



COMMONWEALTH PROTOCOL FACT SHEET 1

Indigenous Language Interpreting Services

WHAT IS AN INTERPRETER?

An interpreter is a trained or registered professional or para professional who enables communication between people who speak different languages. Interpreters convert messages accurately and objectively from one language into another, and can help facilitate communication during meetings, training sessions, interviews, or other more serious situations such as a court proceeding or a medical appointment.

WHY SHOULD I ENGAGE A CREDENTIALLED INTERPRETER?

In-line with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Best Practice Principles on the engagement of Indigenous Interpreters, the use of a person's family and/or friends as interpreters should be avoided, as they may not have the required English competency, training or interpreting skills required to interpret accurately. Children must not be used as interpreters between their parents and a Commonwealth agency or service provider. Using friends or family may affect a person's willingness to participate in a discussion, express an opinion or disclose information. It may also affect the impartiality and accuracy of the interpretation, and have a negative impact on family or community relationships. Using a registered interpreter can help build trust and minimise complaints and appeals from clients/customers.

WHEN TO CONSIDER ENGAGING AN INTERPRETER

In many remote and regional Indigenous communities English is an additional language and may not be commonly understood. Words may have different meanings in different communities and the level of English will vary from community to community and from individual to individual. When facilitating meetings, workshops or training sessions, be aware there may be a need for an interpreter to ensure effective two way communication. While the need for an interpreter can be obvious, it isn't always a straightforward decision. It requires planning ahead and can require a judgement-based assessment in a sensitive manner.

An interpreter may be required for, but not limited to the following situations:

- community consultations and focus groups when a government message is being delivered and/or you are seeking feedback – such as in co-design processes;
- if a person is unable to communicate comfortably and effectively in English;
- if a person understands conversational English but requires assistance to understand complex information;
- a stressful situation where a person's command of English may decrease temporarily; and

- a legal or health related situation such as police interview or medical appointment where complex language is being used, or where complex decisions or consent is being sought.

Fact Sheet 1 Attachment A outlines a Language Need Assessment, which provides a framework to help agencies decide whether a client or customer could benefit from an interpreter.

The Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service website provides detailed information about when to engage an Aboriginal interpreter.

Attachment B provides advice about engaging interpreters for individual communication and community consultation and forums.

WHERE CAN I ACCESS AN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE INTERPRETER?

There are two Indigenous interpreting services that offer accredited interpreting and translation services:

1. The Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service (NT AIS), which is also currently delivering a cross-border service into the South Australian Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands and the Western Australian Ngaanyatjarra Lands; and
2. The Kimberley Interpreting Service in Western Australia.

The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) also provides a directory of independent accredited and certified Indigenous interpreters across Australia. Attachment C provides contact details for these services.

BOOKING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE INTERPRETING SERVICES

The number of registered interpreters for Indigenous languages is not large. Access can be further reduced by the need to avoid conflicts of interest, and take into account issues around kinship and extended family relations that might make an interpreter unsuitable. Agencies should book interpreters with as much lead time/notice as possible and not assume interpreters will be available when needed and should consider implications for timeframes, contract compliance and the need for flexibility and contingency planning. Agencies should also cooperate, where possible, with other agencies and non-government organisations to share resources and coordinate their engagement of and support for interpreter services. This is especially the case in remote areas, for example when an Indigenous language interpreter is commissioned to travel to a remote community for one job.

Before arranging an interpreter the type of job required should be determined, as this will help with appropriate preparation and planning.

A briefing session with the interpreter should be organised prior to the event at which their services are required. The briefing session allows the interpreter an opportunity to ask questions about the subject matter of the session. Many English terms and concepts do not have an Indigenous language equivalent, and the interpreter may need time to work out what the terms mean, especially technical terms and jargon, and how to interpret them.

Any concerns or issues the interpreter has with the assignment can be discussed and worked through at this briefing. Where possible, limit the use of jargon to help improve the interpreting process.

Agencies should consider booking the interpreter for extended times before and after the event in order to undertake this briefing and also to allow time for a debriefing with interpreter, especially if the interview has been difficult or emotional. It is also an opportunity to provide positive and negative feedback as part of a continuous improvement approach.

WHO PAYS FOR THE COST OF THE INTERPRETER SERVICE?

The Commonwealth agency or service provider making the booking will pay for the interpreter.

WHAT IS A PERSON REFUSES AN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE INTERPRETER?

If it is decided that Indigenous language interpreters are needed to communicate effectively with a person or group, but the service is refused, it is important to try to clarify and address the reasons for refusal. For example, it may be necessary to explain that interpreters are bound by the duty of confidentiality, impartiality and accuracy or that the individual or group will not have to pay for the interpreter's services. If there is potential for embarrassment around needing an interpreter a useful strategy might be to explain to the individual that the need is not for them, but for the person conducting the interview/conversation.

It might be useful to talk to family members or friends present to determine the reason why a person is refusing an interpreter.

LANGUAGE NEED ASSESSMENT

Use the following information to help assess a person's communication skills in English. If two or more of the points in the 'likely to need an interpreter' response applies to a person, an interpreter should be organised:

When articulating back, a person is likely to need an interpreter if they have difficulty articulating back what you said to them. The person is less likely to need an interpreter if they are able to articulate meaningfully most of what you said to them, using their own words.

A person is likely to need an interpreter if they only speak in short sentences of four to five words, or mainly give one-word answers. Where the person speaks in full sentences of six or seven words or more, and gives elaborate answers to questions they are less likely to need an interpreter.

A gratuitous concurrence occurs where a person consistently agrees with your questions or propositions you put to them, indicating they may need an interpreter. Where a person is easily able to disagree and articulate a different point of view they are less likely to need an interpreter.

Where a person frequently responds inappropriately to your comments or question, for example, responding with "yes" to what or where questions, they are likely to need an interpreter. Where the person consistently responds meaningfully and appropriately to questions and comments, they are less likely to need an interpreter.

Where you are sometimes mystified as to what exactly your client is telling you even when the words and grammar they are using are clear to you indicates that they are likely to need an interpreter. An interpreter is less likely to be needed where you can process the person's speech clearly and understand what it is they are telling you.

An interpreter may be needed where a person appears to contradict themselves, and is unaware of the apparent contradictions. An interpreter is less likely to be needed where the person does not contradict themselves, or if they do, they are aware of and can address the contradiction.

An interpreter may be needed where the person does not add significant amounts of new vocabulary to the conversation or they rely on using the words or phrases that you have previously said to them. An interpreter is less likely to be needed where the person frequently adds new vocabulary to the conversation.

An interpreter may be needed where the person does not use English grammatically correct, for example mixes up pronouns "he" instead of "she" or uses past tense incorrectly "he look at me". An interpreter is likely to be needed where English is spoken grammatically correct.

Where you find yourself frequently needing to restate and/or simplify your utterances an interpreter may be needed. Where you can talk easily in a normal manner an interpreter is less likely to be needed.

PROCEDURES FOR USING INTERPRETING SERVICES – WITH INDIVIDUALS

When identifying the need for an interpreter:

- identify when to engage an interpreter. Check agency protocol.
- identify the appropriate Indigenous Interpreter Service to use and contact them well in advance of requiring the interpreter.

When booking an interview, most interpreting service agencies seek as much information as possible about the interpreting job. This could include:

- the client's name, family or community
- the language/dialect required
- preferred sex of the interpreter
- date and time the interpreter is required (include time prior to interview to brief interpreter)
- type of interpreting assignment, including subject matter
- address of the agency requiring the interpreter
- name and telephone contact details of person to whom the interpreter reports
- how long (approximately) the interview will take
- if you or the client wish to have a specific interpreter for continuity of care reasons
- the agency cost code/ contact for the invoice to be sent to.

Before the interview:

- brief the interpreter about the interview topic and provide contextual information. Provide any documentation to booking agency prior.
- if the client and/or the interpreter are on site, arrange the seating arrangements to optimise communication (for example, in a circle or triangle formation) with the client, and/or arrange for a hands-free telephone function.
- check to see that the client and interpreter understand and are comfortable with each other.
- allow for extra time when compared to the usual duration of an interview.
- at the beginning of the interview:
 - sit opposite the client and look at the client, not at the interpreter, while talking (Consider cultural propriety when making eye contact with client).
 - speak directly to the client, as you would with an English speaker (not to the interpreter or into the hands-free phone).
 - speak in a normal tone of voice.
 - introduce yourself and the interpreter to the client.
 - explain to the client the purpose of the interview and how it will proceed.
 - speak in the first person to the client (for example, "How are you feeling?"), not to the interpreter (for example, "Ask her how she is feeling").
 - explain that the interpreter's role is only to interpret what is being said and that the interpreter is completely impartial.
 - explain to the client that questions or concerns can be raised at any time during the interview.
 - explain to the client that all information provided by the client is confidential, personal information is protected by privacy law, and the interpreter is bound by a code of ethics.

During the interview

- speak clearly and in plain English. Avoid jargon or slang or technical terms.
- remember to pause after about two or three short sentences, to give the interpreter a chance to interpret.
- check the interpreter understands what you mean. Give the interpreter time to ask questions or ask for clarification.
- be aware that it may take more words than you have spoken to convey the message (each language is different).
- stop speaking when the interpreter signals by raising a hand, or when starting to interpret.
- use pen and paper, particularly for key information, dates and numbers.
- avoid lengthy discussions with the interpreter, because it will exclude the client. If you must discuss something with the interpreter, always tell the client what you are discussing and why.
- if the non-English speaker does not understand, it is your responsibility (not the interpreter's) to explain more simply.

At the end of the interview

- ask the client if they have any questions and if they have understood everything clearly.
- summarise the interview and clarify what will happen next.
- thank both the client and the interpreter.
- once the client has departed, if the interview has been difficult or emotional, ask the interpreter if they would like to spend a little time debriefing.
- provide any positive feedback to the interpreter, and to the booking agency.
- if you had any concerns about the interpreting assignment, also raise this with the interpreter and agency in a constructive way. Discuss this with the Interpreter's service provider⁵ as part of a continuous improvement approach.

PROCEDURES FOR USING INTERPRETING SERVICES – DURING PUBLIC FORUMS AND CONSULTATIONS

Before the consultation:

- brief the interpreter about the forum or consultation topic and any questions which are likely to arise from participants.
- give them time to ask questions and research the topic. The interpreter service may ask that you provide a specific briefing session to all interpreters who are working on the rollout of the engagement.
- consider having both female and male interpreters as this is a sensitive issue in some cultures (ie. males speaking directly to females and vice versa).
- consider if more than one language is required.
- Introduce and explain the role of the interpreter to the forum group.

During the consultation:

- the presenter should talk in plain English, making clear key points and carefully think about the structure of the meeting.
- the presenter should avoid jargon, acronyms, slang or complex technical language.
- work out the language needs with the interpreter and determine the best location for the interpreters to sit and stand.

- some consultations will involve a mix of English and language. For example the interpreter may be seated with some older people specifically assisting them with their communication needs.
- in other consultations, English might be used for much of the discussion. At times however the interpreter might be called on to explain complex concepts in language and there will be group discussion in language until people feel they understand enough to proceed in English.
- if the majority of the audience is speakers of a particular language, use an interpreter during the consultation. Follow the principles for using interpreters outlined for one-on-one interpreting.
- depending on the composition of the audience and the content of the consultation, consider holding separate consultation sessions in relevant community languages.
- advise the audience of avenues for feedback on the consultation session.

Following the consultation:

- record the outcomes of the consultation on file, including any issues/complaints regarding interpreting or information in community languages.
- provide feedback to the interpreting service to aid their quality assurance measures.

CONTACT DETAILS FOR INDIGENOUS INTERPRETING SERVICES

Northern Territory

Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service

Website www.nt.gov.au/community/interpreting-and-translating-services/aboriginal-interpreter-service

Email ais@nt.gov.au

Darwin

Floor 1, RCG House
83-85 Smith Street,
Darwin NT 0800
GPO Box 4450, DARWIN NT 0801

Ph: 1800 334 944

Fax: 08 8923 7621

Alice Springs

Mezzanine Floor, Alice Plaza Todd Mall,
Alice Springs NT 0870
PO Box 1596,
ALICE SPRINGS NT 0871

Ph: 1800 334 944

Fax: 08 8923 7621

Western Australia

Kimberley Interpreting Service

Website www.kimberleyinterpreting.org.au

Email ceo@kis.org.au

Broome

Unit 10 Broome Lotteries House,
Cable Beach Road,
BROOME WA 6725
PO Box 3599, Broome WA 6725

Ph: 08 9192 3981

Fax: 08 9192 3982

Mobile: 0418 217 366

Perth

Fremantle Office
Suite 2
Gallery Suites
185 High St
FREMANTLE WA 6160

Ph: 0439 943 612

Ph: 0447 958 417

Accreditation Authority

National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI)

Website www.naati.com.au/

Email info@naati.com.au