INDIGENOUS INTERPRETERS PROJECT

The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) has received funding from the Australian Government and from the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service (NTAIS) for two projects which will assist in increasing the number of interpreters accredited at Professional and Para-professional level in Indigenous languages. To date, NAATI has offered credentials in over 25 Indigenous languages.

These projects will support the implementation of the National Indigenous Interpreters Framework being developed by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

The Framework is being developed with consideration to the following: increasing the supply of suitably qualified Indigenous language interpreters; stimulating the demand for and use of interpreters by Indigenous communities, governments and third party services providers, and creating a sustainable industry for Indigenous language interpreters.1

Project One: NAATI has received $286,000 of funding from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) which will improve access to the national accreditation system for Indigenous interpreters. Improving access of Indigenous families to a full range of suitable and culturally inclusive services is one of the key objectives of the Council of Australian Government’s National Indigenous Reform Agreement.

Several activities will be undertaken to achieve this goal including the development of appropriate testing material in Indigenous languages in Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia, where there is a high demand for interpreting services. These languages include:

- Kimberley Kriol, Walmajarri, Nyangumarta, Yindjibarndi, Ngaanyatjarra, Wangkatha, Mardu Wangka, Wik Mungkan, Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole), Kala Lagaw Ya and Pitjantjatjara.

The administration of the new test materials which will include training supervisors to run the tests and examiners to mark the tests and will be piloted in one of the Kimberley languages in 2013.

1 Commonwealth of Australia, 2012, Our Land, Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, September 2012, page 163.
NAATI will be responsible for ensuring the quality of the test material; tracking which tests are used where and when; and maintaining the material for all future testing.

Funding will also be used to develop a policy and consultation capacity within NAATI for Indigenous Interpreting. A comprehensive overview of NAATI’s accreditation system is currently underway with a team of international and local experts in the translating and interpreting sector engaged in the Improvements to NAATI Testing (INT) project. This project will evaluate and assess NAATI’s accreditation system.

NAATI will be undertaking consultation and will seek input from members of FaHCSIA’s Interpreter Stakeholder Reference Group and other Indigenous interpreting stakeholders to discuss the aims of the project and the recommendations from the INT project. NAATI will work with the stakeholders to ensure the needs of the Indigenous interpreting sector will be considered in any new proposed accreditation model.

An accreditation fund has been established within NAATI for Indigenous Interpreters. The fund can be used by eligible individuals to cover the costs associated with NAATI application fees and test fees for Indigenous interpreters.

**Project Two:** NAATI has received $295,000 from the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service to undertake several projects within the Northern Territory which will assist in increasing the number of accredited interpreters at Professional and Para-professional level in Indigenous languages. In particular, it will allow for a number of experienced interpreters working for the NTAIS to progress to Paraprofessional and Professional level accreditation.

The Closing the Gap Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement and Northern Territory Stronger Futures provides funding from the Australian Government to the NTAIS.

As with Project One, the funding will be used to develop test materials in Northern Territory Indigenous languages where there is a high demand for interpreting services. Test materials will be created in the following Northern Territory Indigenous languages:

*Yolngu matha; Murrinh-patha; Burarra; Anindilyakwa; Kunwinjku; Modern Tiwi; Maung, Kriol; Gurindji Kriol, Warlpiri; Alyawarr;; Anmatjerr; Western Arrarnta; Eastern/Central Arrernte; Luritja and Warumungu.*

NAATI will also work with the NTAIS to deliver training and skill development support in the marking of Paraprofessional accreditation tests (see below: Examiner Panel and Marking of Test). This activity involves providing support and training to the NTAIS trainers who currently deliver training to Paraprofessional test examiners as part of the accreditation testing that they conduct and to a small group of examiners more regularly used by the AIS for marking.

The funding will also be used to assist NAATI accredited interpreters in applying to have their credentials revalidated. In order to maintain high standards, NAATI has put in place a revalidation system whereby
all interpreters who have gained accreditation from 2007 onwards are required to show evidence of professional development and work experience.

**Undertaking a NAATI test for Indigenous Interpreters**

NAATI has established four levels of accreditation - Paraprofessional Interpreter (PPI), Interpreter (hereafter referred to as Professional Interpreter), Conference Interpreter and Conference Interpreter (Senior). Currently, almost all Indigenous interpreters are accredited at the paraprofessional level. In 2009 three speakers were accredited at NAATI professional level.

Paraprofessional accreditation for Indigenous interpreters is obtained in one of the two following ways:

- completion of a NAATI approved course – this would normally be a Diploma of Interpreting course delivered by a TAFE college (In some instances, completion of the course can qualify a person for NAATI accreditation).
- delivery of intensive interpreter workshops by a reputable consultant or organization (such as NTAIS) followed by NAATI testing in conjunction with a NAATI-approved consultant. This method is often utilised in the Northern Territory to accredit Indigenous interpreters, through funding made to the Aboriginal Interpreter Service by the Australian Government

The PPI represents a level of competence in interpreting at a non-specialised level – and is often referred to as “community interpreting” – where specialised terminology or more sophisticated conceptual information is not required.

The first professional level tests were developed in 2009 by the NTAIS. In doing so, they had to develop their own component covering legal and court training.

**Examiner Panel and Marking Tests**

An examiner panel usually consists of two examiners already accredited in the language being tested. One having the Indigenous language as the first language and the other having English as the first language.

If examiners of this background are not available, NAATI will consider unaccredited nominees, but only if they have proven linguistic skills in both languages and have had some experience as interpreters.

The test must be marked according to the NAATI guidelines set out in the NAATI Examiners’ Manual by the NAATI-approved examiners. Each examiner records their marks for the candidate on a Result Sheet.

Test candidates do their test with a test supervisor in the room. The test is audio recorded and the two examiners who know the language well will be asked to mark the recording. The recording is then sent to the third examiner who knows NAATI standards well and acts as the ‘moderator’.