

SECTION 3

Planning a Multilingual Conference

Planning the Conference

Successfully hosting a multilingual conference is especially rewarding; helping people to come together, learn, and examine new ideas across language differences is wonderful. The energy and excitement that conferences provide is possible in multiple languages when the appropriate preparation has been completed.

Pre-Conference Planning

- An Interpretation Coordinator should be identified and specific duties and expectations be delineated in advance.
- The Interpretation Coordinator should be involved in conference planning.

The Role of the Conference Interpretation Coordinator

- Communicate regularly with the Conference Planner.
- Identify and hire interpreters.
- Hire qualified individuals and provide them with guidelines and expectations. See *Conference Interpreting: Being a Member of a Team* (p. 32).
- In coordination with the Conference Planner, assure that all presenters are notified that simultaneous interpretation will be provided

at their session. The Conference Planner should notify presenters in their workshop acceptance letter. Provide them with the *Presenter Information Guide* (p. 30) to include with the letter.

- Two weeks prior to the conference send presenters and interpreters letters with final planning information. See *Sample Presenter Letter* (p. 34) and *Sample Interpreter Letter* (p. 35). Include appropriate handouts.
- If working with agencies that utilize bilingual staff as interpreters, insist on training time and test their proficiency in doing simultaneous translation. Do not allow conference planners or attendees to utilize your team for anything other than interpretation; if staff members are being used as interpreters, they must stay in the interpreter role.
- Meet with the Interpretation Team at the beginning of the conference to review any last-minute changes and assure that everyone has what they need. The meeting also provides an opportunity for everyone to meet and see themselves as a collective working together.
- Check in with presenters, recipients of service, and your interpreters throughout the conference; make sure that everyone has what they need.

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- Be flexible and willing to switch things around. Something always comes up. Problems are always in need of calm individuals who can take care of the situation as quickly and effectively as possible.
- Be friendly. Have fun. Create the feeling that “we are a team.”
- Be assertive. Difficult situations may arise with a presenter, a person being served, or an interpreter. Situations do not solve themselves; they only get worse when left alone. You are the coordinator; it is your job to keep things running smoothly. If you need help, ask for it, but don’t let situations get out of hand because of fear of confrontation.

The Sessions

- All sessions that will be translated must be identified early in the planning process.
- All speakers who will have their sessions translated should receive *Presenter Information Guide* (p. 30) at the time sessions are approved. Preparing for an effective bilingual session requires planning. The facilitators will appreciate the support.
- Conference planners must assure that

written materials in multilingual sessions be available in both languages. This can be given as a clear expectation to presenters, or support can be provided by the conference planners. Support can range from providing written translation services to giving contact information for professional translators. Session interpreters are not responsible for translating workshop documents.

- All interpreters should receive written information from the presenters they will be translating for at least one week prior to the conference. Every discipline has discipline-specific vocabulary. Even if your interpreter is familiar with every one of the words, their interpretation will be smoother, and it will be easier for them to keep up with you, if they are mentally ready for the direction your presentation will take.
- Workshop presenters and interpreters should discuss the session prior to the conference. This meeting should take place after they have received workshop materials or guidelines. A phone meeting is fine.
- A sufficient number of qualified interpreters should be hired to prevent burnout and assure quality. Interpreters require regular breaks.

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Supporting the Interpreters

- The Interpreter Team Meeting

Sample Facilitator Team Meeting Agenda

- Introductions
 - Conference agenda
 - Assignments
 - Equipment information
- Check in on the sessions; things come up, and your help will be greatly appreciated and contribute to the smoothness of the event. You may find that the interpreter needs a drink of water, or that a transmitter has stopped working. You may walk in on a presenter who is talking way too fast and a frantic interpreter trying to keep up and failing. Gently and assertively interrupt the session and ask the presenter to speak more slowly so that all participants can benefit from the session.
 - Take the time to listen to the quality of interpretation. A conference is one of the few opportunities where you will be able to see and hear your contracted interpreters in action. Even if you do not speak the second language of the presentation, you will get a sense for the flow and feeling.

- There should be time in the beginning of the conference set aside to introduce and acknowledge the Interpretation Team.

Include interpretation in your overall conference evaluation. You will benefit from the input of participants.

By: Betty García Mathewson, New York State Migrant Education Diversity Project

Resources: Views, Volume 12, Issue 11, December 1995, A Monthly Publication of RID

Additional Resources: Kathy Miraglia, B.A., C.S.C., Coordinator of Interpreter Services, University of Rochester
Patricia Leadley, Spanish Language Interpreter, University of Rochester
Contracted interpreters from 1997 to 2005.

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