

Overview

No discussion regarding hiring qualified interpreters is complete without an understanding of the definition of “qualified,” as it pertains to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), state regulation, and the concept of “effective communication.”

As you peruse this Fast Fact, make sure to read the *Sign Language Interpreters: An Overview*, *Sign Language Interpreters: In the Classroom*, and *Sign Language Interpreters: Using Interpreters as a Reasonable Accommodation for Testing*. These Fast Facts also speak to interpreter qualifications and expectations. It is recommended that you read *Sign Language Interpreters: An Overview* prior to reading this Fast Fact.

What are the minimum qualifications to be an interpreter?

The ADA states that a qualified interpreter is one who...” via a video remote interpreting (VRI) service or an on-site appearance is able to interpret *effectively*, accurately, and impartially, both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialized vocabulary.” What is “effective” is determined by the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing. ADA does not mandate certification; however, it is a strong benchmark for determining qualification. Interpreters may also be government regulated.

Interpreter regulation is state-specific. Some states require certification in order to work, others require state licensure, and in some states there is no regulation at all. Some states also require certification to work in particular settings, such as the legal setting or in the K-12 system.



What is interpreter certification?

There are two primary certification bodies in the United States today. They are: 1) Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), which administers a number of generalist and specialty certificates; and 2) Boys Town National Research Hospital, which administers the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), a test specific to K-12 settings. Current RID certification requires a bachelor’s degree (any major) or an approved updated/2012 Alternative Pathway to Eligibility application. Certified Deaf Interpreters meet a different set of certification requirements. The EIPA does not have these types of prerequisites.

Who is responsible to arrange for and pay interpreters?

The ADA is clear in that schools, institutions, businesses, and employers are responsible for arranging and paying for interpreters. Conversely, the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing is not responsible for arranging or paying for this service.

What do I need to know in order to hire the right interpreter?

When hiring an interpreter, it is important to have the following information:

- The *length of the assignment*: If it is over an hour, it may be necessary to use a team of interpreters.
- The *nature of the assignment*: Is it a lecture, small group discussion, a counseling session, one-on-conversation, job interview, sporting event, etc.?

- The *parties involved*: How many people will be involved in the communication, and do they represent more than one spoken language (i.e., English and Spanish)? Will more than one individual who is deaf or hard of hearing be involved in the communication?
- The *preferred communication mode* of the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing: Is it ASL interpretation, transliteration, oral interpretation, etc.?

Whenever possible, consult with the person who is making the request. In fact, the ADA mandates that institutions give “primary consideration to the individual’s choice” regarding communication access. It is important to note that this aspect of the ADA refers to their choice of a specific accommodation (e.g., interpreting vs. live captioning) or mode of interpreting (ASL interpreting vs transliteration), rather than a specific interpreter or other service provider.

Institutions and agencies often use in-house screening tools to determine the skill level of potential interpreters. Some use it in lieu of certification, but many others use it as a supplement to certification.

How do I find a qualified interpreter?

Qualified sign language interpreters can be hired through an agency or directly as a staff member or independent contractor. Individuals seeking to hire an independent contractor often start by accessing the RID’s Directory of Certified Interpreters. Others contact their local deaf and hard of hearing advocacy agency to obtain an interpreter,

should they have an in-house referral program, or to seek a referral to an outside qualified interpreter referral agency.

When hiring an independent contractor, make sure to determine the extent of the fees. Some interpreters will charge portal to portal, meaning the time it takes from one assignment to another. Some will request a minimum hourly rate. Almost all interpreters charge a two-hour minimum.

Not all referral agencies are the same!

In the field of interpreting it sometimes feels like there are more interpreter referral agencies than there are interpreters. Many are small “mom and pop” shops, while others are large spoken language-based operations that do not have visual interpreting expertise. Many do not screen their interpreters. Always seek a referral from someone you trust and who knows this specialized field.

For more information regarding sign language interpreters, please see pn2’s Fast Facts titled *Sign Language Interpreters: An Overview*, *Sign Language Interpreters: In the Classroom*, *Sign Language Interpreters: Using Interpreters as a Reasonable Accommodation for Testing*, and *Dual Accommodation: Using Interpreters and Speech-to-Text Services*.

Resources

RID: Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf

<http://www.rid.org/>

NCIEC : National Consortium of Interpreter
Education Centers

<http://www.interpretereducation.org/>

RID: Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf-
Standard Practice Paper on Team Interpreting.

<http://www.rid.org/about-interpreting/standard-practice-papers/>

Pepnet2- *Interpreters in Postsecondary Education,*
Interpreters in the Post Secondary Setting- DSS
Perspective, Interpreters in Postsecondary
Education- Student's Perspective

<http://www.pepnet.org/pn2day/62015>

References

ⁱ"American with Disabilities Act Title III

Regulations: Part 36 Nondiscrimination on the
Basis of Disability in Public Accommodations and
Commercial Facilities." *Information and Technical*
Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act.
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Sept. 2010. Web.

[http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleIII_2010/
titleIII_2010_regulations.htm](http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleIII_2010/titleIII_2010_regulations.htm).

Visit www.pepnet.org for additional information and resources

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