

# Sign Language Interpreting Services

## Asked Questions

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What is the Interpreter's Role?

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In response to many recent requests concerning how organizations can find a sign language interpreter, the following information may be helpful.

### What are Sign Language Interpreters?

Many individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing use sign language to communicate. Most of them use American Sign Language (ASL), a visual-gestural language with vocabulary and grammar that is different from standard English. Some persons who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing use a system or mode of communication which uses English grammar and is a word for word visual representation of English. This English-like signing is referred to as Pidgin Sign English, Conceptually Accurate Signed English or, more recently, Contact Sign.

When Deaf persons wish to converse with someone who does not know sign language fluently, or vice versa, they use a sign language or oral interpreter. Interpreters provide a vital service by enabling Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing persons to participate in programs, meetings, and conversations on an equal footing.

An interpreter is there for both the Deaf and hearing persons. Many persons who are Deaf recognize themselves to be a linguistic minority. As such, interpreters are there as advocates for the communication process occurring between two individuals.

Interpreting between a signed and a spoken language is the same mental and linguistic process as interpreting between two spoken or two signed languages. While the linguistic and neurological processes are the same, the socio-political context can be vastly different. Interpreting between, say,

French and English, or Russian and German implies working between two historically respected cultures and languages with equal power status. English-ASL Interpreting can be better compared to English-French in Quebec or (British) English-Irish or English-Native American-tongues.

### Who Is a Sign Language Interpreter?

Sign language interpreters have been specially trained to "interpret" spoken English into American Sign Language, or American Sign Language into spoken English. Sign language interpreters have also been specially trained to "transliterate" spoken English to Signed English, or Signed English to spoken English. An individual who knows sign language is not necessarily capable of interpreting, just as an individual who knows a foreign language is not necessarily capable of translating that language into English. Most skilled Sign language interpreters receive training in the role of interpreting, and must pass an exam in order to become certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID).

### Interpreting Services

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*This is one in a series of  
Frequently Asked Questions,  
published in the form of a  
newsletter. These "FAQs" will  
be published periodically.*

## How Do I Find a Sign Language Interpreter?<sup>1\*</sup>

One excellent approach is to ask the individual who is requesting the Sign language interpreter for the names and telephone numbers of interpreters he or she has used in the past.

The Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) maintains a list of certified interpreters. These individuals have been deemed qualified and have a level of expertise suitable for working at the National Institutes of Health. They are available on Blanket Purchase Agreement, purchase order, and the Visa IMPACT Card.

Hiring an interpreter in private practice gives you control over who is sent and the ability to negotiate rates, while matching the Deaf consumer's needs. On the other hand, it is often easiest to contact a referral agency that will match your needs with interpreters who are available where and when you want them. The referral agency can make all the necessary arrangements for you. The following organizations may be useful in providing names of certified/qualified ASL/English Interpreters:

[Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf](#) (See p. 4 for address)

[National Association of the Deaf](#) (See p. 4 for address)

## How Much Should I Expect to Pay for a Sign Language Interpreter?

While fees vary, the cost of a certified Sign language interpreter ranges from about \$25 to \$40 an hour. Referral agencies may charge between \$40 and

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<sup>1</sup>Please note that as of July 1999, the Office of Research Services implemented a centralized program for interpreting and captioning services for all aspects of NIH IC programs. To Request Interpreters, submit your request at: <http://dss.od.nih.gov/interpreting/>.

\$50 an hour. There is usually a two hour start-up or 'minimum,' and a transportation or mileage fee. RID Certified interpreters carry an identification card for verifying their credentials.

## What is the Procurement Process?

When contracting out, utilizing the OEO's Request Form is advisable. This written document will ensure that the referral company has the details of the assignment as you intend. Send or fax the form while making the request. It also provides the assigned interpreter with the complete information to walk into the job knowing what to expect.

The NIH Office of Procurement Management has established several unrestricted Blanket Purchase Agreements. The interpreters and referral companies available through this mechanism are attached. It is recommended that you use these services first. Within the list of BPAs, there is no specified order.

Be sure to review and clarify all terms of the purchase order ahead of time.

The rates listed in this document are for business hours only; agencies and private practitioners vary on their rates for weekends, holidays and overtime; travel and mileage reimbursement, administrative fees; and late/last minute request fee.

**Cancellation Policy:** Generally speaking, assume a minimum of two business days or 48 hours to cancel without full payment being charged. You may encounter a three-business day/72 hours policy with some. Ask!

Any company that you do business with should be willing to provide an evaluation form for NIH employees or patients to complete and return, via OEO Interpreter Services.

The OEO's Policy and Procedures require that the NIH take interpreter service delivery on Certified Interpreters only. This policy applies whether interpreters have been contracted through a referral agency or directly

("interpreters in private practice"/"freelancers"). Please call Interpreter Services for advice if a referral agency is intent on sending a non-certified interpreter.

## What Should I Do When I Find an Interpreter?

Be sure to prepare the interpreter adequately for the specific assignment by providing detailed information about the date, time, location, and nature of the job. Written directions and written copies of any information about the job (e.g., agendas, hand-outs, etc.) will help the interpreter prepare in advance.

If you are coordinating a conference, ensure that there are enough interpreters for breakout sessions. It is inappropriate to require all Deaf persons to attend the same workshops or breakout sessions. It bars them from having the same choice which the hearing persons are enjoying. Event organizers have a clear objective in providing choices for attending sessions. Deaf attendees should be afforded the same opportunity.

Do not hesitate to call Interpreting Services on any matter of concern or interest.

It is the policy of the NIH to have an interpreter work alone for no more than one hour at a time. Although the historical working conditions have been for one person to work two or more hours alone, we have found this not to be the best practice. Primarily, an interpreter cannot process information bilingually for such a period of time and remain accurate. Secondly, such practices have led to various forms of Repetitive Motion Injury, commonly diagnosed as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. The money spent on a second interpreter will be well spent. On-the-job training may be an exception to this.

## Are interpreters enough?

Interpreters are not the be all and end all of reasonable accommodations. They may not even be the correct accommodations for any particular event. Oral Transliterations might be or, more and more, real-time captioning

might be best. Captioning is certainly still a requisite if any videotapes will be used. Meeting rooms should have assistive listening devices installed.

## **Certification**

Certification granted by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf is currently the only national certification awarded to interpreters. The National Association for the Deaf has a national test that is administratively by some states, as do many individual states. Each valid in their own right, there has been to date no comparative study for the purpose of reciprocity. As such, the NIH expects all contract interpreters to hold RID certification or NAD Level IV or V.

## **Recommended Readings**

## Interpreter Code of Ethics: The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf

### Ethical Standards, Protocol, and Responsibilities of Interpreters:

The Code of Ethics exists to protect and guide the interpreter and the consumers. Interpreters, whether staff or contract, are expected to adhere to the RID Code of Ethics at all times:

1. Interpreters/Transliterations shall keep all assignment-related information strictly confidential.
2. Interpreters/Transliterations shall render the message faithfully, always conveying the content and spirit of the speaker, using language most readily understood by the person(s) whom they serve.
3. Interpreters/Transliterations shall not counsel, advise, or interject personal opinions.
4. Interpreters/Transliterations shall accept assignments using discretion with regard to skill, setting and the consumers involved.
5. Interpreters/Transliterations shall request compensation for services in a professional and judicious manner.
6. Interpreters/Transliterations shall function in a manner appropriate to the situation.
7. Interpreters/Transliterations shall strive to further knowledge and skills through participation in workshops, professional meetings, interaction with professional colleagues, and reading of current literature in the field.
8. Interpreters/Transliterations, by virtue of membership in or certification by the RID, shall strive to maintain high professional standards in compliance with the Code of Ethics.

For additional information, please contact:  
[The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.](#)  
 8630 Fenton Street, Suite 324  
 Silver Spring, MD 20910  
 (301)608-0050 voice, (301)608-0562 tty, (301)608-0508 Fax;  
 Fax-on-Demand: #1-800-711-3691

## Interpreter Code of Ethics: The National Association of the Deaf

### What are the Codes of Ethics for Interpreters?

Professional interpreters are expected to comply with one or both of the following codes of ethics. They were established to protect the rights of consumers and interpreters.

1. All information in an interpreting assignment is to be kept in strictest confidentiality.
2. Interpreting services shall always be competent, impartial and professional.
3. Messages shall be rendered faithfully, always conveying the content and spirit of the communicator.
4. In accepting assignments, discretion based on skill, setting and the consumers involved must be used.
5. Counseling or interjecting of personal opinions is never permitted.
6. Information on the role and appropriate use of interpreting services shall be provided to the consumers when necessary.
7. Professional judgement should be exercised in assessing whether communication is understood.
8. Compensation for services should be pursued in a professional matter.
9. Respect of and for the deaf person's rights must always be evident.
10. NAD interpreters shall pursue the highest professional standards at all times according to NAD interpreter code of ethics.

For additional information, please contact:  
[The National Association of the Deaf](#)  
 814 Thayer Avenue, Silver Spring MD 20910  
 (301)587-1788 voice, (301)587-1789 tty, (301)587-1791 fax