

# Mental Health Interpretation: Program Structures and Funding Challenges

## Overview of InfoGuide

Mental health interpretation provides a means for refugees to express themselves freely in their own language and with their own cultural idioms. It gives resettled refugees an opportunity to access mental health care services in a culturally sensitive manner, subsequently reducing stigma and increasing community engagement. This guide will provide a programmatic approach to interpretation, outlining practical examples of sourcing, training, and funding interpretation services. With this guide, you will be able to explore helpful ways to increase your program’s interpretation pool, grasp core concepts to include in interpreter trainings, and gauge how the size and ingenuity of your program can affect interpretation funding.

## Preview of Previous Guide

NPCT’s previous Information Guide on mental health interpretation outlined specific mechanics of therapy appointments and interactions with interpreters. For details on how to best work with an interpreter prior to, during, and after a mental health appointment (including Trauma-Informed Care and Modes of Interpretation), please see our Information Guide and Webinar “Working with Interpreters: Service Provision with Torture Survivors” on our website [gcjfccs.org/refugee](http://gcjfccs.org/refugee) under [Information Guides](#) or [Webinars](#).

## Importance of Mental Health Interpretation

Mental health interpretation is a phrase used by those within refugee resettlement to describe a trauma-informed service provided primarily within a mental health context for an English language learner. While mental health appointments include visits with therapists and psychiatrists, mental health interpretation is helpful for all conversations with clientele who speak English as a language other than their native tongue. Specifically, within a therapeutic setting, the role of the interpreter changes when compared to the setting of a hospital or a public assistance office. In many ways, the mental health interpreter is a very real part of the therapeutic process. For example, the interpreter is responsible as a cultural broker between the client and the mental health provider. Instead of interpreting the client’s words literally, the interpreter should interpret the client’s meaning and allow for cultural differences when necessary.



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## Sourcing Interpreters

Organizations onboard interpreters from multiple spaces as various settings provide different opportunities to connect with individuals with professional skills and valuable knowledge useful for mental health interpretation. While challenges exist in this area, programs across the country have shown innovation and developed creative ways to find interpretation services. The table below outlines possible places to find local interpretation services, common pros and cons of each interpreter category, and potential action items for your program. Consider factors within your locale, including interpreter availability, existing refugee support services, available training, and funding sources. When looking to create or build up your organization’s interpreter pool, search for qualified and compassionate individuals who will take the time to provide quality mental health interpretation services.

Interpreter	Pros	Cons	Next Step Ideas
<b>Who:</b> Volunteer International Student  <b>Where:</b> University Career Fair	Investment is <b>cost effective</b> , leaving outreach and training (see next page) efforts as primary expenses. Any current student <b>educational program</b> may provide useful awareness and knowledge about refugee concerns.	Interpreter <b>buy-in</b> may not be as strong without a financial component, depending on alternative benefits (i.e. credits offered through student’s educational institution or certificates of experience to boost resume for early international career path).	<b>Contact</b> your local university’s social work, public health, and international studies departments to: - <b>attend</b> the next career fair as an exhibitor -request to <b>present</b> at a current international or linguistically focused class
<b>Who:</b> Client’s Family Member (resettled in the U.S. more than 6 months).  <b>Where:</b> Clientele Support Network	A client’s family member is more likely to <b>understand</b> the refugee resettlement process and to provide a depth of <b>empathy</b> that other interpreters may not be able to offer. <b>Familiarity</b> with your program can provide a built-in foundation for the interpreter.	Family members may pose a <b>conflict of interest</b> , if that family member is asked to interpret for a relative. Ensure your program’s policies provide the necessary protection for the interpreter’s integrity and the client’s confidentiality. <b>Vicarious trauma</b> is often experienced by refugee interpreters (see page 4).	<b>Host</b> a welcoming event at your agency’s office and invite members of the community. Include a tour of the facilities, introduce guests to staff members, and provide an overview of interpreter opportunities (including any ongoing trainings your agency offers).
<b>Who:</b> Refugee Community Leader  <b>Where:</b> Refugee Community Center Religious Home	Community members will have a strong sense of the <b>current scope</b> of concerns and underlining issues within the community. They will be able to act as a <b>liaison</b> , offering insights into the culture of the community’s country of origin and the local landscape.	When a refugee community is so small that each member knows each other, <b>confidentiality and anonymity</b> are difficult to maintain, especially within a therapeutic setting. Take extra precautions (such as in-house training and confidentiality contracts) to address this.	<b>Outreach</b> your local mosque or recreational center that serves refugees to meet the leaders and elders and discuss ways to share your program’s interpretation opportunities. Solicit and <b>incorporate feedback</b> into the program’s processes.
<b>Who:</b> Professionally Trained Interpreter  <b>Where:</b> Language Line	An interpreter employed and trained by a third party company will likely be held accountable to a high level of interpretation <b>standards</b> , which would include spoken <b>clarity</b> , professional <b>boundaries</b> , and cultural <b>facilitation</b> needed in a mental health setting.	Interpreters with a qualified certification or training tend to produce the <b>highest cost</b> for programs requesting their services. Additionally, an interpreter who is trained outside of your organization may not have an <b>understanding</b> of your specific program and clientele.	<b>Discuss</b> with your network which companies other providers use for mental health interpretation.  <b>Seek</b> out resources from your regional and national partners, including <a href="#">NPCT</a> , <a href="#">ORR</a> , and <a href="#">SAMHSA</a> .



## Training Interpreters

After successfully staffing your interpreter program, training is crucial to ensuring clientele are receiving the most effective and culturally sensitive mental health interpretation services. See the categories below as a guide to developing training policies and processes for interpreters.

### Content

Training will vary in each setting; however, the following are universal characteristics of any quality training provided to mental health interpreters:

- **Vocabulary** and definitions surrounding common mental health diagnoses and treatment modalities
- Culturally specific **interventions**, such as traditional healers, common to refugee populations
- Basics of **trauma-informed** care: How interpreters can be sensitive to clients' trauma experiences in a therapeutic setting.
- **Confidentiality**: Should be maintained inside and outside of all appointments; use specific examples in your curriculum: "If Marie, a well-known member in her refugee community, tells her therapist she is struggling with depression because she is having marital concerns, it is not appropriate for the interpreter to share that information with the community's elders."
- **Boundaries and Role Expectations**: These will vary in any organization. Be sure to go over what healthy and unhealthy boundaries look like, the definition(s) of the role(s) the interpreter will play, and who in the organization they can turn to for help when they have questions.

### Program Infrastructure

In addition to the training content, each program needs to consider their own infrastructure for training interpreters. Trainings can be completed outside of the agency or organization, within an existing training, and/or as a separate training module. While many trainings are informal and ongoing, it is recommended to provide some standardized introductory instruction for mental health interpreters. Ways to incorporate trainings:

- Provide **individual assistance** to each interpreter as they begin their work with your program.
- Have a **monthly training** for all new interpreters prior to taking any mental health appointments.
- Incorporate a mental health interpretation course into the **new hire/volunteer orientations** already provided by your agency.
- Partner with other agencies and/or mental health providers to offer **regular, consistent trainings** for your community's interpreters.

Tip: Foster a **learning environment** that allows interpreters to request guidance and advice as necessary from staff, instead of relying on new interpreters working through ethical dilemmas on their own.

### Common Challenges

Challenges to training interpreters for mental health interpretation include, but are not limited to:

- **Funding**: While in-house trainings can be a cost effective measure, workshops and in-person classes generally require an admission fee.
- **Time**: Training is not a one time event, but will require ongoing education for the most effective services. Consider appointing a staff member to organize all of the interpretation services within your program to allow for efficiency and a trusted point of contact.
- **Interpreter Literacy Level**: Refugee populations come from countries with varied literacy levels, demonstrating the need for diversified training material. Know that some interpreters will be unable or uncomfortable with reading in their own language and/or translating any written documentation.
- **Capacity**: Staff and or programs may not have much time to develop and incorporate ongoing trainings. Always invite staff input and gauge current workload to determine the best way to invest in an interpretation training infrastructure.

### Remember!

Because many interpreters came to the U.S. as refugees, various cultural differences may interfere with appointment logistics. It is important to remember that interpreters are working within their own skill set. It is up to your program and training to build upon their knowledge and inherent strengths.

# Funding Interpretation Services

A **small sized program**, such as a private practice, a mental health clinic, or a community-based wellness center may not have many funds for an interpretation program. It may need to use private dona-

tions to fund in-house services requiring interpretation .

A **medium sized program**, such as a refugee resettlement agency or hospital may have the capacity to build up a large pool of volunteers to provide mental health interpretation services. By utilizing volunteers, the only cost to your organization is the staff cost of outreach and training. Outreach and training should be conducted as an investment into any volunteer interpreter. Outreach can be implemented via social media (Facebook, Twitter, InstaGram, etc.), community events, and/or disseminating flyers at universities. A large volunteer pool will require enough staff capacity to maintain a point of contact, provide ongoing training, and offer support when needed.

## Vicarious Trauma

Because many interpreters assisting with refugee mental health interpretation have resettled in the U.S. as refugees themselves, vicarious or secondary trauma is a common experience. Whether you are working within a refugee resettlement agency, a behavioral health clinic, or a hospital, understanding vicarious trauma and incorporating that knowledge into your interpreter training is very important. Knowing the signs of when an interpreter is feeling overwhelmed and unable to effectively continue interpreting will assist with your overall goals of providing services to refugees. Model healthy self-care habits within your own work to encourage interpreters working within the mental health setting to do the same. Encourage mental health interpreters to take part in activities they enjoy, spend time with family & friends, and make healthy eating and exercise choices.

Funding interpretation services can be challenging for anyone, though programs of various size and scope have ways to approach those challenges. See the examples on this page for ideas to incorporate into your own programming.



A **large sized program**, such as a university or a comprehensive social service provider, may have the means to develop a self-sustaining interpretation program. Ideally, a large program would have a strong enough organizational infrastructure to initially support a large number of per diem or contracted interpreters. The interpreters may be utilized within the organization’s own internal programming to provide support for the overall institution. Furthermore, with ongoing (and perhaps standardized) mental health interpretation training, the organization would be well-positioned to contract its interpreters to other service providers. The training provided would potentially qualify interpreters for certifications, which would give them the marketable skills to interpret for a myriad of organizations, including social service agencies, mental health providers, and hospitals. The additional funding through external contracting would allow for a moderately to fully self-sufficient program. As the program embedded with a large sized organization is supporting it’s own internal services and sustaining itself through contracted services, it is simultaneously providing much-needed mental health interpretation services throughout the community.

## NPCT’s *Mental Health Interpretation Series*

This InfoGuide is part 2 of the series addressing interpretation.

### Part 1

A clinical foundation for working with interpreters in a mental health context.

[Webinar](#)   [InfoGuide](#)

### Part 2

A programmatic approach to sourcing, training, and funding interpreters.

[Webinar](#)

### Part 3

An exploration of language access and billing for interpretation services.

*Coming Soon!*

# Mental Health Interpretation: Program Structures and Funding

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## Resources

### [Florida Interpretation Trainings for Court Interpreter Services](#)

Specific certifications required by court interpreters in the state of Florida

### [Voice of Love Interpretation Training](#)

Training curriculum focused on trauma-informed interpretation services, includes day-long or half-day workshops for interpreters, providers, and trainers.

### [Healing Triad Curriculum](#)

Three-day training that is tailored for interpreters working with refugees in a mental health setting

### [Bridging the Gap Medical Interpretation Training](#)

Interpretation curriculum specifically geared toward those interpreting within the medical field. Provides interpreter role definitions, biology, common medical vocabulary, and interactive modules

### ["What's in a Word" Interpretation Guide](#)

Guide describing characteristics of quality interpreters and interpretation services and examples of daily activities of interpreters and translators

### [Utah Health and Human Rights](#)

### [NYU/Bellevue Program for Survivors of Torture](#)

### [VOICES Interpretation and Translation](#)

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This information guide is based on an NPCT webinar on this topic presented by Sylvia Acevedo of VOICES Interpretation and Translation, Hawthorne Smith of NYU/Bellevue Program of Survivors of Torture, and Brent Pace of Utah Health and Human Rights. The webinar is archived on our website, [www.gcjfcs.org/refugee](http://www.gcjfcs.org/refugee) under [Webinars](#). For more details about **diagnoses, interpreter interactions, and trauma-informed interpretation**, please see our information guide "Working with Interpreters: Service Provision with Torture Survivors" on our website [gcjfcs.org/refugee](http://gcjfcs.org/refugee), under [Information Guides](#).