



**COMMISSION
AGENDA MEMORANDUM**

Item No. 8d

ACTION ITEM

Date of Meeting December 14, 2021

DATE : December 14, 2021

TO: Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director

FROM: Elicia Snowden, Manager, Customer Engagement (Aviation Customer Service)

SUBJECT: **Airport Language Interpretation Services**

Amount of this request: \$1,000,000

Total estimated project cost: \$1,000,000

ACTION REQUESTED

Request Commission authorization for the Executive Director to approve funding to acquire a language interpretation contract for use at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport in the Amount of \$1,000,000 of a total contract estimate of \$1,000,000.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With around 50 million annual passengers (based on 2019 volumes) at SEA, we rely on the airport's multilingual customer service representatives and contracted staff to assist our international travelers as they move through their travel journey. However, there are instances when an employee with the specific language skills is not available. Additionally, translation is also frequently needed when passengers go through the Department of Homeland Security screening processes administered by U.S. Customs and Border Protection and/or the U.S. Transportation Security Administration. Since every passenger is required to be screened (either domestic or international), many languages are spoken and there is a frequent need by the federal agency officers for language interpretation. The airport has previously utilized a language interpretation service via telephone to meet this need. In addition to seeking a telephone interpretation aid, there is a desire to secure over-the-phone and video interpretation for our deaf and hard of hearing customers. SEA will be fully equipped including special accessibility facilities to provide all travelers a seamless experience.

JUSTIFICATION

This request supports the following Century Agenda and Aviation Division strategic goals:

- (1) Advance this region as a leading tourism destination and business gateway
- (2) Become a Model for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

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As an international gateway for both business and leisure travel, SEA wants to ensure that our non-English speaking visitors have a mean to simply communicate with the staff. SEA welcomes many languages within our airport staff; however, they are not always readily available. As every international arriving passenger must be screened and/or interviewed by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), having a language interpretation ensures that we are equipped to serve the travelers. Additionally, as the Port of Seattle strives to be a model for equity, diversity, and inclusion, the ability to meet the needs of our Limited English Proficient customer base is imperative. Interpreters are from different cultures and have awareness related to different cultural perceptions, values, customs, and beliefs. They are able to communicate keeping check of all the cultural aspects in mind ensuring no miscommunication takes place, which is especially important when interviewing passengers.

Diversity in Contracting

Partnered with Diversity in Contracting and have established a WMBE goal of 10 percent.

DETAILS

This interpretation service contract funding will continue the needed interpretation in the Federal Inspection Services area in SEA's South Satellite as well as transferred into the new International Arrivals Facility when it opens in 2022. This service is also available to the Port of Seattle's Airport Customer Service Representatives (Pathfinders) who work in the seven-day operation of SEA's terminal. Additionally, the Pathfinders have the ability to, not only utilize the over-the-phone translation, but can have reach an interpreter via video on their iPads for all languages including American Sign Language.

Scope of Work

Vendor shall provide on-demand over the phone interpreter (OPI) and video remote interpreter (VRI) services for Purchasers serving Limited English Proficiency individuals (clients) 24/7/365 without disruption for spoken languages and must be connected to an interpreter within thirty (30) seconds at a rate of 95% or greater. Vendor shall facilitate language identification prior to connecting Purchaser with interpreter. Once interpretation begins, the OPI or VRI call cannot be placed on hold or put into a queue. Vendor must ensure that the interpreter is a professional and has the appropriate credentials and qualifications to complete the Services as required.

The Purchaser minimum is that Contractor shall provide and maintain interpreters who are skilled to industry standards, expectations, and trends. The Interpreter shall comply with the ATA Interpreter Code of Ethics, interpret in the first person, and shall be the utmost courteous and professional when interpreting or conversing with the Purchasers and/or the clients. In addition to the certification or qualifications requirements, interpreter must also have attained customer service and professionalism skills, cultural sensitivity and awareness skills (both through verifiable credentials and experience) and safeguarding client information as required through federal and state law, as well as Purchaser policies when identified.

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The interpreters shall accurately interpret the Purchaser and client statements. The interpreter must relay the message in its entirety with the meaning preserved throughout the conversation. Interpreters shall not paraphrase, edit, or omit information which may erroneously change the meaning of the clients' or Purchasers' statements.

ALTERNATIVES AND IMPLICATIONS CONSIDERED

As there are minimal alternatives to this type of service, they will be impactful to both the customers and stakeholders of the airport (specifically Customs and Border Protection) who regularly need assistance with Limited English Proficient passengers.

Alternative 1 – Google Translate

Pros:

- (1) Google translate is free
- (2) Available 24/7 through a web browser

Cons:

- (1) Once you enter the text in Google translate, it becomes property of Google, and they can use the data to their discretion.
- (2) Interviews with CBP are verbal and may contain sensitive information (i.e. document status and other confidential information to the passenger/customer)
- (3) Misunderstandings due to errors in translation
- (4) Automated translation systems are prone to technology bugs
- (5) Supports only 109 languages

This is not the recommended alternative.

Alternative 2 – Microsoft Translator

Pros:

- (1) Microsoft Translator is free
- (2) Available 24/7 through a web browser or smart phone application

Cons:

- (1) Able to provide written translation not verbal interpretation
- (2) Supports only 60 languages

This is not the recommended alternative.

Alternative 3 – Acquire a language interpretation contract

Cost Implications: \$200,000 per year for 5 years

Pros:

- (1) Accurate translation and interpretation for sensitive conversations
- (2) Proper understanding and effective communication between airport employees and customers/passengers

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- (3) People respond more positively and are more comfortable when they can speak in their native language

Cons:

- (1) Issues can arise with technology and outside noise can play a factor when it comes to hearing a speaker clearly when conducting a telephone interpretation
- (2) Body language and facial expressions are major factors in communicating with someone and when a conversation is taking place over the phone, those two things are completely lost

This is the recommended alternative.

ATTACHMENTS TO THIS REQUEST

- (1) Presentation slides