



Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs



Bridge the communication gap

A guide for agencies

Bridge the communication gap

Thousands of non-English speaking people in the community face a communication gap every day. Across Australia, the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) helps bridge that gap.

TIS National has more than 50 years' experience in the interpreting industry and access to more than 2700 interpreters speaking more than 150 languages. Whenever registered clients need to communicate with a person with limited English proficiency, TIS National can provide an interpreter to help 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Who needs interpreters?

Australia is a dynamic and culturally diverse society, whose population speaks hundreds of different languages. In Australian society interpreters are the language link that bridges the communication gap between English and non-English speakers.

There are a variety of reasons why people with limited English proficiency need interpreters. Initially, the Australian Government introduced a telephone interpreting service (now known as TIS National) to provide interpreting assistance to meet migrant information and welfare needs.

TIS National continues to deliver this service and is available to any person or organisation in Australia who needs an interpreter. TIS National provides interpreting assistance to enable non-English speakers to access government agencies and services, police and legal services, education, healthcare and community groups, as well as services offered by private businesses.

English speakers are increasingly seeking to engage interpreters to communicate with non-English speakers. These individuals and agencies recognise the importance of reaching out to non-English speakers to further business opportunities, satisfy community needs and provide accessible and equitable government and other services.

What is the role of the interpreter?

The role of the interpreter is to ensure accurate communication between people of different languages, while taking into account any sensitivities. Interpreters are bound by the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) Code of Ethics which requires them to:

- interpret accurately and honestly without adding or omitting anything being said
- maintain absolute confidentiality
- be impartial and objective: and
- act in a professional manner at all times.



Is it appropriate to use someone who speaks the same language?

Interpreting is a specialist skill that goes beyond a person who merely speaks the same language. It requires a high level of fluency in both language directions and the ability to be able to quickly, accurately and appropriately convey the whole message from one language to another.

The use of an appropriately qualified and accredited interpreter, as opposed to relatives or acquaintances, is essential whenever there are language differences. A situation may arise where you may even be held legally liable if injury, loss or damage is suffered because you failed to use a professional interpreter where it was deemed reasonably necessary.

What qualification should I look for?

Interpreters and translators in Australia are awarded a certification level from the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) according to their degree of competence. NAATI certification is available at the following levels:

- Certified Conference Interpreter
- Certified Specialist Interpreter - Health or Legal
- Certified Interpreter
- Certified Provisional Interpreter.

NAATI may also provide a recognition credential in languages where certification testing is not available as acknowledgement of recent and regular work experience. These interpreters are Recognised Practising Interpreters.

TIS National assigns work to interpreters on the basis of their NAATI certification level and availability in order to ensure you receive the most qualified available interpreter



What do I need to consider when booking an interpreter?

Language

In many countries a range of languages are spoken. For example, a person born in Cambodia may require interpreting assistance in Khmer, any of the Chinese languages or French. Ask TIS National for advice if you are unsure about which language is appropriate for your client's needs.



Sensitivities

In some circumstances certain sensitivities may influence the success of an interpreting situation.

Specialist knowledge

Identifying whether your client will require interpreting of sensitive or complex information, such as interpreting for legal or medical matter, will help TIS National to provide the most appropriate interpreter for your needs. Please record any specific needs when you are submitting your job request.

Gender

In some circumstances you may require a female interpreter for a female client and a male interpreter for a male client. This especially applies for medical appointments or situations when sensitive or personal matters may need to be discussed, such as domestic violence.

Phone, video remote or on-site interpreting

Consider your requirements when deciding to request either a phone, video remote or on-site interpreter.

The quickest and most affordable way to obtain interpreting help is over the phone. Phone interpreting also provides a more anonymous service, which may provide the non-English speaker with fewer concerns about privacy or confidentiality. Engaging a phone interpreter may be inappropriate in cases where the non-English speaker is under some mental or physical stress or where a lengthy interview is anticipated.

TIS National can provide advice on the most appropriate service channel to meet your requirements.

How can I make the most of my interpreting booking?

Phone interpreting

The following tips can help you to get the best results when engaging a phone interpreter:

- Speak directly to your client, not to the interpreter. Interpreters are trained to interpret in the first person.
- Talk a little louder than usual to ensure the interpreter can hear properly.
- Keep sentences short and succinct, with only one idea per sentence.
- Include a pause after each sentence so that participants don't talk over each other or cut each other off.
- If you have the non-English speaker with you, sit and face them and watch their body language.
- If you have the non-English speaker with you, we recommend you use a hands-free/speaker phone to avoid having to pass the phone back and forth. This will enable much more efficient and effective communication.
- Offer the interpreter breaks for long sessions, interpreting can be very demanding. This is particularly important for complex or lengthy jobs, such as phone interpreting jobs of more than 60 minutes duration.

Video remote interpreting

The following tips can help you to get the best results when engaging a video remote interpreter:

- Choose a professional background.
- Place your camera at eye level or higher.
- Check your meeting link works before the start of the video remote job.
- Check your technology in advance.
- Make sure that you have good internet speed.
- Introduce yourself before you speak.
- Make sure to mute your microphone while not speaking. Offer the interpreter breaks for long sessions, interpreting can be very demanding. This is particularly important for complex or lengthy jobs, such as video remote interpreting jobs of more than 90 minutes duration

On-site interpreting

The following tips can help you to get the best results when engaging an on-site interpreter:

- Briefly explain the purpose of the interview to the interpreter.
- During the interview, speak directly to your client, not to the interpreter. Interpreters are trained to interpret in the first person.
- Speak clearly, slowly and succinctly. Pause after every few sentences to allow time for the information to be interpreted.

- The ideal seating arrangement is a triangle, with participants at equal distances from each other, so that eye contact can be maintained at all times.
- Avoid private discussions with the interpreter—this may make the other party feel anxious or uncomfortable.
- Clarify any problems that arise with the interpreter. The interpreter may also need to have brief discussions with the non-English speaker to respond to concerns or explanations about your questions or comments.
- Offer the interpreter breaks for long sessions, interpreting can be very demanding. This is particularly important for complex or lengthy jobs, including on-site jobs longer than 90 minutes.

How much does interpreting cost?

Charges for interpreting services vary according to the type of service provided. You can calculate an estimate of TIS National's interpreting service charges using our [online cost calculator](https://tisnational.gov.au/Costcalculator) (tisnational.gov.au/Costcalculator).

Free Interpreting Service

On behalf of the Australian Government, TIS National provides the Free Interpreting Service. These free services are available to the approved groups and individuals and can be accessed when communicating with people with limited English proficiency.



The eligible groups who can access the Free Interpreting Service include:

- Medical practitioners: when delivering Medicare-rebatable services in private practice. Nurses, reception and other practice support staff can also access the service when working with the registered medical practitioner.
- Pharmacies: when dispensing medication, providing general advice and delivering other general pharmacy services.
- Non-government organisations: when providing casework and emergency services, where the organisation does not receive substantial government funding to provide these services.
- Real estate agencies: to discuss any private residential property matter.
- Local government authorities: to communicate with residents about most local government services.
- Trade unions: to assist members in accessing support and advice.
- Parliamentarians: for constituency purposes.
- Eligible allied health professionals when delivering Medicare-rebatable services in private practice within specific local government areas (LGA).

You can check if you are eligible for the [Free Interpreting Service](#) using the eligibility calculator on the TIS National website (tisnational.gov.au/FIS).

24 hours a day, every day of the year

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)

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