpts regularly used in your written communications. Beyond saving time and budget, ask LSPs how they secure data and provide quality assurance.



# Sample Questions for a Language Services RFP:

## Phone & Video Interpretation

Asking about quality can help you learn more about how a provider hires, trains, and monitors interpreters. You can also ask about the provider's standards for speed and quality.



**Q:** How many full-time **employee (W-2) interpreters** do you have? What percentage of total call volume is handled by full-time employee (W-2) interpreters?

**Why ask:** Learn how many full-time employee interpreters the provider has available to take calls. Vendors may lawfully train employee (W-2) interpreters, unlike independent contractor (1099) interpreters.

Employee interpreters can also be lawfully scheduled to help provide availability during critical times – such as nights, weekends, and holidays.



**Q:** How do you control the quality of your interpretation? Which **training, coaching, and ongoing education** tools do you employ?

**Why ask:** Learn how the provider can provide interpretation that consistently meets its quality standards.

In the previous question, you learn how many of the vendor's interpreters are employees and how many are independent contractors. You might request clarification from vendors who use primarily independent contractors and also claim to train their interpreters, as it's unlawful in the US to train independent contractors.



**Q:** Please provide your **definition of a "contact center,"** and confirm that at-home/residential environments are never classified as a "contact center."

**Why ask:** Verify that all vendors adhere to a consistent definition of what constitutes a "contact center" when it comes to their employees' work environments.



**Q:** What percentage of your qualified interpreters are assigned to contact centers as defined above, and what **percentage of your total call volume** do they handle?

**Why ask:** Learn what percentage of your call volume is handled by interpreters assigned to secure, professional environments.



### **interpretation vs translation-**

Interpretation refers to the conversion of spoken or signed languages; translation refers to the conversion of written languages.

### **independent contractor (1099) interpreter -**

An independent contractor is a self-employed person or entity contracted to provide services to another entity as a non-employee. Companies are legally prohibited from providing compulsory training or scheduling hours for independent contractors.



**Q:** Please provide a list of addresses, interpreter seats, and square footages of all **contact center locations**. Please provide photographs of interpreter work locations.

**Why ask:** Verify that interpreter contact center locations are secure, professional work environments. Gather contact center addresses, should a future audit be necessary.



**Q:** Which **externally-verifiable accreditations or standards** support your vetting and training processes?

**Why ask:** Make sure that the vendor's subjective vetting and training processes align with external criteria that you can verify.



**Q:** How do your performance metrics change during **nights, weekends, and holidays**?

**Why ask:** Most interpretation providers rely heavily on independent contractor interpreters. Because it is unlawful to schedule independent contractors in the US, the provider may have difficulty maintaining performance metrics outside of traditional work hours.



**Q:** Which workforce management and technical processes do you maintain to handle surges in call volume? Please provide historical data on **call volume surges** and how you served them.

**Why ask:** Verify that the vendor is able to hire, train, test, and monitor interpreters to meet demand. The vendor may have trouble ramping up to meet your volume needs if they do not create their own interpreter supply – and instead rely on an existing pool of independent contractor interpreters. It is also unlawful for a vendor to schedule independent contractor interpreters.



**Q:** Please list **external accreditations or compliance** with guidelines related to interpretation that your company holds.

**Why ask:** Vendors often present claims about their interpretation quality as objective standards, despite a lack of externally-verified facts. Learn which available external standards confirm the vendor's interpretation quality. These may include: ISO 9001:2015 for Quality Management Systems or ISO 13611:2014 for Guidelines for Community Interpreting.



**Q:** Across all languages, what is your **average connection time** to a qualified interpreter once a language has been selected? Please provide historical data that confirms your answer.

**Why ask:** Learn how quickly the vendor provides access to interpreters. Some vendors may measure their average connection time as how long it takes their automated system to answer inbound calls – often only a few seconds. Measuring in this way does not equate to how long it takes an interpreter to join the call.



**work environment** -- OSHA defines the work environment as "the establishment and other locations where one or more employees are working or are present as a condition of their employment. The work environment includes not only physical locations, but also the equipment or materials used by the employee during the course of his or her work."

**external verification** - a process that involves the use of a third party to confirm or verify the business activities, often as part of an audit.



**Q:** What percentage of our call volume do you expect to **connect to an interpreter within 30 seconds**? How does this differ between Spanish and all other languages?

**Why ask:** Learn if the provider offers connection times that meet your requirements.



**Q:** When does **billing start and end** for each call? Are there any additional fees or minimum charges? Please confirm we are not charged for any time during which interpreters/ agents act as operators or collect information.

**Why ask:** Identify any potential for savings. Billing should commence only when the interpretation session begins and cease when the interpreter disconnects. Some vendors have interpreters act as operators and may not disclose that they bill for that time.

## Information Security

Questions about information security help determine how vendor answers, routes, and services calls. You can also determine how they keep sensitive customer information secure.



**Q:** How do you demonstrate that employee work environments comply with **quality standards, consumer protection laws, and client security audits**?

**Why ask:** Learn if the vendor undergoes internal and external audits to confirm claims about their service.



**Q:** How do you protect **Personally Identifiable Information (PII)**?

**Why ask:** Verify that, if PII is stored or collected, it is managed appropriately.



**Q:** Which of your interpreter work locations **can clients visit and audit**? Historically, how much of your call volume do these auditable work locations handle?

**Why ask:** Verify that you can audit where most of the vendor's interpretation takes place – not just one center that passes audits but handles little call volume.





**Q:** What physical and **information security practices and protocols** do your interpreter contact centers have in place?

**Why ask:** Make sure vendor contact centers have safeguards in place to maintain physical and informational security of client and customer information. Examples may include:

- 24/7/365 recorded surveillance and mandatory visible ID badges for all staff.
- Secured access doors that require keycard access to enter.
- Interpreter internet access that is limited to whitelisted websites.
- Management audits and enforcement of a clean-desk policy on employee interpreter workstations throughout the day.
- Visitor restrictions from floor access until cleared by management.

## Account Support

The questions below will help you learn about the support you can expect during implementation and for the full duration of the contract.



**Q:** What is the **cost of implementing** your service and what kind of interpretation service do you provide? Please provide specific historical data and references for two successful contact center implementations.

**Why ask:** Learn about any hidden costs for implementing the service and training staff to use it effectively. Verify that vendor claims about implementation match the actual implementation experiences of the vendor's contact center clients.



**Q:** How do you **help clients make the most effective usage** of language services?

**Why ask:** Having a contract with an language services vendor does not guarantee your staff will use the service easily or when lawfully required. Understand how the vendor will help staff access the service easily and routinely when appropriate.



**Q:** What has your **account management team accomplished** for clients with similar language service needs? What were the results for those clients' language access programs?

**Why ask:** Learn how likely you are to receive service from the same account manager for the duration of your contract. You may receive a lower level of service from vendors who repeatedly assign new account managers, as each new account manager must be re-familiarized with your service needs.





**Q:** Who will **manage your account** and how many years of experience do they have as an account manager?

**Why ask:** Make sure your account will receive support from a dedicated and experienced account manager.



**Q:** What is your **annual turnover rate for your account management staff** over the past five years?

**Why ask:** Learn how likely you are to receive service from the same account manager for the duration of your contract. You may receive a lower level of service from vendors who repeatedly assign new account managers, as each new account manager must be re-familiarized with your service needs



**Q:** How do you ensure **billing accuracy?** Has your company or any subsidiary ever been subject to a lawsuit related to inaccurate billing or failure to resolve billing discrepancies?

**Why ask:** Learn if the vendor provides accurate and reliable billing services consistently.

## Translation & Localization

The questions below will help you learn about a provider's translation process, quality standards, and support offerings.



**Q:** Will you assign us a **dedicated account manager?**

**Why ask:** Many providers have sales representatives that temporarily fill this role but then move on after the contract is signed. A dedicated account manager is available to answer questions or concerns and act as a single point of contact throughout your partnership with the provider.



**Q:** Do you use **machine translation?**

**Why ask:** Many translation providers use machine translation as a cost-saving or time-saving measure. Unfortunately, relying on machine translation instead of using human translators during any step of the translation process may result in lower quality translations for clients.



**Q:** Will we have a **dedicated project manager?**

**Why ask:** Learn if you will have a single, dedicated point of contact for all written translation projects. A dedicated project manager knows your individual requirements and anticipates your needs, which streamlines communication.



**localization**- refers to when translators reframe the messaging, imagery, and layout to suit the target culture, so it appears as if you created the written materials specifically for your non-English audiences.

**machine translation (MT) or automated translation** - is a process when a computer software translates text from one language to another without human input.



quality assurance - is the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the various aspects of a project or service to ensure that standards of quality are being met.



**Q: Do you charge project management fees?**

**Why ask:** Understand what the final cost of a project may be. Some translation providers may include a "project management fee" on their pricing sheet, typically listed as a percentage fee for all other rates.



**Q: Does your pricing include editing by a separate linguist?**

**Why ask:** Verify what is included in the pricing and what the translation quality will be like. Some translation providers have low rates because they do not include editing in their translation process, or they have only one person translating and editing the work.



**Q: Does a third person review for quality assurance?**

**Why ask:** Verify what is included in the pricing and what the translation quality will be like. A review step, sometimes referred to as proofreading, is a final quality assurance measure. The reviewer ensures that common issues (errors, omissions, layout abnormalities, etc.) are resolved prior to delivery.

## Additional Reference; Guidance from the US Government

### "Hiring the Right Telephonic Interpretation Provider"

The Department of Justice (DOJ) offers practical advice for procurement professionals in its guide, "Hiring the Right Telephonic Interpretation Provider":

**Know what You need before starting the search:** The DOJ suggests that buyers project interpreter usage in minutes and develop a list of likely target languages. This information helps in negotiating better rates.



**Prioritize merit over price whenever possible:** Assessing vendor quality is an essential component to hiring the right vendor. Consider written proposals, live testing, and prior agency experience with vendors to evaluate key differences in vendor quality.

**Conduct a live test:** Verify vendors' claims about their service. During the testing process, look for:

- Inaccurate or inconsistent ways of identifying the language needed
- Unavailable languages: test languages other than Spanish
- Unreasonably long wait times
- Failure to convey the substance and tone of the entire conversation
- Interpreter errors or lack of linguistic skill

**Ask the right questions and require specific answers.** The DOJ notes that "assessing vendor quality is an essential component to hiring the right vendor." A quality interpretation provider should offer specific answers to questions about:

- Interpreter qualifications
- Connection times
- Quality control and assurance
- Reviews or references



## About CyraCom International, Inc.

CyraCom is a language services leader that provides interpretation and translation services to thousands of organizations across the US and worldwide. Providing the best language services is a complex formula, and we consider every piece of the equation: quality, availability, security, speed and accessibility, and client support. In business for 25 years, we support hundreds of languages and operate 24/7.

### Contact CyraCom

Contact CyraCom today to discuss how we can improve your language services program.

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