Fact sheet 1: Using interpreting services – a guide for service providers

This guide is for use by service providers when engaging an interpreting service to communicate with an individual or group, either face-to-face or by telephone or video conferencing.

Preparation for an organisation

If you are considering engaging an interpreter to assist in communicating with an individual or group, you should:

- identify when to engage an interpreter (refer to Fact sheet 4: Deciding when to use an interpreting service)
- identify the language and dialect required. If the client cannot provide the information, contact a language service provider or use a country and language list (refer to Fact Sheet 3: Language list by country and place)
- identify the format of interpreting service required (face-to-face, telephone or video conferencing)
- identify the most appropriate provider of interpreting services
- ask the client about any preferences they may have for the interpreter such as the interpreter's gender, ethnicity, or whether they are sourced from outside of the local community (an interstate interpreting agency may be used)
- when a series of appointments are required, if possible, ask the client if they would like to use a different interpreter for each appointment to safeguard impartiality, or the same interpreter for each appointment to support continuity of care.
- determine any real or perceived conflicts of interest with the proposed interpreting method and make a plan to avoid them (refer to Fact Sheet 7: Using interpreting services – conflict of interest)
- familiarise yourself with non-verbal cues (e.g. eye contact, tone, posture) and cultural values (e.g. family roles) that might be common to your client's background.

Additional considerations for group forums

If you are facilitating interpreting services for a group forum, you should consider:

- using both male and female interpreters and/or holding separate forums for males and females, as the issues being discussed may be gender sensitive
- holding forums in individual community languages - depending on the composition of the audience, the issues being discussed and the number of people who speak a particular language

- whether written material should be available in relevant community languages. This may include promotional material for the meeting, materials that might be referred back to during the meeting, information about seeking further information, and how to give feedback or make a complaint (refer to Fact sheet 2: Using translating services for written materials).

Booking an interpreting service

To book an interpreter, contact a preferred interpreting and translating service and ask to book a National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) credentialed interpreter.

Please refer to your organisation's interpreting and translation policy for details of preferred providers or contact Human Resources within your agency.

You will usually need to provide the following information:

- the client's name
- the language and dialect
- any preference for the interpreter (e.g. a particular interpreter who has previously provided satisfactory service or an interpreter of a particular gender or ethnicity)
- date, time and exact location the interpreter is required (include some time prior to the interview to brief the interpreter)
- approximate duration of the interview
- type of interview (e.g. medical, legal, police interview) and nature or matter to be discussed
- name and telephone contact details of the person to whom the interpreter reports
- information about the telephone system that will be used, if applicable (e.g. speaker phone)
- the agency contact details, address and/or email for invoicing.

Before the meeting

Before beginning the meeting, you should:

- sight the interpreter's NAATI ID card when meeting them on-site
- brief the interpreter about the meeting topic, context, likely discussion and/or any sensitivities
- arrange the seating to optimise communication between the staff member, the client/group and the interpreter (if the meeting is occurring on-site)
- ensure that the client and the interpreter understand and are comfortable with each other
- obtain suitable information products in the client's preferred language, if relevant
- plan for extra time over the usual duration of an interview.

How to begin the meeting

It is important to ensure the client is comfortable, understands the purpose of the meeting and is clear on the role of the interpreter.

When you first begin the meeting, ensure you:

- introduce yourself and the interpreter to the client
- sit opposite the client and speak directly to them, not to the interpreter (e.g. 'how are you feeling?', rather than 'ask her how she is feeling')
- explain the purpose of the meeting and how it will proceed
- explain that the interpreter's role is only to interpret what is being said, that they must be completely impartial, that they are bound by a code of ethics and are required to keep the discussion confidential
- explain to the client that any questions or concerns can be raised at any time during the interview
- ask the client to repeat key concepts back to you, to confirm they understand
- if you believe at any point that the client does not understand, it is your responsibility (not the interpreter's) to clarify and re-explain more simply.

Meeting etiquette

To help the meeting flow smoothly and to facilitate accurate and full interpretation, be mindful to:

- speak in a normal tone of voice and at a manageable pace for the interpreter
- communicate using short sentences whenever possible
- pause after about two or three sentences to give the interpreter a chance to interpret
- speak clearly and concisely, without using jargon or slang
- keep control of the interview
- not try to save time by asking the interpreter to summarise
- be aware that it may take more words than you have spoken to convey the message
- stop speaking when the interpreter signals by raising a hand, or when starting to interpret
- show any key information such as dates or numbers visually, e.g. on paper, a whiteboard or projector
- 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
- ensure that the client has the necessary time to understand meeting discussions.

Meeting outcomes

Before you conclude the meeting, ensure you:

- summarise with the client the meeting outcomes and the next steps
- check that the client has understood this information
- check with the client if they require further clarification before the meeting has concluded
- record the outcomes of the meeting on file, including any issues or complaints regarding interpreting
- make note in the client's file that an interpreter was required, the relevant language, and any other information that may help meet the client's needs in future (e.g. preference for a male or female interpreter)
- provide any feedback to the interpreting service, if applicable.

Supporting resources

This document is part of a series of resources available to other South Australian Government agencies when developing their interpreting and translating policies.

South Australian Interpreting and Translating Policy for Migrant and Non-Verbal (Sign) Languages

Fact sheets

Fact sheet 1: Using interpreting services – a guide for service providers

Fact sheet 2: Using translating services for written materials

Fact sheet 3: Language list by country and place

Fact sheet 4: Deciding when to use an interpreting service

Fact sheet 5: Can family and friends provide interpreting services?

Fact sheet 6: Role of bilingual staff in your organisation

Fact sheet 7: Using interpreting services: conflict of interest

Fact sheet 8: Interpreting services: your rights and responsibilities

You can access all of the interpreting and translating resources on the Department of the Premier and Cabinet website.

For more information:
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