

Meeting Interpreters

Find The Right Linguist For Your Event

Interpreting is a relatively young industry in the U.S., and it is currently unregulated. Interpreters are not legally required to have an accreditation unless they are hired directly by a court and are being paid with taxpayer dollars.



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Because it is relatively easy for a bilingual individual to hang his shingle, meeting planners need to know what to look for in a linguist to make sure that meeting content is interpreted faithfully and that it is delivered in the same register as that of the speaker, however colloquial or specialized speech might be.

A recent survey of interpreters shows that in North America, only 25.8 percent of interpreters work on international/transnational events and 21.8 percent on scientific or technical conferences. Those are the most commonly needed areas of expertise for the majority of meetings, but there are many sub-categories (i.e. sales, politics, trade, information systems, financial, office equipment, arts, to name a few, and a myriad of topics just within the medical field). The fact that the

majority of conference interpreters are freelancers further complicates matters when choosing interpreters.

Seek Experienced LSPs

Furthermore, meeting planners, generally speaking, are not set up to screen interpreters to verify their proficiency in the field in question, nor should they have to. One of the best ways to make sure your client gets a good return for his investment in this often crucial service, is to retain the services of an established language agency. The best of these language service providers (LSPs) are those who have proven experience in the industry in question, and who source their interpreters from existing professionals and reputable university language programs. Companies that require accreditation from the linguists they employ (even if it is not yet mandatory) encourage the development of their personnel by offering access to continuing language education.

These firms make sure that the interpreters and translators who work on collateral materials for meetings have the training and credentials to carry out assignments at a specialized level.

They have coordinators available 24/7 to schedule interpreters and technicians who operate the equipment to transmit the interpretation to your audience anywhere in the U.S. and abroad. They provide an all-inclusive quote that covers all pertinent services such as travel, accommodations, ground transportation, custom or consular paperwork, shipment of equipment, etc.

Coordinators strive to source interpreters and equipment for your meeting from the venue or the closest location to reduce or eliminate travel costs.

It's important to strive to hire companies that are operated by working linguists and offer equipment, as they will generally have greater insight as to the capabilities of the interpreters, as that is their forté, versus companies that rent the equipment and offer interpreting as an adjunct service, without staff having that skill personally.

What Credentials Should An Interpreter Have?

In conference interpreting, the most important fact you need to ascertain is the experience that the proposed interpreters have in the field in question. In most language combinations, interpreters work in pairs. In some languages, such as Japanese and Arabic, a team of three interpreters called a "petite équipe" is needed.

LSPs will regularly schedule interpreters who have successfully done work in that category, especially if it is a technical field, to provide the necessary experience without these interpreters having to cut their teeth on your dollar.

It's important to verify if the interpreters hold any certifications. Although most certifications are geared towards work in the courts because that is where most interpreters work regularly, they ensure basic interpreting skills.

Certifications include the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Exam, one offered by the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) and another offered by the U.S. State Department. Interpreters also may have degrees or certificates in languages, interpreting or translation. Some interpreters may belong to the International Association of Conference Interpreters, which only admits candidates who have been audited and approved by working members.

Working With Interpreters

Once you have chosen an LSP, the coordinator assigned to your account will work closely with you to walk you through the necessary steps to ensure a successful conference from the language standpoint and to save you money by suggesting alternatives for equipment and language coverage in all rooms involved.

The coordinator will develop glossaries, determine specs for the equipment, the layout of the room, guidelines for the speakers to work with interpreters, etc. The interaction with your coordinator and adherence to LSP conference management practices will go a long way towards making sure you have a productive experience.

The LSPs' experience guarantees that the money spent on language services will support communication throughout the meeting so that all attendees feel that they have been taken into account and can learn and freely give input for the achievement of client objectives, without language barriers.

Bear in mind that the cost of providing a mediocre service for marginal savings could be considered pound wise and penny foolish as you risk endangering the considerable costs involved in staging a meeting if it does not comfortably meet language/communication criteria and thereby foster esprit de corps. **IFMM**

Maria Cristina de la Vega is a federally certified interpreter and has more than 35 years of experience in conference interpreting. She is one of the founders and the president of ProTranslating. Headquartered in Miami, FL, ProTranslating provides interpreting, translation services and linguistic solutions primarily to corporations worldwide. For more information, visit www.protranslating.com.

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