Before you hire—ask yourself: “What are my project’s language needs?”

### Interpretation (Oral)

**The project will require someone who can:**

- Listen to a communication in one language and orally convert it to another language (either simultaneously or consecutively) while retaining the meaning.
- Orally communicate in the target language and can convey the meaning of that conversation in English (direct “in-language” communication).
- Listen to English language media and convert audio into spoken target language.
- Listen to target language media and convert audio into spoken English.

**Key Interpretation Assessment and Certification Bodies:**

- Federal Language Assessments Using the ILR Scale (such as the Defense Language Proficiency Test, Foreign Service Institute Test, or the FBI Language Proficiency Test).
- The Federal Court Interpreter Program (FCIP) Certification.
- The American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) have certification programs.
- Select state court programs (The Language Access Services Section (LASS) of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) has drafted the testing materials used by many states) provide certifications.
- Select university/college programs certify and/or assess language skills.

### Translation (Written)

**The project will require someone who can:**

- Convert written English language text into written target language.
- Convert written target language text into written English.
- Listen to the target language media and convert audio into written English text (transcription).
- Listen to the English language media and convert audio into written target language (transcription).
- Review target language text and orally translate meaning into spoken English (sight translation).

**Key Translation Assessment and Certification Bodies:**

- Federal Language Assessments Using the ILR Scale (such as the Defense Language Proficiency Test, Foreign Service Institute Test, or the FBI Language Proficiency Test).
- The American Translation Association (ATA), the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) all have certification programs.
- Select state court programs (The Language Access Services Section (LASS) of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) has drafted the testing materials used by many states) provide certifications.
- Select university/college programs certify and/or assess language skills.

### Beware—Language Service Decisions to Avoid:

- Hiring linguists without verifying their language qualifications.
- Hiring linguists who have not had their skills independently assessed by a qualified assessment or certification body (e.g., the linguist is certified in court interpretation by the Federal Court Interpreter Program, or achieved equivalent recognition from a qualified assessment or certification body).
- Hiring a vendor or linguist without establishing a quality control plan and remedies for low quality language service.
- Hiring a vendor without inquiring about the formal qualifications or certifications of its linguists.

- Hiring linguists without verifying that they can meet your specific language and/or vocabulary needs (e.g., hiring a certified medical interpreter to interpret legal arguments in court).
- Hiring translators to interpret, unless they are qualified to do both.
- Hiring interpreters to translate, unless they are qualified to do both.
- Using self-identified multilingual staff, who are not otherwise certified or assessed in the target language, to assess the linguistic skill of a professional translator or interpreter.

For additional copies or technical assistance in language access matters, contact the Federal Coordination and Compliance Section at LEP@usdoj.gov.

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