



TIP SHEET:

# Identifying Indigenous Language Speakers



You must provide interpretation (oral) and translation (written) assistance, when necessary and available, to limited English proficient noncitizens, including those who speak or understand rare or indigenous languages.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) continues to encounter noncitizens (especially from Mexico and Guatemala) who are not proficient in English and are presumed to be proficient in Spanish when in fact they are not; they speak and understand an indigenous language. Obstacles to communication with these noncitizens may be exacerbated by the fact that they tend to have limited formal education and ability to read/write in their indigenous language and, because of past persecution and discrimination, may not be forthcoming with their need for language assistance apart from Spanish.

## Identifying Indigenous Language Speakers

To help you better identify and communicate with indigenous language speakers, ERO is providing the following best practices:

- 1) Ensure Field Office and facility staff are familiar with how to identify limited English and Spanish proficient noncitizens, as well as available language line(s).
- 2) Confirm accuracy of any language designation, including Spanish, already recorded for the noncitizen in data systems or otherwise by another agency such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection.
- 3) Assume any noncitizen from Guatemala or Mexico does not speak Spanish proficiently and conduct a proactive assessment of their language needs. For example, ask (in Spanish): "Is there another language you speak more often with family in your home?" and "Are you more comfortable speaking in that language?"
- 4) Ask the noncitizen from Guatemala or Mexico (or otherwise) if they specifically speak an indigenous language.
  - a. Use the ERO Language (and Indigenous) ID Card to phonetically read aloud common Indigenous languages.
    - i. Recommend printing/laminating ID card or uploading/saving to your computer/government iPhone.
  - b. Use the audio/visual (PowerPoint) Intake tool for identifying indigenous languages, allowing the noncitizen to hear and see a phrase recorded in several indigenous languages.
  - c. Use the I Speak Indigenous Language Identification flyer, allowing the noncitizen to select a phrase written in several indigenous languages. Please be mindful that some noncitizens may be illiterate.
  - d. Ask for assistance from an ERO language line operator. It's helpful if you know what part of the country the noncitizen is from.
- 5) To further assess Spanish proficiency, listen to the noncitizen's responses to open-ended questions (not just "yes" or "no" questions) and/or periodically ask the noncitizen to repeat a question back to you in their own words in Spanish. If they are having trouble accomplishing either, they are likely not proficient in Spanish.
  - a. Remember that some noncitizens may be able to convey basic information in Spanish but may need language assistance for more technical matters.
- 6) Be aware of the noncitizen's body language or facial expressions, which may indicate confusion and lack of understanding.
- 7) Once identified, record the noncitizen's preferred language in applicable data systems (via the "primary language" field and/or in notes/comments) and in the detention file.
- 8) As needed, notify facility partners, local agency components (e.g., Office of Chief Council), and/or government agencies such as U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Executive Office for Immigration Review about the noncitizen's primary language.

## Available Language Services

ERO continues to work closely with its 24-hour language line vendor to better ensure availability of over-the-phone interpretation services for several indigenous languages.

- To secure over-the-phone interpretation for an indigenous language, please call the ERO 24/7 language line as identified on the ERO Language Services Resource Flyer.
  - Due to the rarity of these languages and limited number of ICE cleared linguists, you may have to make a future appointment for over-the-phone interpretation through the language line operator.



For additional information or questions related to language access, or to provide feedback related to the language line, please contact the ERO Language Access Coordinator at (b)(7)(E) [ice.dhs.gov](mailto:ice.dhs.gov). Facility partners can contact their ERO Field Office Point of Contact.