

Sign Language Interpreters

A sign language interpreter is a person who is trained to facilitate communication between an individual that uses a signed language to communicate and an individual who uses spoken language to communicate. A qualified interpreter is one who can receptively and expressively interpret accurately, effectively, and impartially by using any necessary specialized vocabulary. Interpreters working for compensation in Wisconsin must have a license from the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS). Interpreters are used in many settings, such as hospitals, clinics, court rooms, work places, offices, K–12 classrooms, college classrooms, and anywhere a community event is being held.

Interpretation services can be provided on-site or remotely. Remote interpreter services, or video remote interpreting (VRI), allows people who are deaf or hard of hearing to communicate with a hearing person at the same location by using videoconferencing equipment and an internet connection. VRI can be used instead of an on-site interpreter or be used while waiting for an on-site interpreter to arrive. VRI is not recommended for all situations.

How to request an interpreter:

1. Call or email an interpreter agency or individual interpreter.
2. Provide information, such as:
 - Date of event.
 - Type of event (for example, meeting, social event, presentation).
 - Name of consumer who will use American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter (if applicable).
 - Event time frame.
 - Event location.
 - Name of preferred interpreter (if applicable): A preferred interpreter could be someone you or your agency has worked with in the past or someone the consumer specifically requested.

Where to find an interpreter:

- Wisconsin ASL interpreting agencies:
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/odhh/interpreting/interpreter-agencies.htm>
- Independent ASL interpreters (freelance interpreters):
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/odhh/interpreting/index.htm>
Click on “**Interpreter Directory.**”



Important things to remember when requesting interpreter services:

- Request an interpreter at least two weeks in advance of the event if possible.
- Provide the interpreter any materials that you plan to use at the event (for example, agenda, PowerPoint, videos). This will allow the interpreter to prepare for the upcoming event.
- Consider the time frame: If an event is longer than one hour, two interpreters may be required.
- Consider the context: A certified deaf interpreter (CDI) may be needed to work alongside a hearing interpreter in certain situations. Deaf interpreters generally have native or native-like command of ASL as well as in-depth cultural knowledge that can enhance the CDI-hearing interpreter team's ability to facilitate communication.
- Cover all the bases when making a request:
 - Is there a cancellation charge?
 - Is there a last-minute request charge?
 - Is there an extra charge for events happening outside of normal business hours?
 - Does the event require an interpreter with advanced certification (for example, qualified mental health interpreter, legal interpreter, or CDI)? If so, will there be an extra charge?

Tips on how to work with an interpreter:

- The interpreter will situate themselves near the individual who is speaking so the deaf or hard of hearing person is able to see both the speaker and the interpreter.
- When interacting with an individual who uses sign language, look at them and speak directly to them. Avoid using language such as "Tell him/her."
- Speak naturally. If you are talking too fast, the interpreter will let you know.



ODHH
Office for the Deaf
and Hard of Hearing



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