Utilizing Technology for Sign Language Interpretation

Sign language interpretation also plays a critical role in ensuring equal access to justice for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing within legal proceedings. In any legal setting, effective communication is essential for a fair and just process. For individuals who use sign language as their primary means of communication, having a qualified sign language interpreter ensures that they can fully understand and participate in the legal process. Technology is making Sign Language Interpretation easier to implement and use for all participants in meetings and legal proceedings.

Below is a breakdown on how to effectively utilize and implement the sign language features on Zoom, MS Teams, and Cisco Webex in a virtual and hybrid setting. We have also provided a break down on pricing and overall comparison of each platforms sign language interpretation features.

Virtual - Set up

Zoom

Sign Language interpretation view

Allow host to assign participants as sign language interpreters who can interpret one language into sign language in real-time. Host can assign interpreters when scheduling or during the meeting. Ⓥ

☐ Enable sign language interpretation view by default in scheduler

10 languages   +

American   Chinese   French   German   Japanese   Russian   Brazilian   Spanish   Mexican

British

Similar to enabling language interpretation in Zoom, the Sign Language interpretation setting can be enabled in the Zoom Web Portal > Settings and is conveniently located directly below the language interpretation setting. With the setting now enabled, the option to enable it in the meeting scheduler will now be available. With language interpretation set for a meeting, the host must add the email of at least 1 interpreter but that is not the case with sign language interpretation. This feature allows the meeting to be scheduled with sign language interpretation enabled and doesn't require adding the email address of an interpreter. In order to access this setting a Zoom One Business plan is required, which starts at CAD $27.00 /user/month and requires a minimum of 10 licesnses to be purchased.

☑ Select sign language interpretation video channels below. You can assign interpreters at any time.
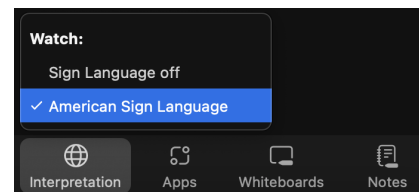
| john@company.com | American Sign Language ⌄ | ✕ |

＋ Add Sign Language Interpreter

Both Microsoft Teams and Webex indirectly provide sign language interpretation without the need to enable a setting prior to the start of the meeting. Since these are not separate features, but are built-in core features to the general usability of the platforms there is technically no purchase required to access these features. These settings are available on all plans, free and paid alike.

Virtual - In Meeting Usage

Zoom

Once in meeting with the sign language interpretation enabled, the attendees will be able to see the glove icon, but instead of the option for a language they will see the option for available sign languages (unless language interpretation is also enabled).
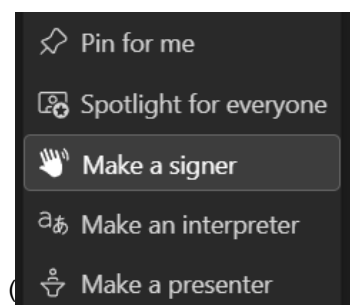
By default, sign language will be off. Once the user enables the feature, they will see a pop-up window with the signers assigned to that sign language. This pop-up window will remain on top of all other windows, no matter what other application windows may open. This ensures that even when the users switch away from the active Zoom window that they can still 'listen' to the meeting just as any other user could.
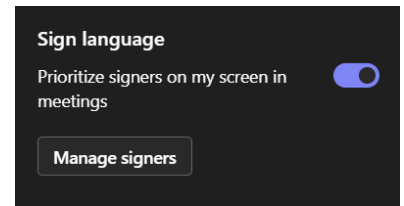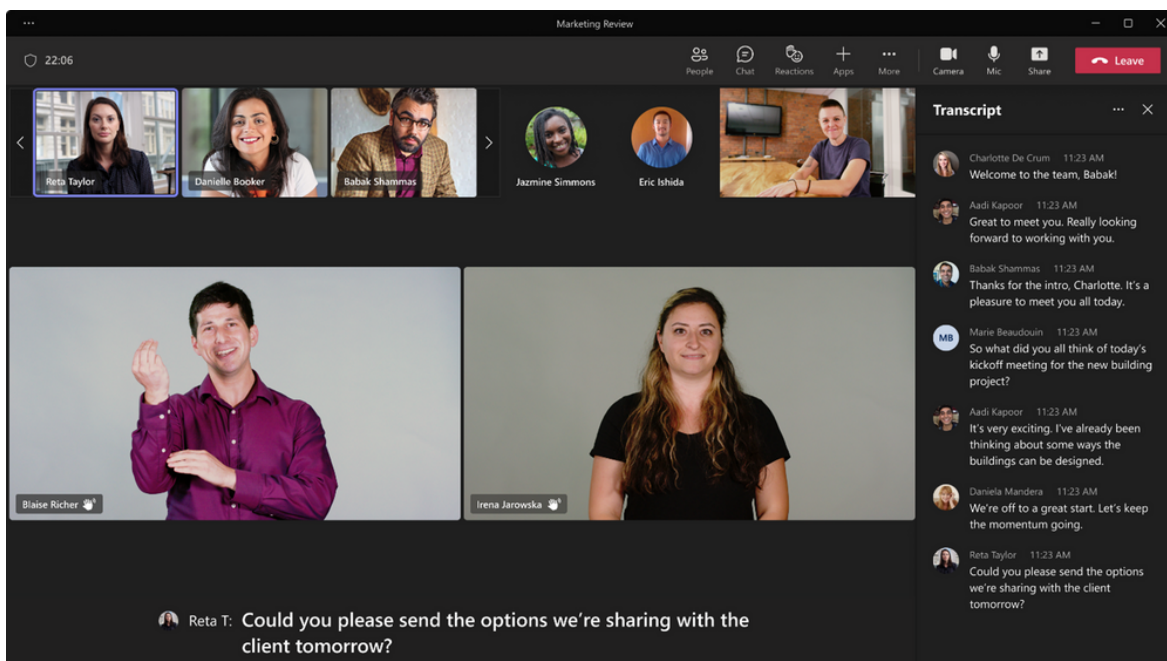
Microsoft Teams

Teams has taken a different approach to supporting sign language interpreters. Since interpretation is generally available on the platform, it's available with all license options. To access the sign language feature, users must select More > Settings > Accessibility while in meeting to access the Acessibility panel. In here, the

option to turn on Sign language as well as Captions can be found. Once Sign langue has been turned on, the option to Manage signers will appear. From here, users can set preferred signers for their meetings. This means that any time that person joins the meeting, their video will be prioritized on the users screen.
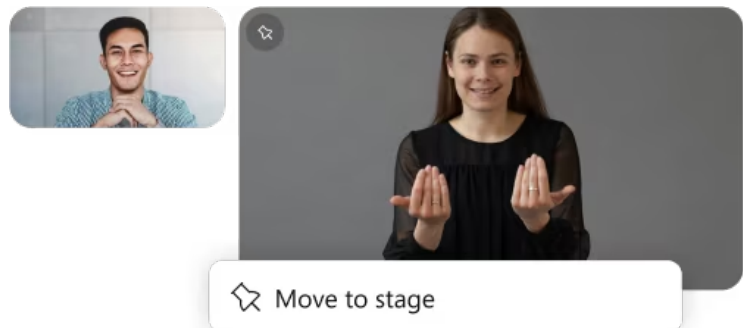

Preferred signers only works if the signer is within the same organization, otherwise they will have to be manually added each time. The good thing about enabling Sign language is that it will be enabled by default on all meetings once it is enabled. With this, a new option will appear in the drop down menu when clicking the more options beside a participants name. This allows users to select an in-meeting signer and, most importantly, allows for external sign language interpreters to be made signers.

Cisco Webex

Webex indirectly supports sign language interpreters by nature of their flexible layout customizer. This gives hosts the ability to pin signers and set custom views for themselves or everyone in the meeting. More specifically, the host can move the signer to the stage (as Webex calls it) and set that view for everyone in the meeting, allowing anyone who is hard of hearing in the meeting to see the

signer. Alternatively, those who are hard of hearing are able to set their own view, pinning the signer and any others if they wish, by selecting Move to stage.

Overall, between the 3 platforms, Zoom has the most comprehensive and accessible sign language interpretation feature. However, it is the most expensive and is only available to users on business level licensing. The approach taken by Teams and Webex can similarly be accomplished in Zoom using the spotlight/pinning feature.

Hybrid

Supporting sign language interpretation at hybrid events or proceedings can be somewhat tricky. There are two main scenarios here to keep in mind.

Signers on-site, Attendees online

With the sign language interpreters on-site at the proceeding or event, you'll need to have a device running the meeting of choice connected to a camera directed at the interpreter. Then, using the same instructions set out above, you can connect the configure the interpreter on the platform of choice for all of the virtual attendees. For those who are on-site, the interpretation process remains the same as the signer will be in a position in the room that is easily visible for those who are hard of hearing.

If the interpreter needs to see the hard of harding participants, a monitor or device can be placed in front of them to display the virtual participants.

Signers online, Attendees on-site

Conversely, if the sign language interpreters are onlin while the attendees are on-site at the proceeding or event, then the setup requires a large monitor or projector & screen. Assuming the virtual setup of the signer has been configured according to the instructions set out above, then the signers video feed needs to be displayed on a large screen capable of sufficiently displaying them for the on-site participants.

Ideally, this screen is large enough to view at a distance which is why we suggest using a projector and screen. All that is required with this configuration is the screen in an easy-to-view position or area with the meeting device connected to the display and the interpreter in view.

For those who are viewing online, the instructions would be the same as the virtual set up and in meeting usage.