



# New Mexico Commission for Deaf & Hard of Hearing

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Website: [www.cdhh.nm.gov](http://www.cdhh.nm.gov)

## Hiring Qualified Interpreters

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The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires qualified interpreters be provided for individuals with a hearing loss who utilize American Sign Language (ASL). The ADA defines a qualified interpreter as, “someone who is able to interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively (i.e., understanding what the person with the disability is saying) and expressively (i.e., having the skill needed to convey information back to that person) using any necessary specialized vocabulary.” Having a qualified interpreter ensures that everyone can communicate clearly and efficiently. Using an interpreter who is not qualified can lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, and gaps in information that undermine teamwork, efficacy, and morale. Not all interpreters will be qualified to interpret in all scenarios, which can make it difficult to know whether the interpreter you are looking to book will be a good fit. This fact sheet will give you some tools to ensure a positive interpreted experience.

**Have agreements in place with one or more interpreting agencies.** Rather than waiting until a request is made and having to scramble to initiate interpreting services, we recommend establishing agreements with one or more interpreting agencies in advance. Different interpreters with varying specialties work for different interpreting agencies, so by establishing multiple agreements ahead of time you are giving yourself the widest range of communication options.

**Ask for a certified interpreter.** The path to becoming an ASL interpreter has many steps, resulting in different levels of qualification. Be sure to ask the interpreting agency for a certified interpreter. Signed language interpreters are required to hold a license to interpret in New Mexico. Different licenses indicate different levels of qualification. If an interpreter holds a New Mexico Community Interpreting License they have passed multiple national level interpreter assessments and are considered a certified interpreter. When an event organizer submits a request to an interpreter referral agency without specifying skill level, the agency may decide to assign a pre-certified, provisionally licensed interpreter who may not have the skills or experience to effectively interpret some events. They may be fine for a simple one-on-one meeting, but they are likely not ready for a large presentation with multiple speakers and complex content. In that instance, the participants with hearing loss suffer. Not all certified interpreters are the best qualified for every situation, but asking for a certified interpreter will often provide a more nuanced and accurate interpretation at no extra cost to the requester.

**Inform the interpreting agency of the purpose of the meeting or event.** In addition to national certification, many interpreters also pursue training or specialization in specific areas. Informing an interpreting agency of the purpose behind your request can help them look for interpreters who have developed skills that will pair well with your purpose. Additionally, any materials you may have available (such as presentation slides, handouts, agendas, etc.) should

be sent to the interpreter in advance so they can best prepare the appropriate interpretation for your specific topic and concepts.

**Listen to feedback from the person with a hearing loss regarding interpreter or interpreting agency preference.** It may not always be possible, but when practicable ask the person with a hearing loss if they have a preference on which interpreter or interpreting agency they would like to use. They will be much more familiar with what skills certain interpreters have and who may be a good communication match. You should also consider any feedback from the person with a hearing loss's perspective on interpreter effectiveness. No matter their qualifications, not every interpreter will be a good fit for every situation. If a person with a hearing loss provides feedback that something in the communication dynamic is not working, please be open and receptive to discussion on how to improve communication access.

**Take the time to communicate!** American Sign Language is not just English on the hands – it is a unique language with its own structure, grammar, and syntax. Additionally, the Deaf community has their own unique culture that influences the ways in which ASL is utilized. As such, interpreters are facilitating not only linguistic but also cultural differences between hearing and Deaf cultural norms. The interpreter may need to ask for clarification or ask for a momentary pause to do the linguistic and cultural mediation necessary for an effective interpretation. This helps to ensure everyone is on the same page and receiving the same information.

### **Additional Resources:**

- NMCDHH Fact Sheets on Interpreting: [www.cdhh.nm.gov/resources/fact-sheets/](http://www.cdhh.nm.gov/resources/fact-sheets/)
- ADA Effective Communication Requirements: [www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm](http://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm)
- National Deaf Center: [www.nationaldeafcenter.org/interpreting](http://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/interpreting)
- National Association of the Deaf: [www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/interpreting-american-sign-language/](http://www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/interpreting-american-sign-language/)
- Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf: [rid.org/about-rid/about-interpreting/hiring-an-interpreter/](http://rid.org/about-rid/about-interpreting/hiring-an-interpreter/)
- Interpreting Solutions: [www.interpretingsolutionsinc.com/Library/certorqualified.pdf](http://www.interpretingsolutionsinc.com/Library/certorqualified.pdf)