

The background of the cover is a dark blue field with a complex, low-poly geometric pattern of triangles in various shades of blue. Large, white, angular shapes cut through the pattern, creating a sense of depth and movement. The text is centered in the upper half of the page.

# HEALTHCARE PROCUREMENT'S

Guide to an Interpretation Services  
Request for Proposal

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# Introduction

Choosing the right language interpretation provider may impact millions of dollars in hospital revenue and reimbursement. What does your healthcare organization risk when selecting a provider? Consider these executive-level priorities impacted by language interpretation services:



## Hospital Funding:

Interpretation services affect HCAHPS scores, patient satisfaction, and readmission rates. Millions of dollars in government funding depend on high performance in these areas.



## Reputation and Accreditation:

Communication-related patient satisfaction scores factor into the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) 5-Star Hospital Ratings. The general public may research these ratings when selecting a care facility. Also, accreditation from the Joint Commission involves language access components, and auditors check for compliance.



## Information Security:

The average cost of a data breach is \$3.62M according to a 2017 study. Interpretation service providers frequently come into contact with sensitive data like Private Health Information (PHI).

This guide provides tips and tools to help you choose a quality interpretation provider and receive an excellent return on investment in the priorities above.

## Guidance from the Department of Justice: *Hiring the Right Telephonic Interpretation Provider*

The Department of Justice (DOJ) offers practical advice for procurement professionals in its guide, *Hiring the Right Telephonic Interpretation Provider* (pdf), summarized here:

**Know What You Need before Starting the Search:** The DOJ suggests that buyers project interpreter usage in minutes and develop a list of likely target languages. This information helps in negotiating better rates.

**Prioritize merit over price whenever possible:** Assessing vendor quality is an essential component to hiring the right vendor. Consider written proposals, live testing, and prior experience with vendors to evaluate key differences in vendor quality.

**Conduct a Live Test:** Verify vendors' claims about their service. During the testing process, look for:

- Inaccurate or inconsistent methods for identifying the language needed
- Unavailable languages: test languages other than Spanish
- Unreasonably long wait times
- Failure to convey the substance and tone of the entire conversation
- Interpreter errors or lack of linguistic skill

**Ask the Right Questions and Require Specific Answers.** The DOJ notes that "assessing vendor quality is an essential component to hiring the right vendor." A quality interpretation provider should offer specific answers to questions about:

- Interpreter qualifications
- Connection times
- Quality control and assurance
- Reviews or references

# Sample Questions for an Interpretation Service RFP:

## Service Quality

Asking about quality can help you learn more about how a provider hires, trains, certifies, and monitors interpreters. You can also ask about the provider's standards for speed and quality.

### Question

### Goal of Question



How many full-time employee (W-2) interpreters do you have?

What percentage of total call volume is handled by full-time employee (W-2) interpreters?

Learn how many full-time employees the provider has available to take calls. Vendors may lawfully train employee (W-2) interpreters, unlike independent contractor (1099) interpreters. Employee interpreters can also be scheduled to help ensure availability during critical times – such as nights, weekends, and holidays.



How do you control the quality of your interpretation?

Which training, coaching, and ongoing education tools do you employ?

Learn how the provider can ensure that its interpretation consistently meets its quality standards.

In the previous question, you learn how many of the vendor's interpreters are employees and how many are independent contractors. You might request clarification from vendors who use primarily independent contractors and also train their interpreters, as it's unlawful in the US to train independent contractors.



Please list the countries in which your interpreters handle the full duration of interpretation calls, noting what percentage of your overall call volume is handled in each country. Please confirm that these calls are not customer service or operator calls but full interpretation sessions.

Learn if the provider sends calls offshore, which may impact call quality and increase the risk of a data breach. Some providers may claim to "handle" calls in the US, but a US operator only answers the call and then routes to an offshore interpreter. Additionally, offshore interpreters may not be subject to the same laws as US citizens and legal residents.



Please provide your definition of a "contact center," and confirm that at-home/residential environments are never classified as a "contact center."

Ensure that all vendors adhere to a consistent definition of what constitutes a "contact center."

Question

Goal of Question



Please provide a list of addresses, interpreter seats, and square footages of all contact center locations. Please provide photographs of interpreter work locations.

Verify that interpreter contact center locations are secure, professional work environments. Gather contact center addresses, should a future audit be necessary.



Which externally-verifiable certifications or standards support your vetting and training processes?

Ensure that the vendor's subjective vetting and training processes align with external criteria that you can verify.



How many hours of initial training do you directly administer to new interpreters? Which healthcare-specific topics does training cover?

Learn how much training vendors provide their interpreters and how the vendor tailors training around common healthcare scenarios.



Is your interpreter training classroom-based and taught by in-person instructors in the US? If not, what are other ways you provide training and how many hours does each training method represent?

Some vendors primarily provide training online, over-the-phone, or not at all. Verify that the vendor provides interpreter training in an environment conducive to learning.



How often do you proactively monitor calls for quality and which competencies does monitoring measure?

Assess the effectiveness of the vendor's ongoing quality monitoring program. Monitoring should correspond to the interpreter competencies learned in training.



How do you provide interpreters with coaching and specific feedback on call quality? When do you provide this feedback?

Learn how the vendor remedies poor interpreter performance and awards outstanding performance. Coaching provided soon after the monitored call may prove more effective than coaching given days or weeks later. If the vendor records calls for quality monitoring, they should explain how private data remains secure.

Question

Goal of Question



What is your average connection time to an interpreter once a language has been selected? Please provide historical data that confirms your answer.

Learn how quickly the vendor provides access to interpreters. Some vendors may measure their average connection time as how long it takes their automated system to answer inbound calls – often only a few seconds. Measuring in this way does not equate to how long it may take an interpreter to join the call.



How do your performance metrics change during nights, weekends, and holidays?

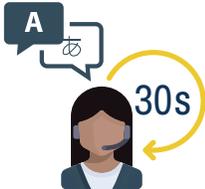
Most interpretation providers rely primarily on independent contractor interpreters. Because it is unlawful to schedule independent contractors in the US, the provider may have difficulty maintaining performance metrics outside of traditional work hours.



Which workforce management and technical processes do you maintain to handle surges in call volume?

Ensure that the vendor is able to hire, train, test, and certify interpreters to meet demand. The vendor may have trouble ramping up to meet your volume needs if they do not create their own interpreter supply – and instead rely on an existing pool of independent contractor interpreters. It is also unlawful for a vendor to schedule independent contractor interpreters.

Please provide historical data on call volume surges and how you served them.



What percentage of our call volume do you expect to connect to an interpreter within thirty seconds? How does this differ between Spanish and all other languages?

Learn if the provider offers connection times that meet your requirements.



Please list external certifications or compliance with guidelines related to interpretation that your company holds.

Vendors often present claims about their interpretation quality as objective standards, despite a lack of externally-verified facts. Learn which available external standards confirm the vendor’s interpretation quality. These may include: ISO 9001:2008 for Quality Management Systems or ISO 13611:2014 for Guidelines for Community Interpreting.



Which endorsements from healthcare industry-specific professional organizations does your company hold?

Determine if industry-specific organizations have vetted the vendor’s service.

# Information Security

Questions about information security help determine how vendor answers, routes, and services calls. You can also determine how they keep sensitive patient and client information secure.

Question	Goal of Question
 <p>How do you demonstrate that interpreter work environments comply with quality standards, consumer protection laws, and client security audits?</p>	<p>Learn if the vendor undergoes internal and external audits to confirm claims about their service.</p>
 <p>Which of your interpreter work locations can clients visit and audit? How much of your call volume do these auditable work locations handle?</p>	<p>Ensure that you can audit where most of the vendor's interpretation takes place – not just one center that passes audits but handles little call volume.</p>
 <p>What physical and information security practices and protocols do your interpreter contact centers have in place?</p>	<p>Ensure safeguards are in place to maintain physical and informational security of patient and client information. Examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24/7/365 recorded surveillance and mandatory visible ID badges for all staff.</li> <li>• Secured access doors that require keycard access to enter.</li> <li>• Interpreter internet access that is limited to whitelisted websites.</li> <li>• Management audits and enforcement of a clean-desk policy on employee interpreter workstations throughout the day.</li> <li>• Visitor restrictions from floor access until cleared by management.</li> </ul>
 <p>How do you protect private health information (PHI)?</p>	<p>Verify that, if PHI is stored or collected, it is managed appropriately. Healthcare providers are responsible for vendor compliance with applicable privacy regulations.</p>

# Account Support

The questions below help you learn about the support you can expect during implementation and for the full duration of the contract.



## Question

What is the cost of implementing your service and what kind of staff training do you provide? Please provide specific historical data and references for two successful implementations.

## Goal of Question

Learn about any hidden costs for implementing the service and training staff to use it effectively. Ensure that vendor claims about implementation match the actual implementation experiences of the vendor's clients.



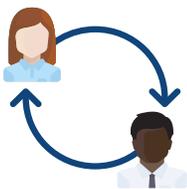
How do you help clients make the most effective usage of interpretation services?

Having a contract with an interpretation service does not guarantee your staff will use the service easily or when lawfully required. Understand how the vendor will help staff access the service easily and routinely when appropriate.



Who will manage our account and how many years of experience do they have as an account manager?

Ensure you will receive support from a dedicated and experienced account manager.



What is your annual turnover rate for your account management staff over the past five years?

Learn how likely you are to receive service from the same account manager for the duration of your contract. You may receive a lower level of service from vendors who repeatedly assign new account managers, as each new account manager must be re-familiarized with your service needs.



What has your account management team accomplished for clients with similar interpretation needs? What were the results for those clients' language access programs?

Use provider's past performance to ensure that they will be an effective partner in supporting your goals – not just a vendor.

## Question

## Goal of Question



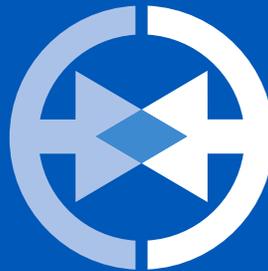
When does billing commence and cease for each call? Are there any additional fees or minimum charges? Please confirm we are not charged for any time during which interpreters/agents act as operators or collect information.

Identify any potential for savings. Billing should commence only when the interpretation session begins and cease when the interpreter disconnects. Some vendors have interpreters act as operators and may not disclose that they bill for that time.



How do you ensure billing accuracy? Has your company or any subsidiary ever been subject to a lawsuit related to inaccurate billing or failure to resolve billing discrepancies?

Learn if the vendor provides accurate and reliable billing services consistently.



## About CyraCom

CyraCom is the leading provider of language interpreting services to healthcare, and its interpretation and translation solutions are exclusively endorsed by American Hospital Association. CyraCom services thousands of healthcare clients throughout the US, including many Fortune 500 healthcare providers – hospitals, systems, and insurers. We support hundreds of languages and operate 24/7.

CyraCom's employee interpreters work in the most extensive network of large-scale interpreter contact centers: all HIPAA-compliant and located in the continental US. Our interpreters receive 120 hours of initial, in-person training in the centers –three times longer than is typical in the language service industry. In training, interpreters learn medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, and other topics essential for healthcare interpreting. Upon completion of training and testing, they become certified interpreters.

## Contact CyraCom

Contact CyraCom today to discuss how we can improve your language services program.

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