



Department of Health and Human
Services
and
Maine Department of Labor

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Guidance for Hosts of Public Events and Meetings to Ensure Access for Individuals Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

This guide compiled by the Maine Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services is intended to provide information to help ensure that all feel welcome and can fully participate in public events and meetings held in our state, particularly those who are Deaf and hard of hearing.

With closed captioning, live transcripts, and American Sign Language interpretation more available and affordable than ever, departments and agencies across the state can plan inclusive events. This guide includes tips for planning an event, use of in-person versus virtual accommodations, captioning options, and advice for working with an ASL interpreter.

American Sign Language (ASL)

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) describes American Sign Language (ASL) as a visual language that uses the shape, placement, and movement of the hands, facial expressions, and body movements to convey important information. As with any language, ASL has its own rules of grammar and syntax. For many Deaf and hard-of-hearing community members, ASL is their first language, and English is their second language. This is why only providing captioning rather than an ASL interpreter transcription of the spoken words won't convey the same nuance or actual meaning for Deaf ASL speakers. For more history and information about ASL and Deaf Culture, visit this [National Association of the Deaf article on American Sign Language¹](#).

When Planning an Event

Ask your Intended Audience What They Need for Accommodation

Maine DHHS and DOL encourage those convening events to include language on public-facing materials notifying attendees of the event's accessibility. An email address can be provided so that attendees may request further accessibility support as needed. [Learn more about the laws that outline equal access requirementsⁱⁱ](#).

Find An ASL Interpreter

In Maine, several interpreting agencies provide access to qualified American Sign Language Interpreters. You can find [the list of these agencies hereⁱⁱⁱ](#). In addition, The National Association of the Deaf has developed a [directory of Deaf Interpreters^{iv}](#), available for video-based interpretation. A [Deaf interpreter](#) often works with a hearing interpreter and is a specialist who provides interpreting, translation, and transliteration services in American Sign Language and other visual and tactual communication forms by individuals who are Deaf, hard of hearing, and Deaf-Blind.

There is a shortage of ASL interpreters, especially for in-person events. Planning for at least two weeks to line up your interpreter is highly recommended.

How to Communicate with a Deaf Person Who is Using a Sign Language Interpreter

- If the person uses a sign language interpreter, focus on, and speak directly to, the person - not to the interpreter. [NIH -10 Tips for Using a Sign Language Interpreter^v](#)
- Avoid blocking the view of your face and mouth as you talk. This includes covering your mouth with your hand, raising papers in front of your face, or turning away.
- Speak clearly without shouting.

ASL Interpreting – In-Person or Virtual

In-person interpreting should always be provided for in-person events, while virtual interpreting is fine for virtual events. Virtual and in-person interpreting are similar in cost, although sometimes it can be easier to find an interpreter virtually.

If an event lasts more than two hours, you will need to plan on having at least two interpreters. Physically and mentally, interpreters will need to take breaks. Interpreting agencies can provide more guidance.

Is There Funding to Pay for an ASL Interpreter?

When planning your event, you should include a communication access budget item, so you are aware of those costs up front. Corporations are increasingly more willing to sponsor accommodations at events.

Some foundations and state arts commissions also support ASL interpreters at events. For foundations and corporations committed to equity, supporting accessibility for nonprofit events is an opportunity to honor that commitment.

Captioning Options

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), or real-time captioning

CART is the instant translation of spoken words into text on the screen. Real-time, manual captioning is usually better than automatic machine-generated captioning. Providing captioning is not a replacement for ASL interpreting but is always recommended, even when ASL interpreting is not required. Providing captioning for events helps ensure those with unreliable internet connections and those who cannot watch the video with sound can follow along with your event.

Captioners can be prepped with advance information regarding spelling of speakers' names, terms and acronyms that will be used, and other pertinent details to help them with accuracy. Many businesses provide real-time captioning in English and other languages, captioning or transcription after

the event and other services. [Zoom provides a feature to enable^{vi}](#) real-time manual captioning, and many other meeting platforms have similar features.

You can find more information about captioning services in Maine in the Department of Labor’s [Resource Guide^{vii}](#) for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened.

Machine-generated captioning (“live transcription”)

If the meeting/presentation is being recorded for public access, the meeting should include CART captioning even if the original participants did not request CART as an accommodation. While auto-generated captioning has come a long way, it does not yet provide the precision necessary to effectively communicate information. Autogenerated transcription for services such as YouTube, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams can have error rates as high as 5-12 errors per 100 words, resulting in an incoherent translation or a translation that may communicate something other than what was intended.

Zoom Tips for Virtual Meetings with an ASL Interpreter

Various video platforms have been tested for video quality, and none beat the video quality of Zoom.

Tips for accommodating Deaf participants during Zoom video events:

- If there will be more than a few Deaf participants, it is helpful to turn off all videos except for the presenter and the interpreter. When others want to speak, they can then turn on their video; this has the visual impact of someone raising their hand. When participants are done speaking, they should turn off their video again.
- Attendees should [hide all participants who have their videos turned off^{viii}](#) to highlight the presenter, interpreter, and those commenting or asking questions.
- Keeping all videos on if the meeting is fewer than nine people, is acceptable.
- Using the multi-pin feature allows an interpreter/attendee to “pin” multiple videos, such as the interpreter and a speaker, multiple

interpreters, or multiple speakers. Meeting hosts can enable multi-pin for interpreters and each participant by clicking on the ellipsis on that person’s video or in the “Participants” tab.

- Meeting hosts may use the spotlight feature to spotlight the presenter and the interpreter. This is especially important for Deaf-blind community members who won’t be able to use the “pin” feature.
- With Zoom webinars, the only way for non-speaker participants to communicate is via the chat feature. For those with ASL as their primary language, the chat feature may be inaccessible. If you’re hosting a large Zoom meeting, encourage attendees to use “Speaker View,” and then spotlight the speaker’s video to ensure accessibility for all participants.
- During screen sharing, the videos are minimized making accessibility for Deaf participants relying on interpretation difficult. If screen sharing, limit open videos to three and be aware that Deaf individuals can’t read the screen and view the interpreter simultaneously. Ensure they have time to read the screen and view the discussion. When ready to return to the discussion, stop the screen share and return the participant videos to full size.

Additional Resources:

- [Captioning and Sign Language Interpretation in Zoom: Features and Pitfalls](#)^{ix} (Web AIM, December 2022)

ⁱ <https://www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nad.org/resources/civil-rights-laws/>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dod/resource_guide/resource_guide_complete.shtml#interpreting

^{iv} <https://www.nad.org/deaf-interpreters-directory/>

^v <https://www.edi.nih.gov/blog/communities/10-tips-using-sign-language-interpreter>

^{vi} <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/207279736-Managing-closed-captioning-and-live-transcription>

^{vii} https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dod/resource_guide/resource_guide_complete.shtml#captioning

^{viii} https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362323-Adjusting-your-video-layout-during-a-virtual-meeting#h_7fbf4fed-9ea2-44ed-83d4-11f1b7b689cd

^{ix} <https://webaim.org/blog/captioning-interpretation-in-zoom/>