

Steps Toward Identifying Effective Practices in VRS Interpreting

2008 REPORT

Submitted on behalf of the
National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers
By the Interpreting Via Video Work Team
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FORWARD

The National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC) is authorized and funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, U.S. Department of Education. The NCIEC includes the following consortium sites:

- National Interpreter Education Center (NIEC), Northeastern University
- Northeastern Regional Interpreter Education Center (NURIEC), Northeastern University
- Gallaudet University Regional Interpreter Education Center (GURIEC), Gallaudet University
- Collaboration for the Advancement of Teaching Interpreter Excellence (CATIE), College of St. Catherine
- Mid-American Regional Interpreter Education Center (MARIE), University of Arkansas at Little Rock and University of Northern Colorado-DO IT Center
- Western Region Interpreter Education Center (WRIEC), Western Oregon University and El Camino College

The NCIEC Consortium sites are working collaboratively to increase the number of qualified interpreters nationwide and ensure that quality interpreter education opportunities and products are available across the country. A primary requirement of the NCIEC grants is to conduct ongoing activities to identify the needs and effective practices in the fields of interpreting and interpreter education. This report has been prepared based on the findings and conclusions of VRS vendor representatives, expert group members, interpreter practitioners, and deaf consumers.

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Interpreting Via Video Work Team
Steps Toward Identifying Effective Practices in VRS Interpreting

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC) has established a multi-year initiative implemented by the Interpreting via Video Work Team. This Work Team is leading a national conversation about issues in video relay service (VRS) and video remote interpreting service (VRI), identifying current and effective practices as well as education/training needed to support interpreters in mastering requisite competencies to work in these settings. The overarching goal of the Work Team is to identify effective practices while forging stronger links between VRS and VRI service providers, educators, practitioners and consumers. The results of this work will lead to ways academia and industry may work together to leverage strengths and resources and increase the quantity and quality of interpreter services.

From September 2007-September 2008, the Interpreting via Video Work Team focused on identifying common needs, issues, and practices of the video relay interpreting industry. The Work Team's initial analysis will provide input to interpreter educators regarding essential educational and training needs of interpreters working in video settings. To this end, the Work Team conducted a multi-pronged investigation: a VRS Summit hosted at Gallaudet University, followed by a meeting of recognized experts in VRS and interpreter education designed to synthesize the work begun at the Summit, and lastly collected input from interpreter practitioners and Deaf consumers to validate the findings.

This report is a compilation of the information collected from these activities as a national dialogue is undertaken regarding the necessary knowledge and competencies

required of interpreters to work in the exciting and fast growing field of interpreting via video. The culmination of this report includes recommendations on the need for future research so that interpreter practitioners and interpreter educators can better prepare to respond to interpreters working in video relay systems.

INTRODUCTION

The priorities listed in the Federal Register (Vol. 70, No. 148) issued by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration includes “using state-of-the-art technologies for training on how to deliver interpreting services from remote locations and in handling various technologies during interpreting assignments.” More recently in the 2007 NCIEC Interpreting Practitioner Needs Assessment (Winston and Cokely, 2007) interpreters identified working in video relay service settings as one of the priority education and training areas for the future. Responding to both imperatives, the Interpreting via Video Work Team set out to look at current practices in the area of VRS interpreting by working collaboratively with service providers, educators, practitioners and consumers.

Over 80 people participated in the process including practitioners, consumers, VRS vendors, organizational partner representatives, and content-area experts. The process consisted of four components: a) a VRS Summit convened representatives from VRS providers; b) a VRS Experts Group empanelled six content experts with VRS; c) VRS Practitioner Focus Groups sampled interpreter perspectives from across the United States, including Spanish-ASL VRS interpreters; d) and Deaf Consumer interviews sampled VRS consumer perspectives from across the United States, including consumers of color. The information generated at the VRS Summit formed the basis of the remaining three steps of the process. This report provides a comprehensive summary of the Work Team activities, as well as recommendations for future research and training needs. Exploring effective competencies in video remote interpreting was also identified as a priority area for this Work Team and it will be part of the second phase of the Work

Team's initiative. It is not included in the scope of this report. The VRI research is scheduled for 2009 and the process and findings will be detailed in a future report.

VRS SUMMIT

Academia-Industry Collaboration: An Essential Partnership for Preparing Qualified Personnel Resources for the Video Relay Services Industry

In September 2007, representatives from eight video relay service providers convened for a 3-day VRS Summit in Washington, DC. The purpose of the Summit was to identify the basic knowledge, skills, attributes, and competencies an interpreter should have as a candidate to work in VRS. Shared during this process were also many issues and concerns surrounding interpreting in video relay settings. Participants agreed that working together, educators and service providers can identify and find solutions to the challenges of educating and hiring interpreters for this new world of work.

The main goal of the Summit was to begin a dialogue among VRS vendors and NCIEC regarding the current state of the VRS work, the vision of effective practices, and the educational needs that exist to achieve effective practices. Categorization of the standards and practices was done as part of this collaborative work. Also identified were core competencies necessary for VRS interpreters and research/resources needed to advance the industry. These core competencies served as the focus for subsequent work by the Expert Group members, the interpreter practitioners and the Deaf consumers.

The Summit not only illuminated the benefit of the diversity of thought and approaches but also the unity shared in the desire to support interpreters in mastering requisite competencies, as well as enlarging the pool of highly qualified interpreters, with the end result of improved customer services. After the Summit, VRS representatives re-entered their corporate worlds recognizing that while each entity in the process is unique, everyone has common constraints and shared needs.

EXPERT GROUP

In February 2008, six VRS content-area experts met in Denver, CO for a three-day meeting with the intention of completing three tasks. The first task was to organize and streamline the list of competencies that had been generated during the VRS Summit in September 2007. The second task was to develop the protocols, demographic survey and questions to be used during Focus Groups for interpreters who currently work in VRS settings. The third task was to develop the protocols, demographic survey and questions to be used for the Deaf Consumer Interviews. Additionally for tasks two and three, the Expert Group participants were asked to identify venues for soliciting interpreter practitioners and Deaf consumers as participants.

Competencies

Two foundational documents were used to build the specialized VRS competencies: *Video Relay Services Interpreting Task Analysis Report* (DO IT Center, 2005) and *Toward competent practices: Conversations with stakeholders* (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). The content area experts were asked to familiarize themselves with the documents prior to meeting, paying particular attention to the domain areas outlined in each of the sources. These domains provided a starting point for organizing the competencies developed at the Summit. Additional sources used as a basis for the experts discussion were the *RID Video Relay Service Interpreting Standard Practice Paper* (RID, 2007) and *Interpreting Culturally Sensitive Information in VRS Settings* (Lightfoot, 2007).

The content-area experts agreed to apply the categorization system used by Witter-Merithew and Johnson. The five categories include: Theory and Knowledge

Competencies, Human Relations Competencies, Language Skills Competencies, Interpreting Skills Competencies, and Professionalism Competencies. The competencies generated at the VRS Summit were incorporated into the template following the Entry-to-Practice domains and competencies.

Practitioner Focus Groups

Based on the categorization of the competencies, the content-area experts were asked to develop the protocols, demographic survey and questions to be used during Focus Groups for interpreters who currently work in VRS settings. The Focus Group questions were developed based on the categorization of competencies generated in the Competencies Task with the intention of soliciting input from practitioners that would validate the competencies generated during the VRS Summit and refined by the content-area experts.

Deaf Consumer Interviews

Again using the competencies as a starting point, the content area experts were asked to develop the protocols, demographic survey and questions to be used for the Deaf Consumer Interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to gather input from consumers on their experiences using interpreters in VRS settings rather than on their experiences with specific service providers or technology.

Review Process

Once the protocols for the Focus Groups and the Consumer Interviews were established, and the demographic surveys and questions developed, all materials were sent to the NCIEC Effective Practices Work Team for review and feedback. The

documents were edited based on this feedback and then submitted to the Internal Review Board at Northeastern University for review and approval.

PRACTITIONER FOCUS GROUPS

Methodology

The Interpreting via Video Work Team convened one Focus Group in each of the following cities: Portland (OR), Denver, Minneapolis, and Washington, DC, because these geographically-diverse cities have at least two call centers managed by different service providers. Using each of these cities also allowed the Focus Groups to be facilitated by members of the Work Team or the Consultant. Two Focus Groups specifically for trilingual (ASL/English/Spanish) interpreters were convened in conjunction with the Texas Society of Interpreters for the Deaf (TSID)/RID Region IV Conference in Houston, TX, and were facilitated by the Consultant. The TSID/RID Region IV conference had a workshop track specific to this population, and in addition, Mano a Mano, an organization for interpreters who work in Spanish-influenced communities, held a half-day, town hall meeting on the first day of the conference. One Focus Group was also convened during the National Alliance of Black Interpreters (NAOBI) conference in Boston, specifically for African American/Black interpreters, and was facilitated by an Expert Group participant.

With input from the Expert Group participants, the Work Team determined that the Focus Group criteria for participation would be a minimum of two years experience working in VRS settings (required) and certification (preferred). Certification was initially delineated as RID CSC, CI, CT, NIC [any level], NAD IV, or NAD V. Texas BEI certification was added once the Focus Groups in Houston were set up. Additionally, the Expert Group determined that each Focus Group would be limited to six participants and one note taker.

Each Focus Group facilitator was responsible for recruiting participants for his/her city's discussion, as well as for securing a meeting space, finding a note taker and arranging a meal (i.e., lunch or dinner) for the participants. Various methods were used for contacting the VRS interpreters. First attempts were done through the VRS vendor partners. Most of the city-based Focus Groups recruitment was done with assistance from these organizations and their respective local call center managers. Further efforts included direct invitations to individual interpreters, and asking for assistance from participants of the Expert Group. Other resources were utilized, as well, for identifying VRS interpreter participants including Mano a Mano, National Alliance of Black Interpreters, Maryland Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts, Gallaudet Interpreting Services, various interpreter training programs, interpreter referral agencies, state RID Chapters and listservs.

The biggest challenge was in recruiting participants for the Focus Groups held during the TSID/RID Region IV conference and the NAOBI conferences. This was due, in part, to the fact that potential participants were scattered throughout the country rather than concentrated in one geographic region, and they worked in multiple call centers rather than in a limited number of centers within a specific city. Furthermore, participants were asked to attend the Focus Group one day prior to the start of the conference which meant travel plans required arriving a day early. In the end, the Focus Group during NAOBI did have a full compliment of six participants, while the two Focus Groups prior to the TSID/RID Region IV conference had four and three participants, respectively.

Prior to each Focus Group, the Consultant sent a packet of information to each facilitator. The packet contained a sample letter of invitation to participants, the Focus Group Protocols, the Demographic Survey, the Consent Form, and the list of questions. Prior to the Focus Group, the facilitator sent the Demographic Survey and Consent Form to participants so they could read and fill them out prior to the meeting. The facilitator provided this information to the note taker, as well as providing the questions, so that he/she could become familiar with the material. The Focus Group questions were not sent to the participants prior to the meeting so that their responses would be unrehearsed.

After the Focus Group discussion, the note taker cleaned up the notes and provided a copy to the facilitator. The facilitator forwarded the notes and the Demographic Surveys to the Consultant for review and analysis. The consent forms were sent to the Work Team Chair.

Demographic Survey Narrative

Prior to participating in one of the VRS Focus Groups, each participant was sent a demographic survey to complete and bring to the discussion. (See Appendix A.) The purpose of the demographic survey was to gather general background information on the participants and to get them to start thinking about and formulating their comments and input prior to the discussion. The discussion questions were not provided to the participants prior to each Focus Group so that their answers would be unrehearsed.

Seven Focus Groups were convened between April and June, 2008. The Focus Group in Washington, DC included seven participants and the two Focus Groups in Houston had four and three participants, respectively, while each of the other groups included six participants for a total of 38 participants. The Focus Groups included men

and women (Fig. 1), ethnicities (Fig. 2), participants of various ages (Fig. 3), and educational backgrounds (Fig. 4).

Figure 1: Gender

Female	27
Male	9
Did not indicate	2

Figure 2: Ethnicity

Asian/Pacific Islander	2
African American/Black	8
Hispanic/Latino	6
White/European American	23

Figure 3: Age

18-29 years	6
30-39 years	7
40-49 years	18
50-59 years	4
60-69 years	2

Figure 4: Education

High School diploma	3
Associate's degree	8
Bachelor's degree	18
Master's degree	8
Doctoral degree	1

The eight participants with Associate's degrees had degrees in Interpreting. Of the 18 participants with Bachelor's degrees, three were in Interpreting; other degrees were in Psychology/Sociology/Anthropology, Psychology, Human Services, Marketing, Liberal Arts, Deaf Cultural Ministry, Communications, Psychology/ASL Interpreting, Sociology/Psychology/Interpersonal Communication & Women's Studies, Psychology, Criminal Justice, Computer Graphic Design, and Education. Eight people held Master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling – Deafness, Deaf Education and Liberal Studies and one person held a doctorate in Special Education: Deafness.

Participants were asked to indicate how long they had been interpreting in general (Fig. 5), how long they had been interpreting in VRS settings (Fig. 6), how many hours per week they interpreted both in and out of VRS settings (Figs. 7 & 8), and in what other settings they interpreted (Fig. 9).

Figure 5: Length of General Interpreting Experience

15+ years	20
11-15 years	6
6-10 years	10
2-5 years	2

Figure 6: Length of VRS Interpreting Experience

4-6 years	14
2-4 years	24
<2 years*	0

*Pre-requisite for participation: Minimum of 2-years experience

Figure 7: Hours per week worked in VRS

35+ hours	1
25-35 hours	6
15-25 hours	7
5-15 hours	18
<5 hours	4

Figure 8: Hours per week outside of VRS

>35 hours	4
25-35 hours	2
15-25 hours	4
5- 15 hours	13
<5 hours	15

Figure 9: Settings worked outside of VRS

Education: K-12	7
Education: Post-Sec.	24
Legal	8
Medical	28
Mental Health	16
Community	30
Religious	15
Corporate/Business	20
Conference	20
Performing Arts	10
Employment/VR	13
Other*	4

*Outdoor Education, Deaf-Blind, Government

All of the participants except one were certified, with several participants holding more than one certification. While this was not a requirement to participate in the Focus Group, it was a preference. The participants, who have held certification from 2-25 years, hold the following certifications (Fig. 10):

Figure 10: Certifications held

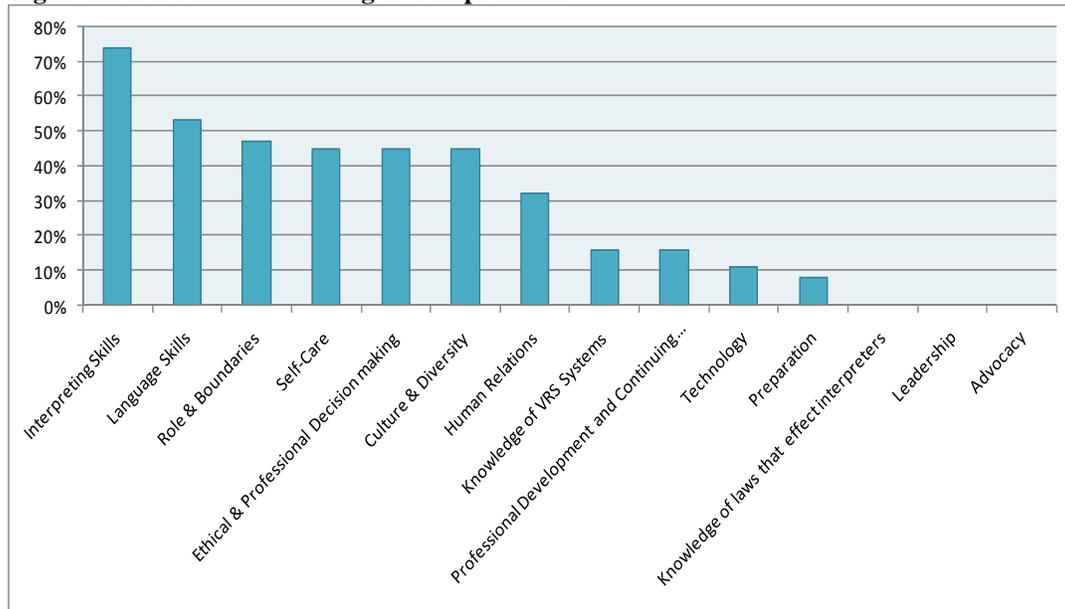
RID CSC	1	RID NIC	2
RID IC	2	NAD IV	5
RID TC	2	NAD V	3
RID CI	23	TEXAS BEI III	3
RID CT	26	TEXAS BEI V	1
RID SC:L	2	TEXAS BEI Legal	2
RID SC:L (written)	1	CEIC (Colorado DOE)	1

Participants were asked if they felt prepared when they first started interpreting in VRS settings. Twenty-three people indicated that they did not feel prepared, while the remaining 15 indicated that they did feel prepared for this setting. Most of the people who indicated that they *did* feel prepared to work in VRS settings referenced their previous experience with interpreting in general as the means to their preparation. Of the people who indicated that they *did not* feel prepared, most made reference to the technical challenges and equipment issues of working within a VRS setting rather than to their interpreting skills.

With regard to receiving training once they had been hired to work in VRS settings, 32 of the participants indicated that they received on-the-job training when they started working in VRS settings, sometimes in the form of 3- or 4-day trainings provided by their employer. Fourteen people indicated they received preparation in their interpreter training program, 13 received training via in-service settings, and two people indicated having had no training at all.

On the demographic survey, participants were presented with a list of 14 areas of “effective competencies” and asked to pick four they felt were the most important for interpreters to have when working in VRS settings. The following chart (Fig. 11) is ranked from the topics selected most often to the topics selected least often or not at all. (NOTE: One person selected seven areas; this data is not included in the tally.)

Figure 11: Practitioner Ranking of Competencies



With regard to working with Deaf interpreters in VRS settings, 30 of the 38 participants indicated that they had never done so. Five people had worked with a Deaf interpreter between 1-5 times in their career, one person indicated having worked with a Deaf interpreter 1-2 times per month, and one person indicated having worked with a Deaf interpreters 3-5 times per month.

Participants were asked, as VRS interpreters, what they could do to improve the service they provide. The prevailing themes centered around improving language and interpreting skills, maintaining integrity and professionalism, making ethical decisions, continuing with professional and personal learning, and taking better care of themselves. Several respondents mentioned having a mentor or wanting to find a mentor as a way to improve their skills and to work on collegial networking.

With regard to continuing education activities, the participants were asked to indicate which type of activities they would be most interested in taking. Thirty-two of 38 people indicated a preference for in-service training rather than degree-based training.

Twelve people indicated interest in a post-baccalaureate certificate program, while only three people indicated interest in a master's level program specific to working in VRS settings. As one participant indicated, "there should be more workshops offered that specifically target what interpreters encounter in the VRS settings, but [I] do not feel a separate or supplemental degree/certificate is needed." Another participant wrote that "in-service education is important to keep the service provided by VRS interpreters as standard as possible so there is consistency for VRS callers."

Finally, the participants were asked to provide additional comments about working in VRS settings. The following themes emerged, some of which require additional investigation: a) wanting more team support, b) needing to get and maintain balance between work time and personal time, c) learning better self-care techniques, d) learning how to work within a corporate structure, and e) figuring out how to maintain quality of service while meeting the demands for increased quantity of service.

The demographic information was gathered in order to obtain a broad understanding of the participants in the Focus Groups. Overall, they were a highly skilled collective of people with deep interests in improving the quality of services provided to consumers who use interpreters via video.

Data Analysis

A series of 13 questions, several having multiple parts, was developed for the Focus Group interactions. Based on feedback from the first Focus Group meeting, the Work Team realized that there was some redundancy in the questions and a decision was made to remove question Number 9 during the remaining Focus Group meetings. All

remaining questions were asked during the subsequent Focus Groups although they were sometimes abbreviated if time was a factor in ending as scheduled. (See Appendix B.)

Overall, the comments provided by the Focus Group participants validated the list of competencies that were generated during the VRS Summit and further refined during the Expert Group meeting. There were numerous issues that came up during the Focus Groups for trilingual interpreters that were not discussed by bilingual interpreters. Many of these issues surrounded working with consumers who are from any one of 23 different Spanish-speaking countries, each of which has different linguistic and cultural norms.

Knowledge

Due to the far-reaching effect of VRS services, several people emphasized the importance of having extensive world knowledge, wide-ranging life experiences and broad educational background. Related to this is the need to understand geography on local, regional, national and international levels. VRS calls are far less restrictive in terms of geography than are face-to-face situations where consumers and interpreters live and work in close proximity to each other. Related to this, there was also emphasis on the need to know specialized vocabulary, such as for sports, city signs/geography and academic institutions.

In addition, Focus Groups participants emphasized the need to understand telephone culture and norms including how to handle phone-trees (i.e., Press 1 for...), automated recordings, and being on hold. General telephone life skills are also important, such as how to order food and how to make reservations.

Within the Focus Group discussions with trilingual interpreters, awareness of the following knowledge areas were identified as being important: linguistic variations in

Spanish among different Spanish-speaking countries, particularly different uses of the same word in different countries and different dialects within those countries, Latin American news, names of public figures (i.e., politicians, athletes, celebrities), currency of different Spanish-speaking countries, capitols, cities and states of different Spanish-speaking countries, and Spanish-language television, particularly telenovelas. The participants also stressed the need to understand immigration issues as many of their calls involve immigration and migration, and to understand international influence on different Spanish-speaking countries, such as Russian influence in Cuba and African influence in the Dominican Republic.

Human Relations

In terms of human relations, participants during the Focus Groups identified the following key areas: sense of humor, strong interpersonal skills including getting along with others, tolerance for ambiguity, politeness, confidence, assertiveness, patience, humility, diplomacy, flexibility, being a team player, and being thick-skinned. They also mentioned the need for good customer service skills, having respect for self and others, being aware of gender variations in communication, and knowing how to establish trust with callers.

The trilingual interpreters mentioned the need to recognize one's own biases with regard to linguistic and dialectical variations among Spanish speakers, and to understand cultural and national variations among people from different countries. They also mentioned a willingness to negotiate with callers to make sure communication is effective.

Language Fluency

All Focus Group participants mentioned the need for VRS interpreters to have native or near-native fluency in all languages they use in their work, as well as the ability to have flexibility in those languages, particularly with regard to register variation at the intimate level and with regard to use of space when using ASL. They also emphasized the need to have diverse language experiences as a way of developing large vocabularies in ASL, English and, for trilingual interpreters, Spanish. Being able to figure out signs out of context and being able to see, learn and remember new signs quickly were deemed to be important skills for the VRS interpreter.

With regard to trilingual interpreters, the need for understanding variations of Spanish and dialects of Spanish is critical. Mexico, for example, has approximately 56 dialects within the country which does not include the numerous indigenous dialects. Trilingual interpreters also need to know that a word in one country may have a different meaning in another country. For example, “chavos” refers to money in Puerto Rico and, though it can also refer to money in Mexico, it typically designates young people (teens).

Related to the need for understanding variations of Spanish, trilingual VRS interpreters also work with Deaf callers who have moved to the United States but do not know ASL and may or may not know their national sign language. The lack of fluency in sign language, coupled often with a lack of reading/writing literacy in Spanish, provides unique challenges to the trilingual VRS interpreter. In addition, if the call is being made to the Deaf person’s country of origin, particular to family members, the VRS interpreter may need to deal with home signs, regional dialects or other linguistic and cultural nuances that are unknown to the interpreter.

When working among three languages at one time, interpreters need to deal with deaf consumers who may be signing ASL, mouthing English and fingerspelling in Spanish, or mouthing Spanish and fingerspelling in English. In turn, some deaf consumers want the interpreters to mouth Spanish while signing ASL. Another linguistic issue that came up is the need to deal with gender-specific and number-specific language in Spanish that does not necessarily occur in English or in ASL.

Cultural Literacy

Participants in all Focus Groups emphasized the need to have broad cultural background, to have experienced cultural diversity on a personal level, and to be open to learning about other cultures. This relates to the need for having broad world knowledge and for knowing that culture impacts not only the language use of the callers but also the message. Having broad world knowledge includes knowing where the callers are from and realizing that the callers may share a cultural background with each other which is different from that of the interpreter. Related to this, VRS interpreters need to understand their own comfort zones and boundaries, and know when to ask for a team or a switch if they find they cannot remain culturally neutral.

For trilingual interpreters, there is a need to understand different Hispanic/Latino cultures and know that different countries and cultures have varying views of gender, the role of women, people of color, levels of education and literacy, disabilities and medical conditions, and the role and use of interpreters. One issue that was emphasized by all participants in the Focus Groups for trilingual interpreters is that for many Hispanic/Latino people, family comes first and foremost over everything else. It is common for several family members, and often several generations of family members,

to be on the call at the same time, often talking simultaneously. Understanding that cross-talk is culturally appropriate and part of the noise of the culture is crucial. Other cultural “noises” include the television, the radio, babies crying, children playing, people talking on the phone, any or all of which may be going on at the same time as the call. It is not culturally appropriate to ask for any of these noises to be quieted so the interpreter needs to listen and talk within and over the noise.

Professional Behavior

Regarding professional behaviors, the following qualities were discussed during the Focus Groups: flexibility, knowledge and adherence to the Code of Professional Conduct, patience, respect, confidence, being ethical, knowledge of corporate culture and the ability to navigate corporate culture, knowing that you represent the company, being non-judgmental, and being able to stay calm regardless of the call content.

For trilingual interpreters, knowing that flirtatious and flattering comments are often part of communication in Hispanic/Latino cultures and being able to handle such comments by callers is important. It is also important to understand the concept of “professional” within Hispanic/Latino cultures and know that an interpreter is not “just” an interpreter. Because the pool of trilingual interpreters is small, it is common to get repeat callers, both deaf and hearing. Callers often consider the interpreter to be “part of the family” and want to show the interpreter pictures of their children or share current news, not just make a call. It is also common for the hearing caller to want to know how the deaf caller looks, if he has gained weight, if he looks rested, etc.

Non-interpreting skills

With regard to non-interpreting skills, many of the skills required have been mentioned above. Additional skills include: being assertive, understanding technology, being able to type and use 10-key number pads, maturity, aptitude for problem solving, critical thinking, high tolerance for ambiguity, quick decision-making skills, ability to multitask, having a strong work ethic, being punctual, having a strong internal monitor, being confident but not arrogant, being resilient, being comfortable with people from all backgrounds, having common sense, being able to switch gears in an instant, knowing that not every call will be successful, knowing how to take care of yourself, being able to sit for long periods of time, having good time management, and being able to sing. (Note: one trilingual interpreter mentioned having to sing on occasion when the Deaf consumer “sang” in sign language to the hearing person. She has never experienced this during ASL/English calls.)

Influence of Callers' Cultures

Several participants mentioned the reality that it is not possible to know the callers' cultures and/or their relationship to each other. For this reason, it is important for interpreters to be culturally aware yet remain neutral, particularly at the start of a call. People's relationships to each other dictate how they address each other and talk to each other. For example, conversations between parents and children are usually different from those between health care workers and patients or clergy members and parishioners. Without knowing the callers' relationships, interpreters need to be careful with their language use.

Strategies to deal with cultural and linguistic variation

The strategy that is employed most often by VRS interpreters is to ask for clarification when they do not understand the message either due to cultural or linguistic reasons. The interpreter needs to listen and watch carefully to pick up on cultural nuances that may be new or unfamiliar. As several participants emphasized: If in doubt, ask. Never assume. It is important for the interpreter to realize that he/she does not know what happened prior to the call, nor what will happen after the call is completed.

In addition to asking for clarification when not understanding the message either due to cultural or linguistic reasons, VRS interpreters employ other strategies for managing the message which include slowing down the pace of the call so that content comes in at a manageable rate and “borrowing” language characteristics from callers by using their words or signs. VRS interpreters need to be comfortable with accents and be aware of any biases they have surrounding accents. Another important skill for VRS interpreters is being able to separate oneself from the call and not relying on or getting stuck in one’s own culture.

For trilingual interpreters, it is important to know that different Spanish-speaking cultures have varying views on gender, the role of women, and interactions between men and women. It is important not to stereotype or label callers. It is sometimes necessary to negotiate with callers to make sure there is understanding and effective communication, particularly if the interpreter is not familiar with the linguistic and cultural nuances of the callers and/or their country of origin. For trilingual interpreters, it is important to know that there will be linguistic differences across Spanish-speaking countries, particularly with regard to pronunciation.

Additional strategies VRS interpreters use include having a sense of humor, asking for clarification, requesting a team, slowing down the pace of the call, using prediction skills, learning how to buy time, using the mute button, and using electronic resources such as the World Wide Web or Instant Messaging. Interestingly, while many participants know how to request a team for a challenging call, several indicated that they sometimes forgo making a request because the other interpreters in the call center do not work well as team interpreters or because they do not have the content-area knowledge required for the call.

Factors that impact the message

Environmental or physical factors that impact the message include: signer's background (i.e., too light or too dark), lighting (i.e., too much glare or too dark), signers who are moving (i.e., in cars or on trains), loud clothes, no clothes, camera angle, screen quality, connection speed, background noise (i.e., multiple talkers, TV, radio, crying, pets), and bad cell phone reception. Work place factors that impact the message for the interpreter may include an uncomfortable chair, no footrest, need for a tissue, need for a pen, bad mood, lack of sleep, need for food, or need for a break. Other factors that impact the message include the gender of the interpreter or the callers, code-switching by the caller, having someone read from a scripted text, or lack of world experience and world knowledge on the part of either the callers or the interpreter.

For trilingual interpreters, factors that impact the message include language-switching by the callers, callers wanting to know about the interpreter's background (e.g. Hispanic/Latino or not, where they learned Spanish, where they are from), accents, and the degree of trust or mistrust by the callers. Trilingual interpreters also mentioned the

ability to deal with people with physical deformities such as missing fingers, eyes, ears, nose, etc., particularly when interpreting for callers from other countries who may be coming to the US for medical treatments.

Managing differences between callers and the interpreter

The Focus Group participants reported having developed various skills in managing calls which include different cultures. These include: drawing on past experiences (e.g. particularly global knowledge), remaining neutral, clarifying and checking for accuracy, negotiating understanding, relying on quick recall of prior calls, asking for clarification, using processing time and being polite.

When handling calls that come from diverse geographic regions, the participants mentioned the following strategies as being helpful: asking for clarification, being able to visualize geographic areas, using technology (WWW or IM), and sharing signs with colleagues. One suggestion for becoming well-traveled and geographically aware is to interpret in places outside of one's home area, such as on a cruise or during conferences in other places, so that interpreters can gain exposure to diverse areas and peoples.

When calls are between people of different generations, interpreters rely on the following techniques: having patience, asking for clarification (don't "fake it"), having a thick skin, and not stereotyping or being judgmental. Also important for interpreters to understand is generational phone etiquette and signing styles. When working with members of older generations, this means having strong fingerspelling receptive skills. When working with members of younger generations, this means understanding jargon and slang and knowing when they are or are not "dissing" each other.

For trilingual interpreters, it is important to be aware of the “Americanization” of younger generations and how language used by younger people may be in conflict with home-country norms and, therefore, disrespectful. Awareness of family dynamics is essential, as is knowing how deaf people are viewed in other cultures. One example of the changing role of a deaf person in the family is from Cuba. Deaf people can sometimes call out-of-country easier than hearing people can so the deaf person has become the center of the information access, whereas in the past, the deaf person may have been marginalized.

Non-interpreting demands on interpreters

Participants in the Focus Groups identified the following demands which are placed on them when working in VRS settings: multitasking , handling a variety of calls without preparation or knowledge of topic, working with callers who are also texting during a separate conversation, knowing how to deal with phone trees, dealing with the noise within the call center (e.g. other voices, computers), dealing with eye strain, preventing repetitive motion injuries, understanding vicarious trauma and how to deal with it, and being in a sedentary job (e.g. sitting all day, posture issues, weight gain [one person set up a Weight Watchers group at her center]). Other factors include being aware of corporate expectations and knowing that the interpreter’s job is to make money for the company which may lead to feeling pressure to always be on a call. Another important element is to understand that there is no ability to develop relationships and rapport with callers, nor is there any way to have resolution or closure at the end of a call.

For trilingual interpreters, other demands include understanding turn-taking within Hispanic/Latino cultures (e.g. particularly the norm of people talking over each

other), understanding power differentials, understanding different phone etiquette, handling nick names, being able to recognize different ring tones and busy signals in different countries, understanding different holidays, and foods (e.g., “wrapping” food could be using corn husks, plantain leaves, tortillas or something else), and understanding various political systems or educational systems. It is also important to understand the lack of literacy among people from various Spanish-speaking countries in either Spanish or English which makes fingerspelling very difficult to use and/or understand.

Strategies to deal with non-interpreting demands

The participants indicated that they use various strategies for handling the above mentioned demands, including laughing, crying, getting massages (e.g. one call center has a massage chair), getting enough exercise, getting enough sleep, taking care of personal needs, and getting support from colleagues, family and therapists.

For trilingual interpreters, several people indicated the need to stay current on pop culture and politics from various Spanish-speaking countries. The participants indicated using several resources such as colleagues, CNN en Español, People en Español, Spanish-language television (e.g. telenovelas), and Spanish-language radio. One area of concern is that many trilingual interpreters are not tri-literate in that they can speak Spanish but cannot read and write in Spanish. This is a challenge, especially with regard to producing and reading fingerspelling in Spanish.

Impact on and interactions with the Deaf community

During the Focus Groups, interpreters reported that, as a result of working in VRS, they feel more confident when they work out in the community, are more confident in their voicing skills, and bring a more global perspective to their work. However, many

VRS interpreters currently work very little or not at all in the community due to several factors including not having the time, not having the energy, not feeling the need to “chase a paycheck” or not wanting to drive due to high gas prices.

Interpreters reported that because they are not doing as much community work and do not have as much time to attend Deaf community functions since they started working in VRS settings, some of their relationships within the Deaf community have been severely restricted or severed. They see more Deaf people while doing VRS work but feel a loss of connection to their local community; they may be more recognized but on a less personal basis. At times, they feel a sense of resentment from local Deaf community members because they are not available to do community-based work. Additional resentment also stems from having to schedule an interpreter much farther in advance than previously required because so many interpreters’ VRS schedules are booked at least a month in advance.

One of the drawbacks expressed by participants of VRS work is that in the event of an error or misunderstanding, it is almost impossible to rectify the situation once the call has ended. In community work, there is opportunity to see the client again or to clarify information if the error is identified after the fact.

Some participants said that they feel somewhat disconnected from their local Deaf community, miss interacting with consumers, miss the ability to develop rapport with consumers and miss the 3-dimensional nature of face-to-face work. When they do work in the community, they notice they have shorter processing time and less stamina for monologic work such as lectures or presentations, both from ASL to English and English to ASL.

For trilingual interpreters, the VRS setting provides them with more opportunity to do trilingual interpreting although they are also not doing as much community interpreting which takes them away from local consumers. Due to the smaller pool of trilingual interpreters working in VRS settings, the interpreters report seeing more repeat callers and, therefore, have become more known to a wider, though not local, consumer base. They also reported having a broader vocabulary base due to the number of regional, national and international calls.

One benefit trilingual interpreters see is that the Deaf community is now more aware that the “face” of trilingual interpreter includes a wide variety of colors, looks, backgrounds and experiences. The trilingual interpreters also believe that trilingual callers are more loyal to a company generally and to a specific interpreter specifically. Non-Hispanic/Latino interpreters participating in the trilingual Focus Group reported feeling that deaf callers forgive them more if there are language errors because they are not Hispanic/Latino.

Suggestions for colleagues who want to work in VRS

Participants indicated that VRS interpreters should have or develop the following attributes: patience, comfort with ambiguity, flexibility, confidence, ability to multitask, knowing how to prioritize, being able to ask for what you want, being “thick-skinned”, humility, being open-minded, good with problem solving, strong critical thinking skills, knowing how to manage stress, good time management, and being open to and willing to accept responsibility for mistakes. One point that was emphasized is that VRS interpreters need to know and accept that they do not and cannot know everything, and that they will need to ask for help at different times.

Skills identified as being important to VRS interpreters include strong ASL-to-English abilities, strong understanding of turn-taking, and the ability to use a keyboard and 10-key pad. One suggestion was to practice using videotapes, DVDs, blogs and other on-screen materials to practice for working in a VRS setting.

Knowledge sets needed by VRS interpreters include knowing that VRS is hard work, understanding technical language, understanding personal and professional boundaries and roles and knowing how to maintain them, and understanding that there is no preparation time in VRS settings.

Similarities and differences between VRS and other settings

In terms of similarities of working in VRS settings as compared to other settings, participants indicated that all settings require interpreting processing skills, strong language skills, and solid ethical decision making skills. Some participants view interpreting in VRS settings and in community interpreting as the same in terms of content regardless of the delivery method.

With regard to differences, many comments focused on VRS being part of a corporate/business climate and needing to work within the regulations of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). For actual interpreting, the biggest difference is in not being able to prepare for the assignment: not knowing the clients, not knowing the topic and not knowing the nature of the call. Likewise, there is no opportunity to debrief after the call with any of the consumers. One participant mentioned that she feels these differences have set the interpreting profession back by 20 years.

While trilingual interpreters were not asked directly about the differences between interpreting ASL/English calls and ASL/English/Spanish calls, several participants

highlighted the differences in the nature of trilingual calls from bilingual calls. The biggest difference is that the majority of trilingual calls are personal in nature, even during day-time, work-week hours when bilingual calls are typically business/professional in nature. On the flip side, trilingual interpreters report handling fewer X-rated calls, even during night-time hours, possibly due to how women are viewed and respected in Hispanic/Latino cultures; male callers do not want to embarrass themselves or their female interpreters.

Role of Deaf interpreters in VRS

As indicated on the Demographic survey, 30 of the 38 participants have never worked with a Deaf interpreter in the VRS setting. During the Focus Group discussion, though, the general consensus was that Deaf interpreters would be a great benefit in this arena, particularly when working with consumers with limited language skills or, in the case of foreign-born deaf callers, with limited ASL skills. Participants also commented that Deaf interpreters could help with training and/or quality control.

The concerns with using Deaf interpreters in VRS settings had to do with the following: whether or not a deaf consumer would want another deaf person to know his/her business, and whether hearing consumers would be willing to tolerate the additional lag time of working through two interpreters' processing.

One perception by the Focus Group participants was that Deaf interpreters are not used because they are not recognized by the FCC, hence service providers cannot get reimbursed for using them. One call center manager said she gets around this by hiring Deaf interpreters as supervisors. This gets them into the call center where they can serve as a resource or team as needed.

For those participants who have worked with Deaf interpreters in VRS settings, it usually happened when the Deaf interpreter was in the same location as the Deaf consumer rather than when the Deaf interpreter was in the call center. The Deaf interpreter usually served as a clarifier and/or advocate on the call. This often occurred with Deaf-Blind consumers who use tactile communication and cannot see the interpreter on the screen, or with foreign-born, non-ASL-using Deaf consumers who have other communication needs.

Conclusion

Overall, many of the issues and comments made during the Focus Groups were consistent with those made during the VRS Summit and those made during the Expert Group meeting. As with any interpreting, strong language skills, strong interpreting skills and strong ethical decision-making skills are necessary. The differences highlighted between VRS and non-VRS settings has to do with the inability to prepare for the call before it happens and the need for having a broader world view and more global perspective in the work.

DEAF CONSUMER INTERVIEWS

Methodology

In an effort to gather data from Deaf consumers regarding their experiences using interpreters in video relay settings, the Work Team conducted interviews during national or regional conferences held by organizations of Deaf people. A conference setting provided a critical mass of consumers from which to draw interviewees. Due to confidentiality issues, it was not possible to gather names of consumers from either service providers or from interpreters.

The interview questions were developed by members of the Expert Group and provided to the interviewers prior to the interviews. Five questions were developed with the intention of focusing interviewees' comments on their experiences using interpreters in VRS settings rather than focusing on their experiences with specific service providers. The five questions were developed in ASL and written using a modified gloss system. The English version of the question was also included. Both versions of the questions were provided to the interviewers prior to the interviews.

During the conferences, a member of the NCIEC or a designee recruited individuals to participate in the interviews after assessing that they, in fact, used video relay services on a regular basis. Prior to the interview, the interviewee completed a Demographic Survey and Consent Form. Interviewees were not shown the questions prior to the interview so their responses could be spontaneous. Whenever possible, interviews were conducted by a Deaf person; some interviews were conducted by a hearing person who is fluent in American Sign Language and nationally certified as an interpreter. No time limit was imposed on the interviews and most lasted between 5-8

minutes. Each interview was conducted in American Sign Language and recorded onto mini-DVDs using a digital camera. The mini-DVD tapes were then converted to DVD format for viewing. All interviews were transcribed from ASL into written English by a Deaf consultant.

Demographic Survey Narrative

Deaf consumer interviews were conducted during three conferences: the Southeast Regional National Black Deaf Advocates Conference in Washington, DC (April 2008), the Intertribal Deaf Council Conference in Pembroke, NC (July 2008), and the National Association of the Deaf Conference in New Orleans, LA (July 2008). By conducting interviews during conferences, it was possible to include a broad cross-section of the Deaf community. While the sample size is small (25 interviews), the sample population includes participants of various ages, ethnic/racial backgrounds, education levels, and geographic areas.

Prior to each interview, participants completed a Demographic Survey. (See Appendix C.) The purpose of the demographic survey was to gather general background information on the participants and to help them focus on the topic. The interview questions were not provided to the participants prior to each interview so that their answers would be unrehearsed.

Twenty-five people were interviewed including females and males (Fig. 12), participants of various audiological status (Fig. 13), age (Fig. 14), ethnicity (Fig. 15), and educational background (Fig. 16.). With regard to having Deaf family members, four participants indicated that they have Deaf parents, three have Deaf grandparents, nine

have Deaf siblings, two have Deaf aunts or uncles, and nine have other Deaf relatives including cousins, nieces/nephews, family's sponsor, or extended relatives.

Figure 12: Gender

Female	13
Male	1

Figure 13: Audiological Identification

Deaf	23
Hard of Hearing	2
Deaf-Blind	2

Note: Two people identified themselves as both Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Figure 14: Age

18-29 years	2
30-39 years	2
40-49 years	12
50-59 years	6
60-69 years	3
70+	1

Figure 15: Ethnicity

Asian/Pacific Islander	1
African American/Black	4
Hispanic/Latino	3
Native American/American Indian	5
White/European American	11
Other	3

Figure 16: Education

High School Diploma	5
Certificate/diploma	3
Bachelor's degree	10
Master's degree	8
Doctoral degree	2

With regard to residence, five lived in Maryland, three lived in Texas, three in Virginia, two in Washington State, and one each in California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, New Mexico, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and South Carolina. Three Canadian residents also participated in the interviews, two of whom lived in British Columbia and one who lived in Saskatchewan.

Twenty participants indicated that they use more than one VRS service provider, while three indicated that they do not. (Note: Participants were not asked to indicate which service provider[s] they use.) Participants indicated the frequency with which they use VRS (Fig. 17) and the location from which they place most of their calls (Fig. 18).

Figure 17: Frequency of VRS Use

Daily	7
4-5 times per week	7
1-3 times per week	3
4-5 times per month	4
<3 times per month	3

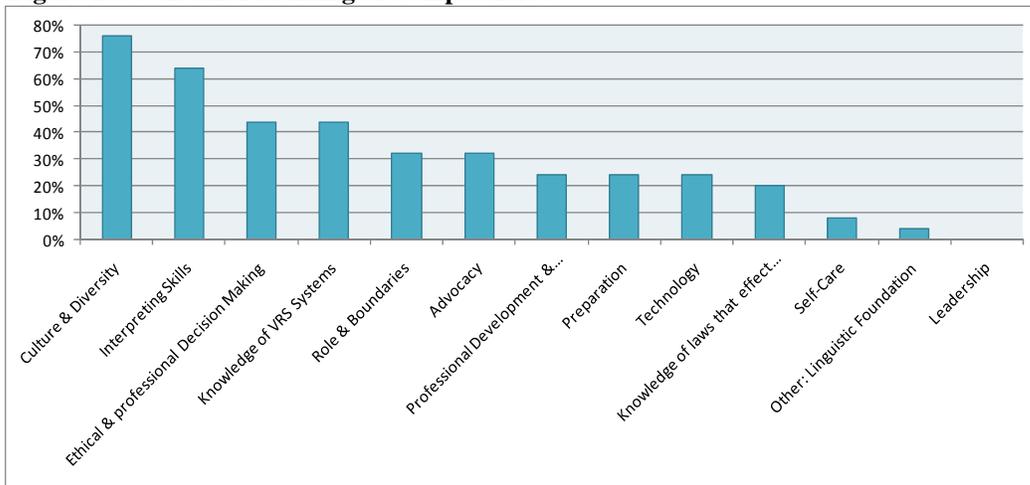
Figure 18: Location from which calls are made

From home-personal calls	15
From home-business calls	9
From school	3
From other locations*	4

*i.e., deaf community agency or health care facilities

On the demographic survey, participants were presented with a list of 14 areas of “effective competencies” and asked to pick four they felt were the most important for interpreters to have when working in VRS settings. The following chart (Fig. 19) is ranked with the topics selected most often at the top and the topics selected least often or not at all at the bottom.

Figure 19: Consumer Ranking of Competencies



NOTE: Two choices included on the Demographic Survey for practitioners were NOT included on the Demographic Survey for Deaf consumers: Language Skills and Human Relations. However, during the taped interviews, the majority of interviewees mentioned the need for interpreters to have strong language skills and human relations skills.

Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted with 25 Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind people during three conferences. Sixteen interviews were conducted by a Deaf person and nine were conducted by a hearing person who is fluent in American Sign Language and nationally certified as an ASL-English interpreter. (See Appendix D.)

Each interview opened with the following questions: What is your name and in what state do you live? How often do you use VRS? (Note: Questions were asked in ASL. These English translations are for the written report.) These were used to open the interview and to get a general sense of the interviewees' level of experience using interpreters in VRS settings. Interviewees were assured of anonymity, therefore no identifying information is provided here.

Issues and/or problems related to VRS

Several themes emerged from the interviews with Deaf consumers in terms of the types of problems that occur in VRS settings but that do not occur in other settings. Most notable was the issue regarding the quality of interpreting services being provide by VRS companies. While many interviewees were generally satisfied with the services they receive, several mentioned the decline in the skill level of interpreters on VRS, particularly in relation to their ASL language skills. Interviewees felt that the skill level of interpreters was much higher when VRS call centers were first established. Interviewees cited examples such as interpreters not being able to sign fluently, not being able to read fingerspelling or numbers, and not being able to recognize sign variations. Several interviewees cited preference for using VRS interpreters who are CODAs, yet they did not say how they identified the interpreters as such.

A few interviewees also expressed concern about whether the interpreters have strong enough English language skills to appropriately do the job. A couple people expressed concern about interpreters not being able to adequately match their register and education level thereby making them sound “stupid” to the hearing consumer.

While many of the interviewees acknowledged the fact that VRS interpreters are located all over the country and that a call can go to any number of call centers, they expressed frustration at either the interpreter using regional signs which they themselves do not know or at their using regional signs which the interpreter does not know. One interviewee mentioned having to be more alert during VRS calls in the event that he/she sees an unknown sign.

With regard to interpreters’ language abilities, or perceived lack thereof, interviewees expressed concern that interpreters do not often ask for clarification if they do not understand the deaf or hearing consumer. The general sense is that interpreters just “go ahead” with the call regardless of whether or not they understand the content. The interviewees expressed preference at having interpreters ask for clarification or ask for repetition. When using an interpreter in a face-to-face situation, it is often easier for the deaf consumer to clarify information if he/she senses that the interpreter does not understand the information. The deaf and hearing consumers can also see each other and can see any confusion the other may have. When using an interpreter through VRS, the deaf consumer cannot see the hearing person and cannot determine the hearing person’s attitude, mood, comprehension, or comfort with using an interpreter.

In addition to being concerned about general language abilities, several interviewees expressed concern that interpreters often lack content-area-specific jargon or

language, such as related to education or computers. One person expressed frustration at having to educate the interpreter about her profession either before or during a call to ensure that her message is clearly conveyed. She said that misunderstandings with the hearing consumer often arise when the interpreter does not understand the content, does not use appropriate vocabulary or jargon, and does not ask for clarification.

One interviewee expressed concern at never knowing which interpreter will show up on the screen and not knowing the interpreter's skill level before a call starts. Not knowing who the interpreter will be on a call was a concern to several interviewees who teach ASL and interpreting. They mentioned getting their former students as their interpreters which sometimes led to discomfort on the part of either the caller or the interpreter, or both, particularly if the deaf person is making a personal call.

Another theme that was mentioned by several interviewees was the impersonal nature of using interpreters through VRS. Several people mentioned that VRS interpreters seem unfriendly, moody, patronizing, cold or aloof and would prefer that interpreters smile more and look happy. The lack of eye contact was one reason the interviewees mentioned feeling disconnected from VRS interpreters. Some interviewees would like to have more interaction with VRS interpreters, though they realize that company policy often prohibits interpersonal communication. Overall, interviewees would like interpreters to be more polite and have better manners.

The issue of clothing was also mentioned by several interviewees. This was of particular concern to the Deaf-Blind interviewees. Using a video screen to communicate is sometimes more difficult in general for Deaf-Blind people and visual cues can more easily get lost in a two-dimensional format when interpreters do not wear clothing that is

in contrast to their skin tone. One Deaf-Blind person also mentioned that lighting can sometimes be a challenge on a VRS call, yet she has no control over being able to make changes other than to try her call again via a different interpreter or a different provider. In a face-to-face setting, she, the hearing consumer, and the interpreter can make adjustments as needed to ensure proper lighting and clothing. Related to the issue of clothing, one African American/Black interviewee mentioned that he needs to remember to wear light colored clothing so interpreters can see his hands clearly.

Several of the Native American and African American/Black interviewees expressed interest in having VRS interpreters who are of the same racial background. Only one Native American interviewee reported having had a Native VRS interpreter. One African American/Black interviewee expressed interest in being able to pick an African American/Black interpreter and wondered how service providers could accommodate his needs. Another male interviewee, also African American/Black, would like to see more male VRS interpreters in general, and more male, African American/Black interpreters in particular, as he is not always comfortable with female interpreters or with non-African American/Black interpreters, particularly when making personal calls.

On a related note, several interviewees expressed interest in knowing an interpreter's credentials at the start of the call, or knowing if the interpreter has any kind of conflict of interest due to the nature of the call. One suggestion was to provide an interpreter's certification level when his/she appeared on the screen. One interviewee liked using a specific service provider because the interpreter's number appeared and stayed on the screen. This interviewee likes to thank her interpreters at the end of calls

and in lieu of being able to ask their names, she thanks them with their number. She also likes the fact that she can contact a company supervisor with either compliments or suggestions and mention a specific interpreter. Interpreters with other service providers will give their number at the start of a call but she cannot always remember it and is not comfortable asking for it.

Other challenges of using an interpreter through VRS as opposed to face-to-face are related to the technology. It is harder to read a two-dimensional screen than a three-dimensional person, various background colors and textures are sometimes distracting, and picture quality varies depending on the provider, band-width availability, and equipment. One interviewee said that his picture quality improved when he got upgraded equipment.

One other challenge the interviewees mentioned is that hearing people often hang up on the VRS interpreter thinking the call is from a solicitor or is intended for a business. One person cited an example of calling a friend via a VRS interpreter and having the friend hang up. It was only after she called back and the interpreter quickly mentioned the caller's name that the hearing person stayed on the line.

The interviewees mentioned various techniques they use to end a call when they are not satisfied or comfortable with the call. One person said that she will pretend she forgot something, sign off quickly, and then make the call again knowing that she'll get a different interpreter. Another person uses the "privacy" screen when she places a call so she can see the interpreter before the interpreter sees her. If she does not like the interpreter who appears on the screen, she disconnects and calls again. This saves her the embarrassment of having to end a call after it has started. One person mentioned asking

the interpreter directly to transfer the call or get another interpreter. She said that some interpreters accept her request without a problem while others get defensive.

Desirable qualities or competencies of a VRS interpreter

With regard to which qualities or competencies VRS interpreters should possess, many comments fell into the category of language knowledge and usage. Interviewees expressed strong feelings that interpreters need to have fluent language skills in ASL and English, and Spanish for interpreters who work with Spanish VRS, as well as knowledge of sign variations such as PSE. VRS interpreters need to be able to produce their languages smoothly and have clear ASL production skills and English pronunciation skills. VRS interpreters need strong linguistic skills in order to effectively match consumers' register, signing style, education level, and background, and to know when to ask for clarification. Several interviewees specifically noted the need for strong facial expression (non-manual markers), the ability to make and maintain eye contact and the ability to read fingerspelling and numbers. It is important to note that while not included on the list of competencies on the Demographic Survey, the value of strong language skills among interpreters was a top priority for many of the interviewees.

Interviewees stated that interpreters need to complete an interpreter training program so they can develop strong skills and gain the ability to understand and follow the code of ethics. Several interviewees stated that VRS interpreters should be certified before they start working in this setting.

Interviewees also expressed concern that interpreters need to be culturally aware and sensitive to callers, specifically callers of different racial backgrounds and callers

who are Deaf-Blind. One interviewee stated specifically that interpreters need to know Deaf culture.

In terms of characteristics, interviewees mentioned that VRS interpreters should be confident, warm, friendly, charming, polite, professional, and have a strong sense of personal and professional ethics. VRS interpreters should not be arrogant or patronizing. A few interviewees also mentioned that VRS interpreters need to wear appropriate attire.

Topics to avoid when using VRS

While several interviewees said that there are no topics they avoid when using VRS interpreters, the majority of interviewees mentioned not being comfortable when making personal calls, particularly medical-, financial- or family-related calls. Business- or school-related calls posed no problems for interviewees who mentioned these areas.

A few interviewees said that no topic was off-limits though they prefer an interpreter of the same gender for some calls, mostly medical. One person who identified himself as gay stated that he is more comfortable if the interpreter is gay or lesbian because he feels like that interpreter will understand him better. One interviewee, who is over 60 years old, stated that she prefers using interpreters who are closer to her age rather than interpreters who look like kids, are fresh out of school and still “raw”. She said she sometimes wonders what younger interpreters think of her because she is older. Several interviewees expressed interest in having interpreters who are of the same racial background to help with cultural understanding regardless of the topic.

Several interviewees mentioned the interpreters’ Code of Ethics and specifically cited the tenet of confidentiality. One person stated that as long as interpreters keep information confidential, he is willing to discuss any topic through a VRS interpreter. Another

interviewee, though, mentioned a situation where personal information about him was circulated in the community and he felt that the information could only have come from a VRS interpreter.

One person mentioned not being comfortable communicating through a VRS interpreter if the call was sexual in nature, or if it involved someone with whom he was in a serious relationship. Another interviewee said she knows that some Deaf people make pornography-related calls through VRS but that she would never do that.

One African American/Black interviewee said that he sometimes wonders how the VRS interpreter, particularly a non-African American/Black interpreter, represents him to the hearing consumer. He wondered if he should have the interpreter notify the hearing consumer that the deaf consumer is African American/Black, but was not sure what would be appropriate without being offensive.

A few interviewees mentioned using different service providers for different kinds of calls, particularly if they want anonymity and suspect they will get an interpreter they know if they use a specific company. In contrast to this, one interviewee stated using the same company all the time because he knows the interpreters and they know him.

Determining the success of a call

Several interviewees stated that they use “gut” feelings to determine if a call is successful or not, or they read the interpreter’s lips and/or facial expressions to see if he/she is mouthing the right words. Related to this, one person said he determines the effectiveness of the call based on the interpreter’s signing skills. If the interpreter does not have strong ASL competencies the interviewee wonders if the interpreter can accurately represent both his message and his personality. One person mentioned frustration at being very animated in

his discourse yet seeing the interpreter as being very passive and non-emotive in his/her work.

Several people mentioned that if they got appropriate responses from the hearing consumer and felt that the conversation was progressing as expected, that meant the interpreter was doing a good job. One deaf person said she sometimes asks the interpreter to repeat the information back to her so she can check for comprehension. One technique that several interviewees mentioned is to check back with the hearing consumer after the call. This happens either via email or instant messaging, by placing another call through a different interpreter, or by seeing the hearing consumer in-person at a later time or day. One person cited an example of setting up a meeting through a VRS interpreter yet found upon arrival at the meeting that the hearing person did not have some of the information that she (the deaf person) had conveyed on the call. She was frustrated that the interpreter had not fully interpreted the message.

The more familiar the deaf person is with the hearing person's communication style, the easier it is to know if a call is going smoothly. According to several interviewees, this happens most often when talking to family members. If miscommunication occurs, it is usually because the interpreter misunderstood. One interviewee stated that she uses VRS interpreters for "safe" conversations, meaning those calls that are more superficial so she does not have to worry too much if the content is not completely clear.

As one person stated, it is not really possible to know if the call was successful or not. Other than verifying the responses he gets from his questions, he relies on "blind faith" and just has to trust that the call is successful. But, he feels he can usually tell if a call is going well or not.

Additional Comments

At the end of each interview, interviewees were asked if they had any additional comments that they would like to add. This question was open ended so interviewees could provide other examples if they wanted.

One comment that was mentioned by several people was the need for VRS interpreters to be culturally sensitive to the communication needs of Deaf-Blind consumers, particularly with regard to clothing color (dark clothing is better), signing space (usually smaller), signing pace (usually slower), and environmental cues (lighting, writing numbers on paper using thick, black markers). One person mentioned the need to work more closely with the FCC to improve services for Deaf-Blind consumers.

Several interviewees mentioned the need for Deaf consumers to take a workshop or get some kind of training on how to use VRS interpreters, how to navigate hearing phone culture, and how to deal with hearing people who do not want to deal with Deaf people. One person cited the example that Deaf callers need to have better phone etiquette and not do so much multi-tasking while on a VRS call, specifically not to eat, drink and or text message while on the call.

One interviewee said she greatly appreciates Spanish-language VRS services, especially now that it is available 24-hours a day. Another interviewee expressed interest in having VRS interpreters know and recognize Canadian signs since VRS calls also go to Canada.

A few interviewees mentioned wanting to see more Deaf interpreters utilized in VRS settings, not just in advertising or marketing but as actual VRS interpreters. With

more deaf people moving to the United States from other countries, one person felt it would be beneficial to use Deaf interpreters to facilitate calls with non-native ASL users.

One interviewee expressed concern that VRS companies are catering to the hearing consumers by listening to their suggestions and comments but not paying attention to deaf consumers and their suggestions or comments. Her sense is that service providers' attitude towards the Deaf community is that Deaf people should just be happy with the services in existence and whatever is being given is "good enough so stop complaining."

Conclusion

Many of the issues the Deaf consumers raised were the same as those raised by the practitioners. Consumers are concerned about VRS interpreters' language skills, interpreting skills, and world knowledge background. Consumers want interpreters who can appropriately manage a call and provide satisfactory service.

Overall, many people expressed appreciation at having access to VRS interpreters, particularly because this mode of communication allows deaf people to use sign language to communicate rather than using printed English as with TTYs. One person stated that she feels a greater sense of independence because she does not have to rely or depend on other people. One person had the following advice for VRS interpreters: Expect the unexpected!

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

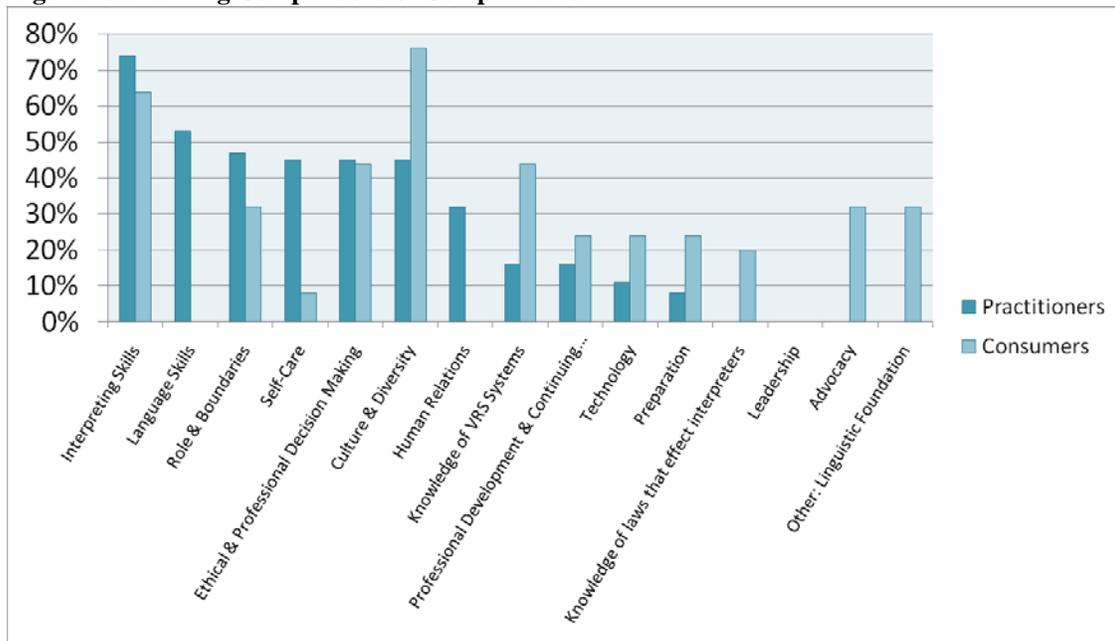
Focus Group Discussion

The VRS Summit at the start of this project identified the following competency categories as being important for interpreters who work in VRS settings:

world knowledge, language fluency, cultural literacy, human relations skills, telephone etiquette skills, and professional/ethical behaviors. The competencies were then synthesized by the content-area Experts Group and likewise validated by the comments and input gathered from both VRS interpreters and from Deaf consumers.

On the Demographic Surveys, both practitioners and consumers were asked to rank a list of competencies by selecting the four competencies they believed to be the most important for VRS interpreters. The results for each group were reported earlier in the Demographic Survey narratives for interpreters (see p.19) and for consumers (see page 40.) It is interesting to note a comparison of the two in Figure 20 below.

Figure 20: Ranking Comparisons of Competencies



While many of these competencies apply to interpreters who work in any setting, they are especially pertinent to interpreters who work in VRS settings because of the wide-reaching and diverse nature of calls. The need for fluent language skills and broad-based cultural knowledge cannot be underestimated, particularly in light of the fact that two integral parts of the interpreting puzzle are unknown prior to a VRS call – namely the consumers and the topic. Because neither the consumers nor the topic are known to the interpreter, there is no opportunity to do preparation or to consider how past experiences or knowledge can guide the work.

For trilingual interpreters, the goal of complete linguistic and cultural fluency in Spanish is admirable but may not be feasible given that calls may be placed to any one of 23 countries, each of which has various regional dialects and/or indigenous languages. This is compounded by the fact that each country has, in addition to its own linguistic and cultural norms, its own social norms (i.e., relations between people) and its own societal norms (i.e., currencies, holidays, political structures, etc.).

While it is not possible for interpreters to understand every caller, either Deaf or hearing, and every topic, VRS interpreters have developed strategies for handling cultural and linguistic variation among callers. In addition to remaining aware of the nuances, they realize the need for neutrality and flexibility, and the need to listen and watch for linguistic and cultural characteristics of the callers and incorporate them into their work without appearing condescending or oppressive. A critical component to the success of a call is being able to request clarification. Experienced VRS interpreters have developed this skill over time, though it takes time and is sometimes hard for newer VRS interpreters to do.

For trilingual interpreters, negotiating with consumers sometimes means not only requesting linguistic clarification, but also asking for cultural, familial or other kinds of clarification. This is often predicated on understanding various views on gender, disability, and the role of women and elders.

Another strategy that VRS interpreters employ for managing calls is to request a team interpreter. While most expressed appreciation at having teams readily available in the VRS setting, some participants expressed reticence at requesting teams, usually because they were not comfortable with any of their colleagues who happen to be available or because they had had previous team interpreting experiences that were unsuccessful or unhelpful. An additional reason why interpreters do not always request a team is because the content of the call is so specific that no one else in the call center has background on that topic.

One issue that is particularly important for trilingual interpreters to understand is the significance of family in Hispanic/Latino cultures. Family takes precedence over all other matters and multigenerational interactions are the norm with family members having different levels of status and different levels of expectations. Elders, for example, are to be respected and the translations rendered by the interpreter need to reflect this. With multigenerations of family members on the call, as is often the case, there is heightened need for interpreters to be aware of nuances in their own language use.

One of the skills that VRS interpreters must possess in order to be effective is that of human relations. It is crucial that VRS interpreters interact appropriately and effectively with callers. Several traits that were mentioned by interpreters include tolerance for ambiguity, patience, flexibility, and diplomacy, none of which can be

underestimated. These human relations skills need to be coupled with more standard professional behaviors such as confidentiality, ethical decision-making, and being non-judgmental. Professional behavior also includes understanding and working in corporate culture. Interpreting has always been seen as a “human services” field but the VRS arena is corporate-based and must adhere to stringent government regulations and oversight by the FCC. For some interpreters, making the shift to a corporate-based environment has been difficult. Several participants mentioned the loss of contact with consumers, particularly Deaf consumers, as one of the most challenging changes since VRS interpreters are not allowed to engage consumers on a personal level during calls.

Concurrently, VRS interpreters have had to deal with change in their relationship with members of the Deaf community in face-to-face environments. VRS interpreters reported spending less time in the community, both working and socializing, which in some cases has led to resentment by local Deaf consumers. This is exacerbated for trilingual interpreters because there are few of them in general and doing less community work is felt more acutely by consumers in Spanish-influenced communities.

The VRS interpreters reported feeling a sense of loss at the diminished interpersonal connection, on the one hand, and yet the relief of not having to “chase a paycheck” on the other hand. When VRS interpreters do accept community-based assignments, they report having shorter processing time and less stamina for monologic work, both from ASL-to-English and English-to-ASL. This has an effect on their team interpreters as well as on their consumers. The alternate side of this, though, is that VRS interpreters report feeling more confident in their skills, particularly their ASL-to-English skills, as a result of seeing such a diverse group of callers in the VRS setting.

Another change that VRS interpreters have experienced relates to their reliance on technology. Interpreting is a profession that has traditionally not depended on technology. Now, however, interpreters are being asked to overlay computers, 10-key and internet protocols onto their work. This requires a different kind of mental processing that, for some, detracts from their ability to process and interpreting information.

VRS interpreters are now sitting for long periods of time, in confined spaces without natural light or air circulation. Other environmental characteristics that affect VRS interpreters include lighting both in the call center and in the Deaf callers' environment, background variations in the Deaf callers' environment, screen quality, connection speed, and background noise in both the call center and in the hearing and Deaf callers' environments. More recently with the advent of portable video phones, VRS interpreters are now having to deal with Deaf consumers who are moving, sometimes between rooms (i.e., walking), and occasionally between locations (i.e., in the car.)

For trilingual interpreters, the attribute of being non-judgmental is especially important because they sometimes interact with Deaf callers from countries with less-developed health care systems and who may have physical deformities or missing body parts such as eyes or limbs. One example of when this might occur is when a Deaf person comes to the United States for medical treatment and calls back to his/her home country with updates. The VRS interpreter must be careful not to insult or offend the Deaf consumer by reacting in a negative, surprised, or even repulsed, way.

While the biggest difference between working in VRS settings as compared to other settings is the lack of preparation time, another difference is in the inability to clarify or rectify an interpretation or situation after a call has ended. When working in the community, the chance of working repeatedly with the same consumers is significantly greater than when working in VRS. The number of consumers one sees in VRS, though, is exponentially increased while at the same time the ability to develop rapport is exponentially decreased.

Deaf Consumer Interviews

Just as the input from the Focus Group participants confirmed the list of competencies identified by the Summit participants and the Expert Group members, so, too, did the input gathered from the Deaf consumers who were interviewed. They identified fluent language skills and strong human relations as being highly important despite the fact that these two items were inadvertently left off the list of competencies they were asked to rank on their Demographic Surveys. The Deaf consumers also identified a strong need for VRS interpreters to possess cultural knowledge and diversity awareness, as did the interpreters from the Focus Groups.

With regard to the need for strong language skills, Deaf consumers expressed concern that the quality of VRS services seems to have declined in recent years. They reported seeing more and more interpreters who cannot read their signs, cannot sign well themselves, and cannot accurately and skillfully process the information on the call. These concerns related to both the interpreters' ASL skills as well as their English skills, and encompass other factors such as appropriate use of register, lexical selection and professionalism. (Note: Only one Deaf consumer mentioned using Spanish VRS services

and did not mention the language skills of trilingual interpreters. Further investigation is needed with that population of consumers.)

One area of concern for Deaf consumers that is endemic to using VRS is encountering regional and dialectical sign variations. Because a VRS call can get routed to call centers throughout the United States, and more recently Canada, Deaf consumers are seeing a wide range of interpreters. No longer are they limited to those interpreters in their local area who, it is assumed, use linguistic characteristics familiar to local consumers. Not only do callers have to be alert when they see an unknown (regional) sign, but they must also be careful when using regional signs that the VRS interpreter may not recognize. Examples include signs for cities, local people or local places.

Deaf consumers realize that sign variations exist and that interpreters may not have the background or knowledge of all topics. In knowing this, though, they expressed preference for having the interpreter ask for clarification rather than going ahead and hoping the callers do not notice.

Deaf consumers do not know who their interpreter will be prior to the call, just as VRS interpreters do not know who their consumers will be. Nor will the Deaf consumer know the skill level, certification or background of the interpreter. For most calls, this is not usually a problem as Deaf callers have developed strategies for ending a call if unsatisfied. For other calls, though, particularly those of a personal nature, Deaf callers expressed concern when the interpreter who answers the call is known to them. The biggest issue is when the interpreter is a former student of the Deaf caller or former co-worker and the caller does not want the interpreter to know about his/her personal business.

Deaf consumers mention feeling disconnected from VRS interpreters on an interpersonal level. This parallels the comments made by the VRS interpreters regarding the impersonal nature of calls. This relates back to the corporate nature of VRS calls and to some of the regulations imposed by the FCC, namely that VRS interpreters are not allowed to ask personal questions of callers which makes the interpreter seem aloof. Deaf callers would like VRS interpreters to be professional and maintain strong ethical decision-making, yet they would also like the interpreters to be friendly, polite, and approachable.

Technological constraints such as lighting, background, Internet connectivity and the like are of concern to Deaf consumers, just as they are to interpreters. These issues are particularly acute for Deaf-Blind callers who have visual limitation that directly impact their ability to use VRS services. Additionally, the fact that many interpreters are generally not trained to work with Deaf-Blind consumers only compounds the situation as the interpreter may not be aware of how to accommodate the needs of the Deaf-Blind person. The Deaf-Blind community is working to mitigate problems that arise for Deaf-Blind consumers, including working with the FCC, in hopes of making this venue more accessible.

Several Deaf consumers of color expressed interest in using VRS interpreters who share similar cultural backgrounds. This is especially important to callers when managing cultural issues, such as in the case of Native American callers who want to discuss Native rituals or ceremonies. Using an interpreter who is unaware of cultural nuances and content-specific signs can lead to misunderstandings. This is in contrast to using an interpreter in a community setting where the consumers often have prior

knowledge of the interpreter and the interpreter's background culturally and linguistically.

Interestingly, several Deaf consumers mentioned the need for Deaf people to take classes on proper telephone etiquette and proper VRS etiquette. They expressed frustration that members of the Deaf community do not know how to use the phone and do not understand phone "culture." This would also help Deaf consumers better interact with hearing callers and make the interaction smoother without relying as extensively on the interpreter to manage the call process.

Deaf consumers indicate a preference of having more Deaf interpreters working within the VRS arena, as did the VRS interpreters. Deaf interpreters would be especially helpful for calls involving callers who use sign languages other than ASL such as people who have immigrated to the United States or people who have grown up without having had access to sign language.

Conclusion

Many of the issues raised and discussed by both the VRS interpreters and Deaf consumers are similar in nature and serve to validate and support the work done by the Summit participants and the Expert Group members. There are additional issues that need further study in order to fully understand effective practices for working in VRS settings which are discussed in the next section of this report. As we further our research and continue our steps toward identifying effective practices in VRS settings, however, we must remember that the end goal is the same for everyone – effective, high-quality communication.

QUESTIONS WARRANTING FURTHER STUDY

Information gathered thus far heightens awareness that there are still many questions for which we, as a profession, do not have appropriate answers. Several themes emerged during the discussions and interviews that warrant future review and research.

First, working VRS interpreters ranked the issue of *Self-care* as being quite important to them, yet this project did not gather data on what that looks like either on the job or during personal time. Self-care issues on the job include looking at what constitutes an appropriate work-week, break frequencies and durations, and work station ergonomics and logistics. These issues are particularly relevant to VRS service providers as they continue to develop and refine work-place standards to meet the growing need for VRS services. Personal time self-care issues include looking at the frequency and duration of non-VRS interpreting work, types of extra-curricular activities that may help or hinder the interpreter in his/her work, and the more traditional self-care areas such as proper nutrition, sleep, and exercise.

Second, this report is missing the perspective of hearing consumers. Due to fiscal and staff limitations, it was not possible within the scope of this project to gather data from hearing callers. Their input, however, is crucial to gaining a balanced perspective on the state of the field, specifically related to the competencies that hearing consumers want to see in VRS interpreters and related to how hearing consumers perceive VRS as a service. For example, both VRS interpreters and Deaf consumers indicated an interest in seeing more Deaf interpreters working in VRS settings but there is no data to support or refute whether hearing callers would be willing to accept this configuration. It would be

interesting to see if hearing callers would be willing to accept an additional interpreter and the additional processing time if they understood the call accuracy would increase. Additionally, this perspective is critically needed if a proposal to employ deaf interpreters were to be made to the FCC.

A third unexpected theme that emerged from the project pertains to trilingual interpreters who work between ASL, English and Spanish or bilingual interpreters who work between ASL and Spanish. Only recently did the FCC approve payment for calls which use Spanish as one of the languages. Trilingual interpreters not only deal with the same issues as do their ASL/English counterparts, but they also deal with potentially more complex linguistic and cultural factors because they handle calls that are made to any number of Spanish-speaking countries. While the foundation of Spanish as a language is shared, there is significant variation between Spanish-speaking counties with regard to lexical items, linguistic usage, societal norms, and cultural norms. Further investigation into the needs of trilingual interpreters is important as the number of trilingual VRS interpreters increases. Part and parcel with this is the need to interview Deaf consumers who use Spanish VRS services.

Related to this area is the underlying need to investigate certification for trilingual interpreters. At the present time, there is no national entity that has any kind of tool to assess the skill and knowledge sets of sign language interpreters who work with languages other than ASL and English. The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitation Services is developing a test for interpreters who work between ASL, English and Spanish, but it is not yet ready for use. The lack of certification impacts both the trilingual interpreters' ability to get work in VRS settings, particularly in Puerto Rico,

and the trilingual interpreters' income level as certified interpreters are generally paid at a higher rate than non-certified interpreters.

A fourth theme that warrants further investigation surrounds the use of Deaf interpreters in VRS settings. While most of the interpreters who participated in the Focus Groups had never worked with a Deaf interpreter in a VRS setting, the general consensus was that this option was needed. Several Deaf consumers also indicated in their interviews that they would like to see Deaf interpreters used more often, particularly during calls with Deaf consumers who use a sign language other than ASL. This work may need to be undertaken by other NCIEC Work Teams such as the Deaf Interpreter Work Team or the Deaf Advocacy Training Work Team.

Fifth, communication and access needs of consumers who are Deaf-Blind also emerged as an area requiring further study, despite the small number of Deaf-Blind people who were interviewed. Deaf-Blind people have a variety of communication preferences, some involving tactile communication and some involving close vision communication. The addition of technology makes managing the communication event more challenging for the Deaf-Blind person because he/she is unable to adjust lighting, placement or other environmental cues as easily as during a face-to-face interaction. In addition, the VRS interpreter may have little or no experience working with Deaf-Blind consumers and may not understand ways to adjust his/her signing style to meet the needs of the consumer. It is important to work with organizations and agencies that serve Deaf-Blind persons to more fully understand the issues in order to meet their needs, and to provide appropriate information to the FCC about communication needs over video technology.

Finally, while this report provides comprehensive views by VRS interpreters and by Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind consumers, it does not provide enough information to help us understand the discrepancies between interpreters' and consumers' perspectives. As indicated by the chart showing a comparison of competencies in Figure 20 on page 52, interpreters and consumers both indicated that interpreters need to possess strong *interpreting skills*, and they were similar in their responses as to the need for interpreters to have strong *ethical and professional decision making skills*. In other categories, however, there were significant differences in the ranking of competencies.

As mentioned above, interpreters selected *self-care* as an important competency yet few consumers selected this as being important. What the survey didn't ask, however, is what constitutes self-care and why it was or was not selected.

Another discrepancy is between interpreters' and consumers' selections regarding *knowledge of VRS systems*. Deaf consumers selected this as being an important competency for interpreters to possess, yet interpreters selected this infrequently. Likewise, consumers selected *knowledge of laws that affect interpreters* as being somewhat important, yet none of the interpreters selected this as a needed competency.

Another competency that was ranked by consumers but not at all by interpreters is that of *advocacy*. Traditionally, the role of the interpreter is not to advocate, and in VRS settings, in particular, the FCC and some service providers have established guidelines that prohibit VRS interpreters from advocating. However, consumers indicated that this is an important competency for VRS interpreters to have. What is not clear from this data, though, is what form of advocacy consumers would like interpreters to exhibit, nor

is it clear how advocacy in a VRS setting is different or the same from advocacy in other settings.

Another significant discrepancy between interpreters' and consumers' responses relates to *culture and diversity*. These terms were not defined by the project, nor were the consumers or practitioners asked to provide a definition of them. Without further study, it is not possible to know if consumers or interpreters were referring specifically to Deaf/Hearing cultural differences or referring to more general differences such as race, ethnicity, gender, etc.

Conclusion

This report is an important step in the process for understanding the roles and needs of interpreters in VRS settings. Additional investigation and research are needed, however, to gain a more complete understanding of the various factors that influence and impact work in this setting. The Interpreting via Video Work Team will continue its work in identifying steps toward effective practices in VRS settings, as well as broaden its scope to better understand issues pertinent to Video Remote Interpreting. The Work Team looks forward to continued collaboration with stakeholders, service providers, practitioners and consumers as current and effective practices in interpreting via video are examined.

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Appendix A

Practitioner Demographic Survey



Gallaudet University Regional Interpreter Education Center Interpreting Via Video (VRS) Focus Group Members - Background and Experience

1. Gender: Female Male

2. What is your hearing status? (please circle one)
 Hearing Deaf Hard of Hearing Deaf Blind

3. What is your age?
_____ 18 - 29 years old
_____ 30 - 39 years old
_____ 40 - 49 years old
_____ 50 - 59 years old
_____ 60 - 69 years old
_____ 70 or better

4. What is the highest educational level you have achieved?
_____ High school
_____ Certificate/diploma
_____ AA degree (Specify major) _____
_____ Bachelors degree (Specify major) _____
_____ Masters degree (Specify major) _____
_____ Doctorate (Specify major) _____

5. Ethnicity
_____ Native American/American Indian
_____ Asian/Pacific Islander
_____ African-American/Black
_____ Hispanic/Latino
_____ White Non-Hispanic/European American
_____ Other Please specify _____

6. Which of the following characterizes your role(s)? (check all that apply).
_____ Signed language interpreter
_____ Spoken language interpreter

- Interpreter educator
- Language instructor
- Other: _____

7. What state do you live in? _____

8. How many years have you been interpreting? _____

- Less than 2 years
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- More than 15 years

9. How long have you been working in VRS settings?

- Less than 2 years
- 2-4 years
- 4-6 years
- More than 6 years

10. How much do you interpret in a VRS setting? (please check one)

- Less than 5 hours per week
- 5-15 hours per week
- 15-25 hours per week
- 25-35 hours per week
- More than 35 hours per week
- I have a staff interpreter position at a VRS Call center.
- I am currently not interpreting in VRS settings, but I have in the past.

11. How much do you interpret in non-VRS settings, either paid or pro-bono? (please check one)

- Less than 5 hours per week
- 5-15 hours per week
- 15-25 hours per week
- 25-35 hours per week
- More than 35 hours per week
- I have a staff interpreter position.

12. In what non-VRS settings do you work, either paid or pro-bono? (check all that apply)

- Education, K-12
- Education, post-secondary
- Legal
- Medical
- Mental Health
- Community
- Religious

- Corporate/Business
- Conference
- Performing Arts
- Employment/Vocational Rehabilitation
- Other _____

13. Are you a certified interpreter? Yes ____ No ____
 If yes, how long have you been certified? _____
 If yes, what certification do you hold? _____

14. When you first started interpreting in VRS settings, did you feel appropriately prepared?
 Yes ____ No ____
 Please explain: _____

15. What type of education and/or experience did you have that prepared you to work in the VRS setting?
 None
 Pre-service training (eg interpreter training program)
 In-service training (eg workshop, conference sessions)
 On-the-job training
 Other. Please describe: _____

16. From the following effective practices, place a check next to the FOUR that are most important for interpreters working in VRS settings.

- Knowledge of VRS Systems
- Culture and Diversity
- Self-Care
- Role & Boundaries
- Preparation
- Ethical and Professional Decision Making
- Interpreting Skills
- Language Skills
- Technology
- Knowledge of laws that effect interpreters
- Leadership
- Advocacy
- Human Relations
- Professional Development and Continuing Education

17. How often have you worked with a Deaf Interpreter in a VRS setting?
 Never
 1-5 times in my interpreting career
 Less than once per month

- ___ 1-2 times per month
- ___ 3-5 times per month
- ___ 6-10 times per month
- ___ More than 10 times per month
- ___ I am currently not interpreting in VRS settings but I have worked with a DI or CDI in this settings in the past. How often? _____

18. What can you do as a VRS interpreter to improve the service you provide?

19. Do you see a need for specific types of continuing education for interpreting in VRS settings?

Post baccalaureate certificate Yes _____ No _____

Masters degree Yes _____ No _____

In-Service Yes _____ No _____

Why or why not? _____

20. Rate your satisfaction with the *task* of VRS interpreting?

1 2 3 4 5

1 = Not satisfied with the *task* of VRS interpreting

5 = Very satisfied with the *task* of VRS interpreting

21. Rate your self-care on the following scale:

1 2 3 4 5

1 = Do not take care of yourself

5 = Take care of yourself very well

22. Additional comments: _____

THANK YOU for your participation!

Appendix B

Practitioner Focus Group Questions

Thank you for participating in our Focus Group.

- Please introduce yourself.
- How often do you interpret in a video relay setting?
- How many years experience do you have as a video interpreter?

Our goal today is to examine the elements required by sign language interpreters to provide video relay interpreting services. Our examination will consider not just entry-level competence but also qualifications unique to working in video relay settings.

We know the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) uses the definition of qualified interpreter as outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

28 C.F.R. 36.303 (b) (1). The term qualified interpreter is defined in the regulation to mean: ...an interpreter who is able to interpret effectively, accurately and impartially both receptively, and expressively, using any necessary specialized vocabulary.

1. Given the above definition, how do you define what “qualified” means to work as a video interpreter? What elements might you use to identify what the entry-level video interpreter might look like? (Note to facilitators - in seeking responses look for attributes, knowledge, skills, language and cultural literacy.)

- a. What unique knowledge does the entry-level video interpreter possess?
- b. What human relations skills does the entry-level video interpreter use?
- c. Describe the language fluency required of the entry-level video interpreter?
- d. Identify the cultural literacy demonstrated by an entry-level video interpreter?
- e. What types of professional behaviors are demonstrated by the entry-level video interpreter?
- f. What non-interpreting skills does the entry-level video interpreter possess?

2. Describe how the callers’ culture(s) might influence your work as a video relay interpreter?

- a. What strategies do you use to accommodate the communication process between deaf and hearing callers when:

- i. They share a culture different than your own. How might this impact the message?
 - ii. They share language characteristics different than what you might have experienced. How might this impact the message?
 - 3. What other key factors often impact the message i.e. the flow of communication?
 - 4. What strategies do you employ for managing:
 - a. Issues related to calls which include cultures different than your own?
 - b. Language idiosyncrasies different than those you use?
 - c. Calls from individuals from geographic regions unfamiliar to you?
 - d. Calls between individuals of generations other than your own?
- Ex. Do you have hypothetical examples of how you might demonstrate any of the above issues?
- 5. What demands do interpreters experience in VRS settings and what are the effects of these demands? For example, dealing with technical demands, turn-taking, telephone etiquette.
- Ex. Can you provide hypothetical examples of these demands?
- 6. What strategies do you use to deal with these demands?
 - 7. How has working in VRS settings impacted:
 - a. Your work with the deaf community?
 - b. Your relationship with the deaf community?
 - 8. What problem solving strategies do you most commonly use in your work as a Video Interpreter?
 - 9. If you were hiring someone to do your job, what would you look to them to demonstrate in terms of knowledge, skills and attributes?
 - 10. If you were training a person to work in VRS settings, what would you tell them were key areas of knowledge, skills set or attributes they should have or develop?
 - 11. How does working in VRS settings compare to working in other settings? Similarities? Differences?
 - 12. What/Where do you see the role of Deaf interpreters in VRS?
 - 13. What has been your experience working with Deaf interpreters in VRS settings?

Appendix C

Deaf Consumer Demographic Survey



Gallaudet University Regional Interpreter Education Center Interpreting Via Video (VRS) Deaf Consumer Interviews

1. Gender: Female Male

2. What is your hearing status? (please circle one)
 Hearing Deaf Hard of Hearing Deaf Blind

3. Do you have Deaf family members? (Check all that apply.)
_____ Parents
_____ Grandparents
_____ Siblings
_____ Aunts or Uncles
_____ Other (please specify) _____

4. What is your age?
_____ 18 - 29 years old
_____ 30 - 39 years old
_____ 40 - 49 years old
_____ 50 - 59 years old
_____ 60 - 69 years old
_____ 70 or older

5. What is the highest educational level you have achieved?
_____ High school
_____ Certificate/diploma
_____ AA degree
_____ Bachelors degree
_____ Masters degree
_____ Doctorate

6. Ethnicity
_____ Native American/American Indian
_____ Asian/Pacific Islander

- African-American/Black
- Hispanic/Latino
- White Non-Hispanic/European American
- Other Please specify _____

7. What state do you live in? _____

8. How often do you use interpreters in VRS settings?

- Every day
- 4-5 times a week
- 1-3 times a week
- 4-5 times a month
- Less than 3 times a month

9. Do you use more than one VRS service provider?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

10. Where do you use VRS interpreters? (check all that apply)

- Home, for personal
- Home, for business purposes
- School
- Work
- Other

11. From the following effective practices, place a check next to the FOUR that are most important for interpreters working in VRS settings.

- Knowledge of VRS Systems
- Culture and Diversity
- Self-Care
- Role & Boundaries
- Preparation
- Ethical and Professional Decision Making
- Interpreting Skills
- Technology
- Knowledge of laws that effect interpreters
- Leadership
- Advocacy
- Professional Development and Continuing Education
- Other (please specify) _____

12. Additional comments: _____

THANK YOU for your participation!

Appendix D

Deaf Consumer Interview Questions

INTERVIEWER:

PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING EXPLANATION TO THE INTERVIEWEE

Our goal today is to gather input from the Deaf community about video relay services (VRS). We are interested in what qualities you think an interpreter must have in order to successfully work in VRS settings. Thank you for participating in our interviews.

BEGIN INTERVIEW:

1. What is your name and in what state do you live?
2. What kinds of problems come up in VRS settings that don't come up in other settings? (eg lack of context)
3. What does a good VRS interpreter look like (qualities)?
4. Are there any topics that you avoid when using VRS? Is so, what are they?
5. When you're done with a call, how do you know it's been successful?