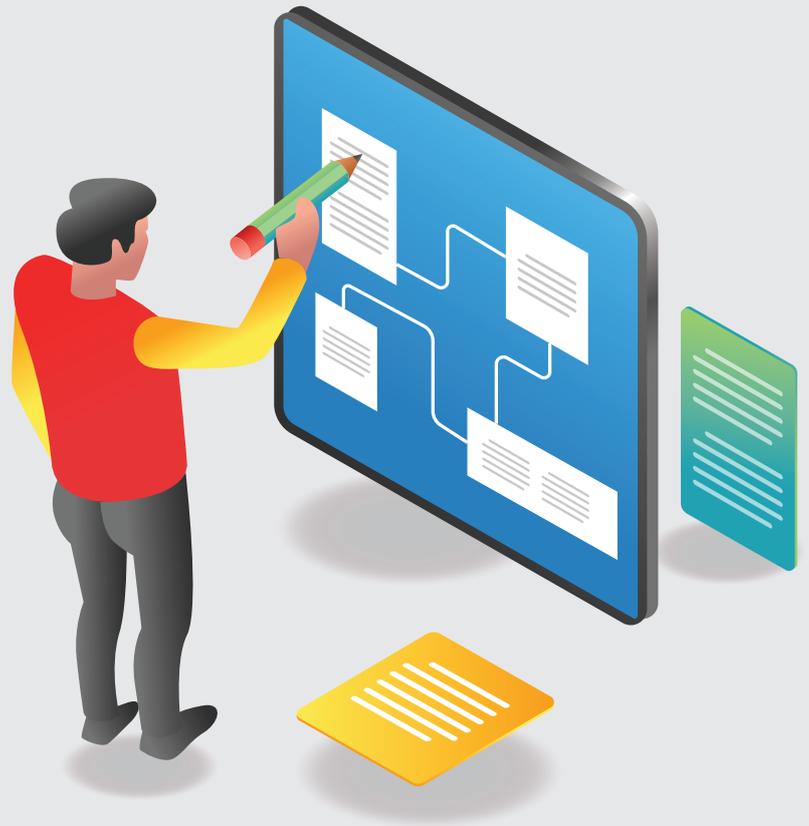




ASSESSING UNDERREPRESENTED INTERPRETING COMMUNITIES IN THE US



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INTRODUCTION

Cross Cultural Communications

Cross Cultural Communications, LLC (CCC) is an international interpreter training agency based in the United States. They specialize in medical interpreter training, community interpreter training, and cultural competence in interpreting. They also provide technical assistance, consulting, and course development for interpreters, interpreter trainers and service providers who work with linguistic minorities and immigrants (Cross Cultural Communications, LLC, 2022).

Myers & Lawyer

Myers & Lawyer are multilingual interpreters and researchers based in the United States. They specialize in multilingual resource development and dissemination, training and practitioner-based research for service providers and interpreters. Their work centers and uplifts the experiences of minoritized interpreters including but not limited to Deaf and hearing interpreters who identify as Black, Indigenous and/or People of Color, while also addressing emergent issues in the field of interpreting.



Scope and Purpose of this Study

In 2021, Cross Cultural Communications (CCC) recognized their curriculum and trainings did not address the needs of underrepresented interpreting communities of color. To address this lack, CCC partnered with Myers & Lawyer to conduct research with underrepresented interpreting communities of color who live and/or work in the United States. This study was one of the few that spanned the spectrum of interpreting modalities to include tactile languages, signed languages, and spoken languages with attention to interpreters who work across these modalities, as well. This study specifically addressed barriers to entry, advancement, and retention of interpreters of color with emphasis on training and resources for professional development.

Definitions and Terms



BIPOC

Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color



Race

the color of one's skin



Ethnicity

the cultural background and practices that a person grew up and/or lived



Underrepresented

We use this term to refer to interpreters who form a minority within the interpreting field due to race, ethnicity, immigration status, non-native language use, disability, and/or sexual orientation. We understand that interpreters can embody many of these identities and experiences simultaneously and could have an impact on how these interpreters navigate the field.

METHOD

Survey

Participants completed an online survey about their experiences as BIPOC interpreters working in spoken languages, signed languages, and/or tactile languages in the United States. Participants were asked about their race, ethnicity, disability status, languages used, the context for acquisition and/or language learning, languages and modalities in which they interpret, the settings and states in which they interpret. Participants were also asked about certifications they have obtained; their access to and experiences with interpreter training and professional development; and ways their access or lack of impacted their entry, sustainability, and advancement in the field of interpreting. Interpreters were eligible to participate in the survey if they were 18 years or older; working in the United States; working in spoken language(s), signed language(s), and/or tactile language(s); and identified as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color. The survey was made available from August 2022 to September 2022.

The survey was available through a unique Qualtrics link that was posted on Myers & Lawyer's website. Additionally, the survey link was shared on social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram by way of a recruitment video in American Sign Language with spoken English voiceover coupled with an English transcript. The survey was disseminated through national and state-based professional interpreting organizations, interpreting agencies, and service-based organizations. Snowballing occurred when other interpreters would share the survey on their social media pages or contact interpreter colleagues to participate in the survey.



The final sample consisted of a total of 179 interpreters with 80 identifying as spoken language interpreters and 99 identifying as sign language or tactile language interpreters (Table 1). Within the sign language interpreter group, 12 identified as Deaf and/or Disabled interpreters and 20 identified as multilingual, multimodal interpreters. Within the spoken language interpreter group, 19 identified as multilingual spoken language interpreters. Multilingual interpreters were classified as spoken language or signed language by selecting their primary categorization as either a sign language interpreter or a spoken language interpreter, then selecting their working languages, which indicated they were working across multiple languages. The interpreters lived in four countries including the United States, Brazil, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic, and all worked within 50 states of the United States and Puerto Rico.

Table 2 shows the age distribution of spoken and sign language interpreters. The minimum age range of participants was 18 to 24 years old and the maximum age range was 61 or older. The majority of interpreters identified within the 41 to 50 age range for both spoken language and sign language interpreters. Participant characteristics based on educational background can be found on Table 3. Sixty-eight interpreters identified themselves as Black, seventeen identified as Asian, 6 identified as Brown, 3 as Indigenous, twenty-two as multiracial, and forty-one participants did not specify their race. Additionally, twenty-two participants identified as racially white. However, ethnically they identified as Jewish, Latinx (including Puerto Rican and Mexican), and Afghan. There were 4 participants who identified as both ethnically and racially white; their responses were removed from the survey findings as they did not meet the research criteria.

Table 4 shows that sign language interpreters had more formal training than spoken language interpreters. Table 5 provides a visual representation of certification for spoken language interpreters. Just under half of the spoken language interpreters who responded to the survey were certified. Contrastingly, as shown in Table 6, about eighty percent (80%) of sign language interpreters who responded to the survey were certified. Table 7 represents the final sample by certification type.

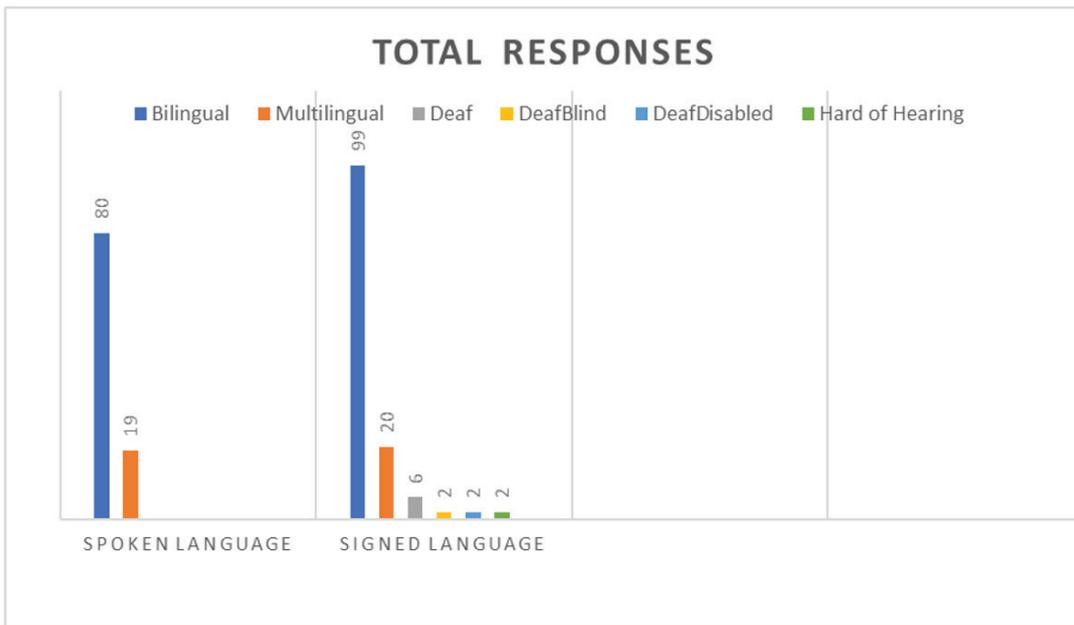


Table 1. Survey Responses (N =179)

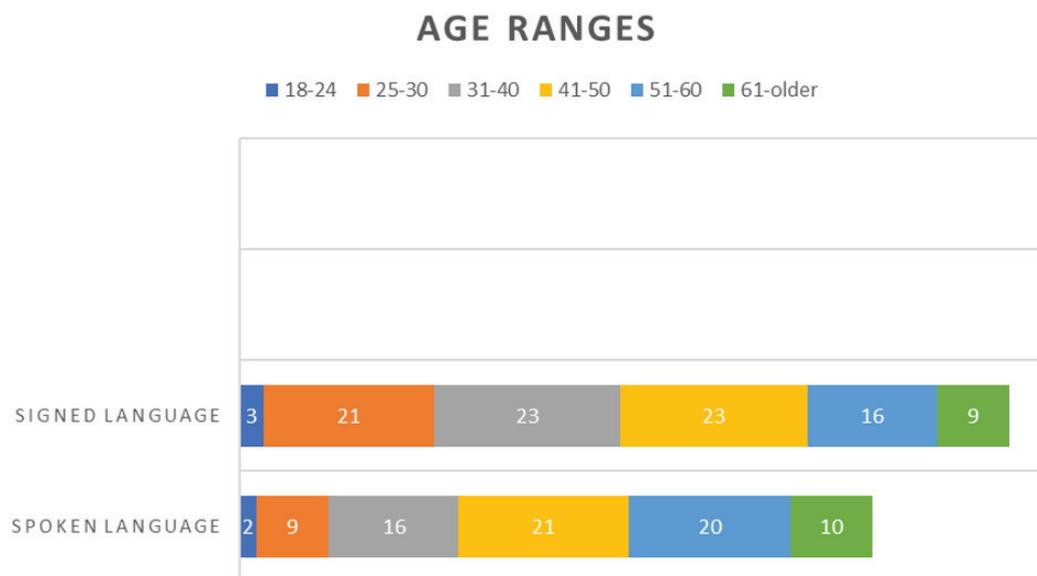


Table 2. Age Range Distribution by Spoken and Signed Language Interpreters



HIGHEST GRADE LEVEL COMPLETED (SPOKEN LANGUAGE)

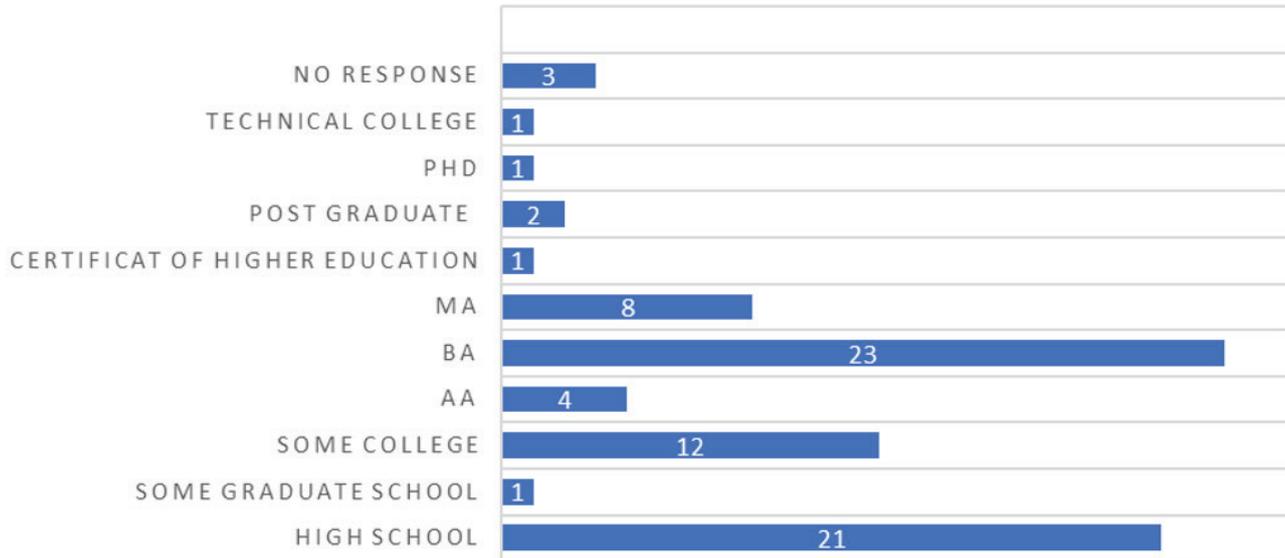
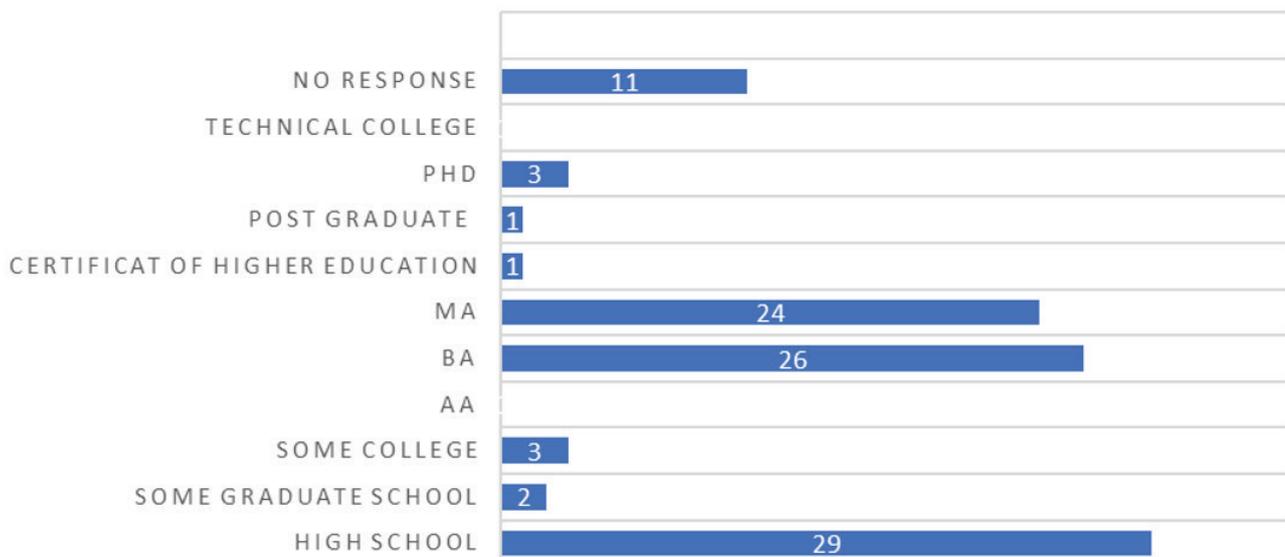


Table 3. Educational Background

HIGHEST GRADE LEVEL COMPLETED (SIGNED LANGUAGE)



FORMAL INTERPRETER TRAINING

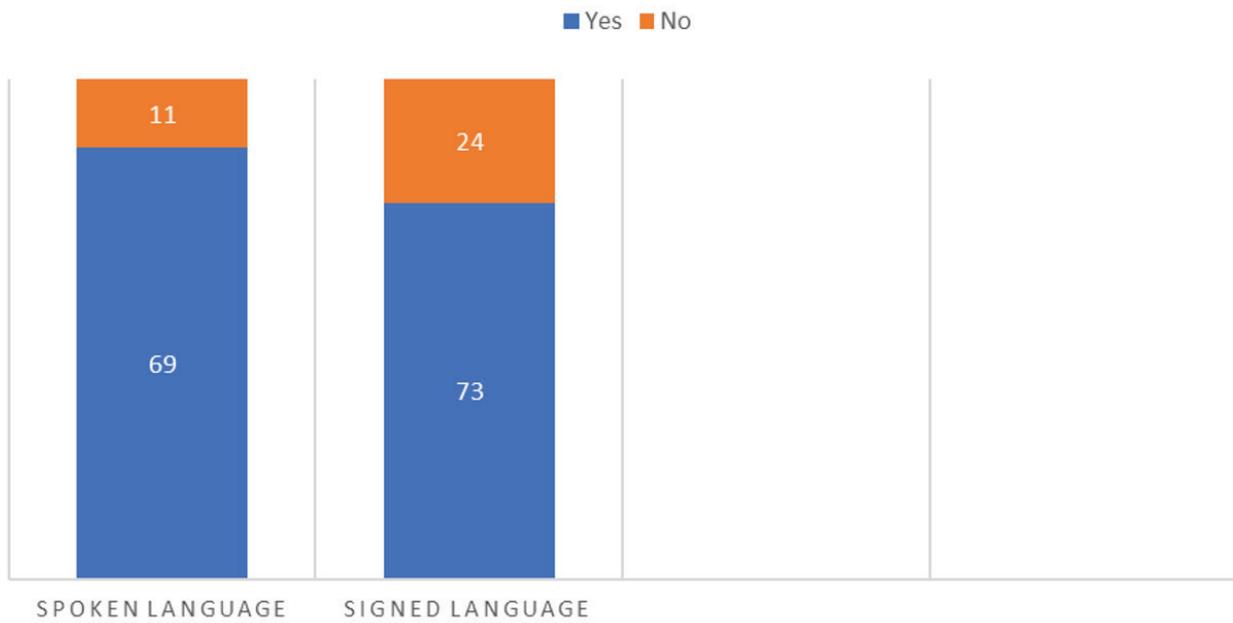


Table 4. Formal Interpreter Training

Certifications (Spoken Language)

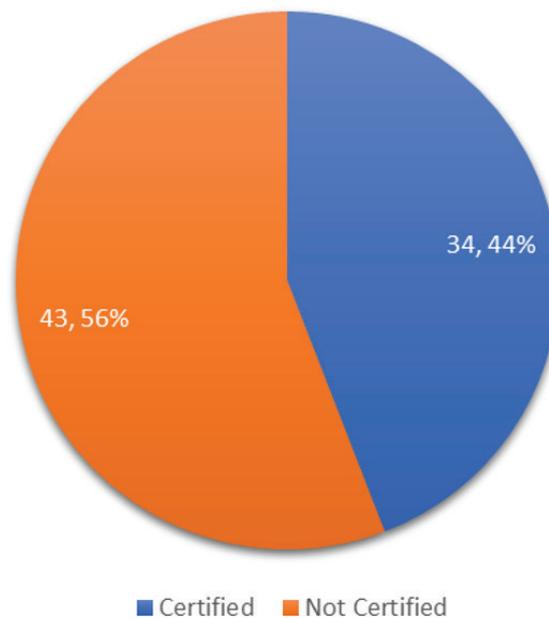


Table 5. Certification Distribution by Spoken Language

CERTIFICATIONS (SIGNED LANGUAGE)

■ Hearing ■ Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing

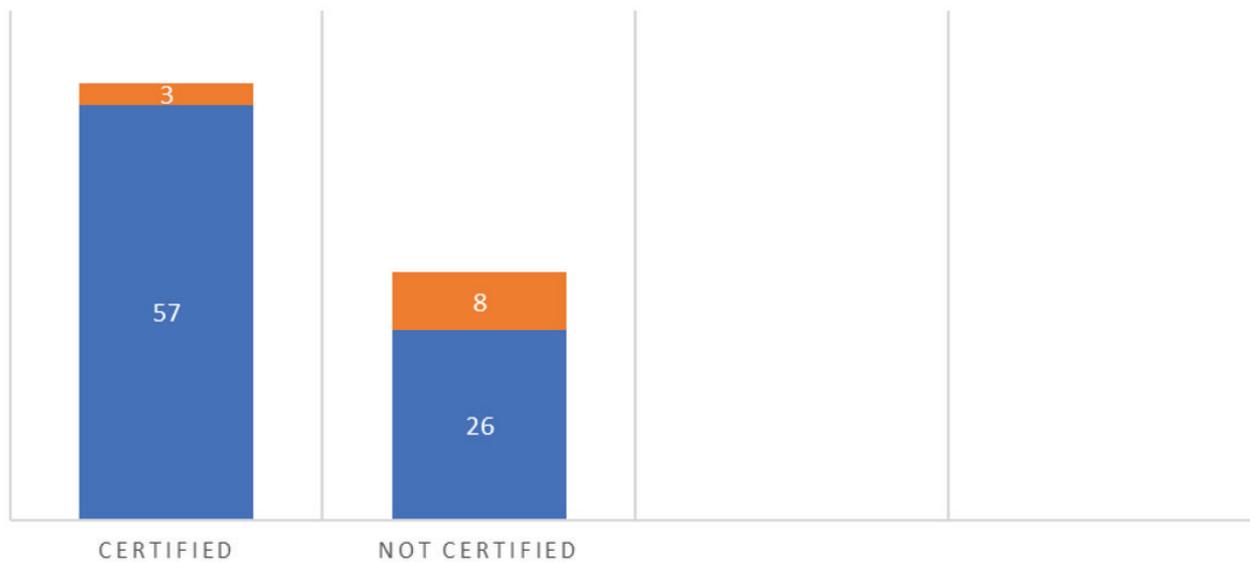


Table 6. Certification Distribution of Sign Language Interpreters



CERTIFICATIONS

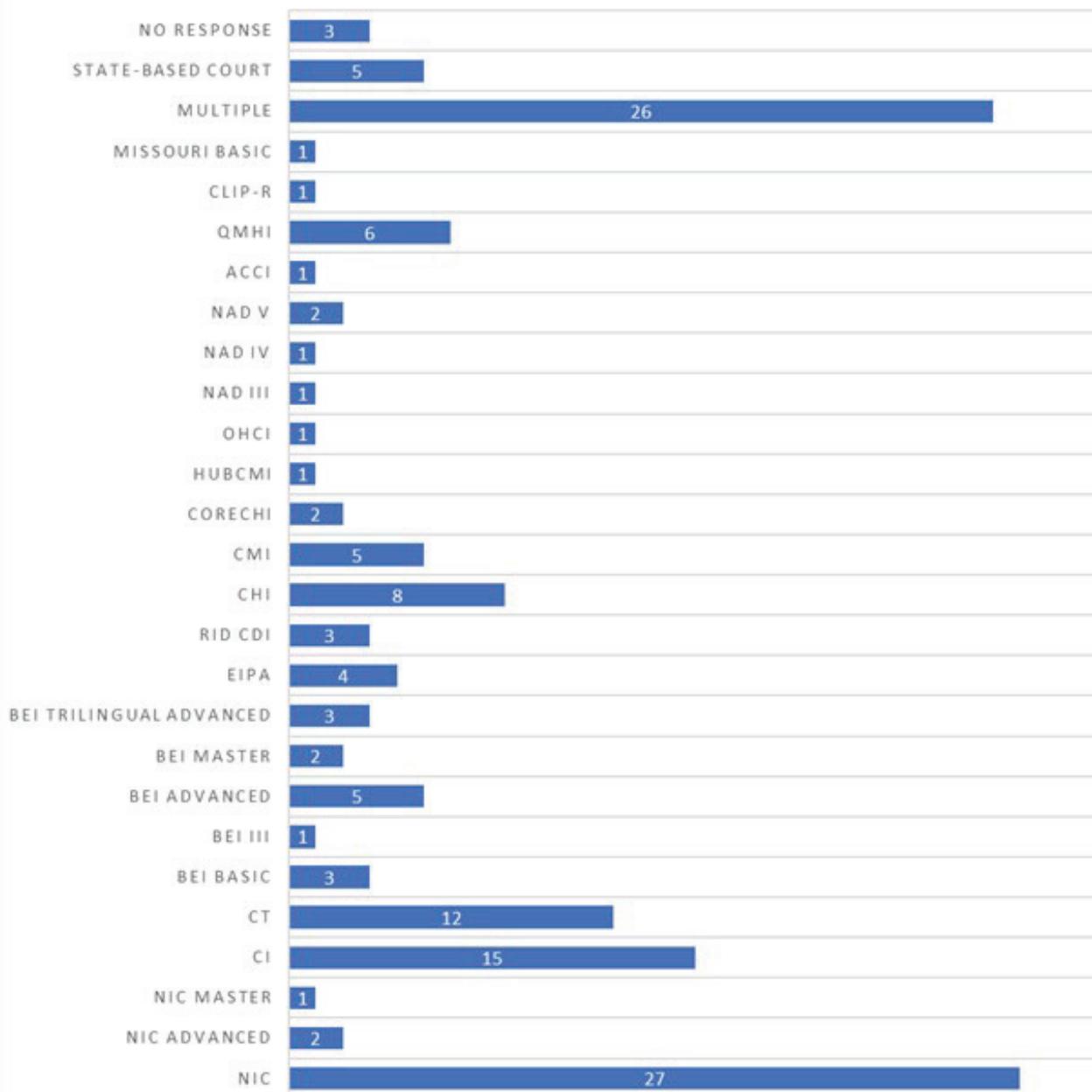


Table 7. Certification Types for Spoken and Signed Languages

Focus Groups

Participants were asked about their interest in participating in a focus group session. Seven possible focus group dates were provided at the end of the survey and participants were requested to select their top three choices. Myers & Lawyer contacted the respondents to confirm them for one of their preferred focus group dates. If participants were not able to attend their first choice, Myers & Lawyer followed up with their secondary and tertiary choice. There were a total of 27 participants across 7 focus group sessions. One focus group session was held specifically for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, and DeafDisabled interpreters. This session was conducted in American Sign Language. All other sessions were conducted in spoken English with a live Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) provider transcribing each session into English.

FINDINGS

Spoken Language Interpreters

Work Contexts

Respondents were asked to list their two primary areas of specialization. Spoken language interpreters reported working in the following settings: medical (N = 44), community (N = 37), educational (N = 19), legal (courtroom only, N = 13), legal (both in and out of the courtroom, N = 9), mental health (N = 7), legal (outside the courtroom only, N = 7), and legal not specified (N = 7). Other settings listed were immigration, political, and social justice.

Respondents were asked what percentage of their work is performed virtually/remotely and what percentage is performed in-person/onsite. Based on the 74 responses provided, fifty-three percent (53%) of spoken language interpretation services were provided onsite and forty-eight percent (48%) of spoken language interpretation services were provided virtually/remotely with some interpreters working both onsite and virtually.



Language Acquisition and Learning

Six interpreters stated they had learned their working languages in formal settings alone, while five learned in informal settings alone. All other respondents learned their languages in both formal and informal settings. Spanish and American English were the most common language pairs among respondents. Of the 78 responses, 34 reported that Spanish was their first language and they subsequently or simultaneously learned English. An additional 14 reported that English was their first language and they subsequently or simultaneously learned Spanish. Maternal languages of lesser diffusion in the United States reported were: Swahili, Mixteco, Kinyarwanda, Madingo, Berber, Bengali, and Farsi.

Sign Language Interpreters

Work Contexts

Twenty-nine sign language interpreters did not provide a response when asked about their specializations. Those who did specify their two primary areas of specialization reported the following: community (N = 47), education not specified (N = 17), medical (N = 16), mental health (N = 13), video relay service (VRS, N = 13), post secondary education (N = 5), video remote interpreting (VRI, N = 3), K-12 education (N = 1), and performance/theater (N = 6). Other settings listed were legal, platform interpreting, social services, conference, faith-based, social justice, vocational rehabilitation, business/corporate, and government/corporate.

Respondents were asked what percentage of their work is performed virtually/remotely and what percentage is performed in-person/onsite. Based on the 86 responses provided, fifty-four percent (54%) of signed language interpretation services were provided onsite and forty-four percent percent (44%) of signed language interpretation services were provided virtually/remotely.

Language Acquisition and Learning

Two interpreters stated they learned their working languages exclusively in formal settings, while two learned exclusively in informal settings. All other respondents learned their languages in both formal and informal settings. American English and American Sign Language were the most common language pairs among respondents, with 59 reporting that English was their first language and they subsequently or simultaneously learned American Sign Language. An additional 7 reported that American Sign Language was their first language and they subsequently or simultaneously learned English. Of the seven respondents who reported American Sign Language as their first language, four identified as Deaf. Other signed languages used by the sign language interpreter group included: ProTactile, Turkish Sign Language, Indian Sign Language, International Sign Language, Venezuelan Sign Language, and Nepali Sign Language. Other spoken languages used were: African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Vietnamese, Portuguese, Cantonese, Japanese, Swahili, Creole, Patois, French, Indonesian, and Spanish.



DISCUSSIONS

Certification

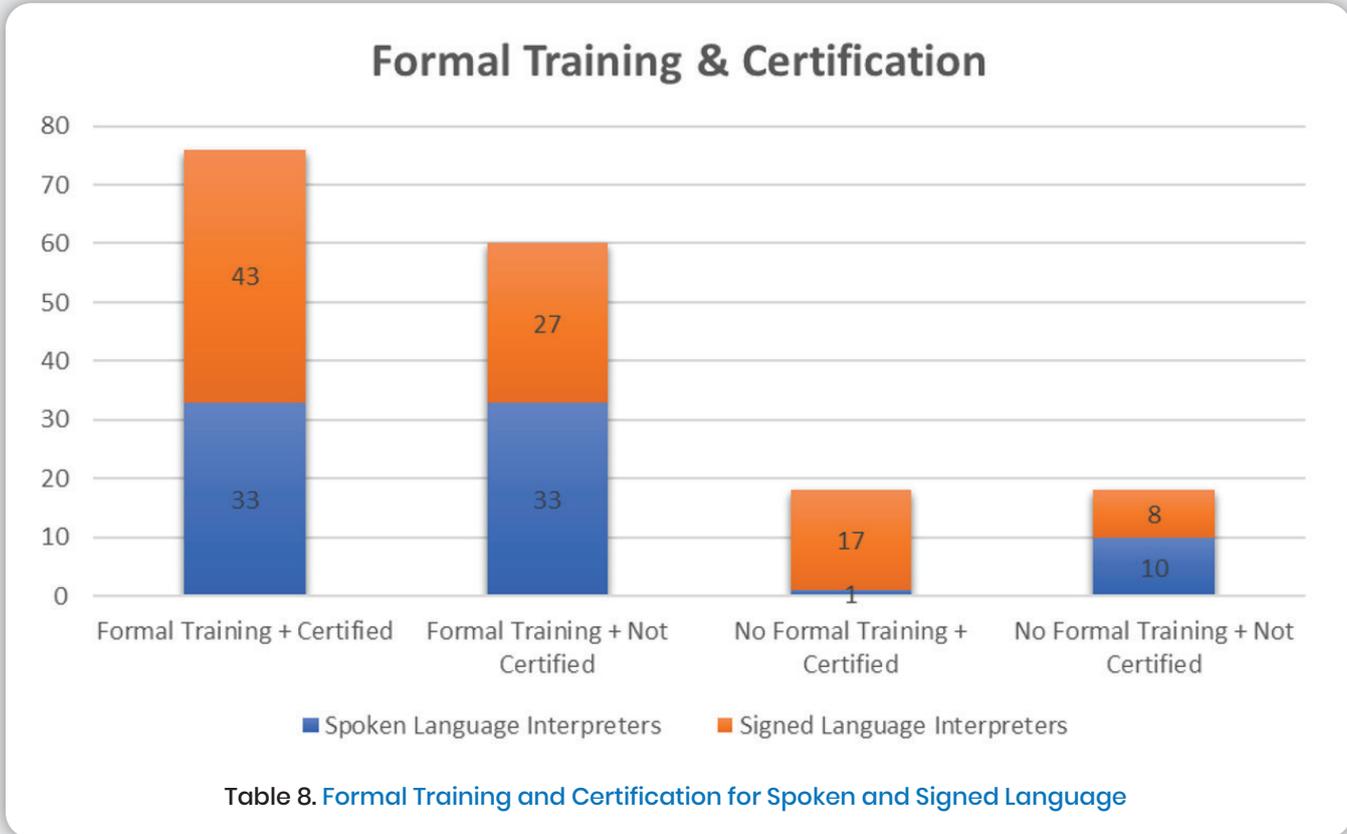
When discussing certification and the respective outcomes, it's important to recognize that the options for spoken language interpreters and sign language interpreters vary greatly. For sign language interpreters, national certification options are limited to the National Interpreter Certification (NIC), and now within the past few years, the Board of Evaluations of Interpreters (BEI) has gained some traction in being recognized and respected as a national certification. There are also several state-level certifications, some of which include specializations such as legal, medical, and a national educational assessment that is often used to qualify interpreters to work in K-12 settings. Requirements for state-level certifications vary.

However, for spoken language interpreters, there is no national generalist certification. There are two entities for national medical interpreter certification, the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters (NBCMI) and the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI). There is also the option for Federal Court Interpreter Certification. Outside of these 3 national certification entities, many states that are a part of the Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification have their own state-level option. These state-level certifications, even with state-level application and implementation, are nationally recognized as "certifications". In many cases, interpreters are able to apply for reciprocity in other states that are part of the Consortium. Programs geared toward the aforementioned certifications are usually established based on the required prerequisites (i.e. 40-hour medical interpreter training). Many state-court certification exams don't have any formal training prerequisites.



For sign language interpreting, certification was an essential part of the professionalization of the field and presently continues to be a gatekeeping tool for access to professional opportunities. This is evidenced by 64% of uncertified sign language interpreters stating that they felt their work opportunities were limited by not holding a certification. Within the United States, there are legal requirements for the provision of language access across both spoken and signed languages (see the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, to name a few). The Americans with Disabilities Act underpins the aforementioned laws to bolster compliance, provide recourse for noncompliance, and general implementation in the field of sign language interpreting which serves as an additional incentive for certifying interpreters. The certification of sign language interpreters is mostly regulated by one national governing body, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), with a Code of Professional Conduct (CPC) and an Ethical Practices System (EPS). Contrarily, regulation of spoken language interpreters in non-specialized/credentialing settings has led to fewer barriers to entry for interpreters but also less accountability within the field when compared to sign language interpreters.

When discussing formal training and certification, it is important to note that sign language interpreters equate “formal interpreter training” to 2-4 year university-based interpreter training programs which also includes formal instruction in sign language. In contrast to spoken language interpreters, sign language interpreters who attend university-based interpreter training programs tend to be trained in preparation for the generalist national certification. *Table 8* shows the distribution of training and certification for spoken and sign language interpreters.



Training

When asked about their formal training, twenty-five of the signed language respondents stated they had no formal training, all of whom were ages 51 years or older. Contrastingly, all respondents ages 50 years and younger (N = 73) reported formal training. It is possible that the relationship between formal training and age may be influenced by the changes in the university degree prerequisite for sign language interpreters to sit for certification testing and the expansion of university-based sign language interpreter training in the 1970s. Of the seventy-three who stated they had formal training, fifteen stated they had university level training without a specialization.

Sixty-eight of spoken language respondents stated they had formal interpreter training. Noteworthy is that all of these respondents were 31 years and older. Interestingly, almost none of the respondents between the ages of 18 and 30 years reported having formal training. Thirty-three of the respondents who had formal training had no certifications. When inquired about the reason they weren't certified, the top four responses were: not specified (N = 12), economic barriers (N = 7), lack of resources (i.e., access to training and mentors, N = 5) and not wanting to pursue certification (N = 5).

In addition to exploring whether they had formal interpreter training or not, respondents were asked about representation in training materials. Of the 69 spoken language interpreters who responded to questions related to representation in the training materials, forty-eight percent (48%) felt that the text-based training materials reflected and represented them. Thirty percent (30%) felt they were not represented or reflected in text-based resources. The remaining respondents felt this question was not applicable to them (Table 9).



TEXT-BASED TRAINING MATERIALS (SPOKEN LANGUAGE)

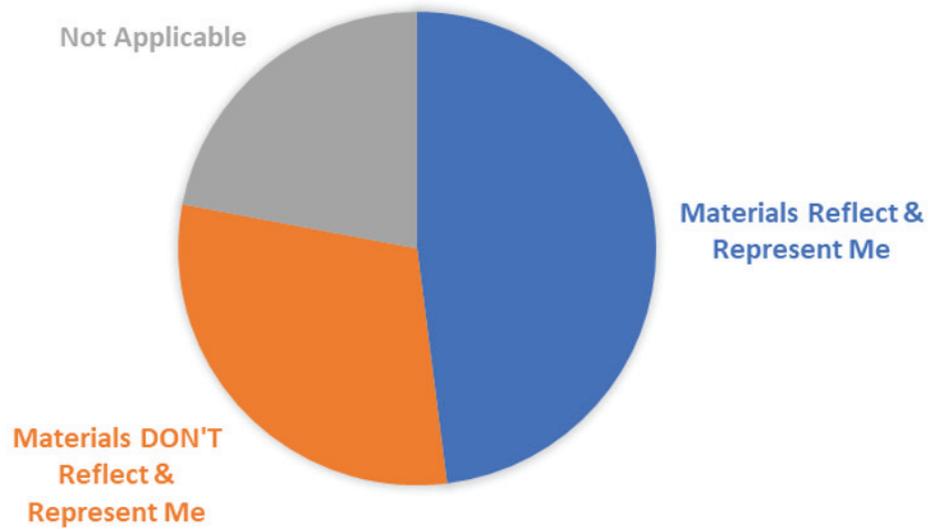


Table 9. Text-Based Training Materials (Spoken Language)

In relation to training material videos, of the 70 responses, forty-one percent (41%) felt they were represented and thirty-seven percent (37%) felt they were not represented in video-based materials. The remaining respondents felt this question was not applicable to them (Table 10).

VIDEO-BASED TRAINING MATERIALS (SPOKEN LANGUAGE)

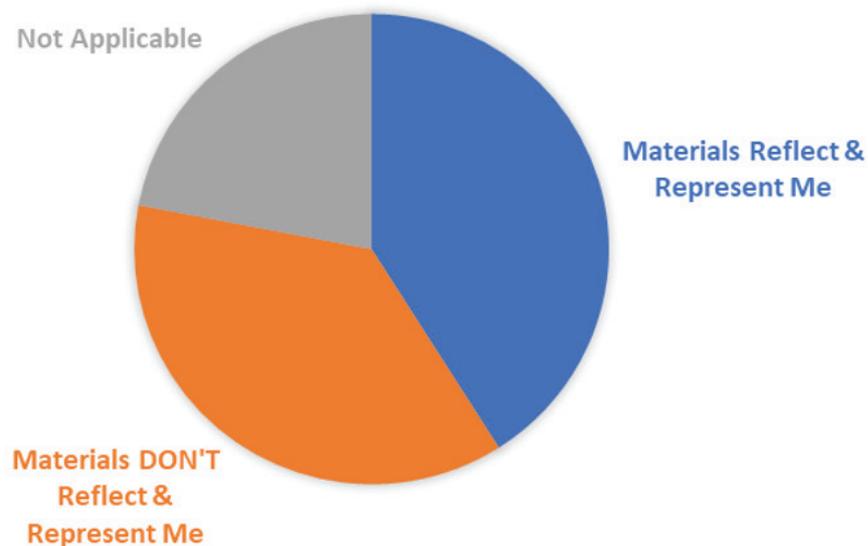
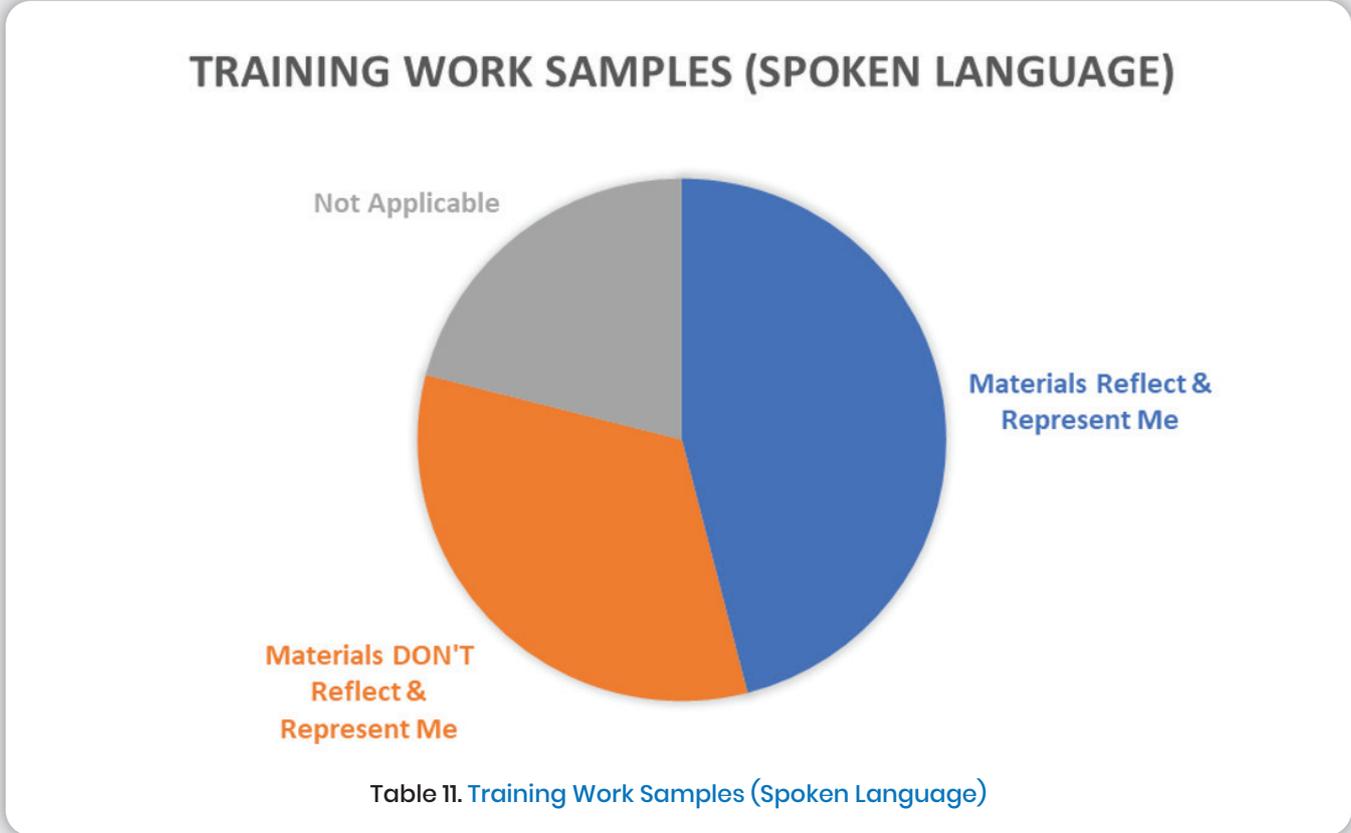


Table 10. Video-Based Training Materials (Spoken Language)

Respondents were also asked about work samples used in trainings. Forty-six percent (46%) felt they were represented and thirty-three percent (33%) felt they were not represented in training work samples. The remaining twenty-one percent (21%) of respondents felt this question was not applicable to them (Table 11).

When asked what supports they needed for trainings geared toward skill maintenance and skill development, the top three responses provided by spoken language interpreters were: financial, time to attend training sessions, and hybrid options (onsite + online)¹.



¹- Other main supports that were referenced were: mentorship opportunities, diversity of training content and trainers, opportunities for deliberate practice in a safe environment, and networking opportunities, to name a few.

Now, as we transition to sign language interpreters, eighty-three percent (83%) reported they did not feel represented or reflected in text-based training materials and eleven percent (11%) felt they were represented in training materials. The remaining six percent (6%) felt this question was not applicable to them (Table 12).

TEXT-BASED TRAINING MATERIALS (SIGNED LANGUAGE)

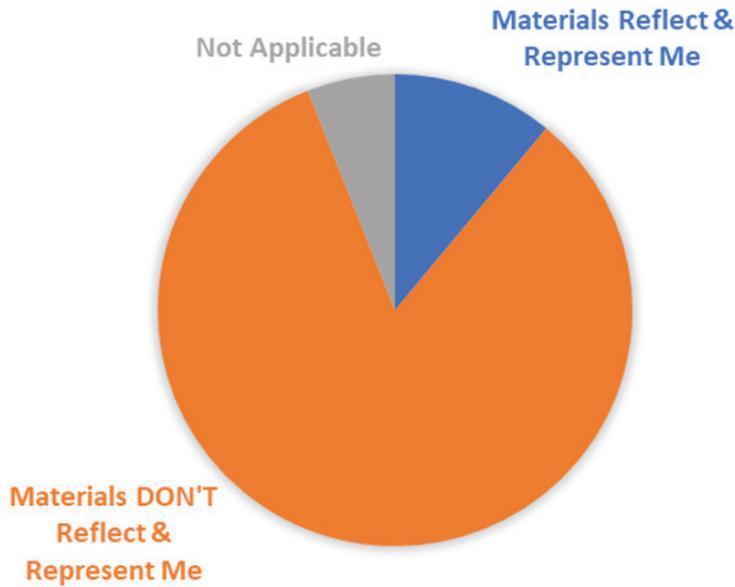


Table 12. Text-Based Training Materials (Signed Language)

In relation to video-based training materials, eighty-eight percent (88%) felt they were not represented or reflected in the materials. Contrastingly, eleven percent (11%) of respondents felt they were represented. Only 1 of the respondents felt this question was not applicable to them.

VIDEO-BASED TRAINING MATERIALS (SIGNED LANGUAGE)

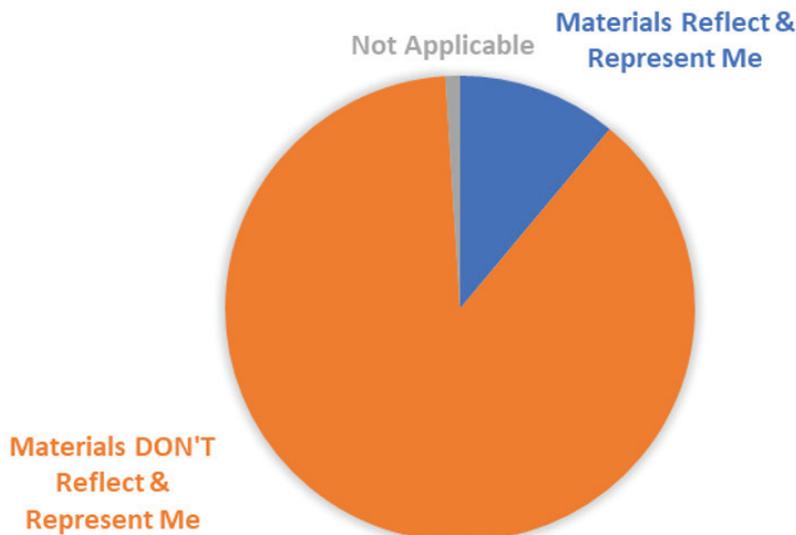


Table 13. Video-Based Training Materials (Signed Language)

Respondents were also asked about work samples used in trainings. Eighty-four percent (84%) stated they were not represented, while eleven percent (11%) felt they were. Five percent (5%) felt this question was not applicable to them (Table 14).

TRAINING WORK SAMPLES (SIGNED LANGUAGE)

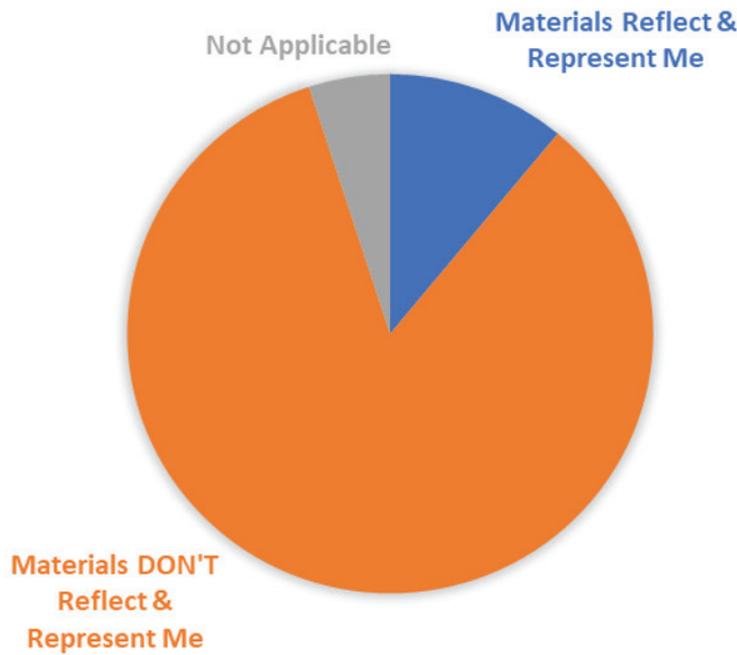


Table 14. Training Work Samples (Signed Language)

When asked about supports needed for trainings that aid in skill development and maintenance, the top four responses provided by sign language interpreters were: diversity of training content, mentorship, diversity of trainers, and trainings that incorporated deliberate practice.

Special Populations of Interpreters

There are groups of interpreters who present with unique experiences and whose professional needs are often left unmet. Some of these special populations participated in this study and included: Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, and multilingual interpreters. We discuss each of these groups below.

Deaf and DeafBlind Interpreters

There were six Deaf interpreters, two DeafBlind interpreters, two DeafDisabled interpreters, and two hard of hearing interpreters who participated in the survey. Four of these individuals also shared their experiences in a focus group session. It's important to note that five of the interpreters from this group were also multilingual working across signed, written, and spoken modalities. They worked across signed languages such as ProTactile, Black ASL, Venezuelan Sign Language, International Sign Language, Mexican Sign Language, Indian Sign Language, Catalanian Sign Language, and Spanish Sign Language. They also worked with written and spoken languages such as: English, Spanish, African American Vernacular English, and Hawaiian Pidgin.

As it relates to barriers, five of the interpreters named *disability* as a barrier to their advancement in the field. Other factors such as race, ethnicity, and outward aesthetic were also named as factors that constituted barriers. Though almost all of the interpreters in this group held degrees ranging from bachelor's to terminal, *education level* was frequently cited as an additional barrier they experienced in the field.



When asked about what supports are lacking and needed for them to access necessary trainings, *accessibility to training content and diversity of training content* were common responses. They shared that very few university-based interpreter training programs provide training for Deaf interpreters. Community-based trainings, workshops, and professional development are often offered by non-Deaf/Disabled trainers and are rarely focused on skills specific to Deaf interpreters. (Certified) Deaf interpreters (C/DIs) comprise a small percentage of interpreters in the field. Those who are not certified, though they may have years of experience, do not always feel qualified or endorsed to provide training and workshops to other Deaf interpreters (pre-certification or otherwise). Therefore, the underrepresented status of Deaf interpreters also presents a challenge for training and supporting new cohorts of Deaf interpreters (who may be entering the field or who have worked in the field but desire to pursue and/or maintain certification).

According to the focus group participants, only about 20 Deaf interpreters (both certified and non-certified) nationwide identify as People of Color. All of the focus group participants were based in the east and northeast coasts of the United States. It is important to recognize that Deaf interpreters of color may not have easy access and/or exposure to one another. This can potentially lead them to feel isolated in their respective work settings; particularly those who solely work in-person. Additionally, there are several factors that present obstacles to obtaining an accurate count for the non-certified Deaf interpreter population; many of whom are Deaf interpreters of color. Some of these factors include, but are not limited to:

- Deaf interpreters who live and work in rural settings and have limited access to each other
- Deaf interpreters who are not well-established or those who exclusively work virtually often remain elusive in the field until they attain a level of certification where they are then placed on an interpreter registry
- Pre-professional Deaf interpreters who exit the field due to the paucity of interpreter training programs available that accept and/or address training specific to Deaf interpreters

Multilingual Multimodal Interpreters

Multilingual, multimodal interpreters were interpreters who worked across signed languages and spoken languages. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the interpreters (N=20) who identified as multilingual named ASL<>Spanish<>English as their working languages. Three of these interpreters also used Portuguese (not specified) or Brazilian Portuguese, one interpreter worked with Turkish Sign Language (TID), and one interpreter used Vietnamese as their fourth working language. One interpreter worked with Creole/Patois<>English<>French<>ASL<>Nepali Sign Language.

The information provided by these interpreters was analyzed within the sign language interpreter category because they identified primarily with the sign language interpreter group. When reviewing these interpreters' certification decisions, it makes sense that they would classify themselves as sign language interpreters. There is only one survey respondent who holds certification in both signed language and spoken language pairs.

The overwhelming majority of the multilingual, multimodal interpreters chose to seek certification in ASL<>English only (up to the date of the survey). Three of the interpreters stated they do not hold any state-level or national interpreter certification for any of their working language pairs. Four interpreters hold the BEI Trilingual Advanced certification for ASL<>Spanish<>English and only one interpreter holds a nationally recognized credential (CoreCHITM)² for English<>Spanish spoken language pairs. At this time, there is no certification for multilingual, multimodal interpreters who use languages other than ASL<>Spanish<>English. As a result, interpreters who use other languages are left without options for validating their skills in the field unless they pursue spoken language certification. Additionally, they may have more difficulty finding trainings that are offered if they work with languages of lesser diffusion.

Multilingual interpreters who participated in the focus groups expressed having no formal interpreting training in their spoken languages (e.g. Spanish, French, Portuguese, etc.). Many of the interpreters learned their spoken languages in home and/or community settings. There were two interpreters who expressed taking university-level classes or earning minors in their spoken language (one prior to becoming an interpreter and the other after becoming certified in ASL<>English who now wants to pursue Trilingual certification). There needs to be more emphasis for multilingual, multimodal interpreters to attain training for their spoken languages. Without a national generalist certification for spoken languages, and working under the assumed protection of ASL<>English state-level or national certification, it is easy for these interpreters to have less accountability and/or scrutiny regarding their spoken language interpreting skills. Additionally, with few trainings designed for multilingual, multimodal interpreting, the onus lies on the interpreters to intentionally seek out bilingual training opportunities for their various language pairs in order to continue to develop and maintain skills in all of their working languages (Myers & Lawyer, 2021).



2- The purpose of the Core Certification Healthcare Interpreter™ (CoreCHI™) certification is to offer healthcare interpreters of any language a valid national professional standard that assesses their core professional knowledge as well as critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and cultural responsiveness skills and abilities needed to perform the duties of the healthcare interpreter. The main reason for operating this core certification is that interpreters of any language share the same core professional knowledge and cognitive skills distinguishing them from a speaker of two languages who is not an interpreter. The CoreCHI™ certification provides an equitable process for qualifying practitioners of any language at the foundational, basic level.

Multilingual Spoken Language Interpreters

These were multilingual interpreters who worked across multiple spoken languages. Nineteen interpreters identified as multilingual spoken language interpreters. They had a variety of spoken languages as their maternal language, with only thirty-seven percent (37%) (N = 7) selecting American English as their first language. Roughly half of the interpreters identified three working languages and half identified working in 4 or more languages.

Nine of the multilingual interpreters reported holding either state-based court certifications or national medical certifications, but only four provided the certification names. All except for three of the multilingual interpreters stated they had received formal interpreter training. The most common formal training contexts listed were: medical (N = 11), legal (N = 9), and community (N = 6) with many interpreters receiving training in multiple specializations. Two of the interpreters who had no formal interpreter training stated they were new to “professional” interpreting and that their entry into the field was due to community preference or encouragement. One interpreter listed economic barriers as a reason for not having received formal training.

Some factors that interpreters felt negatively influenced their sustainability and access to work opportunities were: their education level, race and/or ethnicity, and their language (i.e. accents, linguistic style/variance, or dialects used). Seven of the interpreters did not feel there were any factors that negatively impacted their access to work.



LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were a few limitations to the study that are worth noting here: barriers to accessing the research, the temporality of the survey, and the use of specific terminology that did not transfer across the spoken and sign language interpreting fields.

Barriers to Access

One limitation to this study was the linguistic barrier to access. The recruitment materials shared for the study were only developed and disseminated in English and American Sign Language. This may have led interpreters of other languages to believe that their participation in the study was not desired or that the research was not geared towards them. Additionally, once the study was underway, its provision exclusively in written English presented a barrier to participation. There were a few interpreters whose first language was a signed language who contacted the researchers to have specific questions translated to their signed language in order to respond to the survey. There may have been others who started and did not complete the survey due to a language access barrier. Focus groups were also held in spoken English. The recruitment materials announced that the focus groups would be held in English or American Sign Language (for the Deaf interpreter focus group).

Technology may have presented another barrier, and therefore, limitation of the study. The survey was designed using Qualtrics and was only available online. Though the survey was designed to be completed on a computer or a mobile device, we cannot know how many interpreters we were unable to reach due to technological barriers; particularly interpreters who live in remote and/or rural areas. Additionally, considering that we had a few Disabled and at least 1 DeafBlind survey participant, we do not know if there were features of the survey that were inaccessible to some respondents. There were some individuals who had difficulty typing their responses to the survey questions using a mobile device because they could not see the text they had previously typed.



Temporal Limitations

There were several survey respondents who, after completing the survey, stated that they had difficulty with some of the questions because they were unsure if they should respond based on previous experiences or their current experiences. For example, COVID-19 expanded the possibilities of remote interpreting for interpreters who previously worked mainly in-person. Prior to that shift, their experiences with other interpreters of similar backgrounds, their ability to access resources and training, and potential for connecting with other professionals and mentors in the field may have been previously limited. Once the field pivoted to more remote interpreting, interpreters felt their access to the aforementioned was less restricted. Therefore, some respondents addressed the survey questions based on their current contexts and others based on their prior experiences. An important implication is that the survey was not able to capture the nuanced experiences of the respondents and how their experiences changed over time.

Use of Terminology

We recognize that though signed language/tactile language and spoken language interpreting are part of the interpreting profession at large, there are distinct bodies of knowledge between the two groups of interpreting professions. Specifically, there was a discrepancy in understanding and application of the term BIPOC. We found that initially there were significantly fewer responses from spoken language interpreters. After receiving several inquiries, it became clear that the term BIPOC is not a prevalent term within spoken language interpreting spaces. Issues of race and/or ethnicity are not commonly addressed in spoken language interpreting. As a result, it is possible that our survey response sample size could have been greater if we were able to reach more spoken language interpreters whose identities were a match for the research criteria and if we explained in more detail what groups are encompassed in the term BIPOC instead of assuming the term would be universally understood by spoken and signed language interpreters alike.

Race and ethnicity were two concepts that were often conflated by the participants. Participants were asked to self identify their race and their ethnicity using the terms they felt best described them. There were some participants who stated they did not know or were not sure how to respond to one or both of the questions related to their race and ethnicity. This was to be expected especially within the context of a country like the United States where the difference between race and ethnicity is often made salient in almost all aspects of society.

Generally, the concept of formal interpreter training is different between spoken language and sign language interpreters. Spoken language interpreters often conceptualize formal training as workshops and professional development. Though this is also the case for sign language interpreters, when the phrase formal interpreter training is used, 2- to 4- year university based training programs are what come to mind.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We provide a few recommendations based on the information shared by sign language and spoken language interpreters in the survey and focus groups. The recommendations below are categorized in two areas of need: *trainings and curriculum and resources*.

Trainings

Spoken and sign language interpreters shared what they desired in order to improve the experience with professional trainings; a synopsis of their comments is presented below:

Trainers who represent their backgrounds

Having trainers from diverse backgrounds is paramount. However, it is imperative that we think beyond gender, race, and ethnicity when we consider 'diversity'. It is common to consider gender, race, and ethnicity in spaces that discuss diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). However, these are not the only factors that affect the underrepresented status of interpreters working in the United States. Amongst spoken and sign language interpreters, other than the common DEI factors mentioned above, the following should be taken into account when considering representation: age, disability, non-native language user, professional trajectory, credentials, 'grassroots' & formally trained interpreters, to name a few.

As shown in this study, differences in age had an impact, specifically, on interpreters' experiences with training and certification. This is also important for grassroots interpreters versus those who are formally trained. Therefore, those providing training need to be prepared to address the different pathways to certification and how evolving certification requirements may impact these populations of interpreters differently. Additionally, there is a need for increased visibility of interpreter trainers who have embarked on alternative pathways to certification. Interpreters who identified as having a disability found that their disability was often one (of many) factor that they felt limited their advancement and sustainability in the field. There is a need for more interpreter trainers (and interpreters in general) who openly identify as Disabled.

The non-native factor is especially significant for spoken language interpreters given that the majority of spoken language interpreters are native language users of the languages they interpret. Therefore, the underrepresented non-native users of languages need to have access to trainers who pursued interpreting languages for which they were also not native users. We also want to use this as an opportunity to caution trainers from using binaries such as non-native and native language users. These binaries overlook groups such as native users who have been denied opportunities to develop fluency due to the monolingual ideologies of the United States that often do not support bilingualism or multilingualism. It is not uncommon to have users of a language whose linguistic competencies are deemed to not rise to the desired level to work as professional interpreters. Therefore, having representation of these populations is also essential for the development and retention of interpreters with these backgrounds.

Trainings on vicarious trauma

Many of the interpreters who participated in this study felt that it was essential to have trainings that focused on vicarious trauma (VT). VT has become a hot topic in the field of interpreting especially as more attention is put on self-care. In discussing VT, we often hear about different encounters we interpret and how the multi-levelled impact (emotional, psychological, mental, physical, etc.) can lead to burnout. What is not often discussed is that being part of a minoritized group also exacerbates the propensity of burnout because of the hostile work environments underrepresented interpreters frequently experience. This should be considered before factoring in the impacts of the actual work performed.

Training interpreters from dominant groups

Often dominant-culture professionals question how to better support BIPOC interpreters. Yet, it is rare that these questions shift to addressing the mindsets and behaviors of non-BIPOC professionals. The participants in this research highlighted the need for training that addresses the biases and prejudicial behavior of non-BIPOC interpreters for improved collegiality as well as improved interactions with consumers.



“...working with majority culture white interpreters, it’s become even more obvious how uncomfortable they are and that there is no real leadership in teaching them how to deal with their problems and how to deal with the problems that they face in working with BIPOC [people]. What does training look like, where does all of that take place for them?”

“For my non-BIPOC interpreters I would like to share that in many cases when racism and prejudice behavior is present you have the power to either reinforce the action or to stop it. Utilize the privileges you have to move around the system to advocate for others and make sure patients receive fair treatment. A second opportunity for learning has been in my experience the white English dominant non-BIPOC interpreters controlling meetings and putting other interpreters down because they have an accent.”

“Investigate Whiteness. White interpreters/non-BIPOC need to become very clear about what whiteness is, its role in everyday life and in systems. Interrogate whiteness comprehensively--how it operates within the individual, across relationships, within systems and related to the environment. In particular so-called liberal/open-minded white interpreters need to contend with and stop distancing themselves from their so-called white extremists.”

Trainings on the “business of interpreting”

“[After completing my bachelor’s degree] I still felt not ready to work. I was doing a lot of pro bono with the community, church interpreting, volunteering at various events with organizations but still feeling lost as to how to start working.”

Many interpreters, ranging from emerging to professional, cite a lack of adequate business acumen to successfully navigate the business side of interpreting. Several of the focus group participants stated that in their 2- to 4-year interpreter training programs, they never discussed matters such as resume writing, invoicing, professional image, managing taxes, tax classifications, tax forms, and the like. This particularly leads underrepresented practitioners down a path of passive, rather than active, professionalization. Inexperienced and uninformed interpreters rashly navigate this landscape making decisions that can potentially have a long-standing negative trickle-down effect on their counterparts. This manifests differently between spoken and sign language interpreters which is due, in large part, to the differing levels of professionalization between the two and population concentration.

Oftentimes, emerging interpreters will use their first successful interaction as the basis for how they engage with all other hiring entities without the tools to be able to determine whether or not they have been treated fairly and justly given their education, experience, credentials, and skill set.

Like language, business acumen isn’t developed as a result of one class or module. It should be interwoven throughout the curriculum in a way that the basic knowledge and skills are solidified through repetition and diversity of application. Once a foundation is established, several subject matter experts (i.e. a certified public accountant, experienced agency owners, etc.) should be employed to concrete learned skills and information in a way that is specific to the profession.

Trainings on remote/virtual interpreting

Based on the survey and focus groups, there has been a notable increase in the amount of interpreting services provided virtually, with more and more interpreters working exclusively in virtual settings. As a result, trainings need to be prepared to equip interpreters with the necessary competencies for navigating and working in virtual spaces. This includes but is not limited to the use of technology and various interpreting platforms, interpreting protocols for creating maximum linguistic efficiency (Myers & Lawyer, 2021) in virtual spaces, and how interpreter ethics apply in virtual spaces.



CURRICULUM AND RESOURCES

Curricula that reflect the experiences of underrepresented interpreters

Keeping in mind that underrepresented has a different denotation between spoken language and sign language interpreters, underrepresented interpreters within both groups felt they were not well reflected in curricula and training materials. The sense of not being represented across interpreting curricula and training materials was particularly demonstrated in the sign language interpreting group. Therefore, any curricula and training materials that are produced and implemented with sign language interpreters need to pay special attention to the representation of BIPOC Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Hard of Hearing, and multilingual, multimodal interpreters. This includes but is not limited to representation of cultural/linguistic nuances varying abilities, and the like in videos, images, and other stimuli used for training interpreters. The impact of accessing your own, or similar experiences, in professional contexts cannot be overstated. This is particularly true in a visual language such as signed language. Having models that use sign language in similar ways, individuals with varying races and ethnicities (many interpreters never see a non-White sign language user during their interpreter training program), and individuals with varying abilities (specifically Deaf, Disabled, DeafBlind) is still lacking for sign language interpreter curricula.

Though a smaller percentage of spoken language interpreters felt they were not represented, this percentage was still a significant number which evidences that more curricula and training materials for the spoken language groups should pay special attention to interpreters who are non-native language users as well as to multilingual spoken language interpreters. It is critical that trainers examine implicit bias within the materials that are created and/or selected for interpreter training. For example, are the patients in training scenarios always appearing to be indigent? Are the professionals always from particular racial or ethnic groups? Does the curricula unintentionally reinforce ideas about specific demographics of people, which in turn shapes how interpreters view these demographics and could in turn influence their professional interactions and the quality of services provided.

“Some Hispanic interpreters that are “light skin” have grown with their own idea or superiority specially around indigenous groups...”

Do not be judgmental when working with individuals that don't look like [you]. It affects the quality of interpreting you provide.

“[Non-BIPOC interpreters need] to see the humanity and individuality of every person they interpret for (check your assumptions at the door), and to also check patriarchy/infantilization”

Within the spoken language group, language power seemed to be a theme worth mentioning. Interpreting curricula need to explicitly address language power, variances within languages/language varieties, and cultural sensitivity.

Access to mentors with similar backgrounds

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, available resources for interpreters were strongly influenced by geographical confines. Many interpreters had to use what was available to them on a local, state, and/or regional level. These resources and their availability look different for spoken and sign language interpreters.

“The main issue for me is the lack of educational opportunities in an affordable way.”

Based on the established trajectory of an interpreter training program student, the concept of mentors and mentorship is much more prevalent with sign language interpreters. Finding a mentor is an integral part of these programs, and in many cases, a graduation requirement. Given that eighty percent (80%)+ of the sign language interpreting field are middle-aged white females, there are very few opportunities for students (and professionals) to find diverse mentorship amongst the remaining twenty percent (20%). Seventy-nine sign language interpreters were asked if finding a compatible mentor was easy and sixty-two percent (62%) of them disagreed (with thirty-five percent strongly disagreeing). We followed up by asking them if their mentor was BIPOC, and sixty-four percent (64%) of them responded that their mentors were, in fact, White. Lack of access to mentors with similar backgrounds leads to more rapid interpreter attrition specifically due to the fact that these mentors are not able to provide the supports that these interpreters need due to a lack of relatability and lived experience. The impact on attrition was further reinforced by twenty-five percent (25%) of sign language interpreters and eleven percent (11%) of spoken language interpreters stating that they contemplate leaving the field at least once every few months.



We believe that implementation of the aforementioned recommendations in the areas of trainings and curricula and resources would positively impact entry, retention, and advancement of spoken language and sign language interpreters. With the potential positive impact on these three areas, the visibility of more underrepresented interpreters could increase. As a result, the workforce would become more diverse once other underrepresented populations began to see the prevalence of interpreters with backgrounds and experiences similar to their own. We recommend that further research be conducted to evaluate the significance of implementing these recommendations for interpreter entry, retention, and advancement in the field, but also for changes in perception as others begin to recognize interpreting as a viable career path.



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We value the relationships and connections we forged with each and every one of you, and we hope that you feel your experience is reflected in the content shared within this document. Our desire is to spark more dialogue and drive actionable changes in order to improve your experiences and those of interpreters like you. We are committed to continue working alongside you and others to create a more inclusive and welcoming profession that provides opportunities for interpreters like us all to thrive.

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