

Policy and Procedures for NOAA's Sign Language Interpreting Services Program

November 30, 2009

NOAA's General Interpreting Policy

In accordance with section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, all Federal agencies are under an affirmative duty to ensure that equal access in employment is provided for individuals with disabilities. "Equal access in employment" applies to all Agency sponsored events, including applicant interviews, orientation, meetings, training, conferences, office parties, or other programs during regular business hours¹. No individuals with a disability will be excluded, denied services, segregated, or otherwise treated differently than other individuals because of the absence of auxiliary aids and services, such as sign language interpreters.

Sign Language interpreting is a reasonable accommodation that may be required by individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing in order to equally participate in the workplace or to enjoy access to NOAA's programs offered to members of the public. A qualified professional interpreter will provide, when requested, communication services so that the employee can fully participate in any and all discussion in the workplace. A qualified interpreter is an interpreter who is able to interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialized vocabulary.

How to Request Sign Language Interpreting Services from NOAA's Civil Rights Office

(Requests for NOAA sponsored meetings or events taking place in the Hoover Building, Washington DC, should be directed through the Department of Commerce's Office of Civil Rights. Contact person: Robin M. Mack, rmack@doc.gov or 202-482-8117.)

Requests from NOAA program offices and any persons interested in acquiring interpreting services for a NOAA sponsored meeting or event, should be directed towards Interpreter@noaa.gov or through the Oracle Calendar System (to reserve an appointment with one of the on call interpreters for meetings and events on the Silver Spring Campus.)

¹ When an employee who is deaf or hard of hearing who, as part of his/her job, attends a meeting or event outside of the workplace and it is sponsored by an outside organization, the sponsoring organization is principally responsible for providing interpreters. However, NOAA will provide services if the sponsoring agency fails to do so.

When requesting interpreting services, be sure to include the following information:

- The date the meeting or event is to occur
- The start and end times
- The location of the meeting or event, including room numbers
- The names, email addresses, and telephone/cell phone/pager numbers of two on-site contact persons who can escort the interpreters through security (one of the contacts should be the Deaf or Hard of Hearing employee)
- If sending an email, also include a cc: to the employee's supervisor
- Please send copies of handouts, agendas, notes, lectures, or other pertinent materials to Interpreter@noaa.gov or fax them to 301-713-0983.

An on-call interpreter will be on duty in the Civil Rights Office (CRO) at SSMC 3, Room 10509, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Walk in, and telephone requests for on call interpreter use will be accepted, but the primary mechanism for reserving time with the on call interpreter is through the Oracle Calendar system. To invite an interpreter to participate in your meeting or event, please send an Oracle invitation to the interpreting services Oracle account called "Interpreter Interpreter". If there is no schedule conflict, go ahead and schedule the meeting or event—the interpreter will need a 15 minute cushion blocked off before and after the assignment.

If there is a scheduling conflict on the Oracle Calendar, or if additional interpreters are needed, the requestor should send an email message to Interpreter@noaa.gov with all of the event information listed above. Interpreting requests longer than two hours require a team of two interpreters (this is the industry standard.) Certain other demanding, fast-paced situations may also require two interpreters.

Communication after the Initial Request is Placed

To update your request with changes, send an email to Interpreter@noaa.gov or update your request through the Oracle Calendar system. No other communication methods will be accepted. If any CRO staff member sends you an e-mail regarding an interpreting request, please click "Reply to All" so the information will go back to all CRO staff members. The names of the assigned interpreters are available the day of the event, through the contractor's website at www.bisscheduling.com. Emergency cancellations or last minute changes may be communicated by sending an email to biscoord@bisworld.com (please also send a cc: to Interpreter@noaa.gov.)

Requests made with Short Notice, Unexpected Extensions, and Cancellations

It is best to request interpreting services as soon as you become aware of the meeting or event, so we may have adequate time to arrange interpreters. If you request on very short notice, we cannot guarantee you services, however every effort will be made to honor those requests. Last minute requests may incur additional fees to the agency. Unexpected extensions are treated as last minute requests and the agency is charged an additional fee. Cancellations are expected from time to time, but requestors are urged to try to make the cancellation more than 3 workdays before the event. If cancellations are made with less than 3 workdays prior to the event, the agency is expected to pay in full for the entire scheduled time and number of interpreters.

Large, Public, or Out of Town Events

When planning a large, public, or out of town event (outside of the Washington DC metropolitan area), it is necessary to include the requests for interpreters early in the planning stage. All announcements, notices, or invitations posted, delivered or published for NOAA sponsored events shall include the notice: "This program is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other accommodations should be directed to (name) (email and/or telephone number)." Meetings which require advance registration need not provide a sign language interpreter unless requested. Use registration forms to allow attendees to identify any special accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a script, an agenda or words to music, please send it to Interpreter@noaa.gov, as it would be helpful for the interpreters as they are preparing for the event.

Multi-Day Training, Conferences, Retreats, etc.

For any event of three or more days in duration, please initiate the request for interpreters at least three weeks prior to the start of the event in order to guarantee that interpreting services are provided.

Three-month Request (Quarterly)

For regularly scheduled events such as staff meetings, you are responsible for submitting requests three months at a time. Requests are due: mid-December for January, February & March; mid-March for April, May & June; mid-June for July, August & September; mid-September for October, November & December.

Questions about the NOAA Interpreting Services Program

Jennifer Croft of the CRO Staff serves as the Interpreting Services Contracting Officer's Technical Representative (COTR) and is responsible for overall operation of the Sign Language Interpreting Services program. Any operational questions may be addressed to Ms. Croft, however, requests for services must be made via Interpreter@noaa.gov or the Oracle Calendar system.

The NOAA Civil Rights Office is pleased to assist you and remains available to all employees and managers to service your EEO needs.