

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.
Affiliate Chapter Relations Committee

Affiliate Chapter Handbook
Third Edition
Section 13

Speakers Bureau:
Tooting Your Own Horn

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Speakers Bureau

The best way to connect with your community is to get out into it. One of the most effective, low-cost ways to begin doing so is by starting an affiliate chapter speakers bureau. Giving talks to local clubs, schools, churches, service organizations and professional groups not only gives the affiliate chapter the chance to take its message directly to local audiences; it also provides the perfect opportunity to begin building relationships with those audiences.

Preferring to “do business” with people we know is part of human nature, and a speakers bureau is a great vehicle for getting people in the community to feel they know the affiliate chapter. Meeting a goodwill ambassador from the affiliate chapter and hearing him or her give a talk allows people to “put a face” with interpreting and the affiliate chapter. That alone can go a long way toward changing the perception some people have about what is involved in interpreting.

I. Whether the affiliate chapter is starting a speakers bureau for the first time or just wants to improve the speakers bureau that already exists, here are eight tips that will help:

A. Determine your purpose

The purpose may be to build community relationships or it may be to educate the community regarding specific needs (e.g. licensure, standards, working conditions, etc.) or it may be both. Be flexible enough to recognize that your needs/purpose may change with time.

B. Give the same amount of attention to setting up and promoting your speakers bureau as you do to planning and publicizing a special event.

A good speakers bureau has the potential, over time, to bring significant and lasting rewards. One that is poorly planned and operated, however, is likely to be a public relations disaster.

C. Choose the right speakers.

For most community speaking engagements, enthusiasm, personality and the ability to “read” and engage the audience are more important qualities than a deep and exhaustive knowledge of the subject matter. Studies have shown that 93% of a presentation’s impact is due to the speaker’s voice and body language. The seven percent that is content is important, of course, but the other 93% will build the good community relationships affiliate chapters seek.

D. Consider using board members and volunteers.

Having a large pool of speakers to draw from not only lets the affiliate chapter reach more groups, but also makes it easier to create a speakers bureau that is adaptable.

E. If you don't have enough people in your organization who aren't terrified of public speaking or aren't well suited for it, ask for help.

Consider asking for help from your local Toastmasters Club. Toastmasters International is a non-profit educational organization that teaches people how to become effective public speakers. There are 8,500 chapters worldwide, and you can find contact information for your local club at the Toastmasters International website. (www.toastmasters.org)

F. Publicize your speakers bureau.

Send out press releases, add a promotional page to your website, and contact clubs and organizations directly – preferably by phone. This approach allows you to make a personal connection, which is more effective and much less expensive than an impersonal direct-mail campaign. If you don't already have a list of social, service, religious, or legislative groups in your community, ask your public library and United Way. Develop a directory that includes names of speakers and their areas of expertise.

G. Have a short “de-briefing session” with each speaker shortly after each talk.

While the details are still fresh, the members of the speakers bureau should get the speaker's insights and impressions about the audience and about ways the affiliate chapter might forge an ongoing relationship with the group.

H. Hold monthly or bimonthly speaker meetings.

This will give people a chance to share their experiences, discuss ideas for future presentations, and keep the enthusiasm going.

II. The above tips are important to consider if your major goal is to build community relationships. There may be other considerations if your purpose is to educate or to testify:

A. Make sure all speakers deliver a consistent message.

No matter who is presenting for your affiliate chapter, all speakers must be properly trained and familiar with the presentation. This is why it helps to create an outline for presenters to follow. The outline provides consistency and a common template for your presenters. Bring speakers together in advance for the purpose of sharing background on

the “issue”. Hold the initial meeting in a relaxed setting. Introduce an agenda and review the entire presentation with your speakers. Ask them to contribute ideas or suggestions. This will help give your speakers a sense of ownership.

B. Consider the development of audiovisual materials.

Audiovisual materials will give speakers the chance to make a more professional and consistent presentation. These materials can include sound systems, overheads, slides, videotapes, DVDs, or even computer-generated presentations. Creating and producing audiovisual presentations can be costly in terms of both money and time. There are several things to consider when pursuing this option:

1. How much money is budgeted for this project?
2. How much time can the speakers spend putting together the information?
3. What’s the speaker’s knowledge of what makes an effective audiovisual presentation?
4. What’s the speaker’s comfort level with these types of materials?
5. Where will the presentations be held and what audiovisual capabilities are available?

C. Plan time to practice the presentation/testimony.

Take turns giving the presentation in front of members of the speakers bureau. Critique each other. Make sure the message, audiovisuals, and presentation style accomplish the intended goal.

III. One final thought: establish, in writing, any needed policies.

- A. How does the bureau decide who goes out on what speaking assignment?**
- B. Are speakers reimbursed for any costs incurred, such as parking or meals?**
- C. What is the procedure for reimbursement?**
- D. If an honorarium is offered, how is that to be handled?**
- E. Do members have specialty areas?**

For example, does one person handle requests on educational interpreting while another member handles requests on licensure of interpreters?

F. What is your budget?

IV. If you still have questions about setting up a speakers bureau or for additional help consider using these resources:

A. Toastmasters International (or other public speaking groups)

B. Local Chamber of Commerce

C. Farm Bureaus (many have a strong speakers bureau)

D. The speech or communications department of a local college; often they will make available the services of a graduate student

E. “Public speaking” in the Yellow Pages

F. Internet

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