

RFP 20-1311 Interpretation Services

Clarification Questions

1. In the past, the State has experienced issues with filling requests and unexpected cancellations for requests that have been filled.

a. Do you track your fill rate and cancellation rate separately?

Yes, our customizable scheduling system tracks the fill rate and cancellation rate separately.

b. What is your fill rate over the past 2 years?

Our fill rate over the past 2 years is approximately 99%.

c. What is your cancellation rate over the past 2 years?

Our cancellation rate over the past 2 years is approximately 1%.

d. Please describe your methodology for calculating your fill rate and cancellation rate. For your fill rate, does this figure include situations where an interpretation method is substituted and thus different from the client's request (for example, if a client requests an in-person interpreter and you provide a VRI interpreter)?

Ad Astra uses our customizable, automated scheduling system to track details surrounding interpreter assignment fulfillment and cancellation. We set up our system to produce dashboards that synthesize, both graphically and numerically, the fill rate and cancellation rate, among other assignment details (e.g., requester, facility/location, language, duration, assigned interpreter). By "tagging" critical data points throughout our project management/scheduling process within our system, we are able to easily track our fill rate and cancellation rate and provide this information to our clients.

Our 99% fill rate as given above in answer "b" is calculated solely by analyzing the number of requests that we filled according to our clients' original specifications (i.e., this rate does not include substitutions of interpretation methods).

However, our 1% cancellation rate given above in answer "c" does include situations where we substituted another method than the initial request (with the client's permission) to handle an interpreter cancellation.

Ad Astra's mission is to provide in person interpretation whenever requested, and only in rare situations of last minute interpreter

cancellations (and with client permission) do we substitute a virtual OPI/VRI interpreter. Our high fill rate demonstrates our ability to fulfill requests per our clients' original request specifications.

- e. What strategies do you employ to maintain a high fill rate and a low cancellation rate?

Ad Astra employs proactive scheduling management, recruitment, and training to maintain a high fill rate and low cancellation rate.

Our deep, broad experience performing comprehensive language services has enabled us to understand and use optimal strategies to assign interpreters to avoid/mitigate cancellations.

To ensure a high fill rate/low cancellation rate, we leverage our scheduling system to choose the best matched interpreter for each specific assignment. Our scheduling system houses our pre-qualified pool for the State of Indiana, and importantly details interpreter geographical location and availability information. We have found that proximity to an assignment plays a big role in decreasing the likelihood of interpreter cancellation, so we account for location details when assigning interpreters.

Additionally, we develop backup interpreter plans for assignments so that we may draw on our available resource pool to provide another interpreter should there be an unexpected cancellation.

Furthermore, another strategy for maintaining our high fill rate and low cancellation rate is our rigorous recruiting practices. We have assembled a large pool of interpreters we can draw from in order to cater to specific needs. Our Recruiting Team continuously screens and tests experienced interpreters to add to this pool. With this resource pool, we are positioned to continue to maintain a high fill rate.

We also provide regular training to our pool of interpreters that includes their obligations, including their duties surrounding assignment scheduling and cancellations. Our training delves into interpreter responsibilities and ethics, terminology, client-specific policies, and other details that provide interpreters clear understanding of expectations and guidance on how to meet the State's needs.

Further, we quickly remove any interpreters from our pool when we identify a pattern of cancellation, which serves as a deterrent to all interpreters from accepting assignments they cannot fulfill.

Our large pool of trained and experienced interpreter resources, along with our strategic scheduling to provide the “best match” for each unique assignment, have been fundamental to our high fill rate and low cancellation rate.

- f. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your fill rate and cancellation rate?

The COVID-19 pandemic has not affected our fill rate or cancellation rate.

Because many of our State and Federal Government agency clients closed their offices at the beginning of the pandemic, we saw a decrease in our workflow. Thus, we had more interpreters available and fewer assignments for them. We also brought more interpreters on board during the pandemic. With plenty of our regular, skilled, vetted interpreters available and ready for work, we have had even fewer cancellations in recent months.

- g. How have you tried to mitigate the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Ad Astra has taken a proactive and thorough approach to mitigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have strictly adhered to Federal, State, and local guidelines as well as specific client needs and protocols. We have adapted to varying COVID-19 requirements in more than 10 states.

Communication has been key. We have communicated with our clients to find out what the latest facility protocols are and then communicated any requirements quickly to interpreters. This included developing online training and testing for interpreters that covers how to handle themselves while interpreting on-site within client facilities in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, we quickly developed training for 100 Spanish interpreters that included terminology and specific guidance on how to interpret at a COVID-19 State of Maryland testing site.

Further, we have provided personal protective equipment (PPE)[i.e., face shields, face masks, hand sanitizer] to our interpreters free of charge. We require that any interpreter who has been exposed to COVID-19, to self-quarantine for 14 days, and in such situations a replacement interpreter is assigned. Any other interpreters who have been in contact with the interpreter

exposed to COVID-19 are also required to self-quarantine for 14 days or present a negative test result for COVID-19.

We have worked closely with clients to mitigate their particular challenges during this time as well. At the beginning of the pandemic, when offices/facilities were shut down, we offered a week of free OPI services to clients at no cost as they regrouped and organized how they would continue providing language access during the shutdown (often with a transition to virtual services). We are prepared to offer these services again if we face a "second wave" of COVID-19 that further shuts down in-person services of the agencies we support.

We also ramped up our virtual interpreting services at the onset of the pandemic. Along with our existing OPI/VRI professionals, we trained additional interpreters in virtual interpreting services best practices, and strengthened our interpreter team across any platform that our clients use. This has allowed clients to continue to rely on our high caliber interpreters, regardless of office/facility closures.

Also, at the beginning of the pandemic, our translation workflow greatly increased due to the need for written material to be quickly distributed about the COVID-19 crisis. Many of these requests needed substantial desktop publishing support. Knowing that our state clients had budget concerns, we offered to provide a document template for free to speed up the translation process while also providing cost-savings to the Government.

During the pandemic, we have also coordinated with offices that serve the Deaf and Hard of Hearing population. For example, we collaborated with the Maryland Governor's Coordinating Offices, Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing, sharing the office's critical up-to-the-minute ASL video updates through our social media channels and maintaining a dialogue to keep the office informed of the challenges faced by interpreters and users of interpreting services as the pandemic unfolded.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ad Astra has continually worked to meet new client demands. We have flexibly implemented changes and training almost immediately during the pandemic to mitigate any issues our clients could have during the pandemic. We have worked closely with our clients throughout the country to provide safe and thorough language interpretation and translation services in any form they desire, and according to their specific requirements.

In Person
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