



# What your consultant interpreter needs to know

Put luck on your side and ask an AIIC consultant interpreter to advise you on the technical details and provide you with a cost estimate.

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Vincent BUCK.

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**You are in charge of pulling together an international meeting**, either for your own organisation or as an event planner for a client, and you need interpreters. Put luck on your side and ask an AIIC consultant interpreter to advise you on the technical details and provide you with a cost estimate. Here is what you should be ready to discuss.

## **Conference dates**

Depending on their languages and local market, many experienced conference interpreters tend to be booked 4 to 8 weeks in advance.

For some rarer languages, finding interpreters at short notice is virtually impossible. For instance, if you need Portuguese or Greek for a meeting in Europe, book well ahead, or at least make sure that you do not meet the same week as the European Parliament in Strasbourg. In fact, the more lead-time there is to put a team together, the easier and the cheaper it will be.

## **Conference venue**

Your interpretation budget will depend to a substantial extent on whether the team can be composed of interpreters based in or around the conference venue. You should be aware that non-local interpreters will charge you for travel expenses and time between their home base and the conference venue, and will require a daily subsistence allowance for any day spent away from home.

So, if you assemble in an exotic location and the whole team has to be flown in from far away, plan your conference budget accordingly. Should your meeting however take place in one of the following cities, for example, your consultant interpreter will most probably be able to recruit a team on the spot.



## **Language regime**

Enquire which languages will be spoken (passive languages) and into which languages interpretation is required (active languages). That information is important right at the start of the recruitment process, especially if many languages are involved. Large teams are always composed of interpreters with complementary language combinations and last-minute changes may impose costly restructuring of the team.

Primarily the number of active languages will affect your interpretation budget, and to a lesser extent how many passive languages must be covered. Interpreters on the same team will command identical fees, whatever their individual language combinations - except maybe for a handful of languages where demand far exceeds supply -, but the more languages, the more interpreters. AIIC's professional standards will give you an indication of the required team strength as a function of the number of working languages. Of course, team strength considerations depend to a large extent on the event's set-up, and it is always best to discuss them in detail with your consultant interpreter.

It should be noted that asymmetrical language regimes (where the active and passive languages do not match exactly) offer great value for money in those situations where it is important to give participants the possibility of speaking many different languages. For instance, covering 5 languages into 3 takes no more interpreters than covering 3 languages into 3.

## **Language distribution**

It may be difficult to estimate language use at a conference, especially if a similar event has never taken place before. However, it is important to try and have a general idea of how the languages will be distributed to optimise recruitment, especially if 4 or more languages are to be interpreted from.

If your event is a conference with little interaction from the floor, ask the speakers in what language they intend to deliver their paper. If your event is a meeting with much discussion, ask the chair and the meeting secretary what they will speak. The countries of origin of the participants can also give you interesting clues.

Armed with that information, your consultant interpreter will approach interpreters with the most appropriate language combination, so as to avoid unnecessary relay and balance out the work between interpreters.

## **Subject matter**



You should have a clear picture of what the conference will be about and who the participants are.

Recruiting a team of interpreters is much more than simply booking anyone available with the right language combination. Like anyone else, interpreters have their likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses.

Some of them may do brilliantly at high-level diplomatic conferences, but feel less comfortable with the glib speakers usually encountered at sales meetings.

Likewise, whether your meeting is about prudential rules in banking supervision, laparoscopic surgery or object-relational database systems, finding colleagues with prior exposure to your field should not be a problem, as AIIC interpreters have many very technical meetings under their belt.

However the subject matter and the type of conference should be specified as early as possible into the recruitment process, to ensure that you get the interpreters with the most appropriate profile.

Once a contract has been signed and a team has been put together, don't forget to send the team the full documentation (meeting agenda, list of participants, reports, papers to be read out, reference material) well ahead of the event. Also, if the meeting is very technical, a briefing session with the speakers is advisable.

### **Conference schedule**

Due to quality and health concerns, AIIC rules specify that interpreters should not work in excess of two 3-hour sessions a day, separated by a break of at least 90 minutes. Longer sessions are of course possible, provided that the team strength is increased. At any rate, interpreters and delegates alike will be grateful for periodic coffee and meal breaks.

If you plan to have break-out sessions, they should be carefully planned from the outset so that extra teams of interpreters can be recruited if need be.

### **Simultaneous Interpretation equipment**

Enquire whether your conference venue has built-in simultaneous interpretation booths or whether mobile booths will have to be rented. It is important to make sure that interpretation booths comply with the relevant ISO standards. These standards can be consulted [here](#). Sub-standard booths weigh heavily on the interpreters' output, especially if the problems are poor ventilation and sound quality. If you have no prior experience with



simultaneous interpretation equipment rental companies, your consultant interpreter will be happy to recommend or contact one for you.

Meeting rooms should be laid out so that the interpreters enjoy an unobstructed view of the speakers at the rostrum and of the projection screens. This is particularly important at technical meetings where slide presentations or videos are to be shown, as visuals will help the interpreters contextualise the speakers' message.

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