



**Improving Rural Interpreter Skills**

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# Module 3: Professional Engagement



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# Overview & Objectives

**Overview:** This module provides the space to explore the benefits of purposeful engagement within the interpreting profession. Participants will connect with and establish relationships with colleagues who share mutual interpreting-related interests outside of IRIS. Upon completion of this module, participants are encouraged to sustain these professional networks for continued growth and development.

## Learning Outcomes and Objectives

### Upon Completion of this module participants will be able to:

1. Identify opportunities for professional engagement.
2. Create a network within your selected professional engagement activities.
3. Implement and carry out professional engagement activities.
4. Reflect on the experiential benefits and impacts of professional engagement.





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# Introduction, Part I

## What is professional engagement?

As a community of learning via the IRIS CORE curriculum, we explored the benefits of collegial dialogue and the dangers of a single story. Over the course of nine months, we practiced how to engage and connect with one another while getting further clarity on how limited perspectives can suppress transformative change.

These same principles can be applied to the practice of professional engagement. Our operational definition of professional engagement is twofold. First, actively giving back to the profession through service. Second, building a professional network serves as a natural support system throughout your interpreting career.

Professional engagement gives you a greater understanding of the history, context, and systematic intricacies of the industry that is interpreting. Think back to the IRIS CORE Initiative Module 3: *Evolution of the Sign Language Interpreting Profession*, where you explored the various truths and untold stories that contribute to where we are as a profession.



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# Introduction, Part II

## **The value of the rural interpreter experience**

As rural interpreters, we have firsthand knowledge that access to quality interpreting services is undeniably challenging. The rural interpreter's experience is generally overlooked by training entities and professional organizations. While our needs are great and resources may be limited, we have unique insight and valuable experiences to offer the broader interpreting field.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for video remote interpreting services has skyrocketed prompting rural interpreters to work in various non-rural settings, with non-rural teams and a wider variety of non-rural deaf consumers. Conversely, this also means that the rural interpreter experience is no longer limited by geography. Interpreters with little to no firsthand knowledge of the rural landscape are engaging with rural deaf communities and rural entities (i.e. medical providers, law offices, social services, etc...) and cultures.

For these reasons, it is of even greater importance that rural interpreters find meaningful ways to create space and actively participate in professional organizations in order to build professional networks and be agents of change.

Consider paying forward your value as a rural interpreter. Our field needs it.



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# What is your why?, Part I

## Reflecting on your why

We all have our why. Why we started this work, why we want to develop and grow as interpreters, and why we choose to stay. Whatever your reasons it is likely that they are, in part, altruistic. It is also likely that you have passion for this work, and want the best for the profession and the deaf communities you serve.

People who are passive participants in organizations often just hope for the best without any action on their part. However, engagement *requires* action. The effort to better this profession can only be accomplished through active and intentional participation. What changes do we want to see in this profession? As we saw in the Community Engagement module (module 2), it is impossible to do this alone. As we lean into one another, we *make space* for one another. From this place, we are able to be an agent of change. It begins with you and me for us to transform this profession.



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# What is your why?, Part II

## It begins with you

Jonathan Webb, RID President 2019-2021, shared the [following sentiments](#) in the [Summer 2020 issue of VIEWS](#):

*“For years I have asked why RID? I have asked this question as a novice interpreter, a young certified interpreter, a mentor, a teacher, a volunteer holding various levels of responsibility. I still ask the question today but I ask it with a different understanding. I ask the question why RID? based on a willingness to ask the question for over twenty years. I ask the question today having asked myself many times and in many ways, digging deeper and deeper, reaching my standard conclusion- love.*

*Certainly, I am not alone in this assessment. We all may use different words or descriptors as labels to what we internally understand, but many of us do indeed love RID. Please make no mistake- most of us who claim love for RID have no real love of the institution as an institution. We have no love of the system; in fact, many of us deplore the system and machine that RID is at times. Instead, I would suggest, we love the ideal of RID and what we believe we have the power and ability to manifest through RID. We love our Deaf communities. We love that we have the honor of working in a field rooted in justice and equity. We love the people whom we have the honor of serving. We love knowing that justice and resistance are more than just fanciful words and concepts co-opted by the trendy” (p. 7).*



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# Engagement as Development

## The bigger picture

As illustrated in “[What is a committee, and why should I join](#)” and “[Committee Work as Professional Development and Learning](#)”, professional engagement as a part of a workgroup (i.e. council, committee, task force, affiliate chapter, etc...) allows for a collective group of people with similar interests and diverse backgrounds to collaborate on policy, projects and overall ‘hot topics’.

This collaboration provides the space for driven practitioners to challenge the status quo and represent the broader membership of that organization. The active engagement and process of such work furthers the professional development of each member of the workgroup.

You have shown your commitment to professional development both by participating in the IRIS program and by your accountability to your COL(s). This same commitment is applicable to your future professional engagement commitments.





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# Engagement Opportunities

## Ways to engage

Professional engagement looks different for everyone. This may mean attending your local RID affiliate chapter meeting, joining an ad hoc committee or a workgroup, supporting logistics at your state interpreter conference, or representing the organization as an ambassador. What you do to actively engage in the profession matters less than *how* you actively show up. The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged us to create engagement opportunities that are virtual and remote, allowing for flexibility and additional options.

As you start to engage with organizations and colleagues outside of IRIS, it is important to acknowledge that this experience is a journey rather than a destination. This might mean that you will need to connect with more than one organization. You may find a better fit with one organization over another. This process and the connections you make might be new for you, and *that is ok*. Your facilitator(s) and COL are here to support you along the way.



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# Getting Started

## Where do I begin?

To stimulate your thinking about professional engagement:

1. View [an interview](#) Marva Johnson sharing her experience with professional engagement.
2. Review the document (embedded in Canvas) as a springboard for ideas of where you can connect.

*Note:* We welcome additional listings! If you know of another organization to add to this document, please connect with your facilitator(s) to have it added.



# Canvas Discussion: COL Professional Engagement Brainstorm



**NOTE:** You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

As a COL, we will brainstorm the ways you can connect to professional engagement opportunities. Create an original post responding to the following prompts:

**If you are *not* already** actively connected to a professional organization, begin to think about what interests are important to you and how can they be transferable to your professional engagement. With that thinking, list two organizations where you would like to make active connections describing why these resonate with you and how you would like to engage.

**If you are *already*** connected to a professional organization, share your experiences of engagement with your COL and list at least one other organization you would like to make an active connection with.



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# Moving Forward

## Professional engagement here we come . . . .

Using the tools you have learned via IRIS thus far (both from the CORE modules and induction experience) *and* after identifying at least one organization you would like to connect with, please complete the following:

1. Make initial contact with the organization. Share with them why you are reaching out, and in what ways you would like to engage.
2. Create a plan for at least 10 hours of professional engagement (i.e. make the time to commit to the engagement). You are encouraged to start this engagement during the induction. However, you may not be done with all 10 hours by the end of this induction. That is okay. We want to support you in getting started.
3. Carry out the initial stages of engagement.
4. In the beginning stages of your professional engagement activity, reflect in your IRIS Induction Journal the following:
  - a. What valuable lessons did you gain from this professional engagement activity?
  - b. What challenges did you experience in this activity? How might you overcome those challenges going forward?
  - c. How was this professional engagement different from community engagement? How were those similar?
5. Before the end of the module, respond to the GoReact prompts on the next page.

**NOTE:** If you are having difficulty connecting with an organization ask your facilitator for support.



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# GoReact Discussion: Engagement Experiences



**NOTE:** You have to log into Canvas to complete this assignment

## Original post directions:

After completing steps 1-4 outlined on the previous slide (*Moving Forward*), respond to the following questions:

1. What learning nuggets did you get from interacting with different individuals during this engagement that you could use in your work as an interpreter?
2. What do you hope to accomplish as you finish out your 10 hours of engagement?
3. How will you continue to maintain your new professional network post-IRIS?

## Response post directions:

Respond to the post of one of your colleagues by asking clarifying questions, seeking additional information, or expressing an idea that encourages critical thinking and moves the conversation forward.





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# Synchronous Session



This module **requires your attendance** at a synchronous session. Your facilitator(s) will share the exact details of the date and time of this session. This meeting will be highly interactive reflecting on your professional engagement experiences.

## Preparation for the meeting:

1. Review your journal entries described on the *Moving Forward* page. Come prepared to discuss the following questions:
  - a. What valuable lessons did you gain from this professional engagement activity?
  - b. What challenges did you experience in this activity? How might you overcome those challenges going forward?
  - c. How was this professional engagement different from community engagement? How were those similar?



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# References

- Salman, Y. (2021, May 4). What is a committee, and why should I join: A young professional's perspective. *Linkedin*. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-committee-why-should-i-join-young-perspective-yousef-salman>
- Sax, C. & Nardone, P. (2021, April 22). Committee work as intentional professional development and learning. *Chief Learning Officer*. Retrieved from <https://www.chieflearningofficer.com/2021/04/22/committee-work-as-intentional-professional-development-and-learning/>
- Webb, J. (2020, Summer). President's report. *RID Views*, 3(37), 6-9.



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# Additional Resources

## Further (optional) reading on engagement & leadership in interpreting:

- A Study of Deaf Leaders' Attitudes Towards Sign Language Interpreters and Interpreting by L.H. Forestal (Available via [UNC library](#))
- [Exploring professional identity: A study of American Sign Language/English interpreters](#) by N. Harwood
- [Servant Leadership: Fausto's Lesson for Sign Language Interpreters](#) by G. Oliva
- [Leadership in Sign Language Interpreting: Where are we?](#) by A. Siberlich
- [Leadership: Perspectives From Deaf Leaders and Interpreter Leaders](#) by M. Taylor
- [Cudas in Leadership: An Exploration of Emic Perceptions within the American Deaf Community](#) by R. Voss



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