

BUSINESS PRACTICES: HIRING AN INTERPRETER - BILLING CONSIDERATIONS

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., (RID) Standard Practice Paper (SPP) provides a framework of basic, respectable standards for RID members' professional work and conduct with consumers. This paper also provides specific information about the practice setting. This document is intended to raise awareness, educate, guide and encourage sound basic methods of professional practice. The SPP should be considered by members in arriving at an appropriate course of action with respect to their practice and professional conduct.

It is hoped that the standards will promote commitment to the pursuit of excellence in the practice of interpreting and be used for public distribution and advocacy.

About Business Practices

RID does not dictate or restrict business practices. It does however, expect interpreters to conduct business in a manner consistent with the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct.¹ There are regional differences in billing practices for interpreting services. These differences may be due to individual state, county and federal laws or may be different due to the supply and demand of professional interpreters² in the area. This SPP is offered as a guide to assist you in understanding potential billing practices in the procurement of interpreting services.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act,³ which was enacted in 1990, most organizations and employers are to take steps that may be necessary to ensure that no individual with a disability is excluded, denied services, segregated or otherwise treated differently than other individuals due to the absence of auxiliary aids and services. Auxiliary aids and services include a wide range of services and devices that promote effective communication. Examples of auxiliary aids and services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing include qualified interpreters, note takers, computer-aided transcription services, written materials, telephone handset amplifiers, assistive listening systems, telephones compatible with hearing aids, closed caption decoders, open and closed captioning, telecommunications devices for deaf persons (TDDs), videotext displays and exchange of written notes. Auxiliary aids and services are necessary to ensure equal access to the goods, services, facilities, privileges or accommodations that it offers, unless an undue burden or a fundamental alteration would result.

In other words, when interpreting services are necessary, it is customarily the responsibility of the service provider (e.g. attorney, physician, hospital, state agency, educational institution, court) or employer to secure and pay for these services.

Hiring an Interpreter

Community based interpreters fall into two broad categories: independent contractor or employee. Interpreters who work as an independent contractor are self-employed. These individuals are responsible for all aspects of operating their own business such as scheduling, billing, collections, liability insurance, taxes and other business expenses. Interpreters who work as employees may be employed by a service provider either full- or part-time. Additionally, these individuals may work exclusively or non-exclusively with their employer(s). Typically, all business aspects are handled by the employer.

Regardless of whether an interpreter is hired as an independent contractor or through a service provider, expect to receive preliminary paperwork in order to establish a business agreement explicitly stating the terms of service, fees and policy and procedure information. This agreement can include information such as:

Rates:

Rates for service are structured in a wide variety of ways. Most common are hourly or daily rates per interpreter. Some providers assess a minimum fee regardless of the scheduled time while others may include a percentage or additional fee to cover the cost of doing business. To ensure the integrity and accuracy of the interpreted message and to protect the occupational safety of interpreters, some assignments may require a team⁴ of two or more interpreters. Fee structures may also include differential rates for holidays, evenings, weekends or shifts. Assignments requiring specialty interpreting^{5,6} skills may also be charged at a higher rate. When circumstances require the interpreter to make special preparations in advance of the actual interpreting task, the interpreter and hiring party agree, in advance, regarding compensation for that preparation time. With the use of video conferencing technology, interpreting services can be sold by the minute.

Travel Fees:

Interpreters or service providers may require compensation based on mileage while others charge for the travel time at their hourly interpreting rate. Travel fees may include parking, cab fare and tolls. Additional fees for travel, lodging and per diem may be incurred when scheduling services that require overnight stays or out of town work.

Cancellation:

Cancellation deadlines may vary from twenty-four hours to two weeks, depending on the cancellation policy of the interpreter or service provider. When the assignment requires less time than scheduled or the assignment is cancelled upon arrival, the charges are generally for the amount of time originally requested.

Information Needed to Make a Request

As part of the business agreement with an interpreter or service provider, you will need to provide the following information:

- Services requestors' name, telephone number, email address and the agency/organization requesting services.
- Date, time and the duration of the appointment.
- Location of assignment (address, directions, floor, building #, etc.).
- Nature and format of the meeting (i.e. medical appointment, lecture, staff meeting, therapy session, etc.)
- Names of deaf participants and hearing participants, if pertinent.
- Name of onsite contact person.
- Materials pertaining to a given assignment as needed (agenda and/or presentation materials).

RID believes that when interpreters and service providers conduct themselves in a professional manner, all parties gain a clear understanding of interpreting business practices.

RESOURCES:

RID has a series of Standard Practice Papers available on the Web site at www.rid.org.

Footnotes reference these materials and others.

¹NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct
<http://www.rid.org>

²Professional Sign Language Interpreting
<http://www.rid.org>

³ADA Home Page
<http://www.ada.gov/>

⁴Team Interpreting
<http://www.rid.org>

⁵Interpreting for Individuals Who are Deaf-Blind
<http://www.rid.org/129.pdf>

⁶Interpreting in Legal Settings
<http://www.rid.org/125.pdf>