

Texting & Notifications Working Group

Meeting 6

February 28, 2024



Agenda

1. Welcome & Introduction
2. Grounding & Framing
3. Beyond Translation, Communicating Effectively with Non-English Speakers
4. Examples in Practice: New Jersey UI from USDR
5. Reflections and Response from SLTT

*Share an experience from a time
when you didn't speak the primary
language. How did it feel?*

Please answer in the chat.



Beyond Translation: Delivering effective non-English messages

GSA 18F & Public Benefits Studio

Public Benefits Studio & Notify.gov

The Public Benefits Studio is a team focused on collaborating with benefits programs to develop shared technology tools and best practices that support a more coordinated public experience across programs.

The first product launched is a text messaging tool called **Notify.gov**

Research Goals

We set out to hear from Community-Based Organizations (CBOs):

- When a government sends notifications by text, email, or other means, who is translating that for non-English speakers?
- What is that process like?
- What makes an effective text notification in any language?

Sentiment of CBOs We Spoke With

Direct Services Organizations

- On-the-ground, usually smaller, hyper-local organizations serving communities directly. Focused on grassroots effort
- **Typical Sentiment:** *“I’m overworked and underfunded.”*

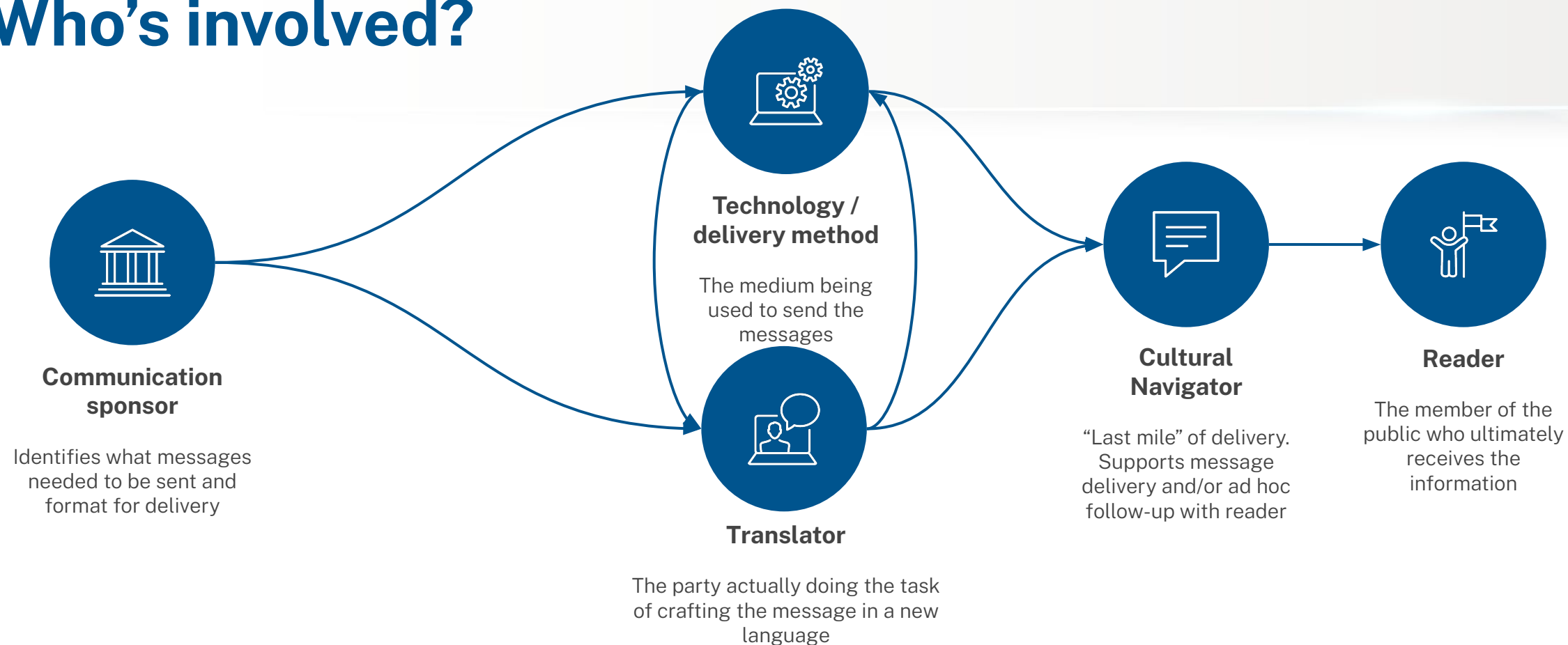
Advocacy/Education/Other Non-Direct Organizations

- Usually have more resources and staffing, but are more focused on awareness, or funding/supporting branches operating at the direct level throughout the world or the USA. Act as the purse for smaller direct service organizations in which they will fill out large grants and distribute the funding down.
- **Typical Sentiment:** *“We have 5000 people across 17 countries and are a UN associated CBO.”*

Coalitions

- Groups of the above types of organizations, usually well funded, but not really doing any kind of service to community members, but instead to the orgs themselves; focused on sharing resources and knowledge among orgs working in the same domain or geographic area

Who's involved?



↑ ↑ Involved throughout ↑ ↑



Subject matter experts

Experts who know about the benefit area or knowledge area (e.g. “SNAP” or “nutrition”); sometimes one in the same with the gov or the CBO

What makes an effective multilingual translation?

Blast vs. Conversations

Tools with the ability to have 2-way conversations



Meeting communities where they are

- Lack of US phone number access or standard SMS
- WhatsApp Usage
- Auditory languages with no written form
- No email or physical mailing address



Plain language, *in other languages*

- Different populations even within a language group have different dialects: origin, education level, and generational differences
- Creating banks of commonly used government documents in the language of their communities



Prioritizing tricky topics

- Understanding eligibility requirements around healthcare, legal, immigration, and general benefits eligibility or procedures.



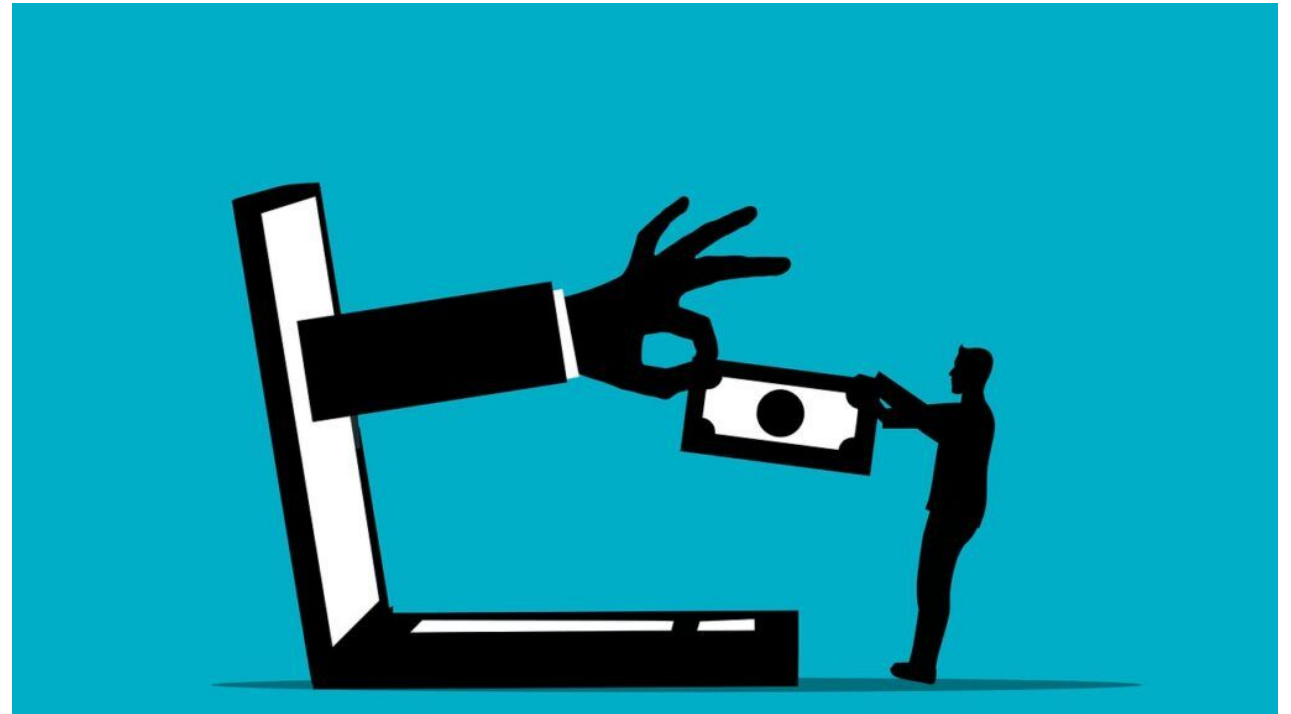
Prioritizing the key life events of non-english speakers

- Some resources that are only available in English despite their heavy use by non-English speaking folks.



Trusted and vetted delivery sources

- Sudden notifications are dismissed and often only trust through a intermediary source like family or CBOs.



POWERED BY
Technology Transformation Services



Example in Practice: New Jersey UI from USDR

U.S. Digital Response

Language Access | Unemployment Insurance (UI) Systems

Marcie Chin, UI Product Lead

Madel Leal, Language Access UX Researcher

February 28, 2024



www.usdigitalresponse.org

@USDResponse

Who we are

We're a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization **pairing the best of pro-bono technical talent** with the people solving **our most important public problems**.

Our experienced volunteer technologists **work alongside public servants** to deliver digital services and build capacity, quickly.

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Today we'll share...

1. Overview of **NJDOL + USDR** language access partnership
2. A **human-centered** language access framework
3. Looking ahead: Scaling language access with **human-powered technology**



Inaccessible UI systems impact vulnerable workers

Unemployment Insurance (UI) programs are often difficult to navigate, with **complex language** that is difficult for the average claimant to understand.

Workers with limited English proficiency are:

1. **50% less likely to receive UI benefits** than workers who speak English as their primary language.
2. overrepresented in industries that are **more susceptible to economic instability and job loss**.
3. at higher risk of being **targeted for UI fraud**.

**20 million
workers**

in the U.S. have limited English
proficiency
(15% of workforce)

Language access positively impacts everyone

North star: Decrease the reciprocity gap between English speakers and individuals with limited English proficiency

For claimants

- Reduce amount of time to complete **initial intake**
- Increase **reciprocity rate** for all eligible workers
- Reduce length of time to **receive benefits**

For administrators & staff

- Decrease **call center load**
- Decrease adjudicator **case load**
- Decrease rates of **fraud, overpayment, and reversals**

Case Study: New Jersey Department of Labor

New Jersey's Vision

To launch an **online unemployment insurance intake form** that is:

- Translated in **plain language**
- **Validated** by Spanish speakers from multiple countries of origin
- **Co-created** with front line staff and administrators

500k

Spanish speaking workers
with LEP
(8% of workers in NJ)

Our approach to language access

Building trust with the community is a key factor to understanding their experience

Translations

Pair machine translation with
“competent human
translators.”

Use plain language.

Maintain consistency between
English and Spanish content.

User Research

Speak to people from multiple
Spanish-speaking countries of
origin.

Compensate research
participants to ensure diverse
feedback.

Employ native Spanish
speakers.

Co-creation

Engage front line staff from
start to finish.

Meet research participants
where they're at - leverage
community-based orgs (e.g.
legal aid, unions, trade
associations).

Mixed bilingual UXR methods

Discovery



During the discovery phase, the team engaged with Spanish bilingual call center agents.

UXR Methods: focus group, online survey

Goal: Establish trust and understand the experience of Spanish-Speaking claimants.

Testing – Validation of Translated Content



The team conducted **qualitative interviews** with Spanish-speaking claimants.

Translations were **tested**, and review sessions were incorporated to **validate** Spanish content.

Goal: Ensure translation were culturally relevant and increase comprehension rates.

Translation example

Providing examples in English helped people grasp words lacking direct Spanish translations.

Some people were confused by words like “**Indemnización.**” Adding “**severance pay**” enabled them to immediately understand the reference.

Words used mainly in English-speaking contexts are helpful to see in English. These include terms common in workplaces where English is the primary language.

❌ Indemnización
❌ Pago por despido/indemnización



✅ Pago por despido (severance pay)

☒ Pago por despido (severance pay)
Pago que recibió debido a una póliza, contrato, o similar, al terminar su trabajo

☒ Otro tipo de pago

☐ No he recibido ningún otro pago

Key Insight: Certain terms, such as “**online,**” “**email,**” and “**smartphone,**” are universally recognized and best left in English across languages. *Translating these widely adopted terms unnecessarily can lead to claimant errors or additional cognitive burden, particularly during an already stressful process.*

Gathered insights

Through our work with NJDOL we learned that **primary Spanish speakers**:

- Primarily access internet through **mobile devices**.
- **Prefer non digital formats**, video resources, or direct assistance.
- Enlist **help from family members** who are often younger and fluent in English.
- Often **compare Spanish and English** content side-by-side.
- May have **unique circumstances** such as seasonal work.

“With this new version, and knowing the current one, it seems to me that in Spanish it is much easier for people to fill out the form(...)But if this is going to be the form, this is a piece of cake, including the vocabulary in Spanish”.

– Insights from NJ call center agents deepened our understanding of the impact of Spanish translate forms.

Gathered insights (cont.)

To further address language barriers for Spanish speakers, we uncovered the following **best practices**:

- Provide **contextual descriptions** of form questions to help claimants understand what is being asked.
- Include **alternative vocabulary words**.
- **Provide English language examples** for claimants to compare with jargony or system-specific terms.
- Identify terms that are **better left in English**.
- Include **visual examples** of required documents.

“For me, my Spanish is of Colombian origin; we understand that ‘domicilio’ can indicate many things.”

– Spanish speaking claimant from Colombia

There is more language access work to do!

Unemployment Insurance content needs to be:

- ✓ Translated in **plain language**
- ✓ **Validated** by workers
- ✓ **Co-created** with front line staff and administrators
- ✓ **Consistent** across all touchpoints and mediums
- ✓ Powered by technology that makes it **easy** for non-technical administrators to publish and maintain

**“Small interventions
can have an outsized
effect.”**

– Hillary Hartley, CEO, U.S. Digital Response

Plain Spanish content resources for UI

Plain Spanish Glossary of Unemployment Insurance Terms

Updated September 29, 2023

This is a working list of plain Spanish translations and recommended usage for common unemployment insurance terms. All content contained in this glossary has been tested and validated for readability and comprehension with Spanish-speaking workers in New Jersey. We will be adding more terms to this list as we conduct more testing and continue to validate additional terms for plain language.

As of March 31, 2023, this list follows guidance from the U.S. Department of Labor's [UI Lexicon Project](#) and was developed from research conducted by U.S. Digital Response in collaboration with the [New Jersey Department of Labor, Nava PBC, Truss, Legal Services of NJ](#), and workers in New Jersey.

If you are working on plain language or language access for unemployment insurance and are interested in receiving support in this area, we are here to help! [Learn more](#) about our Language Access work, or [contact us](#) anytime.

You can also request direct access to the spreadsheet or direct feedback and questions to language-access@usdigitalresponse.org.

The following are tested Spanish translations of commonly used terms by state Unemployment Insurance (UI) agencies in the U.S. Terms with an asterisk (*) are also included in the [UI Lexicon](#) by the Office of Unemployment Insurance at the U.S. Department of Labor.

English	Recommended translation	Additional translation options
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Spanish Translation Guide for Unemployment Insurance

Last updated: September 29, 2023

Overview

This Spanish translation guide provides practical guidelines and resources to help public servants improve Spanish translations for unemployment insurance (UI) content. Created through a partnership between U.S. Digital Response (USDR) and the New Jersey Department of Labor (NJDOL), this guide offers strategies and best practices for writing clear, inclusive Spanish tailored to the needs of UI claimants. Our goal is to increase accessibility and build trust with the over 20 million workers in the U.S. whose primary language is Spanish.

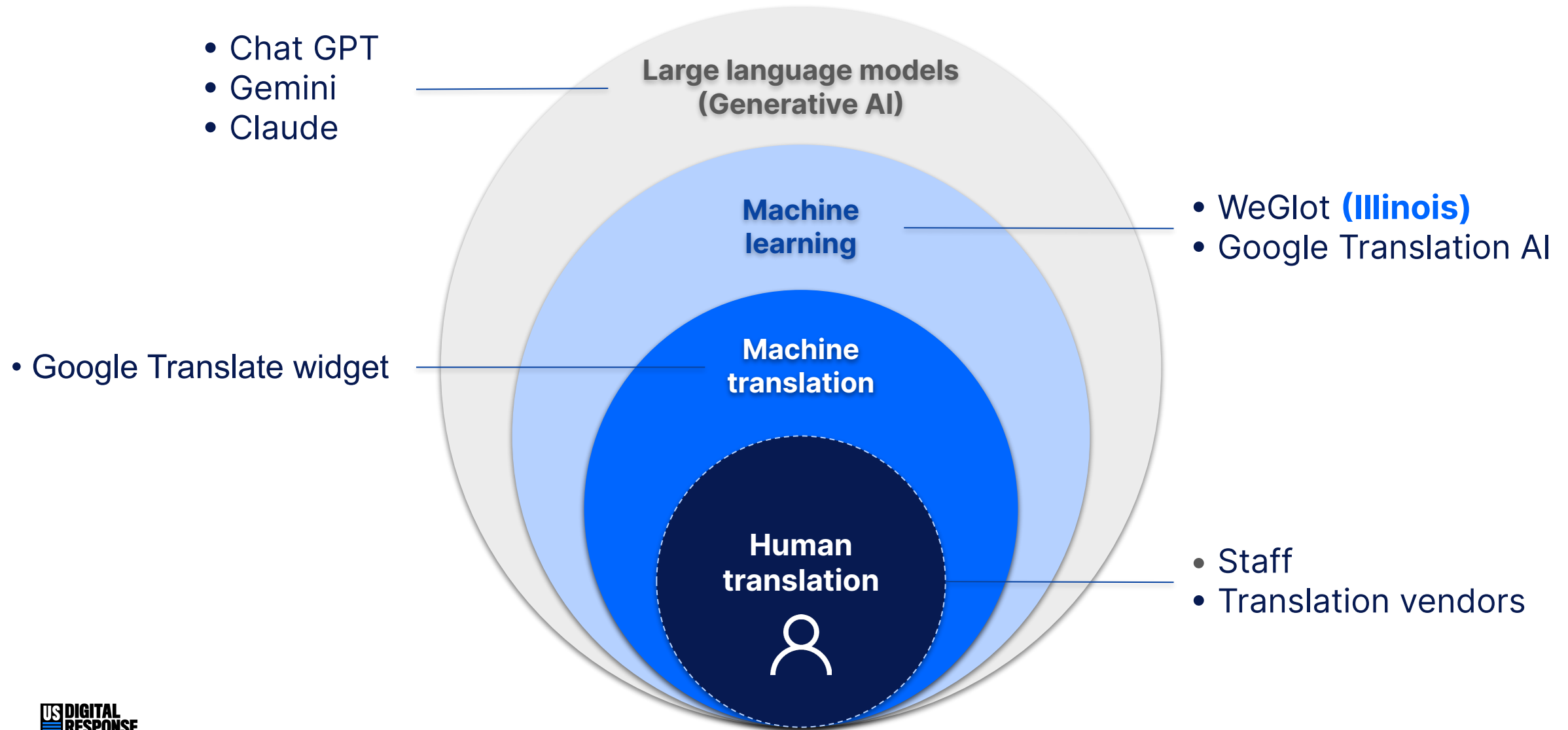
Who This Guide Is For

This guide was created to help workforce agency administrators and staff produce high-quality Spanish translations for all forms of communication with Spanish-speaking UI claimants. While the guide focuses primarily on digital content, the tips also apply to print materials and verbal communication.

This guide is for anyone involved in or interested in improving the user experience for Spanish-speaking claimants through plain language communication. You might use this guide if you are an adjudicator, call

[USDR's Gitbook Unemployment Insurance Modernization](#)

Leveraging human-powered translation technology





Questions?

Thank you

Appendix

Additional case studies

Providing examples in English - translating “laid off” in Spanish

Accurately translating “laid off” into Spanish is notoriously challenging for unemployment systems aiming to provide quality Spanish language access.

While “despedido/a” is commonly used to translate “fired” in Spanish, it also used to convey “laid off.”

Legal terms in Spanish provide distinctions:

- “Despido con causa” means “fired.”
- “Despido sin causa” means “laid off.”

However, the term “despido” carries negative connotations for many individuals regardless of the context. Additionally, appending “sin cause” still fails to fully capture the nuanced meaning of “laid off.”

Cambios en la situación laboral

¿Por qué dejó de trabajar o cambiaron sus horas de trabajo?

☐ Despido sin causa o por motivos ajenos a usted (laid-off)

Su empleo terminó por falta de trabajo, reducción de personal, terminó su contrato, o la sede laboral cerró/cambió.

❌ Despido
❌ Despido sin causa (laid off)
❌ Despido sin causa o por motivos ajenos a usted (laid off)








✅ Separación laboral sin causa o por motivos ajenos a usted (**laid off**)
✅ Separación laboral sin causa o por motivos ajenos a usted + Se quedó sin trabajo (**laid off**)

Using synonyms ensure claimants from various linguistic backgrounds and age groups understand specialized terms.

Because there's multiple **variations** of Spanish, each with its own distinct characteristics, certain English words may have different translations depending on the Spanish-speaking country.

For instance, the Spanish term for "**union**" varies across countries. Displaying only one version of the translation in the form led to confusion for some users. By offering **multiple translations**, they were able to better understand the question.

Best practice includes:

-  "sindicato"
-  "gremio"
-  "gremio/organización laboral"
-  "gremio/unión de trabajadores/as"
-  "gremio/unión de trabajadores/as" + "sindicato"

Datos de su gremio

¿Tiene que buscar trabajo recurriendo a un servicio operado por su gremio/unión?



Sí



No

Nombre de su gremio/unión de trabajadores

Reflection & Response: Poll

Please answer via the poll or by including your response in the chat if the poll is unavailable to you.

Reflection & Response: Diving Deeper

Follow the link in the chat

Reflection: Diving Deeper

In thinking about the strategies presented in today's session:

- What are you most equipped to do? What do you feel confident in?
- What feels most out of reach? Where are you experiencing the most difficulty?
- How are you engaging CBOs to support non-english notifications? How would you like to?
- Are there any other issues not identified that you could use help with?