Mentoring Guidelines for Indigenous Translators and Interpreters

TRANSLATION COMMONS

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Introduction

This document is one in a series of guidelines entitled *Zero to Digital* addressing language digitization practices, authored by Translation Commons. For context, readers should first view the *Introduction to the Zero to Digital Guidelines* and other guidelines and resources on the Translation Commons website.

The *Mentoring Guidelines for Indigenous Translators and Interpreters* outlines a framework for building successful mentorship relationships.

1 Objectives

Professionals are encouraged to check for existing mentoring programs, though these can be scarce for Indigenous translators and interpreters. These guidelines support creating, managing, and documenting mentoring relationships based on individual needs, especially when no formal authority is available.

A 2015 Translation Commons survey of 547 global participants showed limited mentoring practices and low awareness of its benefits in the translation and interpretation (T&I) fields. Respondents wanted help choosing mentoring partners, gaining professional recognition and visibility, third-party support, trial periods, working globally, avoiding regional competition, business mentoring, role clarity, custom programs, and trust-building.

These guidelines encourage mentoring among Indigenous language translation and interpretation professionals by offering a framework for partnerships, agreements, and addressing recognition and compensation challenges in the mentor-mentee relationship (MMR). While the guidelines are comprehensive, not all of the recommendations are mandatory, and should be adapted as needed. Users are responsible for implementation; the authors are not liable for errors. The guide promotes clear, respectful, purposeful collaboration in a shifting technological landscape, emphasizing careful use of online resources.

The guidelines are designed to be adapted to each professional's language, culture, and community. Mentorship is especially valuable in freelance and community-based work. These guidelines support anyone starting, strengthening, or guiding a mentoring relationship, while honoring shared values and mutual respect.

This content is based on various association and academic mentoring programs, the International Coach Federation, the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, and ISO standards, with the aim to support effective mentoring, especially where formal associations are lacking.

2 About These Guidelines

2.1 Using these guidelines

Indigenous T&I professionals can establish mentoring programs, especially where none exist or a personalized approach is preferred. Follow the practical steps for finding partners, setting goals, managing progress, and resolving issues. Personalized programs and new peer-to-peer coaching models are encouraged.

2.2 Quality assurance

These guidelines apply the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act based on ISO 9001) principle to help individuals manage independent mentoring relationships. They include suggestions, references, and templates for evaluating progress. It's important to monitor partnerships and set clear, achievable goals with timelines—such as increasing industry knowledge or improving skills. Both parties should remain positive and committed. Much of the relationship's value lies in affirmation and confidence-building through learning complex skills.

3 Planning the Mentor-Mentee Relationship

Mentoring is a non-employment relationship centered on learning and professional growth. Mentors provide guidance without offering jobs or references. Mentees gain a safe space to explore the T&I field. The experience benefits both parties and supports the growth of the profession.

3.1 Reasons to build an MMR

Mentoring is crucial for Indigenous translators and interpreters, as formal programs often lack culturally relevant, practical skills in business, ethics, and project management. Many Indigenous languages lack standardized writing systems and proficiency tests, and Indigenous language translators and interpreters may have limited formal education or training specific to translation and interpretation. This can leave new professionals vulnerable to exploitative conditions, such as low pay and unrealistic deadlines. Mentorship bridges these gaps by fostering ethical practices and confidence. Mentors refine skills, build networks, and promote a fairer industry, while mentees gain experience, avoid pitfalls, improve quality, build credibility,

and become future mentors—strengthening the Indigenous T&I community through collaboration and cultural integrity.

3.2 Participant qualifications

A mentor in T&I is an experienced professional (freelancer, agency employee, teacher, or expert in a related field, regardless of language pairs) who helps translators and interpreters—new or experienced—develop skills in areas like CAT tools, terminology management, marketing, communication, and branding. However, mentorship doesn't require decades of experience—newer professionals can guide others in tools or technologies.

A mentee is someone seeking guidance to start a career (e.g., a recent graduate or student) or an existing professional looking to specialize, learn new tools or practices, enter a new market, or gain technical knowledge.

3.3 Setting up a mentoring relationship

Mentoring relationships in Indigenous T&I should be tailored to the needs of both mentor and mentee. Aspiring Indigenous T&I professionals should start within their communities to find mentors. Elders, experienced translators, and language keepers offer cultural and linguistic insight. Language revitalization programs, cultural organizations, and T&I associations can facilitate mentorship or connect individuals to opportunities. Mentees can benefit from workshops and online forums. They may also find mentors through these networks. While mentors who work with the same language are ideal, those from other language groups can still offer valuable guidance on broader T&I practices, ethics, and career development.

3.4 Expectation management and motivation

Mentoring programs should have clear, realistic goals. Mentors need the time and skills to support mentees, and mentee goals should match their current abilities. Regular check-ins and goal adjustments are key to success. To avoid demotivation, sessions should be well-structured, flexible, engaging, and include constructive feedback. Highlighting long-term benefits keeps both parties motivated. If motivation drops, revisit goals, feedback, communication, and progress. If needed, a third party can help resolve issues and reignite momentum.

3.5 Logistics

At the start of a mentorship, mentors and mentees should agree on key logistics:

- **Duration**: a few weeks, months, or longer—whatever suits both parties.
- **Meeting frequency**: from monthly to more frequent at first, tapering off as the mentee gains confidence.

- **Format**: in-person, online, or a mix. Online tools can enable easy communication and even allow session recording.

They should also decide how to communicate—scheduled calls, email updates, shared documents, group chats, or forums all support learning. Communication methods should be agreed upon early and kept consistent. Mentoring takes time and effort, so both parties should discuss possible challenges. If either the mentor or mentee becomes unavailable, the mentorship may be paused. If the mentor becomes unavailable, bringing in a co-mentor or seeking peer support are options.

Compensation should be addressed openly. Some mentorships are unpaid, while others may include compensation for training, reviewing work, or admin tasks. In some cases, mentees may be paid for contributing to mentor projects, or funding may come from a sponsor. Arrangements should be flexible and evolve as needed. Clear agreements regarding time, communication, and compensation help ensure a respectful, effective, and sustainable mentorship for both Indigenous mentors and mentees.

3.6 Assessing abilities and skills

Before beginning a mentoring program, mentors and mentees should conduct self-assessments and exchange information to ensure a good fit, and identify focus areas. Mentors should outline their skills, experience, technical abilities, mentoring background, personality, work ethic, availability, and coaching style. Mentees should share resumes highlighting studies, work experience, technical skills, affiliations, prior mentoring, personality, work ethic, availability, and learning preferences. Mentors may also assess mentees through discussions, tests, or work samples to identify development needs and confirm their ability to guide mentees toward their goals, ensuring mutual confidence in continuing the mentorship.

3.7 Mentoring team

A mentoring relationship can involve one mentor or several, depending on the needs of the mentee and the availability of the mentor. If one experienced mentor is able to cover all relevant topics, they can guide the mentee on their own. However, if the mentor needs to step away or lacks expertise in certain areas, a colleague may step in to help with specific tasks like revisions or sharing learning materials. When multiple mentors are involved, it's important to clearly define each person's role and schedule to avoid confusion. Some may work alongside each other, while others might take turns guiding the mentee. The key is open communication and careful planning to keep the program focused and manageable.

Similarly, a mentor may choose to work with more than one mentee at a time. This can allow mentees to collaborate and share resources like glossaries, style guides, or project templates. Working together under supervision, mentees can co-create materials or divide project roles—for example, one translating, another revising, and another handling formatting. Group

projects not only build teamwork but also mirror real-world translation and interpretation workflows.

To support collaboration, a mentor might create a private space such as an online forum where mentees can exchange ideas, ask questions, and share experiences from their mentoring journeys. This space can also serve as a shared hub for useful materials. With good organization and clear guidance, mentoring teams—whether large or small—can provide a rich, supportive environment for Indigenous language professionals to grow and thrive.

3.8 Synergy between mentors and mentees

A successful mentoring relationship requires shared goals, clear communication, and defined roles and boundaries, with mentors guiding and mentees following. Humility and honesty help avoid conflict. Recognizing achievements can encourage teamwork.

3.8.1 Avoiding conflicts

Conflicts in mentoring can arise from unclear roles, miscommunication, mentees hesitating to ask questions, mismatched expectations, and conflicting views. To avoid these, both mentors and mentees should openly discuss expectations and responsibilities at the program's start, document agreements, maintain proactive communication, and establish dedicated times for questions. Mentees should be honest about their skills, and mentors should acknowledge their limitations and suggest alternative resources when necessary. Addressing potential conflicts through open and honest dialogue about needs and expectations is crucial for a positive mentoring experience.

3.8.2 Competition

Competition in mentoring refers to the potential rivalry between mentors and mentees, where mentees may use what they learn to compete with mentors, or mentors may use mentees' work to grow their business. In small communities, this competition can be especially difficult to avoid, as relationships and client bases are often shared and interconnected. To safeguard against this, mentors and mentees might sign a non-compete agreement. This contract ensures that neither party will directly compete by using sensitive business information, such as client lists or trade secrets. It may include time and geographic limitations to make it enforceable.

However, non-compete agreements can restrict future work opportunities for mentees. It is important for mentees to understand the terms and consider how the agreement could impact their career. In cases where a non-compete is not appropriate, a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) could be used instead to protect sensitive materials like texts, glossaries, and client information. This approach helps maintain trust and protects the integrity of the business relationship between mentors and mentees, especially in smaller communities where competition is harder to avoid.

4 Focus Areas

4.1 Translator role

Translation focuses on converting written content into a target language.

4.1.1 Translation Clients

Translators serve institutional clients (governments, UN, EU), private companies (local/global businesses in education, healthcare, legal sectors), NGOs/non-profits (e.g., Red Cross, Greenpeace), and individuals needing personal documents like CVs or letters. Indigenous translators often work within their communities translating legal, educational, and medical documents.

4.1.2 Translation work

4.1.2.1 Fields of expertise

Main translation fields include general, literary, technical, scientific, medical, legal, business, finance, marketing, tourism, sports, and religion. Indigenous translators typically work with legal, medical, educational, and general documents.

4.1.2.2 Project categories

Indigenous translators may work in support of language preservation, cultural projects, or community needs. Specializations reflect local contexts and may involve elders or cultural experts. Projects often require training and collaboration to ensure accuracy and cultural respect. Common projects include documenting oral histories, adapting software and websites, and localizing multimedia like stories, interviews, and educational materials. It can also be needed in bringing outside content such as emergency, health, and regulatory, and other information to the Indigenous community.

4.1.2.3 Linguistic tasks

Translators often handle tasks beyond translation that mentors can help with. Revision checks accuracy, style, and errors against the source text. Review focuses on fluency and suitability of the target text. Proofreading is the final check for remaining mistakes. Other tasks include subtitling, voice-over, transcreation, terminology research, using CAT tools, localization, quality assurance (QA), and post-editing machine translation.

4.1.3 Translator Skills

A skilled translator is fluent in both languages, understands both the source and target culture, and has strong writing skills. Aspiring translators should master techniques like equivalence and paraphrasing, understand cultural nuances, apply creativity, and research accurate terminology and information.

4.1.4 Translator tools

Modern translation relies on digital tools to manage and improve quality. Mentorship is a chance to exchange knowledge—senior professionals share experience, while newer translators introduce useful technologies. Key tools include CAT (Computer-Assisted Translation) tools, which segment text, store translations, and maintain consistency. Although CAT tools often require large bilingual datasets and may not fully support Indigenous languages, learning the basics is still valuable, especially for multilingual projects. CAT tools offer features like project setup, glossary management, translation memory, and file review. They are not perfect; formatting issues and culturally sensitive content may require human judgment. Translators should always prioritize clarity, meaning, and cultural accuracy.

Terminology tools (for example, bilingual glossaries, online dictionaries, and corpora) help the translator understand language in context. Mentors can teach mentees how to build personal glossaries and reference databases, which are especially helpful with under-resourced Indigenous languages. Some translators may also benefit from learning other software for formatting, managing multimedia, or working with websites. The goal isn't to master every tool, but to be comfortable with those that support quality, efficiency, and professionalism.

4.2 Interpreter role

Interpretation focuses on verbally converting spoken content in real time into a target language. The circumstances may require audio equipment and sound-insulated booths. This section covers interpreting modes, key skills, work settings, preparation strategies, equipment, and mentoring advice.

4.2.1 Modes of interpreting

Interpreting has three modes: **Simultaneous/Whispered**, **Consecutive**, and **Sight Translation**.

- **Simultaneous interpreting** involves listening and interpreting at the same time, in other words speaking in the target language while listening to source content in real time. It is often used in situations where it is not appropriate or feasible to stop the flow of speech, for example in hospitals, social services, and schools. It is especially challenging due to limited chances for clarification.

- **Whispered interpreting** is similar to simultaneous interpreting, but without equipment, and is done by whispering into the listener's ear. This is commonly used in community, business, or healthcare settings. Background noise can make it challenging. Both simultaneous and whispering interpreting are ideally done in pairs to reduce fatigue.

- **Consecutive interpreting**, most common among Indigenous interpreters, involves listening and then interpreting after the speaker pauses. It is used in conversations,

interviews, and formal settings like court or medical appointments. This mode relies on memory, note-taking, and smooth turn-taking. Clarification may or may not be possible.

- **Sight translation** involves reading a document and translating it aloud. This is used for short texts like medical forms or school records. As not all terms exist in Indigenous languages, interpreters may have the provider explain the document first, then interpret the explanation.

Mentorship helps build skills in all modes. Mentors and mentees can create personalized training plans using memory exercises, recordings, and drills. Reviewing recordings, analyzing discourse, and observing professionals provide insight. Mentors should give feedback, share best practices, and help mentees adapt to different contexts and community needs.

4.2.2 Interpretation settings

While interpreting is often linked to high-profile events, most Indigenous interpreters work in community settings like hospitals, schools, social services, and courts. Topics are often medical or legal, and modes may vary depending on the situation. Community interpreters usually work directly with clients and providers and often have flexibility to ask questions for accuracy.

Conference interpreting, typically at formal events, requires specialized equipment and advanced simultaneous interpreting skills. It often demands certification and the ability to work under pressure. While some Indigenous interpreters may pursue conference interpreting, community interpreting remains the most common and vital.

Mentorship should include shadowing professionals in different settings, even if the mentee doesn't interpret. Observation and keeping a log help mentees reflect on environments, identify preferences, and understand the skills needed for specific settings like court or healthcare.

4.2.3 Interpretation skills

Interpreters need a mix of language, technical, and interpersonal skills: bilingual fluency, memory, listening and reading comprehension, and the ability to stay calm under pressure. Each mode requires specific techniques, such as note-taking or rapid mental processing. Equally important are interpersonal qualities like adaptability, empathy, and cultural sensitivity—especially for Indigenous interpreters working in community settings. Building trust and showing respect across social and cultural contexts is essential.

Mentors help develop these skills by recommending resources, providing feedback, and guiding both technical and interpersonal growth. Where available, they can support mentees exploring certifications or formal training. Encouraging mentees to connect with peers and professionals also builds practical knowledge and confidence.

4.2.4 Preparing for the assignment

Since interpreting happens in real time, preparation is essential. Interpreters should research the topic, setting, and participants, review available documents, and bring tools like glossaries or laptops. During the session, they may use visual aids or ask for clarification if needed. Ongoing language practice and staying updated on current events support long-term growth. Preparation should match the mentee's skills and preferred settings. Mentors can suggest areas of specialization, recommend resources, and share tips for handling assignments confidently.

4.2.5 Equipment

Equipment use varies. Community interpreters may use wireless systems or recording tools in legal contexts. Interpreters must explain equipment use and get consent. Consecutive interpreting usually just needs a notepad, though audio equipment may be required. Interpreters should be aware of how their presence and tools affect the session, and be prepared to work with various technologies or step out if needed. Mentors can guide mentees on equipment use, explaining its purpose, researching standards, and gaining practical experience. Peer learning also helps build confidence and proficiency.

4.3 Client and agency communication

Mentors should help mentees understand the different types of clients: individuals, organizations, and agencies. Each client varies in background, experience, and communication style, so interpreters must learn to adapt.

Working with agencies differs from working with end-clients. Agencies usually have project managers familiar with translation processes, tools, and quality control, while end-clients may need guidance. Interpreters should communicate clearly and explain what is needed for a successful project—such as materials, planned steps (preparation, translation, revision), possible deliverables (e.g., file formats), and timelines. This builds trust and strengthens the interpreter-client relationship.

4.4 Business best practices

Indigenous interpreters who freelance are essentially small business owners. Mentees should understand their legal, financial, and practical responsibilities. This includes knowing local laws, registering services, obtaining tax IDs, and consulting tax professionals.

A good insurance policy covering any incident that might occur is important because a mistranslation or even a typo, for example, could cause damage to clients.

Marketing is key to growing a freelance practice. Mentees can network at local events, use social media, join professional groups, or create a simple website. Business cards, mailing lists,

and word-of-mouth also help build visibility. Knowing how to work with different clients and communicating clearly and professionally is crucial.

Project management skills support freelance success. Mentees should learn to evaluate requests, provide quotes, agree on timelines, and manage multiple assignments. Setting fair rates is important and should reflect job complexity, format, client type, and experience. Creating a pricing guide, offering loyalty discounts, and charging appropriately for rush jobs are useful strategies.

Mentees should also learn to use task management tools for scheduling, invoicing, and bookkeeping. Understanding payment methods and taxes—especially for international work—is important. In cases of late payment, interpreters should keep records and communicate clearly. Legal action is a last resort due to cost and time. Strong business skills help interpreters grow with professionalism, confidence, and financial stability.

4.5 Professional values

Professional values in translation and interpreting, guided by associations and regulations, emphasize accuracy and impartiality, as seen in codes of ethics (integrity, professionalism, confidentiality) and professional standards (contracts, conditions, payment). Public service and community interpreting, including medical and court settings, also prioritize these values. Other key values include confidentiality, accurate representation of qualifications, and continuous professional development. Mentees should explore relevant codes of ethics and discuss important issues like advocacy and certification (for interpreting) and certification and payment (for translation). Mentors should encourage participation in professional forums and joining associations for ethical guidance and networking.

4.6 Expanding opportunities

To expand their services or meet client needs, Indigenous T&I professionals may benefit from mentoring in additional tasks. These include language-related work such as building bilingual glossaries, style guides, or post-editing machine translation, which requires both language and tech skills. Mentees might also explore Linguistic Quality Assessment (LQA) and Linguistic Sign-Off (LSO).

On the technical side, mentees could be introduced to Desktop Publishing (DTP), compilation, testing, debugging, and quality assurance (QA). Gaining experience in these areas opens new opportunities, especially for those working with clients needing broader language support.

5 Implementation and Operation

5.1 Mentoring Resources

Mentors and mentees should work together to select and adapt materials that align with the mentee's goals and language pair(s), with the flexibility to adjust these resources as the mentorship progresses.

For translation, materials should help the mentee develop key skills such as identifying text type and context, analyzing grammar and vocabulary, and accurately conveying meaning, tone, and style. Practice texts may include real or adapted materials such as birth certificates, datasheets, newspaper articles, official letters or documents, literary excerpts, or field-specific documents in areas like health, education, law, or cultural preservation. It is important to include materials rooted in Indigenous contexts such as oral histories, traditional stories, or documents reflecting community values, ensuring cultural integrity and accuracy are maintained throughout.

For interpreting, mentees should practice whispered, consecutive, and simultaneous techniques using speeches or audio materials from online platforms, films, radio, or live events. Resources like the European Commission's Speech Repository and free archives can be useful, alongside community-based content such as recordings of meetings, ceremonies, or storytelling sessions. When possible, mentees may also benefit from observing experienced interpreters.

All resources should be relevant, culturally appropriate, and supportive of the mentee's learning path, especially considering the unique linguistic and cultural responsibilities involved in Indigenous language work.

5.1.1 Administrative and business practice resources

Understanding the administrative and business side is vital: legal obligations, bookkeeping (using manuals, templates, courses, or mentor-provided materials), and navigating contracts with agencies or clients, including limitations, policies, and legislation. Mentees should also learn to use trade associations for job-related support and benefit from mentors' marketing insights for self-promotion and client acquisition.

5.1.2 Software tools

Translators and interpreters should learn digital tools that support professional work. Translators use CAT tools (free and paid) and cloud or desktop software for terminology, translation memory, and project tracking. Interpreters use tools for terminology, document management, and booth work. Glossary creation and management are essential, especially for interpreting or technical terms. Glossaries should be organized and accessible via databases or software. Style guides—client-specific or industry-based—ensure consistency. For Indigenous work, software may need adaptations for local languages, oral traditions, and community formats. Mentors should help mentees explore tools that meet professional and cultural needs.

5.1.3 Internet resources

The internet offers abundant resources that are useful to translators and interpreters. This includes linguistic information, for example glossaries, dictionaries, grammar and style guides as well as business information including project management, marketing, customer relations, and other topics. The internet also provides software tools and platforms useful for connecting with clients, and operating a translation business.

The mentoring program can include recommendations for taking advantage of relevant online resources. This can be important for individuals that are not experienced internet users. An additional consideration is that not everyone has easy access to the internet. In that circumstance, suggestions for free or low-cost internet access can be helpful. Examples include certain public spaces (libraries, coffee shops, community and shopping centers) and government-sponsored or other programs that provide low-cost internet access.

5.2 Evaluation

Mentors and mentees should establish a shared evaluation system at the start, including a clear error categorization framework to track progress. This ranks errors by severity, from major (e.g., inaccuracies) to minor (e.g., grammar, style). Mentors can provide feedback by referencing error types or offering summaries. Progress may also be assessed via points or pass/fail systems. Feedback during meetings supports in-depth discussions and helps mentees learn from and correct errors, allowing continuous refinement of the evaluation process.

5.3 Roles and responsibilities

Mentors serve as guides, teachers, supporters, protectors, and role models. They share knowledge, create a safe space, encourage growth, and lead through respectful behavior. They should arrive prepared, review notes, bring materials, share experiences, and give honest feedback. Mentees play an active role: arriving on time, prepared, and completing tasks. They should take initiative, ask questions, take notes, and follow through. A strong mentoring relationship requires respect, engagement, and accountability for growth.

5.4 Record keeping

Organized documentation supports mentoring programs. This includes timesheets, schedules, meeting notes, templates, legal documents, and joint project files (glossaries, TMs, source/target texts). Mentors and mentees should agree on secure, accessible (preferably cloud-based) storage and a clear directory structure. How long documents are kept, whether they can be reused, and who has access to them, should be defined.

6 Tracking Progress

Mentors and mentees should define goals, a timeline, and a communication plan, along with methods to track progress and evaluate the mentorship's effectiveness. Tools are needed to assess outcomes.

6.1 Establishing goals

At the program's start, create a shared, trackable list of specific, achievable goals (e.g., mastering a style or reducing verbal tics). Mentors can track progress by marking completed goals and adjusting the approach as needed. This list helps evaluate mentorship effectiveness, prevent disengagement, and guide necessary changes.

6.2 Timetable and communications

Mentors and mentees should agree on a timetable and communication plan at the start of the MMR. This will outline how and when they will meet (e.g., face-to-face, by phone, or via video call on platforms like Zoom or Google Meet), deadlines, and when feedback will be discussed. To help track progress, a simple chart or checklist can be created that includes meeting dates and work completed—such as number of words translated, minutes of interpreting or subtitling completed, or other relevant outputs. Color coding or simple notes (e.g., green for on track, red for delayed) can help assess whether the plan is being followed. If multiple meetings are missed or work is not progressing, this may signal issues such as lack of support or commitment. Before the mentorship breaks down, both parties should communicate openly about the challenges and consider revising the schedule, adjusting expectations, or changing the communication method. This kind of flexibility can help keep the mentorship effective and supportive.

Mentees should feel comfortable seeking mentor advice, and mentors should proactively engage in their development, monitoring communication frequency as an indicator of openness. Timely mentor responses to questions are crucial to avoid mentee stagnation between meetings; the communication plan should be reviewed if contact is lacking. The volume of emails can suggest the health of the relationship, though low volume isn't always negative. Regular discussions about the mentoring process are beneficial for identifying and addressing issues, potentially leading to adjustments in schedule, tasks, or the need for individual practice. Effective communication, through various channels, fosters trust and knowledge sharing. Documenting challenges and solutions, even privately, can aid progress and inform future mentoring experiences.

7 Appendices

APPENDIX A - Template for your mentoring program

Open the Excel file named **Mentoring_Template_ITI** as an MS Excel Spreadsheet or as a PDF, in this folder <link>. This template covers all parts mentioned in these guidelines with spaces to fill out, checkboxes, and buttons. You can reduce or expand it as needed.

APPENDIX B - Glossary

Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tool: Computer software that aids with translation or interpretation and may include features like translation memories, spelling and grammar checkers, terminology tools, and corpus tools.

Corpus [pl. corpora]: A large collection of written and spoken texts used for linguistic analysis using specialized software, often accessible via online search tools.

Freelancer: A self-employed person who sells their work by the hour, day, or job completed.

Glossary: An alphabetical list of terms and their definitions in a particular area of knowledge, which can be in one or multiple languages.

Localization: Changing a product or content to match the culture and language of a market.

Machine translation: Software that translates texts based on language rules and statistics.

Mentee: A person who is advised, trained, or counseled by a mentor.

Mentor: A person who provides advice or training to a mentee and usually has more experience and knowledge in a specialized field.

Mentoring program: A program that brings together mentors and mentees to carry out a previously defined action plan.

Mentor-Mentee Relationship (MMR): A partnership established between mentors and mentees to work on achieving personal or professional goals.

Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA): A legal contract between two or more people who want to share information while keeping it confidential from third parties.

Peer-to-peer mentoring: A relationship established between two people who have the same level of knowledge and expertise to exchange information and share experiences.

Style guide: A document establishing grammar, tone, punctuation, spelling, and format rules that are specific to an organization.

Terminology tool: Tools that help manage language terms and create searchable databases of validated terms.

Translation industry: Business activity in the translation field.

Translation memory: A database that stores previously translated texts

ACRONYMS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

CAT: Computer-Assisted Translation
LDI: Translation Commons Language Digitization Initiative
MMR: Mentor-Mentee Relationship
T&I: Translation and Interpreting

Acknowledgements

This guideline is developed through Translation Commons' Language Digitization Initiative — an effort aligned with UNESCO's International Decade of Indigenous Languages. These resources aim to empower Indigenous and minority language communities to bring their languages online.

If your community would like assistance with digitizing your language, contact krista@translationcommons.org or visit TranslationCommons.org.

Translation Commons thanks its many volunteers who contributed their expertise and significant time to produce this guideline. TC may update this document at any time without notice and is not liable for any related damages. Feedback is welcome and helps improve the guidelines.

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Feedback

This document is a work in progress, with Translation Commons relying on community contributions for completion. It will be regularly updated as an open-source resource. Feedback

and suggestions for improvement are encouraged and can be sent to krista@translationcommons.org.

Translation Commons

The inability to use one's language on digital systems profoundly impacts access to information, participation in civic life, and the ability to represent one's identity, values, and perspectives. It limits community consensus-building, especially across diasporas, and creates barriers to contributing to global knowledge or engaging in policy decisions that affect community well-being. This digital exclusion also increases the risk of cultural misrepresentation or appropriation.

In response to this critical need, Translation Commons launched the *Language Digitization Initiative (LDI)*, a flagship program designed to support language communities in bringing their languages online. This initiative was developed in alignment with UNESCO's International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022–2032), which emphasizes the importance of preserving and promoting linguistic diversity and digital inclusion for all cultures.

Translation Commons is a nonprofit, volunteer-based community of language professionals committed to supporting language digitization, mentoring language practitioners, and creating open-access resources and tools for the global language industries. Our interdisciplinary network includes linguists, translators, interpreters, educators, technologists, students, terminologists, and localization experts—working together to empower communities and support equitable digital access.

At the heart of the LDI is the Zero to Digital series—a comprehensive and practical collection of step-by-step guidelines developed by experts in linguistics, digital accessibility, and language technology. These guidelines support every stage of the digitization process, from gathering linguistic data and managing terminology to implementing language support in digital systems. They are not prescriptive, but adaptable to a community's specific goals, capacity, and resources. Throughout the series, the emphasis remains on data sovereignty, cultural ownership, sustainability, and informed decision-making.

The guidelines are intended for a wide audience, including indigenous language advocates and speakers, researchers, academics, government agencies and NGOs, technology developers, and language professionals.

Digitization enables communities to create localized software, expand native-language content and educational resources, and preserve traditional knowledge for future generations. It fosters language visibility, supports intergenerational transmission, and facilitates meaningful participation in the digital age. Beyond the technical, digitization is a powerful act of cultural empowerment and resilience.

Whether your community is beginning its digitization journey or building upon established work, we hope these resources serve as a trusted foundation. Translation Commons also offers workshops, tutorials, and expert collaboration to demystify complex processes and make digital participation more achievable for all. For additional materials, including the full *Zero to Digital* series, case studies, videos, and presentations, please visit the Translation Commons website.