

# Voice for All: Empowering Minnesotans Through AI Translation Technology

State of Minnesota: Minnesota IT Services

**Category:** Emerging & Innovative Technologies

**Initiated:** January 2024

**Completed:** May 2024



**Kendall Johnson**

Director of Communications

kendall.johnson@state.mn.us

(C) 651-334-1760



## Executive Summary

A government cannot truly serve all if its services only speak to a few.

To create a fully inclusive Minnesota with equitable access to essential services and information, the Enterprise Translations Office (ETO) has embarked on a groundbreaking initiative. Using cutting-edge AI technology, the ETO is revolutionizing translation services to ensure every Minnesotan is seen and served.

The ETO aims to transform how service providers address and overcome the limitations of traditional translation processes by significantly enhancing both the scale and efficiency of AI translation technology. Minnesota is a state of many languages. The ETO's primary focus has been to expand translation capabilities in Hmong, Somali, and Spanish, languages representing 67% of Minnesota's non-English-speaking population.

The ETO's pioneering approach integrates Generative AI technology with human expertise to deliver accurate and culturally relevant translations across various executive branch agencies. Key components of this model include generative AI integration, human expertise, and custom language datasets, ensuring both efficiency and accuracy in translation services.

The impact of the ETO model is profound, enabling a small team of six to efficiently serve over 35,000 state employees across 24 executive branch agencies. By leveraging AI for labor-intensive tasks, the ETO ensures fast and accurate translations, enhancing accessibility to government services.

By centralizing translation services, the ETO not only reduces operational costs but also enhances service delivery, aligning with the state's commitment to inclusivity and equitable access to government services. The project's success underscores the transformative power of technology in fostering communication, trust, and engagement within diverse communities.

What sets the ETO apart is its commitment to continuous improvement and scalability. Beyond the initial phase, the project aims to expand language offerings, enhance AI capabilities, and explore additional innovative technologies to further improve translation services. This forward-thinking approach positions Minnesota as a state that truly speaks to Minnesotans, exemplifying leadership in inclusive government technology solutions.

**Why it matters:** Using AI to expand translation capabilities in Hmong, Somali, and Spanish, the new Enterprise Translations Office (ETO) ensures better access for 67% of Minnesota's non-English-speaking population. While these languages are highlighted due to specific community needs, the ETO supports translations in over 100 languages, reflecting the diversity and broad reach of our services.

## Idea: Slow, Costly, and Inaccurate

The Enterprise Translations Office was established within the Department of Administration to address the inefficiencies of Minnesota's decentralized translation system within state agencies. This system, marked by fragmented approaches and reliance on multiple vendors, incurred high costs and led to inconsistencies in translations, ultimately impacting service quality for non-English speaking communities.

Neglecting this issue posed significant risks, including ongoing discrepancies in translation quality, potentially resulting in miscommunication and legal liabilities, especially concerning critical health and safety information. Addressing this went beyond bureaucratic processes; it was about ensuring the safety, well-being, and trust of every member of Minnesota's diverse communities, fostering a sense of security and inclusivity.

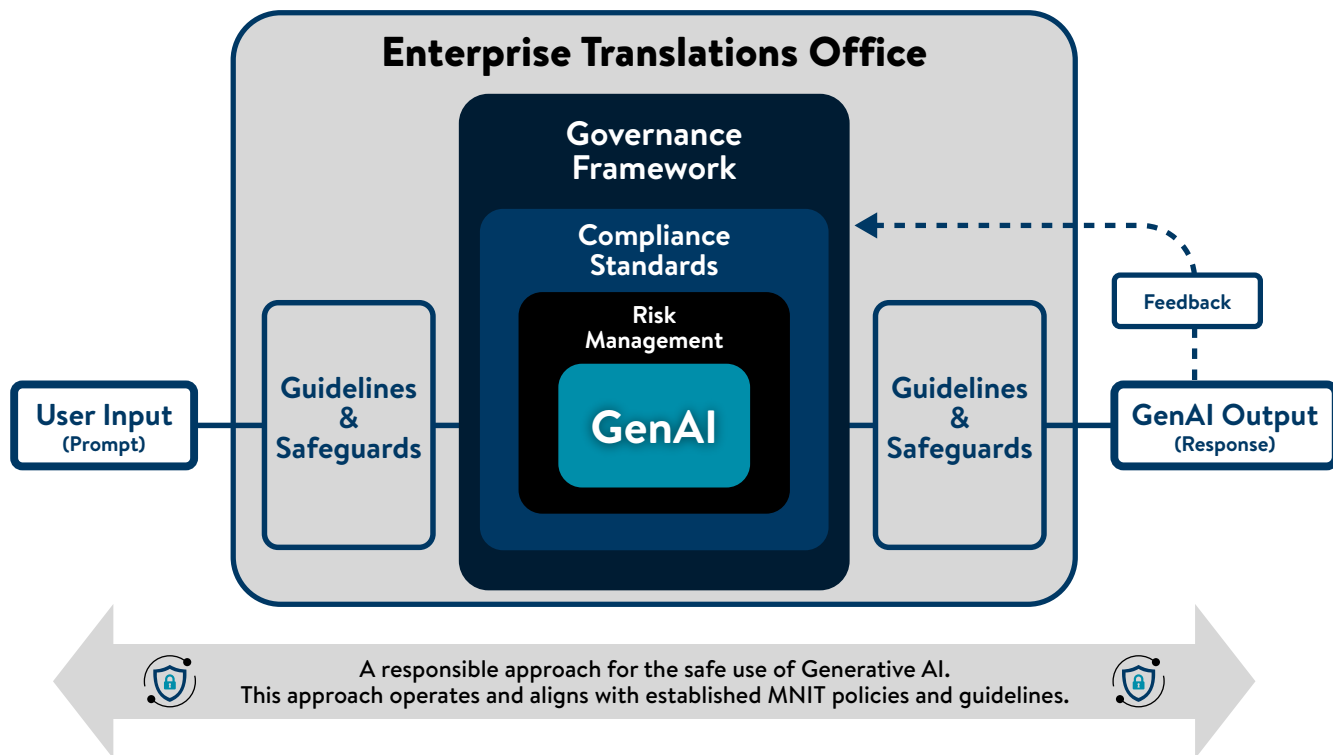
At the heart of the ETO's solution is a pioneering model that merges advanced Generative AI technology with expert human oversight, revolutionizing translation services across Minnesota's executive branch agencies. By automating initial translation stages with AI while ensuring meticulous quality assurance through human expertise, the ETO sets a new standard for accuracy and cultural relevance.

The ETO's approach has not only reduced operational costs and streamlined workflows but also enhanced service delivery efficiency. This unique combination of advanced AI technology with human expertise sets a benchmark for public sector translation services, addressing universal challenges such as cost efficiency, service speed, and cultural integrity in translations. Other states can learn from the ETO's success and leverage AI to address language diversity challenges while meeting accessibility and inclusion mandates.

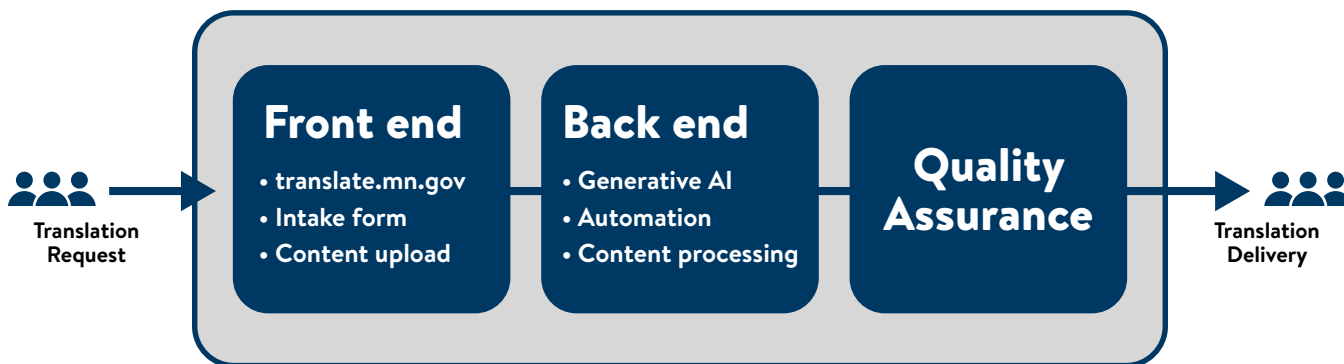
## Implementation: Orchestrating Safe and Efficient AI Technologies

The implementation of the ETO followed an agile management approach, facilitating flexible and iterative testing and development phases. Additionally, the ETO project was in line with the [One Minnesota Plan](#), and objectives in the Minnesota IT Services (MNIT) [Strategic Plan](#), to improve the experience of constituent's interactions with government.

Specifically, the ETO partnered with MNIT's [Transparent Artificial Intelligence Governance Alliance](#) (TAIGA) to implement safe and efficient AI technologies within government operations.



### Enterprise Translations Office Process



## Collaboration with a Focus on Customer Experience

The ETO was a truly collaborative effort. It involved multiple teams within Admin and MNIT focused on development, testing, deployment, and continuous refinement.

Customer experience was central throughout the ETO’s development. The design and functionality of the translation hub were optimized for ease of use, with a clear, user-friendly interface on [translate.mn.gov](https://translate.mn.gov).

The intake process was streamlined to minimize user effort, and regular updates and improvements were made based on user feedback to ensure responsiveness to the users’ needs. Quick turnaround times and high-quality output was maintained to ensure customer satisfaction.

# Impact and success

The ETO project was instrumental in transforming the delivery of translation services across Minnesota's state agencies. By centralizing these services and employing advanced AI technology, the project significantly reduced the dependency on external vendors, cutting costs and streamlining processes.

This transformation supports the state's commitment to inclusivity and equitable access, enhancing service delivery to Minnesota's diverse linguistic communities.

Results like these are evidence that the ETO effectively addressed the challenges of a fragmented translation process. Prior to the ETO, each agency managed its own translations, often resulting in delayed and inconsistent services. Since the implementation of the ETO, the streamlined process now handles translations for over 100 languages with consistency and efficiency.

Feedback from state agencies has confirmed a significant improvement in both the quality of translations and the speed of service delivery, with agencies reporting a notable decrease in operational bottlenecks.



*The Enterprise Translations Office has been an innovative partner in the field of language access. The use of AI has helped MDH provide communities with timely information that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.*

**Dan-Tam Phan-Hoang** | Communications Supervisor, Minnesota Department of Health

*The Enterprise Translations Office is a champion of technology innovation for the State of Minnesota. The Office's thoughtful application of AI to provide translation services allows State agencies to be more responsive than ever before to the needs of all Minnesotans. The Office's use of this technology allows us to quickly and effectively provide tailored information in the unique languages of the diverse cultural populations that are specific to our state. Additionally, the Office's staff are persuasive advocates on how other departments can adopt and use AI technology responsibly in order to improve state services across the board.*

**Casey Carmody** | Senior Policy Analyst, Data Practices Office, Department of Administration

*Minnesota is a better place with the Enterprise Translations Office. They're opening up government by making it more inclusive to Minnesotans who speak hundreds of languages. We've been fortunate to work with the Office in helping us quickly and effectively translate key information. And along the way, they've acted as trusted partners in helping us brainstorm ways beyond translating documents that we can continue to break down language barriers at our agency.*

**Taylor Putz** | Chief of Staff, Minnesota Department of Human Rights



## The Metrics for Success

Success of the ETO was measured through several key indicators.

The early adopters of this transformative technology will benefit from rapid, cost-effective, and consistently high-quality translation services. This shift has dramatically improved the accessibility of state services, ensuring timely and accurate communication with non-English speaking residents.

The agencies have reported:

- Better compliance with state and federal mandates for accessibility.
- Enhanced public trust.
- Increased engagement from the diverse communities they serve.



### Turnaround Time

Previously averaging weeks due to contracting, initial ETO work is providing responses in under **48 hours** and in several urgent situations in under 2 hours.



### Volume of Requests

Over **230 translation requests** (over 500 pages) efficiently handled since the Beta launch, with a projected increase of 30% month over month (M/M) once the service is out of Beta.



### Service Expansion

In addition to in-house expertise for three languages, AI and contract services support the ability to assist with at least **100 additional languages**.



### Cost Savings

Initial savings up to **40% have been achieved for translation costs** by eliminating the need for multiple external contracts and enhancing internal efficiencies.

## The ETO: Investing in the Future of Minnesota

The ETO's strategic approach to integrating advanced AI technology with human expertise addressed several critical goals simultaneously:

- **Promotion of safe AI:** The ETO exemplifies responsible AI implementation in public services, setting a benchmark for the safe and ethical use of artificial intelligence. By embedding AI within a controlled, human-monitored framework, the project mitigates the risks associated with autonomous AI, such as errors in translation that could arise from a lack of contextual or cultural understanding.
- **Prevention of job displacement:** The human-in-the-loop model adopted by the ETO ensures that AI enhances rather than replaces human jobs. By automating the initial stages of translation, human translators are freed from repetitive tasks, allowing them to focus on higher-value aspects such as quality assurance and cultural nuances. This model not only preserves jobs but also enhances employee satisfaction and the quality of work.
- **Augmented intelligence:** The combination of AI and human intelligence in the ETO model creates an augmented system where the speed and efficiency of AI are balanced with the discernment and cultural awareness of human translators. This synergy results in faster, more accurate translations and demonstrates a sustainable approach to employing technology in enhancing government operations.

- **Commitment to cultural sensitivity and inclusivity:** By developing proprietary language datasets, particularly for languages like Hmong and Somali that are less commonly supported, the ETO underscores Minnesota's dedication to serving its diverse population. This focus on inclusivity ensures that all community members have equal access to state services and information, which is vital for maintaining public trust and engagement.
- **Setting new standards:** The ongoing investment in the ETO is crucial as it continues to refine its capabilities and sets new standards for accessible, equitable, and efficient public services. This project provides a scalable model that other states can emulate, promoting innovation and excellence in government services nationwide.

## Looking Ahead

Looking ahead, the ETO is poised for significant growth. Short-term plans focus on AI model refinement and language expansion. Meanwhile, long-term goals involve exploring additional AI applications in public service. The ETO will help solidify Minnesota as a leader in inclusive government technology solutions and a state that truly serves all.