

SUTTER TRANSLATE!

Back in 2017, we successfully advocated for the Punjabi language to be recognized state-wide, when previously it was not a California-recognized language. Since then, our population has become more diverse and more language mandates have been added, we knew we needed an instant solution to better engage with our voters. Thinking locally, not globally like “Google Translate”, we launched our own program “Sutter Translate”, to research technology-based solutions to augment our human-based interaction.

In 2024 Pocketalk was purchased to assist voters, poll workers, and staff with translations. This electronic handheld device instantly allows access to 84+ languages for voice and image translation allowing us to assist voters in any of these languages. We deploy units and post the availability at each polling location, and provide the training needed to use the devices.

Pocketalk devices have additionally been useful year-round in Elections, Clerk of the Board and Clerk-Recorder offices since purchasing. (The department head oversees these departments.) Units are used creatively in these departments; not only providing verbal translations but also translating images. For example, if a non-verbal customer writes their question down on a piece of paper in their preferred language and staff takes a picture of it on the device, the image is translated into English (or any other desired language) and when we respond, it both shows our response on the screen and reads the response out loud in their preferred language. It has been very beneficial when assisting hearing-impaired and sight-impaired citizens, no matter the language!

This device is extremely cost effective at just \$299.95 per unit and comes with a 5-year cellular data plan. Pocketalk is available for purchase online and the data plan provides coverage in over 170 countries/regions. It charges easily, holds a good charge and can also be connected to Wi-Fi if needed. Devices come with easy-to-follow instructions making them easily accessible after a quick battery charge. Even better? Using technology that improved accessibility allowed us to use HAVA grants to fund this program.

Language accessibility has been an ongoing challenge whether it's recruiting enough bilingual poll workers, translating election materials and providing day-to-day assistance. This program has vastly improved communication with non-English speaking citizens in a cost effective and simple way. Pocketalk allows citizens to communicate with staff and not to feel helpless, built poll worker confidence in communicating with voters, and – as a bonus - has helped employees assist citizens within multiple departments. For more information on this device, you can visit www.pocketalk.com.

