

New Jersey Department of Human Services
Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Communication and Language Access Services

I. Purpose and Intent

The New Jersey Department of Human Services' Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DDHH) intends to provide grant funding to New Jersey counties to promote communication and language access for deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind residents of all ages. This Request for Letters of Interest (this RLI) seeks to assist counties in providing communication and language access to their residents by providing funding for the following initiatives:

- Installation of hearing induction loops. https://www.hearingloss.org/wp-content/uploads/HearingLoopSystems_AGuidetoBestPracticeforServiceProviders.pdf
- Installation of public videophones and associated connectivity costs.
- Expanding access to sign language interpreter services.
<https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddhh/services/caption/>
- Expanding access to captioning services.
<https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddhh/assets/documents/CartList.pdf>
- Development and/or provision of community/educational/or healthcare-related programming or services accessible in American Sign Language (ASL).

This is a second-round grant. **Only counties that were not awarded funding in the first-round are eligible to apply.** Interested counties must submit a Letter of Interest (LOI) that details which entities/areas in their respective counties will be recipients of the funding and for which purpose according to the initiatives listed above. Selected respondents will be fully responsible for coordinating and distributing grant funds awarded through this RLI as designated in their LOI. Funds for interpreter and captioning services will prioritize innovative pilot programs with a goal of self-sustainability after expiration of the grant and respondents that show hardship in meeting American Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements for communication and language access. Potential areas to consider for the funding opportunities are county libraries, local community centers, independent living centers, community theatres, airports, non-profit organizations focused on health equity, county jails, municipal and county government agencies, parent-run organizations/groups and county courthouses. Counties are encouraged to consider multiple initiatives (for example, the county library may be interested in installing a public videophone, hearing induction loop, and in developing programs accessible in ASL; the county jail may only need a public videophone for sign language users who are incarcerated to make a telephone call; parent-run/local community organizations may need expansion of interpreter services). Funds for development of programming, services, or content accessible in ASL can be for either children or adults who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind.

The following summarizes the anticipated RLI timeline:

- January 11, 2024 Release of RLI
- January 25, 2024 DHS prospective Respondent presentation
- February 16, 2024 Deadline for submission of questions
- February 23, 2024 Deadline for receipt of Letters of Interest
- TBD Announcement of selected respondent(s)

II. Background and Population Served

Deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind residents face communication and language barriers in accessing county and community-based services, critical health/emergency information, public services, and public educational programming. The mission of DDHH is to provide education, advocacy and direct services to eliminate barriers and promote increased accessibility to programs, services, and information routinely available to the state's general population.

This RLI seeks to promote inclusion of deaf and hard of hearing residents in their county's services and programs. Deaf individuals who use sign language rely on access to videophones for telecommunications as it allows individuals to communicate on the phone using sign language.

Additionally, providing educational content in ASL or providing ASL interpreters to interpret content that is made available to the general public is a way to include deaf and hard of hearing residents in programs and services that are routinely available to everyone else.

Captioning services are a helpful way to provide access to content to those who have a hearing loss and whose primary language is English. Captioning services are provided by Communication Access Real-time Transcription (CART) professionals.

DDHH maintains a directory of sign language interpreters and CART providers which can be found here: <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddhh/services/caption/>

III. Funding Availability

This is a second-round grant. **Only counties that were not awarded funding in the first-round are eligible to apply.** Total funding available through this RLI is \$600,000. Counties could potentially receive a maximum award of up to \$70,000. DHS has sole discretion on the final award amount(s). Amount of award will vary according to each county's proposed needs. All respondents are advised that the award(s) is conditional upon final contract and budget negotiation.

IV. Respondent Requirements

1. Respondents must be a county government agency in New Jersey and LOIs can be submitted on behalf of the County Human Service Director, County Executive, County Commissioner, or other relevant position.

2. All respondents must discuss and get input from the entities within their County on what areas they can provide communication and language access to deaf and hard of hearing residents.
3. All successful awardees will be required to submit a quarterly progress report to DDHH.
4. Successful respondents will be required to undergo the DDHH's deaf and hard of hearing sensitivity training prior to receiving funding.
5. Successful respondents will be required to post public signage where hearing induction loops have been installed and/or where sign language interpreting and captioning services are available.
6. Successful respondents will be required to organize at least one public relations effort (ex: ribbon cutting ceremony to showcase the product and/or press release) recognizing DDHH's funding for this effort and its availability to New Jersey residents.
7. Products and promotional materials arising from this funding will be required to include the DDHH logo. Examples include, but are not limited to, brochures, flyers, and signage for loops and sign language interpreting and captioning services.
8. Sign language interpreters and captionists must be retained through DDHH's online directory. <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddhh/services/caption/>
9. By receiving grant funds, successful respondents agree to have their efforts published.
10. Successful respondents must get DDHH approval in selecting vendors to provide services. Vendors should have primary experience providing ASL and deaf and hard of hearing services.

Please note that all costs encompassed by funds under this RLI must be incurred no later than June 30, 2025.

V. LOI Requirements

LOIs must be limited to five (5) pages and must be single-spaced with one (1") inch margins, normal character spacing that is not condensed, and no smaller than twelve (12) point Arial, Courier New or Times New Roman font and include the information specified below. DDHH will not consider any information submitted beyond the page limit.

The following information must be submitted in a LOI to be considered for funding under this RLI:

- A. All LOIs must be on County (or County agency) letterhead.
- B. Proposed estimated Budget
- C. Narrative

A. Project Description

Detail the following:

- Describe the areas of need, project goals, and objectives, in the County in terms of communication and language access for deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind residents.
- Detail how the County will allocate funding to the identified entities/areas.

B. Implementation Timeline

Please provide a proposed project timeline starting from notification of award (anticipated on February 23, 2024) through June 30, 2024.

C. Estimated Budget

VI. Submission Instructions

The LOIs should be combined into a single PDF document. Respondents should email the combined single PDF document to Melissa Spirito at melissa.spirito@dhs.nj.gov no later than **5:00 pm ET on February 23, 2024.**