

Western Australian Language Services Policy 2020

Aboriginal Language Services

The Western Australian Government recognises the fundamental importance of language to the culture, identity and wellbeing of Aboriginal people, and the basic right of Aboriginal people to understand, and to be understood, when engaging with public sector agencies and services.

Many Aboriginal people in Western Australia, particularly those who live in regional and remote communities, do not speak Standard Australian English (Standard English) as their first language. To ensure government services are accessible and delivered appropriately to the public, the State Government acknowledges its responsibility to provide Aboriginal people with equitable access to government services and opportunities and recognises the crucial role Aboriginal language services have in achieving this.

There are more than 60 Aboriginal languages¹ in Western Australia including 50 languages spoken by 10 or more Aboriginal people. These include Aboriginal English, a dialect of Standard English, and various Kriol languages², the Creole languages of Australia. Hearing either Aboriginal English or Kriol for the first time, many people assume that the languages are the same as Standard English. This assumption, however, may lead to severe miscommunications.

Aboriginal culture informs Aboriginal English and local Kriol languages. Aboriginal English words may seem the same as the Standard English version, but when used in the Aboriginal context they can take on a new meaning. For example, the

meaning of 'cheeky' can refer to something that is dangerous or harmful when spoken in Aboriginal English or in Kriol languages. Likewise, the word 'finish' can mean 'dead' or 'die'.

Like the meaning of a word, the grammar is also different. The requirement in Standard English to distinguish between the three third-person pronouns of he/she/it is not required in Aboriginal English or Kriol languages where gender is not specified and where just one pronoun can be

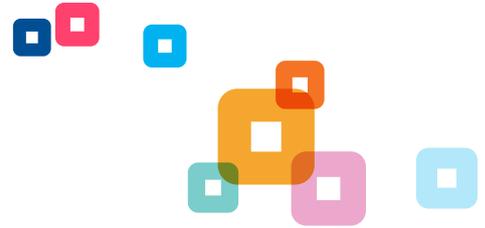
Australia is a party to the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which stipulates that States and Territories should ensure that Indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.

used. As a result, a speaker of Standard English who is not aware of Aboriginal English can easily miss or misinterpret the concepts reflecting the Aboriginal world view retained in both Aboriginal English and in Kriol languages.



¹ Census 2016, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

² There are two major creoles in Australia: one spoken in Queensland, the Northern Territory and north Western Australia (Kriol); and one spoken in the Torres Strait and Cape York (Torres Strait Creole). **AIATSIS, Our Languages.**



Other areas where there is a greater risk of miscommunication include references to gender, scale and time. While an Aboriginal speaker may appear to be confident in responding to questions about such things as their age and address, significant challenges in understanding and being understood may arise during complex medical, legal or other situations.

Many people who identify as English language speakers may say that they do not require an interpreter, but in fact they do. This may be the case for Aboriginal people from time to time, as well as for other communities that are bilingual or multilingual.

Achieving an understanding of each individual situation is essential. Engagement of interpreters is advisable where there is uncertainty so that people understand each other and can comfortably use their language or a blend of languages. It is also crucial to ensure people from all backgrounds are receiving equitable treatment and being presented with all available options and services.

Engaging interpreting services³

1. Ensures that Aboriginal people have equal and equitable access to information about government processes and services.
2. Supports informed decision making on critical issues that may impact an individual's life or the lives of Aboriginal community groups more broadly.
3. Builds better relationships between the Western Australian Government and Aboriginal people and communities.
4. Improves the State's service delivery and program development, including when negotiating contractual arrangements/ funding agreements with Aboriginal people or communities.
5. Demonstrates the Western Australian Government's respect for Aboriginal languages and culture.

When to engage an interpreter

The Office of Multicultural Interests has developed a decision-making guide to assist you.

You can download the guide [here](#).

When to engage an interpreter Decision-making guide

	My Client is Deaf, or hard of hearing	My Client is Aboriginal, or is from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) background
Q	Does the immediate situation require an interpreter? Determine the risk to your client, your agency and yourself if you do not engage an interpreter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your client have an <i>I Need an Interpreter</i> card? • Does your client use Auslan, or have other communication difficulties (Deafblind)? • Does your client have limited communication skills in Standard Australian English? • Is your client able to answer a question clearly without assistance? • Does your client consistently agree with the questions you put to him/her/them? • Do you not understand what your client is trying to tell you, even if the words they use are clear to you? 	
A	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediately offer your client the services of an interpreter. • Your client has the right to refuse this service. In this case, try to identify the reason for their refusal and address the issue. • If they still refuse, document the reason and your actions. 	
Q	Is the situation general and routine (general health, education or community services)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is a tertiary qualified and/or NAATI credentialed interpreter available? • Is a NAATI recognised practising interpreter available in lieu of a tertiary qualified and/or NAATI credentialed interpreter? 	
A	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm your client's name, Aboriginal name (if applicable), community, country and/or language group, age and gender. • Ask them which language/dialects they prefer to communicate in (Aboriginal, CaLD languages). • Identify any cultural sensitivities, such as a female client preferring a female interpreter. • Follow your agency's language services procurement (operating) procedures and guidelines. 	
A	NO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider engaging a telephone interpreter to gather sufficient information to deal with the immediate situation. If required, schedule a follow-up face-to-face meeting with your client and a tertiary qualified and/or NAATI credentialed interpreter. (Telephone interpreting is not suitable for Auslan speakers or people who are hard of hearing.) • Consider engaging a bilingual staff member (if you have one) to gather sufficient information to deal with the immediate situation until a tertiary qualified and/or NAATI credentialed interpreter is available. • Postpone the conversation until a tertiary qualified and/or NAATI credentialed interpreter is available. • REMEMBER unless it is an EMERGENCY, avoid engaging a family member, friend or person under 18 to act as an interpreter. 	
Q	Is the situation more complex (mental health, medical, legal or technical)?	
A	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage a specialist interpreter with the knowledge and skills in the required field. • Refer to your agency's language services procurement (operating) procedures and guidelines. 	

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³ This list was informed by the South Australian Aboriginal Languages, Interpreters and Translators Guide; Policy summary and Information Booklet, Government of South Australia, Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

Cultural sensitivities

It is important to be mindful of gender as well as cultural, religious, political and historical issues, and prejudices or associated sensitivities when engaging interpreters or translating services.

When interacting with Aboriginal clients, as for all clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, it is important to understand, be considerate of, and make allowances for any specific cultural differences.

For example:

- For some Aboriginal people, direct eye contact can be confronting and considered rude or aggressive. For others, a lack of eye contact is seen as disinterest. It is important to take cues from the client, and to remember to be sensitive to clients' needs and how they are experiencing the language services being provided.
- The subject matter to be discussed may determine the gender of the interpreter required.
- A female client will usually prefer a female interpreter.
- Relationships between Aboriginal people may determine certain behaviours—for example, some relatives cannot look at or talk to each other.

It is important to give the prospective interpreter or the language services provider the name of the client so that the interpreter can take appropriate action to ensure any potentially inappropriate or tense situations can be avoided.

It is advisable for government and non-government organisations to undertake staff Aboriginal cultural competency training and development to enable a deeper understanding of Aboriginal cultures and diversity of language. Aboriginal service providers offering cultural training and development can be found through the [Aboriginal Business Directory WA](#).

How to find an Aboriginal language interpreter or translation service

The Western Australian Department of Finance (Government Procurement - Contracts WA) provides all Western Australian public sector agencies, and benevolent public institutions, access to a **Common Use Arrangement (CUA) for Interpreting and Translating Services**.

The CUA provides a list of contractors who have been assessed against a set of specific selection criteria to ensure a high level of quality and assurance.

The CUA is non-mandatory, but its use is encouraged. The CUA includes service categories for CaLD languages, Aboriginal Australian Languages and Auslan. The Contracts WA website lists contractors, and includes pricing schedules for each service category, as well as an electronic booking form. These documents make it easy for users to identify which contractors can provide interpreters and translators in the language/s required.

Booking an Aboriginal language interpreter

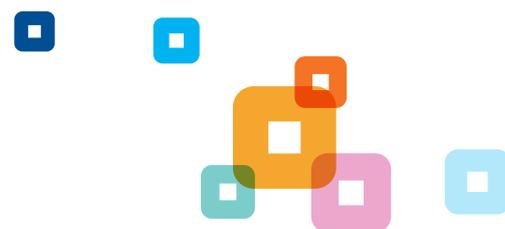
It is the job of the Aboriginal language services provider to assign an appropriate interpreter to the task and prepare them for the interpreting session. This process ensures any potential cultural clashes and conflicts of interest are avoided.

The following information is required before an interpreter can be engaged:

- name of the agency/service division requesting the service
- name of the Standard English speaker requiring the interpreter
- name, Aboriginal name (or skin name if relevant), Country and/or language group, age and gender of the Aboriginal person/persons requiring an interpreter
- Aboriginal language to be interpreted (if known)
- name of the community the Aboriginal client comes from or identifies with
- location, date and time the service is required
- details about the setting (health/hospital, police interview, courts, etc.) and specific topics to be discussed (serious disease diagnosis, etc.)
- names of any other participants in attendance, such as family members/witnesses.



Public sector agencies are advised to brief the Aboriginal language services provider as early and in as much detail as possible to enable the interpreter to become familiar with the matter to be discussed, noting that not all Standard English words have an equivalent word in Aboriginal languages.



Aboriginal names and cultural groups

There are two distinct cultural groups—Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people—who make up Australia’s Indigenous peoples. But there is great diversity within these two broadly described groups exemplified by the over 250 different language groups spread across the nation.

Many Indigenous people are the holders of unique languages, knowledge systems and beliefs, possess invaluable traditional knowledge for the sustainable management of natural resources, and have a special relation to and use of their traditional land, waters or territories.

It’s best to find out what individuals prefer to be called, rather than making assumptions. Traditionally, only Aboriginal groups are associated with Western Australia, however clients in Western Australia today may be from or related to people from other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities across the country and speak those languages.

For example, Aboriginal people may refer to themselves as Yawuru or Yamatji, which is relevant to the greater region they are connected to. Aboriginal identities can also

directly link to their language groups and traditional country (a specific geographic location). For example, Whadjuk people are the traditional custodians of Perth and surrounding area, and Ballardong people represent the north-east York, Northam and Hyden areas, but both groups are from the Noongar nation in the South West. The Martu people are the traditional custodians of a large part of country in central Western Australia that extends from the Great Sandy Desert to Wiluna and beyond, and many Martu speak numerous languages.

Another way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people might describe themselves, which again relates to their country (including the waters), is ‘saltwater people’ for those who live on the coast, or ‘freshwater’, ‘rainforest’, ‘desert’ or ‘spinifex’ for people who live in that ecological environment. Or some people may want to be referred as per their skin name or totem.⁴



⁴ <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/indigenous-australians-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people;>
<https://www.kj.org.au/meet-martu-people-1>; <http://www.noongar.org.au/>

How to work with an interpreter

The illustrated information poster *How to work with an interpreter* is available for display in your office.

Download it [here](#).

Department of Local Government,
Sport and Cultural Industries
Office of Multicultural Interests

How to work with an interpreter

1. Brief the interpreter before the interpreting session. Debrief them afterwards.
2. Allow extra time for the interpreting session, especially for Auslan interpreting, telephone interpreting, video conferences and calls.
3. Introduce yourself and the interpreter to your client. Explain the role of the interpreter.
4. For onsite interpreting, ensure the seating/standing/lighting arrangements allow for clear communication.
5. Speak directly to the client, e.g. "How are you?" instead of saying to the interpreter "Ask him/her how he/she is."
6. Use plain English—avoid industry-specific jargon where possible, e.g. medical jargon, acronyms, slang and colloquialisms.
7. Use short sentences. Speak a few sentences at a time, but talking at your normal pace so the interpreter can remember and interpret accurately.
8. Don't ask the interpreter to undertake duties other than interpreting (e.g. fill in forms). Don't engage in direct conversation with the interpreter to the exclusion of your client. The interpreter will interpret everything you say.
9. Maintain control over the interpreting session at all times.

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This document is based on original material developed by the Cultural Diversity Unit at the Department of Health and modified with permission.

Indigenous Interpreting Project

The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) works collaboratively with Aboriginal organisations across Australia, including the National Indigenous Languages Interpreting Advisory Committee (NILIAC), interpreting services and language centres across Australia.

The Indigenous Interpreting Project (IIP), funded through the Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy, aims to increase the number of certified Aboriginal interpreters and examiners in Australia, increase the range of Aboriginal languages for which there are certified Aboriginal interpreters, and increase the accessibility of interpreting resources for Aboriginal interpreters and organisations.

Aboriginal Language Centres in Western Australia

Aboriginal language centres provide background information about Aboriginal languages, the peoples of specific regions in Western Australia, learning resources and/or cultural and linguistic programs.

Each of the languages below corresponds to the relevant language code in the **Australian Indigenous Languages Database** (Austlang). Through Austlang, you can view more information about the language including its alternate spelling. Access to Austlang is free.

Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre

264 Hannan Street, Kalgoorlie WA 6430

Languages: Tjupan A31, Kaalamaya A4, Ngadju A3, Ngalia C2, Cundeelee Wangka (no code), Kuwarra A16, Maduwongga A86, Manyjilyjar A32, Wangkatja (A12 and A103), Mirning A9, Marlpa (no code), Ngaayatjarra A38, Njanatjarra (a dialect of Ngaanyatjarra), Pitjantjantjarra C6, Yankunytjatjara C4 A80, Pintupi (no code).

Irra Wangga Language Centre—Bundiyarra Aboriginal Community Aboriginal Corporation
Eastward Road, Greater Geraldton WA 6530

Languages: Wajarri A39, Badimaya A14, Yinggarda W19, Nhanda W14, Warriyangka W22, Malgana W18, Ngarla A79.

Kimberley Language Resource Centre (Aboriginal Corporation)

LOT 158 Terone Street, Halls Creek WA 6770

Languages: Bunuba K5, Jaru K12, Gidja (Kija) K20, Nyikina K3, Jabirrabirr K8, Wangkajunga A87*, Gooniyandi K6, Nimanburru K9, Walmajarri A66, Nyulnyul K13, Gajirrawoong K371, Mangala A65, Andajin K23, Kukatja C7, Worrorra K17.

Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga Language Centre

55 Reid Road, Cable Beach WA 6726

Languages: Yawuru

Mirima Dawang Woorlab-Gerring Language and Culture Centre

Speargrass Road, Kununurra WA 6743

Languages: Miriwoong K29, Gajerrong K371.

Noongar Language Centre

PEEDAC, Unit 2/12 Burton Street, Cannington, WA 6107

Languages: Nyaki Nyaki A1, Bibbulman W1, Yuat W11, Wardandi W3, Kaniyang W4, Goreng W5, Pinjarup W6, Wiilman W7, Wadjari W8, Wajuk W9, Balardung W10, Tjapanmay A92.

Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre (Aboriginal Corporation)

Corner of Throssell and Hamilton Roads, South Hedland WA 6722

Languages: Putjarra A54, Yinhawangka A48, Ngarla W40, Kariyarra W39, Nyamal A58, Manyjilyarra A51.1, Nyangumarta A61, Martu A6.

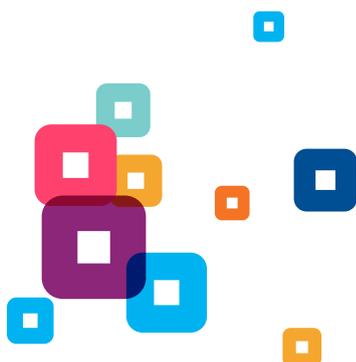
Further reading about Aboriginal English in Education

- *Aboriginal English*, Professor Diana Eades, 1993. Reprinted 2000. Primary English Teaching Association, New South Wales
- *Some Consequences of Attributing "English" (i.e. Standard English) to Aboriginal English Speakers*, Professor Ian G Malcolm
- *Australian Aboriginal English. Change and Continuity in an Adopted Language*, Professor Ian G Malcolm, printed 2018, De Gruyter publishing
- **Aboriginal English Podcast** by Professor Ian G Malcolm on Radio National Lingua Franca Program
- **Australian Aboriginal English and links with culture**

Aboriginal community liaisons

Some Western Australian Government agencies such as the Department of Education and Department of Health employ Aboriginal liaison workers to help support speakers of Aboriginal languages, Kriols or Aboriginal English, and speakers of Standard Australian English. These workers, however, should not undertake the role of an interpreter.

The Department of Education, employs Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs) who support Aboriginal students with academic achievement, participation and communication. AIEOs liaise with local communities to engage parents, caregivers and families in their children's education. They are also adept at identifying and addressing any critical cultural issues that may arise. The AIEOs also provide school staff with support to ensure Aboriginal culture extends into the teaching and learning programs.



Other resources

Aboriginal language service providers:

- **Aboriginal Interpreting WA (AIWA)–(AIWA services available through the CUA)**
- Goldfields Aboriginal Translating and Interpreting Service (GATIS)
- **Aboriginal Interpreter Service NT**

Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries–Aboriginal History

- **Gnarla Boodja Mili Mili (Our Country on Paper) interactive name place map**

Office of Multicultural Interests

- **Western Australian Language Services Policy 2020 and Policy Guide**

Department of Education, Western Australia

- Tracks to Two-Way Learning resource

Australian Government, Department of Communications and the Arts

- **Indigenous Language Centre list**

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

- **Indigenous Australians: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**
- **Map of Indigenous Australia**
- **Indigenous Australian Languages**

Oxfam Australia

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols

SBS

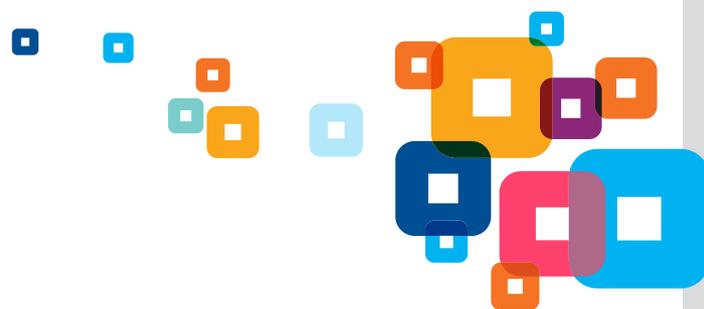
- **Indigenous cultural protocols: what the media needs to do when depicting deceased persons**

First Languages Australia

- **Gambay–First Languages Map**

Western and Northern Aboriginal Languages Alliance

- **Languages in our region**



“ Engaging professional Aboriginal interpreters is the most effective way to ensure that Aboriginal clients understand what is being said, can fully express themselves, and miscommunication, because of cultural differences, is substantially reduced. ”

AIWA Consumers guide to working with Aboriginal Language Interpreters

The importance of Aboriginal language services has been documented in several national reports such as ***The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody***, the ***Recognition, Rights and Reform: A Report to Government on Native Title Social Justice Measures, Bringing Them Home***, and ***Our Land Our Languages***.