

Maryland Deaf Access Committee – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Adapted in part from nycdacao.org
(New York City Deaf Access Committee-AA)

The Maryland Deaf Access Committee (MDAC) is a group of AA members who work in cooperation with our local area and districts to help ensure we can carry the AA message to Deaf AA members seeking recovery from alcoholism. We work specifically with the Area 29 Accessibility Committee, and our work is fully supported by AA Traditions. Our focus is providing ASL (American Sign Language) interpreters to make in-person AA meetings accessible to the Deaf AA member.

We have learned and adapted much from the New York City Deaf Access Committee, Portland Deaf Access Committee, Southern Wisconsin Deaf Access Committee, and Central Texas Deaf Intergroup, to whom we owe much gratitude and appreciation.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing AA members need the fellowship's assistance to receive the message, interact with other AA members, and to be a part of the group. The MDAC exists to foster relationships between the hearing and the Deaf AA member and ensure consistency of AA meetings with qualified interpreters. Because the financial burden of this is too much for any one AA member, or for any one home group, we are requesting that every AA group consider designating a portion of their 7th tradition funds toward our spiritual responsibility: **When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA to be there!** For reference, our Intergroup websites list thousands of in-person meetings per week in Maryland, but none that we know of are interpreted in ASL in person.

Our hope is to make a beginning, build momentum, and ultimately serve 90 in-person meetings in 90 days. We follow all of AA's 12 Traditions and are not affiliated with any outside organization. Our work is also in keeping with the Guidelines from the General Service Office (GSO). at AA.org.

- A.A. Guidelines on Sharing the A.A. Message with the Alcoholic Who Is Deaf
- Serving All Alcoholics – Making the A.A. Message Accessible

For more information on the AA service structure, visit AA.org and the [Area 29](http://Marylandaa.org) website at Marylandaa.org.

Questions and Answers on Accessibility and the Maryland Deaf Access Committee

Can't we just use closed captioning on Zoom? Why do we need an interpreter?

Automatic captioning software leaves the potential for many errors - for example, if a person is speaking very quickly, or mumbling, or their internet connection isn't stable, and so on. If you ever watch TV with live captioning, you'll see countless errors. Also, captioning is a transcription service, not an interpretation service. Transcription is just writing out word for word what is being said without thinking about what it means conceptually - this makes captioning services completely unhelpful for many of AAs references/slogans/expressions, as well as general English turns of phrase and slang - because many of these things are not literal. For example, how would you explain what it means to "turn it over"? Or to "play the tape forward"? Interpretation, on the other hand, takes information from one language and expresses it in another, with full knowledge of both cultures and linguistic differences between the two. In short, transcription is just a bunch of words; interpretation expresses their actual meaning. And as explained farther down, ASL and English are completely different languages - ASL is not just a version of English expressed thru signs. So while many Deaf people grow up bilingual in ASL and English, just typing out English without regard for metaphors/slang/concepts/cultural references/meaning would not be much more helpful than it would be for someone whose first language is Spanish or Italian or any other spoken language.

Can't we use a text-to-speech app or have a fellow type out a transcript on a laptop while sitting next to a Deaf fellow at a meeting? As above, even with the best software available, there would still be errors, and this is still transcription, not interpretation - the difference between the two is vast and very important to understand.

Why are we focusing on in-person meetings and not online/Zoom meetings?

There is already an extensive network of online meetings that are either completely in ASL (which is great) or have ASL interpreters, so there's not as

urgent a need for more online meetings as there is for in-person meetings in Maryland. Visit any Meeting Schedule page in Maryland and scroll to the bottom for a listing of online meetings in ASL or with ASL interpreters. There are none that we are aware of yet.

Another reason is that ASL is a three-dimensional, visual, spatial language, so trying to fully express a 3D language via a 2D screen is not ideal. In addition, online platforms allow a lot of potential for poor communication due to poor lighting/internet service/sound issues. It's not just the Deaf person and interpreter who need a good connection, it's also every person in the meeting who speaks because the interpreter needs to be able to interpret and the Deaf person should be able to see them, as well.

Also, hearing people have access to both in-person and online meetings, we believe the Deaf should as well. While access to Zoom meetings saved countless lives during the early days (and years) of Covid, in-person meetings have many benefits and offer a very different experience of AA, especially when it comes to "the meeting before (and after) the meeting" - in-person meetings allow connecting with other AAs and going to get coffee, etc, to happen in-the-moment.

How much does it cost? We will pay our interpreters \$60-70 for a 1-hour meeting. We are grateful to have connections and support from the interpreting community to be able to make that happen.

Why is it so expensive? Certified, qualified, highly skilled interpreters (like the ones we are grateful to use) would typically be paid \$125-\$150/hr on the low end of the scale. So \$70/hr without context might seem like a big number, but with context, it is actually a very good deal, especially for the quality of service we receive. We're also saving money by contacting interpreters directly, instead of thru an interpreting agency - many of which have their own (higher) pay rates and require a 2-hour minimum to be paid, even if the meeting is only an hour long. When we've told our local districts and area committees about paying \$70/hr, they were shocked to learn we were able to get certified interpreters for such a low rate, as they're aware it's usually much more expensive.

What is the money used for? Money from the Maryland Deaf Access Committee is only used to pay interpreters at AA meetings, in our business meeting, and in

the future for the cost of a basic website. We do not use funds for anything else. When we have a website, we will model the other Deaf Access sites with full transparency using a page to download our monthly treasury reports which include the lists of which meetings the funds were paid for interpreters at each month. Until then, you may reach out to our email address for that information.

Why are we paying interpreters instead of just finding volunteers? This question is addressed on the page about our work and AA's 12 Traditions, under Tradition 8.

Doesn't this fund violate the 6th Tradition? No. The Maryland Deaf Access Committee is an AA service committee, not an outside enterprise, and provides a service within AA to AA members.

Shouldn't having interpreters paid for by the Deaf Access Fund be considered an "outside contribution" to a group and therefore in violation of the 7th Tradition? The Maryland Deaf Access Committee is an AA service committee, and we are within the Traditions to recompense a professional in fees for services.

Should interpreters be allowed at meetings? Will shares be kept confidential? Yes, interpreters should be allowed at all meetings. Open meetings are open to all, but even for closed meetings - professional interpreters adhere to a strict code of professional conduct co-authored by the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). There are seven tenets that establish guiding principles for professional conduct, the first of which is about confidentiality.

Questions about the Deaf/Hard of Hearing, ASL, and Interpreters

What is the proper terminology? You should use "D/deaf" or "hard of hearing." Terms like "hearing impaired" and "deaf-mute" are generally considered offensive, in addition to being antiquated. "Hearing impaired" was once considered the preferred term, but should no longer be used. Some people identify as "late-deafened," to indicate that they became deaf later in life. See a more detailed explanation on The National Association of the Deaf website: <https://www.nad.org/>

What's the difference between deaf (lowercase d) and Deaf (capital D)? Please see the website for the National Association of the Deaf for more information. When we have a website, all of our references will be hyperlinks.

Is ASL a universal language for the Deaf? No. It's American Sign Language. It is estimated that there are approximately 300 different signed languages around the world. American Sign Language is more closely related to French Sign Language than to British Sign Language, even though the opposite is true for the spoken languages in those countries. See again the website for The National Association of the Deaf.

How is ASL different from English? While many people think of ASL as a word-for-word version of English expressed thru signs; ASL is a full, rich, linguistically complex language that stands alone from English, same as any other spoken language you're familiar with. In brief, "Like the words of other languages, ASL signs express meanings, not English words." Click [here](#) to download the full article that quote is taken from - it explains some of the many differences between English and ASL. Source: The Linguistic Society of America.

What is an interpreter? The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) is a national professional organization for interpreters who use signed and spoken languages, committed to providing ethical, high-quality interpreters, focused on continuous professional development. For more information on RID, please visit www.rid.org.

Spread the Word - the AA Fellowship

If you would like a member of the Maryland Deaf Access Committee to come speak to your group about the history and purpose of the Deaf Access Committee, answer questions, or find out how to help us, one of us will be happy to come to your group conscience. We will have a sign-up sheet available and plan to be in contact for an opportunity to visit.

Thank You

Thanks to all who are willing to assist in carrying the message to our Deaf AA members, who are reaching out for our help and want to have the same access to the message of hope as other members of our fellowship. Bill W. said, "When we

are generous with the hat, we give a token that we are grateful for our blessings and evidence that we are eager to share what we have found with all who still suffer.”

For additional information, please contact us at MarylandDeafAccess@gmail.com. To contribute electronically to the Fund read below. To contribute in cash or check, please contact us by email. Please provide your district and group name, city and state. Individuals may contribute as well.

How to Contribute

**Adapted from Southern Wisconsin Deaf Access
The 7th Tradition Contribution**

To contribute toward our primary purpose in helping carry the message to our deaf AA members, some groups pass a separate basket designated for this purpose, and some groups and districts set aside a specified amount per month or quarter. After consulting with your home group members, through the group conscience, please send designated amounts to the following address, noting your home group name, district number, and area.

PayPal/MarylandDeafAccess@gmail.com

Venmo: @District18-21228 Important: please note your contributions with “ASL”
Scan this QR Code:



We rely on contributions from AA members and groups to pay for ASL interpreters. The Maryland Deaf Access treasury is a fund set up similar to district

bank accounts. The primary focus is on providing access to AA for the Deaf and help ensure that we carry the message to all those seeking recovery.

For more information on similar services for the Deaf in AA that have been in service to AA members much longer, please search for these websites:

the **Portland Deaf Access Committee** (established in 2001), <https://pdacaa.org/>

the **Central Texas Deaf Intergroup** (established in 2010), and <https://centexdeafintergroup.org/>

the **New York City Deaf Access Committee** (established in 2022). <https://nycdacaa.org/>

You are also welcome to attend our monthly business meeting. MDAC Monthly Business Meetings are held on the Second Sunday of the month at 4:30 p.m. Eastern. Contact MarylandDeafAccess@gmail.com for more information.