

San José Non-English Access and Engagement

Introduction

The two most popular non-English languages spoken in San José are Spanish and Vietnamese. Spanish speaking residents make up 10.3% of San José's total population and Vietnamese speaking residents make up 6.5% of San José's total population. In 2020, San José 311 (SJ311) integrated Spanish and Vietnamese translation onto the SJ311 platform to allow residents to create service requests in those two languages. This was a multistep process that included creating a high-quality translation tool and intentionally outreaching to targeted communities.

Addition of Google Language Translation Services

Since its launch in 2017, SJ311 services were only available in English, however the City wanted to expand access to non-English speaking residents. An initial solution that was evaluated was an out of the box translation service on the platform. However, most non-English speaking residents preferred simplified English over the translation and found the translation to be offensive in some cases. As a result, the City explored alternative methods.

The challenge was then how to provide the best translation services for users. The City piloted Google's Auto ML machine learning translation services to provide a customized translation solution built on top of the Google Free Translation. The Auto ML model was trained on words and phrases (training pairs) specific to the City and 311 context that reflected the regional dialects of San José's Spanish and Vietnamese speaking community. Some unforeseen challenges included spelling errors, cultural contexts, and dialect, particularly for Vietnamese translation.

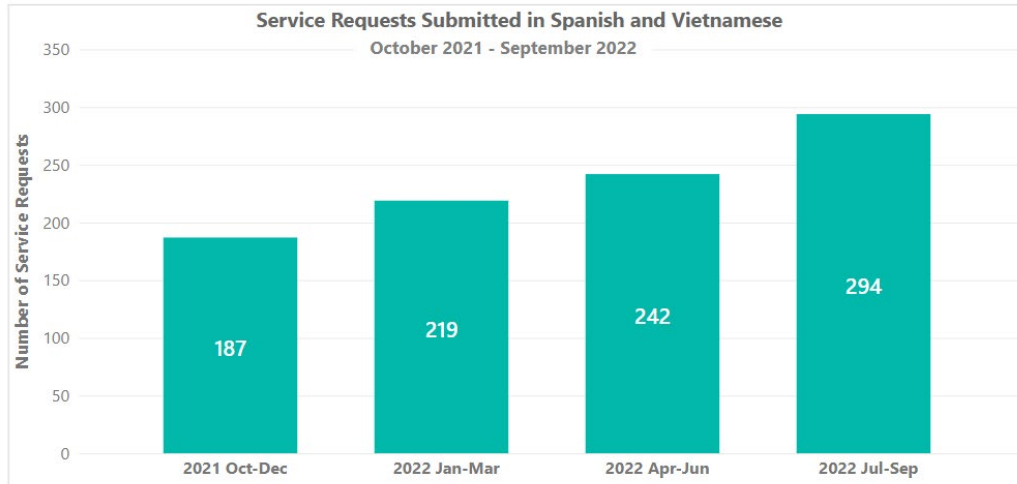
The current SJ311 platform uses a mixed approach to translating text. Static content is translated first through a predefined glossary. Terms not in the glossary are translated using Google's free translation. Dynamic content, such as user provided content in the open text fields and City staff responses are translated using Auto ML.

Increasing Engagement to Platform

After Spanish and Vietnamese translations were added onto the SJ311 platform, the use of the languages remained low. SJ311 and City Manager's Office of Communications worked on targeted community outreach to promote awareness of SJ311 services. The Equity dashboard, a tool created by the City's GIS team, brought together data from 311 usage, equity score and language score that helped identify zip codes with larger underserved populations and people with Low English Proficiency (LEP). Areas with high equity and Language scores were prioritized for outreach.

Outreach was approached in two stages spanning from April 2022 to September 2022 and November 2022 to March 2023. A mix of low-cost tactics, such as printed materials, and high-cost tactics, such as digital ads, were used.

There was an increase of traffic in calls and requests to the SJ311 platform after the outreach. From the end of 2021 to middle of 2022, there was 60% increase of Spanish and Vietnamese service requests.



From 2021 to 2022, there was a 132% increase of Spanish calls and 21.9% increase in Vietnamese calls. Google Ads resulted in 1.3+ million impressions and 16,890 clicks to the SJ311 website. Following the Google and Facebook Ad campaigns and the direct mail postcards, there was an overall increase in service requests from zip codes with a high percentage of Spanish and Vietnamese speakers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This effort has shown the challenges of implementing non-English languages on SJ311 and outreaching to targeting communities. Increasing language access alone is not simply having resources available in different languages but ensuring populations that need them are made aware of these resources. Based on this study, some recommendations that can be made include:

- Allot additional time and resources to implementing Asian languages
- Create ways to track effectiveness of non-digital outreach strategies

As SJ311 is expanding its services, language access becomes increasingly important to ensure residents with the greatest needs are prioritized.