## Interpreting in the Immigration Settings: Focus Groups Summary

#### **INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY**

As part of the effort to gather insight from interpreters who work in immigration settings, two focus groups were conducted in the spring of 2013. An additional focus group was conducted in April 2012.

Altogether, a total of three focus groups met that included 9 interpreters. Four of the interpreters were certified deaf interpreters. Taken together, these individuals represent many years of experience relating to interpreting in immigration settings. Their insight and experience offer a nuanced view of this specialized interpreting setting as detailed in the following pages.

Here is a summary of the key findings from focus group participants:

- ! The degree of cross-cultural knowledge and sensitivity required when interpreting in immigration settings is extremely high. To the extent possible, interpreters should be familiar with the country the deaf consumer is from and how their laws and customs different from the United States.
- ! A high-level of awareness about the immigration and naturalization system also is required to be effective interpreter in these settings. Significant rights are at stake, including citizenship status and possible deportation. Interpreters should have a clear understanding of the entire INS process in order to understand the implications of their interpreting task and ensure adequate communication.
- ! Interpreting

### **METHODOLOGY & PROCEDURE**

To fulfill our aim to secure a broad cross-section of interpreters who work in court settings through remote technology, we undertook 3 Focus Group meetings. It is worth noting that additional focus groups were solicited, but participation was low. One (1) meeting occurred face-to-face and two (2) meetings occurred via audio-conference. Solicitation of participants took place through the RID Legal Interpreter Member Section (LIMS), graduates of the UNC Legal Interpreter Training Program, and through the NCIEC network.

The face-to-face group meeting took place in Denver, Colorado as part of the 2012 ILI conference hosted by the NCIEC MARIE Center and LIMS. The two audioconference meetings were with interpreter practitioners and court personnel from Arizona, California, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Each meeting lasted approximately 90 minutes. All participants were assured of confidentiality. Each meeting included a facilitator who fostered dialogue and posed questions from a focus group script that was approved through the IRB processes at the University of Northern Colorado and Northeastern University. The questions included in the script provide the framework for the focus groups findings report which follows.

Before each session, each group was informed of the purpose of the meeting:

"The overall goal of this particular NCIEC Focus Group endeavor is to identify and vet competencies and skills specific to interpreting in the immigration setting. To accomplish this goal, the NCIEC Legal Interpreting workgroup is engaging in a series of focus groups with interpreters from across the United States. The information gleaned from these events will assist the NCIEC Legal interpreting workgroup to: 1) identify a set of general competency domains for use in organizing the competencies and skills of interpreters working in immigration settings; 2) craft a draft set of competencies to be vetted by a broad base of stakeholders; 3) potentially translate the competencies into curricula or training modules to prepare interpreters to work in immigration settings; and most definitely to 4) identify practices that should be included in the Best Practices for ASL-English Interpreters working in Court and Law Enforcement Settings."

The confidential notes from each meeting were compiled into the report we now present.

#### Key Findings: Conversations with Interpreter Practitioners and Court Personnel

#### **General Questions:**

# Question 1: Can you tell me what two competencies you perceive as being most important for an interpreter working in immigration settings?

Participants recommended a number of competencies they felt were critical for interpreters working in the courts via remote technology. They include:

- ! Knowledge of and ability to use universal signs and gesturing.
- ! A high degree of interpersonal skills and cultural sensitivity.
- ! Flexibility and adaptability, especially in working with other interpreters whether spoken language interpreters or certified deaf interpreters.
- ! An in-depth knowledge of the immigration and naturalization system and the vocabulary unique to that field.
- ! Knowledge of the laws and customs of foreign countries.
- ! Empathy for others.
- ! The ability to see the big picture and how a particular assignment may fit into a broader picture of a deaf consumer trying to gain citizenshipoa2 (n) 3 (h) 1 (e (e)

related proceedings. Two other participants noted that in their role as interpreters in immigration cases, they were tasked with preparing deaf clients for the INS test required for citizenship.

### **Knowledge Questions:**

Question 4: What do you wish you knew before you began working in 4

#### **Professional Practice Questions:**

## Question 6: Describe unique ethical situations you've encountered while working in the immigration setting.

The participants identified a couple of unique ethical situations that they encountered while interpreting in immigration settings. One participant related a story where she had interpreted for a family in domestic setting and later encountered one participant in the immigration setting. She noted that it was