PROCUREMENT GUIDE

# INTERPRETING SERVICES REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

70+ sample RFP questions, tips for preparing your next RFP, and actionable advice to help you find the right provider of interpreting services.



CERTIFIED LANGUAGES INTERNATIONAL™




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# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

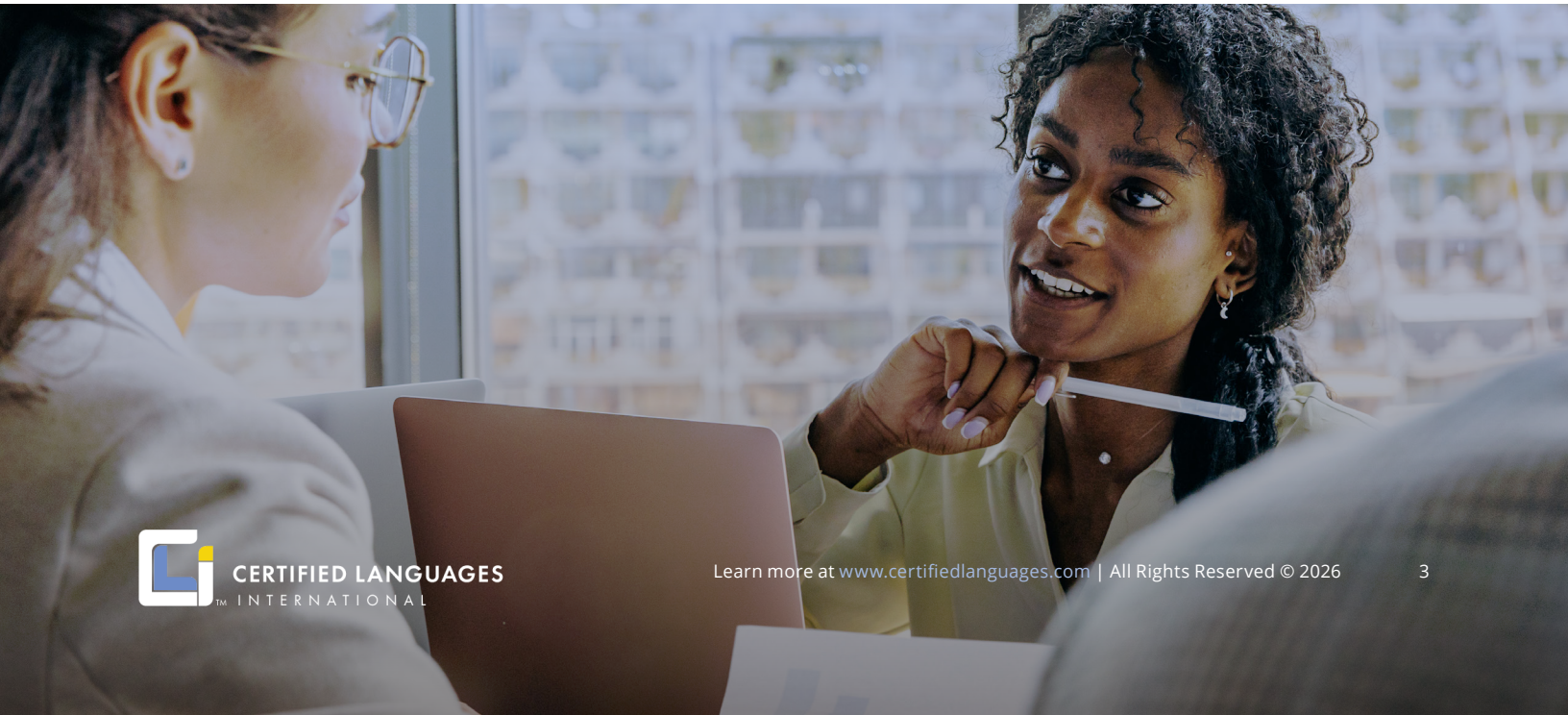
Certified Languages International (CLI) shares practical guidance and helpful tips to help you develop a strong request for proposal (RFP) for remote interpreting services. **This guide highlights key considerations, questions to ask, and steps that can help you identify the right language service provider (LSP) to partner with.**

Before you begin the RFP process, take time to define your organization's goals. Think about what you want to achieve by partnering with an LSP that provides high-quality interpreters.

Your goals might include:

- **Ensure accurate, efficient communication** with individuals with a non-English language preference (NELP)
- **Build customer trust** by offering services in their preferred language
- **Improve customer satisfaction** through equitable access to on-demand interpreters
- **Maintain compliance** with legal, regulatory, and industry standards
- **Support staff** with a clear, streamlined language access plan
- **Strengthen oversight** into data management, budgeting, and reporting

With clear goals in place, you can approach the RFP process with greater focus and confidence.





# KEY COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE RFP PROCESS

## 1. Define Your Language Service Needs

**A strong RFP starts with a clear understanding of your organization's unique language access landscape**. Every organization is different, so taking time to evaluate your specific needs will help ensure you ask the right questions and find the right partner.

Consider these 5 steps:

1. **Start by engaging stakeholders.** This might include language access coordinators, operations leaders, customer experience teams, program managers, IT, procurement, compliance, and frontline staff. Their perspectives can help identify current challenges, needs, and opportunities.

2. **Assess demand for remote interpreting.** Review both current and projected needs for over-the-phone interpreting (OPI) and video remote interpreting (VRI), including historical interpreting minutes for each modality.

3. **Identify customer language needs.** Look at the languages your customers speak and the service settings or touchpoints where interpreting services are most often used, such as contact centers, public counters, field offices, classrooms, virtual meetings, appointments, home visits, emergency response situations, and digital service channels.

4. **Confirm compliance requirements.** Ensure your RFP reflects the laws and regulations relevant to your organization. These may include HIPAA, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), state requirements, privacy and data security laws, contractual confidentiality requirements, accessibility standards, and any industry-specific regulations.

5. **Connect language access to your broader organizational goals.** Language access plays a critical role in improving service quality, strengthening the customer experience, advancing equitable access, reducing risk, and ensuring people can fully participate in your organization's programs and services.

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## 2. Set Clear RFP Objectives

Well-defined objectives anchor your RFP in strategy and attract partners that align with your values. Ground your goals in organizational priorities — whether that's equitable access, digital transformation, regulatory compliance, customer engagement, operational efficiency, or community trust.

**It's also important to balance cost with quality, compliance, and long-term value.** While pricing matters, selecting the right partner involves evaluating their ability to deliver reliable, scalable services.

Look for vendors who can grow with you. As organizations continue to evolve — with expanded digital services, virtual support channels, multilingual tools, and hybrid service models — your language services partner should be able to support that growth.

**Above all, position language services as a core part of delivering inclusive, customer-centered service.**

## 3. Establish a Realistic RFP Timeline

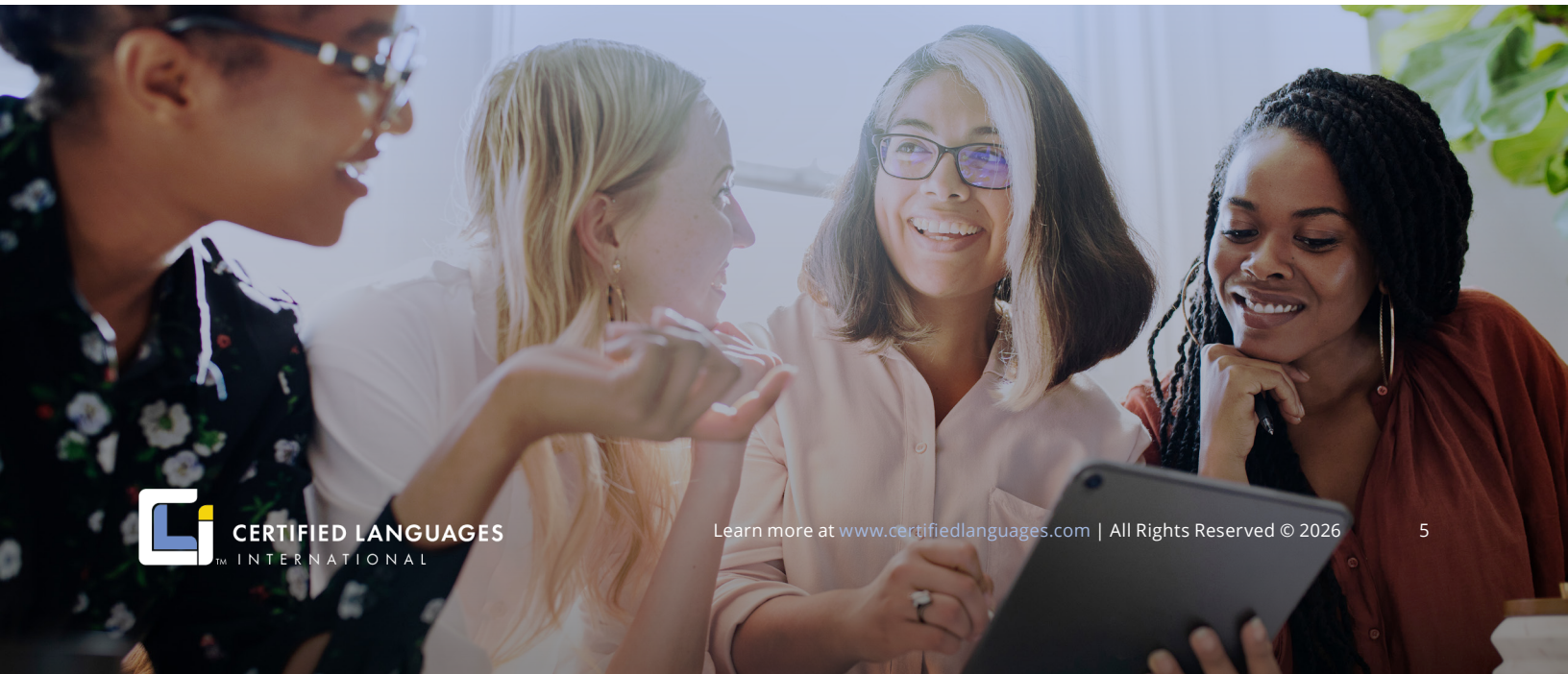
**A well-structured timeline helps keep the RFP process organized and transparent.** Clear milestones allow vendors to understand when key activities will occur — such as when questions are due, when proposals must be submitted, and when decisions will be made. It also signals that your organization values a thoughtful and professional process.

Equally important: **Avoid rushing the timeline.** Vendors need adequate time to develop strong proposals that address your organization's needs. An intentional RFP process realistically takes place over the span of a month or two. When vendors have the time to respond thoughtfully, you gain better information to support your decision.

An RFP timeline might include milestones such as:

| Milestone | Date | Time + Time Zone |
|---|---|---|
| RFP issue date | | |
| Vendors respond with intent to bid | | |
| Pre-proposal conference call | | |
| Vendors submit written clarification questions | | |
| [Your Org] releases answers to vendor questions | | |
| Vendors submit proposals | | |

You can also include milestones for any post-proposal activities, such as finalist presentations or demonstrations, vendor selection notification, contract execution, and implementation timelines.



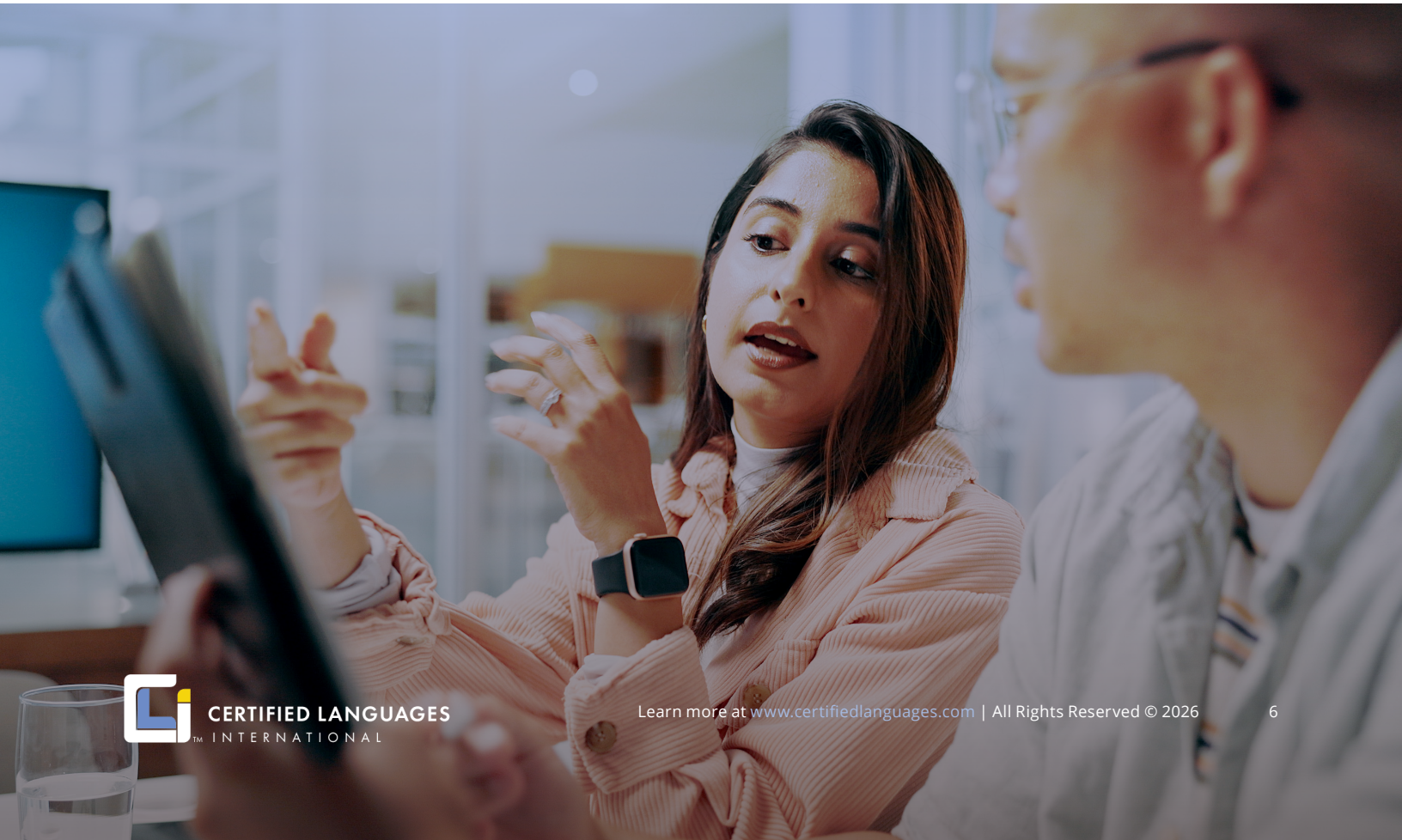
## 4. Provide Critical Information

Finally, make sure your RFP includes other key details vendors will need to respond effectively. For example:

- **A primary point of contact** and contact info for vendor questions, as well as clear instructions on how questions should be submitted
- **Proposal formatting guidelines**, including templates, page limits, and/or file requirements
- **Attachment instructions**, specifying what documents are required or permitted and how they should be organized and submitted with the proposal
- **Submission instructions**, such as whether proposals should be emailed to the primary contact, uploaded to a portal, or submitted through another method

Providing this information up front helps avoid confusion, creates a more efficient process for everyone involved, and makes it easier for you to evaluate proposals consistently.

A thoughtful RFP process does more than identify a service vendor. **It helps you find a true partner who can reliably support you in providing timely, accessible service for every person you serve.**





# PARTNERING WITH A STRONG LANGUAGE SERVICES PROVIDER

**The quality of the interpreting services you offer your NELP customers is only as strong as the LSP providing them.** Choose a partner you can trust. Look for an LSP with a strong reputation, financial stability, and a proven record of long-term success supporting organizations with similar language access needs, service environments, and call volumes.

The following questions can help you better understand a vendor's organization and capabilities.

## Sample RFP Questions

- Provide a brief overview of your company. Include how many years you have delivered OPI and VRI services, the size of your organization, the ownership structure, and your experience supporting organizations with similar scope and volume.
- Has your company experienced any changes in ownership, legal structure, or senior management over the past 12 months? If yes, provide details.
- Describe your current liability insurance policies for your organization, including your cyber liability insurance coverage. Please attach relevant insurance certificates.
- Describe any lawsuits or legal actions currently pending against your organization. Also include any actions that have been resolved within the past 5 years.
- Describe your company's financial stability. Please attach detailed financial statements for the past 3 years.
- Has your company ever declared bankruptcy? If yes, provide details.
- What value or experience do you bring to the industry that would benefit our organization?
- How does your company demonstrate leadership within the language services industry?
- What differentiates your company from other LSPs?
- How do you stay current with regulations, laws, and compliance requirements?

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## Interpreters versus Translators



An **interpreter** facilitates conversations from one language into another. Interpretation is **spoken and signed**.



A **translator** renders the written word from one language to another. Translation is **written**.

# HIGH-QUALITY PHONE & VIDEO INTERPRETING SERVICES

Most LSPs offer similar ways to connect with interpreters by phone or video. **However, the quality of service can vary widely**. That's why you need to evaluate the full experience. This includes call flow, available features, language coverage, support, and hours of availability.

Make sure the proposed solution can reliably meet your organization's language access needs.

## Sample RFP Questions

- Describe your proposed solution for accessing both OPI and VRI services. Include the features and call flow options you offer for each modality.
- If someone has trouble with the automated call flow, can they reach a live representative? If so, please describe the process.
- How many languages do you support for each modality? Attach a list of languages and hours of availability.
- Do you outsource any interpreting services to other LSPs? If so, how often and in what languages?
- What service level agreements (SLAs) do you offer?
- Do you currently use or plan to implement AI (artificial intelligence) to deliver these services? If yes, please explain.
- Can you provide 100% U.S.-based interpreters? If so, are there any limitations or pricing differences?

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## Connection Metrics



The **average speed of answer (ASA)** measures how long it takes for a call to be answered.



The **average connection time (ACT)** measures how long it takes for an interpreter to be connected to your call once the request has been made. Unlike the ASA, this will vary by language.

# FAST CONNECTION TO AN INTERPRETER

No one likes listening to hold music. No one. That's especially true for staff who need to quickly communicate with their NELP customers. When choosing an interpreting partner, speed matters.

Look for two primary metrics: **average speed of answer (ASA)** and **average connection time (ACT)** to an interpreter.

Some vendors use live customer service representatives (CSRs) to answer and route calls. Others do not. Make sure you understand the ACT for each call routing method.

It's also key to understand how they monitor interpreter availability. A strong partner actively manages supply and demand. The goal is simple: When you request a Lingala interpreter at 2:15 a.m., one should be available.

## Sample RFP Questions

- What is your average speed of answer?
- What are your average connection times for OPI services in Spanish and in non-Spanish languages?
- What are your average connection times for VRI services in American Sign Language (ASL), Spanish, and non-Spanish languages?
- Do you measure the frequency of dropped calls? If so, what is this metric for your organization?
- What is your concurrent call capacity?
- What happens when system capacity and interpreter capacity are reached?
- What percentage of uptime has your company achieved in the past 12 months?
- Describe your prescheduling capabilities and process for both OPI and VRI services.

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# RELIABLE INTERPRETING SERVICES

When you need an interpreter, you need one immediately. And you need to be able to trust that your interpreting services partner will connect you without delay.

**A dependable interpreting provider delivers the same experience every single day.** They answer when you call. They provide the languages they promise. And if a disruption occurs, they communicate quickly and clearly.

When evaluating a partner, there are 3 indicators of reliability to look for.

## 1. A Business Continuity Plan

A business continuity plan explains how services will continue during an unexpected disruption.

A strong plan prepares for situations such as severe weather, natural disasters, or technology failures. **It ensures services remain available no matter what happens.**

For interpreter services, the business continuity plan should include redundancy across mission-critical systems. This includes call centers, telecommunications infrastructure, data centers, and interpreter networks. It should also cover data recovery, escalation contacts, backup power, and ongoing system testing and monitoring.

## Sample RFP Questions

- How do you ensure service continuity for planned and unplanned events?
- Provide an overview of your disaster recovery plan for systems that support service delivery.
- How does your organization maintain services during a power outage or natural disaster? What if this scenario lasts for several days?



## 2. A Complaint Resolution Process

Even the best LSPs encounter issues. What matters is how they respond. **A dependable interpreting company proactively acknowledges problems and resolves them quickly.** They want to know if quality or performance is slipping. And they take action to fix it.

If a vendor claims they never have issues — or can't explain their resolution process — that's a red flag. Look for a partner with a clear, structured plan for addressing concerns.

### Sample RFP Questions

- How do customers submit concerns, complaints, or questions?
- Describe your process for addressing and resolving service issues, including escalation procedures.
- What is your typical turnaround time to respond to and resolve customer service issues, both technical and interpreter-related?

## 3. A Method for Measuring — and Acting On — Customer Satisfaction

Effortless, readily available interpreting services help people feel understood, improve the service experience, and empower staff to communicate clearly and confidently. When an LSP actively collects feedback, they gain valuable insight into how to improve.

Just as valuable, they show clients that their voices matter. **Choose a partner that treats customer satisfaction as a priority**. Your feedback should lead to action — not disappear into a black hole.

### Sample RFP Questions

- What is your process for monitoring and measuring customer satisfaction?
- What are your most recent customer satisfaction scores or survey results?
- How does your organization apply client feedback to improve services?

## Certified Interpreters versus Qualified Interpreters*



**A certified interpreter** has passed rigorous testing administered by a professional organization or government entity. The certification confirms their competency using standardized criteria.



**A qualified interpreter** has been assessed for professional interpreting skills. They demonstrate high proficiency in at least two languages and have the training and experience needed to interpret accurately.

They also follow the National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice established by the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC).

*Per the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC)

# SKILLED, EXPERIENCED INTERPRETERS

The quality of your interpreting partner starts with their interpreters. That's why it's critical to choose an LSP with a strong screening and vetting process. **How interpreters are recruited and evaluated can directly impact the accuracy, efficiency, and overall quality of every interpreting session.**

Every LSP has its own process. When you evaluate vendors, make sure you understand how they assess interpreter skills and qualifications.

It's also helpful to know that **national interpreter certifications are only available for a limited number of language pairs and specialties** in the medical and court/legal industries.

Certified interpreters are widely considered the gold standard. However, **qualified interpreters provide a very high level of expertise and professionalism.**

## Sample RFP Questions

- Describe your vetting process for interpreters, including minimum requirements and background checks.
- How do you verify interpreters' language proficiency and interpreting skills, including knowledge of industry-specific terminology?
- What third-party training programs have your interpreters completed?
- What certifications, credentials, or specialized qualifications do your interpreters hold?
- On average, how many years of experience do interpreters have prior to working with your company?

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# ROBUST QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance (QA) should never be a one-time effort. It should be an ongoing process. **The right LSP continuously monitors interpreter performance.** They track quality metrics, evaluate interpreting sessions, and address issues quickly when they arise. They should also keep you informed. If there are concerns about accuracy or performance during a session, you should know about it.

Strong QA programs ensure interpreters maintain high standards over time. That applies whether an interpreter has one year of experience or ten.

## Sample RFP Questions

- Describe your quality monitoring process for interpreters.
- What performance metrics do you use to evaluate interpreter performance?
- If an interpreter's performance falls below expectations, what improvement plan do you implement?
- What is your response time for QA and customer support issues?
- If a concern is reported, do you provide a follow-up report on the investigation? If so, what does it include and how quickly is it delivered?
- What professional code of ethics do your interpreters follow? How do you monitor compliance?
- What metrics do you use to track call center performance?

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# CONFIDENTIALITY & PROTECTION OF CUSTOMER INFORMATION

Interpreters often participate in sensitive conversations. Many of those discussions include personally identifiable information (PII). **That's why privacy and security should be a top priority when selecting an LSP**. Your partner should have strong safeguards in place to protect customer data and maintain confidentiality at all times.

Look for vendors with clear policies, strong security controls, and a proven commitment to compliance.

## Sample RFP Questions

- What confidentiality, privacy, and security measures do you use to protect PII?
- What policies and procedures govern privacy and data security in your interpreters' work environments?
- What is your policy on recording interpreted sessions? How are recordings securely stored and destroyed?
- Can our organization opt out of call recording?
- If any interpreters are located outside the United States, how do you ensure compliance with U.S. data security laws?

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# TECHNOLOGY & INTEGRATIONS

Implementing a new remote interpreting solution — especially a video-based one — can feel like a big undertaking.

The right LSP makes the process much easier. They work with your team to ensure the technology fits seamlessly into your environment.

**Asking the right questions helps confirm that your infrastructure can support the solution you choose.** Some organizations prefer an out-of-the-box platform. Others need custom integrations that support unique workflows. Either way, the goal is the same: Make it easy for staff to access interpreters at every point of interaction with NELP customers.

## Sample RFP Questions

- What platforms, apps, or systems do you use to deliver OPI and VRI services?
- What technological requirements, equipment, and contributions would be required from our organization to effectively engage with your interpreting services?
- What integrations do you offer to connect remote interpreting services directly into our existing workflows?



# SMOOTH SERVICE IMPLEMENTATION

Selecting a language services partner is just the first step. **A successful implementation is what turns that partnership into real value**. A strong implementation plan should include clear timelines, defined responsibilities, staff training, and regular communication.

The good news is that remote interpreting services are typically easy to deploy and use. In most cases, staff simply dial a number or open a video platform, select the language they need, and connect with an interpreter within seconds.

The bigger challenge is adoption. **Staff need to understand your language access plan and feel confident using the service.** That's why it's imperative to choose an LSP that provides hands-on support, training, and resources throughout the implementation process.

## Sample RFP Questions

- How do you ensure a smooth transition from a legacy vendor with minimal disruption to services?
- Describe your standard implementation process for an organization of our size. What timeline and staffing model do you typically offer?
- How will you train our staff to use your services during implementation and for future new hires?
- Describe any additional training you offer.
- What instructional materials, usage guides, and support resources do you provide?
- Are there any associated costs we should expect for training or materials?



# ONGOING ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Efficient account management can make a big difference in your experience with an LSP. Look for a partner that offers a **single point of contact** backed by a broader support team. This helps streamline communication and ensures you always know who to reach out to.

A great account manager does more than answer questions. **They act as an extension of your team**. They monitor service delivery, support your language access goals, and help strengthen the partnership over time. With the right support in place, you'll have confidence that help and resources are available whenever you need them.

## Sample RFP Questions

- What type of ongoing account management and support do you provide?
- Who will serve as the primary contact(s) for our account? Describe their experience, qualifications, and responsibilities.
- Do you offer quarterly business review (QBR) meetings and reports? If so, please describe what they include.

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# DETAILED CALL DATA & REPORTING

Data plays an integral role in managing language access services. Clear reporting helps you **track usage, understand the language needs of your NELP customers**, and **plan for the future**. It also supports **budgeting**, **compliance**, and **operational planning**.

When evaluating an LSP, make sure you understand what types of reports are available and how easily you can access them.

## Sample RFP Questions

- What reports are available? What data elements can be included?
- Can reports be generated in real time? In what formats will they be provided?
- Attach sample call reports.
- How customizable are your reports?
- Can reports be segmented by service type (OPI versus VRI), department, location, and/or other categories?
- Does your reporting system include a web-based dashboard where users can automatically generate reports? If so, please describe the dashboard.

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# PRICING & VALUE ADDS

## Look Beyond the Lowest Price

Cost is always a critical consideration. But price alone should not determine your decision. Interpreter accuracy, service quality, and reliability also matter. Lower-cost vendors may rely on less experienced interpreters. That can lead to **longer calls**, **lower-quality interactions**, **unresolved customer calls**, and **increased risk**.

Choosing a trusted interpreting partner helps protect your organization, your staff, and the people you serve.

## Understand the Full Cost Structure

It's vital to understand the full cost structure before signing an agreement. Ask detailed questions about pricing so there are no surprises later.

Many LSPs base pricing on **call volume** and **language mix**. Be sure to share clear information about your expected usage, including call volume and languages across each modality.

Also keep in mind that many vendors charge different rates for **Spanish** and **non-Spanish** for OPI, and for **Spanish**, **non-Spanish**, and **American Sign Language (ASL)** for VRI. If you provide a pricing template in your RFP, account for these differences so vendors can submit accurate and competitive quotes.

## Sample RFP Questions

- Provide your pricing structure and per-minute rates for OPI and VRI services.
- What are your policies and fees for cancellations and for after-hours or emergency requests?
- When does billing begin and end during a call?
- What value-added services, features, or resources do you include at no additional charge?



# CLIENT REFERENCES

If a vendor claims fast connections, reliable service, and high-quality interpreters, don't just take their word for it. **Customer feedback can tell you a lot about what it's really like to work with them**.

Look for testimonials and case studies on the vendor's website. You should also request references you can speak with directly. Ideally, ask for at least **3 references from organizations of similar size**. These conversations can give you valuable insight into the vendor's performance and partnership approach.

Each reference should include details such as:

- The length of the relationship
- The scope of services provided
- A primary contact
- Contact information



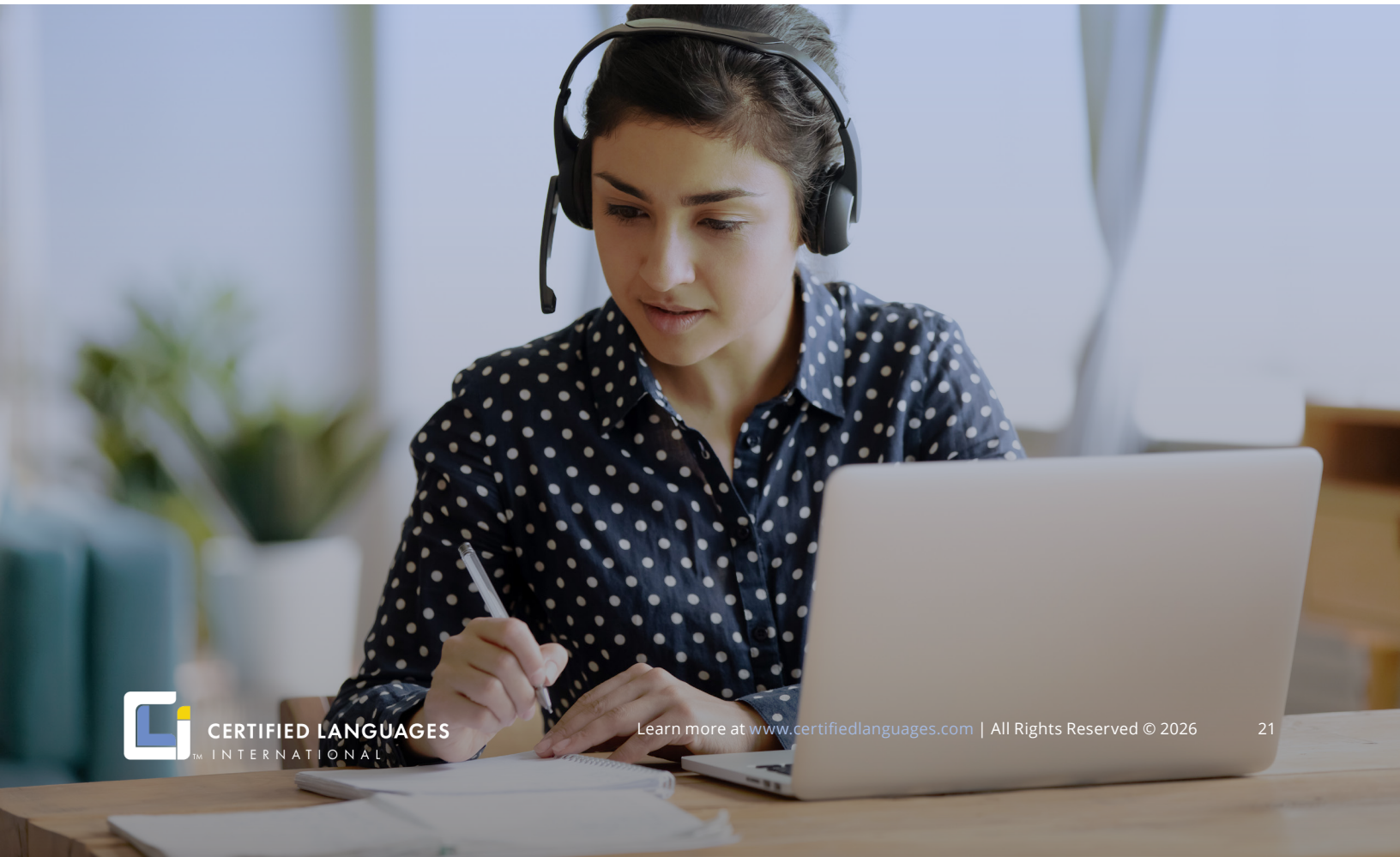
# CONDUCTING TEST CALLS

**One of the best ways to evaluate an interpreting vendor is to try the service yourself.** After reviewing proposals and identifying finalists, ask if you can conduct **trial test calls**. This allows your team to experience the service firsthand.

During test calls, pay attention to the following considerations:

- How easy it is to access the service
- The responsiveness and professionalism of customer support
- The speed of answer and connection to an interpreter
- Audio and video quality during the session
- Availability of interpreters across different languages, including less common ones
- Overall quality and accuracy of the interpretation

Test calls can give you a clear picture of how well a vendor will support your organization in real-world situations.





# ABOUT CERTIFIED LANGUAGES INTERNATIONAL

For three decades, Certified Languages International (CLI) has helped organizations connect with the people they serve — no matter what language they speak. Founded in 1996, CLI is now one of the largest remote interpreting providers in the world. Our mission is simple: Build stronger communities through equitable language access.

CLI specializes in delivering interpreting services 24/7/365 over phone and video. Our network of professional interpreters supports 300+ languages, helping teams communicate clearly with every customer.

Beyond interpreting, CLI provides a full suite of language solutions designed to support modern organizations. These include:

- A virtual interpreter call center platform for seamless access to interpreters
- Document translation services in 100+ languages
- Transcription services for audio, video, and Braille in 100+ languages
- Language proficiency and interpreter skills assessments for bilingual staff and interpreters

**With CLI, organizations gain a trusted partner dedicated to improving communication, strengthening service experiences, and expanding equitable language access across every interaction.**

## Contact CLI for Help with Your RFP

**Contact CLI today to learn more about how we can help you develop the perfect RFP for your organization.**

RFP@certifiedlanguages.com

1-800-362-3241, ext. 2

www.certifiedlanguages.com

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