Executive Summary

46 Voices of the US COVID Pandemic: Trusted Community Influencers and Translators

Stephanie Nguyen, Kaela Gallo, Courtney Pitman, Angie Im, Adam Little, Shipra Kayan, Lorri Nault, Raphael Lee
U.S. Digital Response | December 2020

USDR

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1.0 Background and Methodology

A letter from the team

Translators are critical members of every community. They act as bridges. They piece together information from many sources while maintaining their communities' specific needs and context, so their community has the knowledge they need to survive and thrive.

While we position these individuals as information translators, they also act as editors. Because of their diverse backgrounds, experiences, understandings, and incentives, translators often add their own layer of perspective on the information they curate and share with their communities. This is mostly unavoidable of human nature but in the vacuum of specific, concise information to share, personal biases (whether positive or negative) may have more influence on what translators share with their community at a time like this.

We hope this work brings more nuance and guides your thinking and actions on top of all of the information, news, headlines and data you are hearing about the pandemic.

Thank you for reading this.

About this research

This study builds on research findings from *39 Voices of the US COVID-19 Pandemic*, which examined common COVID-19 information channels for members of at-risk and vulnerable communities. In the original study, we learned that people commonly turn to "translators" – trusted and individuals within a community, such as a workplace, or school – for critical, COVID-related information.

Following the recommendation from that study to *distribute information through translators*, this study was conducted to help governments and organizations better understand and support translators by illuminating the following:

1. Who is a translator?
2. What types of information do they value?
3. Where do they get their information?
4. How do they share it?

Details and further information on the summarized findings and recommendations included in this presentation can be found in the full presentation of [LINK]46 Voices of the US COVID Pandemic: Trusted Community Influencers and Translators.

Translators

Science journalists, social media Influencers	Community groups & organizations
US Mainstream news	Workplace (HR, leadership)

Schools (K-12, charter, boarding, colleges)

This study defines translators as community leaders who interpret rules, target, and share info to specific groups.

How this research was conducted - 3 parts

Part 1
**In-depth interviews
with 46 Translators**

Part 2
**18-Question Field Survey to
1,570 individuals**

Part 3
**Interactive task
with All Translators**

- **N = 46 one-on-one interviews with translators**
- Translators lived and worked across 22 states
- Interviews took place by videoconference or phone
- Interviews helped capture individual experiences of Translators, and provided insight into where information may be sourced, networks with whom information is shared, methods for updating information that is shared, and barriers to sharing updates

- **N = 1,570 individuals who self-identified as translators or non-sharers of COVID info**
- Respondents were defined into 3 categories
  - 539 Translators (Share info with 10+)
  - 483 Micro-influencers (Share info with <10)
  - 548 Non-Translators (Do not proactively share info with any groups)
- Survey data helped surface broader trends in how Translators source, gather, and share various types of COVID-19 information
- Survey data also helped validate differences in where Translators commonly source COVID-19 info pending industry or communities served

- **N = 1,570 survey respondents and 46 interviewees**
- 3 exercises to further explore information needs from the perspective of translators
- Participants were asked to prioritize the types of information that they need for their communities, and the materials and resources that could support them in reaching their communities

Key findings from this study.

# 2.0 Findings

1.0 Who is a translator?

"Translators" represent diverse cross-sections of communities, and influence their communities in a variety of ways.

1.1 – Context matters. There's variation in the category of "translators." Within those groups of translators, they have varying power to make decisions for and influence their communities.

1.2 – Translators have different levels of influence and are communicating different ways. They often have to use workarounds to rise above the noise or fill in knowledge gaps and speak to their community to make sure people get that information. There are barriers to both finding and sharing information.

1.3 – Locating info was not a problem. Once they find it, they struggle to make sense of it. It's hard to understand if: it's up to date, if it's consistent with what they have seen elsewhere, if it's trustworthy and to interpret technical information. This creates fatigue and reduces people's ability to successfully share information.

Translator Roles and Personas Framework
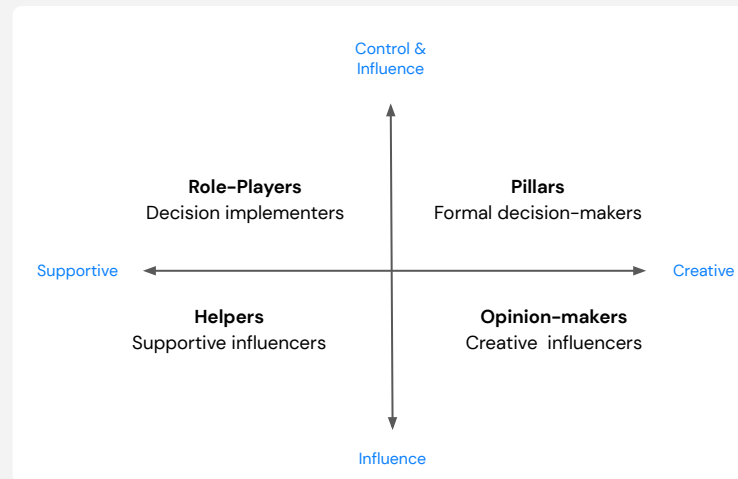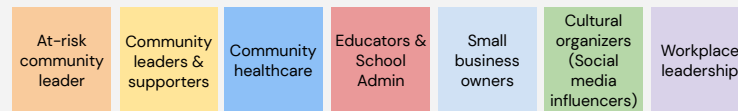
Use "Personas" to think through the strategies and incentives that would work best to engage and empower translators in your own communities. [Resource 3]

2.0 What types of information are valuable to translators?

No single type of information emerged as "Most Important" in the survey. Value depends on the context.

2.1 – Translators identified multiple "first choice" topics of information; important information can change daily depending on the translator's needs. Highlighting one point can't be at the expense of getting people what information they need at any given moment.

2.2 – Vaccine information was one of the topics that translators viewed as important to their communities; however, they flagged they had no information to share yet. To date, translators don't know enough to share a unified "story" about getting — or not getting — the COVID–19 vaccine.

2.3 – Once armed with information, translators are positioned to bring the vaccine narrative to their communities. We heard several express a sense of duty to fight misinformation, including a healthcare social media manager, a Latinx community leader, and a homelessness org director.

Valuable Information Types for Translators

Structured Data & Info Updates

Statistics, trends and data–driven insights

Testing information and resources

Vaccine information

Interpretive & Fluid

Relief and assistance

Rules and guidance for how to act safely

Disease prevention information to remain healthy

Regardless of background or role, these six types of COVID information were commonly cited as valuable by translators.

3.0 Where do translators get their information?

Translators are more likely to value government sources of COVID-19 information than non-translators.

3.1 – Translators more readily seek out and value COVID-19 information than the general public. They especially rely on government sources at all levels to keep their community informed.

3.2 – Translators are finding messy, inconsistent, and out-of-date information.

All information is important but local information (e.g., closure ordinances, testing sites) are particularly valuable.

	High-Value	Medium-Value	Low-Value

	At-risk community leader	Community Leaders	Community Supporters	Community healthcare	Educators & School Admin	Small business owners	Cultural organizers (Social media influencers)	Workplace leadership
Local	Local	Local	Local	Local	Local	Local	Local	Local
State	State	State	State	State	State	State	State	State
Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal

Translators rely on all levels of government in some capacity, but this map highlights particular translator roles that may be easiest for specific gov levels to partner with.. [Resource 5]

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4.O How do translators share information and engage with their community?

Empowered by different levels of influence and decision‑making power, translators reach their groups in a variety of ways.

4.1 – Translators share in a variety of creative, workaround ways. Of the methods to share information, text and email are more common.

4.2 – In terms of tools and resources translators need there are two types: information to inform *their individual* thinking and action and information to inform *community* thinking and action. For translators: maps, interactive planners, checklists, online trainings. For the translator's community: posters, brochures, translation.

Translators tailor information to their communities through communication channels that are meaningful and effective.

Social media

Postcard & Newsletters

Text Message

Informational Videos
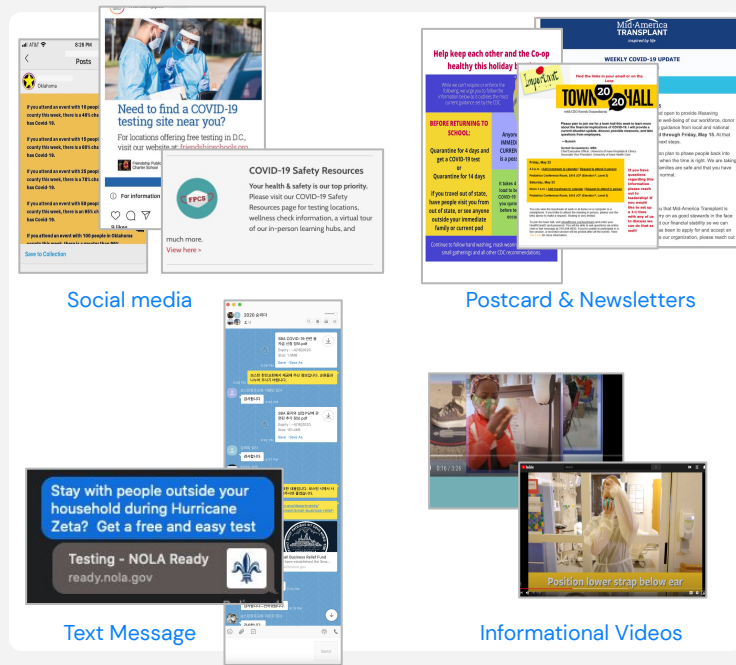
Example artifacts shared by translators.

Recommendations and actionable guidance for governments and community organizations.

3.0 Recommendations & Action Guidance

Recommendation #1: Focus COVID outreach on translator audiences and prioritize support across different community needs — there is no one size fits all strategy.

1. When creating websites or digital tools, think of translators as a primary audience and create features that support their unique needs. [3.1]
2. There is no one size fits all strategy. Pay attention to who you're reaching out to and use different strategies and incentives. [1.1]
3. Prioritize and support across different needs. Even as priorities shift to the vaccine, governments need to demonstrate that they still are supporting everyday needs (e.g., prepare for vaccines, but still provide clear testing information.) [2.1]

Based on Findings [1.1, 2.1, 3.1]

How to take action

- The homepage of your website should offer tools and content that make it easy for translators to deliver messages to their community. Additionally, your homepage should inspire people to share content. For example, the homepage of California's COVID 19 website features a shareable PSA video followed by a prominent call to action to visit a toolkit that provides media assets for different platforms, age groups and languages that support people's ability to share information with their communities.
- Community Translators is a general term and through our research we identified several unique personas. Use these personas to help think through strategies and incentives tailored to different types of translators.
- Your website should make it clear what the most pressing issue is from a public health perspective, but it should not do this at the expense of meeting the ongoing daily needs that people have. For example, the "hero" space on the CDC website allows for a featured message based on CDC priorities (e.g. alerting people to rising cases) while still making evergreen resources prominent (e.g. vaccines, testing, etc.)
- Establish credibility through consistency. Publish only clear, defined guidance and be transparent about how decisions are made or why. Before publishing information, consider whether the information is consistent with neighboring communities, counties, or states, and how it might be perceived by communities living near a border. If you anticipate your community getting mixed messages from nearby communities, consider recommending they take the most precautionary measures of conflicting guidelines.

Recommendation #2:
More tactically, share readable guidance that is platform agnostic, bite-sized, modular and scalable that is easily shared in a text message.

1. Reduce the fatigue that results from having to make sense of information by following best practices for readability, clearly indicating that the information is up to date, and making information consistent. [1.3]
2. Consider that some guidance and messaging be platform agnostic. Content should be bite-sized, modular and scalable. [4.2]
3. Make content easily shareable via text and email to pass onto community members. For example, content should be easy to forward or copy and paste in a text message. [4.1]

Based on Findings [1.3, 4.1, 4.2]

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How to take action

- Modify and create content for brevity, navigability, and clear organization. Use these design principles to make it easier for your communities to find the information they're actually looking for. [See: COVID Design Principles in Slide 7.]
- Create clear, concise, modular messages that are easily shareable and engaging. Recommended roles include: Content marketer, social media strategist, digital strategist. [See: existing resources to improve customer experience or help governments keep citizens engaged.]
- Include media that is reflective of your community and the diversity of the U.S. [See: Free stock photo options: Unsplash, The Gender Spectrum, Nappy]
- Usability test your existing website with members of your community. This can be done by a team member who bridges a community-facing role. If no user researchers, customer service roles for example, can be sufficient. See what stands out the most or least by sharing a screenshot of the website. [See: This guide of how to usability test existing websites.]
- Make content easy for translators to translate, adapt or remix so they can tailor it to the needs of their community. For example, ADvancing States created a toolkit for for state agencies that trains volunteers who make phone calls to socially-isolated older people during COVID. The toolkit offers heuristics (actionable rules of thumb) that allow nonprofits to make customized training materials, from posters to "tip of the day" emails. COVID ActNow creates bit-size content by taking guidelines set by the White House Coronavirus Task Force, Harvard Global Health Institute, and the CDC and synthesizes them into succinct statements that are easy to understand and share.
- Make it easy for people to share content on social media, email or through text messaging apps. For example, COVID ActNow allows people to generate graphics of data for every state, which can then be shared on social media or embedded onto a website.

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Recommendation #3: Recognize and support translators. Encourage them to be consistent with local guidance, reduce misinformation and be transparent with information they know and do not know.

1. Empower and train people to create their own tools and content. Get more people to move from "supportive" influencers to "creative" influencers. Recognize, encourage, reward, support. [1.2]
2. Consistency and coordination is key. Enable reliable, and strategic updates on government websites, social media platforms, and email list servs will allow translators to easily ingest and proactively share information with communities to combat the proliferation of misinformation. [3.2]
3. Work with "opinion-makers" (e.g. at-risk community leaders, social media influencers) to curb misinformation. Focus on empowering translators to shift to more active influencer roles. [2.3]
4. Take advantage of this moment and build a story to address vaccine concerns and set expectations now, even to acknowledge what is still uncertain. [2.2]

Based on Findings [1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 3.2]

How to take action

- Focus on strategies to engage community members depending on the needs of translators in your community. [See: roundtables, listening sessions, grassroots advocacy programs, messaging toolkits, continuing education programs, community liaisons, digital organizing campaigns, allocated funding programs, community outreach teams, etc.]
- Create steady channels of regular updates where your organization will share information. [See: Mayor of Newton Massachusetts' weekly email updates and public safety Twitter feeds]
- Keep people updated with information you know *and information you don't know*. Share future contingency plans, a reminder that you will provide information as it comes, when you do not have information yet, etc. [See: The Rockefeller Foundation's COVID-19 Testing Action Plan]
- Empower people to play the role of a translator by providing ideas, guidance or training on how to share information. For example, The COVID Tracking Project not only provides data and visualizations about COVID, it includes guides to help people create their own visualizations.

Things to help your team take action.

4.0 Resources & Tools
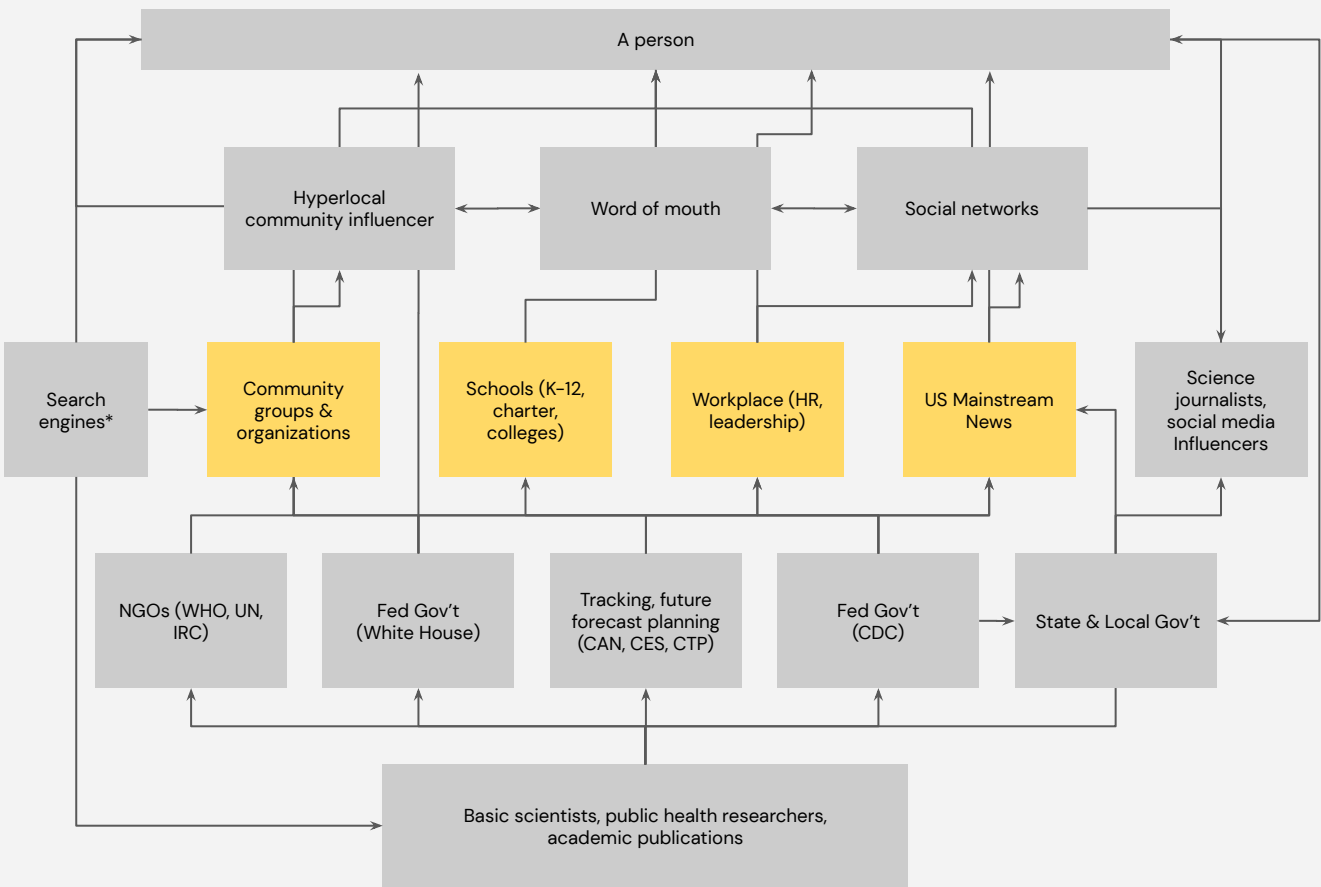
Resource 1: Trust Model

Based on the stakeholders we heard in the interviews, we mapped out a communication trust diagram to show how information flows from and to key sources.

Community: Follow, act on, use or implement in some way

Translators: Interpret rules, target, and share info to specific groups

System curators: Deliver rules and guidance to operate safely

Generators: Understand COVID science

A person

Hyperlocal community influencer

Word of mouth

Social networks

Search engines*

Community groups & organizations

Schools (K–12, charter, colleges)

Workplace (HR, leadership)

US Mainstream News

Science journalists, social media Influencers

NGOs (WHO, UN, IRC)

Fed Gov't (White House)

Tracking, future forecast planning (CAN, CES, CTP)

Fed Gov't (CDC)

State & Local Gov't

Basic scientists, public health researchers, academic publications
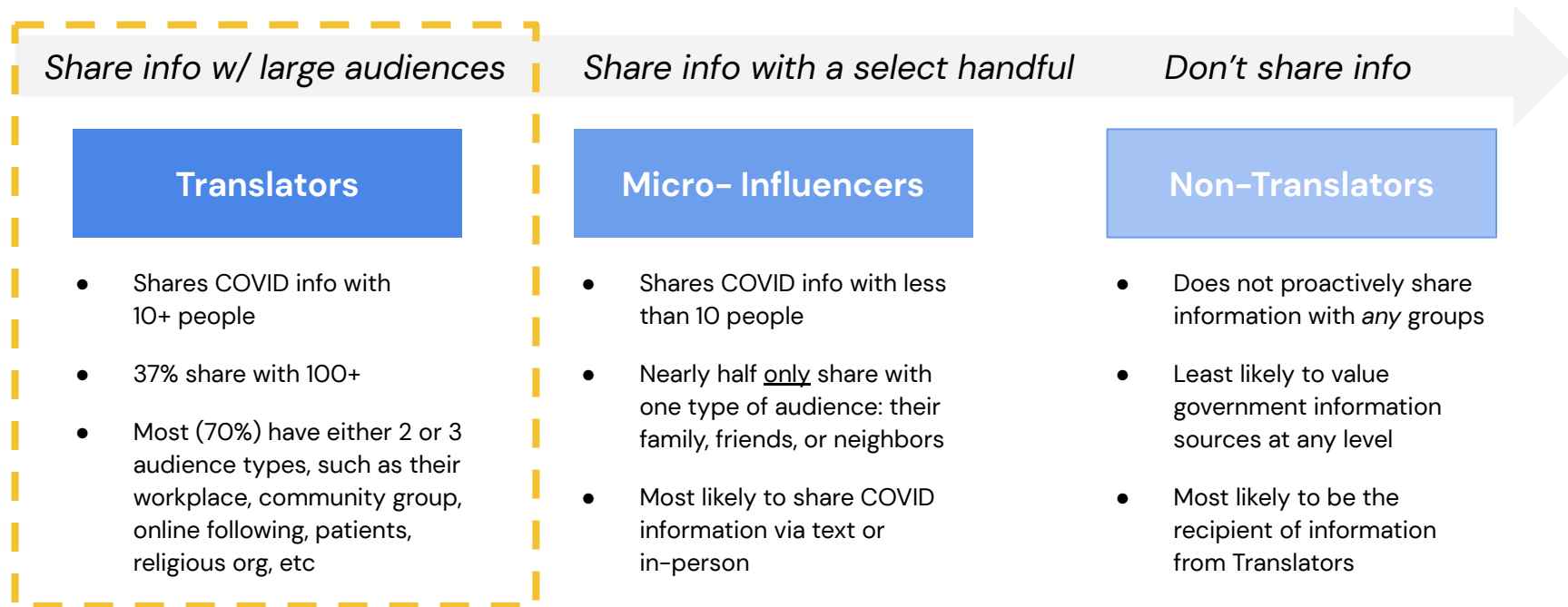
*Search engines are a unique actor in this, operating and sharing info from and to many layers of stakeholders.

Resource 2: There is a spectrum of people in your community.

We recommend that governments focus on a strategy to engage the "translator" audience in order to more closely reach your constituents.

Share info w/ large audiences	*Share info with a select handful*	*Don't share info*
Translators	**Micro– Influencers**	**Non–Translators**

Translators
- Shares COVID info with 10+ people
- 37% share with 100+
- Most (70%) have either 2 or 3 audience types, such as their workplace, community group, online following, patients, religious org, etc

Micro– Influencers
- Shares COVID info with less than 10 people
- Nearly half only share with one type of audience: their family, friends, or neighbors
- Most likely to share COVID information via text or in–person

Non–Translators
- Does not proactively share information with *any* groups
- Least likely to value government information sources at any level
- Most likely to be the recipient of information from Translators

Resource 3: There are a variety of translator personas.

How to strategically parse community influencers based on decision-making power and style of influence.

Pillars
(Formal decision-makers)
- School administration
- Schools staff members
- Community leaders: church leadership, housing director
- Small business owners

Less of decision maker — Decision maker

Supportive influencer — Creative Influencer
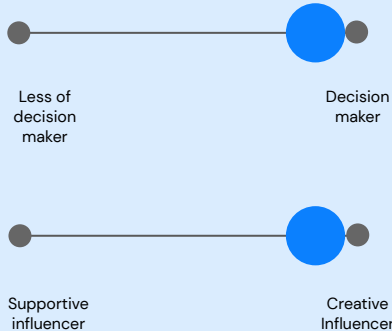
Opinion-makers
(Proactive influencers)
- Servants of at-risk communities
- Social media influencers
- Teachers passionate about the community

Less of decision maker — Decision maker

Supportive influencer — Creative Influencer
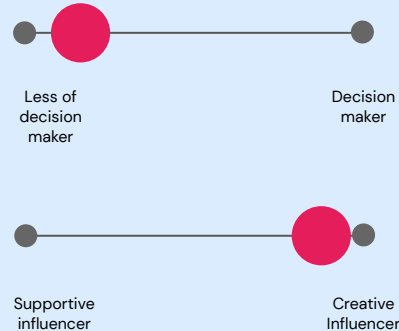
Role-Players
(Decision implementers)
- Workplace leadership
- Community healthcare (grassroots)
- Community healthcare official (hospital, ER)

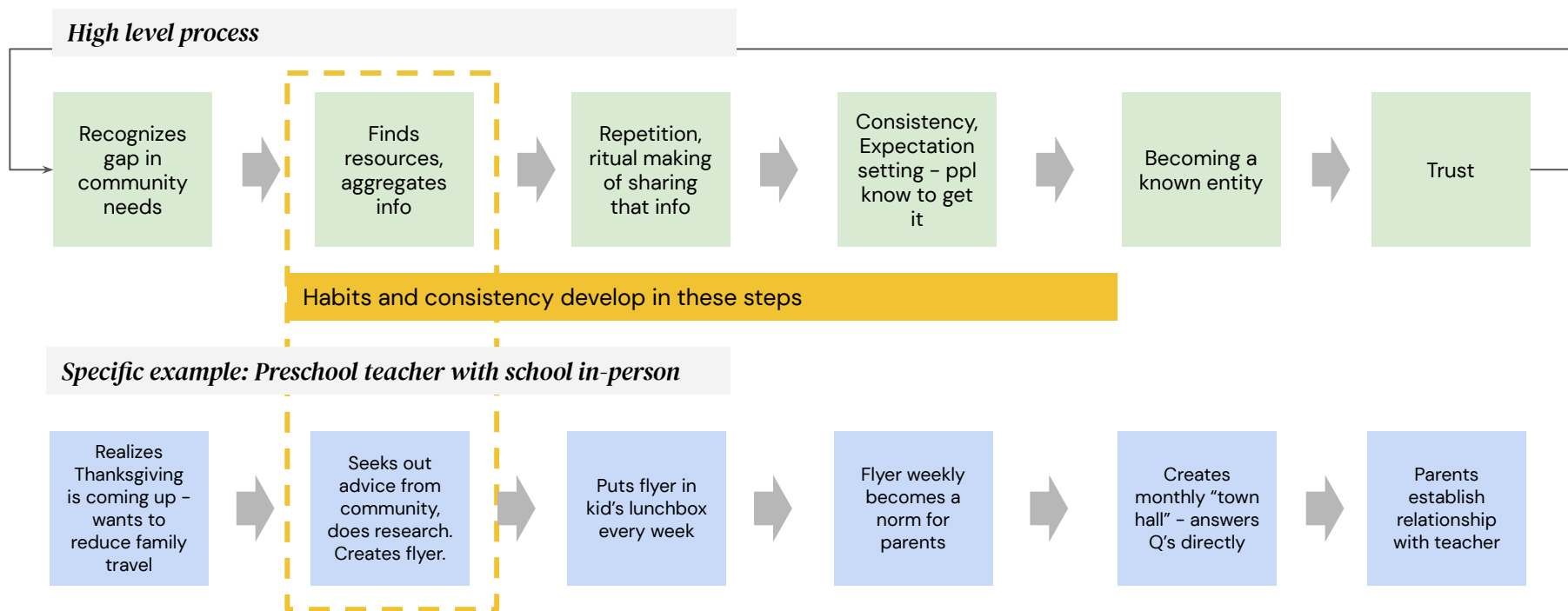Less of decision maker — Decision maker

Supportive influencer — Creative Influencer
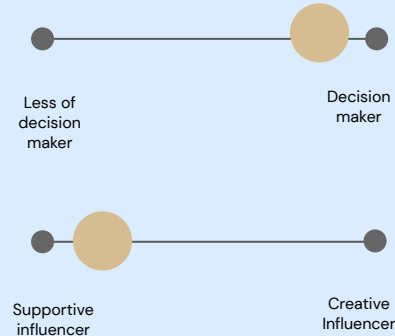
Helpers
(Passive influencers)
- Community supporters and volunteers
- Teachers who are doing their role

Less of decision maker — Decision maker

Supportive influencer — Creative Influencer
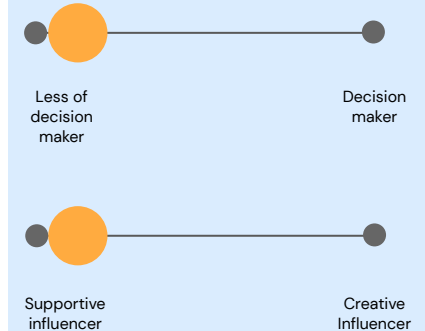
Resource 4: How translators recognize and respond to gaps in their own communities.

This can be used to better understand the process that translators build habits and develop consistency through finding and aggregating sources of trusted information.

High level process

| Recognizes gap in community needs | → | Finds resources, aggregates info | → | Repetition, ritual making of sharing that info | → | Consistency, Expectation setting – ppl know to get it | → | Becoming a known entity | → | Trust |

Habits and consistency develop in these steps

Specific example: Preschool teacher with school in-person

| Realizes Thanksgiving is coming up – wants to reduce family travel | → | Seeks out advice from community, does research. Creates flyer. | → | Puts flyer in kid's lunchbox every week | → | Flyer weekly becomes a norm for parents | → | Creates monthly "town hall" – answers Q's directly | → | Parents establish relationship with teacher |

Resource 5: Levels of government reliance for information based on translator role.

Translators rely on all levels of government in some capacity, but this map highlights particular translator roles that may be easiest for specific gov levels to partner with

Translator Roles

How much do various translators rely on (trust, use, reference) Local, State, and Federal government guidance and resources?

- High
- Medium
- Low

	At-risk community leader	Community Leaders	Community Supporters	Community healthcare	Educators & School Admin	Small business owners	Cultural organizers (Social media influencers)	Workplace leadership
Local	Local	Local	Local	Local	Local	Local	Local	Local
State	State	State	State	State	State	State	State	State
Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal	Federal

Resource 6: COVID Guidance Design Principles

These are aimed at improving how government agencies can better improve guidance websites and places where community translators can find information.

- **Implement findable content**
  - Google / search engine
  - Internal website navigation
  - Through other links, referrals

- **Implement concise search features:**
  - Use short, clear titles and headings

- **Improve navigability through site architecture and effective links between pages**
  - Is it universal? Laws, regulations, etc. Make it available from all pages.
  - Is it specific? Link to any relevant guidance from the main page or from separate topic page
  - Write effective link names to ensure navigation between pages

- **Organize content in a way that is relevant to the amount and relevancy of information**
  - Smaller list: Reverse chronological order with dates, bulleted list
  - Larger list: Topical organization
  - Call attention to new items ("new") icon

- **Review content on a regular, continual basis**
  - Regular review, corrections, updates
  - Delete documents that cannot be updated.

- **Use data to improve content**
  - Basic analytics (pageviews, time on page, traffic sources, click rates, search terms)

- **Incorporate trust & equity into guidance materials**
  - Make content accessible: 508 compliance
  - Ensure content is updated, reliable, state when info is unknown
  - Language and translation options

Note: These guidelines were derived from the Department of Education's "Best Practices for Presenting Policy Guidance Online"

A bit about us.

5.0 About U.S. Digital Response

About U.S. Digital Response

U.S. Digital Response helps governments build responsive, people- centered services with modern and resilient technology that work at the speed of need.

U.S. Digital Response connects experienced volunteer technologists with public servants and organizations responding to crisis. We're fast, and we're free.

Founded by former U.S. Deputy CTOs and seasoned tech industry veterans who led federal open data policies and digital government strategy, USDR is a

nonpartisan effort that connects expert, volunteer technology teams to public servants responding to crisis.

Our pro bono volunteers work with government teams to understand their challenges and get them the right tools to deliver critical services to the people who need them — all within a few days to weeks. Our diverse volunteers have deep expertise spanning engineering, data science, content strategy, design, logistics and supply chain, and disaster response.

Often, the smartest solutions and most effective tools already exist — they just

need to be identified, integrated, and implemented. Our volunteers survey the best of what's available, get systems up and running, and make sure government partners have the tools and training they need to operate smoothly and effectively.

Learn more about U.S. Digital Response at usdigitalresponse.org