



New Mexico Commission for Deaf & Hard of Hearing

Toll-Free: 1.800.489.8536 | Local: 505.383.6530
Website: www.cdhh.state.nm.us

How to Become a Signed Language Interpreter

Contact Person: Lisa Dignan
Lisa.Dignan@state.nm.us
505.383.6530

Becoming a Signed Language Interpreter is not a quick and easy process. It requires at least the same level of education as entering many other professions. Requirements vary by state; this fact sheet will focus on the requirements for the state of New Mexico.

Language Fluency

The first requirement to becoming a signed language interpreter is fluency in both American Sign Language (ASL) and in English. Several colleges and community agencies offer ASL courses either as part of credit programs or Continuing Education programs. See our Fact Sheet on ASL Courses for more information.

Education

A prospective interpreter must attend an Interpreter Education Program. Most Interpreter Education Programs require that applicants demonstrate a significant level of fluency in ASL before they can be accepted into the program. Some are four-year baccalaureate programs, and others are two-year associate programs. Below is a list of interpreter education programs in and around New Mexico, and many more are listed on the website of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (www.RID.org).

Four-Year Baccalaureate Degree Program

University of New Mexico Signed Language Interpreting Program
<https://ling.unm.edu/signed-language-program/index.html>

Two-Year Associate Degree Program

El Paso Community College
www.epcc.edu/InstructionalPrograms/Pages/SignLanguageInterpreterPreparation.aspx

Distance-Based Program

University of Northern Colorado
Department of American Sign Language and Interpreting Studies
www.unco.edu/cebs/asl-interpreting

Certification

Signed Language Interpreters are certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), the national professional organization of signed language interpreters. The RID Certification process is called the National Interpreter Certification (NIC) and involves two steps: passing a written test, then passing a performance test. In order to be eligible to take RID's certification tests, interpreters must satisfy the RID Education Requirement. Hearing interpreters must hold a bachelor's degree, and Deaf interpreters must hold an associate's degree (increasing to a bachelor's degree soon). Degrees may be in any field, and interpreters who don't hold a degree may satisfy the education requirement via RID's Alternate Pathway. Tests are administered by the Center for the Assessment of Sign Language Interpretation (CASLI). Details regarding all of the above information and much more are available on the RID website: www.RID.org, and on the CASLI website: www.casli.org.

Generally, graduates of Interpreter Education Programs take the written test shortly after graduation. They then work in the community for one or more years to further develop their skills, then take the performance portion of the test. Most interpreters do not pass the performance test on their first attempt.

Licensure

New Mexico requires all signed language interpreters to be licensed in order to protect deaf and hard of hearing consumers. Practicing without a license is a misdemeanor punishable by up to 364 days in jail and/or up to a \$1000 fine. Interpreting is defined as any form of facilitating communication in a visual form, regardless of the individual's job title or position description. The statute, rules, forms, and other details may be found at the website of the New Mexico Signed Language Interpreting Practice Board (SLIPB): www.rld.state.nm.us/boards/Signed_Language_Interpreting_Practices.aspx.

There are three types of signed language interpreter licenses issued by the SLIPB:

- **Provisional License:** interpreters who have graduated from an Interpreter Education Program at an accredited postsecondary institution are eligible for this license. This license may be held for up to five years and qualifies the interpreter to work in simple educational and community settings while he or she is working toward meeting the qualifications for one of the two licenses below. Provisionally licensed interpreters must meet Continuing Education requirements in order to renew their license each year.
- **Educational License:** interpreters who hold the Ed: K-12 credential from RID or who meet the requirements for the Ed: K-12 are eligible for this license. This license is valid only for interpreting in K-12 settings; not for community or post-secondary settings. Eligibility requirements for the Ed: K-12 credential include: score a 4.0 or better on the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA); pass the EIPA Written Test; satisfy the RID Education Requirement; and be a current Associate member of RID. These licenses are renewed every two years, and license holders must meet Continuing Education requirements and remain in good standing with RID to renew.
- **Community License:** interpreters who are nationally certified by RID are eligible for this license. These interpreters may work in almost any setting (court work requires further credentialing). These licenses are renewed every two years, and license holders must meet Continuing Education requirements and remain in good standing with RID to renew.