

Selecting an Interpreter

1. Decide what type of interpreter you might need.

Did you ask? Did the individual request an interpreter because he or she is deaf or hard of hearing? It is important to note that some individuals who are deaf may prefer not to use an interpreter (especially in a one-on-one session or with sensitive information). They may prefer to either lip read (if capable) or write notes back and forth.

It is important to never assume, but instead to always ASK, and if a request is made for an interpreter, what type of interpreter is being requested?

- **American Sign Language** (most common): ASL is used by many people in the U.S. who cannot hear or who may be hard of hearing. ASL uses hand shapes, positions, movements, facial expressions and body movements to convey meaning. ASL uses an alphabet (finger spelling), signs representing ideas and gestures. ASL is an independent language that has its own grammar and syntax.

(There are other types of sign language: Pidgin Signed English (PSE) and Signed English. PSE is a compromise between ASL and English. It generally follows the sentence structure of English but incorporates some aspects of ASL. Signed English does not incorporate ASL. It is simply the signing of English words in the English order.)

- **Oral Interpretation**
- **Real Time Captioning Services**
- **Deaf/Blind Interpreting** (unique form of interpreting that requires a special skillset – must notify agency if this is required)

2. Ask for recommendations.

It is best to go with an agency if at all possible because, ideally, they have already screened and qualified their interpreters.

- Speak with your local Center for Independent Living, government agency for the Deaf/hard of hearing, or other local expert agency.
- Ask people who have actually used the interpreter's services.
- Call a translation and interpretation agency.

- Look in your local phone directory for American Sign Language, Sign or Translating. Explain your requirements and ask them to recommend several interpreters with whom you can meet.
- If you are unable to find an agency, another resource is www.rid.org. (These are often independent interpreters and should be interviewed.)

3. Meet the providers.

Meet and develop a relationship with a couple of different providers prior to tax season so you will have a list of interpreters available when necessary. Proper planning and one afternoon of interviews will prevent chaos and confusion during your busiest times. Most agencies will be able to provide you with the following information, but be sure to ask the specific agency. If an agency is not available, make sure to ask the individual interpreter you are interviewing.

- Check the interpreter's qualifications. Make sure they are QUALIFIED. Many professional interpreters have an interpreter's certificate. Those who don't should at least have passed advanced level language exams and courses on interpreting; however, don't rule out interpreters without all the paperwork. Some very good interpreters simply grew up bilingual and gained interpreting experience over the years. The key word is qualified.
- Learn about the interpreter's experience. Try to choose an interpreter with experience in the subject about which you'll be talking; however, if this is not possible, be prepared to give them a brief introduction to your work so they may be prepared. It is a good practice to give the agency and/or independent interpreter a list of common terms used in your work (e.g., itemized vs. standardized, etc.).
- Ask about the fees, policies and procedures. It is common for agencies/individuals to have set policies, such as a two-hour minimum. Anything over two hours or with large groups may require more than one interpreter, a request often necessary 3-5 business days prior to need. (These are just some examples as policies will vary by provider.)

4. Be prepared.

- Have a list of interpreters available prior to the start of tax season. Include contact names and phone numbers. Make sure this information is shared with staff or other appropriate personnel, such as site coordinator. At the very least, have a process for requesting such services posted and available.

- Have accurate information readily available upon request. For example, know whether the interpreter will be working one-on-one with a client or in a large group. Be able to provide the exact location, time required, directions regarding parking, etc.

5. Get feedback

Get feedback from the deaf consumer on how well the interpreter did. Have a quick written survey available for the individual to complete. Often, the hearing person thinks the interpreter was great since hands were flying, but communication may not have been effective. Tax mistakes due to miscommunication have caused many Deaf individuals personal financial hardships.