

Tips for working with interpreters

To maximize effectiveness when working with an interpreter, here are some tips you can use:

1. Meet with the interpreter beforehand.
 - Clarify unique vocabulary, technical terms, acronyms, jargon, seating arrangements, lighting and other needs.
 - Provide interpreter with any written materials ahead of time.
2. Reserve seats for the deaf or hard of hearing participants.
 - Provide a clear view of the speaker and interpreter.
 - Deaf or hard of hearing participants may still choose to sit elsewhere.
3. Interpreter should be in the consumer's sight line.
 - This allows deaf or hard of hearing participants to pick up visual cues and the expressions of the speaker.
 - In small group discussions, consider using a circle or semi-circle seating arrangement instead of a theater style arrangement.
4. Be aware of lighting.
 - Provide good lighting so the interpreter can be seen.
 - If lights will be turned off or dimmed, be sure the interpreter can still be seen clearly. Use spotlight or small lamp to direct light toward the interpreter.
5. Speak naturally.
 - Speak at your normal pace. Interpreters will ask you to slow down or repeat if necessary.
 - Interpreters listen for concepts and ideas, not just words, to render an accurate interpretation.
6. Avoid private conversations. Everything will be interpreted.
 - Whatever the interpreter hears will be interpreted. Do not ask the interpreter to censor any portion of the conversation.
 - Ask the deaf or hard of hearing person directly if they are following the conversation.
7. One person should speak at a time.
 - An interpreter can only accommodate one speaker at a time. Encourage the group to follow this rule.
 - If you are facilitating a group discussion, be aware that the interpreter will be several seconds behind. Pause before recognizing the next speaker to allow the interpreter to finish with the current speaker.

8. Talk directly to the deaf or hard of hearing person.
 - Maintain eye contact with the deaf or hard of hearing person.
 - Avoid directing comments to the interpreter (i.e. Tell him... or Ask her...) Respond directly to the deaf or hard of hearing person.

9. Avoid asking the interpreter for opinions or comments regarding the content of the meeting.
 - Interpreters follow a code of ethics that requires impartiality and confidentiality with all assignment-related information.
 - Do not assume the interpreter has prior knowledge of the deaf person or will be interpreting future appointments.

10. Provide a short break every hour.
 - Interpreting is mentally and physically taxing.
 - Do not expect the interpreter to interpret during these breaks.