

Working Effectively With Interpreters

This guidance was developed by Open Doors for Multicultural Families.

Learn more about ODMF: <https://www.multiculturalfamilies.org>

Creating physical spaces that are culturally responsive and result in a sense of belonging is an important aspect of the Community Conversation. It is critically important to learn from the perspectives of our culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Providing interpreters will enable all participants to understand and share their thoughts.

The following checklist is intended to guide the use of interpreters at your event. It focuses on interpreters of spoken language, not American Sign Language.

Before the Event

- Make sure your planning team includes people who have connections to communities of color or organizations that have built trusted relationships with communities of color. These planning team members will likely be able to recommend logistical considerations (time and place to hold the event) and people who can help with outreach, interpretation/translation, and follow-up with the community. These are important and sometimes labor-intensive responsibilities, so make sure they are distributed across several members of the planning team.
- Choose a time, date, and location that will work for participants who have the least flexible schedules and transportation barriers (e.g., after work hours).
- Set aside enough time for the event. If you are interpreting back and forth between English and another language, you should double the duration of the event.
- Identify the language(s) that require interpretation.
- If you are new to planning events with interpreters, start with just one language in addition to English (e.g., Spanish and English).
- Schedule in-person interpretation well in advance of the event date. Finding qualified interpreters can take time.
- Select an interpreter who has knowledge of disability and special education terminology.
- Invest in relationships with interpreters. A good working relationship with qualified and reliable interpreters will help families communicate and make it easier for you to plan future events.

- Send the interpreters the following information one week before the event so that they have time to prepare:
 - Purpose and subject matter of the meeting.
 - Meeting agenda.
 - The roles of those who will support, including the facilitator and notetaker.
 - Estimated number of participants they will be interpreting for.
 - Common terminologies and acronyms used.
- Arrange seating so that the participant has direct eye contact with presenter, not with the interpreter.
- Prior to the event, schedule a one-hour meeting with the interpreters, facilitator, and table hosts to:
 - Review the purpose and subject matter of the meeting.
 - Review roles of the facilitator, table hosts, and notetaker.
 - Clarify the expected role of the interpreter(s).
 - Determine a plan for communicating if people need to slow down and check for understanding (e.g., hand signal or raising hand).
 - Let the facilitators, table hosts, and interpreters know that participants will be asked to evaluate both the quality of the event and interpretation.
 - Answer any questions.
- Remind the participants of the event time and date via phone, text, or social media groups in their language. Email is not a reliable way to communicate and send reminders.

During the Event

- Presenters should speak directly to the participants, not the interpreter. If possible, the interpreter should sit behind the participants to remind others to speak to the participants.
- Presenters should speak clearly and concisely.
- Pause to allow the interpreter to start interpretation or finish their sentence.
- Check your pace to allow time for interpretation and for the participants to process critical information.
- Avoid talking in side conversations because they are difficult to interpret.
- Read body language of the participants. Rephrase if you suspect there might be a misunderstanding.
- Avoid jargon, acronyms, and idioms that are difficult to interpret or specific to American culture.

- Check in regularly with families for understanding.
- It's okay for the presenter or facilitator to admit that they are nervous to lighten the mood and show vulnerability.

After the Event

- Debrief with the interpreter:
 - Did they receive sufficient information before the meeting?
 - How was the pace of the entire meeting?
 - Was the information presented easy to interpret?
 - Constructive feedback about what went well and suggestions for improvement.
- Ask the participants to provide feedback on:
 - The pace of the entire meeting.
 - Whether they understood the information presented.
 - Whether they were able to fully articulate their opinions and thoughts during the meeting.
 - The interpreter's performance. Use the Interpreter Evaluation Form, which has been translated into many different languages.
 - Constructive feedback about what went well and suggestions for improvement.