



Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project



Helpful Tips and Advice for Interpreters

- 1. In what context do interpreters volunteer and does it matter?** Most interpretation opportunities for volunteers are in the context of asylum cases. There are also opportunities to interpret for adjustment of status interviews. The context is very important because the outcome may literally determine the course of the client's life. The setting is professional and formal. Please dress appropriately.
- 2. What is asylum?** Asylum is a legal status that may be claimed affirmatively or defensively. Asylum may be granted to an individual who is able to establish that he or she has been persecuted, or has a well-founded fear of future persecution, by the government, or that the government is unable or unwilling to control, on account of a "protected ground". Protected grounds are: race, religion, nationality, political opinion and membership in a particular social group.
- 3. What adjustment of status?** Adjustment of status means that the client is applying to adjust to legal permanent residence status in a local USCIS office. Individuals granted special immigrant juvenile visas can apply to adjust status immediately (subject to visas being available). Individuals who are granted asylum must wait a year.
- 4. Where do interviews take place?** This depends on the type of appointment. Practice interviews will be held at Esperanza's office: 1530 James M Wood Blvd, parking available on the corner of James M Wood Blvd and Colombia Ave. Asylum interviews will be held at the asylum office: 1585 South Manchester Avenue, Anaheim, CA 92802. Parking is available on site. Adjustment of status interviews will be held at various USCIS offices. Check with the attorney whose case you are assisting with about where to meet, the time to meet, and if there is anything in particular you should know about the client or the case.
- 5. What information will I need for the interpretation?** It is useful to have reviewed the immigration forms relevant to the case. For asylum this is the I-589, and for adjustment of status this is the I-485. For asylum cases it is also useful to have reviewed the client's declaration and any supporting declarations the attorney gives you. These documents explain the facts of the case and are crucial topics the asylum officer will be interrogating the applicant about during the interview. Please make sure you feel comfortable translating the vocabulary between English and the applicant's language. Also, please review the KYR English-Spanish Glossary of Terms.
- 6. What should I bring to the interview?** If the interview is at a government office (for example, the asylum office in Anaheim or a USCIS office), please make sure to bring an

official photo ID to the interview (i.e. driver's license, passport, etc.). You will need this to check in at the Asylum Office.

7. How much can or should I talk to the client before the interview? It is a great idea to chat with the client before the interview and try to develop a level of comfort and familiarity. However nervous you are, the client is probably more nervous. Be sure to explain your role at the interview (that you will be their voice and you will be translating everything that the asylum officer is saying). Remind the client that you are working on her/his team and that you are eager to help the client do well and feel as comfortable as possible.

8. How important are the details of what the client says? Very important!! The details may be the difference between the client winning and losing their case. Legal standards, credibility and consistency are all at stake. Small things matter. For example, gang member or gang members, armed or using machine gun (notice the small differences in the type of weapon). Listen carefully to the question the asylum officer asks the client. Do not paraphrase the applicant's answers; you must interpret the applicant's full response to the officer exactly.

9. What happens if I don't know or remember a word? It happens to everyone. Interpreting is a skill and you improve with practice. During asylum interviews, a telephone monitor will listen in to ensure the interpretation is correct. This is a helpful safeguard. It means if your interpretation is even slightly inaccurate, the monitor can propose a better interpretation. Monitors do interject frequently so do not feel disappointed if it happens to you. Monitors can also be of particular assistance when working with clients that speak different dialects. Just do your best, stay calm, and keep going. Getting flustered or frustrated will only harm the flow of the interview and make the applicant feel nervous- something we want to avoid at all costs.

10. Can I take notes when performing the interpretations? Most interpreters take notes when performing consecutive interpretations to prevent forgetting details of the asylum officer's questions and the client's responses. If you write notes during the interview, it **MUST** be on the paper the asylum officer gives you. You may **NOT** use your own paper or notepad.

11. What if I don't understand a question that the government officer asks? You can and should always ask the officer to repeat themselves if you missed something. It is far better for you to seek clarification than for the client to misunderstand the question. You have the right to ask for help. Neither you nor the applicant will be penalized if you ask for an explanation, or if you ask the officer for a different word that's easier for you to translate. In fact, you may even make the asylum officer feel pleased that you are so careful and attentive about your responsibility as an interpreter.

12. What if the applicant says something I don't understand or gives an answer that doesn't make sense? Rather, tell the officer you did not understand the response from the client and would like to ask them the question again. Don't start a conversation with the client to try to find out what the problem is. The asylum officer may become agitated and

wonder why you are having a side conversation. Once you tell the officer, it is his/her job to decide what to do. The officer may ask you to talk to the applicant. If so, you can speak to the applicant but do not speak to the applicant on your own. You need the officer's permission to do anything except to translate the officer's questions and the applicant's answers.

13. What practical advice do you have for me? Don't be late. Eat before the scheduled interview – particularly if it is at the asylum office. Please do not bring any food items or beverages into the building. Interviews can take a couple of hours and interpreting is tiring. Make sure you have the energy to get through it! Also, if you need a break (for example to use the bathroom, or because you have interpreted for siblings one after the other), ask for it. Be sensitive of the timing and nature of questioning though. Go slow, stay calm and confident. You can do it!

Good luck from the Esperanza team!