



COMMONWEALTH PROTOCOL FACT SHEET

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Indigenous Language Translation Services

WRITTEN AND AUDIO-VISUAL TRANSLATION

There is a range of situations in which communication with a person or groups of people with limited English proficiency via written or audio-visual material may arise. These include:

- government information or advertising campaigns;
- information about government policies or services; and
- requests for community input in program or policy development.

WHEN TO USE TRANSLATION

English may not be the first language of many of the individuals in your target audience, particularly if they live in a remote community. Indigenous languages are oral languages. Whilst some Indigenous languages have recently been written phonetically, Indigenous languages are verbal languages and some cannot be translated into written form.

Indigenous people who have learnt to read effectively will have learnt to read in English during their education and will have subsequently learnt to read their own language. Many community members can hear and speak, but not read and write their languages. Agencies should carefully consider their target audience if deciding to translate written material into Indigenous language.

The use of interpreters to deliver audio and video content for remote Indigenous audiences is an effective way for agencies to communicate their message. Examples of products utilising voice recordings into Indigenous languages include:

- radio advertisements;
- talking books;
- talking posters;
- computer apps;
- web pages;
- phone apps; and
- DVDs for services such as health.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN TRANSLATING INTO WRITTEN OR AUDIO-VISUAL COMMUNICATION

The translation of information intended for members of the public should be in plain English.

A translation will be far more effective if the original English text is clear and stylistically consistent. Consideration may need to be given to seeking specialist advice on communication products. This could assist in decisions on considerations such as whether it is appropriate to simply translate an English language product, whether the product needs to be adapted or modified, or whether a completely different product should be developed.

See the [Multicultural Language Guidelines](#) for guidance in identifying issues to consider when preparing material for translation or audio-visual communication.

PLAIN ENGLISH GUIDE

The term 'plain English' refers to clear language that a target audience can readily understand and act on the first time they read it. While it uses words and expressions that are familiar to everyone, it is not simplistic or childish. Even complex concepts and legal documents, such as contracts and legislation, can be written in plain English while maintaining legal accuracy.

Plain English is effective because it:

- focuses on the message;
- uses no more words than are necessary; and
- avoids jargon, complex and bureaucratic language.

When developing plain English products for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for whom English is a second or subsequent language, the concepts and context of Indigenous languages should also be taken into account.

[The Plain English Legal Dictionary: Northern Territory Criminal Law](#) is an example of a plain English product which utilises a style of English that closely matches the words, grammar and discourse of Aboriginal languages, stating:

There are major differences between English and Aboriginal languages at several levels. English and Aboriginal languages come from vastly different language families. They have completely different grammatical systems, and particularly in the area of abstract concepts, there are rarely equivalent words. Aboriginal languages have many words and ideas that are not found in English, and vice-versa. On top of this, the conceptual background that provides the framework for understanding legal English is often significantly different between a native speaker of English and a person who grows up speaking an Aboriginal language. Interpreting or explaining English legal terms into Aboriginal languages is a much more complex exercise than transferring legal terms from English into other European languages, which share a much more similar vocabulary and conceptual background.

(Aboriginal Resource and Development Services; North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency; Aboriginal Interpreter Service, Northern Territory Government, 2015, *The Plain English Legal Dictionary: Northern Territory Criminal Law*, ARDS, pp4.)

The intention is that this legal dictionary should not only be easier to understand by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for whom an Indigenous language is a first language, but the definitions will also be easier to interpret into Aboriginal languages.

COSTS OF TRANSLATION

The cost of translating documents or making voice recordings is the responsibility of the Commonwealth agency or service provider. Fees for the provision of translation services vary depending on the service, and the complexity and length of the assignment. Agencies should obtain an itemised, written estimate from the translator or interpreting service to establish the per-word cost or hourly cost, turnaround time and any administration fees, and to document any special instructions before the project is assigned to the translator. Information should be sought on the fees that may apply if:

- the translation job is cancelled, or changes are required to the English text;
- the translation will be proof read and/or edited by a second translator (either by requesting this service from the translation agency or if working with an individual translator, by selecting a second translator to perform proof reading and editing services);
- translations of important information need to be checked (back-translated to allow comparison with the original text) by another translator; or
- the costs involved for any changes or discrepancies and for final proofing of the typeset copy.

Fact Sheet 2 Attachment A provides contact details for Indigenous interpreting and translation services.

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