



Vocational Rehabilitation Interpreter Practitioner Interview Findings

**SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE
NEEDS ASSESSMENT TEAM
NATIONAL CONSORTIUM OF INTERPRETER EDUCATION CENTERS (#H160A&B)
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Foreword

The National Consortium of Interpreting Education Centers (NCIEC) is authorized and funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), U.S. Department of Education. Through grants awarded by the Department, the National Interpreter Education Center (NIEC) and five Regional Interpreter Education Centers (RIECs) that comprise the Consortium 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 needs in the field of interpreter education. This report has been prepared based on the ongoing effort to collect and analyze information to assess the needs of interpreter education programs across the country. This Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Interpreter Interviews - Report of Findings is submitted by the NCIEC on behalf of the NIEC and the five RIECs. The report provides an overview of the needs assessment process and presents and discusses information gathered through the interview process.

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Appendix A – Interview Guide

Vocational Rehabilitation Interpreter Practitioner Interview Findings

I. Executive Summary

The National Interpreting Education Center (NIEC) is authorized and funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), U.S. Department of Education. In addition to the NIEC, grants were also awarded to five Regional Interpreter Education Centers (RIECs). Together, the six Centers have established the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC). This collaborative approach to implementation of the RSA grants fosters Center-to-Center communication and coordination; better leveraging of available resources, and more effective stewardship of federal funds. Since grant award, the NCIEC has been working on a number of national initiatives, one of which has been design, development and implementation of needs assessment activities in key focus areas. The overall objectives of the needs assessment activities are to identify current and future needs of interpreter education programs, interpreter educators, interpreters and consumers of interpreter services.

Under the leadership of the National Center, a number of national needs assessment and data collection activities have been carried out to identify issues and challenges **specifically** related to interpreting in vocational rehabilitation (VR) settings and providing interpreting services to VR consumers. These include:

- Interviews with U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) and Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) professionals to obtain their input regarding interpreting in VR related issues and challenges
- Interviews with Directors of representative state VR agencies
- Survey of State Coordinators (SCDs) working for state VR agencies to collect input regarding interpreter related challenges and priorities
- One-on-one interviews and focus group sessions with current and previous consumers of VR services

In addition to those efforts, other national needs assessments led by the National Center included numerous design elements that further supported the collection of information related to interpreting in VR. Specifically, the Phase I and II Interpreter Practitioner Needs Assessments, Phase I Deaf Consumer Needs Assessment, and the Interpreter Referral Agency Needs Assessment all included questions designed to gather input related to interpreting in VR.

This latest needs assessment effort was targeted specifically to gather input from interpreters that are currently providing interpreting services for state VR agencies and the consumers they serve. The effort was carried out through interviews conducted with state VR agency staff interpreters as well as freelance interpreters that contract with state VR agencies. To ensure maximum representation from interpreters working

across the country, a composite of state VR agencies was developed, taking into consideration agency size, geographic location, urban versus rural service delivery, consumer characteristics, and whether the agency was operating under an Order of Selection. The objective was to achieve input from a diverse mix of state VR agencies to ensure an appropriate level of national representation on the part of the interpreters participating in the process. Interpreter interviewees were recommended by the SCDs of the state VR agencies selected to participate in the process. In total, 18 interpreters representing nine state VR agencies provided input to the process.

An informal interview guide was developed to provide consistency to the interviews, and in some cases, to support collection of quantifiable data; that guide is attached as Appendix A. However, the interview process was purposefully designed to be open-ended, with the objective of capturing real-time information and anecdotal input that would offer insight to the daily rewards and challenges associated with working for state VR agencies. To that end, interviewees throughout the process identified advantages and disadvantages related to interpreting in VR, and offered a broad range of recommendations for improving the quality of interpreting in VR settings. The information gathered through the interviews will be used in addition to other VR related data collected in the overall NCIEC needs assessment effort to design a VR interpreter survey instrument, which will be disseminated to state VR agency interpreters in the Fall of 2010.

The findings presented in this report should be viewed as potential indicators of an opportunity, issue or challenge, and serve as just one more guidepost to developing education and training priorities that are relevant and responsive to the needs of VR interpreters both today and in the future.

II. VR Interpreter Interview Findings

Information collected through the interview process included some quantifiable data in areas including interpreter work status, pay, settings interpreter services are provided in, training priorities and information related to the characteristics of the VR consumers interviewees provide interpreting services to. In addition to collecting quantifiable data, a significant amount of qualitative and/or anecdotal information was reported by participants in these as well as additional areas. This data is particularly important and provides a 'snapshot' of real-time opportunities and challenges faced by interpreters working in today's VR environment. As noted above, and given the preliminary nature of these findings with a small number of VR interpreters, the findings presented in this report should be viewed as potential indicators of an opportunity, issue or challenge, and serve as just one more guidepost in the development of interpreter education priorities.

a. Full versus Part-time Interpreter Employment Status

An Initial question in the interview process sought to collect information regarding interpreter work status; specifically, whether the interpreter interviewee is employed either full-time or part-time as a staff interpreter by the state VR agency, or whether they work for the state VR agency as a contract or freelance interpreter. That information is reported below for the 18 interpreters that provided input to the process.

Interpreter Employment Status Table 1		
Work status	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
Full-time staff Interpreter	7	39%
Part-time staff interpreter	6	33%
Contract/freelance interpreter	5	28%

The majority of interpreters who participated in the interview process were staff employees of the state VR agency.

b. Required Credentials and Education

The interview process included two questions designed to assess the state VR agency's requirements for credentials and education for the interpreters they hire or contract with. Information related to minimum credentials is reported below for the nine state VR agencies represented by the interpreters participating in the process.

Credentials Required by State VR Agency		
Table 2		
Required qualification	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
Interpreter licensure	1	11%
Local credentials	1	11%
National certification	4	44%
Both local credentials & national certification	0	0%
No minimum credential requirements	1	11%
Don't know	2	22%

The information reported on Table 2 reflects requirements for the interpreter position represented by the interviewee. However, a few interpreters stated there are different credential requirements for staff interpreters than for contract/freelance interpreters. The largest response set (44%) of interviewees reported that their state VR agency requires that the interpreters it hires have national certification. Two of the interviewees that work as contract/freelance interpreters did not know whether the state VR agency they provide services for has minimum credential requirements. However, one of those individuals stated they are nationally certified; the other individual stated that their state does not have any minimum credential requirements. Two of the interviewees stated that while their state VR agency does not require national certification, there are other screening processes in place to ensure the interpreter hired has a certain level of experience, or allowing a timeframe during which a hired interpreter may achieve national certification. One interviewee stated their state VR agency requires its interpreters to be nationally certified or locally screened by the state Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

The interview process also collected information regarding minimum educational requirements of the state VR agencies for whom the interpreters work.

State VR Agency Minimum Education Requirements		
Table 3		
	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
None	4	44%
High school degree	3	33%
Non-degree certificate	0	0%
AA/AS degree	1	11%
BA/BS degree	0	0%
MA degree	0	0%
Do not know	1	11%

It was interesting to learn that the majority of the state VR agencies represented by the interpreters participating in the process have no minimum education requirement (44%), or require only a high school degree (33%). A few interpreters participating in the interviews stated that while their state VR agency prefers that the interpreters it hires/contracts with have an AA/AS or BA/BS degree, it is not currently a requirement.

c. Interpreter Pay

There has been some perception in the field that interpreter pay may be lower in VR than is available through other employers, and may pose a barrier to attracting interpreters to work in VR settings. To learn more about the issue, an interview question asked interpreter interviewees whether the pay they receive, either as a employee of the state VR agency or as a contract/freelance interpreter, is competitive with pay available through other interpreter employers in their state and local area.

Interpreter Pay Table 4		
Is pay competitive	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
Pay higher	3	33%
Pay lower	1	11%
Pay competitive (about the same)	5	55%

It is positive to note the number of responses indicating that interpreter pay in VR is either competitive with or higher than pay offered by other interpreter employers in the states in which the interviewees work and reside. And in the case of the one set of interpreters that reported pay may be lower, they were comparing the pay offered by the state VR agency to pay available to contract/freelance interpreters in their state, and reported that contract/freelance interpreters are paid a higher hourly wage. However, those individuals also noted that benefits offered by the state agency in fact make pay somewhat comparable, although this is not always recognized by individuals the agency is seeking to hire or contract with. Another interpreter stated that, while contract/freelance interpreters may make a slightly higher hourly wage, the benefits available through the state VR agency make compensation competitive or higher.

A few interpreters raised another issue regarding contract/freelance interpreter pay. In their states, if an interpreter accepts a VR-related assignment and the VR consumer cancels at the last minute, the interpreter may not be compensated, although the assignment had been booked in advance. They stated this issue is often a deterrent to getting the best qualified contract/freelance interpreters in the state to accept VR-related assignments. In other anecdotal information reported, one contract/freelance interpreter reported standardized pay through the referral agency with whom she contracts, except in K-12-related assignments. The referral agency pays approximately one third less for interpreting assignments in that setting, yet interestingly enough, K-12 is the one area in which the state is developing standards for interpreters. Only one set of interpreters actually provided pay ranges for the three levels of interpreters their state VR agency employs. The first pay range starts at \$35K and tops at \$54K; the second range starts at \$37K and tops out at \$57K, and the third pay level tops out at \$59K. Finally, one interpreter reported that contract/freelance interpreter pay and the reimbursement process is so prolonged, that it becomes a deterrent to attracting contract/freelance interpreters to accept VR assignments.

Those interpreters that are not employed as full-time staff by the state VR agency were asked whether they are paid for hours on-site or portal-to-portal. Only one interpreter reported they are paid portal-to-portal. The other six interpreters reported they are paid for the hours on-site at the interpreting assignment, and reimbursed for mileage. Two of the interpreters reported that there are enough assignments in their state that they will often turn down assignments outside of their local area, particularly if it takes longer to drive to and from the assignment than the actual hours they would spend interpreting. The contract/freelance interpreters were also asked who pays them: the state VR agency or a third party. Three of the interpreters reported they are paid by the state VR agency; another four reported they are paid by the referral agency that brokers their assignments.

d. Breakdown of Interpreting Time

The interview process also sought to understand how interpreters are utilized, or the percentage of time they spend interpreting for VR consumers and/or state VR agency staff. In reviewing the table below, it should be recalled that a number of the interpreters participating in the process are contract/freelance interpreters, and therefore spend a portion of their time interpreting for non-VR consumers. In addition, a number of the interviewees did not provide data on the table below, stating that day-to-day interpreting assignments can vary significantly depending on the state VR agency’s caseload and/or the interpreting needs of the state VR agency’s deaf/hard of hearing staff. These interviewees felt that because of this variation, assigning any percentage range would not be truly representative. Therefore, Table 5 only includes the input of a portion of the interpreter interviewees.

Breakdown of Time Interpreting in VR						
Table 5						
% of Time Interpreting	0%	1-10%	11-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
VR Consumer		1	10	2	5	
VR Agency Staff	1		1	2	10	

With regard to the percentages that were assigned, state VR agency utilization of staff interpreters seems to vary widely. For example, in one state, both of the full-time staff interpreters participating in the process reported they only provide interpreting services to VR consumers, but that they also have second level responsibilities in the agency as job coaches. In fact, most of the staff interpreters participating in the process reported they have other responsibilities in addition to their role as an interpreter. In one state VR agency, the interpreters participating in the process reported they spend most of their interpreting time interpreting between a deaf/signing rehabilitation counselor for the deaf and a non-signing, hard of hearing or late-deafened VR consumer. Those interpreters also stated they provide a smaller percentage of their time interpreting for VR consumers without the rehabilitation counselor for the deaf. Several interpreters reported there are often times when deaf/hard of hearing staff and deaf/hard of hearing VR consumer are both present, and they provide interpreting for both sets of individuals. Interpreters from another state VR agency reported they have seen an increase in

interpreting between the rehab counselor for the deaf, a VRS interpreter and a consumer using sign. This occurrence decreased in their offices using videophones, but remains high elsewhere in the agency.

e. Type of VR Consumer Interpreting Services Provided For

In order to understand the training and education needs of those interpreters that provide services to deaf/hard of hearing VR consumers, it is critical to learn more about that consumer population. The interviewees were provided a listing of VR consumer sub-groups and asked to assign a number in the range of 1 to 5 to each of the sub-groups (1 = little time spent interpreting for VR consumers in the sub-group; 5 = a lot of time spent interpreting for VR consumers in the sub-group). The interviewees were advised to try to use as many of the scale points as possible to illustrate the relative level of interpreting provided for each consumer sub-group. In order to better discern any potential trends with regard to the prevalence of interpreting services being provided to one consumer sub-group as compared to another, a mean rating was developed based on the 1 to 5 rating weight and the actual number of respondents that provided a response to the question.

Ranking of VR Consumer Sub-groups						
Table 6						
Consumer Sub-group	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Deaf consumer				1	8	4.8
Deaf/hoh consumer with little/no work history			4	2	3	3.8
Low-functioning deaf/hoh consumers		3	1	2	3	3.5
Deaf/hoh consumers with limited English	1	3		1	4	3.4
Racial/ethnic minority deaf/hoh consumers	1		4	2	2	3.4
Hoh consumers	1	1	5	1	1	3.0
Deaf/hoh consumers using assistive technology	1	3	1	3	1	3.0
Deaf/hoh consumers with cochlear implants	4	3		1	2	2.4
Deaf/hoh consumers in remote/rural locations	3	3	3		1	2.3
Transition-age deaf/hoh consumer	3	2	4			2.1
Deaf-blind consumers*	7*	2				NA
Late-deafened**		2	1			NA
*Deaf-blind consumers served by different agency in state than the agency employing interpreter						
**Late-deafened not on list, but identified by three interviewees as consumer group served						

In a few cases on the table above, interpreters from one of the state VR agencies provided two numbers, indicating a difference in the profile of VR consumers served by their field offices. In addition, a few of the interpreter interviewees were reluctant to assign a ranking to the category 'low-functioning deaf/hard of hearing consumers' because of the negative association of the label.

The sub-groups with the highest mean ratings are: Deaf consumers; deaf/hard of hearing consumers with little or no work history; low-functioning deaf/hard of hearing consumers; deaf/hard of hearing consumers with limited English, and racial/ethnic

minority deaf/hard of hearing consumers. Finally, interpreters from one state VR agency reported their agency is increasingly providing interpreting services individuals who were recently incarcerated, or who are in and out of treatment facilities for addiction.

f. Interpreting Languages and Systems

The interpreters were also asked to identify the extent to which they utilize the various interpreting languages and systems when interpreting in VR.

Interpreting Languages

Interpreting Languages Used						
Table 7						
Languages	0%	1-10%	11-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
ASL/spoken English					6	2
Other signed language/English		1	1	1		
ASL/other spoken language	1	1				
Other language combinations	1		1			

Several interpreter interviewees stated that they often use different interpreting languages or systems when interpreting for state VR agency staff versus when they provide interpreting services to VR consumers.

In addition, one group of interpreters participating in the process had difficulty understanding the list of languages provided. That group of interpreters work for the same state VR agency, and did not provide a percentage range on the table above. However, those individuals reported that the highest percentage of their work is between ASL-using or bilingual deaf rehabilitation counselors for the deaf and hard of hearing or late-deafened clients. They further reported they are primarily working from ASL/Contact sign into a form of Oral Transliteration in those assignments. Since many of their agency’s rehabilitation counselors for the deaf are bilingual, as interpreters, they are interpreting and transliterating from moment to moment. In their assignments with deaf consumers, they are primarily working in ASL/Spoken English. The interpreters in this group also stated that they did not know a Signed Language other than ASL or a Spoken Language other than English, but that they do make use of Spoken Language interpreters, which occurs more frequently in some offices (1-2 times per month) than others (1-2 times per year). The group recommended that the question include utilization of a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI). They stated some of the state agency field offices make more use of CDIs than others, but that as an agency, they are advocating for more frequent use of CDIs.

Interpreting Systems

Interpreting Systems Used						
Table 8						
Interpreting Systems	0%	1-10%	11-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
Signed/Spoken English Transliteration		3	1		2	1
Oral Transliteration	2	3				
Cued Transliteration	4					
Other Language Transliteration	2					

The same group of interpreters also did not provide percentages regarding use of interpreting systems. However, they reported that the highest percentage of their work is between ASL-using or bilingual deaf rehab counselors for the deaf and hard of hearing or late deafened consumers. This means they are working from ASL/Contact sign into a form of Oral Transliteration for those assignments. They reported they occasionally, but much less often, work between non-signing clients and non-signers, such as placement staff or employers. They also reported they have recently noted an increase in the number of hard of hearing agency staff requesting services, for example, requests for help with a phone message, re-transliteration of a missed interaction at staff meeting, or a request for transliteration services at a training.

An interpreter working for a different state VR agency reported their agency is increasingly using real-time captioning as a replacement for oral transliteration

g. Interpreting in VR sub-settings

Interpreters were asked in the interviews to assign a ranking to indicate what settings they do most of their interpreting for VR consumers in (1 = little interpreting done in that setting; 5 = a lot of interpreting done in that setting). The interviewees were advised to try to use as many of the scale points as possible to illustrate the relative level of time spent interpreting in each setting. In order to better discern any potential trends with regard to the amount of time interpreters spend interpreting in one type of setting as compared to another, a mean rating score was developed based on the 1 to 5 rating weight and the actual number of respondents that provided a response to the question. The various VR-related sub-settings are organized based on the mean rating score assigned.

It should be noted that there were some interpreters that stated they do no interpreting in intake and eligibility determination settings, independent living settings, K-12 transition-related settings, or legal settings. However, to ensure consistency, these were assigned a ranking of '1' as '0' had not been provided as an option to other individuals participating in the process.

Ranking of Interpreting Settings						
Table 9						
Setting Category	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Employment placement settings		3	1	3	2	3.4
Postsecondary/vocational settings	2	2	1	1	3	3.1
Employment preparation settings	1	2	2	3	1	3.1
Career assessment	2	1	2	4		2.8
Medical settings	4	1	2	1	1	2.3
Mental health-related	3	3	2	1		2.1
Intake and eligibility determination	5	2			2	2.1
Independent living settings	6	1	2			1.5
K-12/transition-related settings	5	3	1			1.5
Legal settings	7	2				1.2

The settings with the highest mean scores were: employment placement; postsecondary/vocational; employment preparation, and career assessment settings. Aside from the mean ranking scores, it is interesting to note that interpreter responses are actually spread fairly widely across the first six of the settings listed, with few interpreters selecting the '5' ranking. This suggests that this particular group of interviewees interprets in a number of settings, all directly tied to preparing and placing the VR consumer in employment.

h. Interpreter Training Needs

Interviewees were provided a list of potential training topic areas and asked to assign a ranking from 1 to 5 (1= low need for training; 5 = high need for training). The interviewees were advised to try to use as many of the scale points as possible to illustrate the relative importance of each potential area of training. In order to better discern any potential trends with regard to the priority need for one type of training as compared to another, a mean rating score was developed based on the 1 to 5 rating weight and the actual number of respondents that provided a response to the question.

Ranking of Interpreter Training Priorities						
Table 10						
Type of Training Needed	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Interpreting for LFD consumers			1	3	5	4.4
Mentoring training for interpreters			2	3	4	4.2
Ethical training for interpreters			3	3	3	4.0
Interpreting for diverse populations	1	1	2	3	3	3.6
Interpreting in employment related settings	1	1	3	2	2	3.3
Training for VR staff/counselors that work with interpreters	3		1	1	4	3.3
Interpreting for mental health consumers	3		1	4	2	3.2
Interpreting in domestic violence settings	2		3	3	1	3.1
Training for deaf VR counselors that work with hearing consumers	2	2	1	1	3	3.1

Interpreting for consumers with cochlear implants or using assistive technology	1	2	4	1	1	2.8
Interpreting in substance abuse settings	2	2	1	3	1	2.6
Interpreting in medical settings	3	2	1	1	2	2.6
Related to VR service delivery, core operational concepts and basic terminology	2	2	1	2	1	2.4
Introductory training related to role and mission of VR	5	1		2	1	2.2
Interpreting in legal settings	6	1		2		1.7

The categories of training are organized by highest to lowest mean score. The four highest ranked areas of training are: interpreting for LFD consumers, mentoring, ethics and interpreting for diverse populations. With regard to mentoring, it should be noted that most interpreters participating in the process highlighted the need for more mentoring opportunities in the field. Mentoring was identified as critically needed and particularly valuable with acclimating the novice interpreter to work in settings in which they are unfamiliar. Most stressed that effective mentoring can result in better decision making and better service to the deaf consumer. It can also help the novice interpreter determine areas of future specialization. Several interpreters recommended the use of CDIs as mentors, and the importance of garnering the rich linguistic/cultural perspective of these professionals.

Also of note are comments made by respondents regarding training related to interpreting in medical settings and legal settings. With regard to medical settings, a number of the respondents assigning a lower ranking to the need for interpreter training in this area commented there are quality existing resources already available for interpreting in medical settings. Most respondents assigned training for interpreting in legal settings a low ranking because they do not work in the setting.

Other potential training areas raised by interviewees included:

- Training for deaf rehabilitation counselors that work with hearing consumers could be expanded to include training related to working with hard of hearing/late-deafened consumers who are culturally hearing. This could include guidelines regarding what to ask interpreters to be aware of and to describe in terms of speaking style and/or behavior that may be clinically important in serving the consumer. Training for deaf rehabilitation counselors should address the interpreting process and impact on meetings.
- There is a need for non-traditional training. Workshops are the most common mode of training and education offered, but often not an effective means of providing the kind of in-depth training and development interpreters need.
- Increasingly, employer interview processes are behaviorally oriented, and rely on personality assessments and other modes of understanding more about the individual; these types of interviews are challenging to interpret.
- Training for interpreters that work with VR consumers should include information related to the consumer's basic legal rights related to employment.

i. Incentives to Working in VR

The interpreters participating in the process were asked to identify incentives and benefits related to working in VR. The bullet point list below captures that input, which is typically representative of an individual's input, not always the opinion or perceptions of the group, although much of the input is similar in substance.

- Employment as an interpreter in a state VR agency provides opportunities for ongoing collaboration with other professionals employed by the agency, and the potential to be part of a team-based approach to serving deaf/hard of hearing individuals.
- State VR agency interpreters have the opportunity to provide input into how the deaf consumer receives services and can serve as an informal advocate within the agency on behalf of the deaf consumer.
- Staff interpreters in the state VR agency are encouraged and supported in the pursuit of on-going education and professional development.
- Interpreters are trained as job coaches as a second level responsibility to interpreting, thereby allowing the interpreter to develop additional skills and proficiencies.
- The interpreter works in partnership with other state VR agency staff and the consumer throughout the service delivery continuum toward independence and self-reliance for the consumer.
- Staff interpreters are used by VR agency as resource related to deafness, not just interpreting.
- The interpreter is able to advocate for appropriate use of CART or CDIs, as well as recommend when interpreting is the most appropriate mode of communication.
- The state VR agency recognizes the importance of interpreter services, and as employees of that agency, interpreters feel highly valued.
- Work in VR provides interpreters with opportunities to develop long-term relationships with deaf/hard of hearing consumers and participate in their progression toward independence and self-reliance.
- In VR, the interpreter has the opportunity to work with deaf professionals as peers.
- Working in VR keeps the interpreter in contact with a segment of the deaf community and provides ongoing opportunities for the interpreter to understand the deaf/ hard of hearing individual's experience and participation in society.
- Interpreting for VR consumers keeps the work of the interpreter 'real'.
- Working for a state VR agency affords interpreters opportunities for high stakes/high profile assignments.

j. Challenges and Disincentives to Working in VR

The interpreters participating in the process were asked to identify challenges and/or disincentives related to working in VR. The bullet point list below captures that input, which is representative of an individual's input, not always the opinion or perceptions of the group, although a significant portion of the input is similar in substance.

- It can be challenging to be an employee of a VR agency and at the same time, maintain objectivity when interpreting on behalf of the VR consumer.
- Interpreting in VR has changed dramatically. In the past, interpreting assignments were typically low consequence. A novice interpreter in the past would have an easy transition from the IEP to the SS office, VR office, or food stamp office. Today, assignments are of much higher consequence, requiring the recent graduate to have a high set of skills right out of the gate. In spite of this demand, existing IEPs still provide the same basis education and training
- The VR consumer is challenging to work with, and is typically more low-functioning than clients in non-VR settings.
- VR consumers are often linguistically and experientially challenged; in the past VR consumers were typically high school and/or college graduates that had certain level of skill sets - today the VR consumer group is more highly comprised of LFD individuals that are underemployed and under-represented.
- Work in VR often involves assignments with consumers that are either immigrants or have parents that were immigrants and are not acculturated; the deaf consumer and/or their family members are not English proficient and need spoken language interpreters, and there are often many language and cultural nuances present, making interpreting very complex.
- Because the interpreter is a staff member, the agency may have the expectation that they work like any other staff member, and doesn't recognize the need for frequent breaks or the physical demands related to interpreting.
- When the interpreter is a full-time staff member, they are usually the first to be assigned interpreting assignment, even in cases where it might better serve the consumer to have a male interpreter assigned, or an interpreter that is experienced interpreting for consumers from diverse ethnic background, or from the same ethnic background as the consumer.
- A staff interpreter has numerous constituents: the state VR agency, the rehabilitation counselor, the consumer, other service providers, and the potential employer; this can be isolating and often no other staff member can relate to the unique role fulfilled by the interpreter.
- VR consumers can be unpredictable; they may cancel at the last minute, and a free-lance contract interpreter may be left having scheduled a day to work with that client, but then not being reimbursed when the assignment is cancelled.
- Staff interpreters often have other administrative responsibilities; this can cause confusion and conflict in understanding priorities.
- There are not enough qualified CDIs working for the VR agency; these individuals would often be the best qualified to work with certain VR deaf/hard of hearing

consumers, particularly deaf/ hard of hearing VR consumers with secondary disabilities.

- Coordination of services with other agencies, particularly when cost sharing interpreting services for individual assignments, can be complex and frustrating.
- The state VR agency does not support interpreter training and professional development needs; interpreters do not feel valued.
- Other departments that interact with the state VR agency do not understand the range of communication access options and view the interpreter as the solution to all communication needs.
- Each consumer has unique communication needs and employment-related goals; there is a need for context when entering each assignment.
- Interpreters have to interact with potential employers of the VR consumer who have no knowledge of deafness and/or how to work with interpreters.
- Interpreters may assist consumers in the process of online applications/personality screenings, which are challenging to interpret and raise concern about impact of interpretation on testing/norms.
- In VR there are many last minute requests for interpreting services, which often precludes upfront preparation to provide optimal interpreting, especially for clients entering new jobs, attending orientations, etc.

k. Recommended Changes and Priorities for the Field

In a final open-ended question in the interview, participants were asked to identify the one or two priorities they would like to see established for the field of interpreting, and interpreting education.

- There is a need for a centralized, on-line source or repository of information and resources that can be made readily available for working interpreters; NCIEC should establish a national one-stop for interpreting-related resources.
- There are limited dollars for travel to participate in training or CEU opportunities, and limited opportunities in rural states for interpreters to develop or hone their skills. NCIEC should develop and promote opportunities for distance learning or on-line training as means of achieving CEUs or participating in professional development.
- Some states do not have a four-year IEP offering. On-line training and professional development opportunities should be developed in ways that can serve interpreters and new recruits in those states and assist them in achieving a BA/BS degree and preparing for national certification.
- NCIEC should develop and promote opportunities for distance learning that include locally-based or video-accessed mentoring support.
- RSA should require and fund staff development opportunities for VR interpreters the way it funds staff development for VR counselors.
- There is a need for training and education schemas that relate to the specific employment settings – for example, employment as an auto mechanic.
- National attention and solutions must be developed for responding to the challenges associated with the increased reliance on VRS/VRI and the increasing shortage of

interpreters available to provide services in community settings and in settings and situations in which VRS/VRI is not an option.

- NCIEC should continue to focus attention on recruiting students into IEPs, starting at the high school level, and marketing interpreting as a field in which job opportunities are growing.
- There is a big gap between most of the IEP training currently available and the skills and knowledge required to be a qualified and prepared interpreter. NCIEC should address this gap through developing and increasing opportunities for mentoring, internships and continuing education for novice interpreters and recent graduates.
- New graduates and novice interpreters are lost once they graduate; they tend to drift away from the deaf community and opportunities to use and hone skills acquired in the classroom. NCIEC should assess ways of linking recent graduates and novice interpreters with the deaf community and providing ongoing opportunities to practice and hone skills.
- NCIEC should assess ways to involve and compensate the deaf community by making them an ongoing part of interpreter preparation, particularly with regard to interpreter learning and practicum experiences.
- Student retention in IEPs is a big issue. The field needs to develop better strategies for keeping students in interpreter training programs, and developing interventions with those IEP students that don't cut it. This may best be achieved through mentoring and better opportunities for practice including internships – however, it is recognized that many interpreters that are qualified as possible mentors don't want to take on the extra work.
- VR interpreter has many constituents: the VR agency, the VR consumer, the rehabilitation counselor, the potential employer; this creates challenge; should be mentoring and supervision for these folks about ethical decision-making, consumer advocacy, and workload – the staff interpreter has very different set of challenges than the typical staff member.
- A national entity needs to take the lead in ensuring opportunities for mentoring. Mentoring opportunities should be implemented through a partnership between the state-based commission for the deaf, the state VR agency, the local RID chapter, and the interpreter services organizations in the state. Mentoring should be a requirement for recent graduates and novice interpreters – much like residency programs in medical settings.
- There need to be better opportunities for networking and developing connections between deaf professionals and Interpreters.

This concludes the report on information and findings to emerge in the VR interpreter interview process. As mentioned in the Executive Summary, the findings will be used in addition to other data collected through the NCIEC needs assessment effort to design a survey instrument that will be disseminated to state VR agency interpreters in the Fall of 2010.

Appendix A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Purpose: Determine if interpreter(s) is full or part-time

If part-time, what does that mean – same core hours or vary weekly

If full-time, does the VR agency contract directly with the interpreter, or does the VR agency go through an interpreter referral agency?

What percentage of time does the interpreter spend interpreting for VR consumers? (10% increments; 1–100%). Does the interpreter always know if the consumer they are interpreting for is a VR consumer?

What incentives and/or barriers there are related to interpreting in VR settings or for VR consumers as compared to other settings/consumers?

With regard to challenges; try to get information from about whether there are inherent challenges related to interpreting for a VR consumer (consumer-specific, or related to the VR agency operations and delivery system).

Interpreting Languages

Have interpreter assign percentage ranges regarding amount of interpreting time using following languages

Languages	0%	1-10%	11-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
ASL/spoken English						
Other signed language/English						
ASL/other spoken language						
Other language combinations						

Interpreting Systems

Have interpreter assign percentage ranges for interpreting system use:

Systems	0%	1-10%	11-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
Signed/Spoken English Transliteration						X
Oral Transliteration						
Cued Transliteration						
Other Language Transliteration						

VR consumer characteristics

Ask interpreter to rank the type of 'deaf' consumer she works with most (if possible, use 1-5 ranking, 5 being most often)

- Deaf consumers -
- Transition age deaf/hoh consumers -
- Deaf/hoh consumers with little or no work history -
- Racial/ethnic minority deaf/hoh consumers -
- Deaf-blind consumers -
- Deaf/hoh consumers with limited English -
- Deaf/hoh consumers that use assistive technology -
- Low-functioning deaf/hoh consumers -
- Hard of hearing (hoh) consumers -
- Deaf/hoh consumers with cochlear implants -
- Deaf/hoh consumers in remote rural locations -

Interpreter qualifications and education

Collect information regarding requirements VR agencies have in their state (credentials and education)

Credentials:

Interpreter licensure

Local credentials

National certification

Both local credentials and national certification

Education:

Non-degree certificate

AA/AS degree

BA/BS degree

MA degree

Interpreter pay

How does pay from VR agencies compare to pay from other clients? What is typical hourly pay in your geographic area, and is the VR agency competitive

Is interpreter paid portal to portal, or just for hours on-site?

Who cuts the check – the VR agency or the referral agency? (Need to get at whether the interviewee works directly for the VR agency, or works for the interpreter referral agency that assigns them to the assignment with the VR agency)

Interpreting in VR sub-settings

When working with VR consumer, what settings do they do most of their work in. Use 1-5 ranking, 5 being most work done in that setting.

- Postsecondary/vocational settings -
- Medical settings -
- Employment placement settings -
- Legal settings -
- Mental health settings -
- Employment preparation settings -
- Career assessment -
- Intake and eligibility determination -
- Independent living settings -
- K-12 transition-related settings

Interpreter training needs

Identify those areas where the interpreter feels training and education is most needed (1-5 ranking, 5 most needed).

- Interpreting in mental health settings -
- Interpreting for LFD consumers -
- Interpreting for diverse populations -
- Mentoring training for interpreters -
- Training for VR staff/counselors that work with interpreters -
- Interpreting in substance abuse settings -
- Interpreting in employment related settings -
- Interpreting in medical settings -
- Interpreting in legal settings -
- Interpreting in domestic violence settings -
- VR service delivery, core operational concepts and basic terminology -
- Ethical training for interpreters -
- Interpreting for consumers with cochlear implants or using assistive technology -
- Training for deaf VR counselors that work with hearing consumers -
- Introductory training related to role and mission of VR -

Probe about availability and interest in mentoring.

Open-ended question

Open-ended question asking for ideas regarding increasing the number of interpreters that work in VR – how to draw more folks to work in that setting.