# Using interpreting services to communicate with people

Government of South Australia
Department for Communities and Social Inclusion

This checklist 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

☐ Identify when to engage an interpreter (see How to decide whether 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 (see Language list by country and place).
☐ Identify the format of interpreting service required (face-to-face, telephone or video conferencing).
☐ Identify the appropriate provider of interpreting services (e.g. a NAATI-accredited interpreter or bilingual worker). (see The role of bilingual staff).
☐ If possible, 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 (see 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

☐ Consider having both male and female interpreters and/or separate forums for males and females, if the issues being discussed are gender sensitive.
☐ Depending on the composition of the audience and the issues being discussed, consider separate consultations in relevant community languages.
☐ Consider whether written material should be available in relevant community languages. This may include promotional material for the meeting, materials that might be referred to during the meeting, information about seeking further information, and how to give feedback or make a complaint.

## Booking an interpreting service

☐ Contact a preferred interpreting and translating service and ask to book a NAATI-accredited or NAATI-recognised interpreter (see Interpreting and Translating Policy for preferred providers).
☐ Provide the required information. This usually includes:

- the client's name
- notification if you or your client/group wish to have a particular interpreter, for continuity
- 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 of matter to be discussed
- name and telephone contact details of person to whom the interpreter reports
- information about the telephone system that will be used, if applicable (e.g. speaker phone)
- the agency contact, address and/or email for invoicing.

## Before the meeting

- [ ] 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
- [ ] If the meeting will occur on site, arrange the seating to optimise communication between the staff member, the client/group and the interpreter
- [ ] Check to see that the client and interpreter understand and are comfortable with each other
- [ ] Obtain suitable information products in the client’s preferred language, if relevant
- [ ] Allow for extra time over the usual duration of an interview.

## How to begin the meeting

- [ ] 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?’, not ‘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 to discussion confidential
- [ ] Explain to the client that questions or concerns can be raised at any time during the interview
- [ ] Ask the client to repeat key concepts back to you, to confirm their clarification
- [ ] Should you believe at any point that the non-English speaker does not understand, it is your responsibility (not the interpreter’s) to explain more simply.

## Etiquette

- [ ] 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 short sentences to give the interpreter a chance to interpret
- [ ] Speak clearly and concisely, without using jargon or slang
- [ ] Keep control of the interview
- [ ] Don’t 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 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.

## After the meeting

- [ ] Record the outcomes of the meeting on file, including any issues or complaints regarding interpreting
- [ ] In the client’s file, record that an interpreter was required, the relevant language, and any other information that may 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.