

PROFESSIONAL SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING AGENCIES

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., (RID) Standard Practice Paper (SPP) provides a framework of basic, respectable standards for RID members' professional work and conduct with consumers. This paper also provides specific information about the practice setting. This document is intended to raise awareness, educate, guide and encourage sound basic methods of professional practice. The SPP should be considered by members in arriving at an appropriate course of action with respect to their practice and professional conduct. It is hoped that the standards will promote commitment to the pursuit of excellence in the practice of interpreting and be used for public distribution and advocacy.

About Professional Sign Language Interpreting Agencies

This paper considers "interpreting agency" to include both non-profit and for-profit entities, as well as those individuals and groups who coordinate sign language interpreting services in larger organizations such as school disability services coordinators, etc. Any group or organization coordinating sign language interpreting services should follow these standard practices.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects Deaf people's human rights to access spoken language in their preferred mode of communication. Professional sign language agencies are dedicated to providing appropriate services to this protected group. These agencies screen, coordinate, schedule, and dispatch qualified professional interpreters in a knowledgeable and ethical manner.

They adhere to the tenets of the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) and follow best practices as outlined in the RID Standard Practice Papers. They work in accordance with all applicable federal and state laws, regulations, and policies. It is of great importance that they have a thorough knowledge of the local Deaf communities they serve, the ADA, and the sign language interpreting profession.

Value of Working with Professional Sign Language Interpreting Agencies

Managing interpreting for appointments, meetings, and events is a complex process. Personnel of professional sign language interpreting agencies possess a depth of understanding of the wide range of language and cultural variance of the consumers involved in assignments, including ethnic diversity, disabilities such as blindness or cognitive impairments, and regional language variations. They also consider the environmental and situational needs that may impact the interpreting needs. Utilizing their experience and expertise, they then select interpreters who have the appropriate competencies and specializations to meet these specific linguistic, cultural, and situational needs.

The professional sign language interpreting agency serves three (3) participants in any interpreting situation: the **Clients/Requestors** - the person(s) contacting the agency to make the interpreting request; the **End Users/Consumers** - those present at the interpreted interaction; and the **Service Providers** - the interpreters.

For CLIENTS/REQUESTERS, professional sign language interpreting agencies are a single and convenient point-of-contact for:

- Accessing pre-screened, qualified, and available sign language interpreters
- Verifying interpreting credentials, education, experience, and areas of specialty, as well as any specific requirements such as immunization or background check documentation
- Procuring sign language interpreters who are able to satisfy the specific staffing requirements of an assignment
- Ensuring adherence to the ADA, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and other pertinent regulations
- Managing short-notice requests and unexpected changes
- Providing a confidential way for consumers and clients to provide feedback
- Mediating and resolving conflicts, problems, and complaints involving any or all consumers

For END USERS/CONSUMERS, professional sign language interpreting agencies:

- Help participants understand how to navigate an interpreted interaction
- Utilize their experience and knowledge of interpreting situations and the Deaf community to provide appropriately skilled interpreters who understand the unique communication needs of the parties involved
- Advocate for using interpreters with native cultural and linguistic competence
- Ensure that all private information regarding the request is kept confidential
- Strive for continuity of services and consistency of interpreters placed in ongoing jobs whenever possible
- Provide a confidential process to both request and give feedback about particular interpreters' capabilities before and after the assignment, ensuring that the feedback can be expressed in the communication best suited to the consumer (written and video)
- Actively solicit input and involvement from Deaf stakeholders

For SERVICE PROVIDERS/INTERPRETERS, professional sign language interpreting agencies:

- Provide a convenient way to secure work at a wide variety of venues
- Establish and define the working relationship regarding employment status (employee or contractor)
- Provide clearly articulated policies and procedures
- Offer assignments based on the interpreter's qualifications, credentials, and experience
- Select teams of interpreters who work well together
- Procure and provide essential information regarding the specific requirements of an assignment
- Gather preparation materials that assist the interpreter (e.g., scripts, lectures, pre-reading material)
- Arrange for access to presenters by the assigned interpreters
- Solicit any information about the assignment environment that would impact the interpreters (e.g., size of audience, duration, formality)
- Provide administrative functions which may include advertising, billing, payroll, education, and advocacy
- Assist with meeting last minute needs which affect the assignment
- Promote the development of interpreters' skills and comfort in various venues

Key Responsibilities of Professional Sign Language Interpreting Agencies

Professional sign language interpreting agencies will:

- Maintain regular available hours to accept requests for and coordinate assignments
- Respond in a timely manner to all requests
- Manage communication with the requesting party regarding the assignment
- Provide the most appropriately qualified interpreter(s) available for the assignment
- Make available easily accessible avenues for feedback from participants
- Establish mechanisms to monitor and improve the quality of the services provided
- Clearly define policies and procedures for billing, payment, and collections
- Advocate for appropriate working conditions for interpreters
- Adhere to the CPC standards

Established Policies

Professional sign language interpreting agencies develop, maintain, and communicate clearly stated policies regarding booking, scheduling, billing, payment, and dispute resolution. They are knowledgeable about the RID Standard Practice Papers, and establish, adhere to, and communicate to all stakeholders policies that reflect these standards of the profession.

Interpreter Selection

Professional sign language interpreting agencies know and adhere to the standards for interpreter qualifications and conduct set forth by the CPC. They apply the CPC standards during recruitment, screening, and the continued employment of interpreters. They actively seek input from Deaf and hard of hearing consumers who utilize their services to ensure satisfactory quality of interpreting services.

Administration

Professional sign language interpreting agencies are committed to employing Deaf individuals as service providers (Certified Deaf Interpreters CDIs), consultants, and in administrative roles whenever possible. They also employ individuals in key positions who, through a combination of education and experience, have an in-depth understanding of the issues salient to the provision of high quality sign language interpreting services in accordance with the CPC. Agency employees who coordinate interpreting services also possess knowledge of the cultural and geographic characteristics of the area they serve and use that information to choose appropriately qualified interpreters. These agencies accurately represent the qualifications of the interpreters who work with them.

Conclusion

Professional sign language interpreting agencies incorporate the tenets of the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct and the guidelines outlined in the RID Standard Practice Papers into their business practices. RID believes that when interpreting agencies conduct themselves in an ethical manner, supporting industry standards, all parties benefit.

RESOURCES:

NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct at www.rid.org

RID Standard Practice Papers at www.rid.org