



Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification

Frequently Asked Questions Research Services

1. What is the Consortium?

The Consortium is a multi-state partnership dedicated to developing court interpreter proficiency tests, making tests available to member states, and regulating the use of the tests. Consortium resources achieve economies of scale across jurisdictional and organizational boundaries.

The Consortium addresses resource shortages by defining and implementing standards for identifying proficient, qualified interpreters. Without those standards, state courts risk employing unqualified interpreters, leaving equal access to justice by linguistic minorities an unfulfilled obligation.

In 2002, the Consortium was named as a finalist in the prestigious Innovations in American Government awards program. That program is administered by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and is sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

At the end of 2005, there were 34 member states representing over two-thirds of the nation's non-English speaking population. For current membership information, click the "back" button and go to "Which states belong to the Consortium?"

[Top](#)

2. When and how was the Consortium founded?

The Consortium was officially founded in July 1995 by Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, and Washington. This came about as a consequence of findings and professional relationships established during research conducted by the National Center for State Courts between 1992 and 1995 (See Hewitt, William E., *Court Interpretation: Model Guides for Policy and Practice in the State Courts*, Williamsburg, VA, National Center for State Courts, 1995. (This publication is available online. Go back to the Court Interpretation home page and click on National Center for State Courts' and Other Important Publications.)

The NCSC research showed that establishing an interstate authority with the capacity to coordinate test development efforts and investments on a national scale was both desirable and feasible. In 1994, judicial leaders in Minnesota and Oregon, who were committed to improving interpreter programs in their states, asked the National Center for State Courts for assistance in developing interpreter testing programs of equal quality and effectiveness to those then in existence in New Jersey and Washington (which were studied and documented in the *Model Guides* publication). Acting on that opportunity, staff of the NCSC invited representatives of those four states to work together with the NCSC to create a voluntary program in which member states could pool financial resources and professional expertise to eliminate duplication of expense and effort, and lower the cost of interpreter test development and administration for all of the member states. Thus, the Consortium was created to counter the high costs of test development and associated proprietary interests by providing a vehicle for exchange of expertise while safeguarding work products.

[Top](#)

3. What are the conditions of membership?

- Make a financial contribution
 - 25,000 for most states

- \$15,000 for states with fewer than 100,000 home speakers of languages other than English
- \$50,000 for states with more than 1 million home speakers of languages other than English
- After five years of membership, pay an annual assessment equal to 10% of the initial membership fee.
- Appoint an official representative of the state to participate in Consortium business.
- Agree to abide by test administration and security standards.
- Participate in governance and program development activities.
- For a sample of the Consortium Agreement, click the “back” button and click on Official Agreements for Consortium Organization and Operation.

[Top](#)

4. What are the advantages of Consortium membership?

Testing—the objective determination of an individual’s interpreting skills—is the foundation for programs to improve interpreting services. The core concept behind the Consortium is to: *“establish court interpretation test development and administration standards, and provide testing materials, in order that individual states and jurisdictions may have the necessary tools and guidance to implement certification programs.”* Equally important as the test development cost savings, however, are the benefits that go with belonging to a standardized national testing program.

• ***Published test documentation enhances the credibility and legitimacy of the testing program***

The Consortium has prepared and maintains standardized manuals for test construction, test administration (including a candidate information booklet), and test rater training. This documentation is housed at the National Center for State Courts office, and serves as the foundation for meeting the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education, 1985). Standard 5 relates to the publication of technical and users manuals.

• ***Maintenance and publication of test validity and reliability statistics***

Standards 1 and 2 of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* relate to validity and reliability. Item-level data are maintained for tests to analyze and report validity and reliability statistics, when appropriate, for each test form. This analysis protects the courts from legal challenges and helps identify weak test items so they may be replaced in subsequent tests.

• ***Participation in a standardized testing program permits interstate reciprocity***

The use of standardized testing instruments, administration and test rating procedures makes it possible for Consortium members to establish certification reciprocity. This means that in most cases, interpreters tested in other member states need not be retested in the home member state. The National Center for State Courts maintains a central database of all interpreters who have been tested using Consortium tests. Positive identification is possible because records are maintained using the person’s social security number as record id number. Members of the Consortium are entitled to obtain the master list of interpreters who have been tested in other states.

• ***Test administration innovations***

Consortium member states have used the National Center for State Courts as their test administration contractor during their initial round of testing. With repeated experience, the Center was able to make

specific recommendations to refine the testing procedures and implement several modifications of conventional testing that save money and time. The Consortium also saves money by coordinating states' testing for languages other than Spanish, where low numbers of test takers tend to increase per test cost.

- **Training**

Consortium members have established a standard core curriculum and training materials for basic orientation workshops for all interpreters employed in the courts, regardless of language. Most member states offers these workshops, and the reviews from workshops have been overwhelmingly positive.

- **Comprehensive networking resource**

Members of the Consortium maintain communication, share problems and solutions and stand together as a body capable of influencing policy and practice for improving the quality of interpreter services nationwide. Information exchange among the members results in shared policy documents, court rules, forms and statistics.

[Top](#)

5. What tests are available to members?

<i>Language</i>	<i>Number of test forms</i>
Arabic	1
Cantonese	1
Haitian Creole	2
Hmong	1
Korean	1
Laotian	1
Mandarin	1
Portuguese	1
Russian	2
Somali	1
Spanish	4
Vietnamese	2

Tests in Portuguese and Serbo-Croatian are under development during 2005. For a current list of examinations, click the "back" button and click on What Oral Examinations are available to member states?

[Top](#)

6. Who are the current and potential beneficiaries of the Consortium?

Current direct beneficiaries of the Consortium include thirty-four state court systems and their linguistic minority populations. Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, and Washington initially founded the Consortium, with the help of the NCSC, as a way to provide for and regulate exchange of existing court interpreter proficiency test instruments and to develop new tests. Twenty-nine other states have become members: Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Wisconsin. (Accurate as of September 2005.)

Potential beneficiaries therefore include all state courts or other court organizations—and the linguistic minority populations they serve.

[Top](#)

7. What problem(s) does the Consortium program address?

The Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification addresses the shortage of qualified interpreters in the state courts by helping those courts test and identify qualified individuals. Without those quality standards, equal access to justice by linguistic minorities remains an unfulfilled obligation of the American system of justice.

Millions of non-English-speaking American citizens and residents are being denied equal access to justice because they are unable to comprehend and fully participate in state court proceedings. Numerous state commissions, research studies and media investigations have concluded that the plight of non-English speakers in the state courts is compelling and requires immediate attention. "Improve interpreter services" has been a central recurring theme in published studies of commissions and task forces across the country charged with evaluating the extent of racial and ethnic bias in our courts. Many factors contribute to the miscarriages of justice that are likely to occur when linguistic minorities appear in court as litigants or witnesses. The most fundamental factor is the absence of professional competence standards for court interpreters. Few states have comprehensive, statewide mechanisms for ensuring that interpreters possess the appropriate minimum skills required for interpreting in a legal setting.

Demographic trends as of the last census (2000) suggest that the American judicial system faces mounting difficulties in meeting the challenge of ethnic and linguistic diversity. Recent census figures indicate that about 10 percent of people living in the United States are foreign born. Eighteen percent – almost 45 million people – report that they speak a language other than English at home and almost 5 percent “do not speak English well,” or “do not speak English at all.” These trends undoubtedly will continue well into the 21st Century. (<http://factfinder.census.gov>)

[Top](#)

Inquiries regarding **Court Interpreting** or of any of these resources
may be directed to the Research Division Office

research@ncsc.dni.us

1-800-616-6109

Last Modified: March 21, 2006

Copyright 2002 – The National Center for State Courts. All rights reserved.