

INTERPRETING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH HEARING LOSS

Individuals with hearing loss are as diverse as any other segment of our population. They are representative of a wide variety of educational and intellectual levels, socioeconomic backgrounds, cultures and experiences. The only thing they all share in common is the inability to hear and understand spoken words under certain circumstances.

Those born deaf usually refer to themselves as “Deaf,” not hearing-impaired, and never deaf-mute or deaf-dumb. The majority of these individuals prefer to use sign language and most often do not choose to speak orally for themselves. English is acquired as a second language for these individuals; some are fluent in written English, but many are not. They tend to use note writing only for very specific and very brief communication. Because only thirty percent of English is visible on the lips, it is also incorrect to assume that deaf people can lip-read well. In view of these facts, these individuals will often request the services of a sign language interpreter to help facilitate effective communication. Because different deaf people prefer different systems of sign communication, it is best to secure a professional, qualified interpreter able to adapt to these different systems.

A minority of individuals born deaf, as well as some late deafened and hard-of-hearing individuals, do not choose to communicate with sign language. Some may prefer lip reading and speaking for themselves. Others may prefer to use a professional oral interpreter, who is an interpreter trained to relay and restate information in the manner most effective for lip reading. Some may choose computer aided real-time (CART) captioning, which uses typed English for communication. It is best to determine each individual’s preferred mode of communication and to seek advice from the individual about service provisions.

WHO IS/IS NOT A QUALIFIED INTERPRETER

Who is not a qualified interpreter?

Initially it is often helpful for an agency to understand, generally, who is **not** a qualified interpreter. Utilizing the individuals listed below as interpreters will not ensure confidentiality, impartiality, or accuracy. This can lead to misunderstanding and mistakes. Furthermore, the use of a person who is an unqualified “interpreter” may lead to undesirable legal, medical or educational consequences.

- ⊗ Family members, including hearing children of deaf parents
- ⊗ Friends
- ⊗ Co-workers
- ⊗ Other hearing people who have learned some “sign” or fingerspelling. These individuals are known as “signers.” A signer is a person who has acquired or is acquiring skills in sign sufficient to enable her/him to communicate with deaf persons. He/she has had no training to understand the role of the interpreter or to practice the [*NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct*](#).

Who is a qualified interpreter?

An “interpreter” is one who has been trained in an interpreter-training program and/or is certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) or the National Association of the Deaf (NAD). The task of interpreting is not a simple one. It takes years of learning and understanding the language, culture, and procedures for dealing with the various situations encountered while interpreting. Professional judgement, skill, English language competency and ethics are all critical aspects learned over time.

The interpreter is a professional who is fluent in sign language and knowledgeable in the different sign systems or modes of communication used by persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, as well as the interpreting process itself. Many of these interpreters are certified by an established recognized national or state professional agency, or organization such as RID or NAD. As such, they adhere to a professional code of conduct ensuring confidentiality, impartiality, and accuracy to the best of their ability in both the intent and content of the message.

In layman’s terms, a qualified interpreter can accurately voice what a person who is deaf or hard of hearing is signing, and correctly sign to the person who is deaf or hard of hearing what the hearing individual is saying, at normal conversational rates. They are able to make adjustments for language levels and to bridge cultural differences between hearing and deaf people.

Some persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing may prefer to use oral interpreters. In this instance, the deaf or hard-of-hearing person “reads the lips” of the oral interpreter who is specially trained to relay and restate information in the easiest manner for lip reading, adding only natural gestures and facial expressions, not signs, to enhance effective communication.

The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) requires that public accommodations, as well as local and state governments, make available appropriate auxiliary aids and services where necessary to ensure effective communication. The type of auxiliary aid or service necessary to ensure effective communication will vary in accordance with the length and complexity of the communication involved. Agencies, businesses, and service providers should consult with deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals whenever possible to determine what type of auxiliary aid is needed to ensure effective communication. The most commonly used auxiliary aid for a deaf individual is a qualified interpreter.

TIPS FOR USING AN INTERPRETER

- ◆ Any questions regarding the interpreting process or clarification of the interpreter's role and function should be asked of the interpreter prior to the assignment.
- ◆ Provide the interpreter with any written or media materials that will be used in the meeting prior to the time of the meeting. Clarify any terminology and acronyms specific to the situation.
- ◆ The interpreter may want to meet with you a few minutes prior to the beginning of the interpreting session to obtain information necessary for the meeting and/or to make last minute arrangements and adjustments.
- ◆ Allow the interpreter and the deaf individual to advise you regarding the most beneficial seating arrangements, lighting accommodations, etc.
- ◆ The interpreter may also want an opportunity to chat briefly with the deaf or hard-of-hearing person to determine the individual's communication needs.
- ◆ Check with the interpreter regarding any special needs, for example lighting, an appropriate chair, and break times. Interpreting can be very fatiguing and, depending on the situation and the interpreter, a break may be needed after sixty minutes of interpreting. This break also helps the deaf and/or hard-of-hearing individual from becoming fatigued, which allows them to maintain their focus. If the assignment is two hours or longer, two interpreters may be needed. The interpreters will switch off approximately every twenty minutes to ensure accuracy and to overcome fatigue.
- ◆ Always observe "turn taking" in a group situation. The interpreter can only interpret one speaker at a time.
- ◆ The interpreter may occasionally need to stop a speaker and ask for clarification. This is to help ensure the accuracy of the interpretation.
- ◆ Speak directly to the deaf or hard-of-hearing person, as if the interpreter were not present. The interpreter is there to facilitate communication and, as such, is not a participant. For example say: "Your appointment is scheduled for next Tuesday," rather than, "Tell him/her that his/her appointment is scheduled for next Tuesday."
- ◆ Maintain eye contact with the deaf or hard-of-hearing person. The deaf or hard-of-hearing person will be watching both you and the interpreter.
- ◆ Ask the deaf or hard-of-hearing person to restate what has been said if you are uncertain about the comprehension of the message. Communicate directly with the deaf person. Do not ask the interpreter if the deaf person understands.
- ◆ Speak naturally. Interpreters are trained to keep up with a normal speaking pace.
- ◆ There is a lag time in interpreting which if not allowed for may prevent the deaf or hard-of-hearing person the opportunity to participate. Allow the interpreter time to finish signing a question before expecting a deaf or hard-of-hearing person to be able to respond.
- ◆ Private conversations should not occur with the interpreter or with anyone else in the presence of the deaf or hard-of-hearing person. Ethically, the interpreter must interpret everything heard.
- ◆ If the communication process breaks down, address the situation with the deaf or hard-of-hearing person first. You may need to explore using a different interpreter or communication mode. If the deaf or hard-of-hearing person consents, you can seek guidance with the interpreter regarding the communication difficulty.
- ◆ When using films or videos, try to be sure the material is captioned and that your AV equipment can display the captions.

Interpreting Services for Deaf and/or Hard-of-Hearing Individuals Request Form

This form will assist you in obtaining and organizing helpful information for the procurement of interpreters for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

**Always arrange for interpreting services as far in advance as possible (two weeks or more is ideal).
It is difficult to secure qualified interpreting services at the last minute.**

Be prepared to provide the interpreter the following information when requesting services:

Name of the agency/business making the request: _____.

Agency/business contact person: _____.

Agency/business phone number: _____.

Agency/business address (with any necessary directions on how to get there):
_____.

Client's/Customer's name: _____.

Client's/Customer's language preference: ASL, Signed English, Cued Speech, Oral, Tactile interpreting (deaf-blind), or other (specify): _____.

Purpose of the meeting (for example): medical, counseling, courtroom, wedding, other (specify):
_____.

Special physical setting considerations: formal/informal, platform, size of group, room layout, lighting, etc.: _____.

Date of interpreting service: _____.

Time/duration of interpreting assignment: _____.

- ✓ The interpreting process takes more time than direct spoken English. Allow extra time for a meeting when using an interpreter.
- ✓ Generally, if the anticipated length of interpreting will exceed two hours, you should arrange for services of an additional interpreter. The interpreters will work as a team. This is necessary because the physical and mental demands of interpreting are exhausting over extended periods of time. Both interpreters will be billing for the entire time they are there.
- ✓ There are other special circumstances when an additional interpreter may be necessary. The interpreter and/or the client/customer can provide guidance on whether more than one interpreter is necessary. Examples of these circumstances are: the customer or client may not use any formal or recognized sign system (home signs), they may use foreign language signs (for example, Spanish Sign Language), the subject matter may use highly technical or specialized vocabulary; or more than one deaf person may be attending, each with different communication modes.
- ✓ After providing the interpreter with information on the interpreting assignment, ask them if they are qualified to interpret for this specific client, in this specific setting.

Notify the interpreter:

- ✓ If the client/customer is aware there will be interpreter(s) present.
- ✓ If you have arranged for any other interpreters to team interpret.
- ✓ Of any special request from the client/customer regarding interpreting needs.

Discuss with the interpreter billing procedures and practices including:

- ✓ Rate of pay.
- ✓ Any necessary procedures to follow or paperwork that needs to be completed in order for you to pay them.
- ✓ Cancellation policy. By scheduling an interpreter in advance, you are reserving that time. The interpreter may bill for interpreting not canceled in advance, since they are unable to reschedule themselves for any alternative work.
- ✓ The interpreter may expect to be paid a minimum number of hours for an assignment
- ✓ Payment or reimbursement for any travel expenses, including mileage, lodging, meals, travel time and other related incidentals.
- ✓ Payment cycle. Unless other arrangements have been made most interpreters expect payment within thirty days of a completed assignment.