

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

**In-Person Sign Language Interpreting Services Policy
National Capital Region**

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Purpose	2
2. Scope	2
3. Policy	3
4. Types of In-Person Sign Language Interpreting Services	4
5. Roles and Responsibilities	6
6. Compliance and Quality Assurance	7
7. Customer Experience and Inquiries	8
8. Forms and Procedures	8
9. Definitions	8
10. Request NCR Sign Language Interpreting Services	8

1. PURPOSE

- a) In accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part § 15e.160, and Departmental Regulation (DR) 4300-008, *Reasonable Accommodations and Personal Assistance Services for Employees and Applicants with Disabilities*, this policy outlines the guidelines for the National Capital Region (NCR) Sign Language Interpreting Services Program, which provides in-person and virtual sign language interpreting services by utilizing visual or tactile modes of communication for USDA Employees, USDA Job Applicants, USDA Customers, and USDA Visitors in the NCR who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, and/or have hearing loss.
- b) The NCR Sign Language Interpreting Services Program was established to ensure equal access through the removal of technology and communication barriers at USDA.
- c) This policy guides all USDA Mission Areas, Agencies, and Staff Offices with consistency, accountability, efficiency, direction, definition, and clarity on how in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services are implemented in the NCR for employees who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, and/or have hearing loss.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- a) USDA Employees, USDA Job Applicants, USDA Customers, and/or USDA Visitors in the NCR who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing and/or have hearing loss who request in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services for work-related individual use and/or for USDA programs, events, and activities; and
- b) USDA Mission Areas, Agencies, and Staff Offices in the NCR responsible for providing reasonable accommodations to USDA Employees and USDA Applicants, and accessible programs and effective communication to USDA Customers and USDA Visitors, for work-related individual use and for USDA programs, events, and activities.

In-person Sign Language Interpreting Services shall be available Monday through Friday (except federal holidays), between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM EST, in accordance with the federal government's operating status in the NCR, as determined by the Office of Personnel Management. In-person Sign Language Interpreting Services shall be available for employees' work-related activities that occur outside of the hours of 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM EST, if approved by the employee's supervisor and the USDA TARGET Center.

In-person Sign Language Interpreting Service requests, and the scheduling of these services, shall be processed through the vendors' automated web-based request system (i.e., website, web portal).

All requests for in-person Sign Language Interpreting Service should be submitted at least twenty-four (24) business hours in advance. To ensure the availability of in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services, the USDA TARGET Center recommends submitting requests at least two (2) weeks in advance.

In-person Sign Language Interpreting Services that were not requested at least twenty-four (24) business hours in advance (short-notice services) are provided only if on-call sign language interpreters are available. On-call sign language interpreters are assigned by the USDA TARGET Center on an ad hoc basis and the assignments are based on the interpreter's scheduled availability at USDA Headquarters, Monday through Friday (except federal holidays), between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM EST, in accordance with the federal government's operating status in the NCR, as determined by the Office of Personnel Management.

3. POLICY

- a) **Compliance:** This policy is compliant with DR 4300-008, Section 501 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, 7 CFR Part § 15e.160, and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 1990, as amended. This policy provides guidance and assigns responsibility for requesting in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services in the NCR.
- b) **Contract:** USDA has established contracts with multiple Sign Language Interpreting Services vendors to acquire in-person Qualified Sign Language Interpreting Services for USDA Employees, USDA Job Applicants, USDA Customers, and USDA Visitors in the NCR who request in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services for work-related individual use and for USDA programs, events, and activities.

In-person Sign Language Interpreters are certified by either the Registry of the Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), the American Consortium of Certified Interpreters (ACCI) or possess the suitability qualifications as outlined in the contract's performance work statement.

- c) **Funding:** All in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services are centralized at the Department Level, funded through the Department's Shared Cost Program (DSCP), and are available per request for work-related individual use and for USDA programs, events, and activities. The apportionment for funding the Sign Language Interpreting Services in the NCR, pursuant to the DSCP, 1) is not based on the total number of employees at each Agency or Staff Office who use the Sign Language Interpreting Services, and 2) is not based on the frequency with which employees at each Agency or Staff Office use the Sign Language Interpreting Services. Instead, the apportionment for funding the Sign Language Interpreting Services in the NCR, pursuant to the DSCP, is based on each Agency or Staff Office's total number of full-time employees in the NCR.
- d) **NCR Service Requests:** The USDA TARGET Center facilitates the in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services for the NCR only.

All requests for in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services shall be submitted through a vendor's Self-Service Web Portal at least twenty-four (24) business hours in advance of the Sign Language Interpreting Services assignment; however, to ensure the availability of in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services, the USDA TARGET Center recommends submitting requests at least two (2) weeks in advance of the Sign Language Interpreting Services assignment.

To cancel a request for in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services, the cancellation must be submitted sixteen (16) business hours prior to the scheduled Sign Language Interpreting Service assignment.

- e) **Short-Notice Service Requests:** Short-notice service requests will be accepted based on interpreter availability; however, the USDA TARGET Center cannot guarantee the availability of Sign Language Interpreting Services at short notice (i.e., a request made less than twenty-four (24) business hours in advance). Services that were not requested in advance (on-call and/or ad hoc services) are provided only if an on-call interpreter is available.
- f) **Access to Service Requests:** Employees may submit (with facilitation from the USDA TARGET Center, as needed) and review requests for in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services through the vendors' Self-Service Web Portals. Members of the USDA TARGET Center's Sign Language Interpreting Services Program shall have access to all requests for in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services, to verify quality assurance and validate the timeliness of the delivery of services.
- g) **Sign Language Interpreting Services Outside of the NCR** are available to USDA Employees, USDA Job Applicants, USDA Customers, and USDA Visitors, through a separate contract vehicle outlined in Procedure ISP-201 Request Nationwide Sign Language Interpreting Services. Contact the USDA TARGET Center at target-center@usda.gov for additional information.
- h) **USDA Job Applicants, USDA Customers, and USDA Visitors in the NCR** who require Sign Language Interpreting Services in the NCR must submit their request (with facilitation from the USDA TARGET Center, as needed) to the appropriate USDA Mission Areas, Agencies, Staff Offices, Hiring Officials, or other Agency Points of Contact who are responsible for submitting those requests for Sign Language Interpreting Services as a reasonable accommodation or program modification through the vendors' Self-Service Web Portals. Mission Areas, Agencies, and Staff Offices are responsible for engaging in the Reasonable Accommodations interactive process.
Farmers and Ranchers who require interpreters for the submission of grant applications or for delivery of other USDA services are considered USDA Customers.

4. TYPES OF IN-PERSON SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING SERVICES

- **Certified American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter**
American Sign Language (ASL)/English Interpreters (translation between ASL and spoken English), Signed Exact English (SEE), Pidgin Signed English (PSE), close vision, and sign supported speech are trained professionals who have been certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) or the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) to facilitate the communication of people who do not share a common language or communication mode.
- **Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI)**
Certified Deaf Interpreters (using a deaf person as an intermediary between a hearing person and another deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing person) have demonstrated knowledge and understanding of interpreting, deafness, the Deaf community, and Deaf culture. CDIs have specialized training and/or experience in the use of gesture, mime, props, drawings, and other tools to enhance communication. CDIs possess native or near-native fluency in American Sign Language and are recommended for a broad range of assignments where an interpreter who is deaf or hard-of-hearing would be beneficial.

- **Pro-Tactile American Sign Language Interpreter**
Pro-Tactile American Sign Language Interpreters (translation for deafblind individuals where the client places his/her hands on the CDI or the Sign Language Interpreter's hands so as to feel the formation of signs) adapt ASL to be useful for people who are blind. Rather than have the individual use their own hands as a reference for communication, individuals who convey information with pro-tactile ASL use the perceiver's hands and body.
- **Low Vision Interpreter**
Low Vision Interpreters (for individuals with vision impairments who can only read signs at close range) utilize a method that relies on an individual's residual vision for communication. The interpreter positions themselves close to the consumer to reduce their signing space and reduce their rate of interpreting.
- **Trilingual Interpreter**
Trilingual Interpreters (translating from spoken English to ASL to another foreign language) have the versatility, adaptability, and cultural understanding of all three languages (ASL, English and another foreign language) to convey all essential elements of meaning to maintain message equivalency.
- **Transliteration**
Transliterator (translation between English-based sign language and spoken English).
- **Oral Transliteration**
Oral Transliteration (words are silently mouthed and gestures are used to convey spoken English). An oral transliterator is an individual trained in oral transliteration and lip reading of deaf or hard of hearing and conveys the messages verbally to hearing individuals and vice versa.
- **Cued Speech Transliteration**
Cued Speech Transliteration (translation from the spoken mode of communication to the cued mode, making all phonemes of that language uniquely visible on the hands and mouth) uses Cued Speech to convey the sounds that make the words an individual is saying so that an additional individual who understands Cued Speech can understand word-for-word what is being said in the same language that it was conveyed in.
- **TypeWell**
TypeWell is a system for capturing spoken content and generating an immediate meaning-for-meaning transcript.
- **Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART)**
CART or real-time captioning is the instant translation of what is spoken into English text using a stenotype machine, notebook computer and software.
- **Video Interpreter** provides services from a remote location through video conferencing technology (e.g., Microsoft Teams, ZOOM, WebEx, etc.)

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

a. The USDA TARGET Center is responsible for the following:

- Facilitating requests for Sign Language Interpreting Services in the NCR—for work-related individual use and for USDA programs, events, and activities—by coordinating with contract vendors who provide those services and coordinating with USDA Employees, Customers, Applicants, and Visitors.
- Coordinating the arrival of sign language interpreters at, and facilitating their access to, USDA buildings in the NCR.
- Notifying USDA employees in the NCR of the available Sign Language Interpreting Services and of the procedures for requesting those services.
- Ensuring that the vendor(s) maintains quality metrics and attains performance measures as outlined in the Performance Work Statement.
- Maintaining a schedule for on-call sign language interpreters who are assigned ad hoc to various short-notice service requests, recurring meetings, and other scheduled meetings.
- Reviewing employees' feedback regarding service delivery and identifying opportunities for improvement.
- Educating and training supervisors and managers, HR Specialists, program and event coordinators, employees who deal directly with the public, and employees requiring Sign Language Interpreting Services and/or using the vendors' Self-Service Web Portals, in the NCR, on the In Person Sign Language Interpreting Services Policy and use of the vendors' Self-Service Web Portals.

b. USDA Supervisors and managers, HR Specialists, program and event coordinators, employees who deal directly with the public, and employees requiring Sign Language Interpreting Services, and/or using the vendors' Self-Service Web Portals, in the NCR, are responsible for the following:

- Notifying USDA Customers, USDA Job Applicants, and USDA Visitors of the Sign Language Interpreting Services available, and the procedures for requesting those services, in the NCR (with facilitation from the USDA TARGET Center, as needed).
- Supervisors and managers are responsible for ensuring that employees under their supervision who require sign language interpreting services are aware of the procedures for obtaining such services in the NCR, and when needed, for ensuring that interpreting services are provided for formal meetings, programs, and so on.
- USDA employees who request in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services—for work-related individual use (for themselves or for other USDA Employees, Applicants, Customers or Visitors) or for USDA programs, events, and activities—must review the In-Person Sign Language Interpreting Services Policy, and complete training as may be required by the USDA TARGET Center on the In-Person Sign Language Interpreting Services Policy and use of the vendors' Self-Service Web Portals.
- USDA employees who request in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services must provide accurate information via the vendors' Self-Service Web Portals, including any relevant terminology, logistics details, or websites; provide any additional information requested by the vendors or the USDA TARGET Center; provide accurate and updated information directly to the vendors about any list of

specific sign language interpreters they do not want to use (i.e., the “Do Not Send” list).

- USDA employees who request in-person Sign Language Interpreting Services must provide an escort for sign language interpreters at USDA facilities in accordance with security protocol (with facilitation from the USDA TARGET Center, as needed). Sign Language Interpreters are expected to arrive sufficiently early (at least 30 minutes prior to the start time of the request) to fulfill security requirements prior to the start time of the sign language interpreting service.
- Contact the vendor directly (with facilitation from the USDA TARGET Center, as needed) for guidance on how to submit Sign Language Interpreting Requests through the vendors’ web portals.
- Contact the USDA TARGET Center immediately regarding service request issues and performance issues (e.g., a sign language interpreter’s late arrival, non-arrival, or poor performance).
- Complete the surveys provided by the USDA TARGET Center or the vendor after each sign language interpreting service is provided.

6. COMPLIANCE AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Contracting Officer (CO) and Contracting Officer Technical Representative (COR) ensure that the vendor complies with the quality standards outlined in the Performance Work Statement and maintains both timeliness, quality and performance measures.

Performance measures include:

- 95% of all Sign Language Interpreting Service Requests are accurately confirmed by the vendor;
- 95% of all Sign Language Interpreting Service Requests are confirmed by the vendor within eight (8) business hours;
- 95% of all Sign Language Interpreting Service Requests received twenty-four (24) or more business hours in advance shall be fulfilled by the vendor;
- 95% of Sign Language Interpreting Service Requests are performed timely by sign language interpreters;
- 95% of Sign Language Interpreting Service Requests meet the requirements of the deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing employees;
- 95% of Sign Language Interpreting Service Requests meet customer preferences and expectations;
- 95% of Sign Language Interpreting Service Requests are delivered in a professional manner;
- In accordance with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) – Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Code of Professional Conduct, sign language interpreters shall adhere to standards of confidential communication at all times, which include interpreter-customer communications, work-related documents, personal customer information, business information, and classified information.

The COR and the vendor conduct monthly meetings to maintain quality control and identify performance and process improvements.

7. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND INQUIRIES

A survey is sent to the employee who requested the Sign Language Interpreting Services once the sign language interpreting service is completed. The survey includes an opportunity to assess the general process for Sign Language Interpreting Services in the NCR, the sign language interpreter's timeliness, the quality of the sign language interpretation, and the USDA TARGET Center's effectiveness in facilitating the Sign Language Interpreting Services.

8. FORMS AND PROCEDURES

- Procedure ISP-101 Request NCR Sign Language Interpreting Services
- Procedure ISP-201 Request Nationwide Sign Language Interpreting Services

9. DEFINITIONS

- **National Capital Region (NCR)** encompasses Washington DC, Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, Montgomery, Prince George's, and Prince William counties, and all cities and towns included within the outer boundaries of the foregoing counties.
- **Vendor:** A business entity or company that has met USDA's criteria for providing in-person and virtual Sign Language Interpreting Services to USDA employees in the NCR.
- **Sign Language Interpreting Services:** Services provided by skilled professionals who utilize a range of visual and tactile communications in a variety of settings to convey meaning between hearing and deaf, deaf/blind and hard of hearing individuals.
- **On-Call Sign Language Interpreter:** A certified sign language interpreter who is assigned by the USDA TARGET Center on an ad hoc basis and the assignments are based on the interpreter's scheduled availability at USDA Headquarters, Monday through Friday (except federal holidays), between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM EST, in accordance with the federal government's operating status in the NCR, as determined by the Office of Personnel Management.
- **Requestors:** Individuals who utilize sign language interpreting services (e.g., USDA Employees, Colleagues, Supervisors, Program Managers, Reasonable Accommodation Coordinators and Event Committees).
- **Job Applicants:** Individuals who have an interview with USDA Personnel in the NCR.

10. REQUEST NCR SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING SERVICES

- A USDA employee shall initiate a request for NCR Sign Language Interpreting Services by contacting the USDA TARGET Center Interpreting Services Program via email at target-center@usda.gov to request the NCR Sign Language Interpreting Services Policy.
- The email request must include the employee's full name, the respective Agency or Staff Office and the employee's contact information. The employee must also carbon-copy the employee's supervisor in the email request.
- The USDA TARGET Center will provide the employee with instructions to proceed with sign language interpreting service requests through the vendor's Self-Service Portal.
- Refer to Procedure ISP-101 Request NCR Sign Language Interpreting Services.