

## **How to Hire an Interpreter: Your Questions Answered**

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Thank you for your interest in interpreting services. This is an informational guide composed by Certified Spanish Court Interpreters in the state of Colorado.

Our goal is to help educate you about your options so that you can make an informed decision when it comes to hiring interpreters for your organization. We know that finding an interpreter can be a daunting and time-consuming project, but it doesn't have to be.

This letter will outline some key points and answer some of the questions you may have about how to find reliable interpreters to provide the highest quality interpretation services for your organization.

Please note that this letter will focus primarily on Spanish interpretation services; however, professional interpretation services are offered in all languages. Refer to Question #7 for more information.

### **Q & A's About Interpreting**

#### **1) Q: Why not just have a bilingual staff person or volunteer interpret?**

**A:** You're not the first person to ask this question! Many organizations believe it would be more convenient or save them money to do so. Unfortunately, you end up providing inadequate and inconsistent services to the community, not to mention scaring away volunteers. This is likely to cost you even more money in the long run.

It is not uncommon for untrained interpreters to interpret with less than 30% accuracy; to drastically change meaning and to omit entire sentences, or even more. What's worse is that neither the Spanish speaker nor English speaker is likely to be aware of this significant loss of meaning and linguistic content. This puts your organization in a position of inadvertently doing a disservice to the very people you are seeking to serve.

#### **2) Q: Why should I hire a *Certified*\* Interpreter?**

**A:** Interpreting is a highly specialized skill that requires formal education or training. Just because someone speaks two languages does not mean that they can be an interpreter. In order to become certified, court interpreters must have university-level fluency in English and Spanish, and are required to pass a rigorous series of written and oral exams.

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\* Certification does not exist for all languages. For languages other than Spanish, interpreters may be Professionally Qualified, as opposed to certified. Refer to Question #7.

We are trained to accurately and completely interpret from one language to the other, and to preserve important and complex linguistic elements, such as register, tone and specialized terminology. A good interpreter is one who facilitates communication between speakers of two different languages with such subtle precision that it is as if the interpreter were not even there. This places speakers of all languages on equal footing with any English-speaking person who might be in the same position.

Also, keep in mind that interpreting is a strenuous activity, requiring intense focus, concentration, sharpened memory skills and vocal skills. Untrained interpreters may be unaware of how demanding the task of interpreting is. They may agree to help without knowing what they are getting into, and end up going home with a splitting headache and a hoarse voice. When this happens, that volunteer is unlikely to want to come back. Certified Interpreters have the experience and skills necessary to do the job well without sacrificing their own health or the service to your client.

**3) Q: How much does it cost to hire a Certified Interpreter?**

**A:** The majority of Certified Interpreters are freelancers, and this is how we make our living. Most professional interpreters will charge between \$50 and \$100 per hour. It is common to charge a minimum of 2-4 hours, and many will charge for travel time and/or miles.

These rates allow interpreters to maintain a high standard of interpreting and ethical practices, as well as to cover business expenses, such as travel, continuing education requirements, self-employment taxes and insurance.

**4) Q: What if my organization can't afford to hire a Certified Interpreter?**

**A:** Many community-based and non-profit organizations find themselves in this situation. One thing to remember is that professional interpreting services are critical for any organization that serves people who may have limited proficiency in English. If you wouldn't expect to have a tech support person service your computer – or an attorney handle your legal affairs – for free, then it doesn't make sense to expect to receive professional interpretation or translation services for free.

**Ways to Take Action:**

- Write up a proposal requesting that your budget provide for interpretation services;
- Apply for grants for professional language services;
- Check into getting student interpreters to volunteer or do an internship, so that they can gain valuable work experience.

*Note about student volunteers:* Students will lack the experience and stamina of a Certified Interpreter. They may need more guidance and require frequent breaks to avoid interpreter fatigue, which can result in serious interpretation errors.

Also, students don't stay students forever. Once they graduate or become certified, they should be fairly compensated.

**5) Q: How many interpreters do I need?**

**A:** Assignments which last an hour or less can be handled by a single interpreter.

Assignments expected to last over an hour require two interpreters. Studies have shown that interpreting accuracy begins to decrease after 30 minutes of simultaneous interpreting. Interpreters work in pairs and trade off every 30 minutes in order to avoid interpreting errors and health problems as a result of interpreter fatigue.

**6) Q: What is the difference between *simultaneous* and *consecutive* interpretation? Do I need equipment?**

**A: *Simultaneous Interpretation:*** Simultaneous interpretation is when the interpreter interprets while the person is speaking.

**When do we use simultaneous interpretation?:**

Simultaneous interpretation is most commonly used in group or conference settings, to allow individuals to listen to a presentation in English. This style of interpretation does not interfere with, or extend the length of the presentation. Equipment is highly recommended in this setting to maximize efficiency and minimize interference.

***Consecutive Interpretation:*** Consecutive interpretation is when the speakers of both languages pause regularly to allow the interpreter to interpret.

**When do we use consecutive interpretation?:**

Consecutive interpretation is most commonly used when the Spanish-speaker is participating in the conversation by speaking, as opposed to just listening. For example, an interpreter would interpret consecutively in an interview-style setting. This type of interpretation will extend the length of the conversation, as time is required for interpreting. Equipment is not required.

**7) Q: What about languages other than Spanish?**

**A:** Professional interpretation exists in all languages. Depending on the language, you may be able to find a Certified Interpreter, or a Professionally Qualified Interpreter if certification does not exist for that language.

As the availability of interpreters for languages other than Spanish may vary greatly, it is a good idea to begin the search for an interpreter early. Interpreters who are not local may offer interpretation services over the phone. Rates will vary depending on the language and the availability of interpreters.

**8) Q: How can I best serve people with limited English proficiency in my community?**

**A:** Everyone in our community deserves equal access to the justice system, regardless of what language they speak. Interpretation services play a vital role in serving individuals who speak languages other than English.

Certified Interpreters are able to facilitate communication between speakers of two languages in a smooth and precise fashion, as if everyone were simply speaking the same language. Your organization and the community you serve both deserve this high level of interpretation.

**Hiring interpreters who are properly certified or qualified allows you to:**

- Do your job to the best of your ability, while avoiding legal or financial headaches in the future.
- Foster equal access to justice for all individuals, no matter what language they speak.
- Keep your volunteers from running for the hills when they find out how hard interpreting is! This way, they can stick around and provide valuable assistance to your organization without getting burnt out.

For a list of active Certified Interpreters, visit the Colorado Judicial Branch's Office of Language Access website: [www.coloradoolo.org](http://www.coloradoolo.org).

You will find rosters of Certified Interpreters for Spanish, as well as languages other than Spanish, and other valuable information.

Thank you for being a part of this important conversation about how to best serve our communities, and to foster equal access to justice for all individuals, regardless of language spoken.