

SECTION 2

Providing Service through an Interpreter

Preparing to Provide Service

Successfully providing service to a person or family that speaks a different language than you is exciting and especially rewarding when the appropriate preparation has been completed. The following information is designed to be your guide.

Setting up the Space

Remember that there are three stakeholders involved in the interaction:

1. the service provider,
2. the participant/customer(s) receiving service, and
3. the interpreter.

As the service provider, your interaction is with the client. The interpreter's role is to help you communicate effectively with the person(s) you are serving. Understanding the interpreter's role will help you to effectively manage the interaction. Set up the space so that you are facing the people you are serving and the interpreter is off to the side. This will help to establish a pattern of direct communication. *The relationship being established is between the service provider and the client.*



Pre-meeting Contact with the Interpreter

Meet with the interpreter prior to the session. A phone call is fine.

- If you are using an interpreter for the first time, review your expectations for their role prior to the meeting.
- Share what will be discussed and any discipline-specific vocabulary you may be using. Every field has jargon. Even if the interpreter is familiar with all the language, the interpretation will be smoother, and it will be easier for the interpreter to keep up with you, if they are mentally ready for the direction your meeting will take.
- Determine the type of interpretation to be provided: consecutive or simultaneous.
 - Consecutive Interpretation: The interpreter will alternate with the speaker, each of you speaking a few sentences at a time. Do not talk so long that the person can no longer accurately remember what you said. *Your words are important; when they are summarized, you lose impact.*

SECTION 2

Providing Service through an Interpreter (continued)

With consecutive interpretation everything must be said twice so your meeting will take at least twice as long. A bilingual meeting requires two appointment slots.

- **Simultaneous Interpretation:** The interpreter will be speaking at the same time as the speaker. The interpreter will be a few words to a sentence behind the speaker. Test out your rate of speech with the interpreter prior to the session. Simultaneous interpretation generally requires audio equipment to be effective. It is excellent for meetings with one or two people as well as groups. The interpreter positions themselves off to the side a bit farther than he/she would during consecutive interpretation. In some situations the interpreter will sit or stand between the people communicating and speak softly into the ear of the listener.

The Interpreter's Introduction

It is important to begin the session with an introduction of the interpreter's role. Interpreters may introduce themselves in the following way.

Hello, my name is _____. I will be the interpreter today. When either of you talk, I will translate what you say. You can speak directly to each other in your usual way. My role is to strictly translate information. I am not a part of your meeting, and I cannot choose what to translate. I am bound as an interpreter to translate everything that is said. If the meaning is not coming across in either direction, I will let you know and ask questions as needed.

The introduction is then repeated in the second language of the session.

An individual who has experience using interpreters can do the introductions equally well. Introductions are especially positive when providing interpretation services to individuals. The act of introducing your interpreter shows ownership and self-confidence. You may choose to combine these methods and introduce the interpreter by name and allow them to describe their role.

SECTION 2

Providing Service through an Interpreter (continued)

Conducting a Multilingual Session

- Speak to and look at the person you are meeting with.
- Speak slower rather than louder.
- Generally an interpreter is providing word for word translation.
 - There are times when there are no corresponding words in one of the languages. Sometimes long conversations may be needed to communicate what seems to be a simple point.
 - At other times, the interpreter may have to ask questions to ensure that the meaning and intent are clear.
- Watch your speed and how much you say at one time. If your interpreter begins to summarize what you say, you will lose impact. Your words are important. Honor the needs of the interpreter and you will build a relationship with the person you are serving.
- Getting comfortable working through an interpreter takes time and can be frustrating.
- You may feel uncomfortable; remember the other person probably does as well and relax. You and the people you serve are all doing the best you can as you work to communicate without a common language.
- Have fun. It is incredibly exciting to be successful in multilingual settings!

By: Betty Garcia Mathewson, New York State Migrant Education
Resources: *Speaking Through or With an Interpreter*, by Wawa Baczynskyj, LICSW:
Metropolitan-Indochinese Children and Adolescent Services (MICAS).
Additional Resources: NYSME staff sharing in workshops 1997 to 2005.
Updated: 12-05.