



CITY OF NEW YORK  
**OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER**  
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DEPUTY COMPTROLLER FOR  
AUDIT

BUREAU OF AUDIT

June 29, 2021

**By Electronic Mail**

Mr. Anthony W. Marx  
President and CEO  
New York Public Library  
476 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
New York, NY 10018

**Re: Final Letter Report on the New York Public Library's Provision of Website Translation Services (Audit # SZ21-092AL)**

Dear Mr. Marx:

This Final Letter Report concerns the New York City Comptroller's audit of the New York City Public Library's (NYPL's or the Library's) provision of website translation services. The objective of this audit was to determine whether the NYPL is complying with standards for website translation services as defined in Local Law 25 and other relevant laws, standards, and guidelines.

Local Law 25 governs the translation of websites of New York City (City) agencies and is intended to make City agencies, and ultimately the City as a whole, more accessible to foreign-born residents whose primary language is not English. While the NYPL maintains that the law does not directly apply to it, the local law's goal of making City-funded services broadly accessible to the public is one the Library shares, evidenced in part by the Library's commitment to the standards adopted by the American Library Association. Those standards in pertinent part state, "Providing library materials for ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups should not be seen as an 'additional' or 'extra' service, but as an integral part of every library's services." Because the City's local laws cited in this report prescribe methods and standards for ensuring that City-funded services are accessible to all segments of the public, we used the criteria they prescribe as a means of assessing the Library's provision of website translation services.

**Background**

New York City, with a population of more than 8.5 million people, is one of the most diverse cities in the world, with more than 3.2 million foreign-born residents from more than 200 countries. According to the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP), nearly one-half of all New Yorkers speak a language other than English at home, and almost 25

percent of City residents age five and over, or 1.8 million persons, are not proficient in English. For individuals with limited English proficiency, interacting with City government can often be a challenge.<sup>1</sup>

Most City agencies have a significant presence on the internet and rely on agency websites to both provide information to and interact with the public. Accordingly, in 2016, Mayor de Blasio signed Local Law 25, amending the City’s Administrative Code in relation to citizens’ ability to access translation of City websites. Local Law 25 requires that every website maintained by or on behalf of a City agency include a translation service enabling users to view the text of that website, wherever practicable, in languages other than English. It also requires that the translation service be identifiable in a manner that is comprehensible to speakers of the seven most commonly spoken languages in the City. As determined by DCP, the seven most commonly spoken languages in New York City among residents with limited English proficiency are:

- 1) Spanish
- 2) Chinese (includes Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese, and Formosan)
- 3) Russian
- 4) Bengali
- 5) Haitian Créole
- 6) Korean
- 7) Arabic

Thereafter, with the City’s enactment of Local Law 30 of 2017, as of July 1, 2017 through the present, all City agencies that provide direct public services or emergency services must develop and implement Language Access Plans, in consultation with the Mayor’s Office of the Language Services Coordinator and the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs. These plans must include translation and interpretation services in the top 10 limited English proficiency (LEP) languages—the 6 designated by DCP and 4 others determined by the Mayor’s Office of the Language Services Coordinator, based on language access data collected by the City Department of Education.<sup>2</sup> The 10 designated languages Citywide in New York City among residents with LEP are:

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<sup>1</sup> Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, “State of Our Immigrant City: Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) Annual Report for Calendar Year 2020.” <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/immigrants/downloads/pdf/MOIA-Annual-Report-for-2020.pdf>; New York City Department of City Planning; <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/about/language-access.page>; <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/planning-level/nyc-population/nyc-population.page>

<sup>2</sup> Local Law 30 of 2017 is codified at Title 23, Chapter 11, § 23-301 of the New York City Administrative Code and in amendments to sections 15(c) and 18(b) of the City Charter. For this audit, we reviewed the NYPL’s website and tested its ability to translate documents into the top 10 most commonly spoken languages for residents with limited English proficiency as required by Local Law 30.

- 1) Spanish
- 2) Chinese (includes Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese, and Formosan)
- 3) Russian
- 4) Bengali
- 5) Haitian Créole
- 6) Korean
- 7) Arabic
- 8) Urdu
- 9) French
- 10) Polish

The American Library Association (ALA) provides standards and guidelines for public libraries to ensure language access, emphasizing that “[p]roviding library materials for ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups should not be seen as an ‘additional’ or ‘extra’ service, but as an integral part of every library’s services.” Under the ALA’s standards, libraries are to provide and actively promote multilingual services and programming for the various ethnic groups in their communities, and establish goals, objectives, and policies that integrate multilingual services into their overall work plan. Further, the ALA states that libraries should provide multilingual services at the same level with the same standards as for the general public. Library card applications, interlibrary loan information, welcome brochures, and other information should be in the preferred language of the library user. In addition, a library should make its web presence known to its patrons who have limited English abilities, and the library’s home page should translate the contents into the preferred language of the library user. Further, important community events should be made available on the library’s web site in the preferred language of the library user.<sup>3</sup> As evidenced by the ALA’s above-referenced statements, libraries such as the NYPL are expected to integrate appropriate language access policies into their services, a policy aligned with that of the City’s relevant local laws.

The NYPL, the nation’s largest public library system, operates as a private, not-for-profit corporation, and is governed by a Board of Trustees which includes *ex officio* members, the Mayor, the Comptroller, and the Speaker of the City Council. The NYPL’s 92 locations include 4 research centers focusing on the humanities and social sciences, the performing arts, Black history and culture, and business and industry, and a network of neighborhood libraries throughout the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island.<sup>4</sup> Among other things, the NYPL provides free and open access to its physical and electronic collections and information, as well as to its services for people of all ages, from toddlers to teens and adults. Research and circulating collections combined total more than 51 million items, among them materials for the visually impaired. In addition, each year the

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<sup>3</sup> American Library Association, “Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Multilingual Collections and Services.” <http://www.ala.org/rusa/resources/guidelines/guidemultilingual>

<sup>4</sup> The NYPL has locations in the boroughs of the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island. The boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens are supported by their own separate library systems.

Library presents thousands of exhibitions and public programs, including classes in technology, literacy, researching, and English for Speakers of Other Languages. The Library serves some 18 million patrons who come through its doors annually; in addition, the Library's website receives 32 million visits annually from more than 200 countries.

The NYPL created a catalog for books, music, and DVDs in different languages to help recent immigrants and bilingual and multilingual communities navigate the Library's array of free services and resources for persons of all ages. As of April 12-30, 2021, the NYPL began a World Literature Festival where they celebrate books and writers from around the world, reflecting the many languages spoken by its patrons in immigrant, bilingual, and multilingual communities across the City.

The objective of this audit was to determine whether the NYPL is providing website translation services as defined in Local Law 25 and other relevant laws, standards, and guidelines which are intended to make entities that interface with City agencies' services more accessible to immigrants and non-English speakers through translations of their websites.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

Our audit found that the NYPL generally complies with the website translation standards prescribed by Local Law 25 and other relevant laws, standards, and guidelines. The NYPL's website, found at <https://www.nypl.org/language>, includes a translation feature for viewing text and essential information in various languages, including the above-noted top 10 designated languages. In addition, this translation feature is identifiable in a manner that is comprehensible to speakers of the seven most commonly spoken languages in the City.

Our audit also found that the NYPL's website provides important information regarding its functions and services, which includes information pertaining to the NYPL's COVID-19 efforts, fines and fees, general policies and rules, internet safety tips for children and teens, library card terms and conditions, rules and regulations. However, although most of the webpages that contain this information can be translated and viewed in each of the top 10 LEP languages as determined by City law, we found that some of the webpages are offered in only some of the City's top 10 LEP languages. The following are examples of those webpages and the languages in which they are translated:

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information (Bengali, Spanish, Russian, Chinese)
- General Policies and Rules (Bengali, Spanish, French, Russian, Arabic, Chinese)
- Internet Safety Tips for Children and Teens (Spanish, Chinese, Russian)
- Library Card (Spanish) and Simply E (app) (Spanish, Chinese, Arabic and Russian)
- Website Terms and Conditions (Spanish, Russian, Chinese)
- The Flickr Commons (Russian, Chinese, Spanish)
- Privacy Policy (Spanish, Chinese, Russian)

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The NYPL's website has a language services page notifying users that they have access to free interpretation services at all locations that interact with the general public. The page also informs users that NYPL will provide free language services, including written translations and in-person or telephonic interpretation, to any person requiring assistance, and that they can email [access@NYPL.nyc.gov](mailto:access@NYPL.nyc.gov) for more information.

While translating English-language documents upon request is a helpful temporary practice, the NYPL should ultimately make its essential documents available directly on its website, through a translation link, in the 10 LEP languages that are most commonly spoken in the City. That work, once completed, would ensure that the NYPL is in full compliance with the standards for website translation services as exist in the City by virtue of Local Law 25 and other relevant laws, standards, and guidelines. Such action would further evidence the Library's commitment to the relevant ALA policy referenced above.

Our findings are outlined in the following table entitled Compliance Summary.

COMPLIANCE SUMMARY		
Criteria	Compliance	Notes
<p>Website translates into the top 10 most commonly spoken languages (as determined by Local Law 25 of 2016 and Local Law 30 of 2017).</p> <p>Ensure library’s web presence is known to its patrons who have limited English abilities. A mirror site of the library’s home page should exist, translating the contents into the preferred language of the library user (as prescribed by ALA Standards and Guidelines, <i>Serving Speakers of Language Other than English, Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Multilingual Collections and Services</i>).</p>	Yes	<p>We reviewed and successfully translated the website text in all 10 noted languages.</p> <p>The NYPL’s website also has a “Translate This Page” feature, which enables translation of the NYPL’s website text into more than 100 languages. As such, the NYPL also complies with ALA guidance that a library’s home page should translate the contents into the preferred language of the library user.</p>
<p>Website translates essential documents into the top 10 most commonly spoken languages. Key documents translate into the NYPL’s top 10 most requested languages of residents with limited English proficiency (as determined by Local Law 25 of 2016 and Local Law 30 of 2017, and as prescribed by the NYPL’s standards).<sup>5</sup></p> <p>Library should provide multilingual services at the same levels according to the same standards as for the general public. Library card application, interlibrary loan information, welcome brochures and other information should be in the preferred language of the library user</p>	Partial	<p>Although the NYPL’s website translates its top-layer content in the 10 designated languages in accordance with Local Laws 25 and 30, the key documents accessed through the website’s links open in fewer than the 10 designated languages. Therefore, we were not able to translate the NYPL’s key documents into the top 10 languages for residents with limited English proficiency directly on the NYPL’s website. The NYPL’s website states that the documents will be provided in the requested language upon request.</p>

<sup>5</sup> The NYPL states that it continuously reviews the translations requested for its documents on its website. Based upon the usage, the NYPL will decide if the translation of a brochure/document should be continued or discontinued in languages other than the top 10 languages required by Local Law 30. At this time, the documents on the website are available in limited languages only. The translated versions of the documents can be requested.

(as prescribed by ALA Standards and Guidelines, <i>Serving Speakers of Language Other than English, Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Multilingual Collections and Services</i> ).		
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We recommend the following two measures to ensure that the NYPL maintains general compliance with the standards for website translation services as defined in Local Law 25 and other laws and guidelines that establish standards and methods for multilingual access to essential services in the City, and thereby ensure that it effectively meets the needs of residents with limited English proficiency who access Library services online.

1. The NYPL should maintain its current level of compliance with standards for website translation services as defined in Local Law 25 and other relevant laws, standards, and guidelines by continuing to offer direct online translation of its webpages' primary content in the 10 designated LEP languages that Local Law 30 prescribes.

**NYPL's Response:** "The New York Public Library is committed to serving this diverse city and making its free resources and collections accessible to non-English speakers. We have made great progress and will continue our work, specifically addressing the Comptroller's recommendations and findings as practicable."

2. The NYPL should make translations of the essential and key documents linked to its webpages directly available to users in the 10 designated LEP languages specified by Local Law 30. As a temporary measure until it offers direct online translation of those documents, the NYPL should continue to translate the essential and key documents on request.

**NYPL's Response:** "Thank you to the Office of the Comptroller for permitting the Library to temporarily offer translation of essential and key documents while we continue to work on a more sustainable solution."

**Auditor's Comment:** NYPL's response demonstrates its commitment to the non-English speakers of the City. We urge NYPL to quickly develop "a more sustainable solution" for translating essential and key documents linked to its webpages in the 10 designated LEP languages.

## Scope and Methodology

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. This audit was conducted in accordance with the audit responsibilities of the City Comptroller as set forth in Chapter 5, §93, of the New York City Charter.

As noted, the Comptroller is an ex-officio trustee of the NYPL. The Comptroller sits on the Board through a representative. Neither the Comptroller nor his representative on the Board were involved in planning or conducting this audit, or in writing the audit report.

The scope period for this audit was March 31, 2021 through June 2, 2021. Our methodology for this audit consisted of the following steps:

- We reviewed relevant laws, rules, policies, and procedures to determine our criteria in accordance with Local Law 25 of 2016.
- We reviewed relevant laws, rules, policies, and procedures to determine our criteria in accordance with Local Law 30 of 2017.
- We researched and determined the 10 designated Citywide languages in the City among residents with limited English proficiency, as determined by the Department of City Planning, the Mayor's Office of Language Services Coordinator, and data collected by the Department of Education.
- We reviewed and analyzed the NYPL's website and tested its ability to translate documents into the top 10 most commonly spoken languages for residents with limited English proficiency.
- We reviewed the NYPL's website to determine which documents and forms were most commonly used, analyzed whether the NYPL's common documents and forms could be downloaded on the website, and tested whether they translate to the 10 most commonly spoken languages for residents with limited English proficiency.
- We reviewed the American Library Association's relevant published materials to determine guidelines and regulations that govern libraries (i.e., public libraries, school libraries, the Library of Congress, and other entities associated with libraries).

Based on our understanding of the Local Law 25 and Local Law 30 requirements for website translation, we outlined all the criteria necessary for agencies to be in compliance. The table below outlines agencies' core criteria required to achieve compliance under Local



Law 25 and Local Law 30 in the areas in which we tested. A summary of these core criteria forms the basis for the compliance summary reported for each audited agency.

<b>CORE CRITERIA</b>	
<b>Compliance</b>	<b>Detailed Criteria</b>
<b>Spanish</b>	Agency’s website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information, and key documents in Spanish.
<b>Chinese</b>	Agency’s website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information, and key documents in Chinese.
<b>Russian</b>	Agency’s website includes a translation feature for viewing text essential information, and key documents in Russian.
<b>Bengali</b>	Agency’s website includes a translation feature for viewing text essential information, and key documents in Bengali.
<b>French Créole (Haitian Créole)</b>	Agency’s website includes a translation feature for viewing text essential information, and key documents in French Créole/Haitian Créole.
<b>Korean</b>	Agency’s website includes a translation feature for viewing text essential information, and key documents in Korean.
<b>Arabic</b>	Agency’s website includes a translation feature for viewing text essential information, and key documents and books in Arabic.
<b>Urdu</b>	Agency’s website includes a translation feature for viewing text essential information, and key documents in Urdu.
<b>French</b>	Agency’s website includes a translation feature for viewing text essential information, and key documents and books in French.
<b>Polish</b>	Agency’s website includes a translation feature for viewing text essential information, and key documents in Polish.

The matters covered in this letter report were discussed with NYPL officials during and at the conclusion of the audit, and they agreed that a preliminary draft and an exit conference were not necessary. On June 11, 2021, we submitted a draft letter report to NYPL officials with a request for written comments. We received a written response from NYPL on June 25, 2021. In its response, NYPL agreed with the audit’s findings and recommendations, stating, “The New York Public Library is committed to serving this diverse city and making its free resources and collections accessible to non-English speakers. We have made great progress and will continue our work, specifically addressing the Comptroller’s recommendations and findings as practicable.”

The full text of the NYPL's response is included as an addendum to this report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marjorie Landa', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marjorie Landa

- c: George N. Alleyne, Associate Comptroller, Finance Department, NYPL
- Angela Jelcic, Director of Business Planning & Reporting, NYPL
- Luke Swarthout, Director of Digital Policy, NYPL
- Kathleen Riegelhaupt, Associate Director, Digital Policy, NYPL
- Sydney Renwick, Associate Director for Government and Community Affairs, NYPL
- Nakia Martin, Assistant General Counsel, NYPL
- Jeff Thamkittikasem, Director, Mayor's Office of Operations
- Brady Hamed, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office of Operations
- Florim Ardolli, Assistant Director, Mayor's Office of Operations



New York  
Public  
**Library**

VIA EMAIL

June 25, 2021

Deputy Comptroller Marjorie Landa  
Office of the New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer  
1 Centre Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor, 1310 North  
New York, NY 10007

Re: NYPL's Response to Provision of Website Translation Services Audit by Office of  
the Comptroller

Dear Deputy Comptroller Landa,

The New York Public Library is committed to serving this diverse city and making its free resources and collections accessible to non-English speakers. We have made great progress and will continue our work, specifically addressing the Comptroller's recommendations and findings as practicable. Thank you to the Office of the Comptroller for permitting the Library to temporarily offer translation of essential and key documents while we continue to work on a more sustainable solution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Iris Weinshall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "I".

Iris Weinshall

Cc: Ernestine M. Rivers, Audit Manager, Office of the NYC Comptroller  
Michele Mayes, VP General Counsel, The New York Public Library  
Nakia Martin, Assistant General Counsel, The New York Public Library