

January 2010

HOW TO WORK WITH SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

The European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsli) is proposing the following when working with sign language interpreters:

Provision

1. Provide full communication access to situations where deaf and hearing people attend. Depending on the communication needs of the participants this can be done through sign language interpreters. Ask the participants before the event which communication they prefer.
2. Ensure that you provide qualified, trained and professional interpreters.
3. Each country has their own national sign language, or more than one sign language, e.g. Switzerland. Sign language interpreters need to be able to interpret between the sign and spoken languages that are requested. Or in the case of deaf interpreters between the sign languages or communication methods requested.
4. The event organizers are responsible for the accessibility to the event. This can be the provision of the interpreting services, and the expenses for travel, meals, and possible lodging of the interpreters. Sometimes the participants can receive funding to pay for these costs themselves.
5. Depending on the situation, one or more interpreters are needed to provide the interpretation services. In the following situation, a minimum of two interpreters should be provided:
 - a. The assignment is in an international setting, or there are more than two languages or foreign (sign) languages used in the setting.
 - b. The duration of the event is two or more hours.
 - c. At conferences or large events
 - d. A deaf person has a main responsibility during the event, e.g. president, presenter, leader.
 - e. The content is highly technical or at academic level.
 - f. Deaf participants with different communication needs are attending or there are deafblind participants attending.
 - g. In a special setting, for example deaf participants participating in a panel discussion and in the audience (in this setting a minimum of four interpreters needed: two teams of each two interpreters).

The interpreters will be teaming or co-working during the event, meaning that they will both be actively at work during all times.

6. Interpreters need regular breaks during the event, to have lunch, coffee and water, preferably in a separate room from the participants at the event. If interpreting services are needed full time, then more interpreters need to be hired for during the event.

Preparation

1. Interpreters will be able to deliver a higher quality of service when they receive information prior to the event, this will benefit all participants. Send the agenda, general information, and the presentations within sufficient time before the start of the event, so the interpreters have sufficient time to prepare and read all the materials.
2. If the event involves a song or a theatre play, please make sure you provide the interpreter with the text beforehand with sufficient preparation time.
3. Provide the interpreters with a contact person that they can contact for all their
4. questions in regard to the interpreting services.

During the event

1. Sign language interpreters need to be well visible. This means that there should be indirect clear lighting on the interpreter, especially on the face and hands. There should be no source of light behind the interpreter, e.g. a window. In addition there should be no object in between the interpreter and the deaf participant(s), otherwise the interpreter is not visible.
2. In most situations the placement of the interpreter is next to the presenter, speaker or chairperson. In this way the deaf participants are able to see the interpreter and presenter next to each other, and not have to shift their eyes or head too much.
3. Good and comfortable chairs need to be provided for the interpreters.
4. The responsibility of the interpreter is to interpret between the different languages they are requested for. The interpreter is not responsible for the content or other issues that arise during the event.
5. The interpreter might interrupt the speaker for clarifications or if the speaker is inaudible.

Tips for speakers

1. Be aware that the interpretation takes always a bit longer than the source language. That means that participants who are using the interpreting services can not react instantly to the question or statement, they need to wait for the interpretation. Allow these participants the extra time to be able to react.
2. Do not read out your written paper. Written language is not suitable for natural interpretation. The spoken language is too fast and points will be missed due to the lack of intonation and pace.
3. If you use visual support to your presentation, such as a powerpoint, make sure that you allow the deaf participant extra time to look at the visual presentation. The deaf participant can not look at the presentation and the interpreter at the same time. If there are deafblind participants, please read out the text on the powerpoint if this essential to the content of the presentation.
4. When using a DVD, video, or TV, make sure subtitles or closed captioning is provided. If this is not available, make sure that the interpreters have the opportunity to watch it before the showing so they are prepared for the content.