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## Fact Sheet for Providing Sign Language Interpreting Services

### **Why do I need to hire an interpreter?**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 mandates that a comprehensive variety of public and private services as well as employers must be accessible to all people, regardless of disability. When dealing with people who are Deaf, Deaf-blind, or hard of hearing, this means that communication must be accessible. In many cases, the best way to ensure this is to have an interpreter.

### **When do I need to use an interpreter?**

An interpreter may be used any time communication is occurring between people who do not share the same language. Deaf, Deaf-blind, and hard of hearing people may not have access to information if it is presented in English, either verbally or in writing. Some simple communications (for example, between a Deaf customer and a clerk in a store) can be done through written notes or gestures, but any time important content is being communicated, having an interpreter present safeguards the participants by ensuring that information is accessible to both parties.

### **Who is required to pay for an interpreter?**

The ADA states that all public and private agencies that provide services to the general public, and all employers with 15 or more employees, must be accessible. This means that, if your agency, service, or business is accessible to people without disabilities, it must be accessible to people with disabilities. Therefore, it is the agency, service, or business which is responsible for payment. Additionally, companies with 15 or more employees must follow fair hiring and employment practices when considering candidates with disabilities.

### **Isn't it expensive to provide interpreting services?**

Interpreting services should be budgeted as part of your annual planning for accessibility services. It is true that, on a per-encounter basis, you may pay more for interpreting services than you generate in revenue for your company. However, if you consider the cost over the course of a year as an overhead cost of doing business, providing accessible services is quite reasonable.

### **Why do I have to have more than one interpreter for some assignments?**

Interpreting is a very taxing activity, both mentally and physically. Research has shown that an interpreter's ability to mentally process the message and interpret it accurately diminishes drastically after approximately 20 minutes of interpreting. The interpreter is usually unaware that his or her accuracy has decreased, so misinformation is unwittingly transmitted. Additionally, the rate of repetitive motion injuries among sign language interpreters is very high (some studies have shown over 60% of interpreters suffering some injuries that require medical treatment). To ensure that the message is interpreted accurately for the full length of your assignment, multiple interpreters may be required, depending on the length and textual density of the interpreted situation.

### **Someone in my office knows sign language. Can that person interpret for us?**

Interpreting is a very complex task that requires more than just knowing some sign language. The process of translating a message from one language to another requires a high level of proficiency in both languages, as well as knowing principles of accurate interpretation. A coworker, or someone who is responsible for other duties in your workplace, should not be put in the position of interpreting for a Deaf colleague or customer, as it takes away from his/her ability to perform his/her assigned duties. Additionally, there is no guarantee of quality, accuracy, or confidentiality of information when using a person who works in your office or workplace. In many cases, more damage has been done by a "signer" who is trying to help out, requiring more extensive interpreting time to repair the misunderstandings caused by not calling in a professional interpreter the first time.