

# Guide for Employers: Sign Language Interpreters

The following information provides employers with strategies to effectively communicate with a prospective or current employee who is deaf or hard of hearing. Using these methods can help remove communication barriers that may exist in the workplace, and create an environment that is beneficial for everyone.

## What accommodations, other than an interpreter, could be used to interview an individual who is deaf?

An employer should strongly consider using the job candidate's preferred method of communication.

There are several ways to communicate with individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. It can be as simple as using a pen and paper if the applicant requests it, texting, or using a smart phone or computer tablet (i.e., mobile applications with interpreters). American Sign Language (ASL) can also be used, but keep in mind that it has different syntax (arrangement of words and phrases) from that of the English language, so a native ASL user may not understand what is communicated if other means of communication are used. The Job Accommodation Network at [askJAN.org](http://askJAN.org) and Great Lakes ADA Center at [adagreatlakes.org](http://adagreatlakes.org) are great resources to reference for accommodations.



## When should an employer consider providing an interpreter for an employee who is deaf?

The employer should provide an interpreter for employer-sponsored events such as trainings, luncheons, celebrations, performance review meetings, team meetings, interviews, orientation and any other employer-sponsored event.

## Who is responsible for providing and paying for a sign language interpreter?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires state and local governments, businesses, and non-profit organizations to provide communication access to people who are deaf and hard of hearing, including employees. For many people who are deaf, this means providing a sign language interpreter. Employers are responsible for paying for this accommodation unless there is an undue hardship, which is an accommodation that would be unduly costly, extensive, substantial or disruptive, or would fundamentally alter the nature or operation of the business.

## Do you have any interpreter resources in your area?

Not all sign language interpreters are certified or registered. To locate a sign language interpreter, contact the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) at [rid.org](http://rid.org), 703-838-0030 (Voice), 703-838-0459 Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD), or use the search tools on the website to look for an interpreter or interpreter agency/referral service. You can search for agencies by name, city, state, area code, or zip code. It may also be good to contact RID directly to ensure that the information listed on the [website](http://rid.org) is current. Interpreters should be nationally certified and state licensed, not a family member or friend.

# Working with American Sign Language Interpreters

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## If possible, meet with the interpreter beforehand

- Discuss any unique vocabulary, technical terms, acronyms or jargon, as well as seating arrangement, lighting and other needs.
- Provide the interpreter with any written materials ahead of time.

## Reserve seats for employees who are deaf or hard of hearing

- Provide a clear view of the speaker and interpreter.
- Employees who are deaf or hard of hearing may still choose to sit elsewhere.

## Offer the interpreter space near the speaker or action

- This allows employees who are deaf or hard of hearing to pick up visual cues and expressions of the speaker and see any presentation materials.
- In small group discussions, consider using a circle or semi-circle seating arrangement instead of theatre-style arrangement.

## Provide good lighting

- Good lighting helps the employee see the interpreter clearly.

## Provide a short break every hour

- Interpreting is mentally and physically taxing.
- If interpreting is required for more than two hours, a second interpreter will be necessary.

## Talk directly to the person who is deaf or hard of hearing

- Speak directly to and maintain eye contact with the person who is deaf or hard of hearing.

## Speak naturally

- Speak at your normal pace. Interpreters will ask you to slow down or repeat yourself, if necessary.
- Interpreters listen for concepts and ideas, not just words, to render an accurate interpretation. **Remember that everything they hear will be interpreted**
- Do not ask the interpreter to censor any portion of the conversation.
- Ask the employee directly if they are following the conversation.

## Ask participants to speak one at a time

- An interpreter can only interpret for one speaker at a time. When facilitating a group discussion, be aware that the interpreter will be several seconds behind. Pause before recognizing the next speaker so the interpreter can finish with the current speaker.
- Ask participants to identify themselves by name before speaking.

## Work Opportunity Tax Credit

The WOTC is a federal tax credit available to employers for hiring individuals from certain groups who have consistently faced significant barriers to employment. For more information visit:

[dwd.wisconsin.gov/jobservice/taxcredit/](http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/jobservice/taxcredit/)

## For more information, contact the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation:



800-442-3477



[dvr@dwd.wisconsin.gov](mailto:dvr@dwd.wisconsin.gov)



[dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr](http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr)

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The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2025 (FFY 2025), the total amount of grant funds awarded were \$87,214,145, including \$15,522,975 reserved for Pre-Employment Transition Services. The remaining 21.3% (\$23,604,337) of the costs were funded by Wisconsin state appropriation.