Spoken Language Dominated Spaces

Working with signed-spoken language interpreters

Are you chairing a meeting, giving a presentation, or hosting a social event? Will there be a mix of people using spoken English and American Sign Language (ASL)? One way to provide accommodation and a level of accessibility is to include interpreting services. Event details will dictate specific requirements for interpreting services. This document is intended to start that conversation.

Top Tips

Be prepared to provide the interpreting team with preparation materials in advance of the event. These will be used to prepare for the linguistic features and content themes being discussed. Materials will depend on the type of event and could include a meeting documentation package, presentation slides, event run-down, etc.

If video materials are being used be prepared to turn on professional captions/subtitles. Do not rely on auto-generated captions. If you plan to incorporate music, be sure to inform the interpreting team in advance. Audio and visual materials require specific preparation methods for the team.

In the presence of interpreters continue to speak to and interact with the person using sign language as you would with others. The interpreting team is working with everyone, not just the sign language users. While it is impossible to *ignore* the interpreters, the focus should be kept on the participants and the event. A goal of interpreted-mediated interactions is for people to share experiences equitably with each other.

Practice turn-taking during discussions; ideally using a raised-hand system. No interpreter can simultaneously render accurate interpretations when multiple people are speaking.

To acknowledge the interpreters a suggested statement is: "We are working with a team of American Sign Language-English interpreters to provide access in both languages for all of us." Record interpreters separately from participants in meeting minutes.

Use terminology such as "Deaf" and "Hard of Hearing". "Hearing impaired" is unacceptable.