

The **Washington Signed, ProTactile, and Trilingual Interpreter Shortage Workgroup** is a collaborative effort to address the ongoing shortage of qualified interpreters for Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and signed language communities in Washington State. This shortage is particularly acute for interpreters skilled in **Signed Language, ProTactile, and Trilingual** interpretation, which are essential for equitable access to services such as **education, healthcare, legal representation, and workplace accommodations.**

- **Increasing Demand:** As the population of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals grows, the need for interpreters in critical settings is rising.
- **Geographic Disparities:** Rural and underserved regions face significant difficulties in attracting and retaining interpreters.
- **Limited Supply:** High training costs, limited interpreter training programs, and challenging certification processes make it harder for new interpreters to enter the field.
- **Specialized Needs:** There is an increasing demand for interpreters with specialized skills, such as ProTactile for DeafBlind individuals and Trilingual interpreters for those requiring additional languages.

Certification, Licensure, and Barriers to Entry

- **Certification and Licensure:** The certification process can be exclusionary due to high costs, complex exams, and the requirement for formal education, deterring underrepresented and marginalized groups from entering the profession.

Financial and Workplace Challenges

- Many interpreters face financial instability as freelancers, leading to high turnover rates and burnout. These financial and emotional challenges make the profession less sustainable for many.

Why This Issue Is Important:

Interpreter shortages limit access to essential services for Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened individuals, particularly impacting marginalized groups such as DeafBlind and DeafDisabled communities. Addressing these shortages is essential for social equity and inclusion, empowering these communities to live fuller, more independent lives. leading to a lack of educational opportunities, inadequate healthcare services, and poor legal outcomes. The shortage disproportionately affects marginalized groups within the Deaf community, such as those who are DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, and

DeafDisabled, DeafPlus. Addressing the shortage is crucial to ensuring these communities equitable access to the resources they need to thrive.

This issue also extends beyond individuals with hearing loss; it is a matter of social equity and inclusion. By improving interpreter access, we empower entire communities to live fuller, more independent lives.

Project Overview:

During the 2024 Legislative Session, **HB2221** was introduced to address this shortage by authorizing the **Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH)** to lead the workgroup, supported by a **\$925,000 proviso budget**. The workgroup, facilitated by **Innivee Strategies** and **Vivid Co**, will produce a legislative report with recommendations aimed at increasing the availability of interpreters and improving access to services in all communities, especially those in rural and historically marginalized populations.

Roles and Responsibilities

ODHH is responsible for the overall project decision-making process.

- The workgroup members are responsible for contributing their perspectives, expertise and to develop recommendations.
- Innivee Strategies is responsible to plan and facilitate workgroup meetings, collect data, synthesize data and workgroup recommendations.
- Vivid Co is responsible for project management, conduct research, analyze data, summarize findings, and to draft and submit legislative report.

Washington State legislature, for more information click on this link, [2221 HBR HSEL 24](#)
[2221-S.pdf](#)

Workgroup Objectives

- The objectives of this workgroup are to develop strategies and standards for the training, certification, and ongoing professional development of interpreters across diverse communities, ensuring they have the necessary skills and support to deliver high-quality services. The group will focus on increasing the availability of interpreters in various specialized areas (e.g., rural, BIPOC, Pro-Tactile (PTASL), CDI/DI, LGBTQIA, etc.) and will explore financial pathways to sustain and support interpreters statewide.

Subgroup Roles and Responsibilities

Each subgroup will address a specific aspect of the workgroup's objectives. Members will sign up for the subgroup that best aligns with their expertise and interests.

1. Licensing and Certification

- a. **Objective:** Ensure that interpreters possess the necessary skills and qualifications to provide quality services.
- b. **Key Questions:**
 - How can we set clear standards for interpreter skills and competencies?
 - What additional certifications or qualifications are needed for specialized areas (e.g., Pro-Tactile (PTASL), trilingual, BIPOC)?
 - How can we maintain and update certification standards to keep pace with evolving industry needs?

2. Supply and Retention

- a. **Objective:** Increase the number of interpreters, especially in rural areas and among underrepresented groups, and ensure long-term retention.
- b. **Key Questions:**
 - What incentives can be created to attract more interpreters to rural areas and underserved communities?
 - How can we foster a supportive environment for underrepresented groups, including BIPOC, protactile, and LGBTQIA interpreters?
 - What can be done to improve retention rates, particularly for specialized interpreters like CDI/DI or trilingual interpreters?

3. Education and Professional Development

- a. **Objective:** Establish strong educational pathways, including Interpreter Training Programs (ITPs), apprenticeships, mentorships, and continuous professional development.
- b. **Key Questions:**
 - How can we strengthen and expand Interpreter Training Programs (ITPs) to meet the diverse needs of interpreters?
 - What partnerships can be formed to create effective apprenticeship and mentorship opportunities?

4. Financial Support

- a. **Objective:** Develop financial pathways to ensure that interpreters are adequately supported in their work and livelihoods.
- b. **Key Questions:**
 - How can we provide sustainable financial support for interpreters?
 - What funding or financial incentives can be developed to help interpreters live and work in their communities?

Workgroup Timeline:

- **Phase 1 (Nov-Dec 2024):** Discuss project goals, define roles, and assign responsibilities.
- **Phase 2 (Jan-Feb 2025):** Data collection, subgroup meetings, and community focus groups.
- **Phase 3 (Feb-Mar 2025):** Analyze data and co-create recommendations.
- **Phase 4 (Mar 2025):** Finalize and present the legislative report

We need YOU!

Are you interested in sharing your perspective and experience by participating in a focus group pre-interview?

Contact Innivee Strategies at WWG@innivee.com by Friday, January 3, 2025.

Are you interested in learning more about the project as a state partner to stay up to date?

Contact us at odhhsapg@dshs.wa.gov

Next Town Hall Meeting

March 5, 2025, from 3:30pm – 5:30pm.

ASL interpreters and CART will be provided. But if you need additional accommodations, please include a description of the accommodation you will need, including as much detail as you can. Also include a way we can contact you if we need more information. Please allow at least two weeks (14 days) advance notice. Last-minute requests will be accepted but may be impossible to fill. Send an email to cory.levin@dshs.wa.gov