

Guidelines and Standards for Language Interpretation in Nova Scotia

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Nova Scotia Coalition on Community Interpreting

This document was developed by the Nova Scotia Coalition on Community Interpreting.

Members of the Nova Scotia Coalition on Community Interpreting include:

Absolute Interpretation Group

Access Language Services Inc.

Association of Community Interpreters of Nova Scotia

Association of Translators and Interpreters of Nova Scotia

Capital Health Interpretation Services

Department of Health and Wellness

Department of Justice, Court Services

Francophone Immigration

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Background

English is the official language in Nova Scotia. Individuals with limited English language skills face barriers. Every year, Nova Scotia welcomes more than 2000 people from other countries and plans to attract more immigrants in the future. Some immigrants are less able to communicate in English creating a challenge accessing quality services in, for example, healthcare, legal, government, and community sectors.

An interpreter is a proven and effective bridge to accessing needed services.

Although more than 5000 interpretation services are delivered in dozens of languages each year in Nova Scotia, many are not getting the interpretation services they need. They continue to rely on friends and family to communicate highly confidential, complicated, or even life-altering information.

The Nova Scotia Government has supported the need for language interpretation in health and justice.

The Cultural Competence Guidelines established by the Department of Health and Wellness have been in place since 2006. The Guidelines promote a culturally competent healthcare system that provides services with tailored approaches. These include appropriate interpretation services that meet the needs of Nova Scotians.

As well, Nova Scotia's 911 system provides translation services in more than 170 languages. Interpreters can be conferenced in to 911 calls.

The Department of Justice Court Services Division partnered with the Nova Scotia Community College to develop and run an integrated Court Interpreter Certification Program. The program develops the capacity of interpreters to provide linguistics to courts.

Until now, Nova Scotia has not benefitted from shared language guidelines or interpretation standards applied across sectors.

The following guidelines and standards were developed by the Nova Scotia Coalition on Community Interpreting, with the support of the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration. These guidelines and standards will benefit organizations that provide interpretation services, organizations that require interpretation services for their clients, and interpreters. This document clarifies each party's responsibility is and what to expect.

Rationale and Purpose

Individuals with limited English language can face linguistic and cultural barriers to accessing services. Without adequate standards, miscommunication and inaccurate interpretation are more likely. Research has shown that a lack of language interpretation services creates inequitable and even adverse outcomes for individuals with limited English language.

The major risk for service-providing organizations is using friends, family members, children, community volunteers, or staff for language interpretation. The use of "ad hoc interpreters," who are not trained or formally associated with existing interpreting services, poses a significant liability. These "ad hoc interpreters" are neither trained nor bound by professional standards. They may not be able to provide unbiased/impartial interpretation, which can severely compromise accuracy, confidentiality and impartiality.

Quality interpretation services are essential to an equitable and inclusive Nova Scotia. These services are invaluable in attracting and retaining immigrants to the province. The importance of language as a foundational part of Canadian society is reflected in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Both documents explicitly recognize the importance of equality before and under the law. No government can discriminate on the basis of ethnic origin.

Language service needs to intersect with identities of race, ethnicity, faith perspectives, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, geographical location, ability/disability, socio-economic status, or worldviews. Language rights as an extension of the right from discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin has been successfully argued in a number of court decisions.

These guidelines and standards underscore the importance of language interpretation as a human right—the right to effectively, compassionately, and safely access services. First and foremost, the guidelines act as a reference point for standard delivery of interpreting services across sectors. The adoption of standards has proven in other jurisdictions to result in a stronger commitment among parties to a higher standard of quality for community interpreting.

Public demand for language interpretation services is expected to increase as Nova Scotia works to attract new immigrants. This highlights the need for quality language interpretation services in an increasingly diverse Nova Scotia.

Roles and Responsibilities

The interpretation services industry provides an essential service to organizations and individuals that require interpreters. This helps to minimize risks and liabilities associated with improperly administered interpretation services. This section describes and defines the relationship between the organizations that require interpreters and the interpreting service provider. By upholding these responsibilities, each party contributes to the goal of providing equal and high quality services to members of the public. It contributes to the vitality of interpreting services in Nova Scotia.

Responsibilities of organizations that require interpreters

Organizations that require interpreters assume full responsibility for the delivery of interpretation services, ensuring staff are trained in cultural competencies and proper protocols of using interpretation services. In doing so, the organization that requires interpreters holds a responsibility to the client and to the interpreter.

For the client, the organization will:

- Assess client needs for interpretation, including the languages for interpretation.
- Ensure that interpreters hired or contracted are qualified to perform the specialized task.
- Assure the client that an interpreter will be arranged.

For the interpreter/interpreting services provider, the organization will:

- Provide the interpreter with detailed assignment information, including booking procedures. This may include the background or context of the assignment and administrative details such as schedules.
- Ensure that the organization understands the needs of the interpreter (such as the length of interpretation session, need for a break, etc.).
- Establish and document terms and conditions of the working relationship.
- Establish an agreed-upon budget for interpretation, interpreter fees, and cancellation process.
- Provide feedback and evaluation to the interpreter to allow for continual improvement of interpretation service delivery.

The role of the interpreting services providers is to coordinate the provision of interpretation services to organizations that require interpreters. They are responsible for documenting and adhering to procedures in three main areas: recruiting practices, quality assurance, and organizational administration practice.

Responsibilities of interpreting services providers

Recruiting practices, which may include:

- Documenting hiring criteria for community interpreters as contractors for the organization. The hiring criteria must reflect the highest standards for language training and competency testing that is currently recognized in Nova Scotia.
- Specifying training requirements in recruiting processes.
- Specifying language interpretation competency requirements. For example: Interpreters must pass the ILSAT (Interpreter Language and Skills Assessment Tool) test, or locally approved equivalent.

Quality assurance, to guarantee the highest quality of interpretation services in compliance with accepted standards of practice (listed below), which may include:

- Ensuring that interpreters adhere to the Code of Ethics as defined by the National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting or a domestically developed one.
- Establishing internal dispatching procedures for selecting appropriate interpreters for clients.
- Determining evaluation criteria for services provided by interpreters working for their organization.
- Updating evaluation criteria regularly to reflect current standards of practice and client need.
- Unless otherwise stated by contract, the service providing organization is responsible for outlining liability insurance requirements and establishing liability coverage for their interpreters working as contractors.

Organizational administration practices, which may include clear operational policies and protocols, and appropriate financial and administrative processes.

Accepted Interpretation Standards of Practice in Community Interpretation

The Standards of Practice reflect **EIGHT** core principles. These principles act as the framework for which the community interpretation industry shall operate in Nova Scotia. These guiding principles for interpreters serve as a tool for organizations and interpreting service providers to recognize the service standards that can be expected from a qualified community interpreter. The principles reflect the accepted Code of Ethics for community interpreters.

1 Competency: Interpreters must have in-depth knowledge and understanding of their working languages and an ability to mentally transpose and verbalize into the target language. Language and interpretation competency can be demonstrated through one or more of the following:

- Post-secondary education—preferably a recognized degree of at least three years duration in interpretation or a related field (like law or health sciences for sector-specific interpretation).
- Interpreting training or education from a recognized institution.
- Successful completion of a recognized and approved testing tool.
- Documented experience in the field, including advanced training in a specific area of interpretation (legal, health, etc.).
- Certification, once established and available through the National Coalition of Community Interpreting (to be implemented provincially, in Nova Scotia.)
- Interpreter must only undertake assignments for which they are competent to perform in the required language and subject areas.

2 Confidentiality: Interpreters are ethically bound by a duty of confidentiality regarding the information they receive.

- Interpreters must treat as confidential all information learned in the performance of their duties.
- Interpreters may only disclose information received in the performance of their duties with express permission or when required by law.

3 Accuracy: Interpreters must preserve the meaning of the message they are conveying. Interpreters have a duty to inform the parties that everything said in the encounter will be interpreted.

- Interpreters must strive to render all messages in their entirety, as accurately as possible and to the best of their abilities, without addition, distortion, embellishment, or omission.
- Interpreters may request that unclear messages be repeated, rephrased, or explained. If anything is misunderstood, the interpreter has a responsibility to inform the parties involved.

4 Impartiality: Interpreters strive to maintain impartiality and neutrality in the performance of their duties.

- Interpreters must show no bias to any party involved in the interpreted encounter. Interpreters must not advocate on behalf of any party.
- This can be accomplished by informing all parties of the duty to remain impartial or by refraining from interpreting when they may have a personal or professional interest in the matter.

5 Role Boundaries: Interpreters maintain their prescribed roles in the performance of their duties and refrain from personal involvement.

- This involves avoiding unnecessary contact with the parties involved and using the clearest mode of interpretation available.
- This protects the interpreters' professional integrity, reduces their exposure to liability, and maintains emotional and physical well-being.

6 Accountability: Accountability is a key component of the relationship that exists between interpreters and the interpreting services provider, which is why interpreting services providers must ensure strong recruiting practices in hiring interpreters.

- Interpreters and interpreting service providers shall be responsible for the quality of the interpreting service they provide to organizations that require interpreters. Interpreters are accountable to the interpreting services provider by virtue of membership with the organization.
- To remain accountable, interpreters shall act in accordance to accepted standards of practices. This will contribute toward a stronger languages industry and build public trust in the industry, allowing for eventual public recognition of the professionalization of the industry.

7 Transparency: All parties must demonstrate integrity in the delivery of interpreting services to clients. Transparency is fostered through practices that are clearly documented and adhered to by all parties.

- By acting in accordance to responsibilities laid out under Roles and Responsibilities section, the industry will reflect the true spirit of transparency in its practices.
- For example, interpreting services providers shall internalize stringent recruitment and evaluation processes, and organizations that require interpreters shall only make requests from the interpreting services industry through recognized interpreting services providers. This is to ensure minimum standards of quality of services are met.

8 Professionalism: Interpreting services providers and interpreters must conduct themselves in a professional manner.

- Professional conduct includes arriving on time for assignments, dressing in appropriate attire for assignments, and conducting themselves in a manner that adheres to the standards of practice. Professionalism in the provision of services includes behaving in the utmost ethical manner, preserving the professional nature of the industry. Moreover, interpreters shall commit themselves to continuously learning and updating skills to ensure language and interpretation competence over time.

Applicable definitions

Ad-Hoc Interpreter: An untrained individual who provides language interpretation services as a volunteer.

Client: The individual whose first language is not English and is in need of interpreting services.

Community interpretation: Interpretation between two languages that takes place in the course of communication among speakers of different languages.

Community Interpreter: A person who facilitates spoken language communication between two or more parties who do not share a common language by delivering the original message from one language into a target language.

Interpretation Services Provider: An individual or organization that provides interpreting services.

Organization that requires interpreters: Includes government departments, courts, health care centres, primary health care providers, private firms, and other organizations that engage interpreters to serve their clients, as well as private individuals.

