



## A Tip Sheet: How to Work with Interpreters

Interpreters are professionals with skills, training, and a professional code of ethics. Flexibility, versatility, and a desire to serve both hearing and deaf/ hard-of-hearing or deaf-blind consumers are characteristic. The following tips will help make your work with *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.* interpreters smooth and successful.

*Interpreting Solutions, Inc.*'s goal is to assist you in coordinating and facilitating a top-quality, professional solution to your communications access needs. *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.* can assist you in addressing each of these critical components.

- ❑ **Gather contact data.** Know how to reach *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.* quickly and do so as soon as you know of a scheduling need, a cancellation, or a change of any kind.
- ❑ **Provide interpreters with an overview of the requirements of the task.** In advance, if possible, provide a written list of specialized vocabulary. Make sure that the interpreter or the agency providing the interpreter knows the theme or topic of the meeting or conference session(s). For example, tell them “This will be an employment interview for a position as an elementary school principal,” or “This is a conference about nuclear physics.” Then, the *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.* interpreter will be able to prepare for specialized vocabulary in advance to ensure accuracy in the communication situation.
- ❑ **Alert your “front desk”** or registration desk that a deaf consumer or participant, and professional interpreters will be participating or arriving. This allows your front desk personnel to assist the deaf consumer and the interpreter to “connect.” In a conference setting, it’s typical for the deaf consumer and interpreter to “connect” at or near the registration area.
- ❑ **Speak directly to the Deaf person,** not to the interpreter. The Deaf person will watch the interpreter to understand what you are saying and will then communicate back to you. Everything spoken will be signed. The interpreter is not permitted to edit the content of a message.
- ❑ **Confidentiality** is important. Everything communicated during an event or meeting is confidential. Please see our free download on interpreters’ professional code of ethics for more specific information.
- ❑ **Be sure to schedule interpreters to cover breaks, social activities, “between session” meetings, and other formal or informal events associated with the conference, meeting or job.** Deaf consumers have the same right to participate in breakout sessions, informal networking, question-and-answer sessions, lunchtime conversations, intermissions, receptions or parties, or other events beyond the

- “official” presentation or meeting. It is helpful to provide an agenda or schedule to the interpreter. At a conference, plan to provide an entire conference packet to each interpreter. *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.* can assist you in assessing what needs to be provided.
- ❑ **If there is only one interpreter, schedule breaks.** Provide a 10-minute break every hour. The non-deaf participants in the meeting will appreciate this too! If you have a team of interpreters, special breaks are not always necessary. Simply use your schedule as planned, with all participants taking a break as needed.
  - ❑ **If interpreters are staying overnight, make sure you reserve and pay for their room in a hotel or other accommodation.** This is particularly important for two-day meetings or conferences. Discuss who will pay for lodging and meals before hiring the interpreters so all are clear on who will make the arrangements and who will pay for it.
  - ❑ **Inform *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.* of the name of the deaf consumer(s) if you know it.** The world of interpreting is small, so most interpreters know most deaf consumers personally and can then prepare for the job effectively if they know for whom they will be working. *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.* also can evaluate situations where there might be a conflict of interest or specific interpreter skill needs.
  - ❑ **Provide agendas and copies of all handouts being used in the presentations.** If you can provide the packet ahead of time, the interpreter will use it to study the content-specific vocabulary of the presentation. At a minimum, each interpreter will need a copy of all the materials given to the deaf participant. If you can also provide copies of lecture notes, lyrics for music that will be used in a service, a script for a skit or play or non-captioned video, etc., this will greatly enhance the interpreter’s ability to communicate your message to the consumer.
  - ❑ **If you have questions about the interpreter’s role or how to “set up” a room so that the interpreter can be correctly positioned, etc.,** contact *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.* in advance of the job.
  - ❑ **Make sure there is adequate lighting and line-of-sight.** If a deaf person cannot see an interpreter clearly, interpreting will not work and you will not be providing access. Remember: *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.* can assist you in these areas.
    - Ask the Deaf consumer what arrangements work best for him/her.
    - Make sure seating is arranged so that the interpreter can either stand or sit beside the speaker(s) in a direct line of sight for the deaf consumer.
    - Make sure the distance between the interpreter and deaf consumer is no more than about 15 feet. Allow for some flexibility in this distance to meet the unique needs of the deaf consumer.

- Make sure that lighting is adequate and that the interpreter is “lit” if the lights go down for a video, PowerPoint, or other presentation.
  - Make sure there is no bright light source, like glass doors, a window, or a projection screen, directly *behind* the interpreter, because this will place the interpreter in silhouette and the deaf consumer will not be able to see the interpreter.
  - Make sure the speaker or others do not frequently need to cross between the interpreter and the deaf person. (Typically, it’s fine if someone has to “cut across” a field of view for a moment, but, for example, having all the graduates in a graduation ceremony file past in between the interpreter and the deaf consumer would not work.)
- **Pre-set seating arrangements if possible.**
- Make sure seats for the interpreter are reserved at meals, small group settings, or tables where meetings or discussions will be held. Typically, with a team of interpreters, you will need two additional chairs at the table or in the circle, one for each interpreter. The Deaf consumer is responsible for identifying specifically which seat is best. Usually, the interpreter sits across the table or circle from the deaf consumer.
  - It is appropriate to place a small sign or card saying “reserved for interpreter” on a chair or table to hold the seat. If you do so, be sure to inform the interpreter and/or deaf consumer where you’ve placed it. Be flexible- it is appropriate for the consumer to choose a different table or seat and to move the cards.
  - Set aside or reserve seating at a conference or performance so that deaf consumers can be seated directly in front of the position where the interpreters will stand or sit. (See above for information on line-of-sight and lighting.) Usually, a sign that simply says “Reserved for those using Sign Language Interpreters” is appropriate. It will not only reserve the seating, but also assist the deaf consumers in finding where you’ve set aside seats! Please note: While it is important to set aside seating, it is not appropriate to “require” a deaf consumer to sit in any particular area or seat. It is up to the deaf consumer to decide where he/she needs to sit.
- **Add the names and contact information for the interpreters you used for a particular event to your planning file.** This will allow next years’ planners to quickly and easily find the information. Consider stapling *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.*’s information directly to this tip sheet and filing it in the planning file. Next year’s planners will be grateful!!
- **Follow up quickly, and in writing, if you have any compliments, concerns or complaints about the interpreters’ professional performance.** Except for your feedback, and that of consumers, the professional has no other way to know how well they did. As professionals, interpreters are open to appropriately offered feedback. It is not considered appropriate to confront an interpreter or complain to

an interpreter about their services in the presence of a deaf consumer or others. If you have a problem that needs to be discussed, or if you wish to offer positive feedback, please do so professionally and in private so that changes can be quickly made.

- **Pay bills on time.** If you have a need for a specific billing timeline, please arrange it with ***Interpreting Solutions, Inc.*** before the job. If you have special invoicing needs, be sure to communicate them to ***Interpreting Solutions, Inc.*** prior to the event. If you choose to not pay your bill on time, you can expect to be charged an overdue fee, much like that billed for other professional services.

