

Multi-language meetings

The success and quality of your meetings rely on everyone being able to contribute their views and information.

Conducting meetings either entirely in a world language* or a local language will exclude key players and reduce effectiveness.

* A world language is a language spoken internationally which is learned by many people as a second language. English is the most widely used.



WHEN INVITED TO A MEETING

1. Ask what language(s) it will be conducted in
2. Notify the organiser if you:
 - would like an interpreter
 - can act as, or know, an interpreter
3. Ask for the information you need to participate fully in the meeting e.g. agenda, start and finish times, any special needs
4. If translated materials would be beneficial, either:
 - request translated versions
 - offer to translate
 - suggest a local translator

WHEN ORGANISING A MEETING

1. Check if interpretation is required, and what languages
2. Brief interpreters and participants
3. Consider room layout to ensure all can see each other
4. Minimise background noise
5. Ensure a clear, easy-to-follow structure for the meeting
6. Schedule regular breaks
7. Translate key materials and visual aids
8. Use small group discussions in local languages

Tips for using interpreters

- where possible use someone who is trained in interpretation
- choose someone who is impartial, with no vested interest in the topic, but with an understanding of the content
- if possible choose someone who is representative of the group (gender, ethnic background etc)
- ask others who they might recommend
- take time to prepare the interpreter by giving them an agenda, explaining jargon, key issues, etc.
- ensure they are given regular breaks (at least every hour)

Options of interpretation

Whispering interpreting - useful when only one or two people require interpretation, but can be distracting.

Consecutive Interpreting - interpreter listens to a longer exchange of information, takes notes, then translates. Difficult to keep people's attention, but useful when simultaneous equipment is unavailable.

Simultaneous Interpreting - requires booths, microphones, consoles, headsets, technicians. Useful in large conferences or formal meetings but requires technology and high level of skill.

See <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/translation/interpreting-equipment.html>

Combining Translation and Interpretation

Selective interpreting

- Prepare translated key points and agendas on flipchart, handouts or PowerPoint
- Incorporate small group discussions in different languages to encourage sharing of views and ideas
- Include interpretation of summaries and action points in the main group

Written Summaries

- Simultaneous, summarised written translation can be done on computer and projected onto a screen using OneNote software or similar. This also provides the basis for meeting minutes.

These options can maximise engagement and minimise disruption.

PREPARATION IS KEY

Additional resources on All In Diary website:

Multi-language meeting and interpretation, COATI Guidelines on Using Interpreters, © Kwintessential Language and Culture specialists

Web links for further information

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/scic/working-with-interpreters/index_en.htm

Quick tips on using interpreters: <http://www.justicewomen.com/>