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Tips for Interpretation and Translation

Communication is key in building communities. Sometimes that isn't as easy as it sounds.

In January 2026, the Sioux Falls school district reported more than 3,000 students were learning English as a second language. Spanish is the most common primary language, but 115 languages are spoken by students. And of course, that means there are adults speaking those same languages across the city! There is also the unspoken language – American Sign Language (ASL) used by people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Non-profit organizations, service providers and businesses do not have to navigate these communication challenges alone.

The Difference Between Interpretation and Translation

We sometimes use these two words as though they mean the same thing. But if you are going to find assistance in communicating, remember they are different.

- **Interpreters do the talking.** They are the communication bridge between people using two (or more!) languages in one conversation
- **Translators do the writing.** They take documents, books, reports or anything else that is written in one language and change it into the language someone needs.

Of course, some people do both. But knowing what you need will help narrow your choices when it is time to find assistance. There are many options, and it may take some time to determine which is best for your current situation.

Finding the Right Fit

The following resources might be a good place to start your search. They are listed in alphabetical order by type of service. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list but an overview of options. Inclusion does not imply endorsement or approval. Agencies and businesses set their own costs, service area and any specialized assistance.

For translation or in-person (face to face) interpretation of languages other than English:

- A to Z World Languages, Inc 605-275-6565
- Lutheran Social Services/Center for New Americans 605-731-2010
- LSS Multi-Cultural Center 605-731-2000

Phone, Online and Virtual options include:

- Language Line 1-800-752-6096
- Propio 1-888-528-6692

For interpretation in American Sign Language (ASL):

The South Dakota Department of Human Services provides a registry of interpreters for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, including their certifications. They also have information on financial assistance for interpreting costs that are not covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Find the information here.

Video Relay Service (VRS) allows individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to communicate with voice telephone users through video equipment. VRS is free to the consumer. Providers are reimbursed through funds from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Options include:

- ASL Anywhere (VRS)
- Convo Now (VRS)
- Grate Interpreting 605-906-7900 (call or text)
- ISI, LLC 605-331-7800
- Purple Communications (VRS and in-person interpreting) 866-669-7707

Best Practices and Helpful Suggestions

Choosing the best resources for your needs is the first step. The next is to develop policies and procedures to make sure you provide the highest possible level of service to your organization or business.

Working with interpreters to support ESL or deaf/hard of hearing individuals

- Best Practices:
  - Use a qualified, professional interpreter who is not personally involved with the person
  - Introduce yourself to the interpreter and share any necessary background or goals, outline any sensitive or legal areas that might be covered.
  - Allow extra time for meetings and appointments
  - Seat the interpreter next to or slightly behind the individual
  - Remember that all conversations and comments will be interpreted, even if they are not directed at the person
  - Do not 'talk down' to someone; a lack of hearing or of English language skills does not reflect on a person's intellect or education.
  - Speak to the individual being served, not the interpreter
  - Organize your thoughts before speaking
  - Speak more slowly, not louder, at an even pace with relatively short segments
  - Jargon, slang and humor do not always work in another language – use them sparingly.

    (Sources: BK South LAABB Community Resources, Refugee Health TA, American Family Physician)

- Helpful suggestions from non-profit organizations in the Sioux Empire:
  - Make appointments ahead of time.
  - Ask those who are deaf or hard of hearing for their preferred way of communicating. Some may prefer writing.
  - Do not assume people who are deaf or hard of hearing can read lips.

- Wait for the interpreter to arrive to begin conversation, especially in a crisis.

When an English Language Learner is a new employee or volunteer:

- Best Practices:
  - Review current Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) standards.
  - Certain labor law and employee rights posters are required in all businesses. Provide them in both English and other needed languages. The South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation (DLR) has free downloadable mandatory federal and state posters in multiple languages available.
  - Provide work and safety instructions in an alternative language when appropriate
  - If possible, have at least one team leader or supervisor available to act as an interpreter as needed.

    (source: The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and MRA Human Resource Management)

- Helpful suggestions from non-profit organizations in the Sioux Empire:
  - Offer classes and trainings in a variety of languages for staff. Check out some options in **For More Information** below.
  - Create and document policies on who will or will not be accepted as interpreters.
  - Seek out and apply for any grants to cover translation services for key documents in the primary languages.

For more information, call 211 or search our online database:

- www.helplinecenter.org/2-1-1
  - Enter your zip code
    - Select Category
      - Language Interpretation
      - Language Translation
      - ESL Classes**Sources:**

- American Family Physician 2014;90(7):476-480: https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2014/1001/p476.html
- American Translators Association: https://www.atanet.org/
- A to Z World Languages, Inc.: https://www.atozworldlanguages.com/
- ASL Anywhere: https://aslanywhere.com/
- BK South LAABB Community Resources: https://sites.google.com/strongschools.nyc/bksouthlaabcommunityresources/home
- Cyracom: https://www.cyracom.com/
- South Dakota Department of Human Services: https://dhs.sd.gov/en/rehabilitation-services/interpreters-for-people-who-are-deaf-or-hard-of-hearing
- South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation Workplace Posters: https://dlr.sd.gov/employment_laws/posting_requirements.aspx
- EEOC: https://www.eeoc.gov/
- Language Line: https://www.languageline.com/
- Lutheran Social Services: https://lsssd.org/
- LSS Multi-Cultural Center: https://lsssd.org/services/community-connection/multi-cultural-center.html
- MRA Human Resources: https://www.mranet.org/
- Propio: https://propio.com/
- Refugee Health TA: https://www.refugeehealthta.org/index.html
- Society for Human Resource Management: https://www.shrm.org/home

Disclaimer: This HelpSheet is developed by the Helpline Center in cooperation with the Sioux Empire United Way. HelpSheets provide a brief overview of the designated topic. For more information, call 211 or text your zip code to 898211.

Updated: November 2026

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