



Washington Society of Jewish Deaf
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HIRING INTERPRETERS FOR JEWISH EVENTS, updated 10/03/2023

The Washington Society of Jewish Deaf is a 501(C)3 non-profit organization that provides programs for the Jewish Deaf and hard of hearing communities of Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

We also offer accessibility resources for synagogues and other Jewish institutions. Feel free to share this information with members of your clergy team or the person who coordinates interpreter requests

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WSJD receives many questions about interpreting services. Below is a list of FAQs. If you have questions not answered here, contact us by email: wsjdcc@gmail.com

- 1. What type of interpreter do members of the Deaf and hard of hearing community need? How does an interpreter provide access to liturgical text?**

Communication needs and preferences of deaf and hard of hearing community members vary. One size does not fit all. When you receive a request from a deaf person for an interpreter, get information on their preferences and needs. Interpreters and transliterators possess specific skills that can meet the communication needs of deaf/hard of hearing persons. (See list below.)

- **AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (ASL) INTERPRETERS** - convey spoken and sign language messages between individuals or groups who use two different languages: American Sign Language (ASL) and English. ASL is a language with its own grammar and syntax, and, like other languages, does not follow English word order.
- **SIGN ENGLISH (SE) TRANSLITERATORS** - convey spoken and sign language messages between individuals or groups who use the vocabulary of ASL but generally follow English word order
- **TACTILE SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS** - convey spoken and sign languages to DeafBlind individuals who place their hands on the hands of the interpreter to receive the message in ASL or SE.
- **CLOSE VISION INTERPRETERS** - convey spoken and sign languages either in ASL or SE to individuals who need interpreters to be within the range of their vision, which may be as close as two or three feet..
- **ORAL INTERPRETERS** lip synch all spoken language for the person who relies on speechreading
- **CUED SPEECH TRANSLITERATORS (not an interpreter)** use **Cued Speech – specific lip movements** - to convey the sounds of the spoken words so that another person (who understands **Cued Speech**) can understand word for word what was being said in the same language that it was said in.”
(www.nchearingloss.org/translit.htm)
- **CERTIFIED DEAF INTERPRETERS** are deaf or hard of hearing individuals who have demonstrated knowledge and understanding of interpreting, the Deaf community, and Deaf culture. These individuals have specialized training and/or experience in the use of gesture, mime, props, drawings and other tools to enhance communication. They possess native or near-native fluency in ASL and are recommended for a broad range of assignments where an interpreter who is deaf or hard-of-hearing would be beneficial to supplement the skills of a hearing interpreter.

Some consumers may prefer that the interpreter silently mouth Hebrew and sign in SE or ASL. Other consumers may just want the interpreter to note the page of the readings and interpret only the English parts even while the Hebrew is being chanted.

2. **Who should I contact for a list of interpreters? What agencies provide interpreting services?**

The WSJD keeps a list of interpreters who are comfortable interpreting in a variety of Jewish settings. The interpreters on the list are freelance and not hired through an agency.

If your facility prefers to contract interpreting services through an agency, go to the [Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library's website](#) to search for a list of interpreter agencies.

3. **In our services, we often chant in Hebrew. Can many interpreters translate from Hebrew to English? If Hebrew is spoken or chanted, what do interpreters need to prepare for their assignment?**

Many interpreters are **not fluent** in Hebrew. Often a Hebrew fluent interpreter will team with a less Hebrew fluent interpreter for worship services. Many interpreters want to have English translations of Hebrew text one to two weeks in advance to prepare for their assignment. Three days lead time may give the more experienced interpreter enough time to prepare for the assignment. For the less experienced interpreters, the longer the lead time the better.

For a Friday or Saturday Shabbat Service – interpreters generally need to have:

- The specific text and pages used for the service and the order in which they will appear
- The prayers that are chanted
- Torah and Haftarah portions
- Rabbi's speech
- The text for any special events that might be accompanying the service (e.g., A class presentation, an awards ceremony)

For a bar/bat mitzvah service – **in addition** to the above items, interpreters generally need to have:

- Bar or Bat mitzvah child's speeches
- Parent blessings or speeches

- Names of individuals receiving aliyahs (special honors) during the ceremony

If available, interpreters often benefit from copies of CDs of the prayers and tunes used in services. This offers an opportunity to become more familiar with tunes used in the services before the assignment. Although the interpreter may know the prayer, an unfamiliar tune can throw the interpreter off.

4. **Where do you suggest deaf or hard of hearing attendees be seated?**

First, ask your consumers. Deaf people depend on their vision for the overall spiritual experience. Many prefer to sit in the front row in the middle section of the sanctuary to have a full view of the bimah where both the Rabbi and the Cantor are likely to be situated.

Other factors include adequate space for the interpreter to sit as well as place for a music stand to hold materials. Deaf and hard of hearing individuals may need to see the space before they decide where to sit. Their decision will take into account the following:

1. The structure of the sanctuary or meeting room.
2. Barriers that may reduce the sight line to speakers. Though they may be watching the interpreter or transliterator, they also may prefer to see the speakers in order to gather facial expressions and body language.
3. Interpreters must be able to hear speakers in order to do their job.
4. The number of deaf attendees expected.

Interpreters will work with the deaf person(s) to ensure that they are visible. Placement of interpreters also depends on additional factors. If the person has close vision needs, the interpreter must sit within the distance vision range best for the deaf person. When arranging for a close vision interpreter, ask the deaf person the distance range (3 feet, 5 feet, etc.) needed.

If you are not sure what the deaf person needs, ask! They know what they need!

5. **What other types of information do I need when I look for an interpreter?**

When you receive a request for an interpreter, ask the deaf person for information on the type of interpreter needed. Provide the following information to the interpreters:

- Date, time, and length of assignment
- The more specific information you have, the better the interpreter will be able to respond. Will the assignment be for a service? a workshop? a meeting?
- Type of interpreting/transliterating services needed by the deaf person(s) (i.e. ASL, SE, tactile, close vision, oral, cued speech, deaf interpreter)

6. **How many interpreters should we hire?**

The number of interpreters depends on the level of experience of the interpreter you hire, the length and the complexity of the assignment.

- If the service/event is more than two hours, two interpreters are usually suggested.
- If the person asks for a tactile interpreter, the number of interpreters depends on the length of the assignment. Ask the tactile interpreter if one additional interpreter is enough, or what is the recommendation. This is because tactile interpreting is physically strenuous and interpreters need frequent breaks because of repetitive motion injuries.

7. **What is the standard pay for interpreters?**

Since interpreters are professionals their fees vary, depending on the level of the interpreter's experience and/or certification. Fees tend range from \$ 60.00 - \$ 150.00 per hour for a two hour minimum. (In other words, if the job is 45 minutes, the interpreter will still charge for two hours.)

While some interpreters may be willing to negotiate their fees, one needs to keep in mind that interpreting is a profession and livelihood.

CLOSING COMMENTS:

The metro Washington DC area is fortunate that many synagogues have opened their “gates” to the Jewish Deaf Community. We recommend that you do not hire for the sake of doing the Jewish Deaf community a ‘favor’ by providing access. While it is a nice gesture, it’s best to first have a commitment from a deaf person who will use the service.

The WSJD is happy to help promote your sign-interpreted events and services that are open to the public.

If you have questions or need our assistance in promoting your sign-interpreted events, feel free to contact the WSJD at wsjd01@gmail.com.

INTERPRETING AGENCIES*

- [Access Interpreting, Inc.](#)
- [Birnbaum Interpreting Services](#)
- [Deaf Access Solutions](#)
- [Hands in Motion](#)
- [HIS Interpreting Services](#)
- [Vital Signs LLC](#)

*This is a small sampling of the many agencies in our area. WSJD does not endorse any specific agency.