

How to Find an Interpreter

Nearly all of NIJC's *pro bono* cases require the use of an interpreter. Even if a client speaks English fairly proficiently, attorneys may find that they need an interpreter or translator to prepare a detailed affidavit or to translate foreign language documents. Immigrant clients who speak English may also benefit from the assistance of an interpreter because the information regarding their immigration case may be difficult for the client to discuss and the client may be able to communicate more effectively in her native language.

Attorneys who accept an NIJC *pro bono* case should expect that they will need an interpreter for the case unless specifically informed otherwise and are responsible for finding an interpreter, although NIJC will assist with the interpreter search when possible.

There are various volunteer and fee-based resources that *pro bono* attorneys can use to try to find an interpreter for their case. Generally, NIJC recommends that attorneys not use a client's family member as the primary interpreter because the family member may have a difficult time remaining objective. Moreover, at times, the family relationship may inhibit the client from speaking openly with her attorney.

Below is a list of foreign language resources that NIJC *pro bono* attorneys have utilized to secure an interpreter or translator for their case:

- **Other attorneys or support staff** within the *pro bono* attorney's law firm.
- **University foreign language programs.**
- **Community organizations** from your client's country or ethnic group.
- **Fee-based language services**, such as Heartland Alliance's Cross-Cultural Interpreting Services (<http://www.heartlandalliance.org/ccis>) and Transperfect Translations (<http://www.transperfect.com>).
- **NIJC's Language of Human Rights: Volunteer Interpreter Project** (<http://immigrantjustice.org/nijc-language-human-rights-volunteer-interpreters>)

How to Work with an Interpreter¹

- Initiate a pre-session with the interpreter. Explain that you would like him or her to interpret everything that is said without adding, deleting, or changing the meaning of anything. Explain that if the interpreter needs clarification of a term (as frequently happens with legal and technical terms), the interpreter should ask you to clarify, rather than attempt to explain it to the client. Ask the interpreter to speak in the first person, so if the client says, “my husband hit me,” the interpreter should state, “my husband hit me.” Explain the purpose of the interview or client meeting to the interpreter.
- Ask the interpreter to sign a confidentiality agreement.
- Allow for additional time for the interview/meeting as it will generally take twice as long.
- Provide an area that is private. **Arrange seating comfortably with the interpreter sitting diagonally behind the client so that you are looking and speaking directly to the client.**
- Introduce yourself and the client to the interpreter. Inform the client that what is discussed will remain confidential, that both you and the interpreter are bound by a code of ethics which includes confidentiality.
- **Speak directly to the client, not the interpreter (say "How can I help you" rather than "Ask her how I can help her").**
- Use short sentences in plain English. Avoid using legal jargon or slang terms. Pause after two or three sentences to allow the interpreter to interpret.
- Encourage the interpreter to take notes if it will assist him or her in interpreting accurately
- **Maintain your role in managing the interview. The interpreter should not conduct the interview, you should.** Avoid side conversations between the interpreter and the client. If a side conversation begins, gently steer the interpreter back into her role as an interpreter by reminding her that you need to know everything that the client is saying. Reaffirm that if the client has questions they are asking the interpreter, you will answer those questions.
- Expect the interpreter to interpret everything that is said by you and your client. Confirm your understanding of the client's situation with the client to ensure accurate interpreting and accurate comprehension on your part. Check the client's understanding of any important or difficult information to ensure accurate interpreting and accurate comprehension on the client's part.
- Summarize where necessary during and at the end of the interview and confirm that your understanding of the situation is accurate. Ask the client to repeat back to you any difficult or complicated information to ensure accurate interpreting and accurate comprehension.
- Ask the client if there are any further questions and confirm what will happen next.

¹ Adapted from Immigrant Women's Support Service Fact Sheet and Legal Momentum's Identifying Whether an Interpreter is Needed and Tips for Working with an Interpreter, available at http://www.legalmomentum.org/assets/pdfs/15-tips_for_working_with_an_interpreter.pdf

