How to Evaluate Language Services Quality Certifications

Five ISO certifications. MBE status. Serving government agencies since 1985. What each certification covers, what auditors check, and how to use this information in your next vendor evaluation.

Why Certifications Matter in Regulated Procurement

Government procurement teams face a challenge that most private-sector buyers do not. You are evaluating vendors in a specialized industry where quality is difficult to verify from the outside. You cannot read a translation in Somali or Vietnamese and know whether it is accurate. You rely on the vendor's systems to guarantee quality, and ISO certifications are the only internationally recognized way to verify those systems exist.

ISO standards are developed by the International Organization for Standardization and audited by accredited third-party registrars. A certified organization has been independently verified to operate documented management systems that meet international benchmarks. A vendor who claims to follow "ISO-like processes" without certification has not been audited and cannot be held to that standard.

> *"A vendor who holds an ISO certification has had their processes reviewed by an accredited certification body. A vendor who claims ISO-like processes has not."*

What Certifications Give You as a Procurement Officer

Audit Defensibility

When a contract award is challenged, ISO certifications provide documented, third-party evidence that the selected vendor meets objective quality standards. The certification file is your paper trail.

Risk Reduction

Certified providers have documented processes for handling errors, managing complaints, and maintaining translator qualifications. Problems still occur, but the system for catching and correcting them is verified to exist.

Scoring Differentiation

In a competitive RFP, certifications provide clear, verifiable differentiators that are easy to score objectively. A vendor either holds the certification or does not. There is no partial credit.

Compliance Alignment

For agencies subject to federal language access requirements (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 13166), ISO-certified providers demonstrate the systematic quality assurance that program reviewers expect.

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The Four ISO Certifications: What They Cover and What Auditors Check

Not all certifications are equal, and not all claims are accurate. The four certifications below are the primary standards relevant to government language services procurement. Each covers a different dimension of risk.

ISO 9001 | Quality Management System

What It Covers

The foundational quality standard for any organization. Requires documented processes for service delivery, continuous improvement, risk management, and client satisfaction monitoring.

What Auditors Check

Whether the organization has a documented quality manual. Whether processes are followed consistently. Whether quality metrics are tracked and reviewed. Whether corrective actions are taken when quality issues arise.

What Buyers Get

Confidence that the vendor manages quality as a system, not case by case. Any vendor holding ISO 9001 has had their overall quality processes independently verified.

Government relevance: All government language services contracts.

ISO 17100 | Translation Services

What It Covers

The industry-specific standard for translation quality. Mandates that every translator meets documented qualification requirements, that every translation goes through revision by a second qualified linguist, and that the provider manages competence records for its entire linguist network.

What Auditors Check

Whether translators meet qualification requirements (education, subject-matter expertise, years of experience). Whether every project includes a revision step by a second qualified linguist. Whether project management and delivery are documented.

What Buyers Get

Assurance that translated content has been produced by qualified linguists and reviewed before delivery. For government documents, where a mistranslated benefits notice or legal form can have serious consequences, this is the standard that directly governs translation quality.

Government relevance: All translation contracts, particularly regulated program materials.

ISO 27001 | Information Security Management

What It Covers

The information security management system. Requires risk assessments, security controls, incident management procedures, and ongoing monitoring. Covers how data is classified, protected in transit and at rest, and recovered in the event of a breach.

What Auditors Check

Whether sensitive data is protected in transit and at rest. Whether access controls are in place and enforced. Whether staff receive security training. Whether the organization has a documented incident response process.

What Buyers Get

Documentation that the vendor has implemented and maintains security controls appropriate for handling government documents, personally identifiable information, protected health data, and sensitive program materials. Increasingly required or strongly preferred in public sector procurement.

Government relevance: Any contract involving sensitive, confidential, or regulated data.

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ISO 18587 | Machine Translation Post-Editing

What It Covers

The process of human review and correction of machine translation output. Requires documented post-editing workflows, qualification standards for post-editors, and quality checks on the final output.

What Auditors Check

Whether the vendor has a documented MTPE workflow. Whether post-editors meet qualification requirements. Whether the final output meets the same quality standards as fully human translation.

What Buyers Get

A certified process for AI-assisted translation. ISO 18587 is the only certification that independently audits the post-editing workflow in machine translation, and it is the rarest of these certifications in this guide. As government agencies evaluate AI translation for high-volume content, this is the certification that separates real MTPE governance from vendors who claim "we have a human review step" without third-party verification. Without 18587, there is no audited evidence that AI-assisted translation has been properly reviewed before delivery. Dynamic Language is among very few mid-market language service providers to hold ISO 18587.

Government relevance: Any contract where the vendor may use AI or machine translation.

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Certification Comparison: The Mid-Market Peer Set

The table below compares certification profiles across Dynamic Language and a representative mid-market peer set. Peers are grouped by size and service positioning. No individual vendors are named. Verify current certifications directly with any vendor before finalizing an evaluation.

Certification	**Dynamic Language**	Mid-Market Peer A	Mid-Market Peer B	Mid-Market Peer C
ISO 9001 (Quality Management)	✓	✓	✓	✓
ISO 17100 (Translation Services)	✓	✓	Some	Some
ISO 27001 (Information Security)	✓	Some	-	Some
ISO 18587 (Machine Translation MTPE)	✓	-	-	-
NMSDC-Certified MBE	✓	-	-	-
All four ISO certifications	✓	-	-	-

Note on the peer set: Most mid-market language service providers hold one or two ISO certifications. Very few hold three. Holding four is genuinely rare and signals a provider that has invested in quality infrastructure across every dimension of service. The combination of four ISO certifications and NMSDC MBE certification in a single provider is extremely rare in the mid-market segment.

Translation NPS
Zero detractors in our latest client survey.

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Business Certifications

National
NMSDC MBE Certified

Washington
OMWBE MBE Certified

Oregon
COBID MBE Certified

ISO 9001 · ISO 27001 · ISO 18587 · ISO 17100

AMTIVO
ISO 13485:2016 Certified
Medical Devices Quality Management

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Vendor Evaluation Checklist

Use this checklist when evaluating language services vendors for government procurement. Each item can be verified through the vendor's certification documentation, past performance records, or direct inquiry during the procurement process.

ISO Certifications

1. ☐ Holds ISO 9001 (Quality Management System)
2. ☐ Holds ISO 17100 (Translation Services)
3. ☐ Holds ISO 27001 (Information Security Management)
4. ☐ Holds ISO 18587 (Machine Translation Post-Editing) - if AI-assisted translation is in scope
5. ☐ Certifications are current and issued by an accredited certification body
6. ☐ Vendor can provide certificates on request

Supplier Diversity

1. ☐ Holds NMSDC MBE certification (if supplier diversity requirements apply)
2. ☐ Certification is current and issued by a recognized certifying body (NMSDC, OMWBE, or equivalent)
3. ☐ Vendor can provide certification documentation for contract file

Past Performance

1. ☐ Has demonstrated government contract performance (state, federal, or municipal)
2. ☐ Can provide references from comparable government clients
3. ☐ Has maintained contract performance over multi-year periods
4. ☐ Has operated under continuous ownership; avoids ownership changes that disrupt performance

Quality Documentation

1. ☐ Can provide translator qualifications on request
2. ☐ Has a documented revision process for all translation projects
3. ☐ Maintains project records and can provide audit documentation

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Information Security

1. ☐ Has a documented security policy for handling government documents
2. ☐ Can describe data handling procedures for sensitive program materials
3. ☐ Has an incident response process in place
4. ☐ ISO 27001 certification current and on file

AI and Machine Translation

1. ☐ Holds ISO 18587 certification (Machine Translation Post-Editing). This is the only certification that independently audits the human review step in AI-assisted translation. Vendors who describe a "human review step" without 18587 certification have not been audited against this standard.
2. ☐ Certification is current and issued by an accredited certification body
3. ☐ Can describe post-editing workflow, including how post-editors are qualified and how output quality is verified against the source
4. ☐ Can confirm human review is applied to all AI-generated content before delivery
5. ☐ If 18587 is not held: vendor can document why a non-certified post-editing process meets equivalent quality standards

About Dynamic Language

The company has served government agencies since shortly after its founding in 1985. Headquartered in Seattle, WA, the company serves clients in over 200 languages and dialects and is ranked among the top 20 language service providers in the United States by CSA Research. Dynamic Language holds five ISO certifications: ISO 9001 (Quality Management), ISO 17100 (Translation Services), ISO 27001 (Information Security Management), ISO 13485 (Medical Devices Quality Management System), and ISO 18587 (Machine Translation Post-Editing). Dynamic Language is a certified Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) under the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC).

ISO 9001:2015	ISO 17100:2015	ISO 27001:2022	ISO 13485:2016	ISO 18587:2017
Quality Management System	**Translation Services Standard**	**Information Security**	**Medical Devices**	**MT Post-Editing Standard**

The company has served government agencies for 30+ years, beginning shortly after its founding in 1985. The Washington State agency contract has been in place since 2004, as has the Oregon agency contract.