

# ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGE TRANSLATION PROTOCOLS



Developed by  
The Alaska Public Interest Research Group (AKPIRG)



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# ABOUT THE ALASKA PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP (AKPIRG)

AKPIRG is a grassroots non-profit committed to connecting Alaskans with reliable information about public interest and consumer issues.

The AKPIRG Language Team includes Veri di Suvero, Rochelle Adams, Erin Willahan, and Annauk Olin. The AKPIRG Language Team focuses on language access in Anchorage while supporting Indigenous Language work across Alaska. In 2018, AKPIRG's board identified the 2020 Census as a top priority issue. Data collected through the Census is used to determine congressional representation and federal spending on health care, education, and food assistance.<sup>1</sup> Alaska Native communities have been historically undercounted, and so AKPIRG hoped that by translating the Census into Alaska Native languages, more Alaska Native people will have access to the Census. As more Alaska Natives are counted in the Census, their respective communities can receive adequate funding.

AKPIRG partnered with the Alaska Census Working Group, a state-wide coalition, who funded and supported AKPIRG's efforts to translate the Census into Alaska Native languages for the first time ever. For the project the Executive Director of AKPIRG, Veri di Suvero (pronouns they/them) hired two additional language experts: Rochelle Adams and Erin Willahan. As the Language Team's projects moved to work beyond the Census, the Team at various times collaborated with Native Peoples Action Community Fund, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. These projects spanned the 2020 presidential primaries, general election, and COVID-19 public service announcements. Annauk Olin was hired as an Indigenous Language Translation consultant in

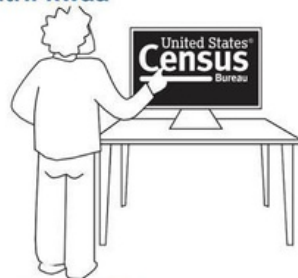
## Nik'iitik akwat gandaa t'aanchy'aa khadoiintin ji' jii chan shriinlii Page 8

JII KAT CH'ADOONTL'OO SHRO'

### 2020 Census juk vagwanrii kwaa

Online ji' gaa gwit'ee haanchy'aa gaanandaii?

2020 Census online shrihiinyaa ji' aii URL kat questinnaire shriinlii.



Jii video guides 2020 Census online kat dha'ait: [2020census.gov/languages](https://2020census.gov/languages)

Neets'aii

U.S. Census Bureau

8

<sup>1</sup> Schwing, E. & Baker, M. (2020, Jan 21). The Census begins where it has struggled before: remote, frozen Alaska. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/21/us/census-alaska-native.html>

November 2021 through funding provided by the Sociological Initiative Foundation (SIF) Participatory Action Research Projects. Annauk led the team in writing, editing, integrating community feedback, and finalizing these Alaska Native Language Translation Protocols by June 2023.

### ***WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE AK NATIVE LANGUAGE TRANSLATION PROTOCOLS?***

- To build a shared set of Alaska Native translation protocols.
- To help build a network of language-bearers in every Alaska Native language.
- To serve a roadmap for outsiders to work with communities long-term in a mutually beneficial and respectful way.
- To create opportunities for intentional work that honors and uplifts the languages and language speakers. Jobs for language translation spans sectors, and it's important to see Alaska Native languages represented everywhere.
- To mainstream everyday use of Alaska Native languages throughout the State of Alaska.
- To offer a resource when applying for grants to support intergenerational language learning, language education, and curriculum creation so that Alaska Native languages exist in perpetuity.

### ***WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS GUIDE?***

- Indigenous language speakers, who may be asked to do a translation project in Alaska.
- Organizations (non-profits, government agencies, private entities) in Alaska who are seeking translations or are facilitating language work.
- Language educators, who are in a position to teach students how to do translation work equitably.
- Grant writers, who are articulating to funders the value that language work brings, and the resources needed to conduct language work in a reciprocal, ethical way.
- Teachers or community leaders implementing historical or language curriculum in Alaska Native schools or communities.

## **PREFACE: DEVELOPING ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGE TRANSLATION PROTOCOLS**

The Alaska Native Language Translation Protocols were developed through the following processes:

1. In fall 2019, AKPIRG hosted a discussion at the Cook Inlet Housing Authority (CIHA) on best practices for Alaska Native Language work across the state. People working with Alaska Native languages from a range of perspectives, were invited to share their experiences and best practices.
2. In December 2019, AKPIRG facilitated a weeklong language gathering at the Alaska Native Heritage Center, with a multigenerational group of 25 Alaska Native language experts from across regions of Alaska, four languages, and multiple dialects. The goal was to foster a space for Alaska Native Language experts to share their knowledge, build community and create educational materials around the 2020 Census in their own words, for their own communities.
3. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Alaska, the AKPIRG Language Panels reconvened virtually to develop health and safety messaging in their languages together. Here are two links to the panelists' Census-related work and their COVID-19-related work.
4. In April 2022, the Language Access Team hosted a 2-hour Zoom session to receive feedback on the first draft of the Alaska Native Translation Protocols from panelists engaged in translation work in 2019-2020. Panelists were compensated for their time.
5. In October 2022, the Language Access Team hosted an Alaska Native Language Translation Protocol community workshop at the First Alaskans Institute's 39th annual Elders & Youth Conference.

Additionally, this work has been informed by existing protocols developed by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network's Guideline for respecting cultural knowledge, the Federation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages Corporation's (FATSIL) Community protocols for Indigenous language projects, and the Inuit Circumpolar Council's (ICC) Circumpolar Inuit protocols for equitable and ethical engagements.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This project is a reflection of our experiences in conducting this work as well as a reflection of ourselves, our learnings and unlearnings, our different positionalities, our past histories and ancestors, our visions for the future, and our ties to one another and to the lands we are on. In thinking through how to clarify and communicate to

ourselves the protocols, emerging from our work, this we felt we could responsibly steward as facilitators and organizers. We hope it is useful to others and we hope to see its use expand.

***Mahsi' choo. Hai' choo. Enaa Baasee'. Quyanaqpak.***

***Quyanna. Quyana. Gunalchéesh. Tsin'aen.***

**We are thankful for our teachers who made, and  
continue to make this work possible.**



We would especially like to give thanks to our panels of language experts: Al'aq Cheryl Charles Smith, Amaya Shaw, Annauk Olin, Anajalutaq Annie Conger, Cathy Moses, Chief, Rev., Dr. Trimble Gilbert, Kk'oleyo Dewey Hoffman, Cungauyar Kikikaq Dorie Wassilie, Freddie Olin IV, Uqnaak Georgianna Merrill, Dr. Hishinlai' Peter, Kenneth Drizhuu Frank, Nuluqutaaq Maggie Pollock, Marie Hoover, Marie Yaska, Mary Fields, Mary Gilbert, MaryRose Agnes, Knownuk Richard Atuk, Qaivaralria Angakayagaq Rosalie Lincoln, Tristan Madros, Velma Schafer, Dr. Walkie Charles, Dr. X'unei Lance Twitchell, Aandaxltin Stephanie Tripp, Melissa Shaginoff, Sondra Shaginoff-Stuart, Hukk'aaghneestaatno Lorraine David, Alberta Vent, Veronica Kaganak, Lorina Warren. It is through their teachings about our languages that our values shine through. These lessons are the framework and help us move forward in this work. We would also like to thank Native Peoples Action Community Fund (NPACF) for their partnership during the translation projects, and to Native Movement for their support in developing trainings for implementing these protocols.

## QUOTES FROM TRANSLATION PANELISTS

“Protocols ensure that there is Indigenous control of Indigenous content. There have been instances where people have lost control of their languages. Sometimes violence occurs where outsiders record elders, and yet, descendants of these elders are denied these recordings. Protocols help others to understand that non-Indigenous peoples cannot claim anything AS their own, and cannot deny or discourage an Indigenous person from working on their own language or from accessing their own language materials.”

-**Xh’unei Lance Twitchell**

“It’s important that we as Indigenous people are able to shape the world that we live in, to ensure our wellbeing, on our own traditional homelands and in our own languages in order to make the best decisions.”

-**Geh Gii Ch’adzaa  
Rochelle Adams**

“I think this is a pretty revolutionary movement that we’re working on because it acknowledges that our languages are our birthright and that means that our languages should be spoken in all the different facets of our lives...When we’re translating Census material into Inupiaq or Denaakk’e (the Koyukon language) or Yup’ik that means that we are telling different agencies that our languages matter and that we prefer to and we require that we communicate in our languages across our communities and with [F]ederal or [S]tate institutions.”

-**Annauk Olin**

(as quoted by Alaska Public Media in an article about AKPIRG’s December Language Gathering)



“Our translation work needs to honor our Elders. We all have different experiences and words we can use when translating. Our translations must be readable and understandable to all generations. Community and Elder knowledge must be integrated.”

-Cungauyar Kikiaq Dorie Wasillie

“We have a committee in the Yup’ik area for translating new words. The committee is often made up of people who work in the educational system.”

-Qaivaralria Angakayagaq  
Rosalie Lincoln

“When we translate, we are not translating for an audience or English speakers—we are translating for ourselves.”

-Knownuk Richard Atuk

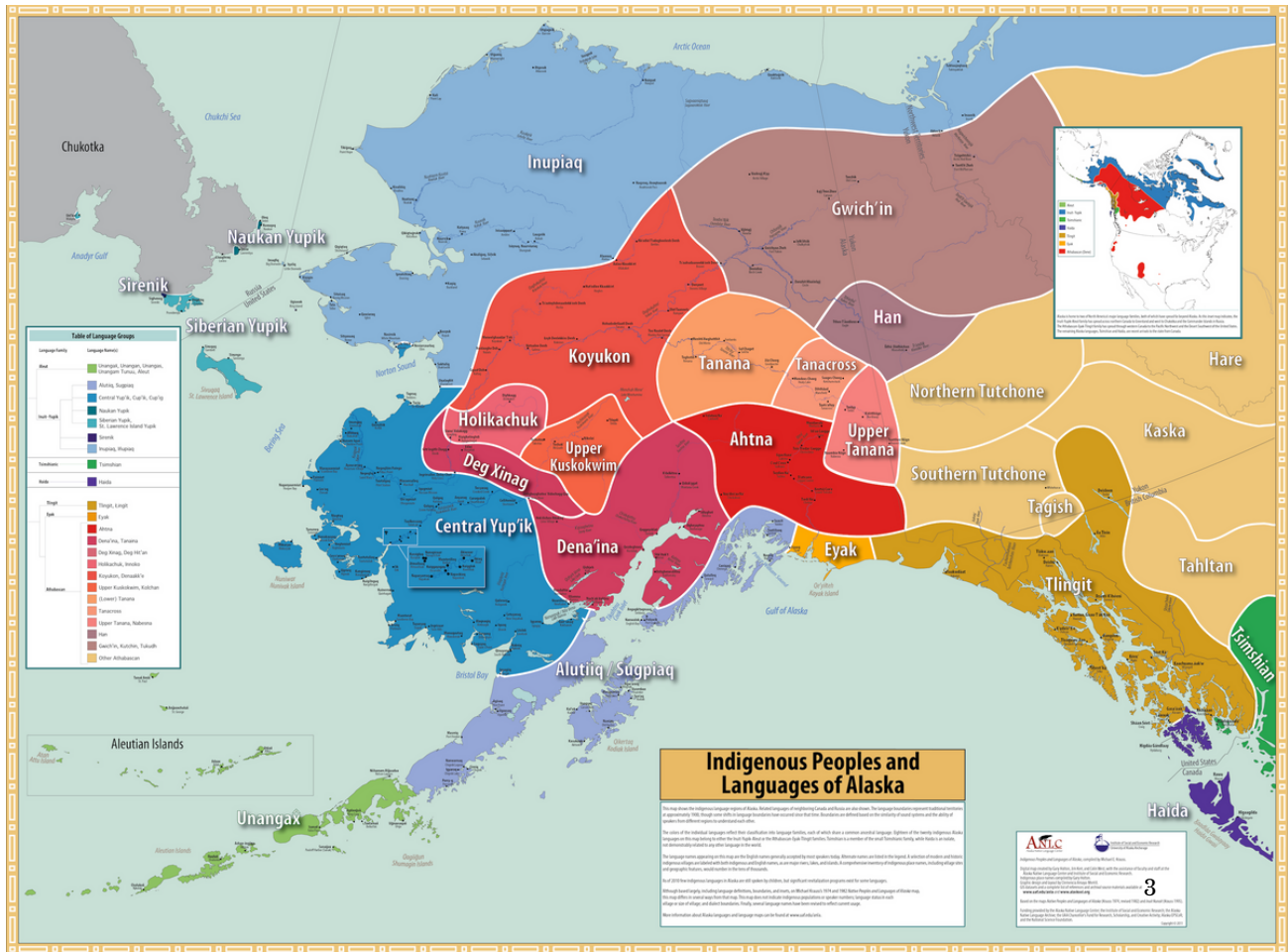
“It’s not been very long since Alaska Native languages have been written. Many elderly speakers focus on speaking their Indigenous languages rather than reading or writing them. When translating, we need options to access audio or oral material.

For the younger generations who are learning to read and write their language, we cannot shame or guilt them for learning this tool. Sometimes people don’t agree on how the Denaakk’e alphabet was created or on certain words. At least people are trying to speak the language—that is the main focus. Let’s remember that our Indigenous ways of learning rely on careful observation, listening, speaking, and doing every day activities as a family and community. We learn best when our language is spoken in an environment of kindness, respect, and healthy communication.”

-Hükk’aagneestaatlno Lorraine David

# I. INTRODUCTION TO ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGES

“Alaska” derives from the Unangan word Alaxsxaq, which means “places the sea moves toward”.<sup>2</sup> Alaska is home to 229 sovereign Tribes and 23 distinct Alaska Native languages, all of which are the official languages of the state. Each language is unique, with their own story, history, and orthography. Nearly all Alaska Native languages share the risk of being severely threatened, but collective strides in language reclamation have created much hope in our communities to bring our languages back.



*Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska, Courtesy of the Alaska Native Language Center*

Alaska Native languages have been spoken in Alaska for millennia. Before Russian and American contact, Alaska Native languages were used in the home and for diplomacy with other Native Nations. Bilingualism and multilingualism were widespread.<sup>3</sup> Alaska is the home of two great North American language families: the Inuit-Unangan and the Na-Dene.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, M. (2009). Alaska and its people: an introduction. In M. Willims (Ed.) *The Alaska Native Reader* (p.1). Durham and London: Duke University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Alaska Humanities Forum. (2017). *Alaska History and Cultural Studies*. Alaska Native Languages Introduction and History | Alaska History and Cultural Studies. Retrieved December 5, 2021, from <http://www.akhistorycourse.org/alaskas-cultures/alaska-native-languages-introduction-and-history/>.

### Languages in the Inuit-Unangan Family

- Inupiatun (Inupiaq)
- Yupigetsun/Akuzipigestun (St. Lawrence Island Yup'ik)
- Yugtun/Cugtun (Yup'ik/Cupik)
- Cup'ig (Nunivak Island Yup'ik)
- Sugt'stun/Alutiit'stun (Sugpiaq/Alutiiq)
- Unangam Tunuu (Unangax/Aleut)

### Languages in the Na-Dene Family

- Dena'inaq' (Dena'ina)
- Denaakk'e (Koyukon)
- Doogh Q'inag (Holikachuk)
- Deg Xinag (Deg Hit'an)
- Dinak'i (Upper Kuskokwim)
- Benhti Kokhwt'ana Kenaga' (Lower Tanana)
- Sahcheeg xut'teen xneege' (Middle Tanana)
- Dinjii Zhuh K'yaa (Gwich'in)
- Häl gołan (Hän)
- Dihthaad Xt'een lin Aandeeg' (Tanacross)
- Nee'aanèegn' (Upper Tanana)
- Koht'aene kenaege' (Ahtna)
- Lingít (Tlingit)
- Wetał (Ts'etsa'ut)

There are two more Alaska Native languages that do not belong to the Inuit-Unangan and Na-Dene Language families: Sm'algyax and Xaad Kíl. Xaad Kíl (Haida) is an isolate and Sm'algyax (Tsimshian) is in the Tsimshianic family along with its cousin languages Southern Tsimshian, Nisga'a, and Gitksan.

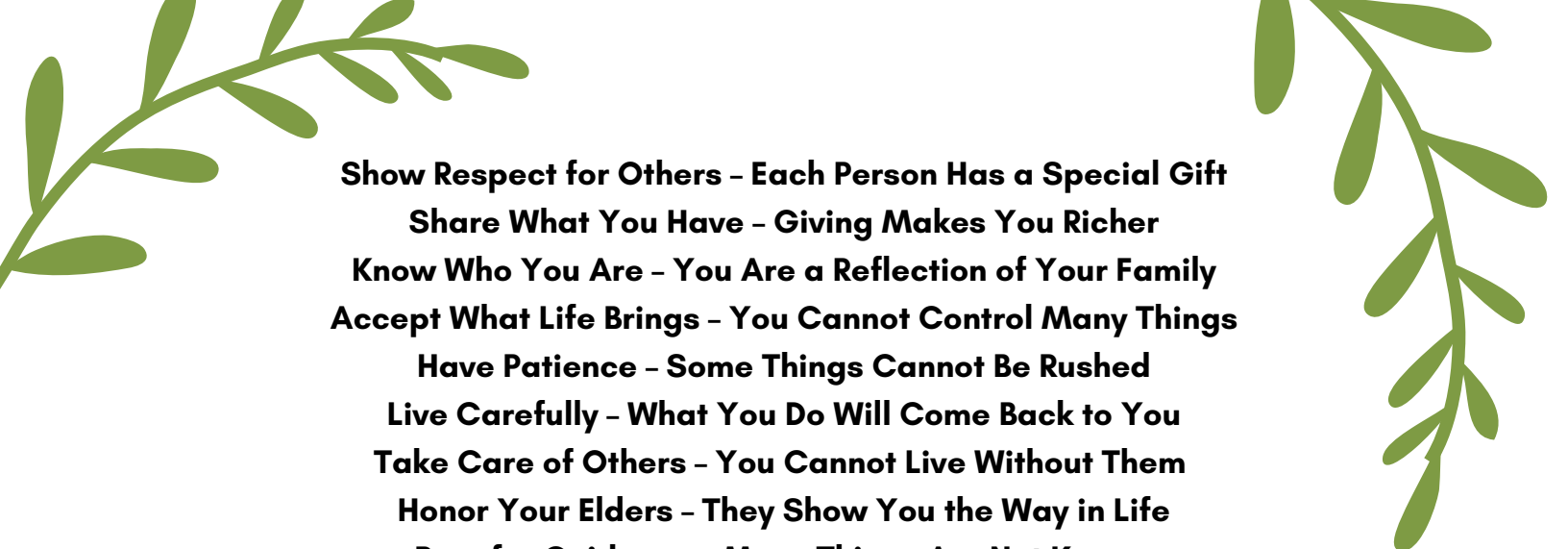
## II. ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGE TRANSLATION PROTOCOLS

Protocols, like languages and cultures, are dynamic. They change and develop over time in relation to many influences. It is critical for translation partners to be accommodating of such changes while also building long-term, ongoing relationships with Indigenous translators. Local communities may have developed their own unique protocols. The protocols provided here do not intend to override local protocols, although there may be points of intersection.<sup>4</sup> Indigenous values should serve as the foundation of every translation workplan. The Alaska Native Knowledge Network, alongside Elders and educators around the state of Alaska, chose 10 values to represent Alaska Native values collectively.<sup>5</sup> Although the values may change slightly in different regions, we are all connected by these guiding principles:

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<sup>4</sup> Federation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL) Corporation. (2004) Community protocols for Indigenous language projects (p.5). Melbourne: FATSIL.

<sup>5</sup> Alaska Native Knowledge Network (n.d.). *Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge*. Guidelines for respecting cultural knowledge. Retrieved October 1, 2022, from <http://ankn.uaf.edu/publications/knowledge.html>



**Show Respect for Others - Each Person Has a Special Gift**  
**Share What You Have - Giving Makes You Richer**  
**Know Who You Are - You Are a Reflection of Your Family**  
**Accept What Life Brings - You Cannot Control Many Things**  
**Have Patience - Some Things Cannot Be Rushed**  
**Live Carefully - What You Do Will Come Back to You**  
**Take Care of Others - You Cannot Live Without Them**  
**Honor Your Elders - They Show You the Way in Life**  
**Pray for Guidance - Many Things Are Not Known**  
**See Connections - All Things Are Related**

Protocols are necessary to show positive interactions of meaningful engagement and equitable practices through long-term relationships. Decolonization involves a deeply critical understanding of settler colonialism and Indigenous response to the current relationship between Indigenous peoples and the State.<sup>6</sup> This also applies to language translation work, and careful attention must be applied to ensure that colonial structures and relationships are not replaying amongst Indigenous translators and partners. Each protocol provides additional actions that help achieve these goals. The protocols should be practiced comprehensively; just because one protocol is being implemented, does not mean other protocols should be ignored. The protocols assist in advancing Indigenous voices, sovereignty, and interests. A paradigm shift is needed to ensure that reciprocal and respectful relationships become the norm and to establish a standard of ethics.<sup>7</sup>

We have identified seven protocols:

- 1. Honor Alaska Native lands, peoples, cultures, and governance systems**
- 2. Indigenous communities lead and participate in every step of the translation process**
- 3. Center Indigenous ways of knowing and learning language throughout the translation process**
- 4. Implement cross-cultural dialogue and shared agreements**
- 5. Integrate a care-first approach that recognizes the gifts of Elders and youth**
- 6. Include adequate compensation, reasonable deadlines, and clear responsibilities within written agreements**
- 7. Indigenous communities are the owners and caretakers of their languages, cultures, and all translation materials**

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<sup>6</sup> Betasamosake Simpson, L. (2017). *As we have always done*. University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>7</sup> Inuit Circumpolar Council (2022). *Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement*. (p.14).








It is the highest obligation and honor to uphold Indigenous knowledge and languages through translation work. Indigenous peoples have the right to access information in their own languages. Translations must also be widely available and accessible to Alaska Native communities. Our translation work is centered around care: for each other, for the experts we work with, and for the work itself. After learning from participating language experts, we hope to share the process that was used to uncover many of their teachings.



## **1. HONOR ALASKA NATIVE LANDS, PEOPLE, LANGUAGES, CULTURES, & GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS**

The honoring of Indigenous peoples, languages, cultures, and governance systems is critical given that all translation work in Alaska takes place on Indigenous land. The foundation of an Indigenous worldview is an intimate relationship with localized space. Language intertwines with peoples, relations, cultures, and lands. Language reclamation should always be grounded in the physical reclamation of land and territory, with the acknowledgement that Indigenous language practices are connected to the lands and bodies on which these languages are born.

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination and self-governance. It is a fundamental principle of international law, included in the Charter of the United Nations. Free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) is a certain right that pertains to Indigenous peoples and is recognized by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). It recognizes our right to give or withhold consent to a project that may affect us or our territories. Once consent is given, Indigenous peoples can withdraw it at any stage. Consent is requested at the earliest stages of development of a translation project.

-  Familiarize with and implement the directives of the UNDRIP within all aspects of translation work. To protect and promote our lands, rights, and collective culture, the world must adhere to UNDRIP. “UNDRIP affirms the right to engage in the governance of all things related to us and our lands, territories, and resources”<sup>8</sup>.
-  Indigenous governance systems must be honored. All translation work and engagements must respect and align in accordance with Indigenous governance structures, institutions, and organizations, foregrounding our sovereignty and self-determination.<sup>9</sup> Our strong governance systems are testimony to how our cultures, ecosystems, and lands have thrived for millennia.
-  Ensure that meetings and decisions take place at locations and times and in languages and formats that benefit their respective communities.<sup>10</sup>
-  Engage with Tribal governing bodies to hire Indigenous language experts and to host language translation events within the respective Indigenous community. Indigenous translators will benefit from the collective knowledge of their community and from working within their own governance system.<sup>11</sup>
-  Non-Indigenous partners should use their privilege to ensure that the land bases of Alaska Native peoples are restored and strengthened, in addition to sharing a land acknowledgement at the beginning of a translation gathering.
-  Identify participants from a cultural group to share cultural knowledge at the beginning of each meeting or gathering. Building intentional time for cultural groups to share songs, prayers, stories, or cultural teachings and advice throughout a translation gathering will set the tone and mindset of the participants.
-  Seek Indigenous authority and guidance. Engage with Indigenous peoples before initiating any proposals, translations, or other work. Become familiar with Indigenous institutions and Indigenous-driven publications at the local, regional, national, and international levels, before reaching out to individuals or Tribes.<sup>12</sup> This will prevent duplication of previous work and will inform partners of Indigenous histories and activities.

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<sup>8</sup> Inuit Circumpolar Council (2022). Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement. (p.14).

<sup>9</sup> Inuit Circumpolar Council (2022). Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement. (p.20).


<sup>10</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2016). Free, prior, and informed consent: an Indigenous peoples’ right and good practice for local communities. (p.15)  
<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/publications/2016/10/free-prior-and-informed-consent-an-indigenous-peoples-right-and-a-good-practice-for-local-communities-fao/>


<sup>11</sup> Gonzales, L. (2021) (Re) *Framing multilingual technical communication with Indigenous language interpreters and translators*, Technical Communication Quarterly, DOI: [10.1080/10572252.2021.1906453](https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2021.1906453)


<sup>12</sup> Inuit Circumpolar Council (2022). Circumpolar Inuit Protocols for Equitable and Ethical Engagement. (p.17).

## 2. INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES MUST LEAD AND PARTICIPATE IN EVERY STEP OF THE TRANSLATION PROCESS


Collective and community-driven decision making and governance have long been the focus of Indigenous knowledge systems.<sup>13</sup> This means that Indigenous communities must actively lead and participate in each step of a language translation process, to ensure that Indigenous spaces, perspectives, and knowledges are centralized. Paramount to production of language materials, we envision community empowerment where communities are not just consumers of materials but producers of materials.<sup>14</sup>

 **The facilitator of a language gathering or other related project requiring facilitation should ideally be both an Indigenous person and an Indigenous language speaker who can also act as a liaison between the project and Elders.**

 **Indigenous translation facilitators should integrate their strong background of Indigenous knowledge and lifeways. The facilitators should be able to hold space for both Elders and young people, and work to empower the language panelists as the experts and drivers. Facilitators are also responsible for creating a culture-based environment.**

 **Working with language experts and community members to ensure that translation materials align with the needs and priorities of Indigenous communities is critical. Language reclamation is “a larger effort by community to claim its right to speak a language and to associated goals in response to community needs and perspectives.”<sup>15</sup>**

 **Facilitate opportunities to create messaging in the Indigenous language first, rather than asking for messaging already developed without input from the community. Language experts should have a role in creating messages that will be relevant to their communities.**

 **Information shared with Indigenous communities should be accessible, clear, accurate, and transparent, covering both the risk and benefit potential of proposed activity. Information pertaining to the project should be delivered in the local language and in a culturally appropriate format.<sup>16</sup>**

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, L. T. (2013). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. London, UK: Zed Books Ltd.

<sup>14</sup> Hermes, Mary, Megan Bang, and Ananda Marin. “Designing Indigenous Language Revitalization.” *Harvard Educational Review* 82 (September 10, 2012): 381–402. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.82.3.q8117w86124187lj>.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard, Wesley Y. (2012). Framing language reclamation programmes for everybody’s empowerment. *Gender and Language* 6(2), (p.359).




<sup>16</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2016). Free, prior, and informed consent: an Indigenous peoples’ right and good practice for local communities. (p.15) <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/publications/2016/10/free-prior-and-informed-consent-an-indigenous-peoples-right-and-a-good-practice-for-local-communities-fao/>



### 3. CENTER INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING AND LEARNING LANGUAGE WITHIN THE TRANSLATION PROCESS

It is important to center translation work within Indigenous ways of knowing and learning language. Often, academic or linguistic institutions can impose non-Indigenous ways of knowing or learning on a translation project. Translation partners must center language expression through Indigenous social, cultural, relational, and spiritual contexts. Linguists tend to understand language as an object that needs to be saved through dictionaries and grammars. Indigenous peoples view language as a living relationship connecting them to their kin and the natural world.<sup>17</sup> While dictionaries and grammars can be helpful during the translation process, Indigenous knowledge of language through seasonal activities or storytelling is just as important as, if not more so than, written materials by outsiders.

Being mindful of how settler-colonial foundations of language expression can be deeply rooted within outsider institutions and within Indigenous communities is important.<sup>18</sup> In some respects, Indigenous language access has been limited to academic and linguistic institutions, so shaming Indigenous peoples for utilizing or learning non-Indigenous methods does not advance the overall health of a language or a learner. Once settler-colonial foundations are identified, translation facilitators can re-orient and re-ground the translation process through Indigenous ways of knowing and learning language. Academia and linguistics can be helpful in certain areas of language translation, but their methods should not serve as the foundation.

-  **Shift power dynamics so that equitable intellectual and political space, status, and participation represents Indigenous peoples and their knowledges.**
-  **Center community goals and views of language in all areas of language work. Implement a decolonial framework of doing Indigenous language translation work that identifies and addresses the underlying issues that precipitate language shift in a given community.<sup>19</sup> This requires developing trusted relationships within a language community.**
-  **Indigenous language learning occurs in family and community contexts where observation and evaluation of learning happens across generations.**

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<sup>17</sup> HENNE-CHOA, RICHARD, EMMA ELLIOTT-GROVES, BARBRA A. MEEK, and BARBARA ROGOFF. “Pathways Forward for Indigenous Language Reclamation: Engaging Indigenous Epistemology and Learning by Observing and Pitching in to Family and Community Endeavors.” *The Modern Language Journal* 104, no. 2 (2020): 481–93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12652>.

<sup>18</sup> Gutiérrez, K. D., & Vossoughi, S. (2010). Lifting Off the Ground to Return Anew: Mediated Praxis, Transformative Learning, and Social Design Experiments. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1–2), 100–117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347877>

<sup>19</sup> Leonard, W. Y. (2020). “Learning by Observing and Pitching In in the Context of Sleeping Language Reclamation.” *The Modern Language Journal* 104, 494–97. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12653>.



**Language experts can design translation materials to aid family and community members to communicate with one another as they accomplish everyday activities.<sup>20</sup>**

➔ **A project should be passing on useful skills and knowledge which the community can continue to use independently (computer skills, skills in language description and analysis, using and maintaining recording equipment, or applying for grants).**



#### **4. IMPLEMENT CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUES & AGREEMENTS**

The creation of cross-cultural dialogue and groups can also enhance the translation process. “Translation is not necessarily the exchange of words for others found in a dictionary but rather a dynamic cross-cultural event to negotiate meaning between culturally constructed concepts as envisioned by distinct individuals or ethnic groups. Translation requires the deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings across cultures to ensure accuracy of significance, rather than merely words.”<sup>21</sup> For organizations seeking materials in an Alaska Native language, this necessitates trust in the language experts and respect for their role as not just translators, but trusted voices and bearers of language, knowledge, and culture.

Translation work should spend equal effort translating Indigenous words into English. If only non-Indigenous language terms are translated then the value of Indigenous concepts and terms will be diminished in the process. For example, projects that involve using traditional place names while creating maps or geographical features prioritizes the use of Indigenous languages.<sup>22</sup> Creating glossaries of Indigenous terms for wildlife and plants can provide a rich level of detail, often not found with English alternatives. For example, the Yugtun term *aciirturet* (“the first group of king salmon running under the melt”) and *masseq* (“old salmon spawning”) show richer, more complex representations of the English word ‘salmon.’<sup>23</sup> Translation work is most powerful when Alaska Native languages and terms are implemented into policies that decolonize systems and provide material and cultural benefits for the Alaska Native peoples that create such terms.

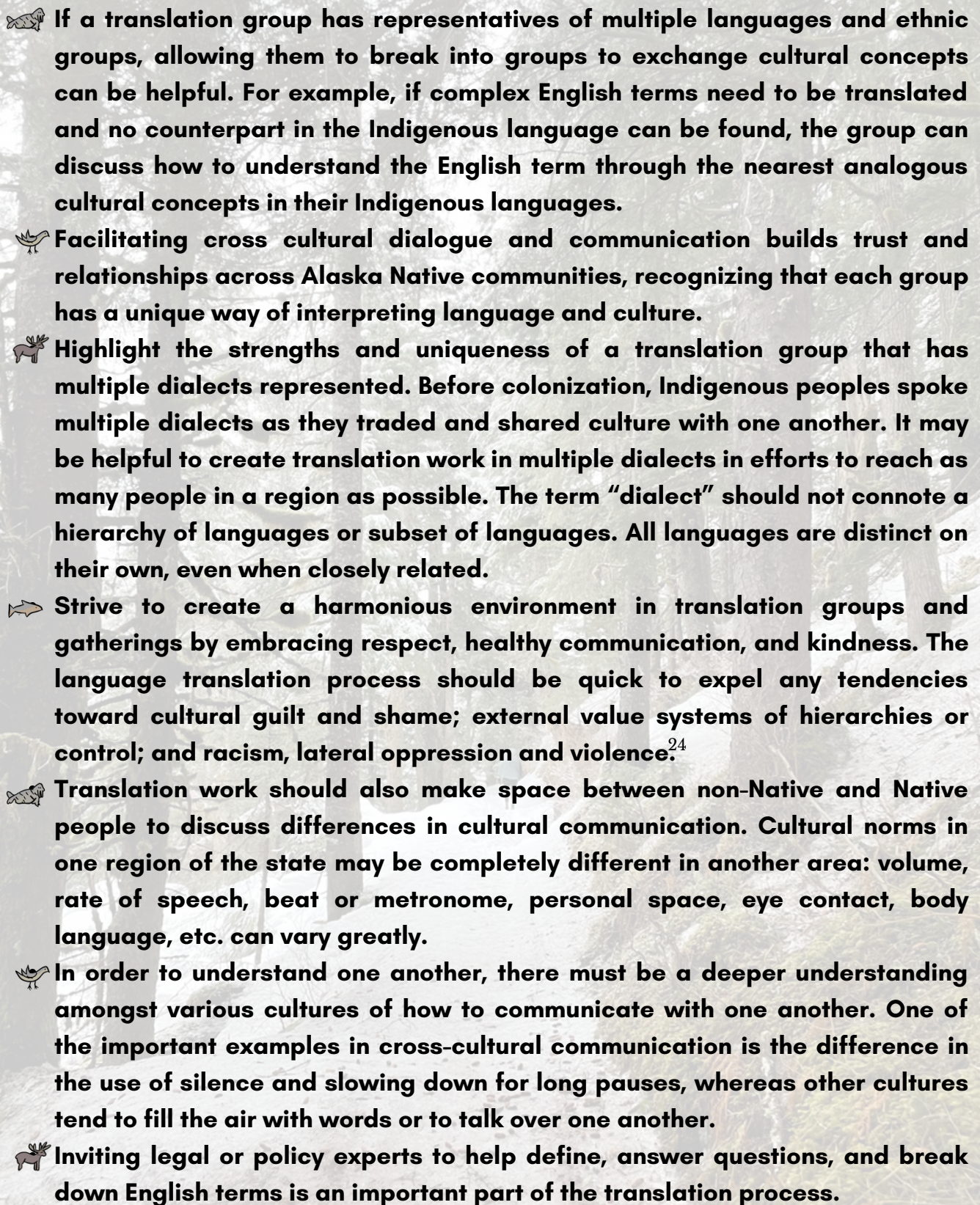







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<sup>20</sup> Bang, Megan, Ananda Marin, Doug Medin, and Karen Washinawatok (2015). “Learning by Observing, Pitching in, and Being in Relations in the Natural World.” In *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*, 49:303–13, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.acdb.2015.10.004>.

<sup>21</sup> Vermeer, H. J. (2004). Skopos and commission in translational action. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The translational study reader* (p.227–238). Oxon: Routledge.

<sup>22</sup> Gallagher, T.J. (1992): “Language, Native People, and Land Management in Alaska.” *Arctic* 45.2 (p.145–149). Web.

<sup>23</sup> Gallagher, T.J. (1992): “Language, Native People.” (p.145–149).

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-  If a translation group has representatives of multiple languages and ethnic groups, allowing them to break into groups to exchange cultural concepts can be helpful. For example, if complex English terms need to be translated and no counterpart in the Indigenous language can be found, the group can discuss how to understand the English term through the nearest analogous cultural concepts in their Indigenous languages.
  -  Facilitating cross cultural dialogue and communication builds trust and relationships across Alaska Native communities, recognizing that each group has a unique way of interpreting language and culture.
  -  Highlight the strengths and uniqueness of a translation group that has multiple dialects represented. Before colonization, Indigenous peoples spoke multiple dialects as they traded and shared culture with one another. It may be helpful to create translation work in multiple dialects in efforts to reach as many people in a region as possible. The term “dialect” should not connote a hierarchy of languages or subset of languages. All languages are distinct on their own, even when closely related.
  -  Strive to create a harmonious environment in translation groups and gatherings by embracing respect, healthy communication, and kindness. The language translation process should be quick to expel any tendencies toward cultural guilt and shame; external value systems of hierarchies or control; and racism, lateral oppression and violence.<sup>24</sup>
  -  Translation work should also make space between non-Native and Native people to discuss differences in cultural communication. Cultural norms in one region of the state may be completely different in another area: volume, rate of speech, beat or metronome, personal space, eye contact, body language, etc. can vary greatly.
  -  In order to understand one another, there must be a deeper understanding amongst various cultures of how to communicate with one another. One of the important examples in cross-cultural communication is the difference in the use of silence and slowing down for long pauses, whereas other cultures tend to fill the air with words or to talk over one another.
  -  Inviting legal or policy experts to help define, answer questions, and break down English terms is an important part of the translation process.

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<sup>24</sup> Twitchell, X.L. (2018). HAA DACHXÁNX'I SÁANI KAGÉIYI YÍS: HAA YOO X'ATÁNGI KEI NALTSEEN / FOR OUR LITTLE GRANDCHILDREN: LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AMONG THE TLINGIT. University of Hawai'i at Hilo, Hilo, HI.

➡ Working with translation panelists to outline agreements for how each participant would like to be treated will help provide a code of conduct throughout the gathering.



Here is an example of group agreements developed by the AKPIRG language panelists:

**Be respectful of different languages and dialects**

**WAIT: Why Am I Talking? Why Aren't I Talking?**

**Be respectful of learners**

**Silence your phones**

**Value humor**

**Take care of your needs**

**Speak clearly**

**Be mindful of noise level when in our groups**





**Sharing and look after each other**



## 5. INTEGRATE A CARE-FIRST APPROACH THAT RECOGNIZES THE GIFTS OF ELDERS AND YOUTH

The language translation process should enhance and strengthen the relationships within the Indigenous community and celebrate the connection to culture. Indigenous languages are representations of culture, and act more like a system of social representation and organization of thought rather than a system of only sounds or words.<sup>25</sup> These are living, breathing languages, containing relevant and historic knowledge. Several studies have shown that exposure to one's own culture and language helps to self-actualize and create a strong foundation for mental, physical, and community health.<sup>26</sup>

One of the most important Indigenous values is respect for Elders. Ensuring that Elders are cared for and encouraged to share their Indigenous knowledge throughout the translation process is critical. Acknowledging the history of language oppression in Alaska also requires translation facilitators to understand that working on language can be emotional and triggering. All efforts to make the translation process as smooth, cooperative, and healing as possible is important.

-  **Create space at the beginning of each gathering so Elders can provide a blessing and then later throughout breakout sessions to share general advice.**
-  **The wellbeing of the language experts should always be prioritized over meeting an end goal or deadline, if they ever come into conflict.**
-  **Airfare and travel arrangements for panelists and support companions should be covered by the translation organization as needed. Especially if the gathering cannot occur in the translators' home community. Companions can assist with childcare as needed. Elder translators might require assistance with physical needs during travel and throughout the translation gathering. Finding ways to strengthen intergenerational, family, and community connections to language is important.**
-  **Panels should also be multigenerational, and include both Elders and youth who may be learners. This is the natural method for transferring knowledge from one generation to the next. In our experience, Elders bring wisdom and grace, adults bring strength and determination, and the youth bring vibrancy and fresh ideas.**

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<sup>25</sup> Córdova Hernández, L. (2019). *Metáforas ecológicas, ideologías u política lingüística en la revitalización de lenguas indígenas*. (p.19). Oaxaca de Juárez, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma "Benito Juárez" de Oaxaca.

<sup>26</sup> Chandler, M.J., & Lalonde, C.E. (2008). Cultural Continuity as a Protective Factor Against Suicide in First Nations Youth.

➔ **When working with Elders especially, all efforts to streamline the technological process should be made. If special language keyboards or characters are needed, pairing Elders with a partner from a younger generation should be organized ahead of time.**

➔ **If Elders live in remote communities without access to computers, printers, or scanners, then translation facilitators should mail the translation materials in advance. When sending translation materials electronically or in print, ensure it is in a format that makes it as easy as possible for the translator to work from. Asking the translator's preference for word processing systems or print materials will allow them to focus the majority of their energy on the translation work itself.**











## **6. ENSURE ADEQUATE COMPENSATION, REASONABLE DEADLINES, AND CLEAR RESPONSIBILITIES ARE IN FORMAL WRITTEN AGREEMENTS**

Protocols are reinforced by formal written agreements. Although many Indigenous languages do not prioritize the written word over oral communication, it is still important to provide agreements in writing for language experts to be clear on, and reference as needed. For consultants, an agreement defines the expectations of the community, the compensation, and makes clear the role of the consultants in the project. It can empower communities to continue to publish language materials, since they can rely on the agreement, which outlines their control of the content and the use of works.

Assuming that each Indigenous language will require the same amount of time for the translation process belies the fact that each Indigenous language has experienced different forms of language oppression or reclamation. Some Indigenous languages

may not have an established writing system, while other languages may already have word glossaries for a specific topic.

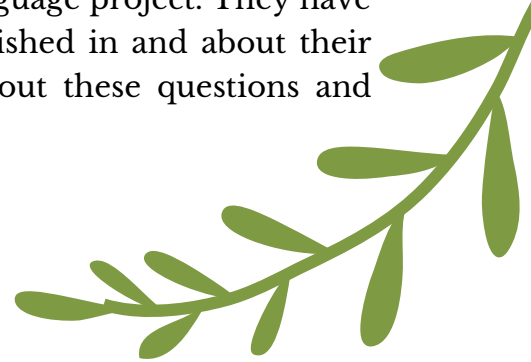
Asking for translations without compensation dismisses the incredible effort Indigenous translators have overcome to reclaim their language, and obscures the fact that they also need a way to support their own livelihoods. This is a continuing form of language oppression. Providing jobs for translators encourages youth to learn their language—it helps everyone see that the language has a future, and is valued. Paying translators uplifts Indigenous knowledge, learning, and values.

-  **Both parties must agree to develop written objectives. The person requesting the translation should always write down their shared understanding of the outcome, to be agreed upon by the language expert. Creating a written agreement honors the time of the knowledge holder.**
-  **The agreement must include adequate compensation. Translators should evaluate the content and request clarification of incomplete sentences or technical terminology, before committing to a deadline.**
-  **Compensation for translators should be for their time, not per word. Words in English will be translated differently depending on the language, so the number of words will vary for each language.**
-  **After a translation product is finalized, consider sharing it with an organization or individual outside of the original translation group for a "quality check". This will ensure that spelling, grammar, and cultural content is accurate within the wider community.**
-  **Ensure that Indigenous language translators are paid in a timely manner, within 7-10 business days after receipt of the final translation product.**
-  **The agreement must include reasonable deadlines. It's important to make sure that language work is not rushed. There should be time to pause for feedback, to circle back to ideas and concepts, and for moments of reflection.**
-  **"Agreeing on timelines to support full participation; ensuring that processes for providing input align with our seasons, priorities, and preferred ways of communicating."<sup>27</sup>**
-  **Including a survey or feedback system for the communities using the finalized translation material may help future translator groups anticipate how to improve the design of messaging or the facilitation of a translation project.**


## 7. INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES ARE THE OWNERS & CUSTODIANS OF THEIR LANGUAGES & CULTURES


Communities are the owners and custodians of their languages and cultures. They have the right to the greatest access to the best available cultural, linguistic, and educational resources for the reclamation of their languages.<sup>28</sup> They have the right to acquire as many skills as possible during the length of any language project. They have the right to be consulted about all aspects of materials published in and about their languages. Entering into dialogue with language experts about these questions and coming up with answers together is a good place to start:

- **Who should have ownership of audio/visual knowledge?**
- **How will the materials be used?**
- **How will the materials be cared for?**
- **Where should the materials be stored?**
- **Who should have access to the materials?**<sup>29</sup>



Building frameworks to strengthen the authority and legitimacy of Indigenous law is critical to ensure Indigenous control of and access to Indigenous knowledges and translations. Indigenous laws, contrasting with intellectual property law, are localized and contextual. They are born in specific locations and they are not necessarily transferable across communities. The most effective way to incorporate Indigenous laws and forms of governance for access and control of Indigenous knowledge or language translations is through agreements and protocols. These should be established by the Indigenous communities themselves.<sup>30</sup>

 **Arrange for copyright authority and royalties to be retained or shared by the person or community from which the cultural or linguistic information originated, and follow local protocols for its approval and distribution.**<sup>31</sup>

 **Indigenous contributors should be properly credited for their input into any language project or publication, by use of individual names and/or the language community as a whole. These names or communities must be placed in a prominent place in the publication.**<sup>32</sup>

 **Make it a practice to ensure that all cultural and language content has been**

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<sup>28</sup>Federation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL) Corporation. (2004) Community protocols for Indigenous language projects (p.5). Melbourne: FATSIL.

<sup>29</sup>Leonard, B. (2001). Documenting Indigenous Knowledge and languages: Research planning & protocol. Sharing Our Pathways. 6. (p.1-5).

<sup>30</sup>Anderson, J. (2010). Indigenous/traditional knowledge and intellectual property. *Duke University School of Law*. (p.33). [https://web.law.duke.edu/cspcd/pdf/ip\\_indigenous-traditionalknowledge.pdf](https://web.law.duke.edu/cspcd/pdf/ip_indigenous-traditionalknowledge.pdf)

<sup>31</sup>Alaska Native Knowledge Network (n.d.). Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge. Guidelines for respecting cultural knowledge. Retrieved October 1, 2022, from <http://ankn.uaf.edu/publications/knowledge.html>

<sup>32</sup>Federation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL) Corporation (2004) (p.5).

acquired under informed consent and has been reviewed for accuracy and appropriateness by knowledgeable local people representative of the culture in question.<sup>33</sup>

- 🐦 Ensure controlled access for sensitive cultural information that has not been explicitly authorized for general distribution.<sup>34</sup>
- 🦌 Language experts should always be made aware of, and have input in, what the translation or language materials will be used for and who will be disseminating them. They should also be told why the translation or language materials are important to the people or organization seeking it.<sup>35</sup>
- ➡ Be explicit in describing how all cultural knowledge and material has been acquired, authenticated, and utilized, and present any significant differing points of view that may exist.<sup>36</sup>
- 🐾 Make every effort to utilize the traditional names for people, places, items, etc., adhering to local conventions for spelling and pronunciation.<sup>37</sup>
- 🐦 Copies need to be freely available to the local or regional language and culture center or other relevant local community organization.<sup>38</sup>



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<sup>33</sup>Alaska Native Knowledge Network

<sup>34</sup>Alaska Native Knowledge Network

<sup>35</sup>Federation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL) Corporation (2004)

<sup>36</sup>Alaska Native Knowledge Network

<sup>37</sup>Alaska Native Knowledge Network

<sup>38</sup>Federation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL) Corporation (2004)



# CONCLUSION

The AKPIRG language team would like to thank all of the Alaska Native language panelists and translation experts that helped to create this document. By sharing these Alaska Native Language Translation Protocols, we hope to build a system that values the process of translation and language reclamation in a more holistic way. The honoring of Alaska Native lands, peoples, cultures, and governance systems must always be at the center of language translation work. Language is a living and breathing entity that is connected to generational knowledge and community wellness. By having a deep understanding of colonization and resistance in Alaska, we intend to rebuild relationships and systems that uplift and empower Alaska Native peoples and languages. Alaska Native languages are the birthright of future generations. We envision our Alaska Native languages to be available in all facets of our lives, with long-term emphasis on language curriculum and education guided by Indigenous knowledge systems. Since these protocols are dynamic, we welcome future collaboration and additions to our current protocol guide.





# ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGE TRANSLATION PROTOCOLS





*Annauk Olin Erin Willahan Rochelle Adams Veri di Suvero*

Language protocols are necessary to ensure reciprocal and equitable relationships between Indigenous translation experts and partners. While these protocols are not exhaustive, they capture some of the core tenets of our work.


 The foundation of an Indigenous worldview is an intimate relationship with localized space. Honor Alaska Native lands, peoples, languages, cultures, and governance systems within the translation process.


 Drawing on Indigenous self-determination and collective-decision making, Indigenous communities must actively lead and participate in every step of the language translation process: from the designing of translation content to the distribution of translation materials.


 Center Indigenous ways of knowing and learning language within the translation process.


 When facilitating translation panels, a culture of care and group agreements assist in creating a healthy environment. Translation panels should reflect community, family, elders, and youth.


- Decolonization resists the imposition of


 Euro-American values and knowledge systems that contribute to the systemic subjugation of Indigenous peoples.

 Careful attention must be applied to ensure that colonial knowledge systems and relationships are not replaying amongst Indigenous translators and partners.

 Language partners must include adequate compensation, reasonable deadlines, and clear responsibilities within written agreements.

 Indigenous language experts/communities should own and benefit from all translation work, and follow local protocols for approval and distribution.

 When facilitating translation panels, a culture of care and group agreements assist in creating a healthy environment.


 Translation work is most powerful when Indigenous languages and terms are implemented into policies that decolonize systems and provide material and cultural benefits for the Indigenous peoples that create such terms.


To see a full description of these protocols, contact


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Given the history of language oppression and colonization in the United States, it is important that partners of Indigenous language experts are held accountable for just and equitable actions. The following recommendations highlight some examples:


## DO:


 **DO** consult Tribal governments or language committees before hiring individual Indigenous language translators.


 **DO** invite Indigenous language experts to collaborate equally on messaging campaigns from the beginning of the project.


 **DO** include Indigenous people in the decision-making process used to publicize or distribute translation materials.

 **DO** include legal, policy, or medical experts who can help break down the meaning of legal, policy, and medical terms.


 **DO** ensure that funding is secured for translation of an entire document, or for selecting the most important points within.


 **DO** provide translation deadlines that give Indigenous translators adequate time to prepare, edit, or consult with other community members.


 **DO** make space for non-Indigenous and Indigenous people to discuss differences in cultural communication.


 **DO** ensure that all technological or word processing systems are set up for the most efficient work environment for Indigenous translators.


## DO NOT:


 **Do NOT** hire translators or a translation company that is not affiliated or acknowledged by a Tribal government whose language is being featured in a translation project.


 **Do NOT** disrespect Elders. Never interrupt or talk over an Elder—leave space for silence and deep listening.

 **Do NOT** assume that linguists or linguistic knowledge are superior to First language speakers or Indigenous knowledge.

 **Do NOT** document Indigenous languages and attempt to sell products back to the community.

 **Do NOT** assume that a concept in English has a “direct” translation in an Indigenous language.

 **Do NOT** simply request the translation of titles or cover pages of a document.

 **Do NOT** share cultural content without Tribal consent and the opportunity to be reviewed for accuracy and appropriateness by knowledgeable local people representative of the culture in question (Alaska Native Knowledge Network).