

**ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES COURTS
FEDERAL COURT INTERPRETER PROGRAM**

FEDERAL COURT INTERPRETER INFORMATION SHEET

The Court Interpreters Act, 28 U.S.C. §1827, requires the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts to prescribe, determine, and certify the qualifications of persons who serve as certified interpreters in federal courts when the Director considers such certification to be merited for either persons who are hearing impaired (whether or not they also are speech impaired) or persons who speak only or primarily a language other than English. The use of competent federal court interpreters in proceedings involving speakers of languages other than English is critical to ensure that justice is carried out fairly for defendants and other stakeholders.

The professional knowledge, skills, and abilities required of a federal court interpreter are highly complex. The interpreter must be not only highly proficient in both English and the foreign language but also impartial. Most important, an interpreter must be able to accurately and idiomatically render the message from the source language into the receptor language without any additions, omissions or other misleading factors that in any way alter the intended meaning of the message from the source language speaker. Communication in courtroom proceedings may be more complex than that in other settings or in everyday life. For example, the parties involved may use specialized and legal terminology, formal and informal registers, dialect and jargon, varieties in language and nuances of meaning. The interpreter must be equally adept at simultaneous interpretation, which is the most frequent form of interpretation used in the courtroom, and in consecutive interpretation and sight translation. The interpreter must possess excellent public speaking skills, including appropriate delivery and poise, and exude the highest professional standards for courtroom demeanor and professional conduct. The constant interplay of all these factors in the courtroom makes the interpreter's task exceptionally difficult.

The single greatest operational requirement in the federal courts is for Spanish-language interpreters. However, there is also a need for interpreters in other languages, including Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese, and Foochow), Vietnamese, Korean, Russian, and Arabic. The need for specific language interpreters is determined by the local district courts and not by the Administrative Office. However, in accordance with the Court Interpreters Act, the Administrative Office prescribes the standards and guidelines for selecting and using interpreters in federal court proceedings.

The Administrative Office classifies three categories of interpreters:

Certified interpreters

Certified interpreters have passed the Administrative Office certification examination. To date, certification programs have been developed for Spanish, Navajo and Haitian-Creole. In these languages, the courts will only select from available interpreters who

have met the Administrative Office's criteria for certification. The Administrative Office's certification examination is administered in two phases and includes written and oral tests that, among other things, measure a candidate's ability to accurately perform simultaneous as well as consecutive interpretation and sight translations as encountered in the federal courts.

In languages other than Spanish, Navajo and Haitian-Creole, interpreters are designated as "professionally qualified" or "language skilled."

Professionally qualified interpreters

There are two ways in which one can be designated as "professionally qualified." An individual with previous employment as a conference or seminar interpreter with any United States agency or with the United Nations or a similar entity may be deemed "professionally qualified" if the condition for employment includes successfully passing an interpreter examination. Another way to be deemed "professionally qualified" is to be a member in good standing in a professional interpreter association that requires a minimum of 50 days of conference interpreting experience in the language(s) of expertise *and* the sponsorship of three active members of the same association who have been members for at least two years and whose language(s) are the same as the applicant's, and who will attest to having witnessed the applicant's performance and to the accuracy of the statements on the application. Individuals who can demonstrate to the local court that they are eligible in either of these two ways can be classified as "professionally qualified."

Language-skilled interpreters

Interpreters who are not certified (Spanish, Navajo, or Haitian-Creole) or considered "professionally qualified," as described above, but who can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the court their ability to effectively interpret from the foreign language into English and vice versa in court proceedings, can be classified as "language skilled" interpreters.

Certified and "professionally qualified" interpreters are paid at a higher rate than "language-skilled" interpreters.

Individuals who are interested in becoming federal court interpreters in Spanish, Navajo or Haitian-Creole must successfully pass the federal court interpreter test battery. *The schedule for the Spanish federal court interpreter examination will not be available until the Spring of the year 2000.* For other languages, individuals may contact local federal courts to determine if that court has a need for the language of expertise. To be considered as a "professionally qualified" interpreter, an individual must submit a resume to the court, detailing education, training experience, current telephone number and mailing address, and when applicable, membership accreditations as described above. The local federal court will determine on a case-by-case basis whether the prospective interpreter is either "professionally qualified" or "language skilled."