Working with a Translator

Prepare materials for translation

Be concise. Write simple, clear and formal sentences and phrases that are no longer than 15 to 20 words.

To avoid misunderstandings, avoid idioms, clichés, colloquial expressions and slang.

Cultural expressions might not be understood by other cultures.

Avoid using words that have more than one meaning or provide the translator with the meaning. Some WIC terms may need to be explained to the translator, such as when trying to describe miscarriage or the WIC Folder. Some words are both a verb and a noun. Provide a glossary of terms and begin developing a glossary of translated terms.

Using words and phrases consistently may be helpful to the reader. Include in the glossary, nutrition and health terms, specialized terms such as WIC Program terms and issues surrounding women, infants and children, rights and responsibilities, program sanctions.

Avoid abbreviations.

Formal names are not usually translated.

Avoid the use of punctuation marks that might be difficult to understand such as parentheses and hyphens.

Run the spell check in Microsoft Word.

Run the Grammar check in Microsoft Word to review the Readability Statistics. Review the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and make edits to try to bring the reading level lower, if necessary.

Be aware that many concepts you express have no linguistic equivalent in other languages. The translator may have to use explanatory phrases which may be longer than the original statements.

Working with the translator

Ask the translator to translate the document to a neutral, universal, simple and grammatically correct language. For example, in the case of Hispanic/Latino subgroups, the document should be understood by most subgroups.

Encourage the translator to alert you about potential cultural misunderstandings.

Ask the translator to ask for clarification or explain a concept.

After translation

A quality control check is using "back translation." by having a second translator translate the document back into English to review the meaning. This method is also useful for critical documents. Another check is to have a second translator review the work of the first translator.

Consider testing the document with participants who read the language. Ask if the document contains unintentional, inappropriate language, or insulting expressions. Community organizations may also review the document.

It is preferable to contract with the same translator or service for continuity of the terminology of the WIC Program used in documents.

Adapted from:
1. Work by Bruce Downing, PhD, and Robert Putsch, MD
2. The Center for Cross Cultural Health, Minneapolis, MN, in their publication, Six Steps Toward Cultural Competence: How to Meet the Health Care Needs of Immigrants and Refugees.