# Vocational Rehabilitation Standards for Providers Manual Chapter 24: Communication Access Services

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## 24.1 Overview of Communication Access Services

"Communication access services" is a global term that describes the provision of sign language interpretation, transliteration, and/or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services to those with hearing and/or speech disabilities.

Sign language interpreting and CART services are provided by qualified individual service providers that facilitate communication between hearing individuals and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. To meet the needs of VR customers who are deaf or hard of hearing, Texas Workforce Commission –VR (TWC-VR) contracts with providers that possess the depth, breadth, and quality of resources necessary to provide communication access services.

Providers are responsible for coordinating and providing VR communication access services according to the needs of the customer as specified on the service authorization. Services must be provided in accordance with the applicable professional and ethical standards of the individual service provider and consist of facilitating communication for customers from a variety of cultures and backgrounds in a variety of settings.

TWC-VR contracts with qualified providers with expertise in the following areas:

* Sign language interpreting services for American Sign Language (ASL) and other forms of sign language, depending on a customer's preferred mode of communication. Also included in this area are Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) services, Trilingual Interpreting services, and Tactile Interpreting services, which uses sign language and touch fingerspelling with one or two hands.
* CART services, which occur when verbal information is converted into text and displayed on a computer, television, or projection screen for an individual to read and follow. Providers must be able to provide services on-site or remotely.

Communication Access Services may be provided to a single customer or multiple customers in various settings. Due to the physical demands of providing these services, with some assignments lasting more than one hour, two or more individual providers may be required. Additionally, circumstances may arise when services must be provided by a noncertified interpreter, which requires TWC-VR approval. For more information, refer to 24.3.1 Service Description.

## 24.2 Staff Qualifications

The contractor and contractor staff members who provide the services described in this chapter also must comply with Chapters 1–3 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Standards for Providers (VR-SFP) manual.

### 24.2.1 Certified Interpreter

A certified interpreter must hold a current certificate issued by the [Texas Health and Human Services (HHS) Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI)](https://www.hhs.texas.gov/providers/assistive-services-providers/board-evaluation-interpreters-certification-program), or a certificate of interpreter competency issued by the [Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID)](https://rid.org/). Certified interpreters are governed by the [Code of Professional Conduct of the National Association of the Deaf and by RID](https://www.hhs.texas.gov/providers/assistive-services-providers/board-evaluation-interpreters-certification-program/code-professional-conduct), as adopted by HHS.

### 24.2.2 Certified Deaf Interpreter

Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs) must hold a CDI certificate issued by RID.

### 24.2.3 Trilingual Interpreter

A trilingual interpreter must hold an advanced or master trilingual certification issued by the HHS Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI).

### 24.2.4 Noncertified Interpreter

A noncertified interpreter lacks interpreter certification but can interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialized vocabulary. A noncertified interpreter may be a hearing interpreter or a deaf interpreter.

### 24.2.5 Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) Provider

A CART provider must hold one of the following:

* A current CART Certification Level I through Level V certificate of competency issued by the [Texas Court Reporters Association](https://www.tcra-online.com/)
* A current [Certified Realtime Reporter (CRR)](https://www.ncra.org/certification/NCRA-Certifications/certified-realtime-reporter) certificate
* A Certified CART Provider (CCP) certificate
* A Certified Broadcast Captioner (CBC) certificate
* A [Certified Realtime Captioner (CRC)](https://www.ncra.org/certification/NCRA-Certifications/certified-realtime-captioner) certificate of competency issued by the National Court Reporter Association

## 24.3 Interpreting Services

### 24.3.1 Service Description

An interpreter conveys messages between individuals without contributing to the dialogue. TWC-VR uses interpreter services to facilitate communication with customers during the rehabilitation process.

Interpreter services are provided by qualified interpreters and include:

* sign language and oral interpretation for customers who are deaf or hard of hearing; and
* tactile interpretation for customers who are deafblind.

Interpreting services include the provision of voice to sign, sign to voice, gestural to sign, sign to gestural, voice to visual, or visual to voice communication access. Qualified individual service providers must receptively and expressively interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, using any necessary specialized vocabulary. Interpreting services may be provided in an individual or group setting.

An out-of-area assignment occurs when the interpreter's assigned location is more than 20 minutes of driving one way based on the shortest time as determined by [MapQuest](https://www.mapquest.com/); however, if an address is not found on MapQuest, [Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps/) must be used. Out-of-area travel will be calculated for travel time at the hourly rate charged in 15-minute increments for the time driving to and from the requested out-of-area location.

Interpreting services can vary based on a customer's individual needs. Types of specialized interpreters include, but are not limited to, the following:

#### Tactile Interpreter

A tactile interpreter provides services to a deafblind individual who receives information by sense of touch with one or two hands.

#### Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI)

A CDI is a certified interpreter who is deaf or hard of hearing and works in tandem with a hearing interpreter. A CDI possesses native signing ability and lifelong experiences as a deaf or hard-of-hearing individual and has undergone specialized training to become an interpreter.

#### Trilingual Interpreter

A trilingual interpreter is a certified interpreter who is able to meaningfully and accurately understand, produce, and transform conversations between a signed language, the English language, and a language other than English.

A certified interpreter is always preferred; however, a service authorization for the use of a noncertified interpreter may be issued when the following criteria are met:

* Use of a noncertified interpreter is authorized in writing by the customer.
* Use of a noncertified interpreter requires consultation with the VR program specialist for the deaf and hard of hearing. A case note indicating that the consultation has been completed must be entered in ReHabWorks before services are provided.

### 24.3.2 Process and Procedure

The provider is contacted to arrange communication access services. The provider schedules the services for the time and location that meets the customer's needs.

When a noncertified interpreter is used, the customer's signature on a document verifying the time, length, and location of service provision must be received along with the service authorization and written authorization from the customer. The communication access service provider also signs the document and then submits it with an invoice for payment. When the provider is required to travel out-of-area, prior approval must be obtained from VR and shall be based on the hourly rate charged for the interpreter rates from [Texas Health and Human Services (HHS), Communication Services for State Agencies (CSSA), CSSA Maximum Rates](https://www.hhs.texas.gov/business/contracting-hhs/communication-services-state-agencies-cssa/cssa-maximum-rates). For more information on lodging and per diem, refer to 24.5 Communication Access Reimbursement of Travel Costs.

Exception:

Cancellation of services within a period of less than 48 hours of the scheduled service, including cancellation upon arrival.

A cancellation upon arrival occurs when a communication access provider:

* arrives at a scheduled appointment for a VR customer and the customer does not arrive to the scheduled appointment. Provider must wait after scheduled appointment time for at least 30 minutes; and
* does not cancel the services within a period of at least 48 hours of the scheduled service.

### 24.3.3 Outcomes Required for Payment

For interpreting services, the provider must submit the following for payment:

* Complete and accurate invoice, and
* Documentation on a separate document or on the invoice of the following:
	+ Customer name
	+ Location where service was provided indicating any service provided remotely
	+ Assignment date and time
	+ Assignment duration
	+ All addresses traveled to during the round-trip (if billing for travel time)
	+ Service provider name
	+ Service provider certification level

Invoices for cancellation fees, including cancellation upon arrival, must state the fees being billed are cancellation fees and not actual services provided.

## 24.4 Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) Services

### 24.4.1 Service Description

CART services display complete translation of all spoken words and environmental sounds to communicate a message among two or more parties. It entails provision of a word-for-word speech-to-text translation displayed on a screen.

An out-of-area assignment occurs when the CART provider's assigned location is more than 20 minutes of driving one way based on the shortest time as determined by [MapQuest](https://www.mapquest.com/); however, if an address is not found on MapQuest, [Google Maps](https://www.google.com/maps/) must be used. Out-of-area travel will be calculated for travel time at the hourly rate charged in 15-minute increments for the time driving to and from the requested out-of-area location.

### 24.4.2 Process and Procedure

The provider is contacted to arrange communication access services. The provider schedules the services for the time and location that meets the customer's needs.

When the customer receives communication access services, the communication access service provider must obtain the customer's signature on a document verifying the time, length, and location of service provision. The communication access service provider also signs the document and then submits it with an invoice for payment.

When the provider is required to travel out-of-area, prior approval must be obtained from VR and shall be based on the hourly rate charged for the interpreter rates as per [Texas Health and Human Services (HHS), Communication Services for State Agencies (CSSA), CSSA Maximum Rates](https://www.hhs.texas.gov/business/contracting-hhs/communication-services-state-agencies-cssa/cssa-maximum-rates). For more information on lodging and per diem, refer to 24.5 Communication Access Reimbursement of Travel Costs.

Exceptions:

* When CART services are provided remotely, the unedited transcript of the CART services must accompany the invoice for payment.
* When a scheduled service is cancelled less than 48 hours before the scheduled service, including cancellation upon arrival.

### 24.4.3 Outcomes Required for Payment

For CART services, the provider must submit the following for payment:

* Complete and accurate invoice, and
* Documentation on a separate document or on the invoice of the following:
	+ Customer name
	+ Location where service was provided indicating any service provided remotely
	+ Assignment date and time
	+ Assignment duration
	+ All addresses traveled to during the round-trip (if billing for travel time)
	+ Service provider name
	+ Service provider certification level

For remote CART services, the provider must submit the following for payment:

* Unedited transcript in Microsoft Word
* Complete and accurate invoice

Invoices for cancellation fees, including cancellation upon arrival, must state the fees being billed are cancellation fees and not actual services provided.

## 24.5 Communication Access Reimbursement of Travel Costs

### 24.5.1 Service Description

For out-of-area travel, the reimbursement of travel-related costs is based on round-trip travel and payment can include reimbursement of approved:

* lodging; and
* per diem.

The VR program does not reimburse for travel expenses to transport customers.

Providers do not qualify for a state tax exemption.

Travel per diem for overnight accommodations may be provided only with prior approval from VR with a service authorization for projected travel costs. Lodging and meal reimbursements are approved by VR and must use the information in the fee schedule.

### 24.5.2 Process and Procedures

After the VR counselor determines there is not a provider to serve the customer within his or her local community, the following process and procedures apply.

To be reimbursed for any travel costs, such as for meals and lodging:

* The communication access services are scheduled with the provider and the customer is notified the services are scheduled.
* At the time of scheduling the communication access services, the provider advises VR staff that reimbursement of travel costs will be required, in addition to providing an estimate of these costs.
* The provider receives service authorization for the projected cost after prior approval is received.
* The service authorization includes separate line items for each of the allowable expenses.
* The provider travels from the defined provider location to the service location and provides the services before returning to the provider location.

The provider submits the required documentation for payment.

### 24.5.3 Outcomes Required for Payment

The communication access provider must submit the following for payment:

* Complete and accurate invoice, and
* Documentation on a separate document or on the invoice of the following:
	+ Customer name
	+ Location where service was provided indicating any service provided remotely
	+ Assignment date and time
	+ Assignment duration
	+ All addresses traveled to during the round-trip (if billing for travel time)
	+ Copies of receipts and supporting documentation for all expenses
	+ Service provider name
	+ Service provider certification level

## 24.6 Communication Access Fee Schedules

Below are some of the factors used by HHS in determining fees paid for Communication Access Services:

Rates for interpreters and CART services are based on several factors. Below are the definitions that determine what rates apply:

* Day: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., weekdays (Monday through Friday)
* Evening: 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m., weekdays (Monday through Friday)
* Weekend: 5:00 p.m. Friday to 8:00 a.m. Monday
* Last Minute: service requests made with less than 48 hours' (two business days') advance notice

#### Interpreter Certification Levels

* Level A:  BEI Level I\Ii, II\Iii, Basic, OC:B; NIC; RID CI, CT, IC, TC, and NAD III
* Level B:  BEI III\IIIi, Advanced, OC:C, OC:V; NIC Advanced; RID CSC, IC\TC, CI\CT, RSC, CDI, and NAD IV
* Level C:  BEI IV\IVi, V\Vi, Master; NIC Master; RID MCSC, SC: L, and NAD V

For additional factors refer to [Texas Health and Human Services (HHS), Communication Services for State Agencies (CSSA), CSSA Maximum Rates](https://www.hhs.texas.gov/business/contracting-hhs/communication-services-state-agencies-cssa/cssa-maximum-rates).

### 24.6.1 Interpreter Rates

Rates for interpreters are listed in the [Texas Health and Human Services (HHS), Communication Services for State Agencies (CSSA), CSSA Maximum Rates](https://www.hhs.texas.gov/business/contracting-hhs/communication-services-state-agencies-cssa/cssa-maximum-rates). The Guidelines of the page do not apply.

When a session exceeds the original approved time, last-minute rates must be billed at the Additional Quarter Hour rates under Interpreter Rates—Evening/Weekend and must be approved by the VR counselor.

### 24.6.2 CART Rates

Rates for CART services are listed in the [Texas Health and Human Services (HHS), Communication Services for State Agencies (CSSA), CSSA Maximum Rates](https://www.hhs.texas.gov/business/contracting-hhs/communication-services-state-agencies-cssa/cssa-maximum-rates). The Guidelines section of the page do not apply.

When a session exceeds the original approved time, last-minute rates must be billed at the Additional Quarter Hour rates under CART Rates—Evening/Weekend and must be approved by the VR counselor.

### 24.6.3 Travel Rates

#### Lodging

The cost of lodging is reimbursed only if it is incurred at a commercial lodging establishment.

The provider should use the least expensive lodging available. The provider cannot exceed the rates allowed on the published US General Services Administration's (GSA) Federal Domestic Maximum Per Diem Rates website. If the county is listed instead of the city, use the county's daily rate found on the [GSA Federal Domestic Maximum Per Diem Rates](https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates) website.

Reimbursement includes:

* the cost of the room;
* city, county, state, and other hotel taxes; and
* the fee for self-parking when applicable.

#### Meals

Meals are only reimbursed if:

* the provider is away from the identified provider location for at least six consecutive hours; and
* overnight travel is required.

Receipts are required for meals to be reimbursed.

Gratuities are not reimbursed. Taxes are reimbursed but are already included in the allowed per diem rate. Alcohol expenses are not reimbursed.

To determine the per diem rate, refer to the [Domestic Maximum Per Diem Rates](https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates) published by the GSA. If the county is listed instead of the appropriate city, the VR counselor uses the county's daily rate.