



DATA-DRIVEN CHANGE IN LOUISIANA:

Strategies for Sign Language Interpreter Profession Growth

CASE STUDY

Statewide ASL/English Interpreting Needs Assessment
Louisiana Commission for the Deaf (LCD)

May 2022 to March 2023
Baton Rouge, LA



Transforming communities
through organizational change.

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Overview

The scarcity and inconsistency of qualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters in Louisiana is not just an inconvenience, but a reflection of the persistent marginalization of individuals and professionals alike. Only 72 certified interpreters serve an estimated 200,000 Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, and Hard of Hearing (DDBDDHH) people across the state. The consequences of this disparity extend far beyond access to education, employment, and daily life. When DDBDDHH individuals in Louisiana visit hospitals, interact with law enforcement or face natural disasters, the availability of interpreters can become a matter of life and death.



The Louisiana Commission for the Deaf contracted with Innivee Strategies to lead a statewide interpreter needs assessment from 2022 to 2023 as part of the LCD 2022-2024 strategic plan.

Through this case study, you can expect to learn about:

Systemic Disparities:

Understand how the scarcity and quality of interpreters create language barriers that negatively affect individuals' access to essential services.

The Importance of a Minimum Standard:

Discover the crucial role of professional certification requirements and ongoing professional development in ensuring consistent and high-quality interpreter services across various sectors.

Professionalization of Interpreters:

Learn how the Tseng Model of Professionalization was used to determine where Louisiana stands with the professionalization of its ASL interpreters, and recommendations to advance the field.

This project was funded by the Louisiana Commission for the Deaf.

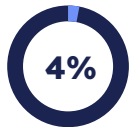


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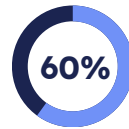
Findings

The needs assessment uncovered critical insights that underscore the necessity for systemic reform in ASL interpreting services across Louisiana, especially in these areas:



Of Louisiana's Certified Interpreters are Black

There are significant gaps in interpreter diversity and access. Despite 30% of Louisiana's population being Black, only 3 certified interpreters identified as Black. This highlights the need for a more diverse interpreter workforce.



Advocated for specialized standards in legal, medical, mental health, & education

Specialized standards in legal, medical, mental health, and educational fields, highlight a need for consistency and professionalism in these fields.



Of K-12 interpreters in Louisiana are not certified

Educational interpreters report working in K-12 education settings without a certification, where they are language models for DDBDDHH students. This underscores the critical need for implementing and enforcing certification requirements to improve educational outcomes and standardize interpreter education across the state.

About Needs Assessments

A needs assessment is a systematic process to identify specific needs, gaps, and opportunities within an organization or community. It makes data actionable and understandable and transforms growth and decision-making. By collecting, analyzing, and strategically implementing data, a needs assessment provides insights that align with the community's needs.

For more information, please visit: inniveestrategies.com/needs-assessment



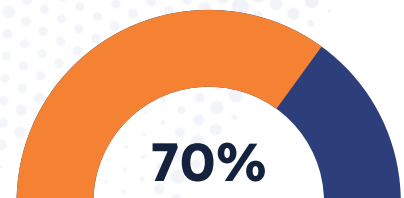
62%

62% of hiring entities stated they were not at all or only slightly familiar with how to ensure interpreters will meet consumers' expectations.



3 out of 5

3 out of 5 certified interpreters who responded earn between \$12 to \$24 an hour, while a 2013 report put the national mean wage at \$40 an hour.



70%

Nearly 70% of survey participants said the level of collaboration among all groups in the interpreting community did not meet their expectations.

The Louisiana ASL interpreting profession is currently in Phase 2 of the Tseng Model of Professionalization, a framework used to assess the professionalization of language interpreting and which provides a roadmap to advancing to the next phase.

Phases of the Tseng Model of Professionalization



Tseng, J. (1992). Interpreting as an emerging profession in Taiwan — a sociological model. [Unpublished dissertation]. Fu Jen Catholic University, New Taipei City, Taiwan.

The ASL Interpreting Field

Interpreters encompass various specializations to meet the broad spectrum of communication needs:

ASL Interpreters:

These professionals handle general communication needs but may not fully meet specialized requirements, such as addressing specific cultural nuances in broad-topic sessions.

Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs):

Deaf individuals who provide nuanced cultural and linguistic interpretation. They are crucial in complex scenarios like legal or medical settings. CDIs also facilitate communication for those who are language-deprived or have limited ASL education, ensuring clear understanding in various contexts.

Other Communication Modes:

Alternative methods like Signed Exact English (SEE), Cued Speech, or oral interpretation cater to preferences within the DDBDDHH community.

Diverse Representation:

Interpreters from diverse racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds enhance cultural competency and relevance. For example, female interpreters for women's empowerment topics or interpreters from LGBTQ+ backgrounds for related sessions ensure content is conveyed with cultural and linguistic accuracy.

From Assessment to Action

Objectives

LCD's strategic plan identified a goal to create new systems and standards for ASL interpreting. This project aimed to gather data on and understand the state of interpreter quality, oversight, and professional development in Louisiana. Looking beyond enhancing the quality and oversight of interpreters, LCD wanted data that would support them in fostering the ongoing growth and professional development of the interpreting profession.

This ambitious goal prompted LCD to deepen its collaboration with Innivee Strategies through a comprehensive state-wide Interpreter Needs Assessment. Selecting Innivee Strategies for its distinctive Deaf-centric approaches, this collaboration allowed for genuine engagement with participants in ASL and the conduction of surveys in the community's native language — capabilities rarely offered by conventional firms. This methodological approach ensured that critical information remained intact, thereby maintaining the integrity of communication and mirroring an in-depth understanding of Deaf culture and necessities. This extended partnership and the subsequent needs assessment were designed to refine ASL interpreting services across Louisiana, rooted in the authentic experiences and perspectives of the community.



Client Testimonial

For several years, the DDBDDHH community, interpreters, and hiring entities had been telling us there was tremendous need for state standards for ASL interpreting. This led to our project with Innivee Strategies, which gave us exactly what we needed to create a clear path forward.

Thanks to this needs assessment project, we knew what we needed to do to advance the ASL/English interpreting profession in Louisiana, plus we had the data and stories to back it up. Following the proposed steps from the Interpreter Needs Assessment Report for the Louisiana Commission for the Deaf, we have established an interpreter registry, an interpreting oversight board, a mentoring program, and have partnered with various community groups to engage them in this process.

We are now working on legislation that will support the transition to our state's first-ever licensure requirement for ASL/English interpreters and elevate communication access for our DDBDDHH community!

Louisiana Commission for the Deaf

Approach

Innivee Strategies' approach involved:

APPROACH #1



Framework Development and Data Collection

Creating a comprehensive framework for sign language interpretation, informed by data gathered from various sources, including Louisiana's Deaf community, interpreters, agencies, and hiring entities.

APPROACH #2



Market Review and Literature Analysis

Conducting an exhaustive review of existing literature and market conditions to identify service gaps and compare local standards with those in other states.

APPROACH #3



Educational Content Creation

Developing tailored educational materials to clarify project aims and procedures, as well as the benefits and risks associated with proposed approaches.

APPROACH #4



Community Engagement and Surveys

Conducting focus groups and distributing surveys to gather insights from diverse segments of the community, including ASL interpreters, DDBDDHH individuals, and entities requiring interpreting services.

APPROACH #5



Data Analysis and Professionalization

Systematically analyzing collected data using the Tseng Model of Professionalization to identify key themes, patterns, and trends, informing recommendations aimed at enhancing interpreter professionalization and addressing educational and supply gaps.



Recommendations

To promote the continued advancement of the profession, following recommendations were proposed to foster systemic improvements and ensure equitable access to high-quality interpreting services:

1

Legislative Advocacy

Establish oversight authorities to enforce interpreting standards at a legislative level.

2

Expand Training Programs

Advocate for comprehensive ASL education and expand interpreter training programs.

3

Strengthen Community Collaboration

Foster stronger collaboration among all stakeholders to address community needs effectively.

4

Promote Inclusivity and Equity

Address disparities in interpreter diversity and distribution to ensure culturally relevant, accessible services.

5

Support Professional Development

Enhance interpreter development through improved salaries, training, and advancement pathways.

6

Enhance Outreach and Education

Implement outreach and training efforts to improve the community's understanding of interpreting services.

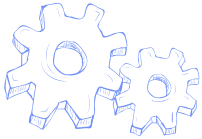
The detailed recommendations listed in the Innivee Strategies [Needs Assessment Report](#), equipped Louisiana with the data and actionable next steps needed to progress toward a more inclusive, equitable, and professional ASL interpreting landscape, meeting the diverse needs of the DDBDDHH communities.

The report transcended mere data collection by highlighting the nuanced needs and challenges faced by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities. It equipped state agency and community leaders to engage in substantive discussions with state policymakers, leveraging the insights gathered to advocate for essential changes.

More than just a needs assessment, this project was a catalyst for change, guiding the evolution of interpreting services in Louisiana toward a more inclusive, equitable, and professional standard. By highlighting specific needs and gaps, it forges a path for future growth and stronger collaborations, transforming strategic visions into tangible outcomes.

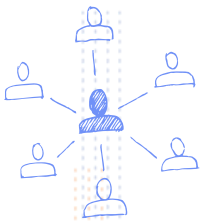
Key Takeaways

This case study demonstrates:



The Struggle of Supply and Demand

This case study illuminates the ongoing challenge of matching the demand for ASL interpreters with the available supply, highlighting the critical need for systemic reforms to ensure equitable access to communication services for the DDBDDHH communities.



Complexities and Nuances of ASL Interpreting

Unlike spoken language interpreters, ASL interpreters face unique challenges, including late acquisition of language and the need for ongoing skill refinement. This underscores the importance of tailored approaches to professional development and certification that recognize the intricacies of ASL interpreting.



Catalyst for Change

Beyond data collection, the needs assessment serves as a catalyst for transformative action, guiding the evolution of interpreting services in Louisiana towards inclusivity, equity, and professionalism. By leveraging insights gathered, leaders can advocate for essential changes and secure support for programs and policies that meet the diverse needs of the DDBDDHH communities effectively.

Thank you

Innivee Strategies thanks the Louisiana community and the LCD for their pivotal role in supporting this case study to improve access to ASL interpreting services. Their efforts not only address critical needs in Louisiana but also created a model for nationwide change in communication access for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing communities.

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