Guidelines for Broadcasting Sign Language Interpreters During Televised Events

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Directions and Techniques

On the following pages, we have some common sense directions and techniques to help make the inclusion of a sign language interpreter on television easy for you and effective for your viewers who depend on sign language interpreters to obtain important and timely information.

Sign Language

When Deaf people and interpreters use sign language it may seem that it only involves broad arm, hand, and body movements, but sign language includes many subtle movements and features. A small adjustment to the shape of the hands, fingers, mouth, head, and body, along with facial expressions, can alter meaning. All of these features must be seen clearly on television for understanding to take place.

This is a particular issue with interpreters delivered in an open format, where the signer takes up only a small portion of the television screen, making their hands and facial features appear relatively small.

On Screen Presentation

There is currently no standardization regarding interpreters using sign language for onscreen presentation. The most common presentations are as follows:

- Sign language on the main screen (interpreter stands next to speaker)

- Sign language presented using chroma key technology

- Sign language in a box using picture-in-picture technology. (Box is preferred to oval.)

NOTE: if given a choice between chroma key or a box (picture-in-picture), viewers prefer chroma key
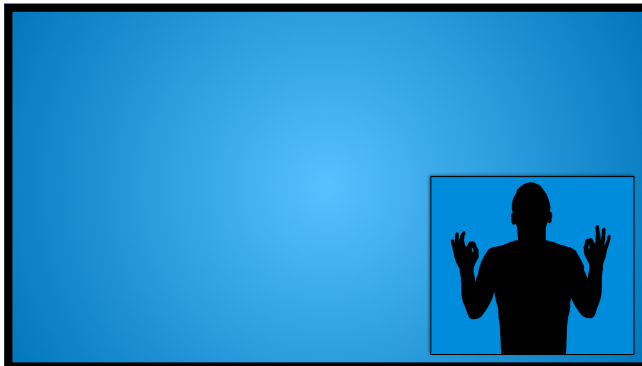
On Screen Presentation

Main Screen - Optimal

Chroma Key - Optimal

Box Picture-in-Picture
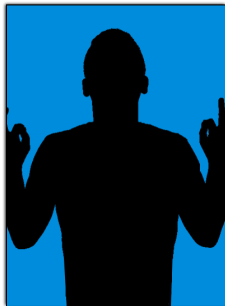**Acceptable - Preferred**

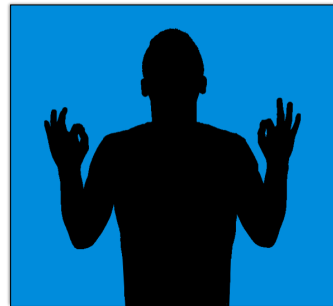**Oval Picture-in-Picture**
Acceptable - However NOT preferred

Capture the Full Signing Space

(High priority)

The full signing space around the signer should be visible at all times. For most sign languages this extends from below the waist to above the head and at least an elbow width to each side.

INEFFECTIVE   **OPTIMAL**   **ACCEPTABLE, BUT NOT IDEAL** **INEFFECTIVE**

Ensure the Interpreter is Large Enough to be Seen and Understood

(High priority)

The signer should appear on the screen at a sufficient size and resolution to enable viewers at normal viewing distances to clearly see and accurately recognize all movements and facial expressions.

Ensure the Interpreter is Large Enough to be Seen and Understood

- This requirement is difficult to quantify in terms of an adequate proportion of the picture, because it depends on the size of the viewer's screen, the viewing distance and their visual acuity.

- The practical recommendation in the context of standard definition television is that **the interpreter should be no smaller than one sixth of the screen**.

- Nevertheless, and unsurprisingly, research suggests that sign language users prefer a larger percentage of the screen be used for the interpreter.
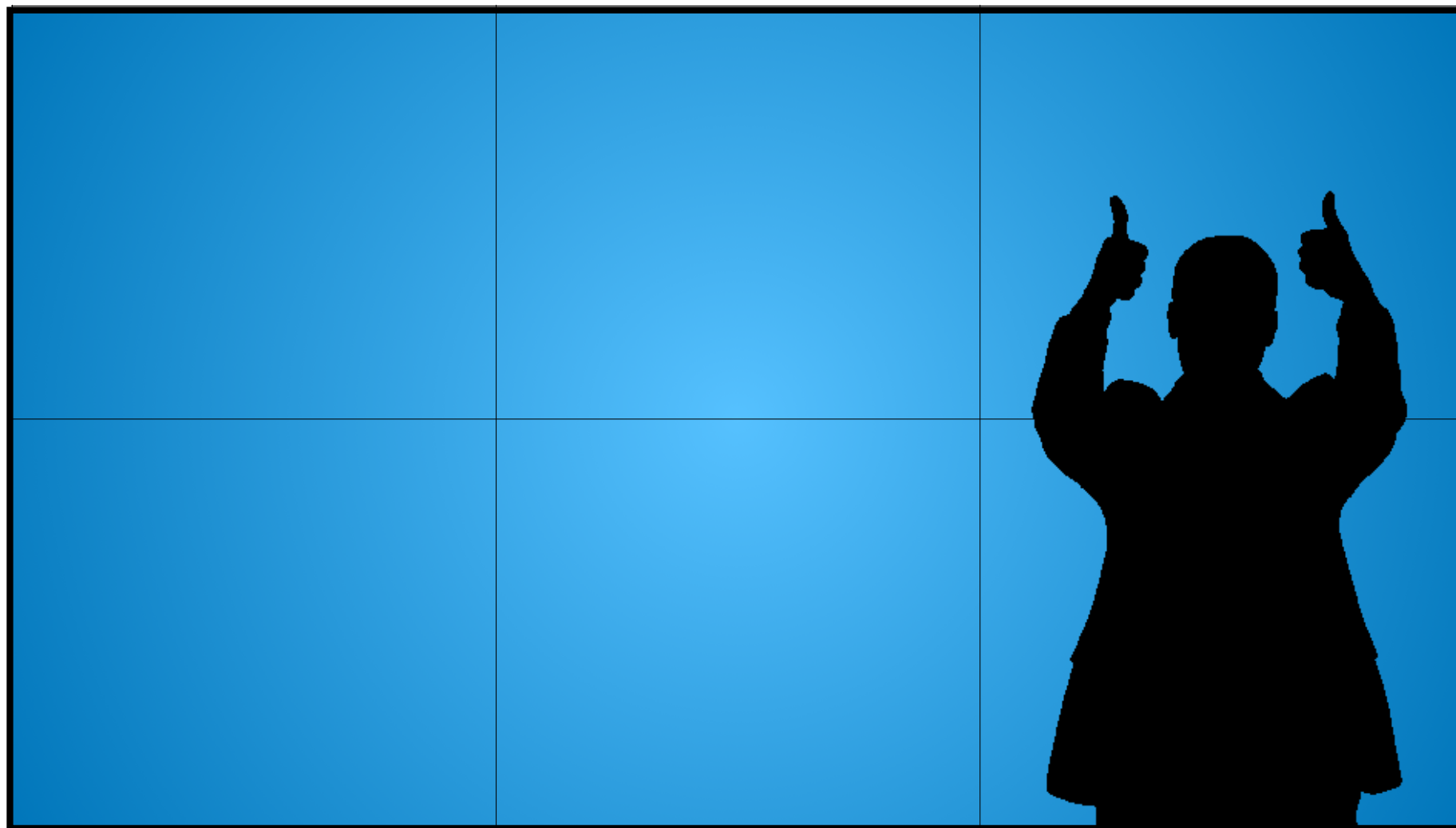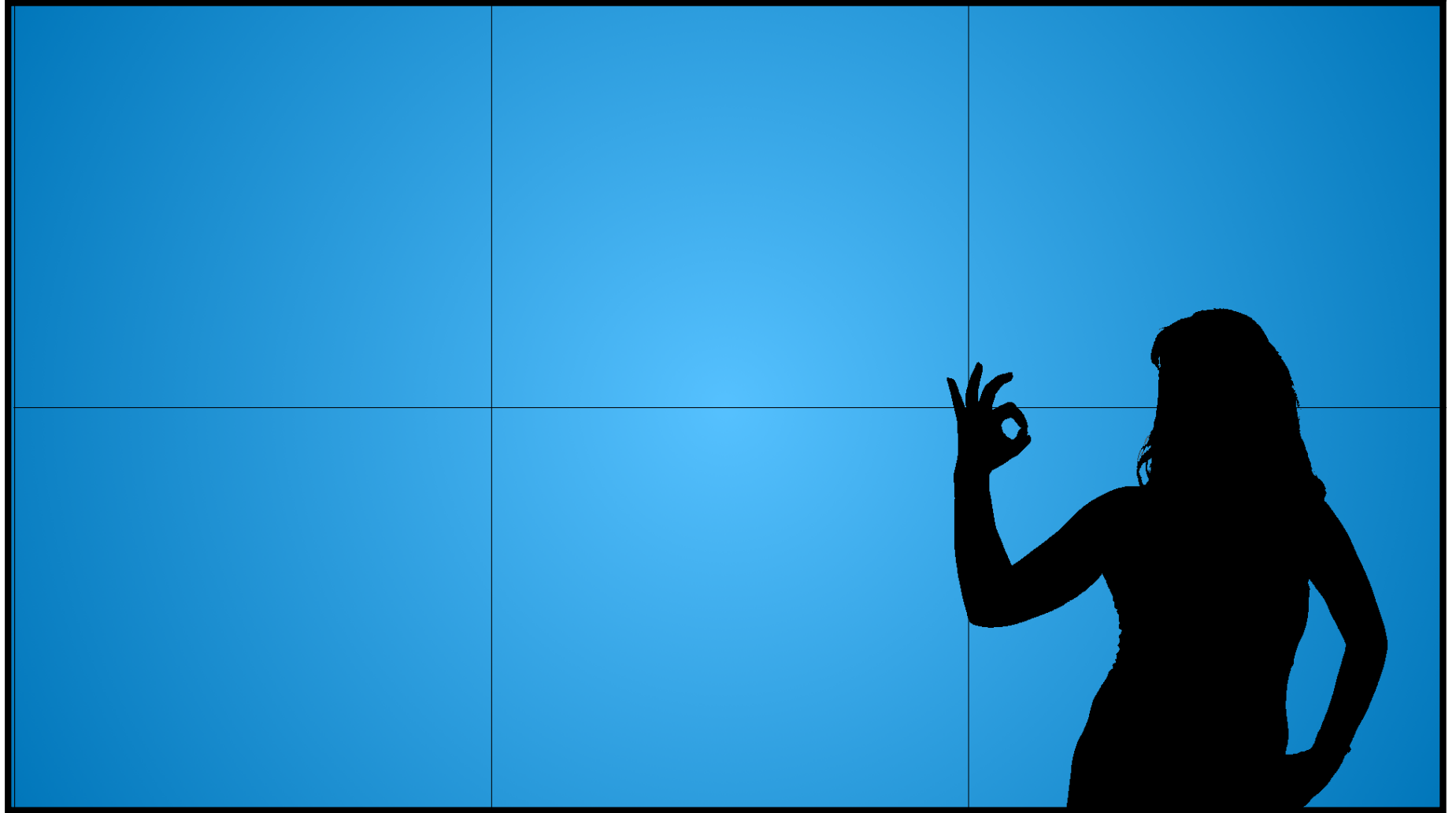
Main Screen

Exceeds Expectations

Exceeds Expectations

Meets Expectations
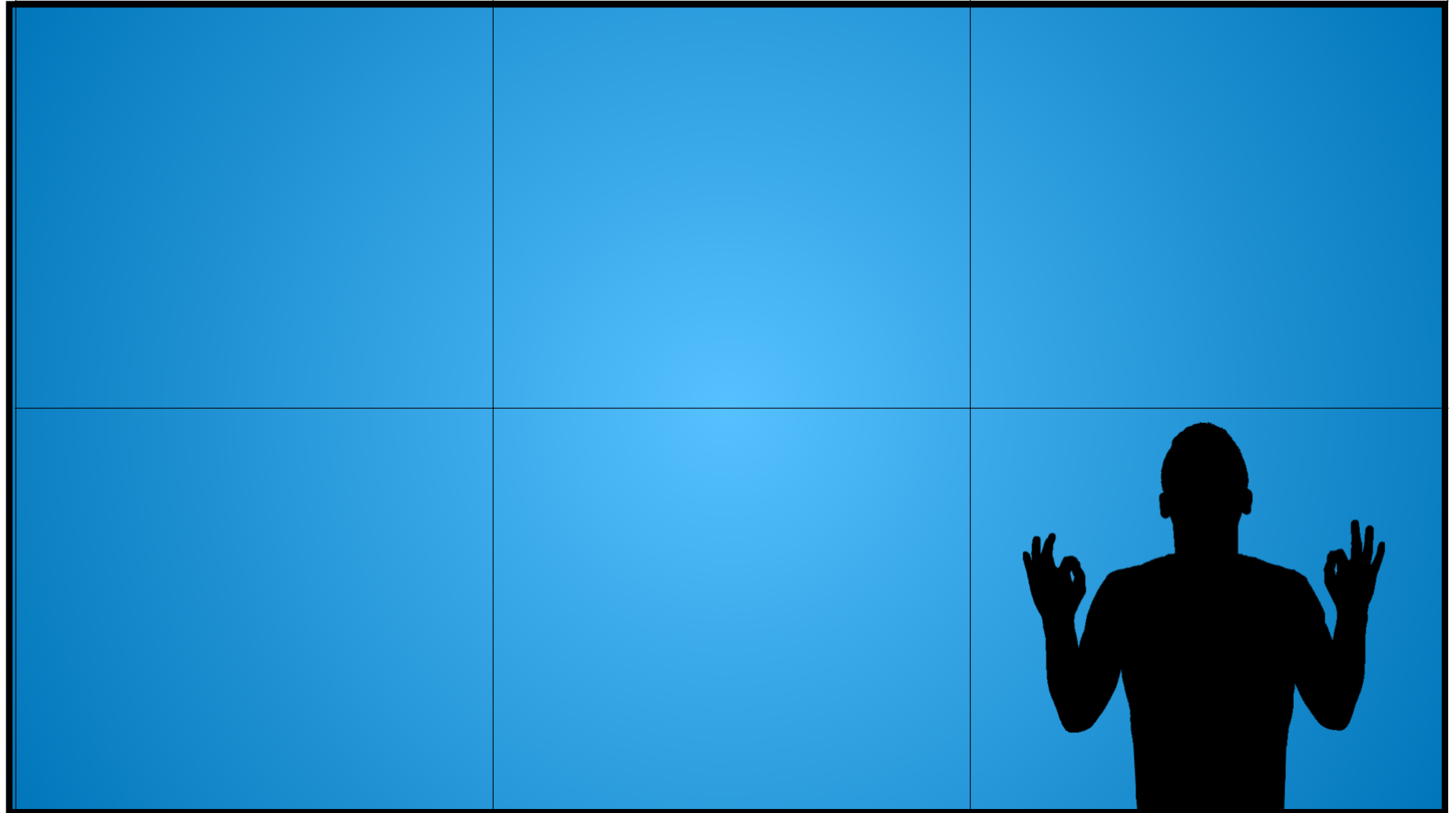
The interpreter should be no smaller than one sixth of the screen.
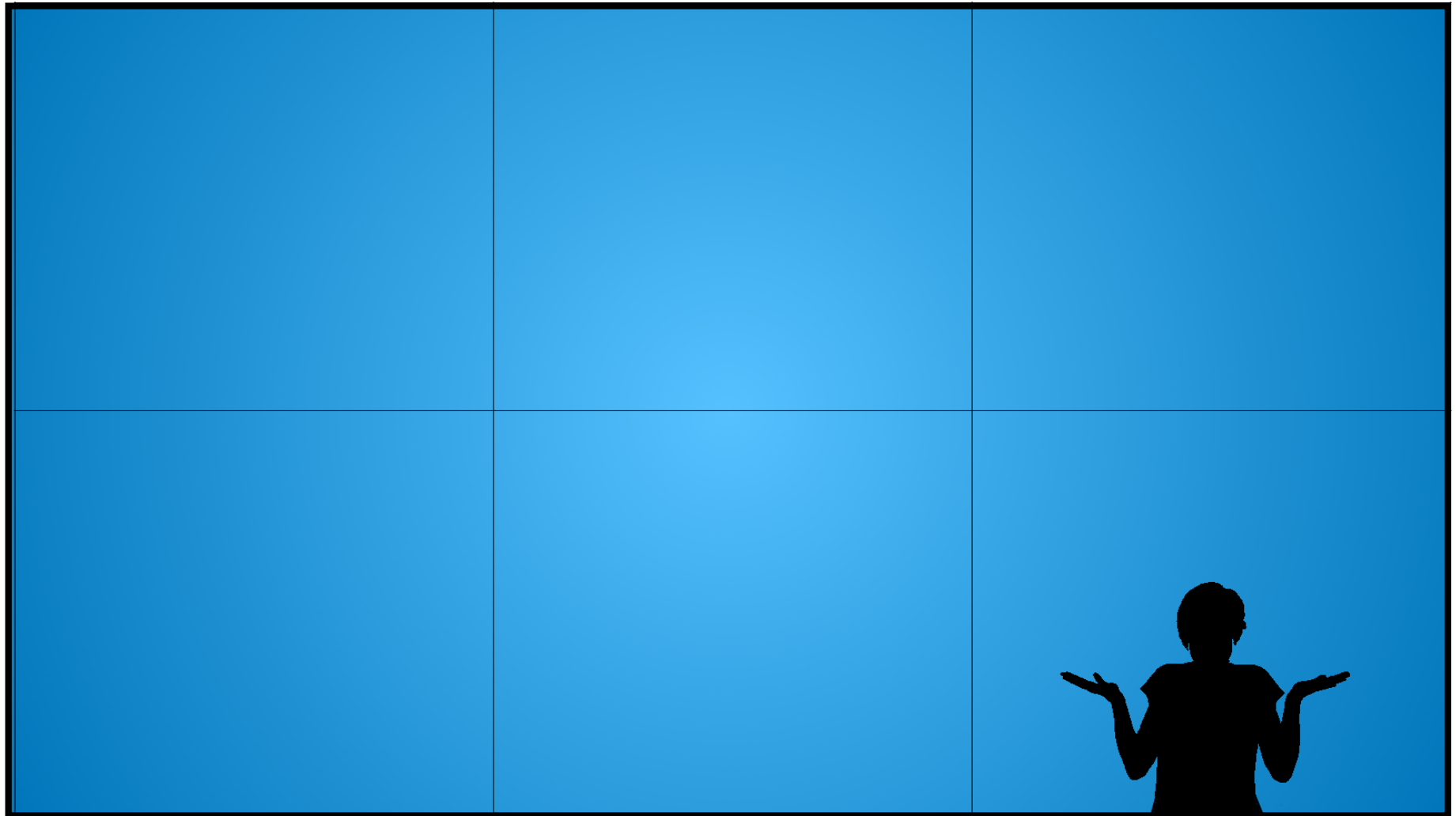
The interpreter should be no smaller than one sixth of the screen.
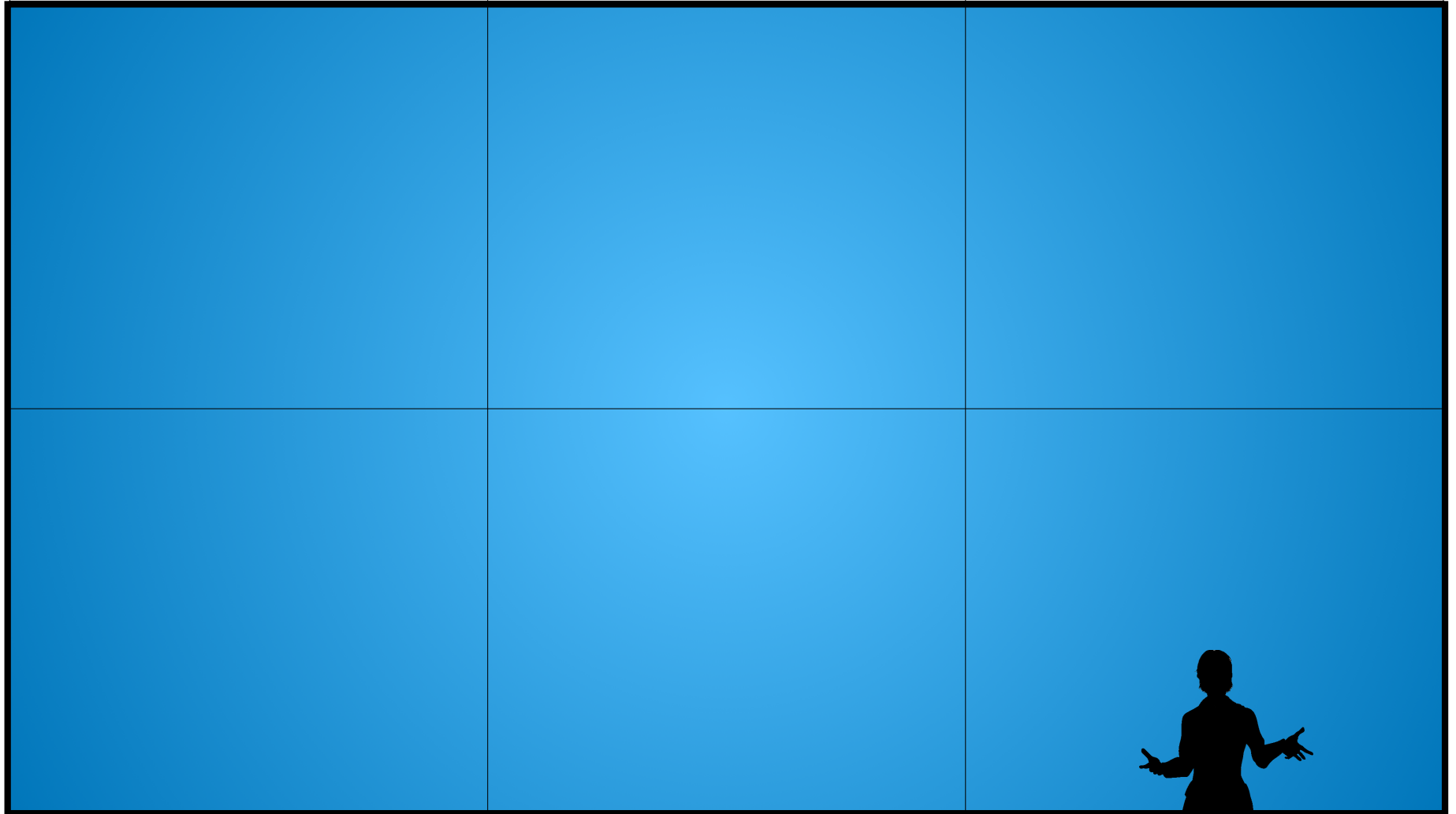
Example of Ineffective Broadcast of Sign Language Interpreters in Puerto Rico

Photo: A Deaf woman, a foot away from the TV, viewing a tiny interpreter in picture-in-picture format. Ineffective - Interpreter is less than one sixth of the screen.

Example of Ineffective Broadcast of
Sign Language Interpreters in Puerto Rico

Ineffective - Interpreter is less than one sixth of the screen.

Example of Ineffective Broadcast of
Sign Language Interpreters in Puerto Rico

Ineffective - Interpreter is less than one sixth of the screen.

Example of Ineffective Broadcast of Sign Language Interpreters in Puerto Rico

Effective - Interpreter occupies one sixth of the screen.

Example of Optimal Broadcast of
Sign Language Interpreters in Puerto Rico
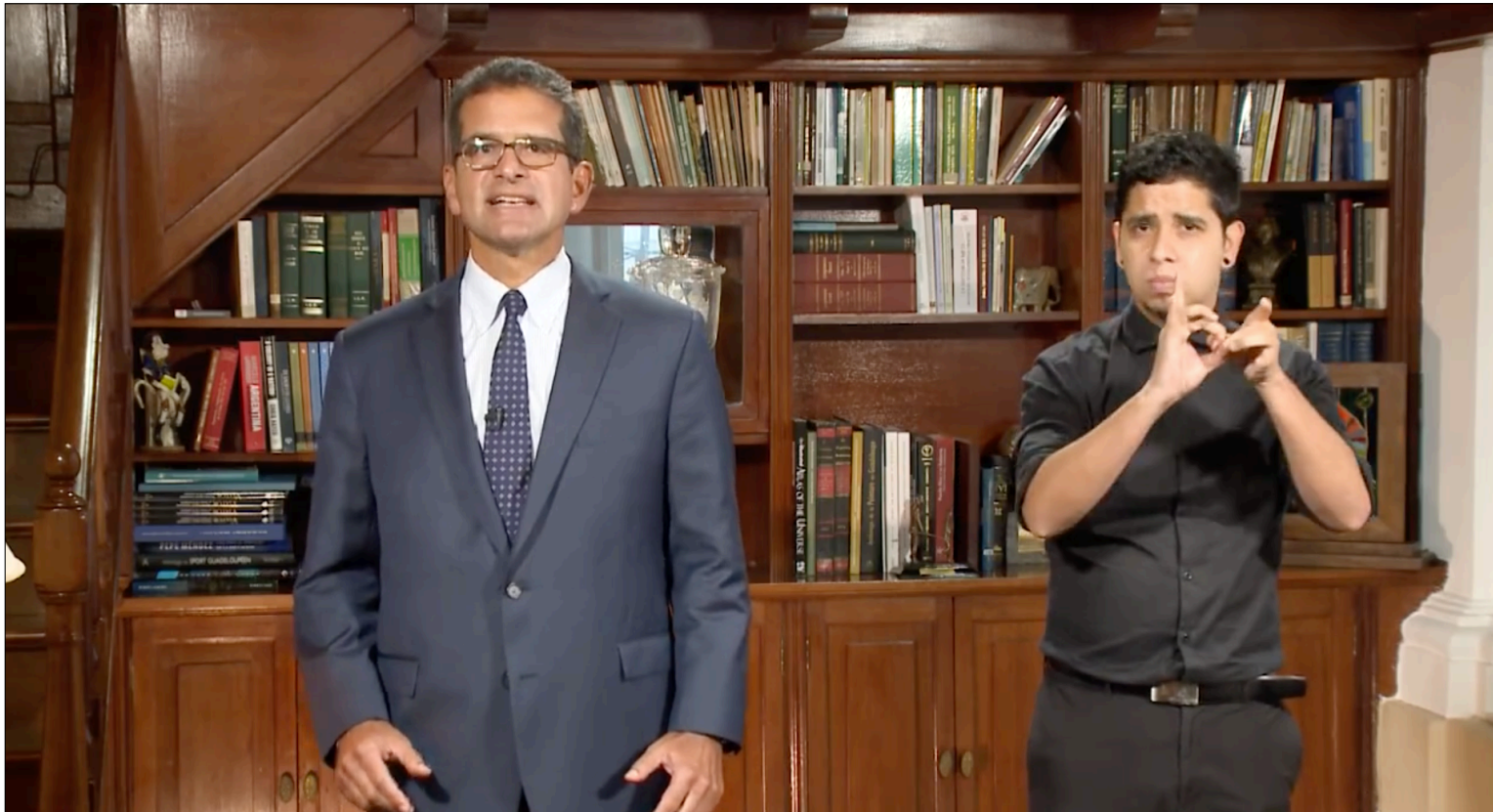
Optimal - Interpreter is in the room standing beside the speaker and on the main screen.

Ensure that the interpreter is large enough to be seen and understood

(High priority)

- The source video stream for the interpreter needs to be captured and encoded at a suitable base resolution, size, and compression so as not to lose vital features in the image.

- For example, if the resolution is too coarse so that lip and mouth movements, or even fingers, are blurred out, then simply rendering this picture at a much larger size on the screen will not restore these missing features.

Ensure that the interpreter can be seen and understood

- During the video broadcast, ensure that closed captions do not conflict or cover the interpreter.

- Ensure that other text, such as scrolling marquee, crawl, or lower-third, do not conflict or cover the interpreter.

- For news broadcasts, place visuals between the signer and the news presenter.

Unacceptable
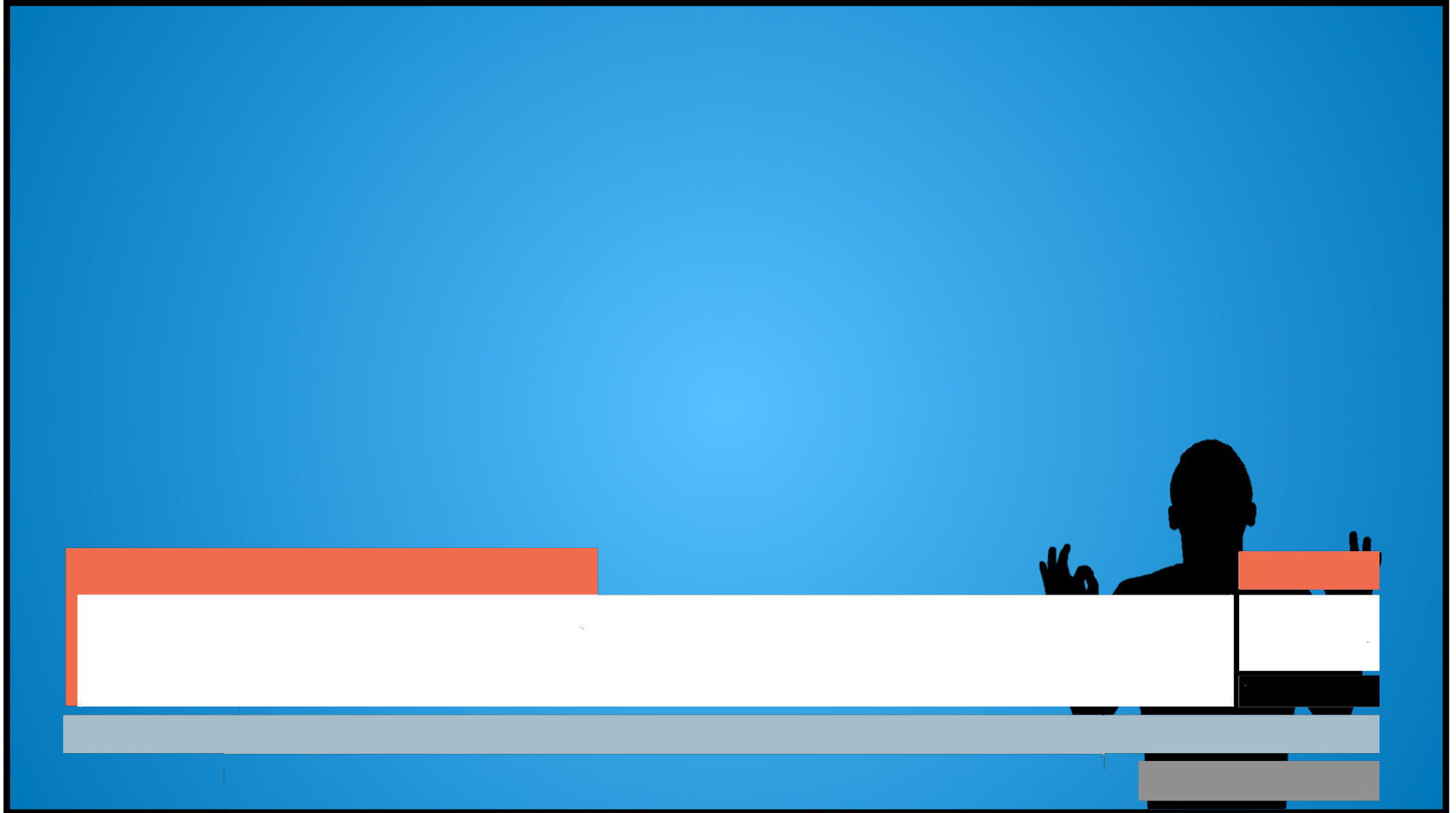
Optimal
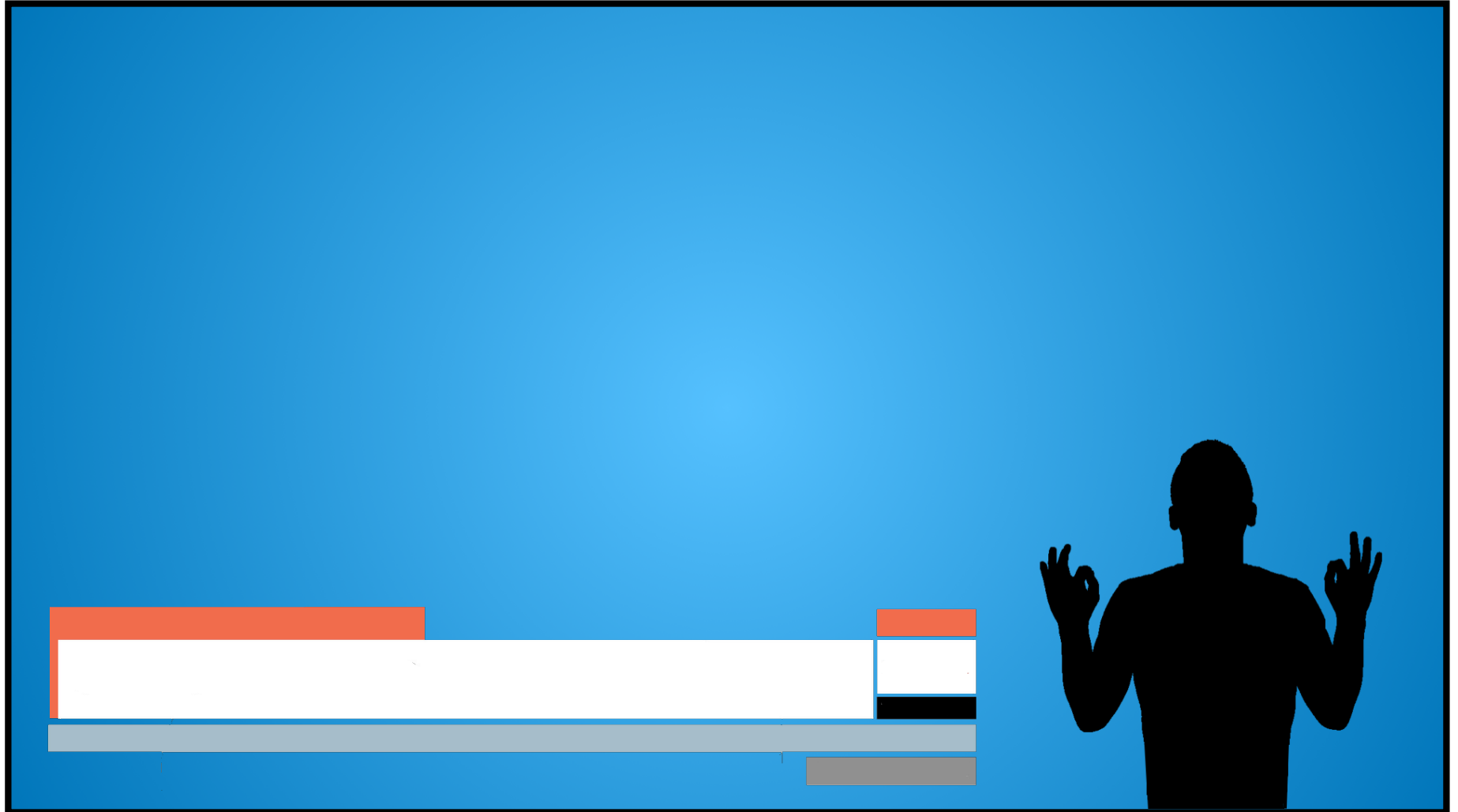
Optimal
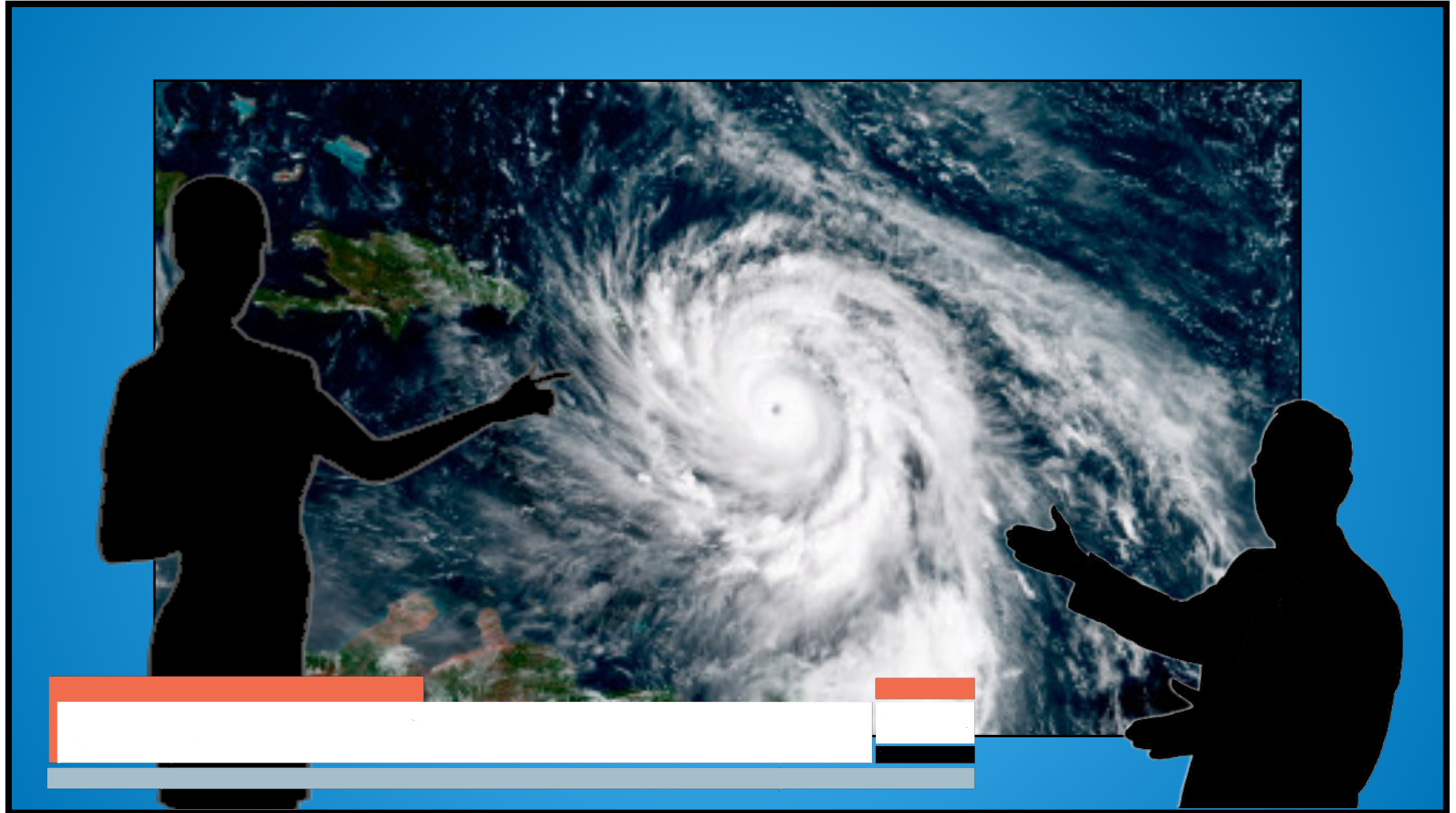
Example of Ineffective Broadcast of
Sign Language Interpreters in Puerto Rico

Use a solid background color
(High priority)

- If you are using picture-in-picture, the colors and tones of the interpreter's clothing should be such that all movements can easily be seen. Traditionally, most interpreters wear black.

- The background, in turn, should also contrast the skin tone and the clothing of the interpreter. Lighting has a large part to play in this. A blue chroma key background, similar to what is pictured in this presentation, would be ideal and comfortable on the eyes.

- Avoid using busy or patterned backgrounds.

Use a solid background color

OPTIMAL

INEFFECTIVE

For picture-in-picture, a blue chroma key background, along with appropriate lighting, would be ideal and comfortable on the eyes.

Talk Shows with Guests who Sign

- **<u>The guest is the focus of the interaction, not the interpreter.</u>**

- The host of the program should speak directly to their guests who use sign language as they would for any other guest.

- The interpreter should be off screen of the main shot. The interpreter should stand behind and a little to the side of the host so that the sight line between host and guest is maintained. Again, the guest is the focus.

Talk Shows with Guests who Sign

- The interpreter will sign to the guest and also voice for them, unless the guest uses their own voice and it is clear for those listening. Ask what the guest prefers.

- If the the preference is that the interpreter voice, the interpreter should be provided with a lapel mic.

- Use a separate, dedicated camera to capture the interpreter and use picture-in-picture or chroma key technology to present the interpreter.

Talk Shows with Guests who Sign

INTERPRETER

Your guests are the focus of the interaction, not the interpreter.

Interviewing Deaf People

- **<u>The Deaf person is the focus of the interview, not the interpreter.</u>**

- The reporter should speak directly to Deaf person being interviewed as they would for any other guest.

- The interpreter should be off screen of the main shot. The interpreter should stand to the side of the reporter so that the sight line between reporter/camera and the Deaf person is maintained. This also allows the interpreter to voice into the microphone while the Deaf person is signing.

Interviewing Deaf People

The Deaf person is the focus of the interview, not the interpreter.

Programs targeting the Deaf Community

For open sign language interpreting of TV programs or for programs specifically targeting members of the Deaf community (where the host of the program uses sign language), the main visual image can be reduced in size leaving a blank area in which the signer can be placed.
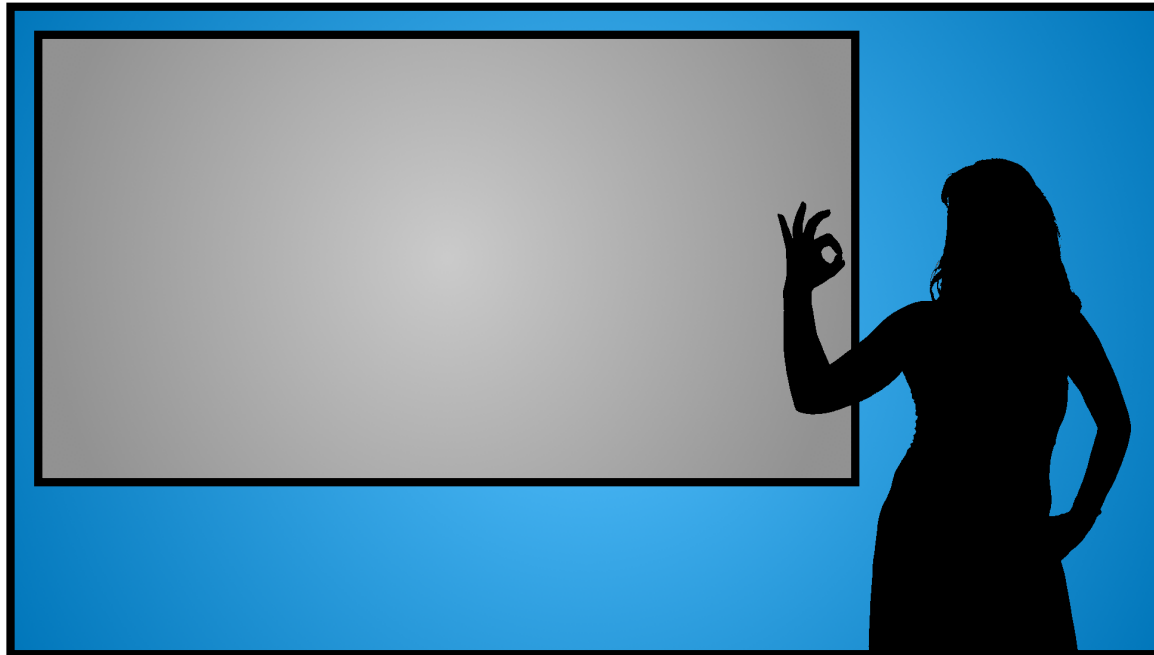
Accessible Emergency Management

- Sign language users are often cut off from auditory sources of information in emergency situations, and may make poor safety decisions if they are uninformed about the nature or scope of an emergency.

- Captioning of TV broadcasts is not necessarily effective in communicating information to all Deaf people, due to the unfamiliarity of technical language that may be used during such events, variability in the accuracy of real-time captioning, or lack of any captioning at all.

- Information delivered in sign language is preferred by many Deaf people as being more immediately accessible than speech represented imperfectly in print.

Accessible Emergency Management

Press Briefings

- Emergency press briefings must be accessible to all deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Consequently, closed or open captioning during emergency broadcasts are mandated by federal law to meet the needs of many deaf and hard of hearing people, but must be done so with high quality captioning service providers to ensure the live captioning comports with federal standards.

- Captioning alone is not enough for many deaf or hard of hearing people to understand important emergency information. Providing Sign Language interpreters help this underserved segment of the population to receive the necessary information to make educated decisions about their own role in emergencies and disasters.

Accessible Emergency Management

Press Briefings

Too often, there are issues with the quality or display of captioning or interpreting during press briefings and public service announcements for emergency planning. These issues include:

- The use of unqualified sign language interpreters and/or unqualified captioning service providers.

- The captioning may be unduly delayed or is improperly placed and blocks the full view of the interpreter.

- Interpreters are sometimes forced out of view of the camera "shot", obstructed, or viewed in an angle that is counterproductive for effective communication.

Press Briefings - Optimal

Press Briefings - Unacceptable

Accessible Emergency Management

Emergency Broadcasts

Captioning and interpreting services are required to be visible on all emergency broadcasts regardless of the medium – **television or the Internet.**

Failure to provide accessible media during emergency broadcasts is a violation of federal law and broadcasting entities need to make every effort to ensure that all media shared with the public is fully accessible.

Accessible Emergency Management

All of the following recommended practices should be implemented in all video emergency broadcasts and public service announcements (PSAs):

1. All communications provided through sign language interpreters and closed captioning must meet community and national standards. In advance of all emergency broadcasts and public service announcements, all interpreting and captioning service providers should be screened and approved in advance by members of the deaf and hard of hearing community. Care must be taken to ensure the interpreters and captioning service providers are trained for emergency situations and familiar with emergency management terminology.

Accessible Emergency Management

2. Make sure a highly qualified sign language interpreter is visible at all times in the broadcast next to the emergency official.

- At all times during the video broadcast, a Medium 2 Shot should be used of both the public official and the sign language interpreter standing next to each other in the video frame.

- At all times during the video broadcast, the speaking official should not block the interpreter and the interpreter should not block the speaking official.

- At all times during the video broadcast, the interpreter should stand slightly in front of the podium and to the side of the speaker

Accessible Emergency Management

3. At all times during the video broadcast, provide high quality captioning and ensure that it does not conflict or cover the interpreter or other text such as a scrolling marquee, crawl, or lower-third (or vice versa).

4. In advance of all emergency broadcasts and during such broadcasts, broadcast media, emergency management, interpreters, and advocates from the deaf and hard of hearing community should be working together to ensure the diverse needs of all deaf and hard of hearing individuals are met during such broadcasts.

Accessible Emergency Management

5. Whenever possible to ensure the emergency broadcast is understandable to every segment of the population, use images and maps to illustrate what people should be doing or where people should be going during emergencies.

6. Ensure that all captioning and interpreting services are clearly visible and not distorted on all re-broadcasts and Internet broadcasts of the same production. For any media displayed on the Internet:

- Embed subtitles and sign language interpreter into a single video so captions or interpreter cannot be cut-out in re-broadcasts or Internet streaming.

- In the alternative, provide XML files (Flash videos) or VTT (HTML5 videos) with the caption file copied.

Access to Online Information

- More people are using smart phones and tablets to receive emergency information or broadcasts through livestreams through the Internet. However, captioning for Internet livestreams have not always been reliable or accurate.

- When emergency information is broadcast both on television and through the Internet, captions and interpreting are often not provided on the Internet streaming even though it was clearly captioned and interpreted on the television broadcast.

Access to Online Information

Best Practices

- Internet video streaming are required by the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act to include the captioning provided on the television broadcast no later than July 1, 2017. However, failure to include captioning on Internet video streaming constitutes failure to provide effective communication to the information for deaf and hard of hearing people, and ensuring the captioning is provided immediately is recommended to avoid a failure to warn the population of emergency information.

- Embed captions and sign language interpreter into a single video so captions and/or interpreter cannot be cut-out in re-broadcasts or Internet streaming.

Example of Ineffective Internet Broadcast of Sign Language Interpreters in Puerto Rico

**Ineffective - Interpreter edited out of frame and captions removed
from the internet broadcast of an interpreted program.**

Hire Qualified Interpreters

- Only employ qualified interpreters. Interpreters who work in the media work with a varied audience with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and also work with an audience that is not present, so they cannot get feedback from consumers.

- It is very important to hire interpreters that are highly experienced, that have worked within a variety of different interpreting settings, and that have had exposure to a wide breadth of sign language users, so that they can adjust to a wide range of registers according to the programs and the audiences they are designed for.

Hire Qualified Interpreters

- Media interpreters need to be highly skilled interpreters. They should have native-command of the national sign language used in the region and they should also have an updated knowledge of the neologisms and terminology of current events.

- Media interpreters have to be highly-skilled in their linguistic abilities, and also in their interpreting skills and strategies. They have to be suitably trained for TV interpreting, that is, they should be familiar with using a teleprompter, a visual monitor, signing in front of the camera, and having no feedback from consumers.

- **If you have any questions about hiring a qualified sign language interpreter, ask for feedback from the Deaf Community and recommendations from the Registro de Intérpretes para Sordos de Puerto Rico.**

Working Conditions for Interpreters

- Sign language interpretation is a demanding task both physically and mentally. Under standard working conditions an interpreter's performance will begin to degrade after a period of 20-30 minutes.

- In standard working conditions, **interpreters work in teams of two** or more, switching places roughly every 20 minutes during a natural break. One interpreter is actively interpreting while the "off" interpreter is monitoring and providing feedback to the working interpreter to ensure accuracy in the interpretation.

- Interpreting broadcast news and press briefings is a very demanding task. The news and briefings are typically very fast paced and demanding in terms of specialized and technical terminology. You should expect to hire two interpreters.

Preparation Time and Materials

- Preparation time is crucial to ensure a quality and accurate interpretation. It is of utmost importance that the interpreter has time to prepare before providing an interpretation.

- Visual materials should be provided to the interpreter in advance. Namely, audiovisual materials, the script, the step outline or the video clips that will be used in the program. These should also be readily available for the interpreter to consult during the broadcast so that signs can be adjusted to these materials.

- Providing a teleprompter with the script and a monitor of the visuals during the broadcast is recommended. Remember sign language is a visual language and the interpreter must accurately portray the visual media you present. Having these materials in advance and during the broadcast is very important for accurate and quality interpretations.

Establish an Advisory Council

Consider establishing an Advisory Council of people with who are Deaf and hard of hearing who can advise you on how best to reach these populations with emergency information and other content that you need to present to the public.

"Deaf people can do anything, except hear."

I. King Jordan, the first Deaf President of Gallaudet University.

Federal Law - Statutory Responsibilities

- It is important to note the practices outlined in this document are not only best practices, they are also required by a number of federal anti-discrimination, telecommunications access and disaster recovery laws.

- In many respects, this extensive body of legislation establishes a framework for emergency preparedness, response, and recovery that is fully accessible to all Americans.

- Furthermore, there are several federal statutes that require emergency managers to provide accessible response, recovery, and preparedness resources to citizens who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Federal Law - Statutory Responsibilities

The **Rehabilitation Act of 1973**, specifically, Section 504, bars any federal agency or any organization receiving federal funds from discriminating against individuals with any disability in the provision of services. Further, Section 508 of the Act requires that all electronic and information-technology resources developed with the use of federal funds must be completely accessible. Consequently, FEMA and all all local jurisdictions funded through FEMA or other federal funds must ensure that all their programs and services are fully accessible to deaf and hard of hearing individuals, including all information available on their websites.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination by state or local governments. As noted in the National Council on Disability's 2014 report on *Effective Communications for People with Disabilities: Before, During and After Emergencies*, "Pursuant to Title II and its regulations, state and local governments must ensure that their communications, including emergency communications, are fully accessible to people with disabilities." This includes live and recorded announcements made by local governments including Mayors and Governors' offices.

Federal Law - Statutory Responsibilities

Section 255 of the Communications Act requires telecommunications equipment manufacturers and service providers to make their products and services accessible to people with disabilities. One example of this legislation in action is the expanded usage of accessible emergency alerts on mobile devices. The Federal Communications Commission has the authority to ensure emergency alert messages are accessible to those who are deaf or hard of hearing including the wording of such alerts as well as providing direct links to accessible information.

The **Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010** established accessibility requirements for emergency information being broadcast on digital television screens as well as through Internet streaming to computer screens and mobile devices.

The **Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act** (Stafford Act) directs the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to assist local and state authorities in cases of disaster or emergencies. Specifically, the law requires that any information disseminated by the agency is available in accessible formats that are understood by "populations with limited English proficiency" as well as "individuals with disabilities or other special needs," and also requires the agency to "develop and maintain an informational clearinghouse of model language assistance programs and best practices for State and local governments in providing services related to a major disaster or emergency."

Federal Law - Best Practices

Optimal practices for including deaf and hard of hearing individuals in all emergency preparedness efforts and trainings are provided here in an "Emergency Planner Checklist" format. This checklist is intended to provide guidance to federal, state, and local government agencies charged with providing access to disaster preparation and relief for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. This guideline promotes minimum standards and is not meant to be exhaustive.

• Set aside disability accommodation funds within the emergency budget, including funds for sign language interpreters and captioning in preparation for all emergency management activities. The NAD recommends that at least 15% of total program budget be allocated to address all accessibility and accommodation needs.

• Include representatives from the deaf and hard of hearing community in all community planning meetings as well as internal agency preparation meetings and in the development of any policies and procedures affecting this community. It is imperative to gather feedback from the community to incorporate into your planning and training efforts. It will also make them part of your emergency planning process as assets, rather than liabilities.

Federal Law - Best Practices

- Establish protocol for immediate securing of qualified sign language interpreters during all emergency situation press conferences through a collaborative effort involving the Public Information Officer, a representative of the deaf and hard of hearing community in your area, and broadcasters. The protocol should entail the process by which a qualified interpreter would be secured quickly in times of emergency. In advance of all emergencies, preparation should include assessing which interpreters in the area are appropriately licensed in the relevant state, as well as qualified and trained to handle emergency management situations and terminology.

- Ensure that the interpreter secured for the emergency press conference is visible on television at all times during the broadcast. The Public Information Officer should monitor all broadcasts to ensure that on all stations broadcasting the press conference, the interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands are visible on the television screen at all times. If a broadcaster needs to show any other graphics or video feed, the video with the interpreter must remain visible on the screen at all times.

Federal Law - Best Practices

- Ensure that Broadcasters are able to provide quality live captioning for all broadcasts of emergency information

- Ensure that all emergency information provided online are fully accessible including with captioning and interpreting.

- Provide ongoing inclusive and accessible training to the deaf and hard of hearing community and to emergency management planners. Federal and local emergency management planners need to engage with representatives from the community to develop accessible training programs and to schedule such training at times and places likely to be attended by members of the community. It is vital for emergency management planners to ensure the deaf and hard of hearing community has hands-on training as well as opportunities to have honest and open conversations with emergency responders.

Federal Law - Best Practices

- Structure all Disaster Recovery Centers to be fully accessible to deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Disaster Recovery Center staff must be fully prepared and trained on how to obtain, provide, and operate accessibility technology for deaf and hard of hearing people. This would include all disaster relief emergency equipment that is made available in the event of a disaster. Furthermore, the centers must also have trained staff who know when and how to contact on-call service providers such as interpreters and captioning service providers.

- Incorporate texting capability with all N-1-1 services. All emergency management teams need to implement texting capability within their local N-1-1 systems, which are more accessible to deaf and hard of hearing individuals as well as comply with new WEA standards for notifications.

Resources

National Association of the Deaf (NAD)
www.nad.org and
https://www.nad.org/about-us/position-statements/
position-statement-on-accessible-emergency-
management-for-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-people/

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