A NATIONAL FORUM FOR THE INTERPRETING PROFESSION

The Interpreting Marketplace

A Study of Interpreting in North America
Commissioned by InterpretAmerica

by Nataly Kelly, Robert G. Stewart, and
Vijayalaxmi Hegde

1st North American Summit on Interpreting

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"What is the average annual compensation for interpreters in North America, across all specializations?" "What percentage of interpreters are contractors?" "How many interpreters does the typical agency have in its network?" "How much of an impact is technology having on the delivery of interpreting services?" We explore these and many other questions in this report, an in-depth review of the North American marketplace for interpreting services.

Why We Wrote This Report

Stakeholders in the North American interpreting marketplace – regardless of industry sector – have more things in common than not. Yet individuals working in the numerous and diverse areas of this field – such as sign language interpreting, court interpreting, medical interpreting, educational interpreting, and military interpreting – have rarely joined forces. Instead, the interpreting industry within North America has long been divided by lines of specialty, geography, and even the types of languages involved (spoken or signed).

As a result of the fragmented nature of the market, no major research effort had ever been conducted in an inclusive, pan-industry fashion to shed light on the market as a whole. To address this void, InterpretAmerica enlisted Common Sense Advisory to carry out the first comprehensive study of the North American interpreting marketplace. The major goals of the study were to carry out a large-scale data collection effort, to engage as many groups within this sector as possible, and to define the major characteristics of the marketplace.

How This Report Is Organized

The report is divided into three major parts:

- **Data.** This, the largest section of our report, reveals the major findings from each of the three surveys we conducted. We discuss some of the most important characteristics of the market on which we collected data, such as industry specialization, geography, pricing, and compensation.

- **Vox Populi.** Here we feature the "voice of the people," a selection of anonymized verbatim quotes from survey respondents on topics of importance to them.

- **Implications.** In this part of the report, we discuss the impact of our findings, how the information can be used, and items that merit further inquiry, as revealed by the study.

Past Research on the Interpreting Market

Common Sense Advisory has carried out extensive prior research on the topic of interpreting. Past reports that relate directly to the topic at hand are encompassed in several major coverage areas:

- **Telephone interpreting.** Our research includes major studies of the supply and demand sides of the remote interpreting market, with a special focus on telephone interpreting, as well as rankings of the largest vendors in this space and major studies on pricing (see "Telephone Interpreting Supply Side Outlook," Sep09; "Telephone Interpretation Procurement," Jun09; "Telephone Interpretation: The Supply Side," Jun08; "Telephone Interpretation: The Demand Side," Jun08; "Top 15 Telephone Interpreting Suppliers," Sep09; and "It's Getting Lonelier at the Top of the TI Market," Jul08).

- **Interpreting technology.** We have also carried out research on the role of technology, including efforts to automate some aspects of interpreting and to expand video interpretation offerings ("The Sense and Nonsense of Simultaneous Telephone Interpreting," Jan09; "Video Interpretation Usage Slowly Rises," May09; "Interpretation Creeps Toward Automation," May08).

- **Specific sectors and geographies.** Our telephone interpretation pricing survey included a close-up look at pricing for major industries, such as health care and insurance. We have also written in great detail about the market for interpreting and translation services in both the U.S. federal government market and the European market ("Language Services and the U.S. Federal Government," Dec09). In addition, we've published repeatedly on interpreting issues related to language access in health care (see "The Language Access Ratio," Sep08; "Hospital Spending on Interpreting Services," Jun08; "Telephone Interpretation Companies Expand Health Care Translation Offerings," Nov08; and "Certification Fixation in the Interpreting Field," May08).

- **Legal requirements for interpreting.** We have written frequently about government requirements for language access within the United States, ranging from analysis of the impact of healthcare reform to predictions about changes under new administrations ("Title VI Enforcement to Grow Under Obama," Jan09; "When Translation is the Law," May07; "U.S. Health Care Reform and Language Services,"Aug09; "U.S. Policy Initiatives Forecast Growth in the Language Services Market," Feb09; "Top 10 Ways to Accelerate Language Access," Aug09).

Interpreting Viewed within the Global Language Services Market

Before we jump into the findings of this study, it is important to situate the interpreting sector within the greater language services market. Common Sense Advisory's latest global market study showed that the total language services market was worth US$26.327 billion in 2010 (see "The Language Services Market: 2010," May10). Of the larger market, interpreting services represents a significant portion – approximately one-quarter of the total global market.

As part of our greater research methodology used for all the studies we conduct of the language services market, Common Sense Advisory views the market as divided mainly into two parts – the supply side and the demand side. Using this characterization, we see organizations that purchase interpreting services as located within the demand side of the market, while both the agencies that contract interpreters and the interpreters themselves form part of the supply side of the market.

Common Sense Advisory's view of the language services market also includes a growing but often overlooked group of interpreting stakeholders – technology providers – which are also located on the supply side. In addition, we include organizations engaged in workforce development – such as professional associations and universities – within the scope of our broader analysis.

We collect data from all these industry groups on an ongoing basis, in the form of interviews, surveys, consulting engagements, and other primary research. We also continually review other studies and information from third parties in order to benchmark and supplement our research findings. In summary, the information presented within this report is based not only on the study at hand but on a methodology that has been tested and refined over the course of producing more than 300 unique reports and briefs on the language services market.

Data

In this section, we describe the methodology we followed in order to collect the data and prepare our analysis. We then present our most important findings, with a special focus on highlighting the results of our surveys of all three major stakeholder groups.

How We Collected and Analyzed the Data for This Report

Our study of the North American interpreting marketplace consisted of five distinct phases:

1. **Study design.** Common Sense Advisory and InterpretAmerica drafted a list of major themes for which data would be needed in order to achieve the goal of defining the major characteristics of the interpreting marketplace. The team developed a scope document that outlined the most important themes along with a list of sample questions and targets.

2. **Survey development.** To collect data from the different market participants, the team designed a separate web-based survey for each of three major stakeholder groups – interpreters, agencies or suppliers of interpreting services, and customers or buy-side organizations. Because of the many sectors involved, special care was taken to develop the survey in a way that would enable extensive statistical analysis of the data, in order to identify specific trends and correlations across diverse variables.

3. **Survey piloting.** The surveys were tested by the study authors as well as InterpretAmerica and Common Sense Advisory research staff. Feedback was solicited from all major stakeholder groups as well as professors in university programs for interpreting, interpreter trainers, and others. Because the people involved in the study design were more familiar with spoken language interpreting, detailed feedback was also requested and received from multiple individuals in the sign language interpreting community.

4. **Recruitment.** The web-based surveys were open for approximately five and a half weeks. All three surveys were published on Monday, April 19th, 2010, and were closed on Wednesday, May 26th, 2010. Throughout this period, extensive efforts were made by both Common Sense Advisory and InterpretAmerica to notify targets of the study and encourage them to participate. Multiple e-mail invitations were sent, notices were placed on

social media and networking sites, and announcements were sent to association distribution lists (see Acknowledgements).

5. **Data preparation and analysis.** After the surveys were closed, Common Sense Advisory began the process of data consolidation across all three surveys, as well as preparation of the data for homogeneity and processing in statistical software. The software was custom-programmed to carry out the statistical tests we required and to run automated correlations among different areas of the datasets.

Terminology Used to Identify Stakeholders in This Report

For purposes of simplicity and consistency with our methodology, we refer to the three major stakeholder groups involved in the data collection for this report with the following nomenclature:

1. **Interpreters.** These are the individuals who actually render information from one spoken or signed language into another. They may provide their services either directly to buyers or through a supplier agency.

2. **Suppliers.** These are organizations – frequently for-profit vendors – that arrange for the provision of interpreting services. They may employ interpreters directly or as contractors. They usually act as a "middleman," taking a request for interpreting services from a client and locating the interpreter on the client's behalf. Non-profit groups and volunteer portals, including language banks, also fall within this category.

3. **Buyers.** These stakeholders purchase interpreting services. These organizations may also have an internal department that provides interpreting services for their internal "clients." For example, a court might have several full-time staff interpreters, but it may also purchase services from local agencies ("suppliers"). The court may also contract directly with freelance interpreters.

Because of the way the interpreting market is structured, it is common for individuals to carry out multiple roles. For example, a hospital interpreting manager might work as an interpreter in some instances, but she or he also negotiates contracts with vendors. Or, an interpreter who runs her own agency might also be a working interpreter. So, while individuals may fall into multiple categories, these are the three major stakeholder groups used for purposes of the present analysis.

A Note about the Data Presented in This Report

In this report, we present findings on many different categories of questions. The total number of survey respondents was 1,457 (1,140 interpreters, 197 suppliers, and 120 buyers). However, we also cross-referenced the data in order to present more specific details. So, the percentages listed throughout the report may, in some instances, relate to smaller numbers than the larger total, as we frequently make reference to correlations derived from subsets of the larger dataset.

For example, we may present salary data for all interpreters that met a given criteria – such as having a college degree or a vendor-specific certification. In such instances, the number of interpreters represented will be smaller than the full 1,140 interpreters who participated in the survey. In some instances, we have omitted this level of detail for purposes of simplified presentation of the data in visual format. In other instances, we include information about response rate to specific questions within the actual text.

It is also important to note that the dataset on the North American interpreting market obtained in the course of preparing this report is believed to be the largest ever prepared in the history of the field, and is possibly one of the most comprehensive interpreting market datasets available in the world today. For this reason, while the analysis and findings presented within this report are significant, they represent only a fraction of the possibilities. Based on this data, Common Sense Advisory intends to continue making additional research available on the North American interpreting market.

Major Findings from Our Survey of Interpreters

We asked interpreters an array of questions about their work, including language pairs, geography, hourly rates, daily rates, annual earnings, employment type, and numerous other issues that are fundamental to understanding the characteristics of the interpreting profession.

The Languages and Demographics of Interpreters in North America

We started out by asking our 1,140 interpreter respondents whether they interpreted primarily for spoken languages or a signed language plus a spoken language. We also included an option for interpreters who interpret from one signed language into another, though they are less common. The majority of our respondents (82.4%) interpret from one spoken language into another, followed by interpreters who work between a spoken and a signed language (16.9%) and interpreters who have mastered two signed languages (see Figure 1).

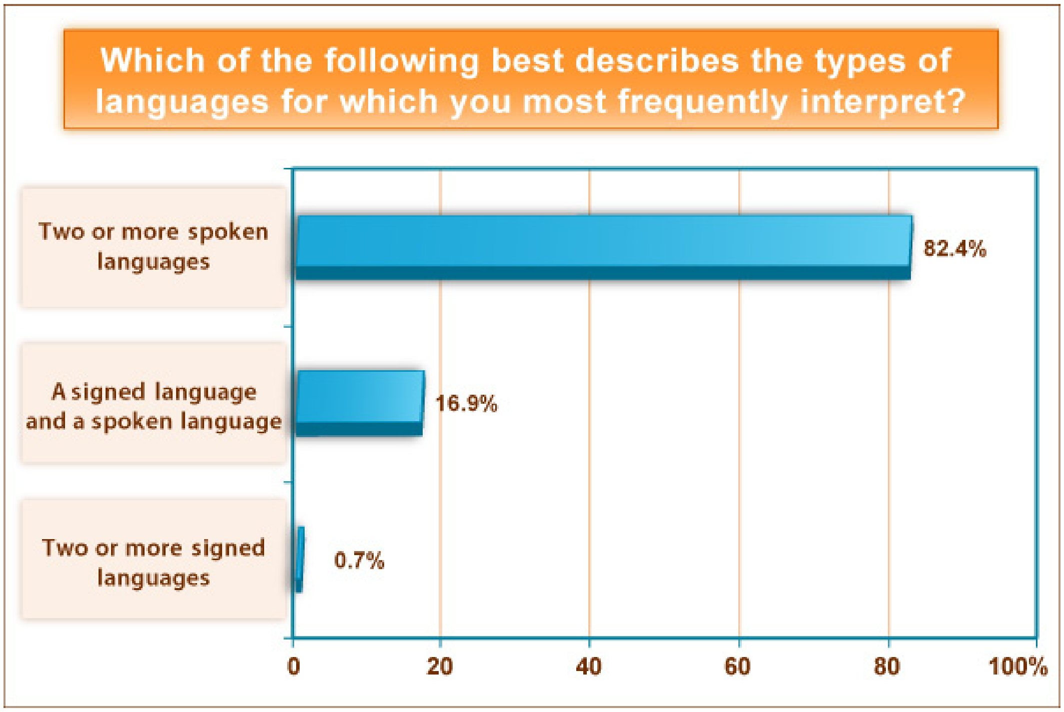

Figure 1: Percentages of Interpreters for Signed and Spoken Languages
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also asked interpreters to list their specific language combinations. Depending on the setting and type of interpreting, an interpreter might interpret in both directions or in just one direction. For example, when an interpreter is bidirectional, the language combination is often listed as "English<>Spanish" to indicate that the interpreter can interpret from English to Spanish and from Spanish to English. However, when an interpreter goes from one language into another but not vice versa, the language combination is listed with the source language into the target language; so an interpreter who renders English into Spanish would be designated as "English>Spanish."

In order to ensure that our survey enabled interpreters with bidirectional and unidirectional combinations to all participate equally, we asked interpreters to tell us about each language combination separately. In total, the interpreters reported 111 unique language combinations. Of these, 73 language combinations were listed by two or more interpreters (see Table 1). The most common combinations were English>Spanish (20.32%) and Spanish>English (19.50%), followed by English>American Sign Language (7.11%) and American Sign Language>English (6.51%). Other popular combinations included French>English (4.34%), English>French (3.33%), Portuguese>English (2.88%), Russian>English (2.58%), English>Russian (2.51%), and English>Portuguese (2.32%).

Language Combination	Percent of Sample	Language Combination	Percent of Sample	Language Combination	Percent of Sample
English>Spanish	20.32	Spanish>American Sign Language	0.45	Hindi>English	0.15
Spanish>English	19.50	American Sign Language>Spanish	0.37	Italian>French	0.15
English>American Sign Language	7.11	Cantonese>English	0.34	Italian>Spanish	0.15
American Sign Language>English	6.51	English>Cantonese	0.34	English>Dari	0.11
French>English	4.34	English>Korean	0.34	English>Kurdish	0.11
English>French	3.33	French>Portuguese	0.34	French>Russian	0.11
Portuguese>English	2.88	Hebrew>English	0.34	German>French	0.11
Russian>English	2.58	English>Hebrew	0.30	Portuguese>French	0.11
English>Russian	2.51	English>Polish	0.30	Punjabi>English	0.11
English>Portuguese	2.32	German>Spanish	0.30	Russian>French	0.11
German>English	1.91	Korean>English	0.30	Urdu>English	0.11
English>German	1.87	Spanish>German	0.30	Armenian>English	0.07
Japanese>English	1.50	English>Farsi	0.26	Dari>English	0.07
English>Japanese	1.46	English>Vietnamese	0.26	English>Armenian	0.07
French>Spanish	1.46	Polish>English	0.26	English>Greek	0.07
English>Mandarin	1.20	English>Hindi	0.22	English>Guajarati	0.07
Mandarin>English	1.20	English>Urdu	0.22	English>Laotian	0.07
English>Italian	1.09	Farsi>English	0.22	English>Somali	0.07
Italian>English	1.05	Vietnamese>English	0.22	French>Arabic	0.07
English>Arabic	1.01	English>Haitian Creole	0.19	German>Arabic	0.07
Arabic>English	0.94	Haitian Creole>English	0.19	German>Russian	0.07
Portuguese>Spanish	0.94	English>Punjabi	0.15	Greek>English	0.07
Spanish>French	0.75	French>German	0.15	Kurdish>English	0.07
Spanish>Portuguese	0.75	French>Italian	0.15	Spanish>Italian	0.07

Table 1: Top Language Combinations Reported by Interpreters in North America
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

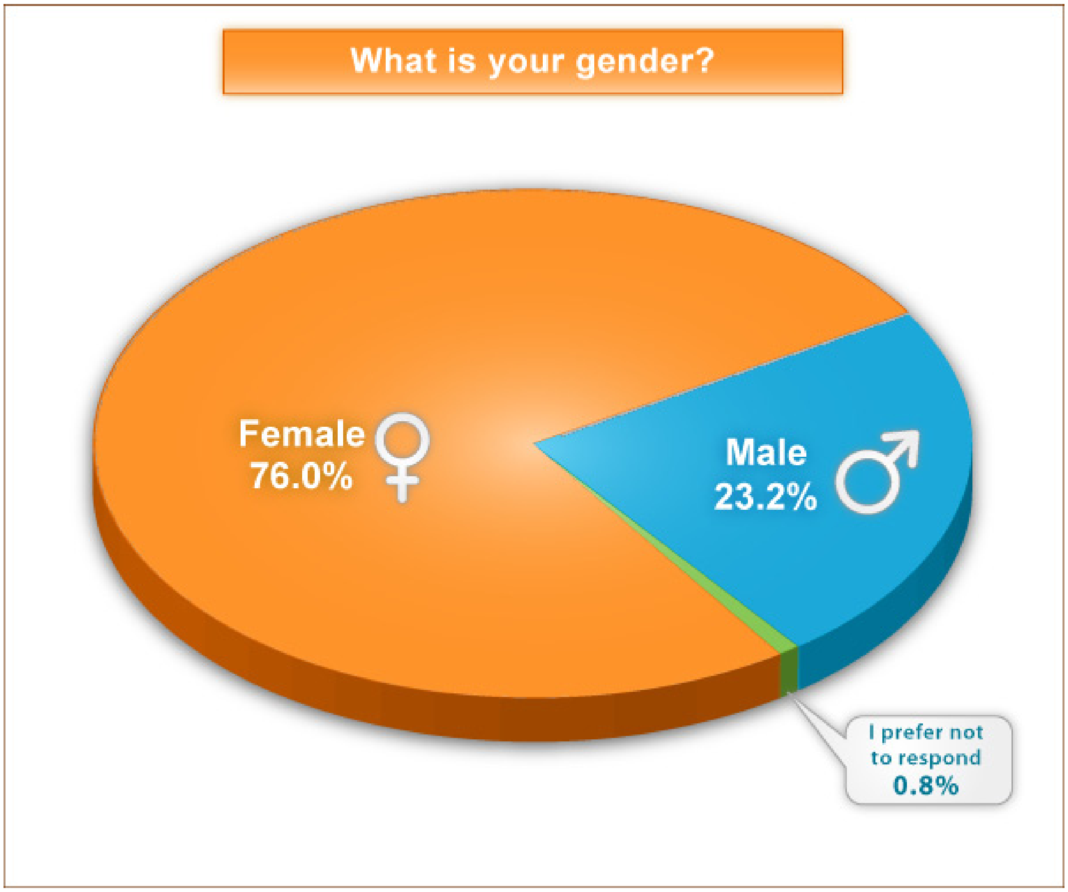

Figure 2: Female Interpreters Outnumber Males by More than Three to One
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We then inquired about interpreters' gender (see Figure 2). The overwhelming majority of interpreters are women (76.0%), with males making up less than one-quarter of the profession (23.2%). We gave interpreters the option not to respond to this question if they preferred not to identify a gender (0.8%). When we cross-referenced this data with other major variables, such as age range or geography, we noticed that this gender distribution – with a significant concentration of females – remained consistent.

The age of the professional workforce is also an important characteristic of the market. Nearly one-fifth of the interpreters in our sample (18.24%) fell between the ages of 58 and 67, meaning that they are near or past the traditional retirement age of 65 (see Table 2). Only one in every 20 interpreters (5.29%) is younger than 28, indicating that this profession is not one that is typically embarked upon by students fresh out of high school or college.

Age Range	Percent of Sample
18-27	5.29
28-37	17.71
38-47	25.99
48-57	28.81
58-67	18.24
68-77	3.61
78 or older	0.35

Table 2: Age Ranges of Interpreters in North America
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

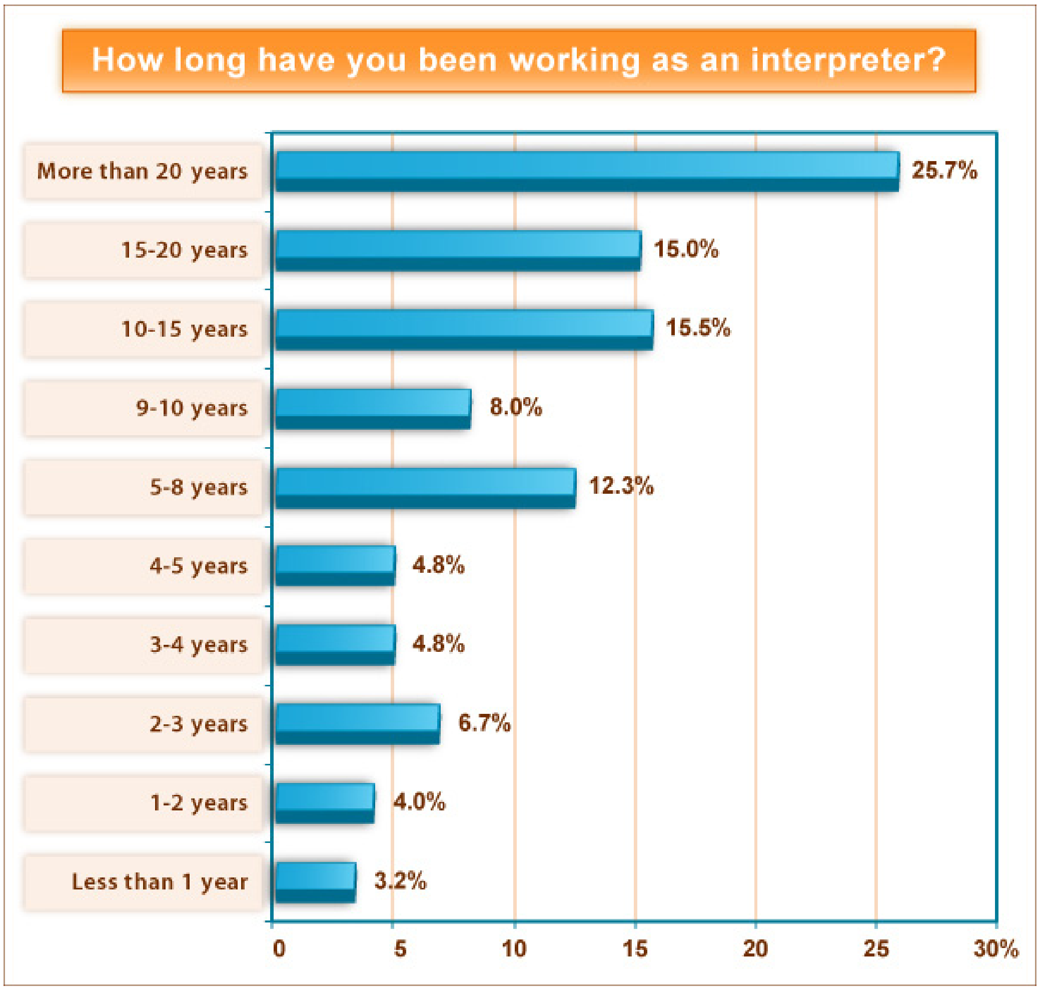

Figure 3: Length of Interpreting Experience of Interpreters in North America
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

When we asked about length of experience in the field, we noticed that a large portion of the individuals surveyed (40.7%) had been working as interpreters for 15 years or more (see Figure 3).

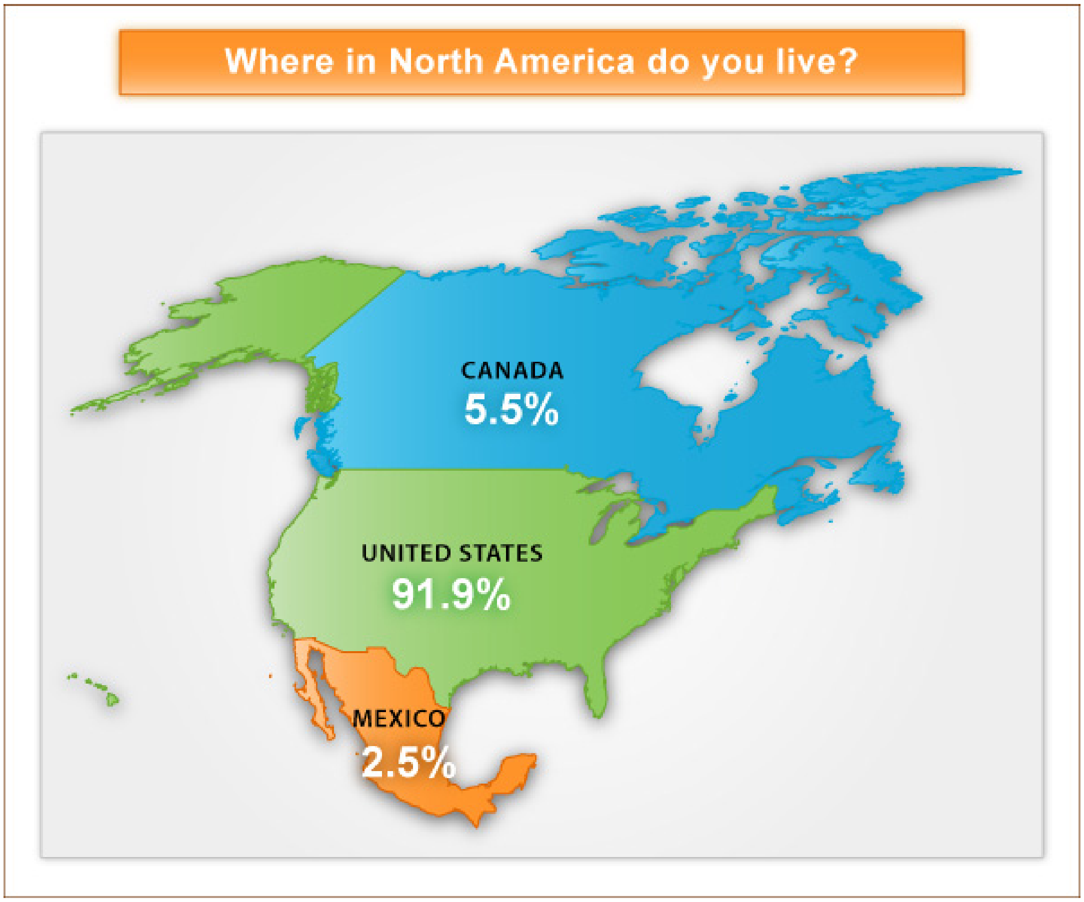

Figure 4: Country Distribution of Interpreter Survey Respondents
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Because the survey encompassed all of North America, we asked interpreters to identify their country of residence. Our survey had a large turnout from the United States (91.9%), with smaller numbers of interpreters from Canada (5.5%) and Mexico (2.5%) (see Figure 4).

We also identified the locations of interpreters in each state or province in each country (see Figures 5, 6, and 7). We asked interpreters to tell us about the areas in which they lived in order to determine the percentages of interpreters working in urban, suburban, and rural settings (see Figure 8). More than half (59.8%) of interpreters are city dwellers, while about a third (29.6%) reside in suburban settings. Only one in every ten interpreters (10.6%) lives in a rural community.

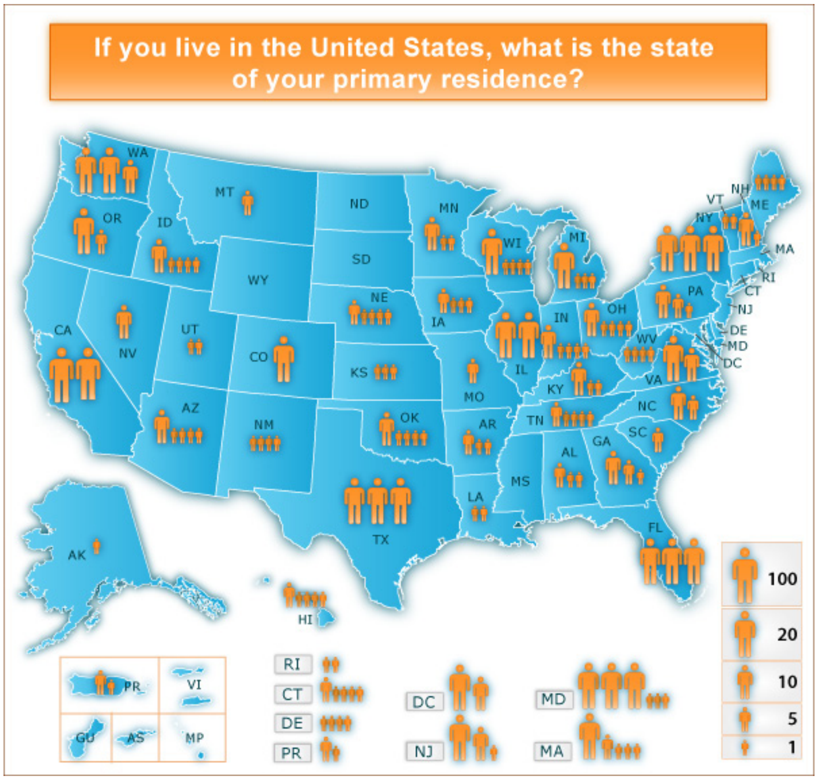

Figure 5: Locations of Interpreter Respondents Based in the United States
Source: Common Sense Advisory

Figure 6: Locations of Interpreter Respondents Based in Canada
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Figure 7: Locations of Interpreter Respondents Based in Mexico
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

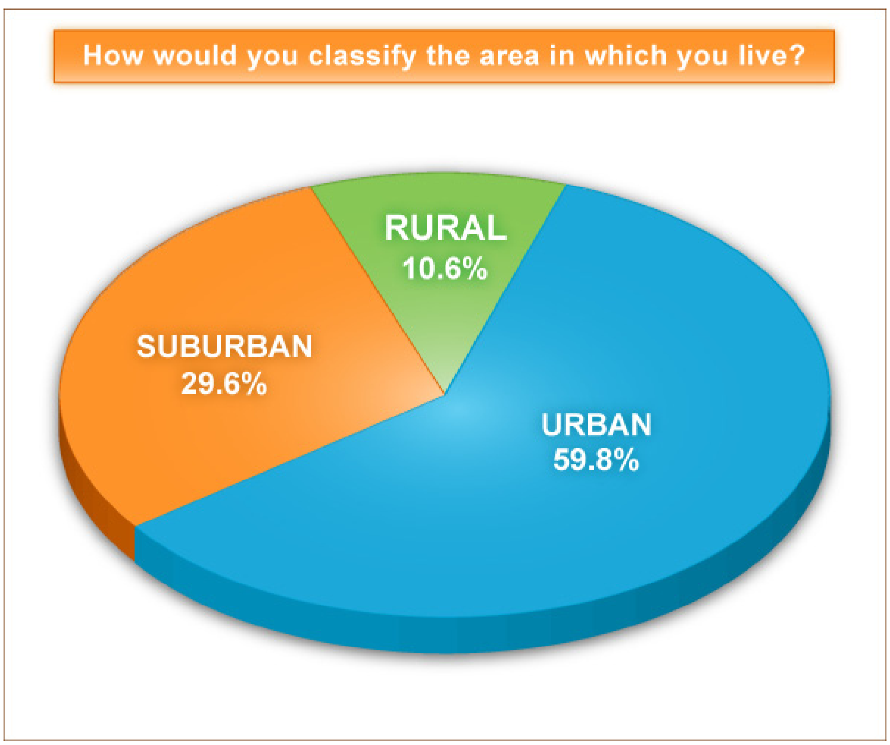

Figure 8: The Majority of Interpreters in North America Live in Urban Settings
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

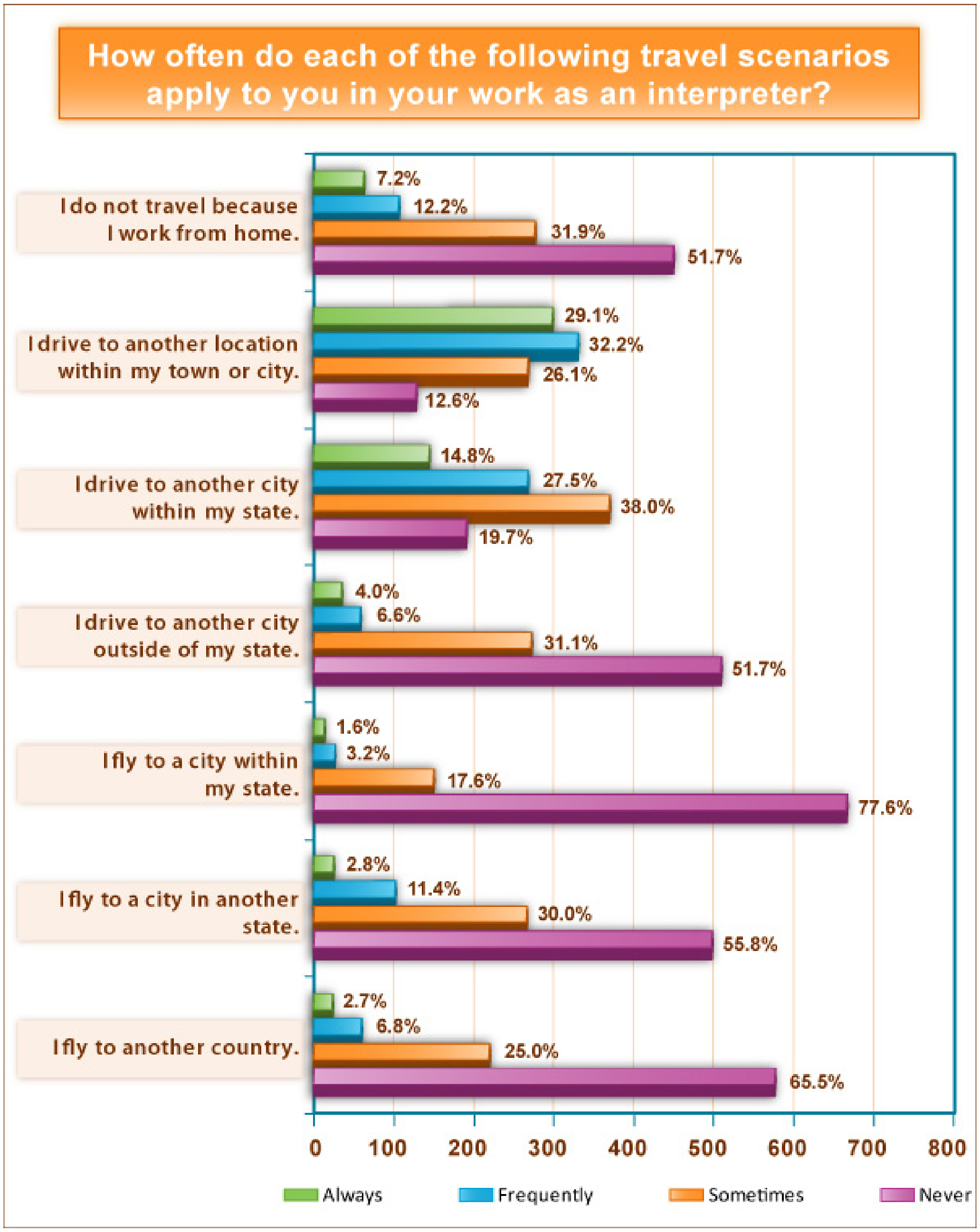

Figure 9: North American Interpreters Work Here, There, and Everywhere
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We wanted to know not only where interpreters live but where they work (see Figure 9). The most common scenario for interpreters is to work within their own town or city – more than half of the sample (61.3%) either "always" or "frequently" work at locations within their own town or city. More than a third of working interpreters (42.3%) always or frequently drive to other cities within their state or province.

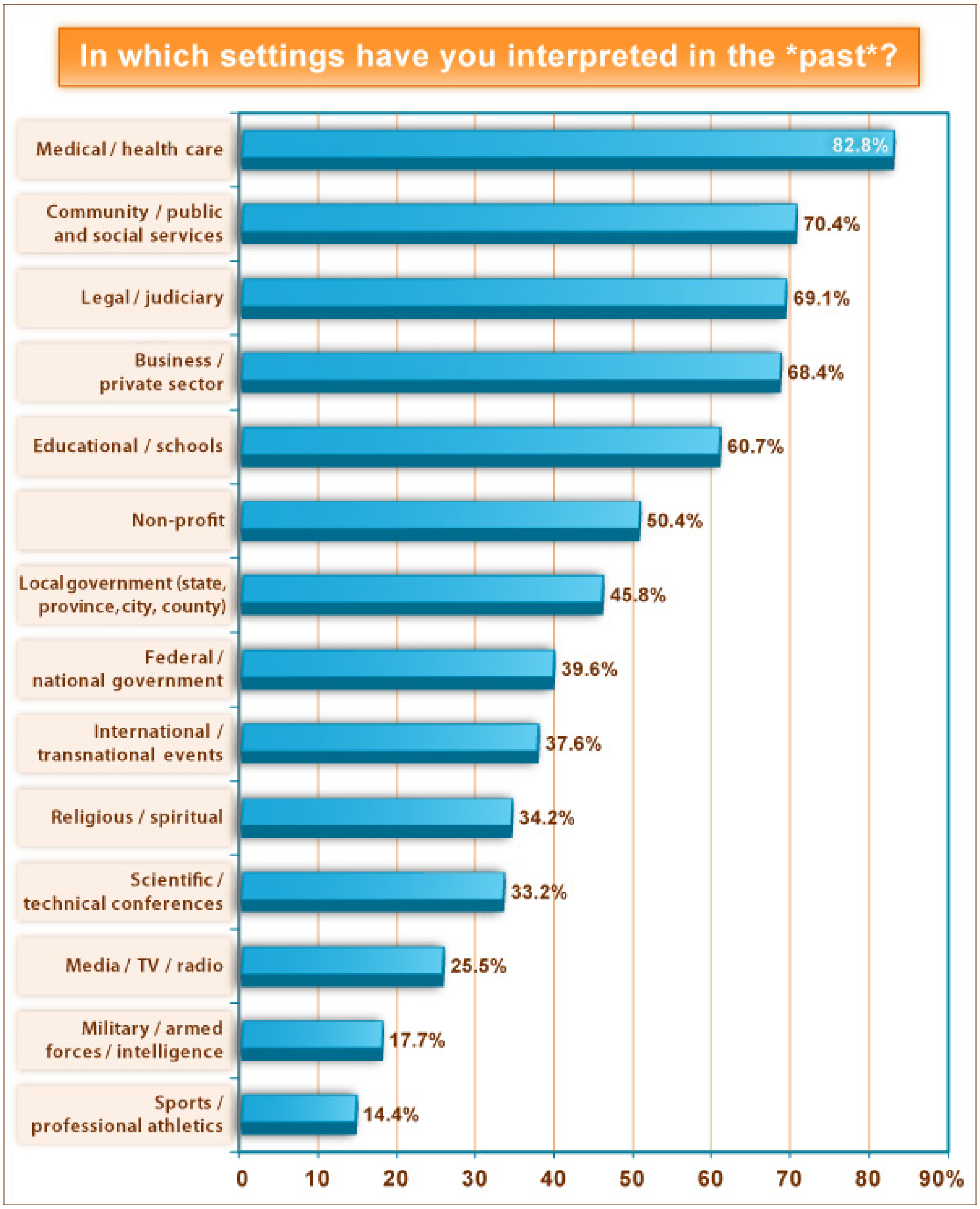

Figure 10: Interpreters Report Having Worked in a Vast Array of Settings
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We asked interpreters about the settings in which they had worked in the past (see Figure 10). The overwhelming majority (82.8%) had worked at some point in the medical or healthcare field, followed by community, public, and social services (70.4%). A high percentage of interpreters also claimed experience in legal/judiciary interpreting (69.1%) and as interpreters for business settings (68.4%). More than half of all interpreters had also worked in the education field (60.7%) and in non-profit settings (50.4%).

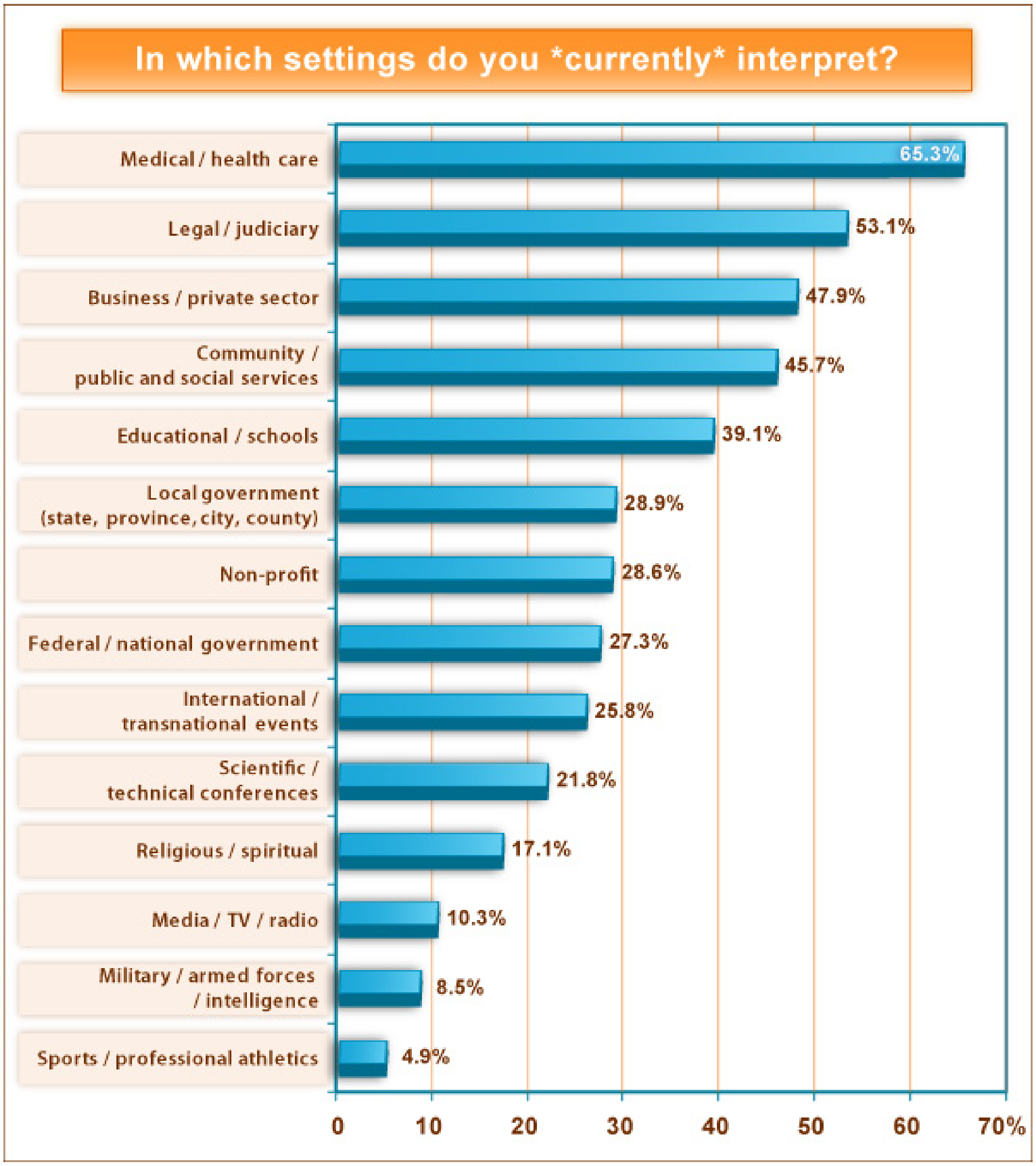

Figure 11: Most Interpreters Work in Health Care and Legal Settings
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

However, we wanted to know not just where interpreters had worked in the past but where they are working today (see Figure 11). We found that the largest group of interpreters (65.3%) reported working in healthcare settings, followed by legal and judiciary (53.1%), business settings (47.9%), and community services (45.7%). More than a quarter of the interpreters we surveyed report working today in schools (39.1%), in local government (28.9%), in non-profit settings (28.6%), for the federal government (27.3%), and at international events (25.8%).

To probe further on this topic, we asked interpreters to estimate how much time they currently spend interpreting within each setting (see Table 3). Health care is clearly the area where interpreters work most frequently in North America, with nearly a third (29.91%) of time spent in this setting. After health care, legal was the most common setting, as interpreters estimated spending nearly a quarter of their time (23.05%) in this industry. Interpreters also reported high percentages for educational (14.65%), business (14.47%), and social services settings (11.20%).

Setting	Percentage of Time Spent Interpreting in This Setting
Medical / health care	29.91
Legal / judiciary	23.05
Educational / schools	14.65
Business / private sector	14.47
Community / public and social services	11.20
International / transnational events	8.25
Local government (state, province, city, county)	7.57
Federal / national government	7.51
Non-profit	6.76
Scientific / technical conferences	5.23
Religious / spiritual	3.45
Media / TV / radio	2.31
Military / armed forces / intelligence	2.06
Sports / professional athletics	1.19

Table 3: Average Time Interpreters Spend Working in Different Settings
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Not only did we want to know what settings interpreters work in but also how often they use each mode of interpreting (see Figure 12). We found that simultaneous interpreting was the most common, with 62.8% of respondents reporting that they "always" or "frequently" use this mode, followed by consecutive interpreting without note-taking (49.7%) and consecutive interpreting with note-taking (41.5%). The least common task for interpreters to perform was sight translation (24.2%).

When we looked at the data across different settings, we found that simultaneous interpreting was common regardless of the setting. This indicates that simultaneous interpreting skills are important for all settings, including healthcare interpreting, even though many training programs for medical interpreters focus more heavily on consecutive interpreting skills.

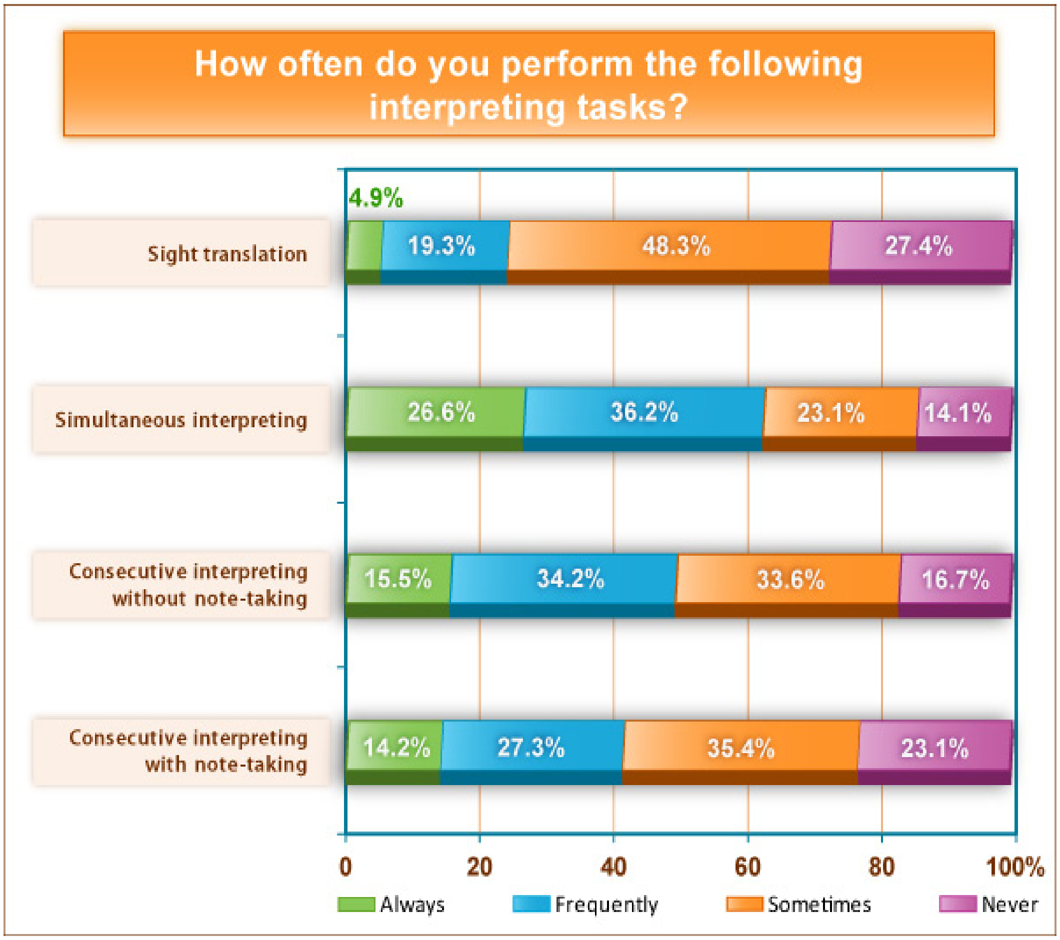

Figure 12: Simultaneous Interpreting is the Most Commonly Employed Mode
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We wanted to know what delivery methods are most common for working interpreters in North America today. So, we asked interpreters to tell us how often they provide services in person, over the phone, and via video (see Figure 13). We found that nearly everyone interprets in face-to-face settings – just a tiny fraction (1.3%) said that they never interpret in person, while well over half (63.6%) reported that they always interpret this way.

Remote interpreting is far less common as an everyday practice, with a very small contingent (5.5%) reporting that they always interpret this way and about a quarter (27.3%) stating that they frequently interpret via telephone. However, more than a third of all interpreters (35.4%) said that they sometimes interpret telephonically. Video interpreting is nearly the polar opposite of in-person interpreting in terms of frequency, with the largest group (65.8%) stating that they never interpret on screen. Nearly one in ten (9.6%) stated that they always or frequently perform video interpreting.

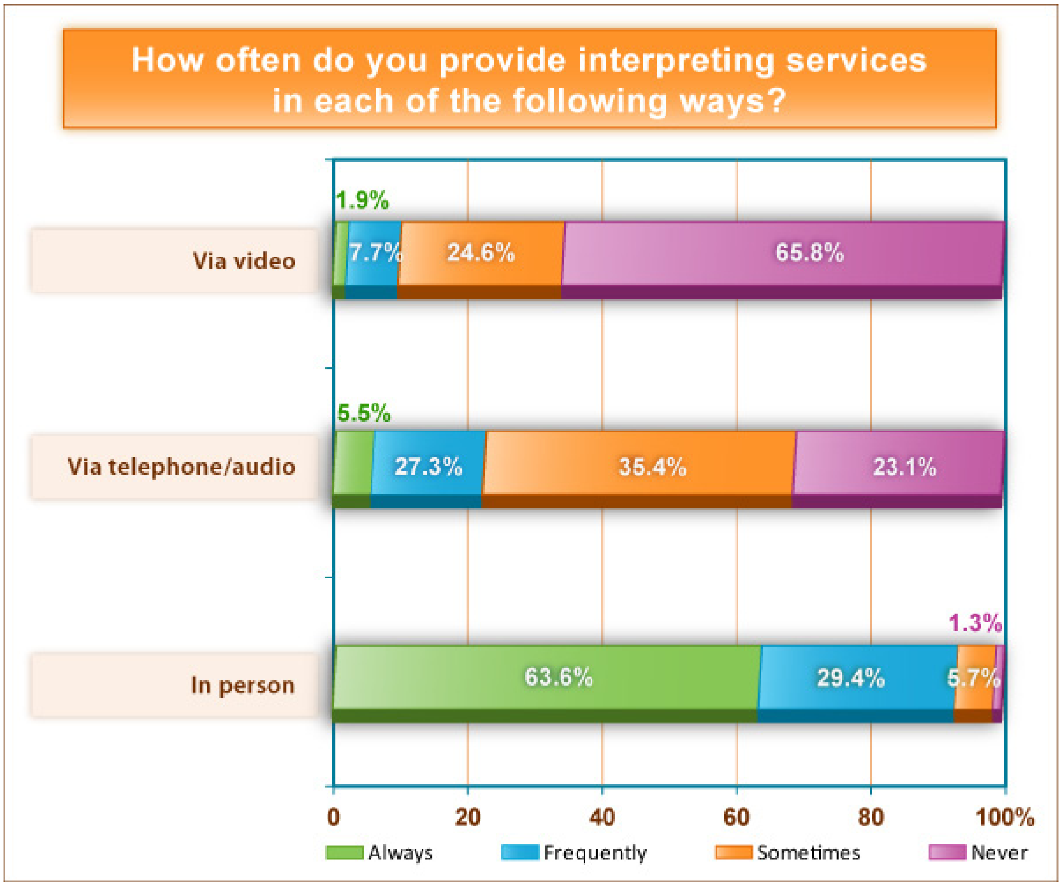

Figure 13: Frequency of Interpretation Delivery Method
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Past research reveals that interpreters do far more than just interpret, so we wanted to see what other language services activities interpreters were carrying out (see Figure 14). While leaders of the interpreting field often decry the fact that interpreters are labeled "translators" – which refers to professionals who render written words from one language to another – the data shows that, in fact, nearly three-quarters of interpreters actually do work as translators (72.9%). In other words, the challenge of convincing people that "an interpreter is not the same as a translator" may be even more difficult than previously thought, since the lines of these two professions appear to be quite blurred.

Only 10.0% percent of interpreters chose "none of the above" in response to our question about other language services, meaning that they do not translate, train, mentor, teach, test, manage, or carry out the other types of language-related work we listed. However, this does not mean that this small contingent works as interpreters only, as the next section on employment and compensation issues will show.

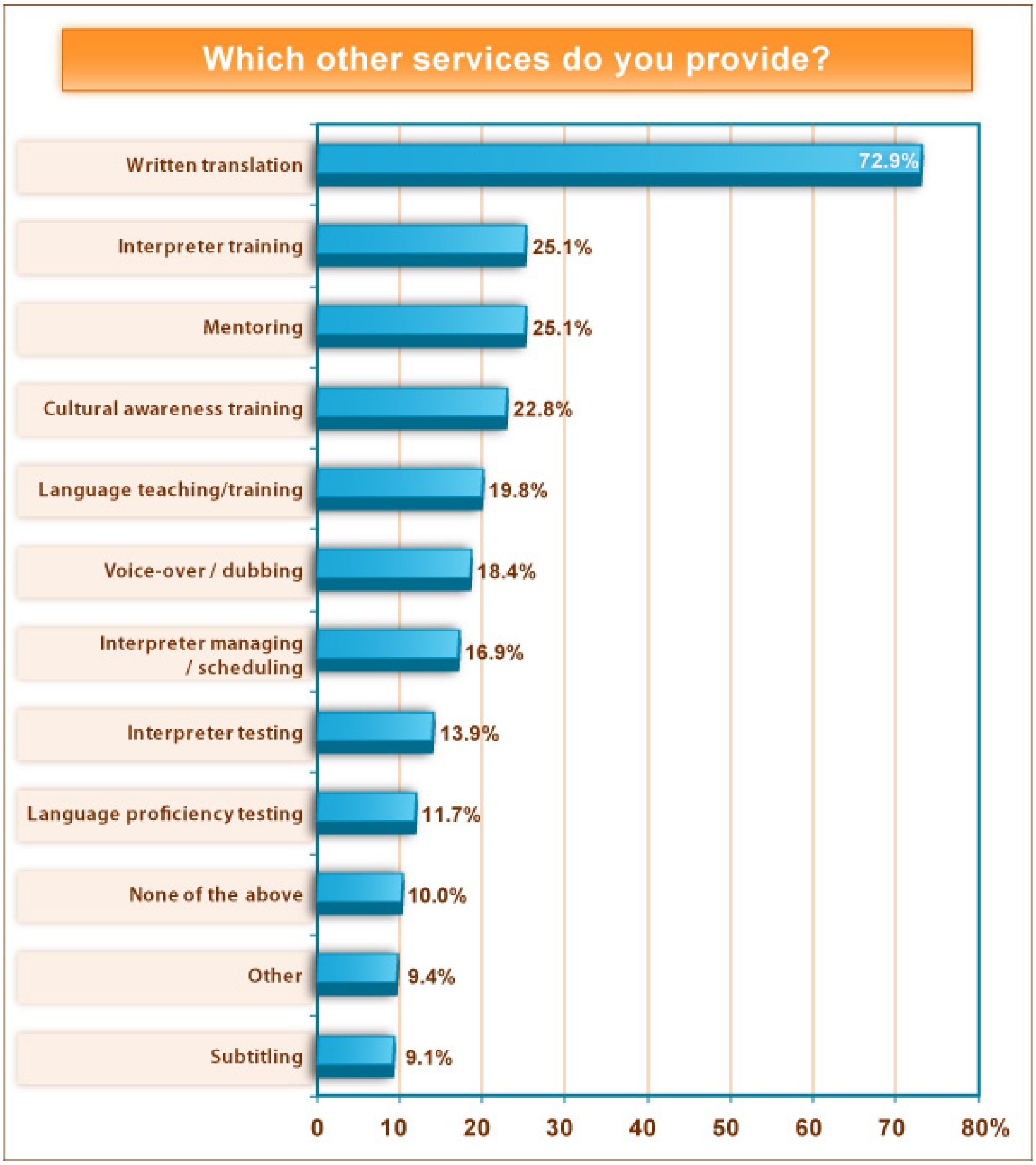

Figure 14: Most Interpreters Also Work as Translators
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

An Overview of Interpreter Education and Training

In order to develop a fuller profile of the interpreting profession, we asked questions regarding levels of education and training related to interpreting. Because many interpreters provide services for members of foreign-born populations, we wanted to ascertain exactly how many interpreters were educated within North America and outside of it. We found that more than half (64.8%) of those in our sample were educated within North America, and the remainder (35.2%) received most of their education elsewhere (see Figure 15).

We attribute the high percentage of interpreters educated within North America to the fact that a large percentage of Spanish-speaking interpreters in the United States may have received education in Mexico. Also, the majority of interpreters for American Sign Language <>English were born and raised within the United States. Similarly, many interpreters in Canada for sign language and French Canadian were educated within North America.

We wanted to know what levels of education interpreters had reached, regardless of the country where they were educated (see Figure 16). The vast majority of North American interpreters are college-educated, with 78.9% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Indeed, the largest group of interpreters (38.4%) said that their highest level of education obtained was a master's degree. In other words, interpreters have, on average, a very high level of education – just a tiny fraction (0.2%) had not graduated from high school.

We asked what type of formal education and/or training interpreters had received in interpreting, and we instructed them to select all that applied (see Figure 17). Nearly one-fifth of our sample (17.9%) stated that they had received training in interpreting through a graduate degree (master's or doctoral) program. Nearly a third (27.7%) said that they had taken multiple interpreter training courses totaling more than 40 hours.

However, the largest group of respondents stated that they had received formal education and/or training through conference workshops (56.8%) and presentations (42.6%), indicating that conferences are an important source of training for interpreters. Other popular options included university courses (17.7%), online courses (14.3%), webinars (13.2%), community or technical college programs (12.3%), bachelor's degree programs (11.0%), training courses of less than 40 hours (11.0%), and courses of exactly 40 hours (9.4%).

On an important note, 7.6% of interpreters reported that they had received no exposure whatsoever to professional training or education on interpreting, not even in the form of a conference presentation.

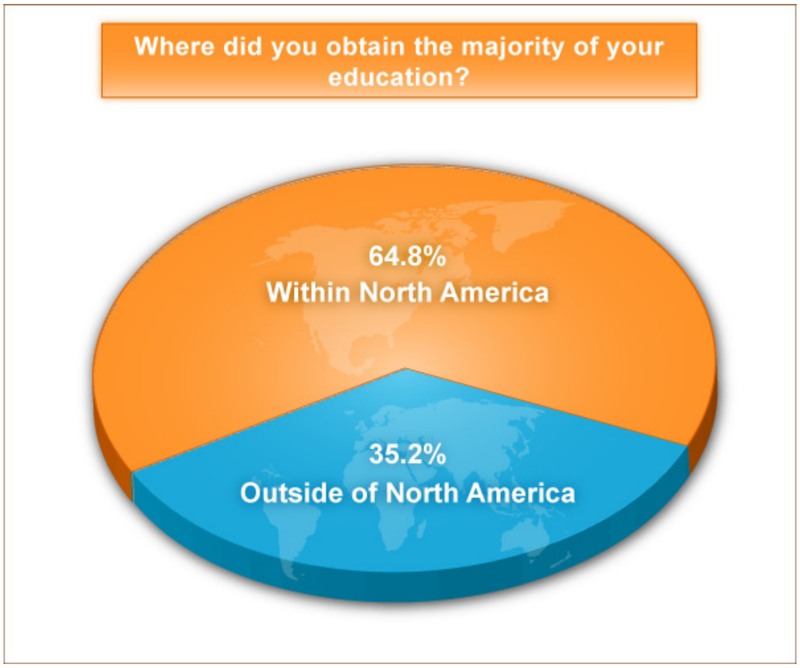

Figure 15: Most Interpreters Received Education within North America
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

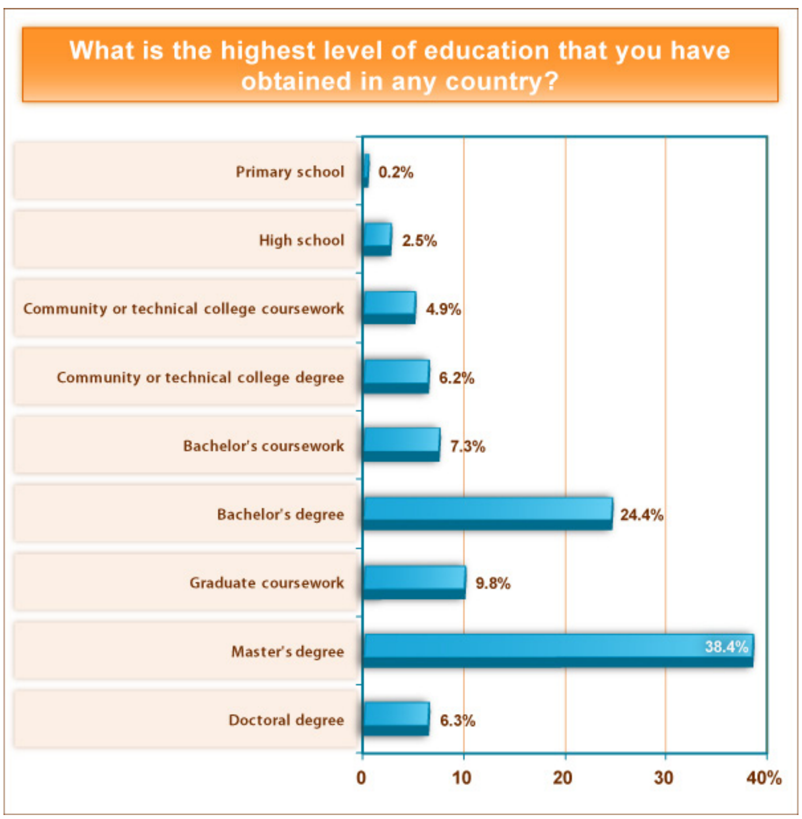

Figure 16: College Education is Commonplace for North American Interpreters
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

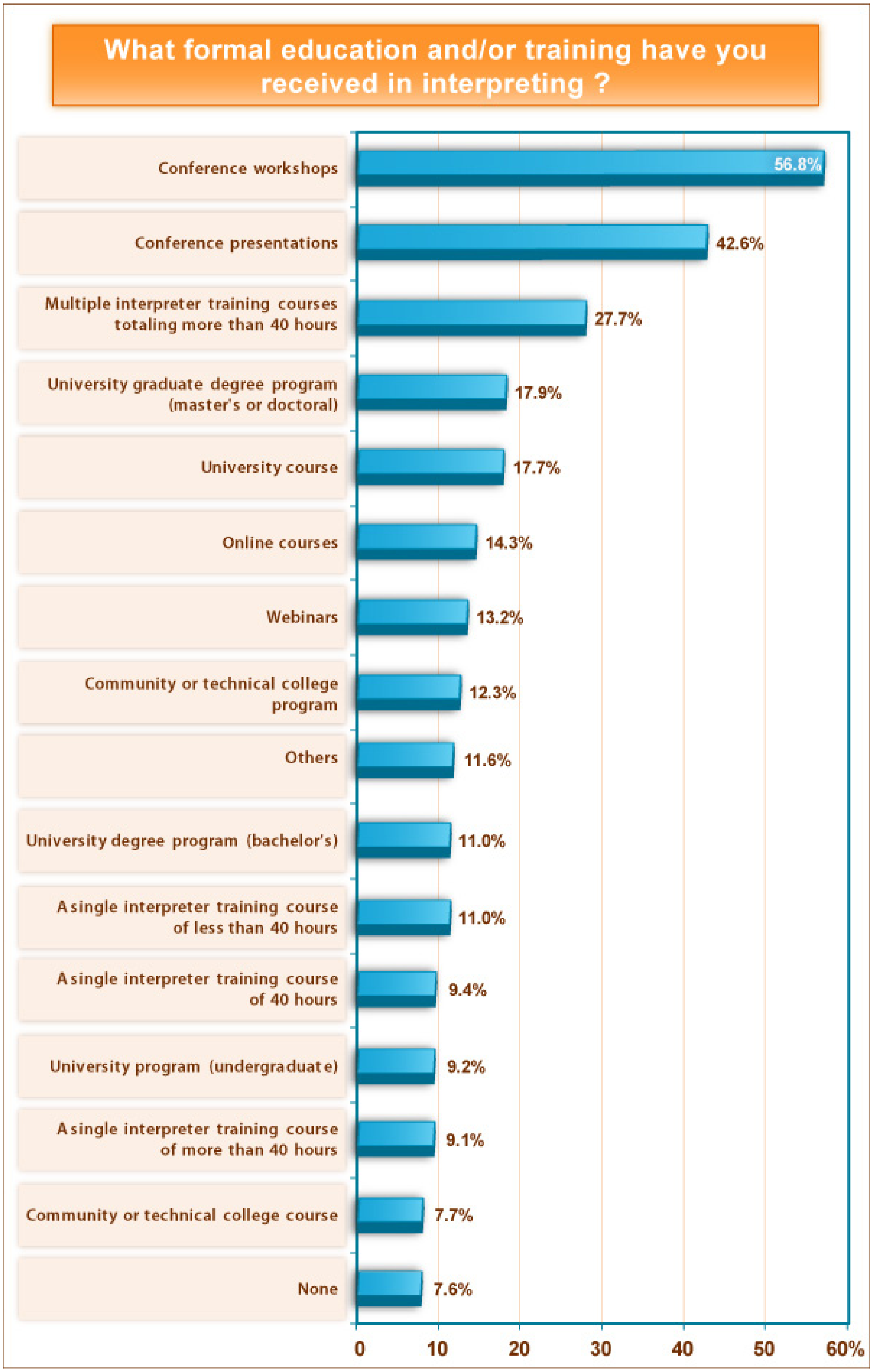

Figure 17: Many Interpreters Receive Training at Professional Conferences
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also asked various questions about a perennial topic in the interpreting field, and one that often sparks debate: certification. To ascertain interpreters' involvement with the many programs that exist within the profession, we asked them to identify whether they already held the certification in question, whether they planned to seek it, whether they had tried and failed to obtain it, or whether they had no plans to seek the credential (see Figure 18).

When we looked at the data for the most popular certification programs in the present day, state court interpreter certification ranked the highest, with nearly a quarter of our respondents (21.9%) reporting that they held a state-level certification and another 14.4% stating that they planned to seek this certification. National certification for sign language interpreters (NAD/RID) was the next most popular certification, with 13.3% of respondents stating that they already hold this certification and another 17.5% stating that they intend to seek it.

One in ten interpreters within our sample (10.5%) holds a federal court interpreter certification, with nearly two out of ten (18.9%) stating that they intend to seek this credential. The next most common credential for interpreters was a state-level medical interpreter certification (7.5%).

Taking into account the data collected on settings presented previously in this report, it is clear that there is an imbalance between the types of settings in which interpreters most commonly work and the certifications that they hold. Medical interpreting was the most frequently cited setting for both past experience and current workload. Yet court interpreting certification tops the list.

However, when we asked about national medical certification, it was very clear that interpreters intend to seek these credentials. For both programs, the number of interpreters stating they planned to obtain the certification in question was extremely high – more than a quarter of the total sample in both cases. It is evident from the data that these programs are addressing a major void in the certification offerings available to working interpreters, especially given the amount of interpreters who work in healthcare settings.

Of course, the fact that multiple programs exist can be confusing for interpreters. For example, comments from interpreters indicated that they were not sure which medical certification programs were associated with which organizations, so they marked both in some cases without knowing which was which. And a small number of interpreters indicated that they already held certification for an initiative for which the test development process is still under way (CCHI).

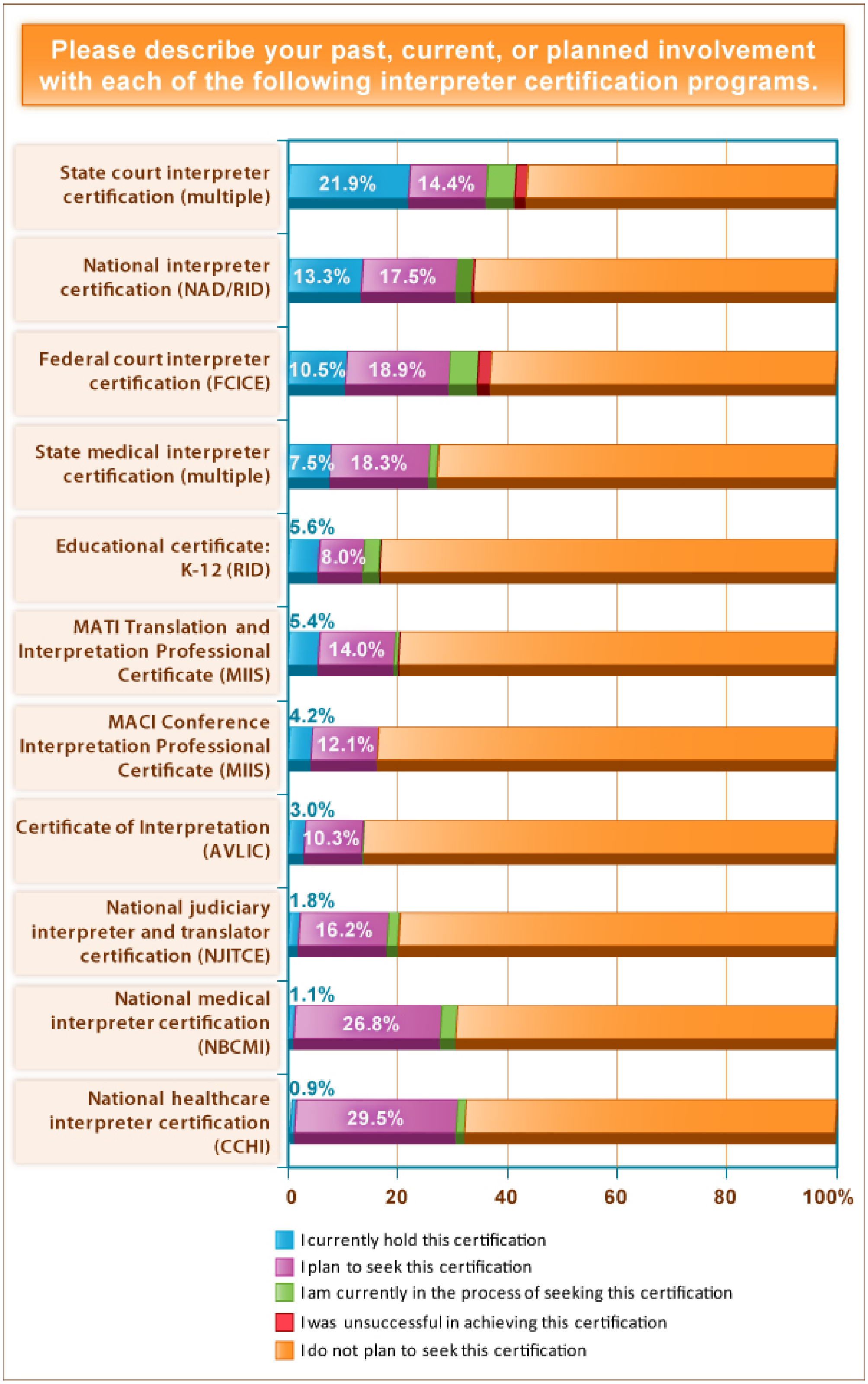

Figure 18: Diverse Interpreter Certification Programs Exist in North America
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

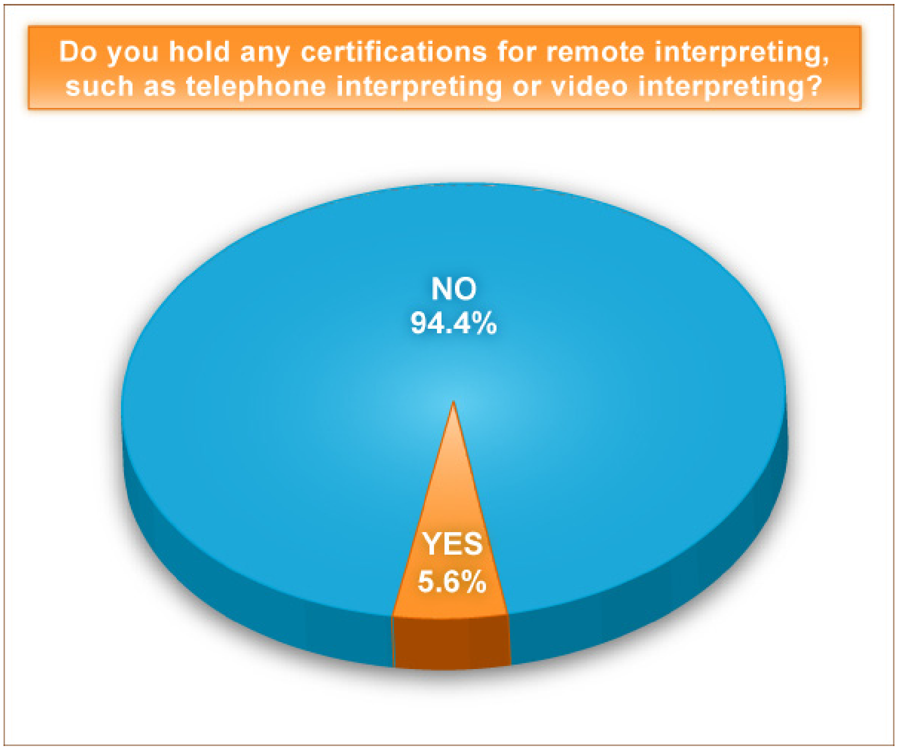

Figure 19: Very Few Interpreters Are Certified in Remote Interpreting
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

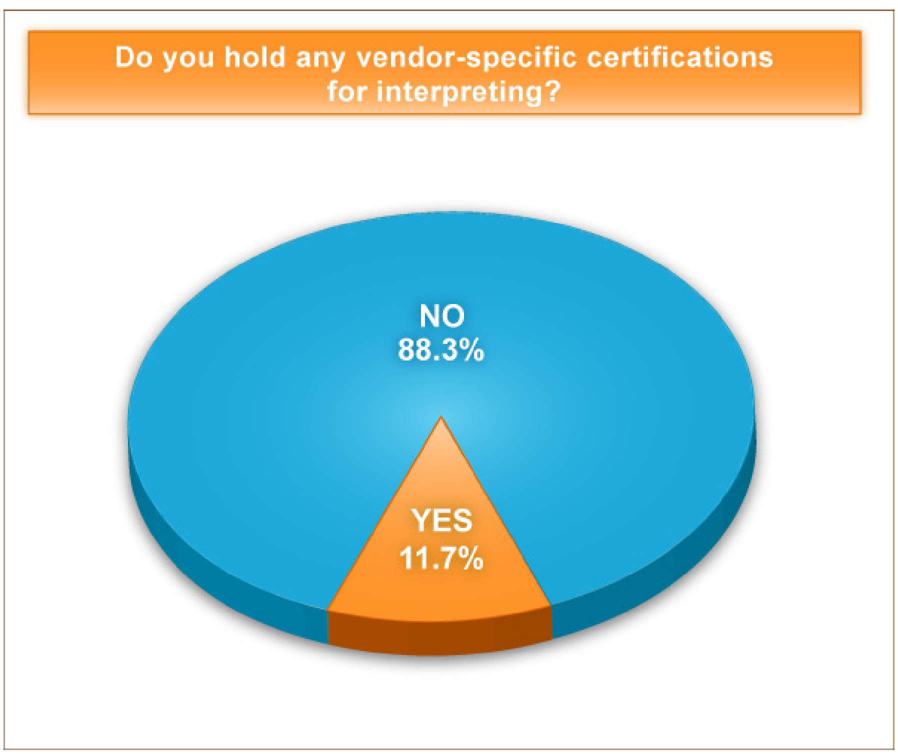

Figure 20: More than One in Ten Interpreters Are Certified by Vendors
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Because traditional certification programs do not necessarily address technologies such as telephone and video interpreting, we asked these questions separately in order to determine the level of prevalence (see Figures 19 and 20). We found that only 5.6% of interpreters held certifications in remote interpreting, but nearly double that amount (11.7%) held vendor-specific certifications for interpreting. In some cases, suppliers or vendors of interpreting services have developed their own programs, often in response to the need for subject-specific knowledge related to their customer accounts, or because certification is simply not available for many language pairs. In other words, if vendors want to ascertain an interpreter's skill level, they may have to assess the skills anyway. As such, some vendors have developed their own certification programs, although the number of requirements and the difficulty of obtaining the certification may vary drastically from one vendor to another.

We also asked interpreters which other tests they had passed aside from the ones listed. We received 341 "write-in" replies to this question. The tests they cited most commonly were from the Department of State (89 mentions) and the United Nations (22 mentions). We saw smaller numbers (fewer than 20 each) of responses for the Department of Justice FBI Linguist test, International Monetary Fund test, Canada Immigration Refugee Board Interpreter accreditation test, Public Works and Government Services Canada test, Interpreter Language and Skills Assessment Tool (the "ILSAT"), and California Department of Rehabilitation Test.

As the data shows, interpreter associations are an important source of training for interpreters, and their conferences are of particular importance. We presented interpreters with a significant list of 77 different interpreting associations in order to find out which ones were most popular. Because the sample comprised mostly interpreters from the United States, the majority of the top associations selected were headquartered in this country.

The most popular association for interpreters – by a landslide margin – was the American Translators Association (ATA), with exactly 50% of our sample stating that they were ATA members (see Table 4). This was followed by the category of "Other," with 19.9% of interpreters writing in associations that were not on our list of 77. The next most popular association was the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (19.3%), followed by the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (18.5%) and the International Association of Conference Interpreters (9.1%). Even though medical interpreting was the most popular setting reported, smaller percentages of interpreters belonged to specialist groups like the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (8.3%) and the International Medical Interpreters Association (5.5%).

ATA - American Translators Association	50.0%	**DVTA** - Delaware Valley Translators Association	1.6%
Other	19.9%	**NETA** - New England Translators Association	1.6%
RID - Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf	19.3%	**WASLI** - World Association of Sign Language Interpreters	1.6%
NAJIT – National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators	18.5%	**CCIA** - California Court Interpreters Association	1.3%
AIIC - International Association of Conference Interpreters	9.1%	**CHICATA** - Chicago Area Translators and Interpreters Association	1.3%
NCIHC - National Council on Interpreting in Health Care	8.3%	**ATIO** - Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario	1.3%
IMIA - International Medical Interpreters Association	5.5%	**FLATA** - Florida Chapter of ATA	1.2%
NOTIS - Northwest Translators and Interpreters Society	5.0%	**NITA** - Nevada Interpreters and Translators Association	1.1%
CHIA - California Healthcare Interpreter Association	4.4%	**MITA** - Metroplex Interpreters and Translators Association	0.9%
TAALS - The American Association of Language Specialists	4.2%	**TAHIT** - Texas Association of Healthcare Interpreters and Translators	0.9%
WITS - Washington State Court Interpreters and Translators Association	2.9%	**NATI** - Nebraska Association of Translators and Interpreters	0.8%
NCTA - Northern California Translators Association	2.8%	**MING** - Medical Interpreter Network of Georgia	0.8%
MiTiN - Michigan Translators and Interpreters Network	2.4%	**NIMIA** - Northern Indiana Medical Interpreters Association	0.8%
HITA - Houston Interpreters and Translators Association	2.4%	**CATI** - Carolina Association of Translators and Interpreters	0.7%
MATI - Midwest Association of Translators and Interpreters	2.1%	**SOMI** - Society of Medical Interpreters	0.7%
CIT - Conference of Interpreter Trainers	2.0%	**TTIG** - The Translators and Interpreters Guild	0.7%
NCATA - National Capital Area Chapter of the American Translators Association	1.8%	**IITA** - Iowa Interpreter and Translator Association	0.7%
NYCT - New York Circle of Translators	1.8%	**TAPIT** - Tennessee Association of Professional Interpreters and Translators	0.7%
CFI - California Federation of Interpreters	1.7%	**CTTIC** - Canadian Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters Council	0.7%
AATIA - Austin Area Translators and Interpreters Association	1.6%	**AVLIC** - Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada	0.7%

Table 4: The 40 Most Popular North American Interpreting Associations
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Some of the most popular "write-in" associations listed in the category of "Other" were sign language interpreting organizations, including local chapters of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (Arkansas RID, Alaska RID, and so on), the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), the National Alliance of Black Interpreters (NAOBI), the American Association of Deaf-Blind (AADB), and the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA).

Other commonly mentioned associations in this category included associations outside of the United States but within North America, such as the Association of Professional Language Interpreters (APLI) in Canada, Colegio Mexicano de Intérpretes de Conferencia (CMIC), and Asociación de Traductores e Intérpretes de Monterrey (ATIMAC) in Mexico.

Interpreters also cited numerous other U.S. state associations not included in our survey, such as the Arizona Court Interpreters Association (ACIA), the Association of Translators and Interpreters in Florida (ATIF), the Colorado Association of Professional Interpreters (CAPI), the Maryland Association of Court Interpreters and Translators (MACIT), and the Texas Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (TAJIT).

Interpreters also named associations from outside of the United States, such as the Costa Rican Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters (ACOTIP), the Asociación de Intérpretes de Conferencia de Argentina (ADICA), the German Association of Interpreters and Translators (BDÜ), the Guatemalan Interpreters and Translators Association (AGIT), the Translators and Interpreters Union in Brazil (SINTRA), and many others.

How North American Interpreters Are Compensated

We asked various questions about interpreters' employment status and compensation. More than half of the interpreters surveyed (52.7%) work in a freelance capacity with no other part-time or full-time job. Another 16.7% of the sample said that they freelance but also work a part-time or full-time job. Nearly a quarter of the sample (24.0%) were full-time employees, and 7.3% of these appear to be "bilingual staff," or individuals whose primary job is to do something other than interpreting (see Figure 21).

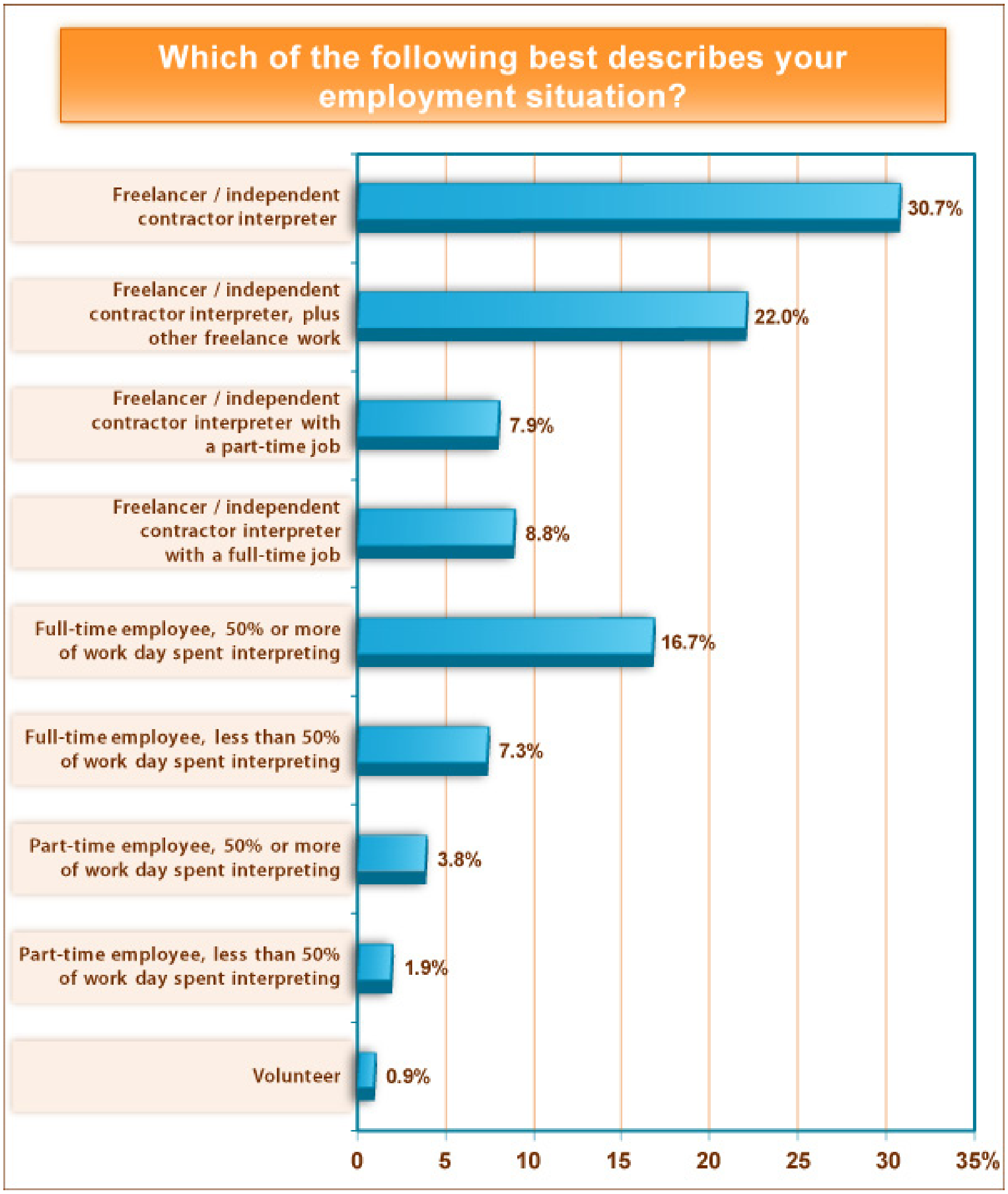

Figure 21: North American Interpreters Work in Diverse Employment Situations
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also asked if interpreters were content with the employment situation they reported (see Figure 22). We found that nearly three-quarters (70.5%) were happy with their current work situation. However, about 14.6% of the total sample said they were freelancers but would prefer a full-time job. When one considers that 52.7% of the total sample consisted of freelancers, this means that roughly one in every four freelancers would rather work in a full-time position.

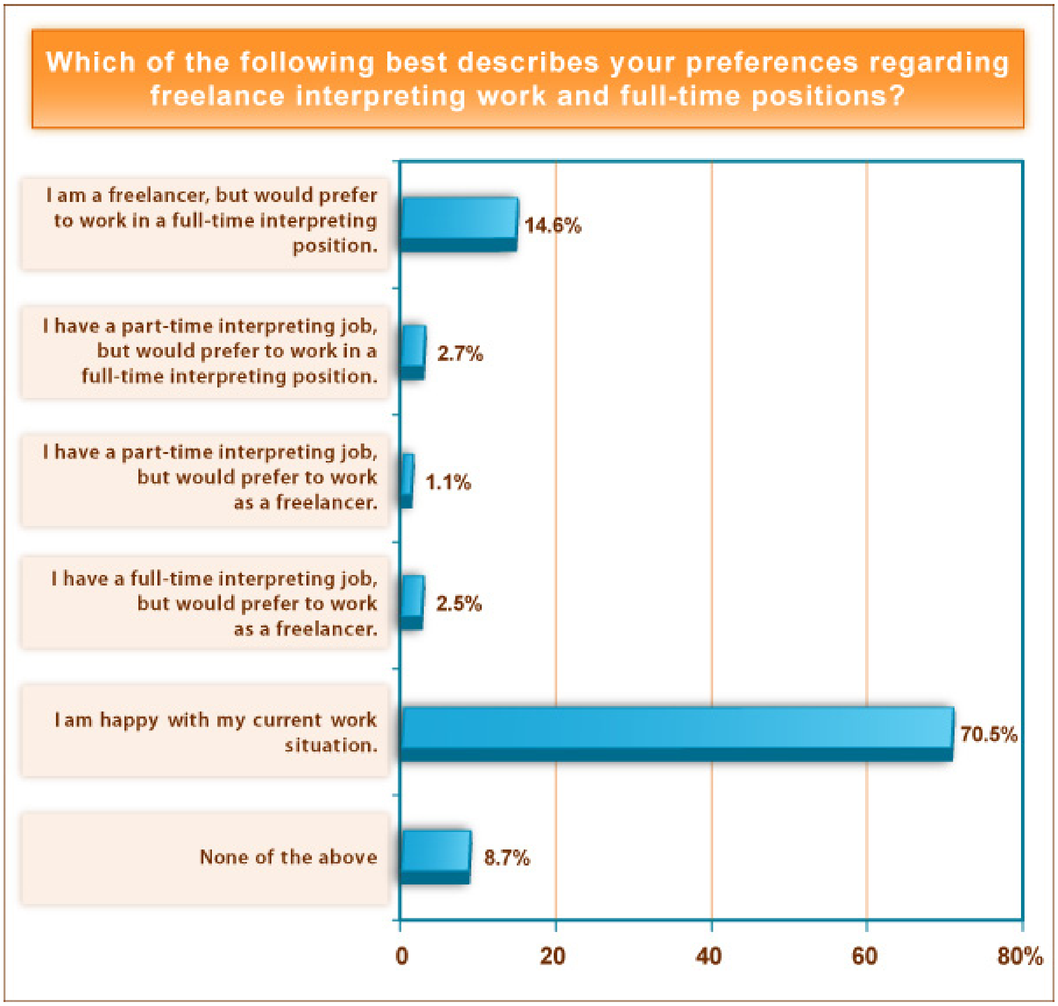

Figure 22: Interpreter Preferences Regarding Freelance and Full-Time Work
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also wanted to know how many hours per week interpreters spend engaged in this line of work (see Figure 23). The largest group of survey respondents (27.9%) said they spent less than 10 hours interpreting per week, followed by those individuals who spent 20 to 29 hours per week interpreting (22.6%) and those who spent 10 to 19 hours per week performing interpreting functions (18.1%). Smaller numbers worked as interpreters 30 to 39 hours per week (17.9%) and 40 to 49 hours per week (8.5%). The tiniest contingents reported interpreting for 50 or more hours per week (5.2%).

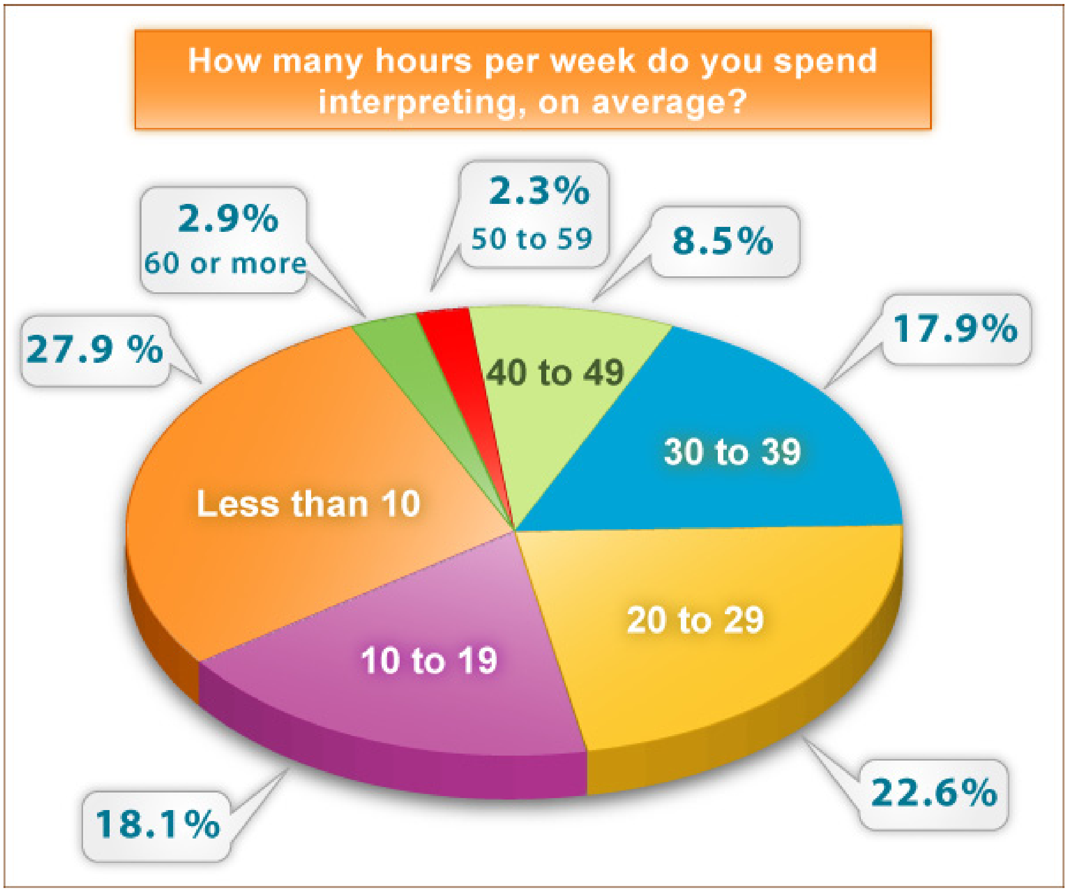

Figure 23: Number of Hours Worked Weekly by Interpreters in North America
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We knew from past research that interpreters are typically compensated on an hourly basis. However, we wanted to know exactly how common this payment method is, as well as how common other methods are (see Figure 24). We allowed respondents to select all payment methods that applied to them. We found that a full two-thirds of interpreters (66.6%) are paid by the hour, while more than a quarter (25.6%) are paid a daily rate. About a fifth (17%) receive a salary, and 13.8% are paid for each project or assignment. Just 7.1% said they were paid by the minute.

We gave interpreters the option to select "Other" for payment possibilities too, and a significant portion (5.8%) of respondents chose this response. The "write-in" options revealed that interpreters are sometimes paid by the half-day (four-hour increments), by the tenth of an hour, by the quarter-hour (15-minute increments), and with a two-hour minimum. Some interpreters pointed out that they work on a pro bono or volunteer basis, and as such, they did not receive any payment for their work.

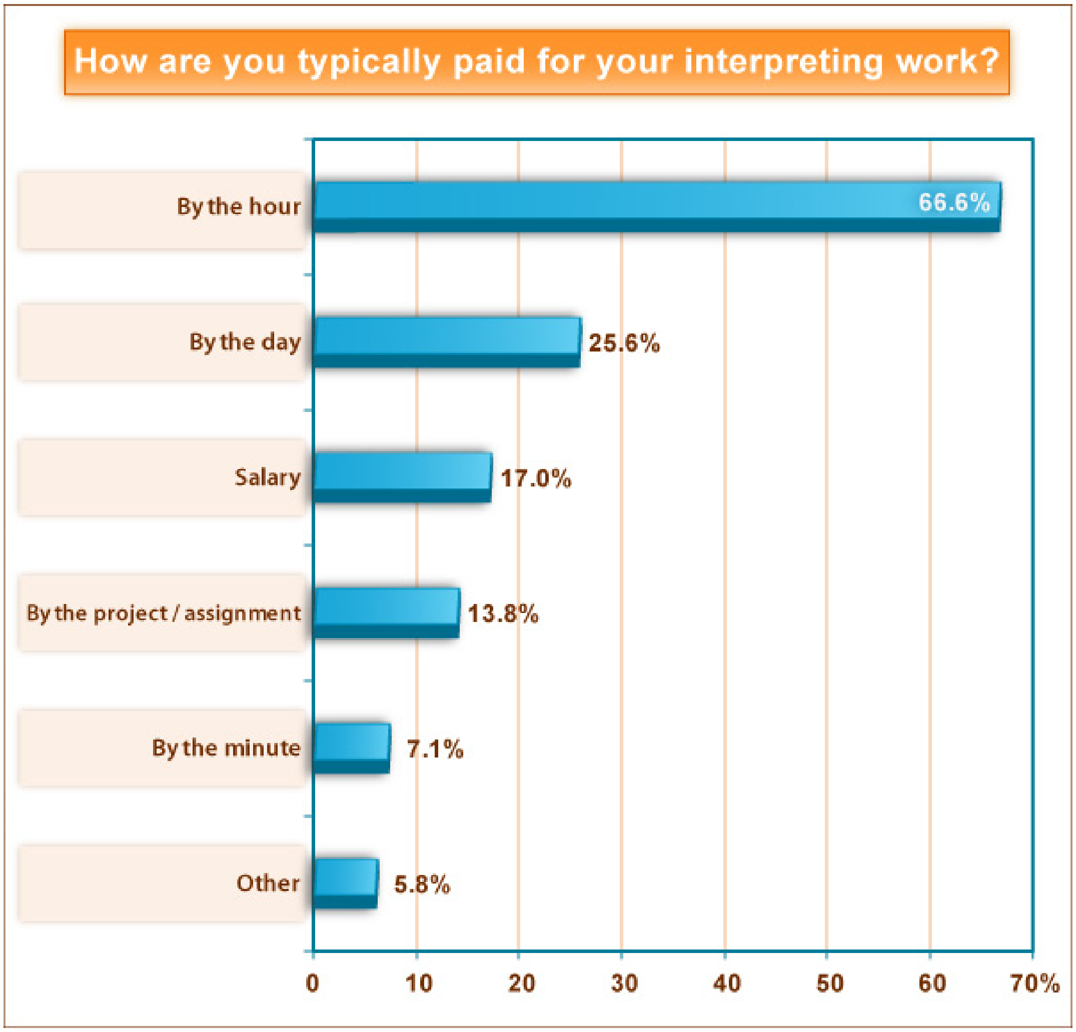

Figure 24: How North American Interpreters Are Compensated for Their Work
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

It was also important for us to ask about the relationships among the different participants of the interpreting market, so we asked about the percentages of income interpreters derived from each major source – interpreting agencies (vendors, suppliers); employers, from which they would receive a salary; and direct clients – organizations that contract directly with interpreters instead of going through an agency or intermediary (see Figure 25).

On average, interpreters stated that they derived 43.89% of their income from employers, compared with 35.37% from interpreting agencies, and the smallest amount, 30.0%, from their direct clients. These findings are consistent with studies that Common Sense Advisory has conducted on employment relationships for freelance translators, in which direct client work is also the least common relationship ("The State of Freelance Translation," Jun09).

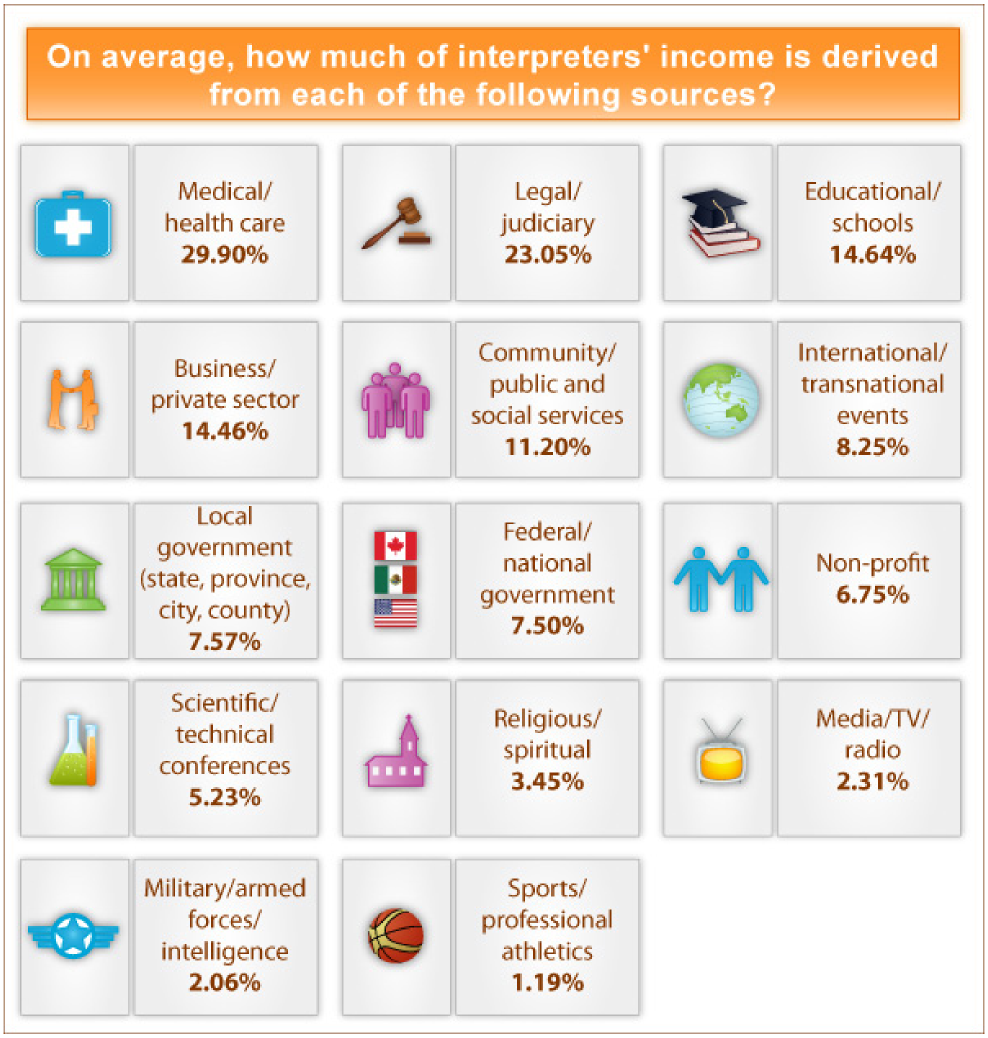

Figure 25: Sources of Income for Interpreters in North America
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We asked interpreters several questions about their compensation. One of the most important questions we asked was how much they earn on an annual basis from their interpreting work.

> *Common Sense Advisory found that the average annual reported earnings for interpreters were **US$29,822 in 2008** and **US$31,586 in 2009**. The interpreters surveyed expected to earn **US$33,515 in 2010**.*

Because the survey was closed in June, interpreters were basing their estimates for 2010 on nearly half a year's worth of earning data. Across all years, we found that the largest group of interpreters earned less than US$10,000 from their interpreting work (see Figure 26).

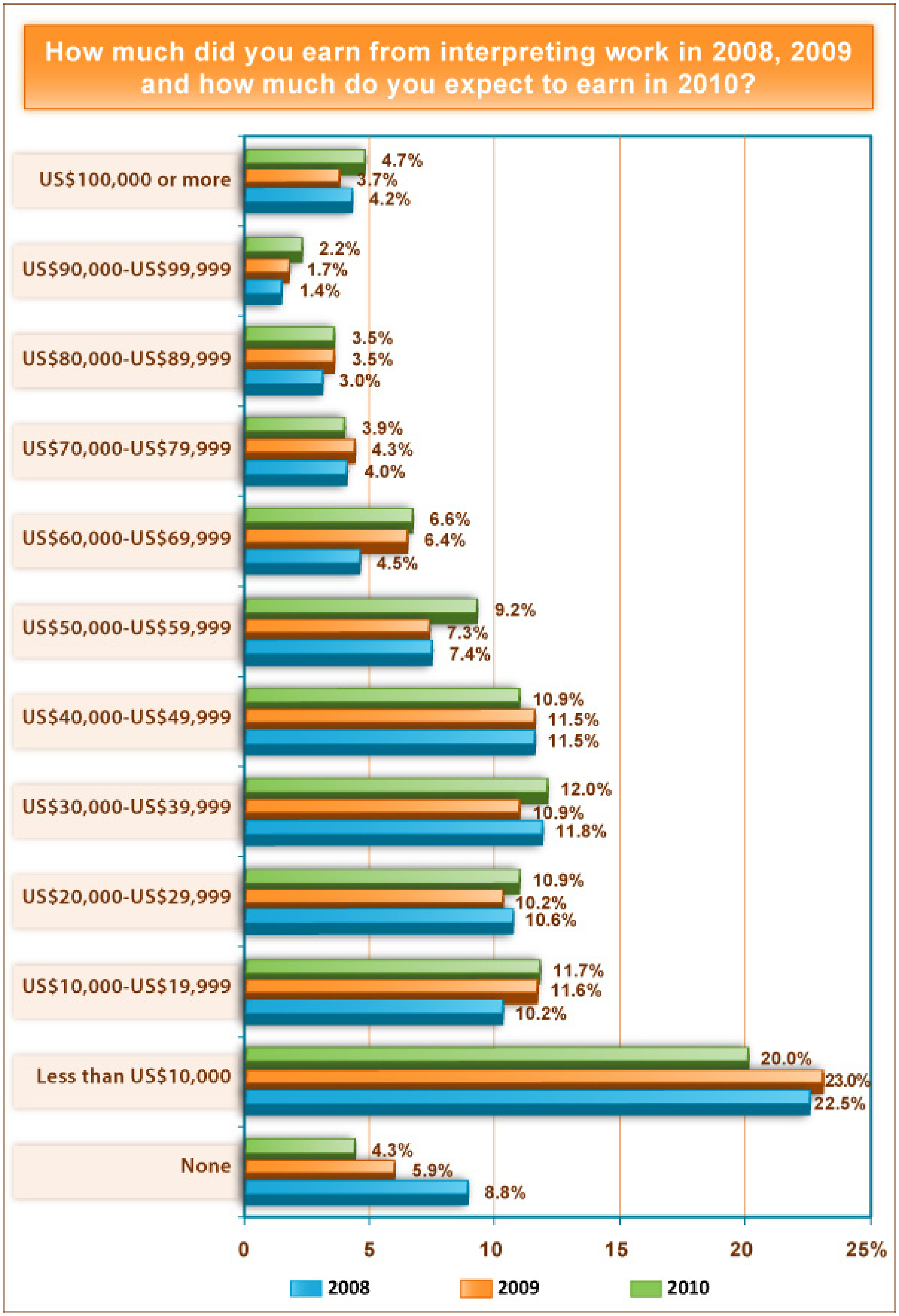

Figure 26: Annual Income Ranges for North American Interpreters
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

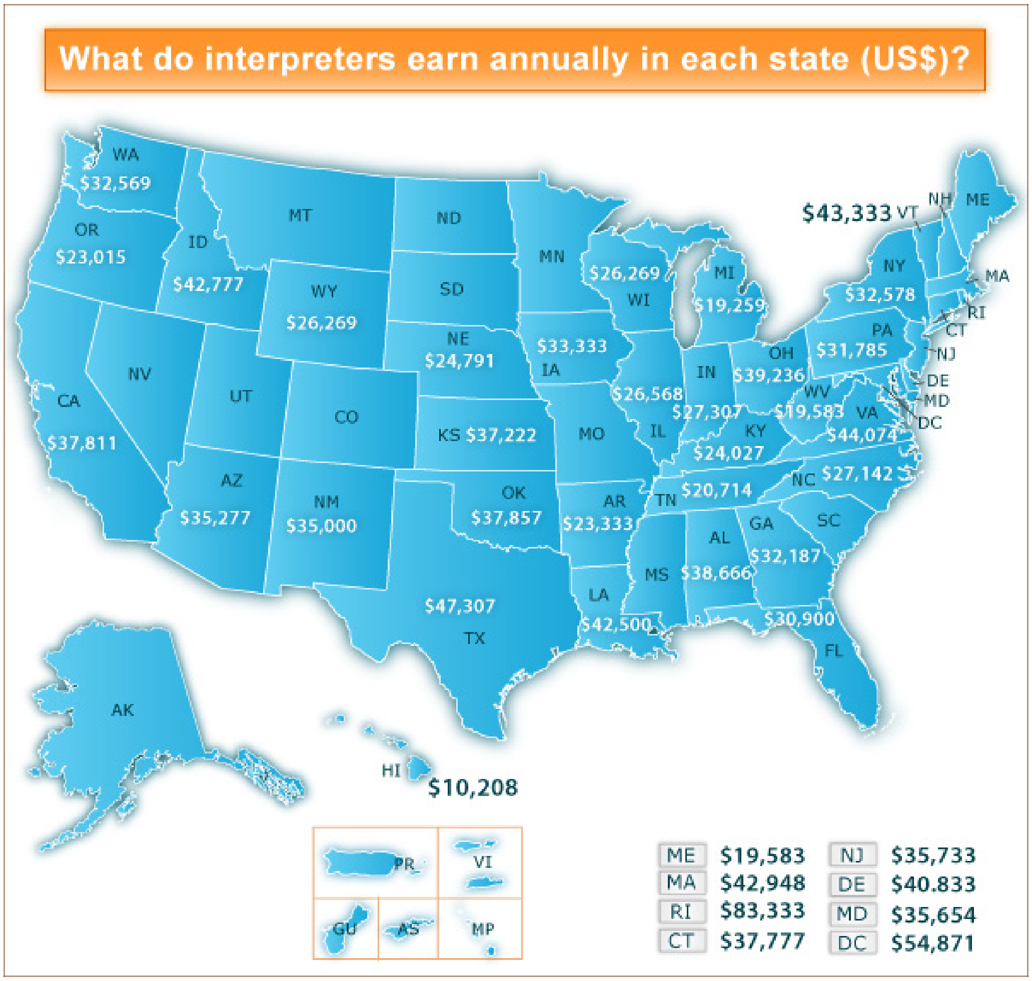

Figure 27: Interpreter Compensation Varies from One State to Another
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Given the high percentage of respondents in the United States, we were able to compute average salaries for all states where we had a sufficient number of responses (see Figure 27). In order to protect confidentiality of respondents' personal financial information, we did not publish state-level salary data for states where there was only one respondent.

Some of the highest compensation rates were found on the East Coast of the United States. While the average rate for Rhode Island is based on a limited number of respondents and is not likely indicative of the larger population in that state, the average rate in the District of Columbia is based on a larger sample and is reflective of the fact that more highly paid interpreting work, largely for government and transnational bodies, is available in this region. Another area where compensation was higher is Texas, which likely relates to a greater demand for work in this state because of the large immigrant population.

However, state-level data is not necessarily as reliable as looking at the data by the type of employment relationship reported by the interpreter. For this reason, we calculated the average earnings for interpreters in each category (see Table 5). Using this method of analysis, we can clearly see that the interpreters who earn the most are the ones who have full-time positions and spend 50% or more of their day interpreting. The three-year average for this group is US$43,031 in annual earnings.

	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
I work exclusively as a freelancer / independent contractor interpreter.	32,434.96	33,690.43	34,626.38	34,779.29
I work as a freelancer / independent contractor interpreter, but I also do other freelance work.	22,475.28	23,584.89	26,151.47	24,895.36
I work as a freelancer / independent contractor interpreter, but I also have a part-time job.	28,263.42	32,696.89	33,972.12	32,883.30
I work as a freelancer / independent contractor interpreter, but I also have a full-time job.	18,071.84	17,926.37	19,095.93	18,634.08
I am a part-time employee and I spend less than 50% of my work day interpreting.	12,499.64	14,444.00	14,117.18	14,444.02
I am a part-time employee and I spend 50% or more of my work day interpreting.	29,721.75	29,582.85	31,856.64	30,879.14
I am a full-time employee and I spend less than 50% of my work day interpreting.	31,356.74	32,245.96	31,641.37	32,737.68
I am a full-time employee and I spend 50% or more of my work day interpreting.	39,395.50	42,822.64	46,095.39	43,030.83

Table 5: Three-Year Comparison of Annual Interpreter Earnings (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

A more important indicator of earnings potential than just the state in which an interpreter lives is the type of setting in which the interpreter works within that state. In general, the more populated the interpreter's place of residence, the more likely he or she is to earn more from interpreting work (see Figure 28 and Table 6). On average, interpreters in rural locations earn US$30,400, while interpreters in suburban settings earn US$32,711. Interpreters in urban locations earn the most of all groups – US$35,865 annually.

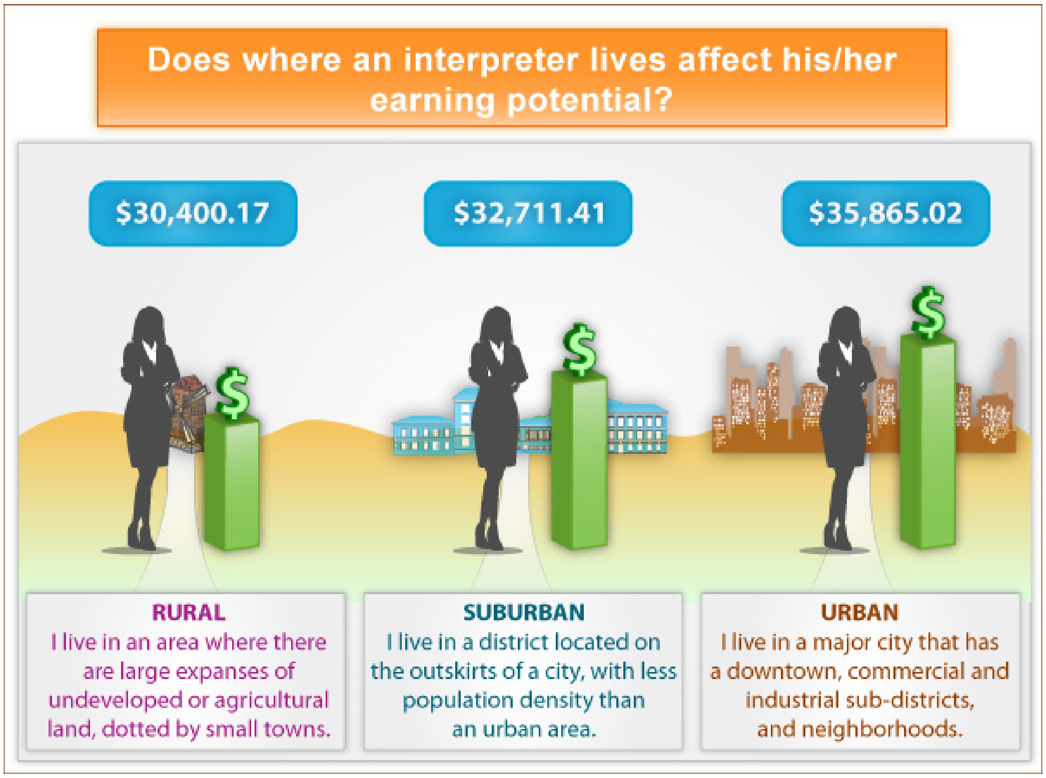

Figure 28: Interpreters in Urban Areas Report Highest Earnings
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Area of Residence	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
Rural	28,124.54	30,047.60	33,028.36	30,400.17
Suburban	31,440.24	32,372.42	34,321.56	32,711.41
Urban	33,981.99	35,464.44	38,148.64	35,865.02

Table 6: Interpreter Earnings by Area of Residence (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also wanted to know if the number of hours interpreters spent interpreting each week affected their earnings. Logic would dictate that the more an interpreter works, the more money he or she should earn. But we wanted to test this assumption. In general, it held true – but only up to a point. Interpreters who said they worked less than 40 hours per week stated that the more they worked, the more they earned. However, interpreters working between 40 and 49 hours per week actually earned less than those who interpreted 30 to 39 hours per week (see Table 7). Also, interpreters who worked 60 hours or more per week earned less than groups that worked significantly fewer hours.

Hours Worked Per Week	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
Less than 10	11,014.63	11,380.16	11,522.11	11,647.58
10 to 19	27,469.79	27,514.32	29,878.30	29,195.44
20 to 29	36,537.99	39,404.28	40,219.03	39,504.24
30 to 39	42,189.06	44,869.64	47,251.16	45,360.44
40 to 49	40,126.10	43,960.55	46,999.50	44,535.38
50 to 59	44,999.50	49,374.50	56,175.97	52,777.28
60 or more	35,216.91	38,695.17	47,173.41	41,805.07

Table 7: Interpreter Earnings by Hours Worked per Week (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We questioned whether the levels of education reported by interpreters affected their income (see Table 8). Interpreters with a bachelor's degree or coursework earned far more than interpreters with a high school degree. Interestingly, interpreters with a community or technical college degree actually reported earning more than interpreters with bachelor's degrees, and even more than interpreters with master's degrees. Because of the small sample of individuals reporting a primary school education only, we did not include the average salary for this group.

Education Level Obtained	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
High school	19,582.92	22,707.85	24,582.83	22,291.20
Community or technical college coursework	29,890.84	33,369.08	34,347.35	32,535.75
Community or technical college degree	33,620.22	34,309.86	35,430.54	34,453.54
Bachelor's coursework	31,883.59	33,405.33	37,753.14	34,347.35
Bachelor's degree	31,869.10	33,477.79	36,064.73	33,803.87
Graduate coursework	37,608.23	38,260.39	41,086.48	38,985.03
Master's degree	32,679.11	34,295.12	36,643.18	34,539.13
Doctoral degree	34,152.08	33,897.83	35,507.99	34,519.30

Table 8: Interpreter Earnings by Education Level (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Sticking with the topic of education, we wondered whether the source of an interpreter's education had any impact on his or her income potential. We spotted a significant disparity – interpreters who were educated within North America earn quite a bit more than their counterparts who received education elsewhere (see Figure 29 and Table 9).

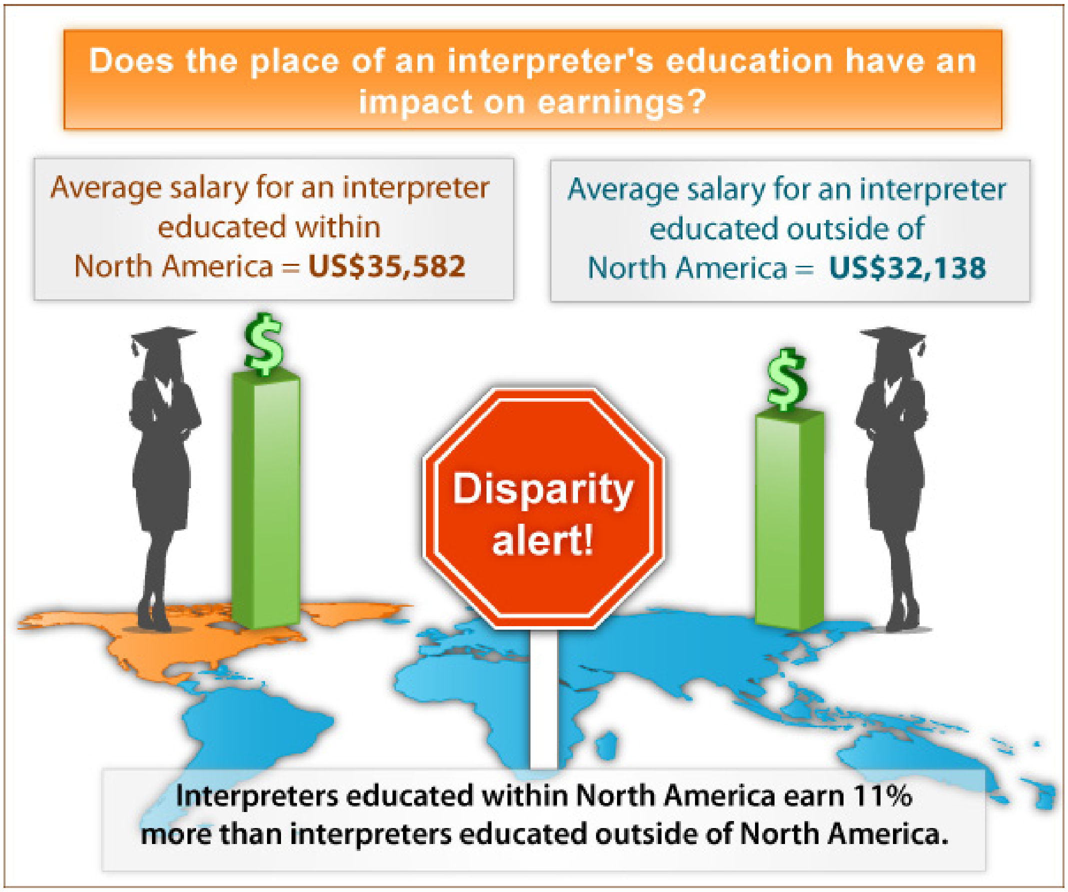

Figure 29: Interpreters Educated Outside of North America Earn Less
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Source of Education	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
Within North America	33,638.89	35,491.33	37,614.27	35,581.50
Outside of North America	30,632.07	31,385.07	34,397.11	32,138.08

Table 9: Interpreter Earnings by Education Source (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also wondered, especially given the high concentration of female interpreters, if gender had any effect on interpreter earnings. The data showed that women earn significantly less than men in the interpreting profession (see Figure 30 and Table 10). While male interpreters earn an average of US$35,967, women earn only US$33,886. This means that even though women make up the majority of the interpreting workforce in North America, men earn 6% more than their female counterparts.

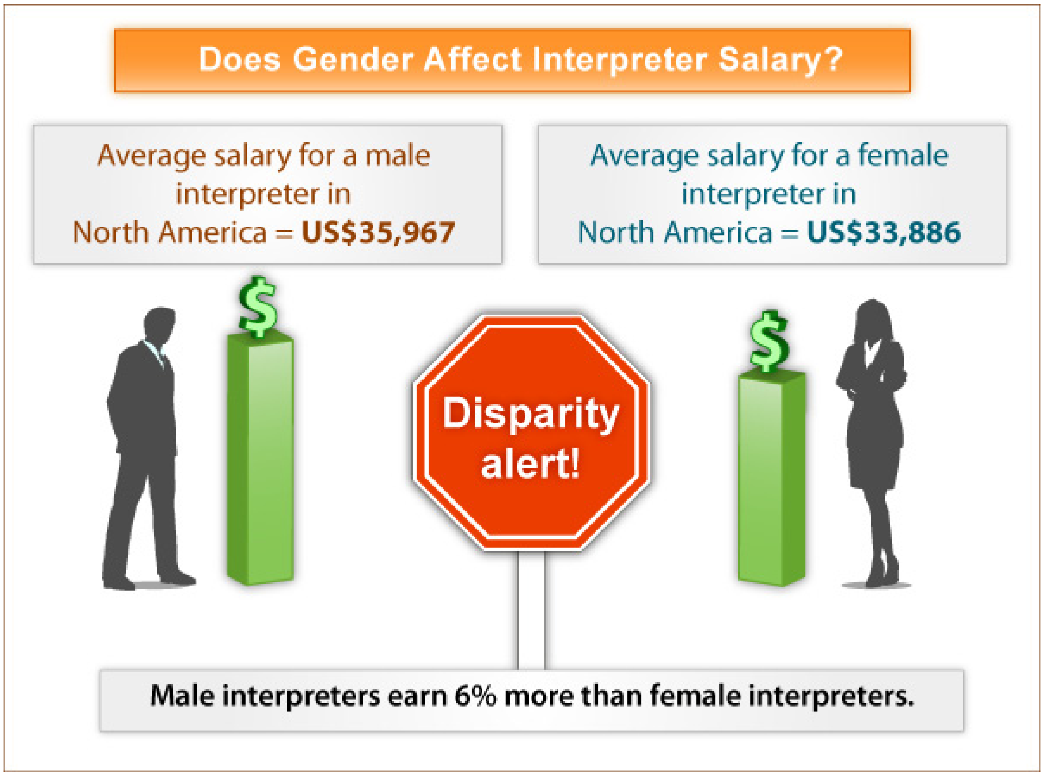

Figure 30: Female Interpreters Earn Less than Male Counterparts
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Gender	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
Female	32,072.71	33,563.21	36,022.56	33,886.16
Male	34,553.12	35,356.67	37,990.59	35,966.79

Table 10: Interpreter Earnings by Gender (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also explored the relationship between years of experience working in the interpreting field and reported and expected earnings. We saw a definite correlation between these two variables (see Table 11). In general, the longer interpreters have been working, the higher their earnings are likely to be. For example, we saw that interpreters who had been working in the field for four to five years earned an average salary of US$19,400 in 2009, while interpreters with five to nine years of experience earned US$27,647. Interpreters with nine to 10 years of experience reported earning US$34,864, while interpreters with 10 to 15 years on the job earned US$36,655. The salary continued to rise to US$39,652 for interpreters with 15 to 20 years, while interpreters with more than 20 years of experience received US$44,529.

Years of Experience	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
Less than 1 year	5,555.44	5,925.67	12,777.35	8,086.15
1-2 years	5,555.25	12,916.18	21,527.29	13,332.91
2-3 years	16,153.40	21,384.14	24,845.67	20,794.40
3-4 years	24,999.52	29,443.97	30,332.86	28,258.78
4-5 years	18,699.55	19,399.54	23,199.54	20,432.88
5-9 years	27,226.42	27,646.59	31,133.97	28,668.99
9-10 years	33,850.87	34,864.38	37,161.69	35,292.31
10-15 years	35,161.86	36,655.37	38,148.87	36,655.37
15-20 years	38,645.36	39,652.29	42,187.02	40,161.56
More than 20 years	44,646.58	44,528.94	45,646.58	44,940.70

Table 11: Interpreter Earnings by Years of Experience (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also compared the data for sign language interpreters and spoken language interpreters to see if there was a notable difference in annual earnings between the two groups. Indeed, there was. Interpreters for sign language earn significantly more than interpreters for spoken languages, a trend that was consistent year after year (see Table 12).

Languages Interpreted	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
Two or more spoken languages (for example, English and Spanish)	31,497.01	32,562.99	35,431.00	33,163.67
A signed language and a spoken language (or two signed languages)	37,292.34	39,944.26	40,800.60	39,345.73

Table 12: Interpreter Earnings by Language Type (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Another important angle of analysis relates to the industry sector in which interpreters work. We wanted to see if interpreters' areas of specialization were strong indicators of their income potential. Again, we saw very clear trends with regard to this variable (see Table 13). We looked at each industry sector to see the annual earnings of interpreters who said they worked in each setting compared with interpreters who did not work in that setting, in order to obtain a clear understanding of the impact of the setting on interpreter income. The highest-paid interpreters in North America are those who work in military settings, followed by those working in federal or national government.

Industry Sector	Yes/No	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
Legal / judiciary	Yes	36,666	38,681	40,439	38,595
	No	28,775	30,122	32,673	30,523
Medical / health care	Yes	30,329	31,856	34,266	32,150
	No	37,663	39,673	41,304	39,547
Community / public and social services	Yes	30,238	32,121	33,852	32,070
	No	35,104	36,655	39,111	36,957
Educational / schools	Yes	31,123	33,050	34,610	32,928
	No	34,250	35,783	38,333	36,122
Business / private sector	Yes	36,741	38,340	39,774	38,285
	No	29,543	31,332	34,087	31,654
Military / armed forces / intelligence	Yes	62,236	63,815	64,210	63,421
	No	30,614	32,322	34,593	32,510
Scientific / technical conferences	Yes	44,279	45,000	47,117	45,465
	No	29,840	31,805	33,943	31,863
Federal / national government	Yes	46,985	48,510	50,177	48,557
	No	27,679	29,443	31,750	29,624
Local government (state, province, city)	Yes	37,866	39,366	41,833	39,688
	No	30,923	32,703	34,701	32,776
International / transnational events	Yes	43,851	46,296	47,925	46,024
	No	29,086	30,522	32,832	30,813
Sports / professional athletics	Yes	37,200	41,200	40,400	39,600
	No	32,718	34,300	36,582	34,533
Media / TV / radio	Yes	44,406	47,288	47,881	46,525
	No	31,459	33,006	35,337	33,268
Religious / spiritual	Yes	34,476	37,209	37,790	36,492
	No	32,627	34,120	36,562	34,436
Non-profit	Yes	34,509	36,862	38,398	36,590
	No	32,274	33,698	36,082	34,018

Table 13: Interpreter Earnings by Industry Sector (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

After these two most lucrative sectors for interpreters, we see that interpreters for media/TV/radio, scientific/technical conferences, and international/translational events are among the most highly paid. Interpreters for local government, sports, and the business sector report the next tier of earnings.

Interpreters who said they provide medical interpreting and social/community interpreting services reported the lowest income levels of all specialty groups. Interpreters who do not work in these settings report income levels that are approximately US$5,000 to US$7,000 higher than those who do.

We also ran correlations between earnings data and the information on vendor and remote interpreting certification. We noted that interpreters who had remote interpreting certifications earned significantly more than interpreters who did not have such certifications (see Table 14). For example, the 2009 data shows that interpreters with remote interpreting certifications earned US$36,538, while those without such certifications earned US$34,448. We also found that interpreters with vendor-specific certifications earned slightly more than interpreters who did not hold these certifications (see Table 15).

Remote Certification Status	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
Yes	36,537.96	36,537.96	39,999.50	37,691.81
No	32,724.77	34,447.73	36,452.22	34,541.57

Table 14: Interpreter Earnings by Remote Certification Status (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Vendor Certification Status	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
Yes	33,584.42	34,999.52	37,546.68	35,376.87
No	32,853.26	34,507.92	36,534.29	34,631.83

Table 15: Interpreter Earnings by Vendor Certification Status (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Daily rates are less common than hourly rates, as noted earlier, but in certain areas – especially conference interpreting – daily rates are more common. We determined the relationship between the daily rates charged by conference interpreters and their annual earnings. We noted a very strong direct correlation between these two variables. The higher the daily rate, the greater the reported and expected earnings (see Table 16).

Daily Rate Charged	2008 Reported Earnings	2009 Reported Earnings	2010 Expected Earnings	Three-Year Average
Less than or equal to $100	25,016.28	26,956.06	28,918.45	27,308.19
$101 to $500	31,568.14	32,780.97	34,154.92	33,365.53
$501 to $1,000	39,649.21	40,801.99	41,057.21	42,869.34
More than $1,000	54,999.50	44,999.50	59,999.50	53,332.83

Table 16: Interpreter Earnings by Daily Rate Charged (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

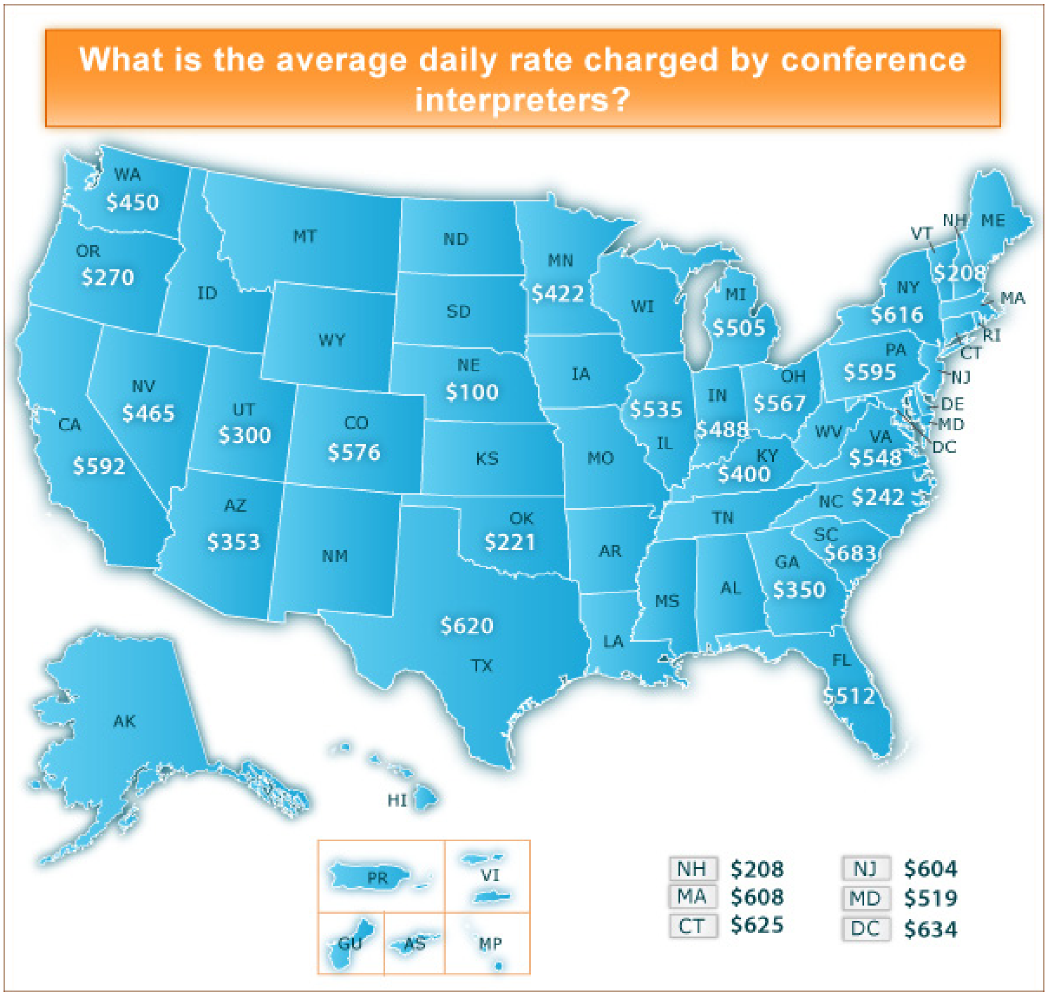

Figure 31: Average Daily U.S. Conference Interpreter Rates (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Because we collected data from conference interpreters separately regarding daily rates, we were able to identify the average daily rates for interpreters living in different places throughout the United States (see Figure 31). Here, we only display the rates for states with two or more respondents.

Not every conference interpreter provided us with daily rates, as this question was optional. However, we collected sufficient information on the minimum and maximum daily rates to provide averages for many U.S. states, as well as several Canadian provinces and Mexican states (see Figure 32 and Table 17). In a few instances, interpreters listed their minimum daily rate as "zero," most likely to indicate pro bono conference interpreting work.

State or Province	Conference Interpreter Respondents	Minimum Daily Rate	Maximum Daily Rate	Average Daily Rate
Alberta	2	50	600	325
Arizona	3	160	500	353
California	75	30	1,600	592
Colorado	7	280	700	576
Connecticut	2	450	800	625
District of Columbia	19	350	950	634
Distrito Federal	12	230	600	385
Florida	26	140	800	512
Georgia	6	60	800	350
Illinois	11	200	800	535
Indiana	4	200	750	488
Kentucky	2	250	550	400
Maryland	22	0	900	519
Massachusetts	9	275	1,500	608
Mexico	3	350	375	362
Michigan	6	40	1,500	505
Minnesota	5	350	500	422
Nebraska	2	100	100	100
Nevada	4	60	700	465
New Hampshire	4	20	500	208
New Jersey	12	500	800	604
New York	27	45	900	616
North Carolina	3	75	400	242
Nuevo Leon	4	200	270	243
Ohio	6	200	1,000	567
Oklahoma	4	30	500	221
Ontario	19	50	900	504
Oregon	3	50	700	270
Pennsylvania	5	350	1,050	595
Quebec	5	600	700	635
South Carolina	3	250	1,200	683
Texas	27	50	2,400	620
Utah	2	0	600	300
Virginia	11	20	900	548
Washington	16	40	1,000	450

Table 17: Conference Interpreter Daily Rates by State or Province (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

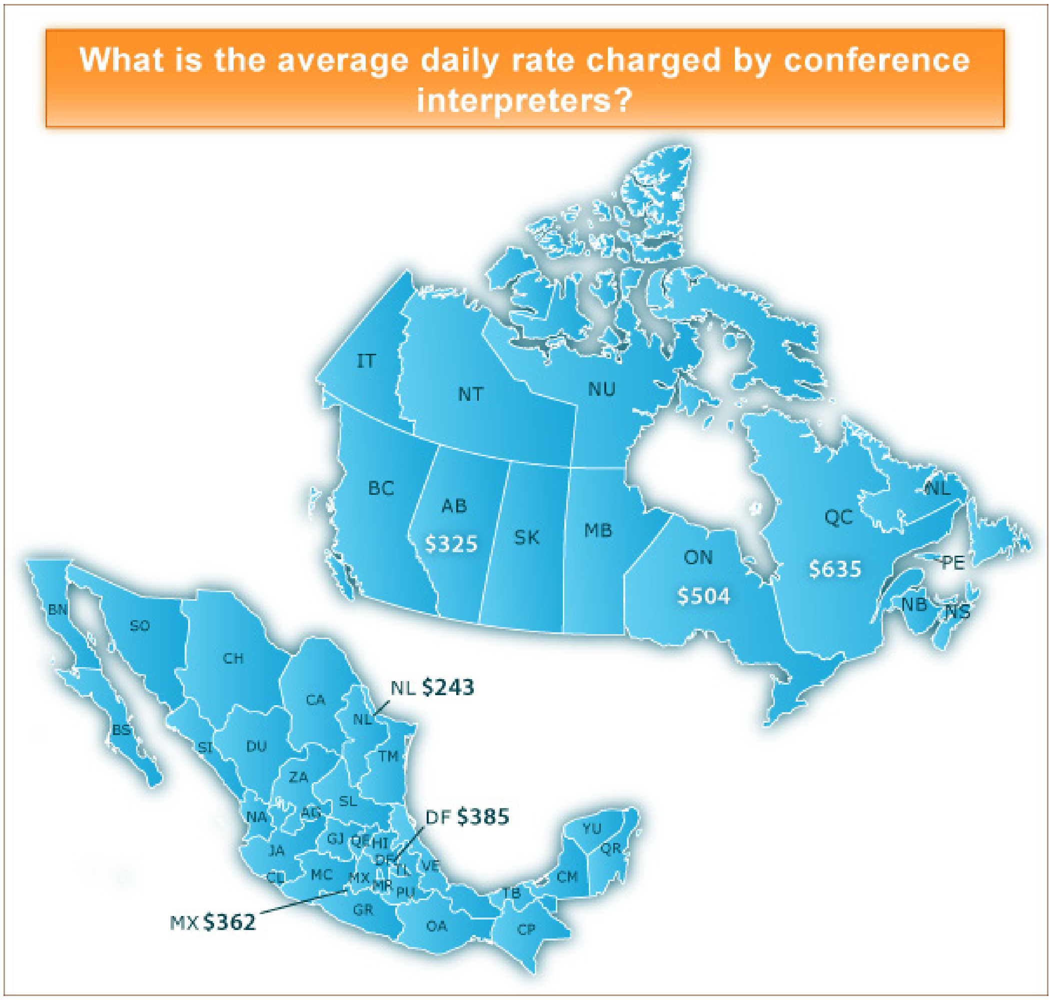

Figure 32: Average Conference Interpreter Rates for Canada and Mexico (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also asked interpreters about their minimum and maximum hourly rates, and identified the average ranges for interpreters in North America as well as within each country (see Table 18). Rates for interpreters in Mexico were high compared with the U.S. and Canada, likely because of the high response rate from Mexican conference interpreters in our sample.

Region	Hourly Rate Range
North America	43.68 to 70.48
Canada	34.46 to 58.84
United States	43.42 to 70.76
Mexico	48.98 to 80.87

Table 18: Ranges of Interpreter Hourly Rates Charged (in US$)
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

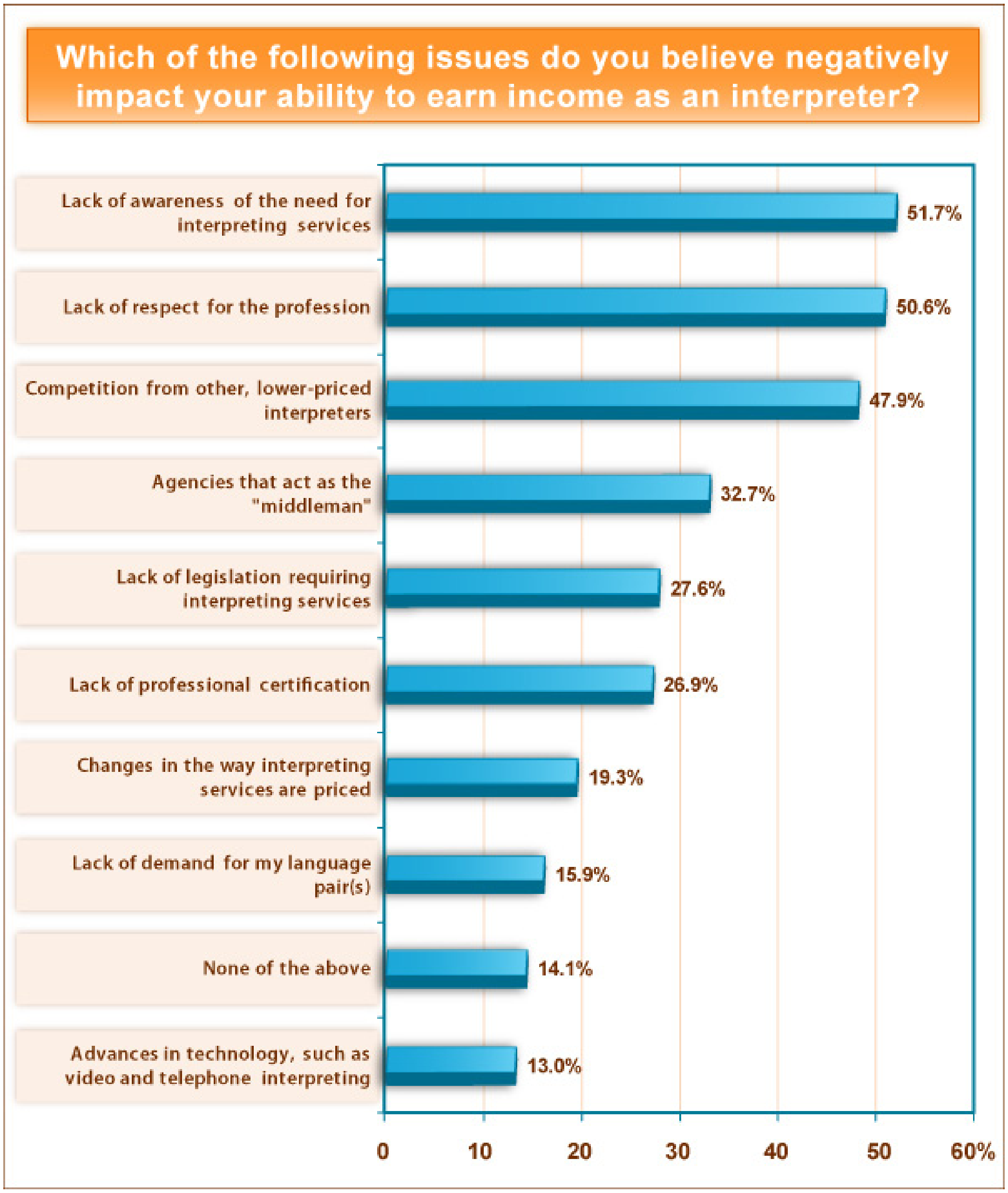

Figure 33: Factors that Negatively Affect Interpreter Income Potential
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We asked interpreters what factors they believed limited their ability to earn income from interpreting work, inviting them to select all issues that they felt applied (see Figure 33). The most popular response was the lack of awareness of the need for interpreting services (51.7%), closely followed by a lack of respect for the profession (50.6%). Interestingly, interpreters rated the lack of legislation requiring interpreting services (27.6%) as a more important issue than professional certification (26.9%).

Views from Interpreters on Other Issues

We included a section with optional questions for interpreters on a few other matters related to emerging trends in the marketplace. We asked interpreters what their views were on the role of technology within their profession (see Figure 34). About a quarter (25.7%) of interpreters said that they think technology will affect their profession within the next year. However, when we asked interpreters to peer into the crystal ball for the next five years, more than half (54.3%) believe technology will have an impact. Looking a decade out, nearly three-quarters of interpreters (74.4%) believe that technology will have influenced their profession.

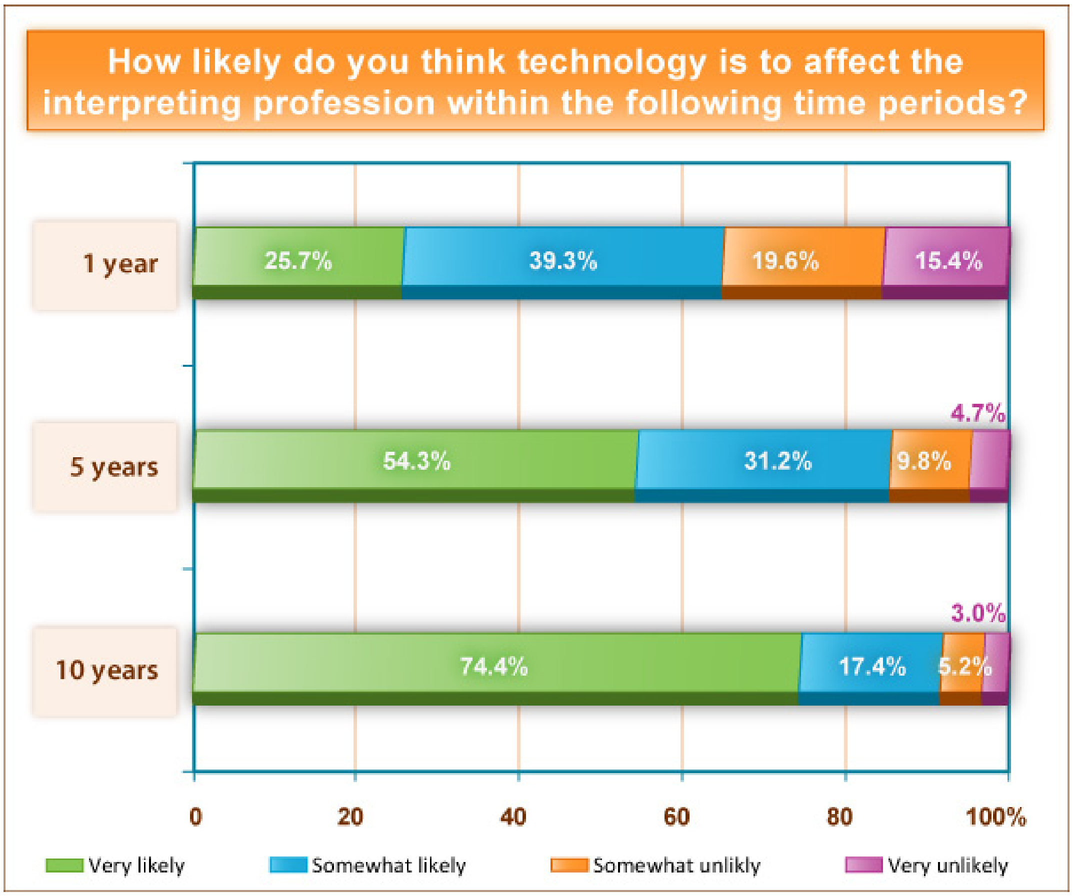

Figure 34: Interpreter Views on the Impact of Technology
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

One trend we wanted to measure was the level of frequency with which interpreters use electronic resources, such as online glossaries and mobile device applications, while actively interpreting. Nearly even numbers stated that they always (28.1%), sometimes (42.7%), or never (29.1%) engage in this behavior (see Figure 35).

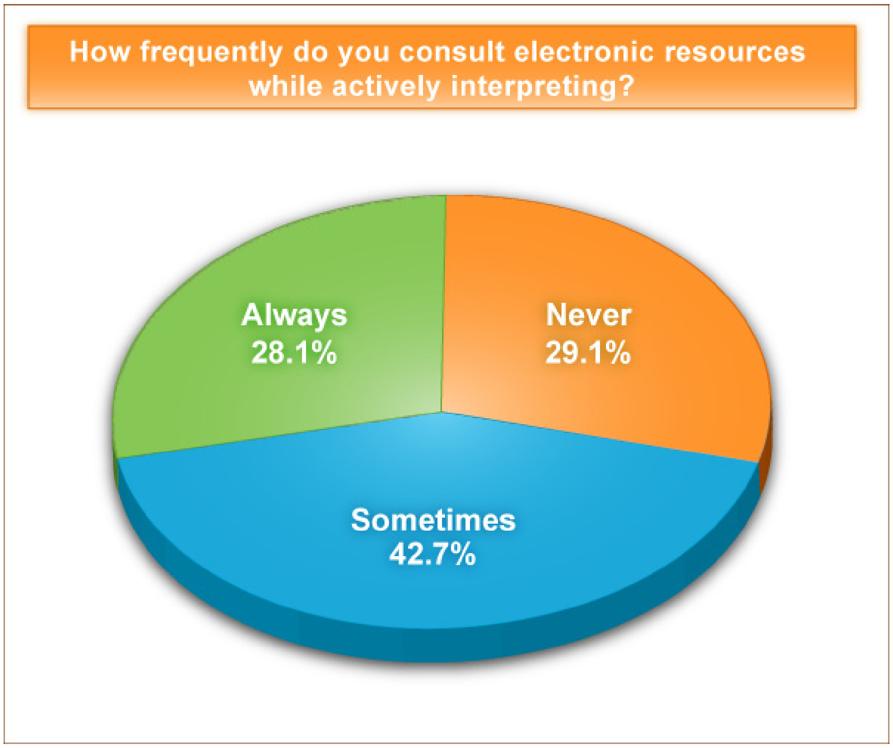

Figure 35: Frequency of Electronic Resource Use by Interpreters
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

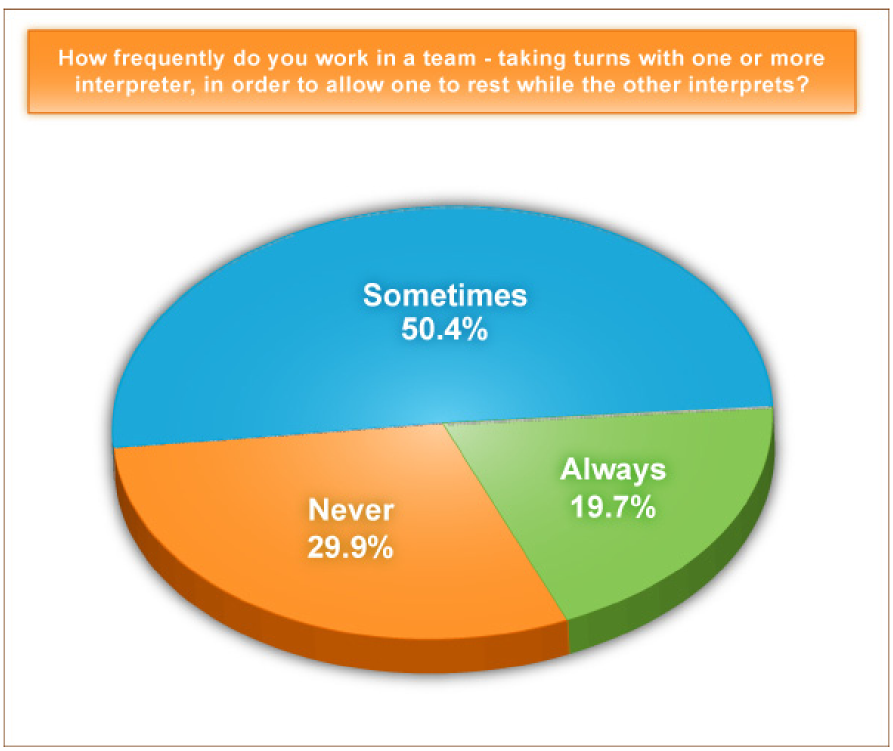

Figure 36: Interpreter Views on the Impact of Technology
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

In addition, we wanted to know about the prevalence of teamwork within the interpreter workforce (see Figure 36). When we asked how frequently interpreters worked in teams, more than half (50.4%) said that they sometimes did this, but nearly a third (29.9%) said that they never did. About one-fifth of the interpreters in our sample (19.7%) said that they always interpret in teams.

Major Findings from Our Survey of Suppliers

In addition to our survey of interpreters, we carried out a separate survey of providers of interpreting services (also called suppliers, vendors, agencies). The 197 companies that participated in the survey were located in various states and provinces throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico (see Figures 37, 38, and 39).

When we asked these vendors to tell us about the geographic scope of their typical service provision, we found that the largest percentage (33.0%) provided services within multiple states or provinces within the same country. About a quarter (25.8%) provided services locally within their town or city, while a similar amount (23.7%) offered services with their state or province. Nearly one-fifth of companies (17.5%) provided services within multiple countries (see Figure 40).

Vendors often claim to offer "every language" or "all languages." However, when we asked suppliers to tell us the total number of language pairs offered, we found an average of 51 languages per company. The highest number of languages reported to us was 474.

> *On average, interpreting agencies in North America offer interpreters for 51 language pairs.*

We also inquired about the number of interpreters in each vendor's network, including both contractors and employees. The largest network we identified included 10,000 interpreters, but the average across all suppliers was 801.

> *On average, interpreting agencies in North America have a network that includes 801 interpreters.*

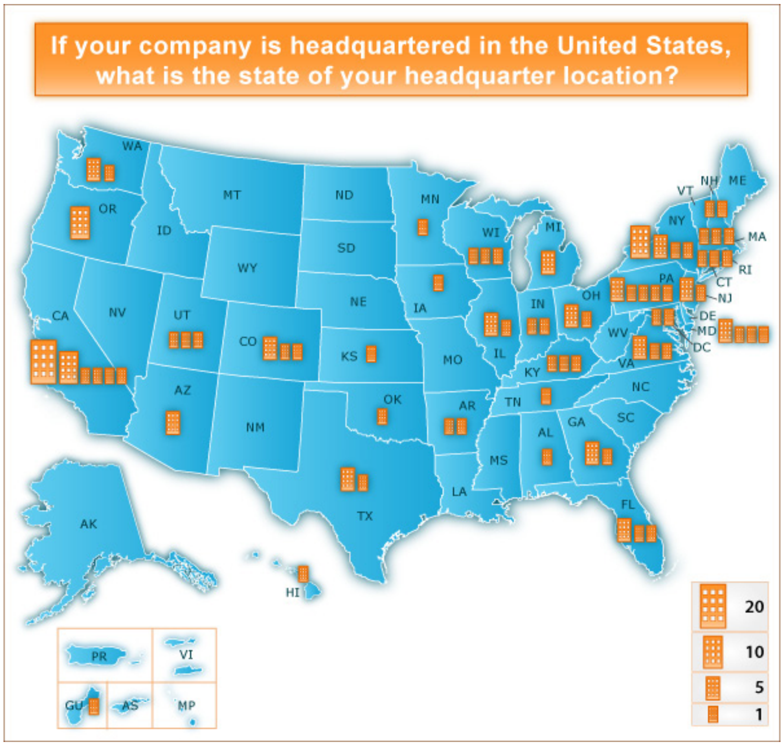

Figure 37: Locations of U.S. Interpreting Agency Respondents
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Figure 38: Locations of Canadian Interpreting Agency Respondents
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Figure 39: Locations of Mexican Interpreting Agency Respondents
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

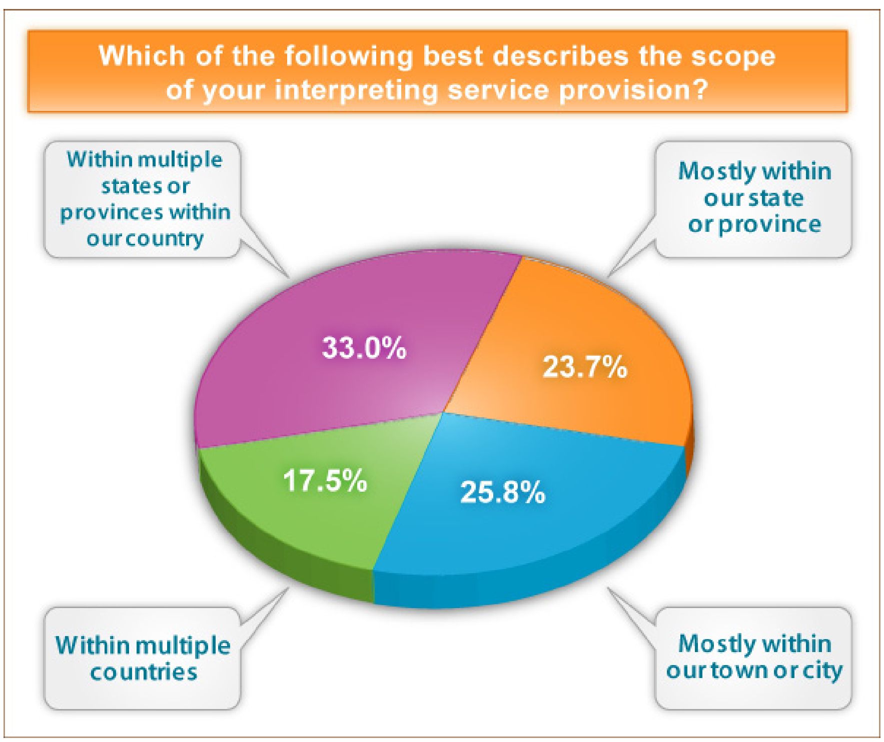

Figure 40: Geographic Scope of Supplier Service Provision
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

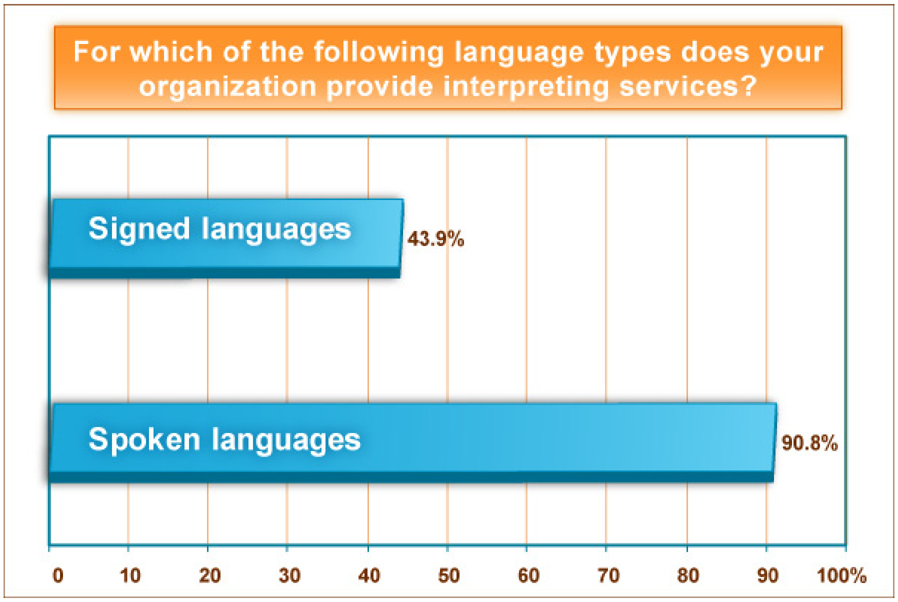

Figure 41: Supplier Provision of Interpreting Services by Language Type
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

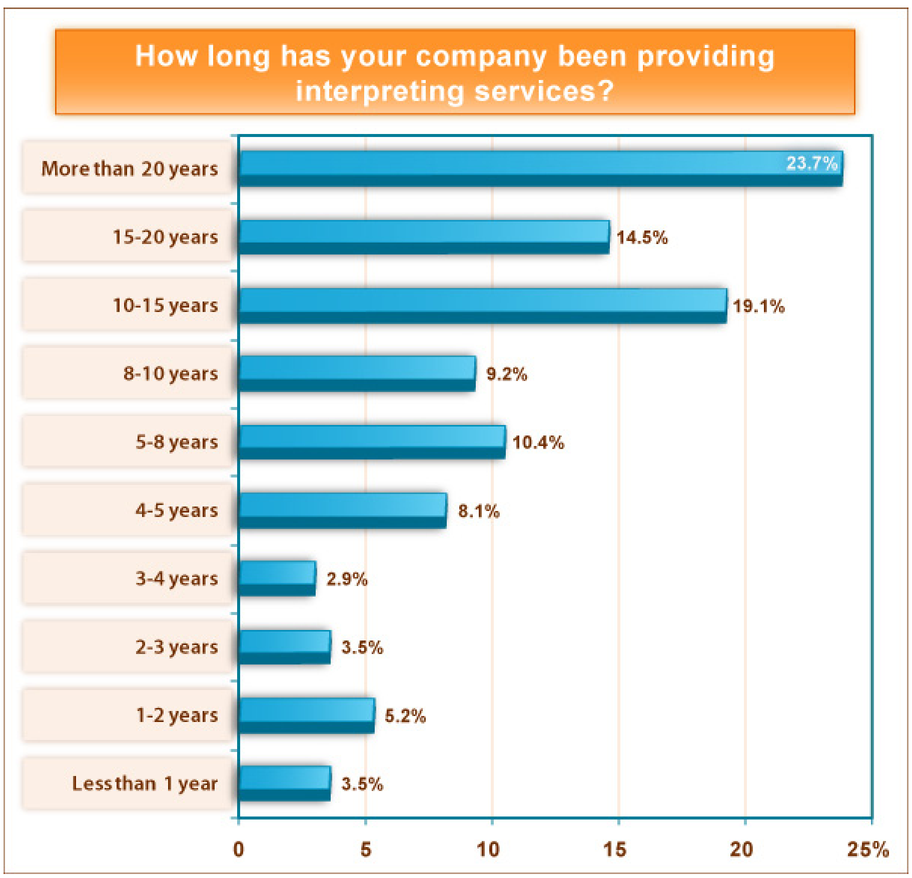

Figure 42: Supplier Years of Interpreting Experience
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also asked agencies to tell us about the types of languages for which they provide interpreting services. We found that nearly all of the companies we surveyed (90.8%) provided spoken language interpreting services. Nearly half (43.9%) offered sign language interpreting (see Figure 41).

The largest groups of suppliers report many years of experience at interpreting service provision. Nearly a quarter (23.7%) stated that they had been in business for more than 20 years, while the second-largest group (19.1%) said they had been operating for 10 to 15 years. Another large contingent (14.5%) had been working for 15 to 20 years (see Figure 42).

As with interpreters, we asked vendors to tell us about the industry sectors in which they worked (see Figure 43). The results for suppliers mirrored those of interpreters. Medical interpreting was the most widely reported industry (89.5%), followed by legal (77.1%) and business settings (75.8%). Community settings (65.4%), educational interpreting (54.2%), and local government work (52.9%) were all reported by more than half of suppliers.

Vendors of interpreting services also reported interpreting for non-profit settings (45.1%), international events (34.6%), national/federal government (32.7%), and scientific conferences (32.7%). Less common settings included media (24.2%), military interpreting (18.3%), religious settings (16.3%), and athletics (13.7%). We also asked suppliers to estimate the percentage of business derived from each sector (see Table 19).

Industry Sector	Percentage of Supplier Revenue
Medical / health care	32.20
Legal / judiciary	19.66
Business / private sector	17.01
Community / public and social services	11.82
Educational / schools	9.17
Local government (state, province, city, county)	8.66
Federal / national government	6.49
International / transnational events	6.39
Non-profit	4.92
Scientific / technical conferences	3.99
Media / TV / radio	2.84
Military / armed forces / intelligence	2.74
Religious / spiritual	1.75
Sports / professional athletics	1.60

Table 19: Average Percentage of Supplier Interpreting Revenue by Sector
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

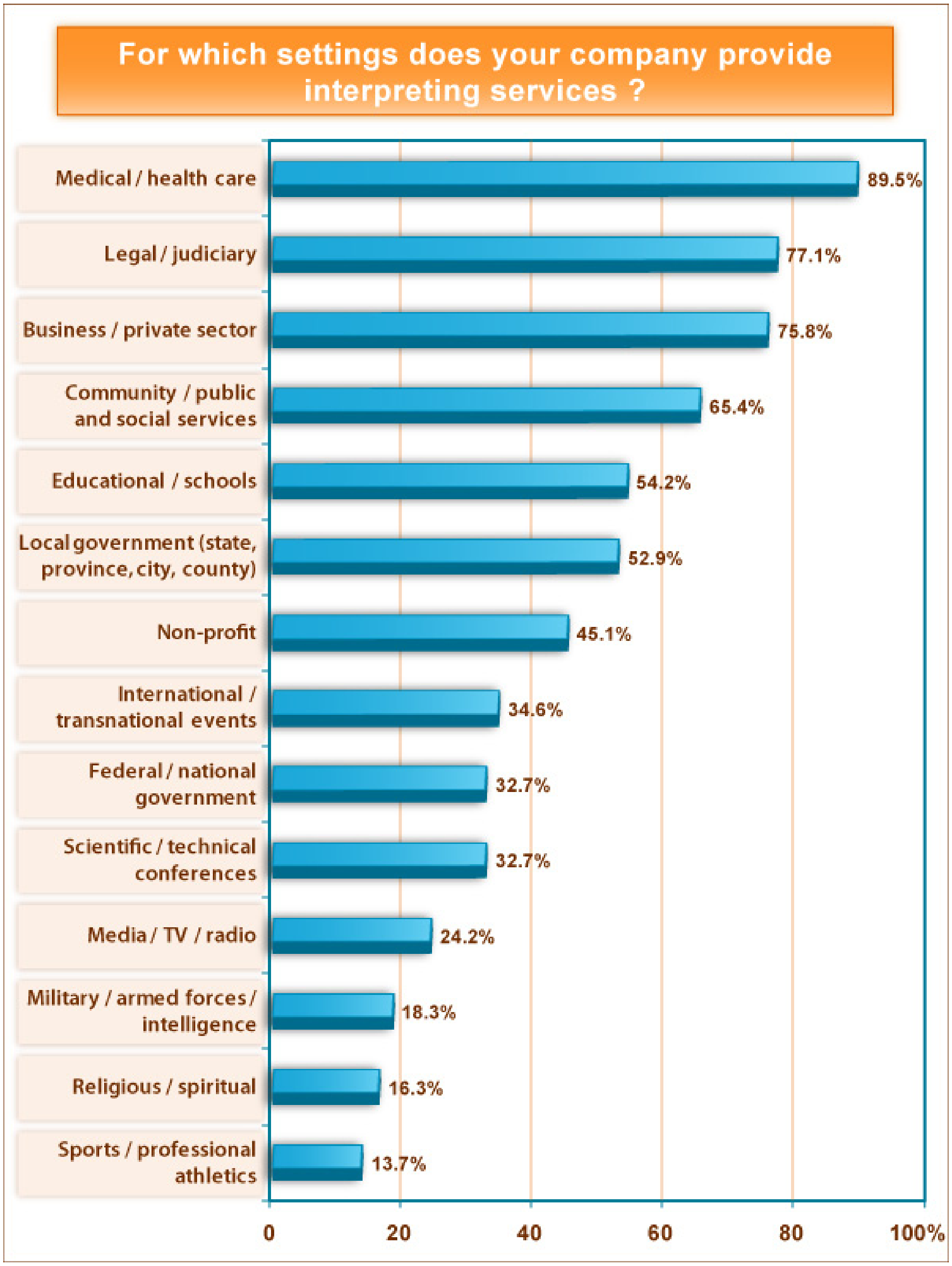

Figure 43: Most Common Industry Sectors Reported by Suppliers
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We wanted to know which services suppliers were offering (see Figure 44). Nearly all respondents (92.2%) offered on-site interpreting, and a large amount (79.7%) offered written translation. High numbers offered telephone interpreting (59.5%) and interpreter scheduling services (54.9%).

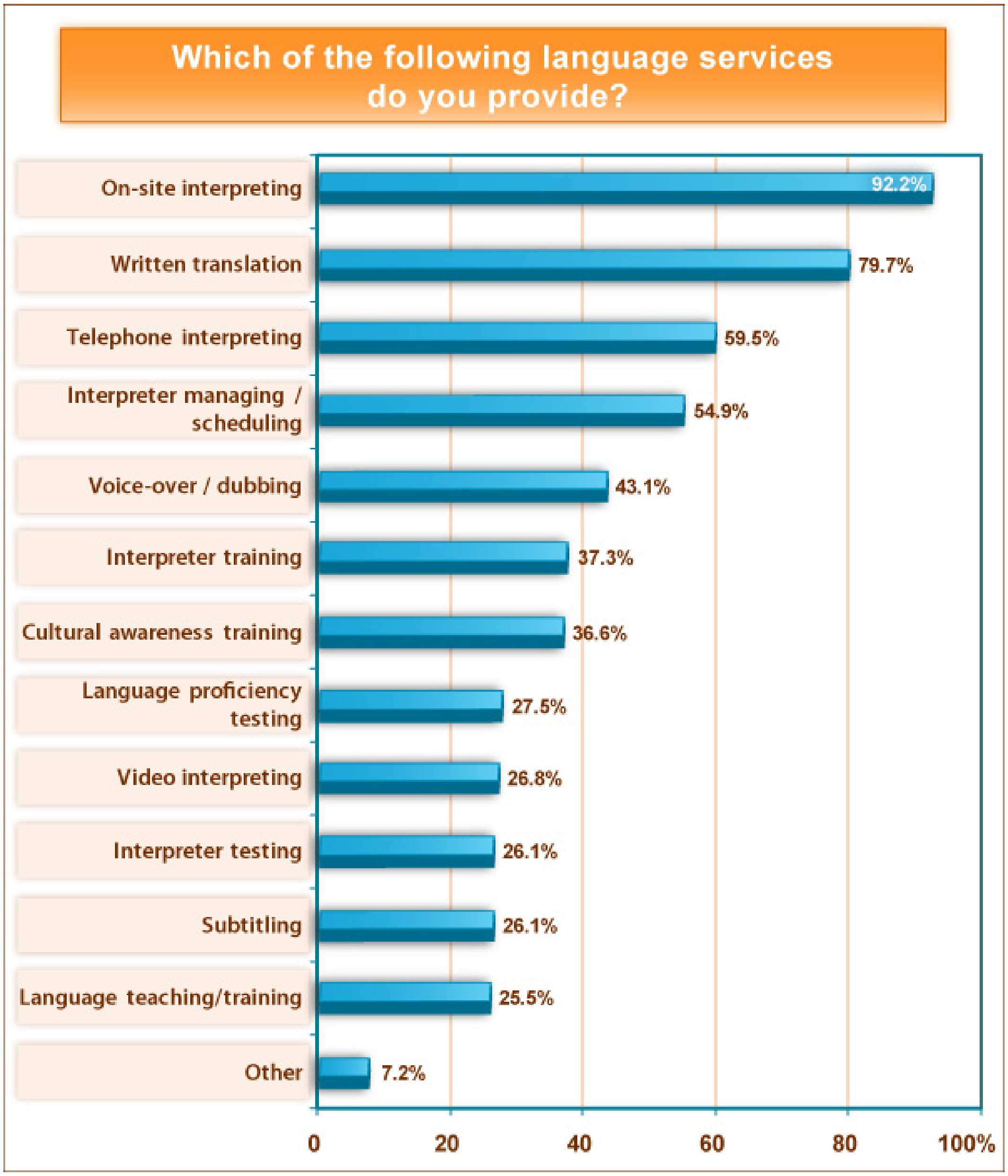

Figure 44: Language Services Offered by Interpreting Suppliers
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Supplier Pricing, Compensation, and Employment Issues

We asked vendors to describe the employment relationship with interpreters (see Figure 45). The vast majority of interpreting companies (63.6%) said that all of their interpreters were freelancers, while about a third (30.1%) claimed to use a mixture of employees and contractors. Just a tiny fraction (6.3%) stated that they used only employee interpreters.

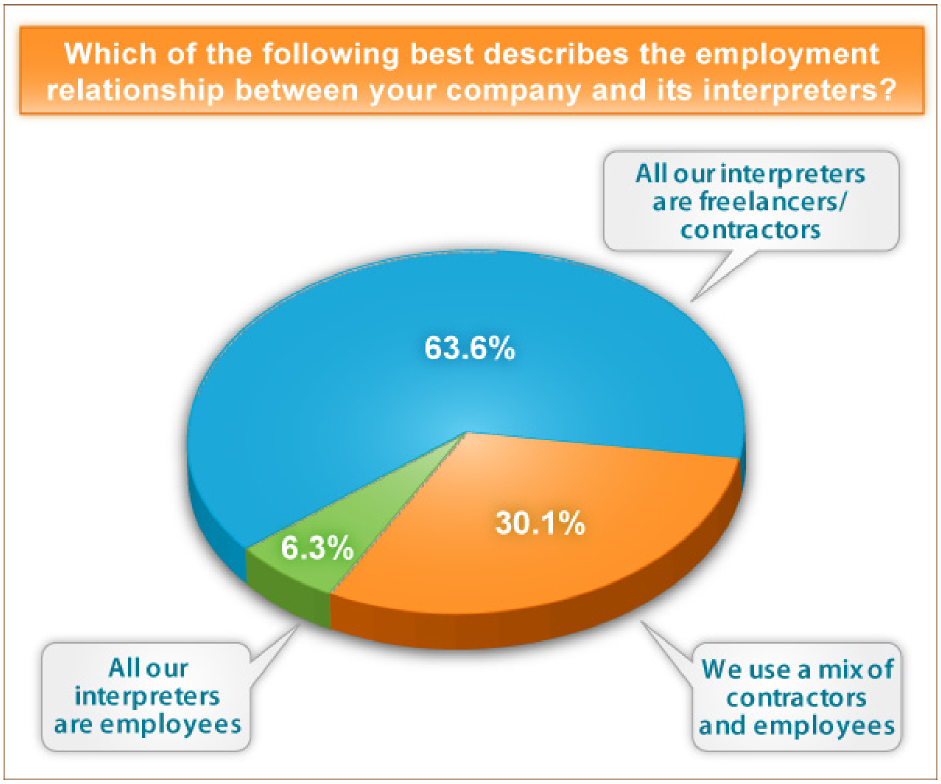

Figure 45: Employment Relationships between Suppliers and Interpreters
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

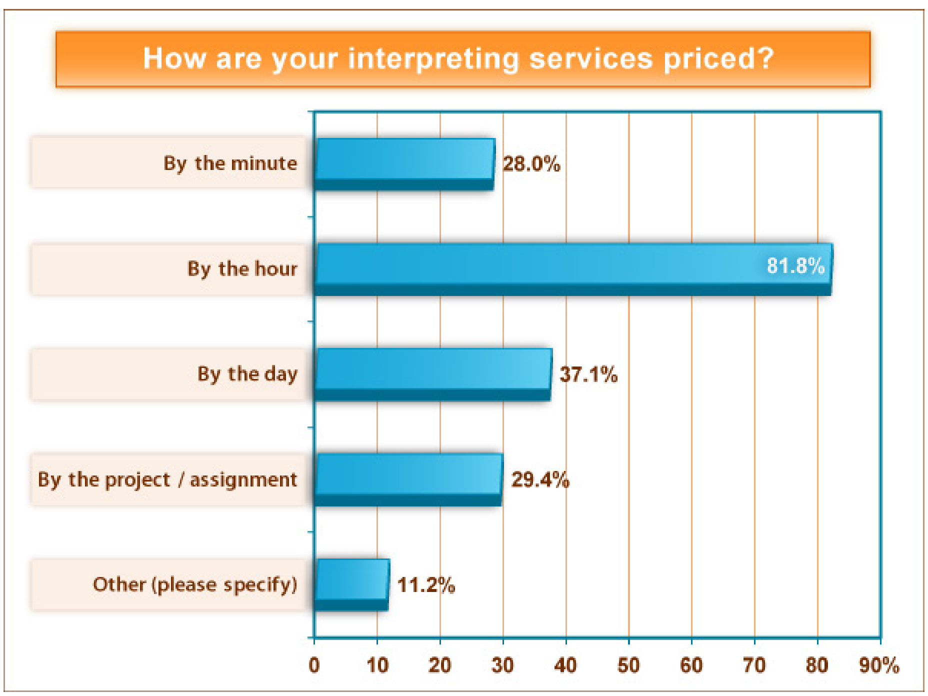

Figure 46: Supplier Pricing Methodologies for Interpreting Services
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We found that suppliers priced their interpreting services primarily by the hour (81.8%). The next most common method was by the day (37.1%), followed by a project or assignment basis (29.4%) and by the minute (28.0%) (see Figure 46).

We asked suppliers to tell us the minimum and maximum hourly rates they charged for interpreting services, so that we could compare them with the hourly rates reported by interpreters (see Table 20).

Country	Minimum Hourly Rate Charged by Interpreters	Maximum Hourly Rate Charged by Interpreters	Minimum Hourly Rate Charged by Suppliers	Maximum Hourly Rate Charged by Suppliers
Canada	34.46	58.84	31.55	44.53
Mexico	48.98	80.87	103.69	171.67
U.S.	43.99	70.76	56.37	110.68
All	43.68	70.48	57.06	111.06

Table 20: Minimum and Maximum Hourly Interpreting Rates
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

> *The hourly rate charged by interpreting companies in North America ranges from* ***US$57.06 to US$111.06****.*

We also asked interpreting vendors to tell us the daily rates they charged for interpreting services, if applicable. A total of 56 companies responded to this question. Their daily rate ranged from US$110.00 per day to US$1,500.00.

> *The average daily rate charged by interpreting companies in North America is* ***US$686.70****.*

Vendors often charge fees to customers above and beyond the hourly and daily rates for interpreting services. The most commonly billed of these items is travel/transportation fees, charged by 83.9% of interpreting companies, followed by cancellation fees, which are added to the bill by 83.1% of firms.

Three-quarters of companies (75.0%) assess a minimum fee, and more than half (58.1%) charge a rush/urgent scheduling fee. Another large portion of interpreting companies (54.0%) charge extra fees for providing interpreting services outside of their normal work schedule (see Figure 47).

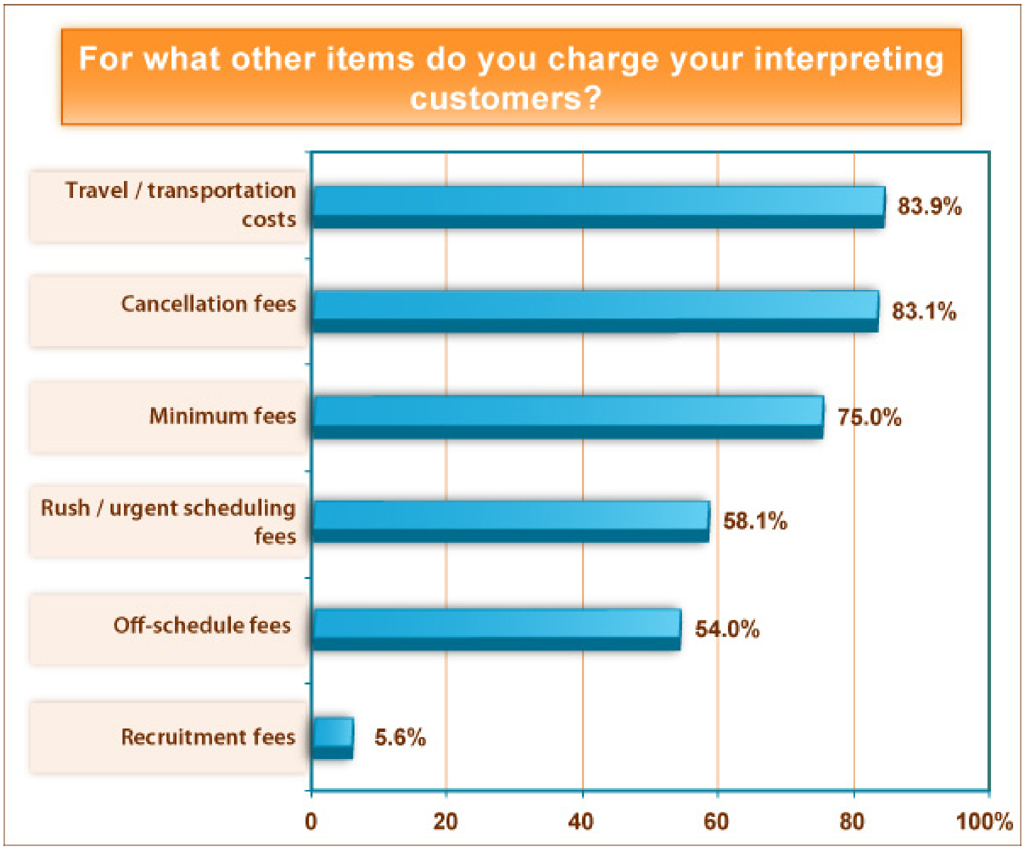

Figure 47: Additional Items for Which Interpreting Companies Charge Customers
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Supplier Views on Education and Training

We asked suppliers to tell us what formal training they require of their interpreters. The largest contingent of interpreting companies (40.1%) said they required interpreters to take a training course of 40 hours, while about a third (32.8%) said that they required interpreters to have a degree in the field. Nearly one in five companies (19.7%) said they required absolutely no formal training of their interpreters (see Figure 48).

We also inquired about the prevalence of codes of ethics and standards of practice within supply-side organizations. Most of the companies in our sample (88.3%) said that they required their interpreters to adhere to a code of ethics or standards of practice, but more than one in 10 firms (11.7%) do not require interpreters to observe any ethical principles or standards (see Figure 49).

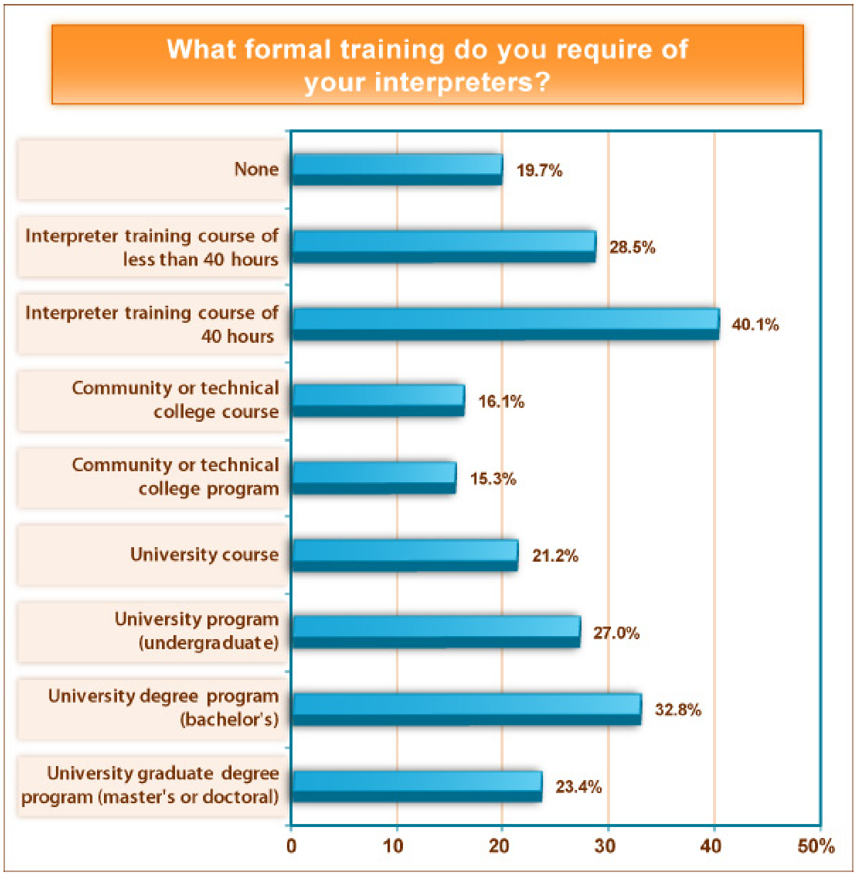

Figure 48: Formal Training Suppliers Require of Interpreters
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

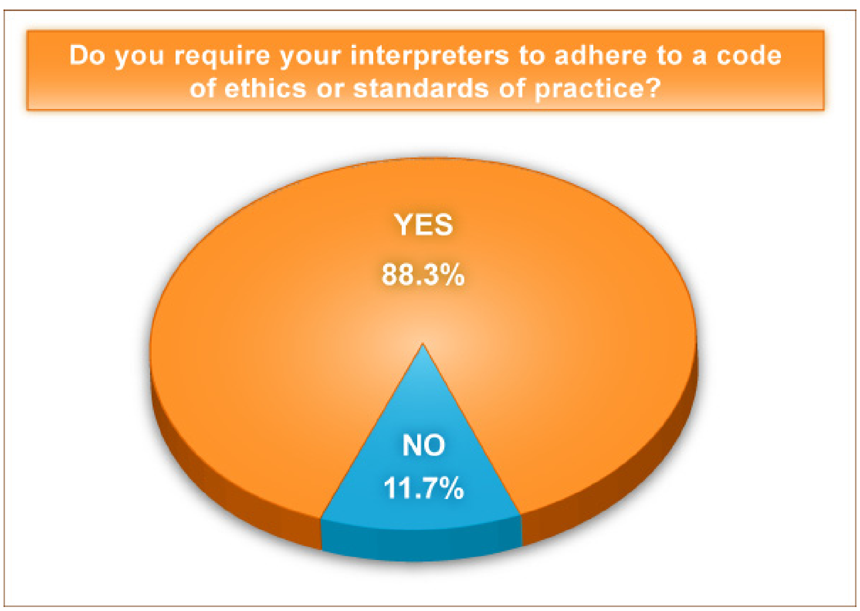

Figure 49: Interpreting Supplier Ethics and Standards Requirements
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

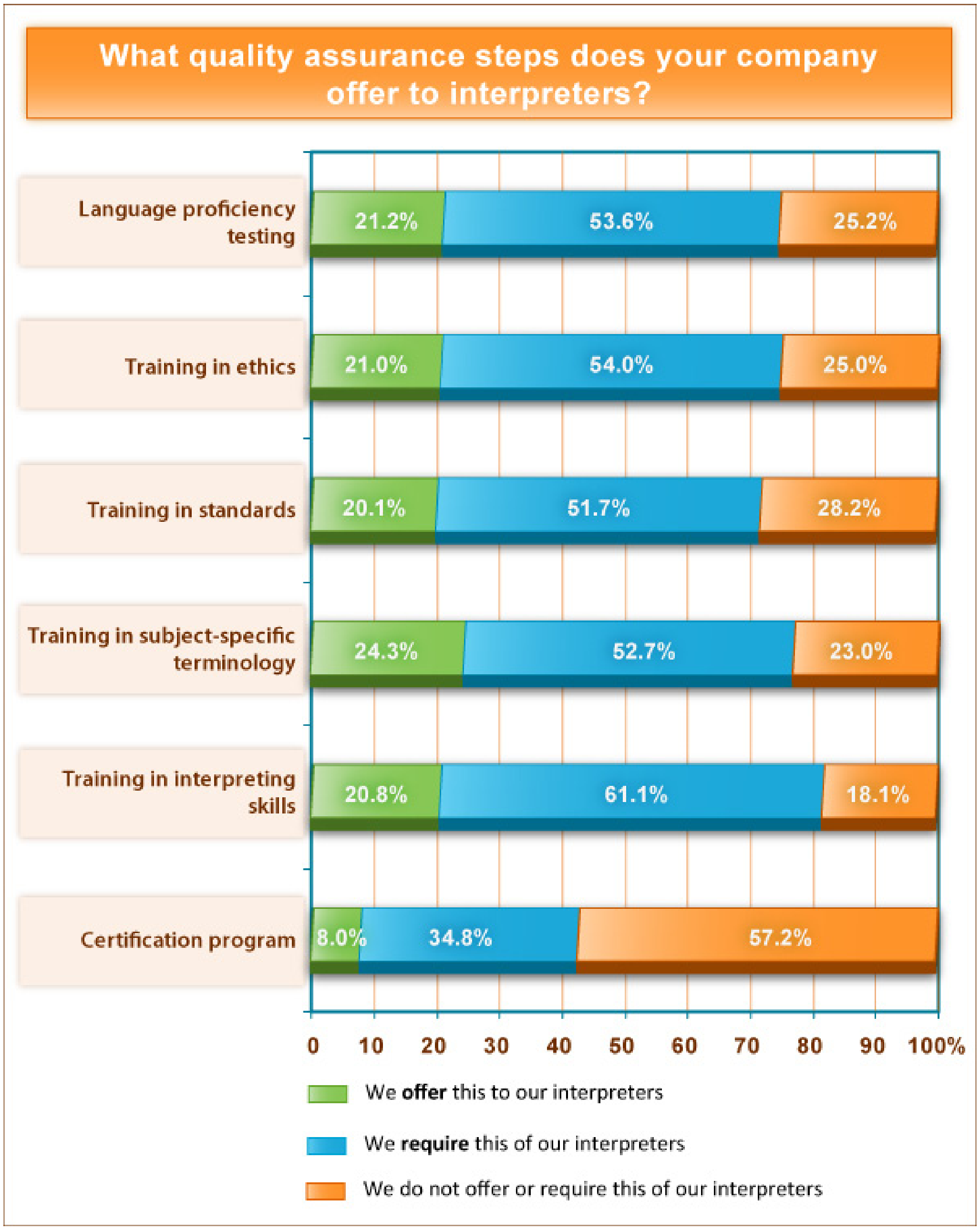

Figure 50: Supplier Testing and Training Requirements of Interpreters
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Vendors claim to require many things of their interpreters – such as training in interpreting skills (61.1%), training in ethics (54.0%), language proficiency testing (53.6%), subject-specific terminology training (52.7%), and training in standards of practice (51.7%). Certification was a far less common requirement (34.8%) (see Figure 50).

Supplier Views on Other Issues

We asked vendors how frequently they provided interpreters with linguistic resources, such as glossaries, translated materials, and/or other information to assist them with their work. Most companies said that they always (42.2%) or sometimes (46.7%) did this, while more than one in 10 firms (11.1%) said that they never did this (see Figure 51).

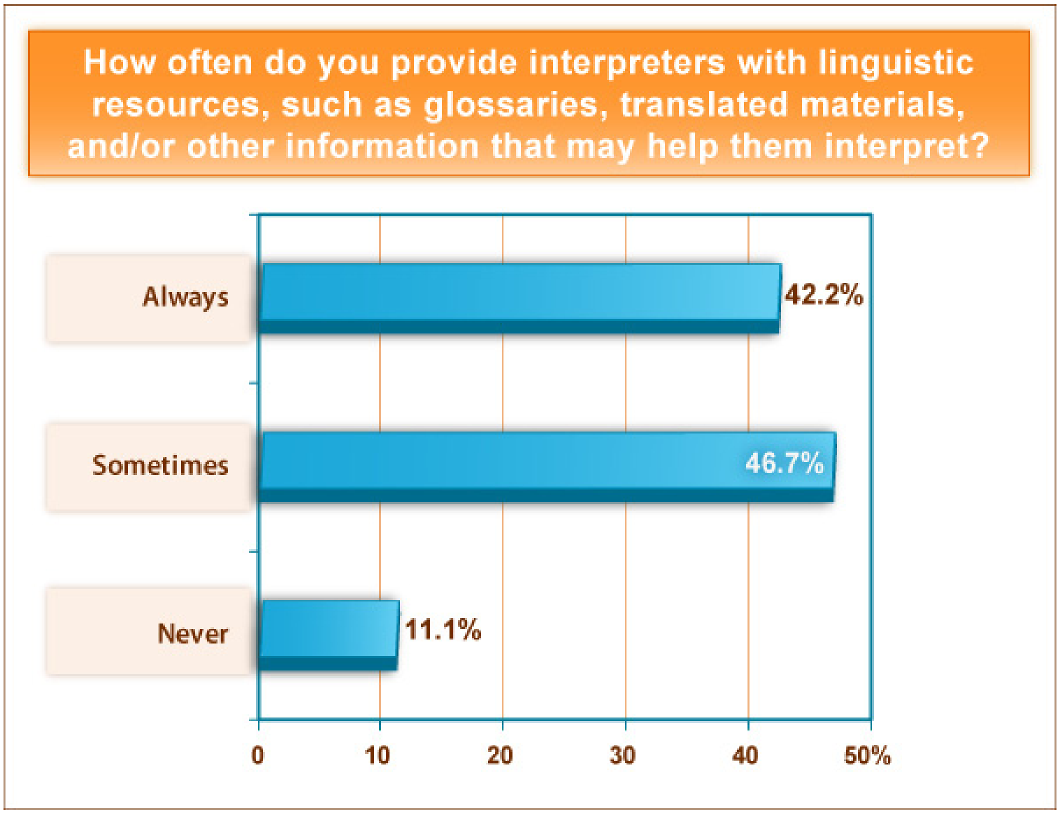

Figure 51: Supplier Provision of Linguistic Resources to Interpreters
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Given the popularity of collaborative workspaces, social networks, and collective learning, we also asked suppliers how they were enabling interpreters to communicate with each other. More than a third of companies (34.8%) said that they did nothing to enable interpreters to communicate with each other. The most popular option was live (in-person) events, with nearly half of companies (48.9%) choosing this option (see Figure 52).

Just 13.3% of vendors provided their interpreters with an interactive space online, and 21.5% offered interpreters a digital newsletter. Peer mentoring was quite popular, with more than a quarter of companies (26.7%) stating that they provided this to their interpreters.

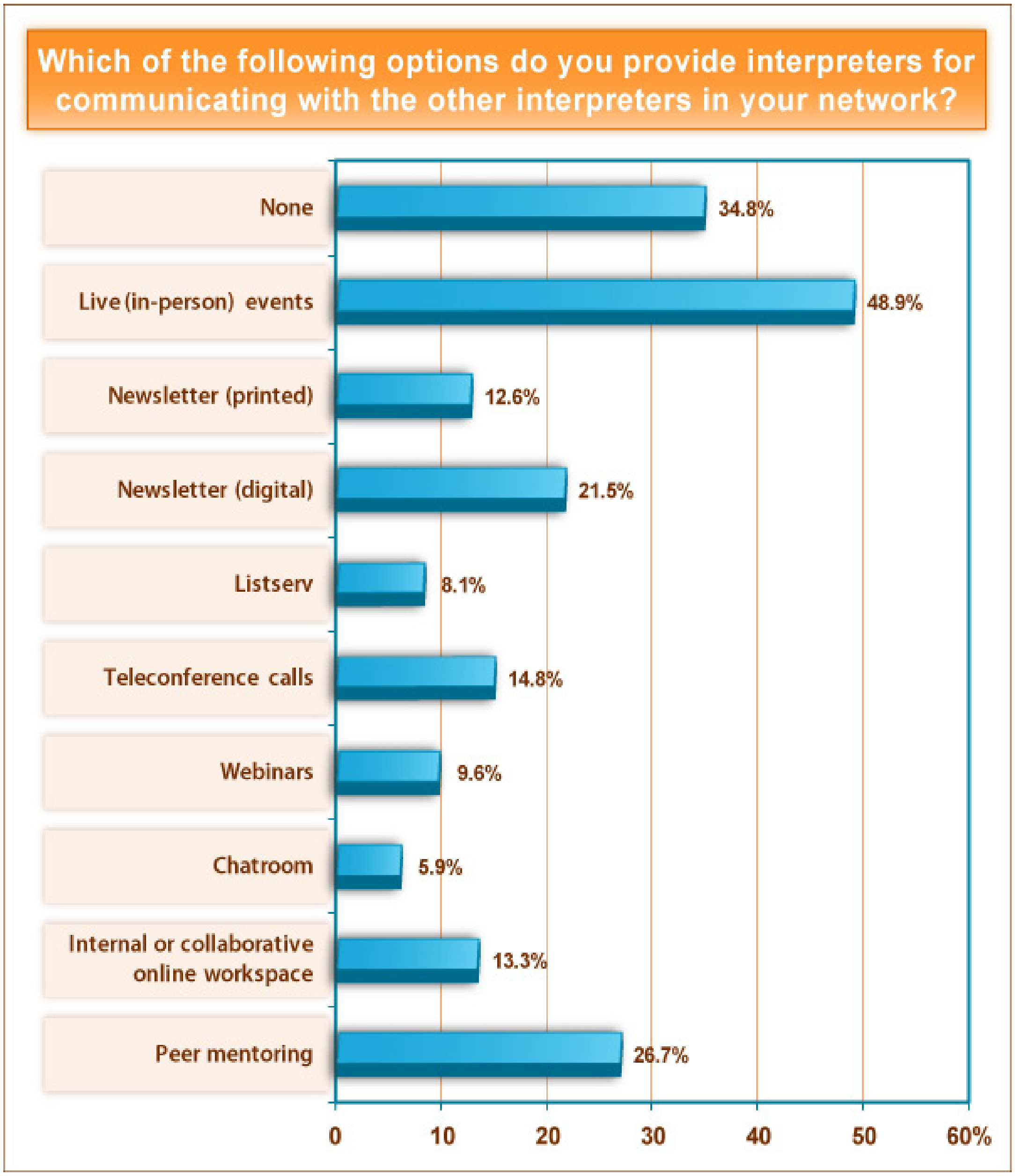

Figure 52: Supplier Provision of Collaboration Possibilities to Interpreters
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We asked suppliers the same question about technology that we posed to interpreters, and we spotted a similar trend. The more vendors look into the future, the more likely they are to believe that technology will impact the provision of interpreting services (see Figure 53).

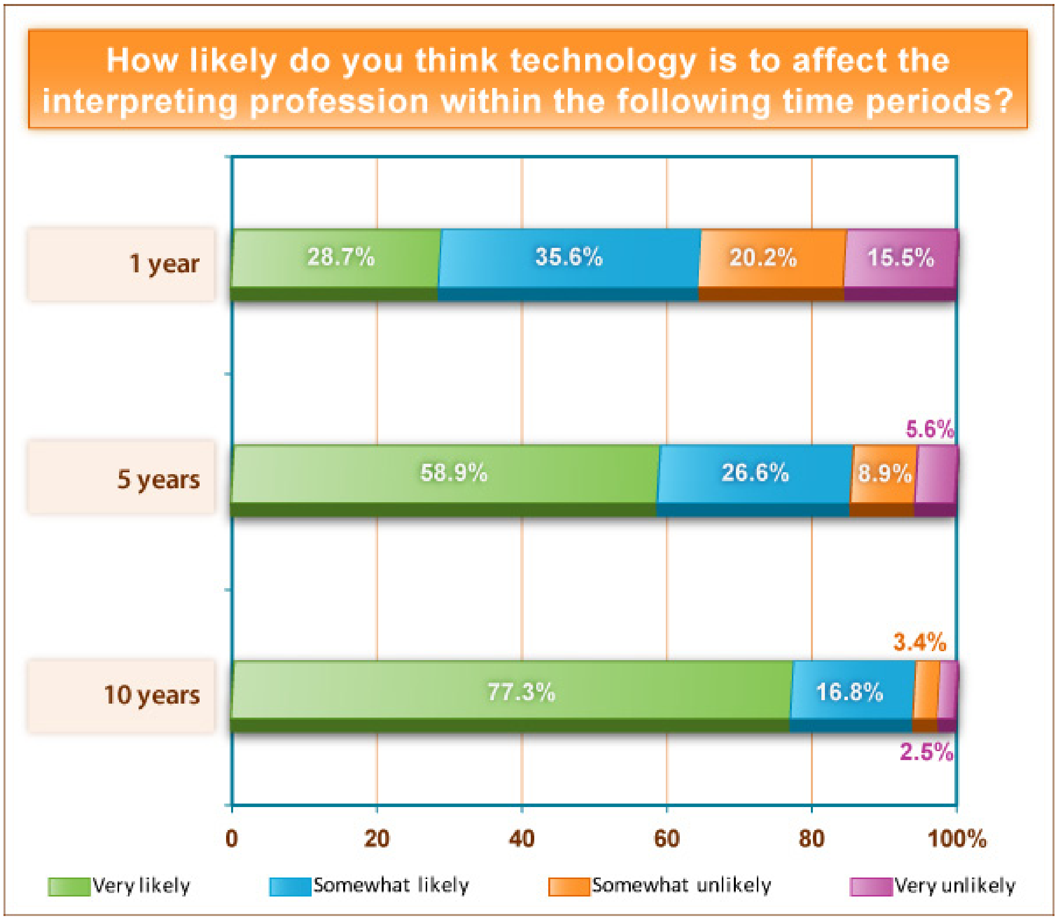

Figure 53: Supplier Views of the Role of Technology
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Major Findings from Our Survey of Buyers

To complement the data from supplier and interpreter stakeholders, we carried out a separate survey of 120 organizations that purchase interpreting services. Most of these companies were located within the United States (see Figure 54). These buy-side representatives stated that they purchased interpreting services for spoken languages (89.6%) and signed languages (72.9%) (see Figure 55).

We asked the purchasing organizations why they primarily used interpreting services (see Figure 56). The largest group (61.9%) said that they needed interpreters to communicate with foreign-born/immigrant populations, followed by those who needed to communicate with members of the deaf and hard of hearing community (15.3%), those who wished to communicate with international delegates or visitors (14.4%), and native-born linguistic minority groups (8.5%).

Figure 54: Locations of Purchasing Organization Survey Respondents
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

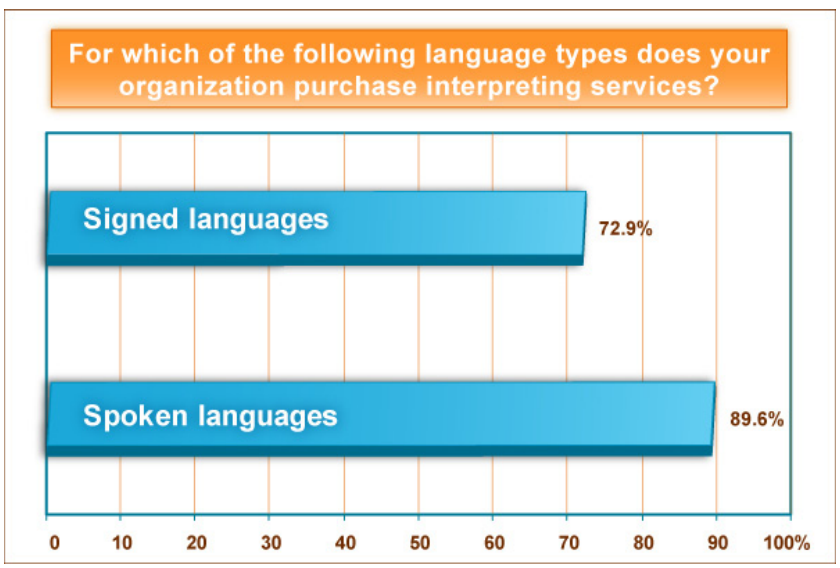

Figure 55: Types of Languages for Which Buyers Need Interpreters
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

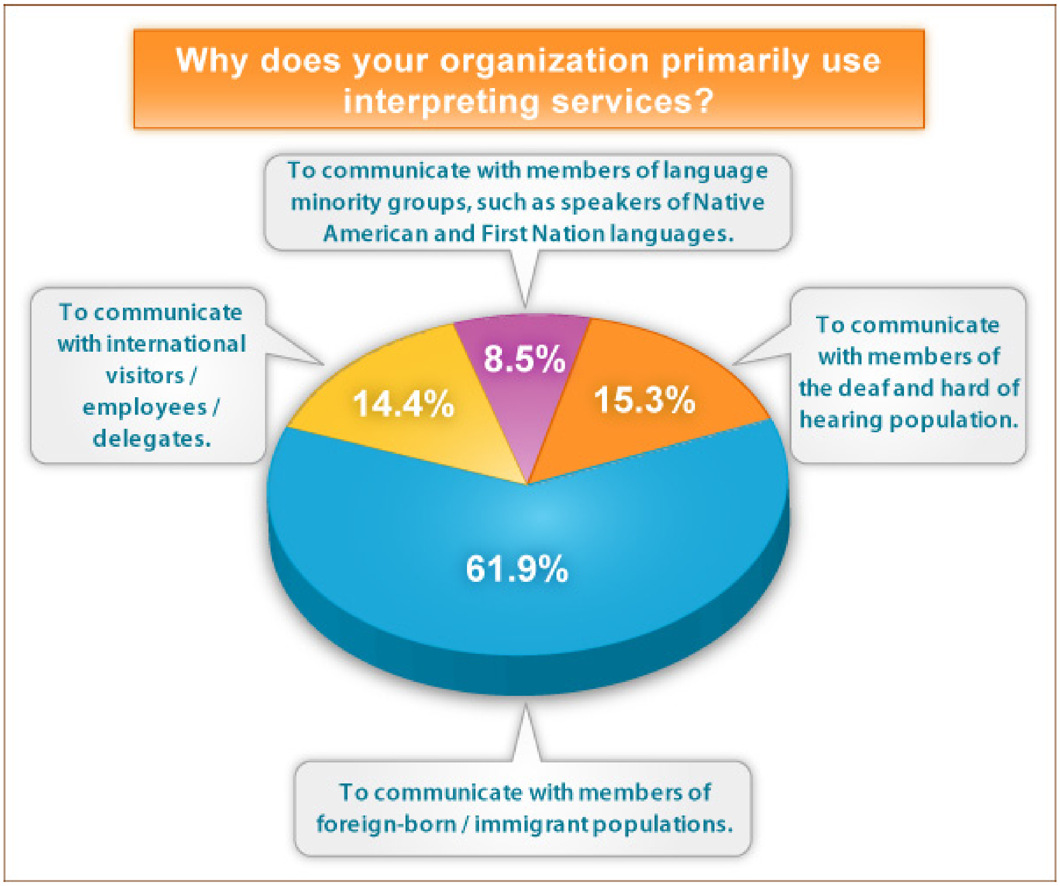

Figure 56: Purchasing Organization Primary Uses for Interpreting Services
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also asked buyers to identify their industry sectors (see Figure 57). The largest group (49.2%) came from healthcare settings, followed by legal and judiciary (13.6%). We observed smaller concentrations of purchasing organizations in all other sectors.

Another area on which we questioned buyers was the types of language services they purchase (see Figure 58). The majority of these organizations purchase on-site interpreting (86.5%) and telephone interpreting (81.3%). A large contingent buy written translation services (62.5%). More than a third (39.6%) use video interpreting services, and similar numbers use language proficiency testing services (35.4%) as well as interpreting managing/scheduling (33.3%).

We also asked buyers to identify their most commonly needed language pairs. They cited 52 unique language pairs (see Table 21).

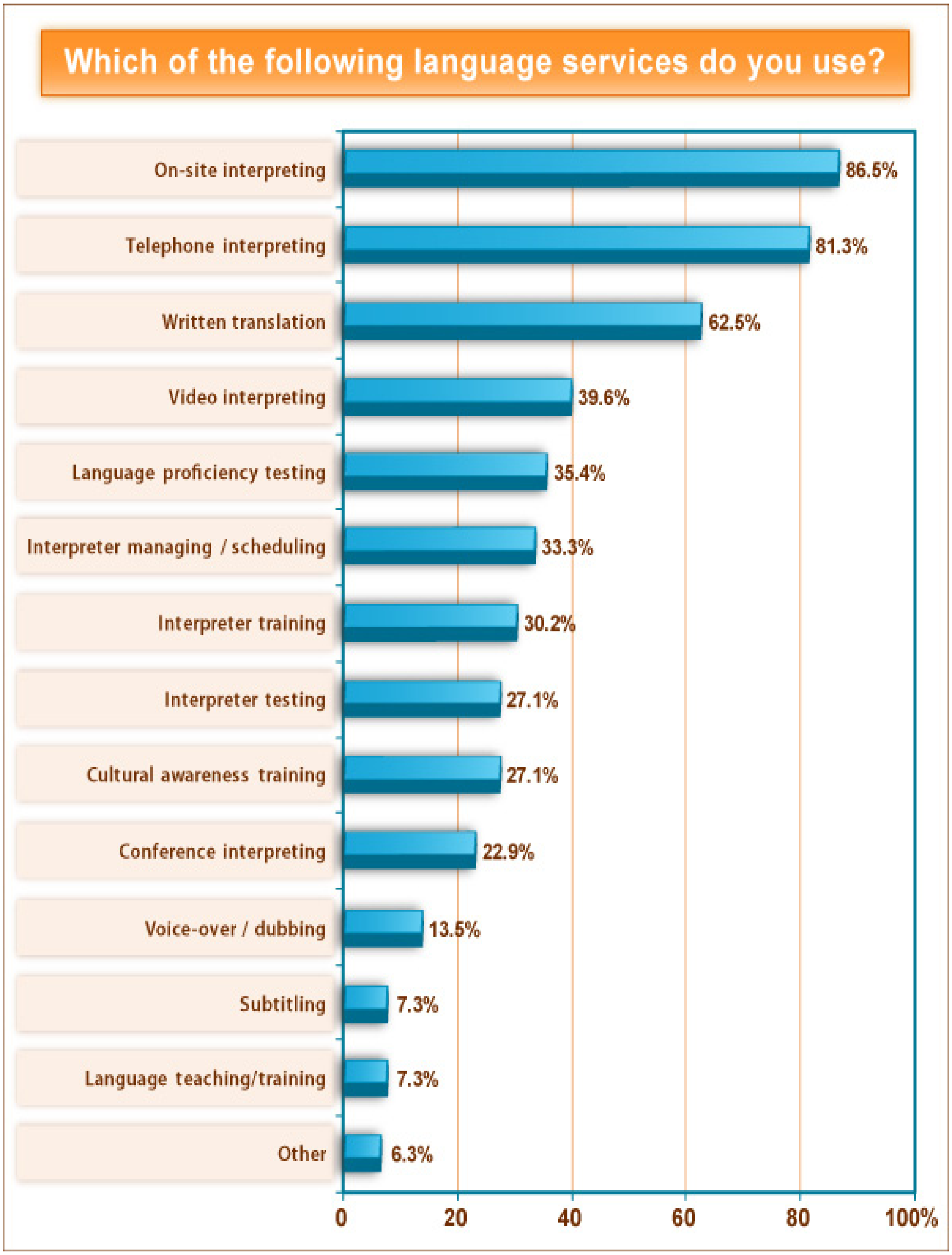

Figure 57: Services Used by Purchasing Organizations
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

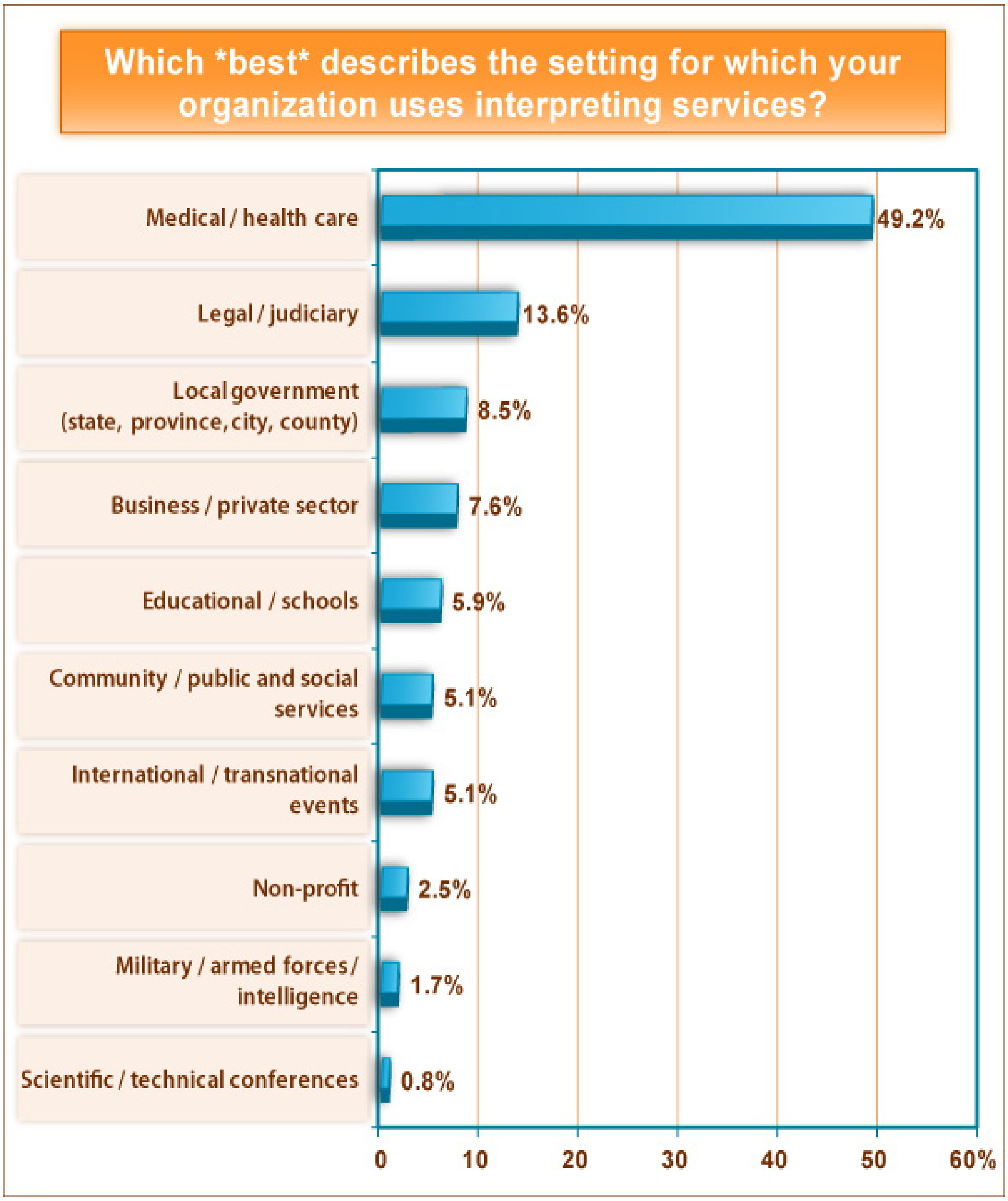

Figure 58: Industry Sectors of Purchasing Organizations
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Language Combination	Percentage	Language Combination	Percentage
Spanish>English	14.44	Armenian>English	0.52
American Sign Language>English	10.24	English>Hmong	0.52
English>Spanish	8.92	English>Laotian	0.52
English>American Sign Language	6.04	Farsi>English	0.52
Mandarin>English	6.04	German>English	0.52
Russian>English	5.25	Tagalog>English	0.52
Vietnamese>English	4.99	Urdu>English	0.52
Arabic>English	4.46	American Sign Language>Spanish	0.26
English>Russian	3.67	Dari>English	0.26
Korean>English	3.15	English>Armenian	0.26
French>English	2.62	English>Dari	0.26
Cantonese>English	2.36	English>Farsi	0.26
English>Arabic	2.36	English>German	0.26
Somali>English	2.36	English>Haitian Creole	0.26
English>French	2.10	English>Italian	0.26
English>Korean	1.84	English>Somali	0.26
English>Mandarin	1.84	French>Portuguese	0.26
English>English	1.31	French>Spanish	0.26
Portuguese>English	1.31	Hmong>English	0.26
English>Portuguese	1.05	Khmer>English	0.26
English>Vietnamese	1.05	Mandarin>American Sign Language	0.26
English>Cantonese	0.79	Mandarin>Spanish	0.26
English>Japanese	0.79	Polish>English	0.26
English>Polish	0.79	Spanish>American Sign Language	0.26
Haitian Creole>English	0.79	Spanish>French	0.26
Japanese>English	0.79	Urdu>Mandarin	0.26

Table 21: Most Common Interpreter Language Combinations Requested by Buyers
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We asked buyers to estimate how much they spent on all interpreting services on an annual basis (see Figure 59). The largest percentage (17.7%) reported spending US$100,000 to US$249,999, but an equal number of buyers claimed they did not know how much they spent on these services. The next largest group of buy-side organizations (11.5%) reported spending US$1 million to US$1.9 million per year on interpreting services.

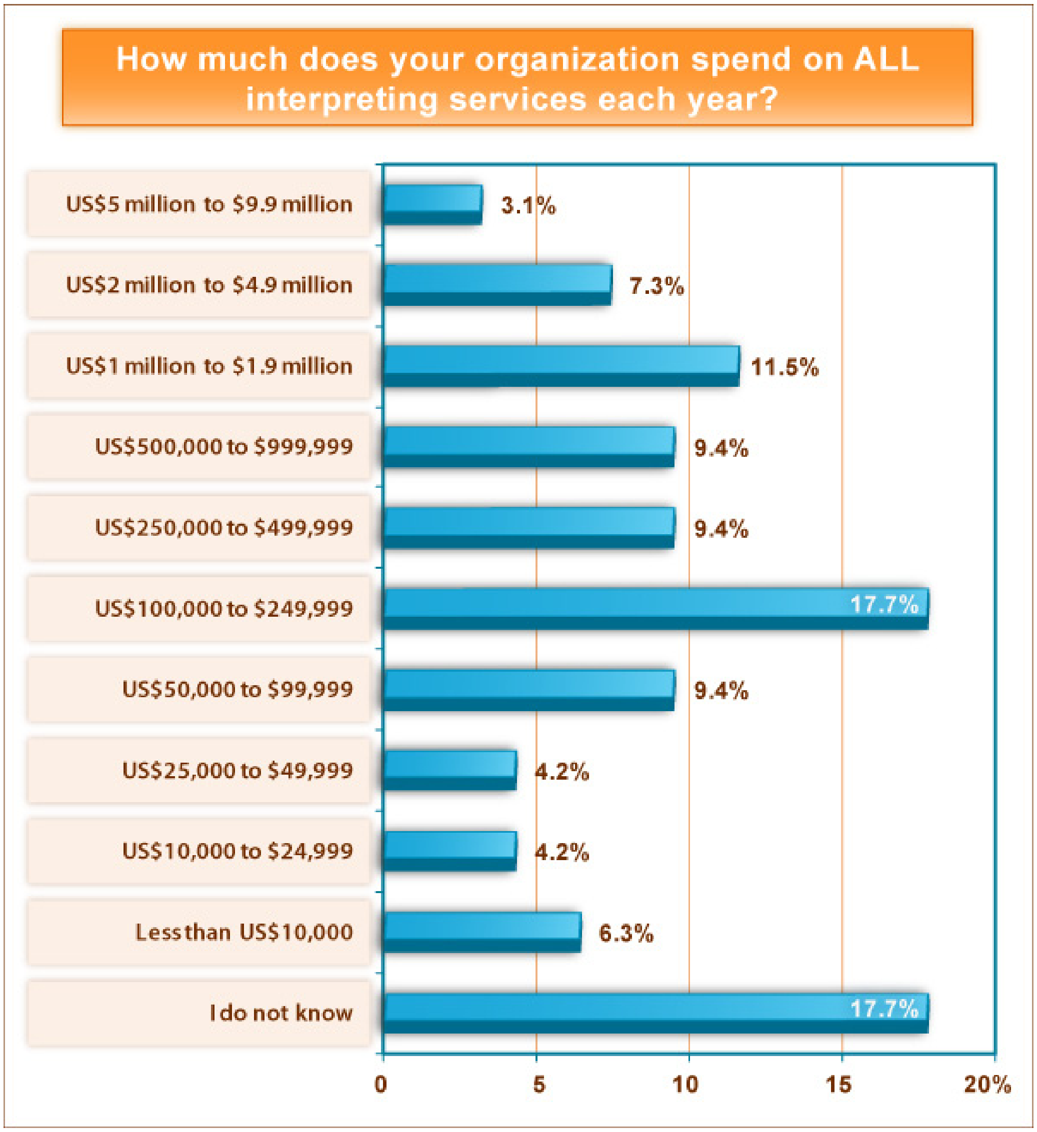

Figure 59: What Buy-Side Organizations Spend on Interpreting Services
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

	Buyers that expect a decreased need	Buyers that expect an increased need	Buyers that expect the need to stay the same
On-site (face-to-face) interpreting	16.13%	53.76%	30.11%
Telephone interpreting	11.63%	55.81%	32.56%
Video interpreting	5.26%	59.21%	35.53%

Table 22: Buyer Views on Future Need for Interpreting Services
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We asked buyers to tell us about their expectations for future needs for interpreting services (see Table 22). The greatest area of expected need was for video interpreting (59.21%), followed by telephone interpreting (55.81%) and on-site interpreting (53.76%).

With regard to how their services were priced, buyers reported the same findings that we observed in our two supply-side stakeholder groups, with hourly rates reported as the most common (65.3%). However, after hourly rates, buyers stated that per-minute rates were most common (36.8%) (see Table 23).

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
By the minute	36.8%	35
By the hour	65.3%	62
By the day	14.7%	14
By the project / assignment	11.6%	11
Other (please specify)	11.6%	11

Table 23: How Buyers Pay for Interpreting Services
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Formal Interpreter Training Requirement	Response Percent
Multiple interpreter training courses totaling more than 40 hours	37.6%
Community or technical college program	25.8%
University degree program (bachelor's)	24.7%
A single interpreter training course of 40 hours	18.3%
A single interpreter training course of more than 40 hours	16.1%
Community or technical college course	16.1%
University program (undergraduate)	14.0%
University course	11.8%
University graduate degree program (master's or doctoral)	10.8%
None	6.5%
A single interpreter training course of less than 40 hours	5.4%

Table 24: Buyer Views on Formal Interpreter Training Requirements
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

We also asked buyers what formal training they believed interpreters should have at a minimum. The largest group (37.6%) said that interpreters should have multiple training courses totaling more than 40 hours (see Table 24).

As with other groups, we asked buyers to tell us about their views on technology's potential impact on the interpreting profession (see Table 25). Buyers appeared to believe more strongly than other groups that technology would influence the provision of interpreting services.

Time Period	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Somewhat unlikely	Very unlikely
1 year	27.38%	48.81%	14.29%	9.52%
5 years	60.21%	30.10%	2.15%	7.53%
10 years	80.72%	12.05%	2.41%	4.82%

Table 25: Buyer Views on Impact of Technology on Interpreting
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Vox Populi

In addition to quantitative data on the interpreting profession, we collected verbatim quotes from interpreters, suppliers, and buyers to enable the "voice of the interpreter" to be heard.

Interpreters Just Want a Little Respect for Their Profession

The sentiment most widely reported by interpreter respondents was their need to be recognized as professionals:

> *"I love what I do, but I feel that the respect for my profession is not there yet. In the hospital, I always have to remind the staff that I am trained, as they are to fulfill their duties, and that the many years of training and experience that I have cannot compare with their heritage learning experience. I get really frustrated with these issues, and I am trying to solve them educating personnel, one at a time, doing presentations in department meetings and everywhere I can get myself into. But it is a real struggle!"*

> *"I am amazed at the lack of respect for professional interpreting in the U.S. (as opposed to Europe). I had cases of being treated as a solicitor or pest for appearing at a doctor's office to interpret, even though this was at the request of a major, country-famous hospital's Patient Services Dept. The treatment is just as bad in courts, where counsel from both sides put interpreters down for any reason. Interpreters are treated as a step up from the guy next door or relative who can speak the language."*

But, while they clamor for more recognition, many interpreters point out that there is not enough awareness of an interpreter's functions among the general public, employers, or sometimes even among so-called interpreters themselves:

> *"Unfortunately, interpreting is a profession that many people practice without the adequate qualification. This makes jobs scarcer for certified interpreters and lowers our average income. It is very important to educate the population about the required skills a professional interpreter needs to do his/her job well. Also, it is important to make it clear that just because someone is bilingual does not mean that he or she can interpret."*

> *"The community interpreting side is very different from conference interpreting. It is not a well-recognized area of the profession. It is highly underpaid and undervalued."*

> *"Many customers who only speak/understand one language have a difficult time understanding the dynamics and skills required for interpreting. Many customers assume there is no skill or training involved and have very few measures in place to evaluate or monitor service. This makes it easier for competitors to undercut our rates when they have no overhead to support proper requirements."*

In relation to the lack of respect and awareness, respondents talked about how no distinction is made between beginners and experienced interpreters when it comes to pay, how prices are pushed lower by their colleagues and intermediary agencies, and about how hospitals, government agencies, and courts are unwilling to hire and pay professional interpreters:

> *"Here in Canada, interpreters are greatly underpaid. Currently there is a wave for professionalism which addresses further training, further testing, and more expenses for interpreters without taking into account the general financial security and income of interpreters working within the industry. This leaves most interpreters frustrated and generally looking to leave the field. This in turn has resulted in the market being served by inexperienced interpreters and has therefore lowered the quality of interpretation being made available."*

> *"The interpreting agencies are undercutting each other and reducing wages to the interpreters. When I started 10 years ago, the going wage for telephonic was 50 cents per minute. The current going wage is 30 cents per minute."*

> *"When I started working as an interpreter with an agency three years ago, I was making $25 per hour. Then I left the agency and took a one-year interpretation program from a technical college. Now with three years of experience and a diploma, I'm making $17.30 per hour."*

> *"Customers are forcing our industry to lower prices; however, they expect the same level of professionalism and still require interpreters to be 'certified.' As a result, some interpreting service providers tend use low or non-skilled resources as interpreters in order to minimize costs and lower pricing to customers."*

The Ongoing Struggle for Increased Professionalization

Respondents complained that not enough importance was being placed on the need for trained and certified interpreters. This, they feel, affects their status as professionals and the pay they receive:

> *"I'm concerned about the lack of focus on recruiting and training interpreters, especially for languages of lesser diffusion. The dialogue around standards for spoken languages both for testing and for training has almost always focused on highly standardized languages. I'm also surprised that the field is still pretty insular – not really taking advantage of the insights and studies through related fields like linguistics, anthropology, sociology, and psychology."*

> *"My company has not provided any professional training in the 11 years I have been interpreting here. The interview was done in English. I was never tested or even spoken to in Spanish (the target language)."*

> *"Most workshops are too short to really develop interpreting skills. Skills in simultaneous, consecutive, and sight translation cannot be developed in five days. This misconception carries on to the buyer of interpretation services, who thinks that because someone had a five-day training, he or she is an interpreter."*

> *"The reason that so little progress has been made in the past 40 years is due to the cycle of paraprofessionals' availability and contractors' preference for low-cost services, in tandem with the cycle of too few academic degree programs and a lack of statutory support for professional academic training."*

Yet not all interpreters have the same level of access to testing services, nor is testing affordable to them, as freelance/independent contractors have to bear the cost themselves:

> *"It is very hard for working interpreters to expand on their education and training, as it is hard to find reputable part-time interpretation courses, especially around smaller cities."*

> *"With so many institutions providing certification, it becomes difficult for a freelancer to choose one that best describes the area one has specialized in. It would be ideal to combine all institutions into one national agency that could provide a chapter in each state, therefore, examinations would not have to skip states for years."*

> *"Demands for more interpreters to be certified, as well as high-priced certification and licensure fees, are eliminating many would-be part-time interpreters from the field."*

Respondents repeatedly cited the need for a centralized, national testing/certifying body, as there are currently myriad tests, which often prove to be too confusing to all parties involved.

> *"Too many interpreter training programs don't give a well-rounded education about deafness and culture. Students coming out of these programs have no 'heart' for the profession. They only care about the money they can make, overlooking the needs of the clients they are serving."*

> *"It would be wonderful to have a national baseline certification test for interpreting, and it would be great to have a national professional association dedicated exclusively to the interpreting profession."*

> *"I would like to see the 'alphabet soup' of interpreter certifications eliminated, and interpreters listed as certified or not. The current hodgepodge of credentials is way too confusing for consumers and customers alike."*

> *"I was an early advocate for certification and standards requirements, especially in legal situations where injustices based on misunderstandings occurred. However, as the process for standards has become bureaucratized and managed by non-linguists/interpreters, it has become overly cumbersome and an impediment to both entry into the field and accurate certification testing."*

> *"Why do we need multiple tracks for certification? We work in a national market. Duplication of effort is costly for interpreters, organizations, and consumers alike."*

Interpreters also discussed the lack of adherence to professional standards of practice and ethical principles:

> *"My main concern about the interpreting profession today is the many stories I'm told about unprofessional behavior by interpreters. It seems like there are a good 20% or maybe even 25% of interpreters who behave poorly with clients and get away with this day after day."*

> *"I am constantly hearing stories about poor performance by interpreters (including certified and well-paid ones) who do things like text message during assignments, not allow clients to finish their statements, and make major errors without caring about the consequences."*

> *"I have yet to meet an interpreter who didn't consider herself to be very good. It makes me wonder if interpreters are taking advantage of being the only bilingual in the room and skipping the serious prep work that this profession requires before you can accurately interpret in both languages."*

> *"In many areas of the U.S., the international standards of practice of the conference interpreting profession are virtually unknown. Simultaneous interpretation equipment is often substandard. And working conditions may be haphazardly set by local laymen service providers, such as equipment suppliers, translation agencies, and event planners."*

Despite Challenges, Interpreters Praise Their Profession

While interpreters were vocal about the problems they face, they also had plenty of positive things to say about their work.

> *"Communicating between two or several individuals in a language that both can understand is already a challenge, because some people talk more than they listen, or prefer to listen to themselves talking. Helping people who do not speak the same language is a thrilling and rewarding experience."*

> *"We have a fascinating job, because we move in circles not part of the average citizen's life. We experience situations that require diplomacy, tact, composure, and an adventurous spirit."*

> *"This is a demanding job, both physically and mentally. But interpreting also gives us a window into many worlds."*

Implications

The findings of this study are numerous, and there is far more analysis to be done that falls outside of the scope of this report. Much of the data speaks for itself. However, here are a few of the most important points revealed by the results of this research endeavor:

- **Industry-specific borders are blurred.** The idea that interpreters must specialize in one particular area does not hold up in the actual market. In reality, interpreters work across many sectors. The fact that interpreters work in so many different areas raises many questions: "Which standards of practice should they uphold?" "Should trainers focus more on basic skills and less on specialized terminology?" "Which organizations are prepared to represent those interpreters who work across multiple sectors?"

- **Most interpreters are also translators.** Education and training for translators has long been seen as separate from that of interpreters, but this does not match the reality of the profession within North America. The fact that so many interpreters work as translators should prompt trainers and educators to re-evaluate their curricula to determine whether they are adequately preparing interpreters for the true dynamics of the profession.

- **The majority of interpreters are freelancers.** With such high numbers of interpreters working as freelancers, training and testing become more difficult, because these services cannot necessarily be required by their clients, who are not their employers in most cases. Instead, the burden is often placed on the interpreters to fund their own testing and training.

- **Technology is here to stay.** Views of technology were unanimous – all three groups believe that technology will change the profession within the next five to 10 years. For the most part, interpreting has not benefited from a high degree of technological innovations, but this is slowly changing. Interpreters are using more electronic resources, and buyers are turning to more automation – not necessarily for interpreting itself but for tasks like scheduling and managing interpreters.

- **More research is needed.** Now that such a large dataset is available for the North American interpreting market, it would be useful to be able to compare this dataset with similar data for other regions of the world, in order to identify differences and similarities. And now that a baseline for data collection has been established, future studies can go into even more detail.

Common Sense Advisory often makes use of a "maturity model" to situate the varying phases that organizations go through before they reach optimal levels of language services utilization and organization. The model we developed for the localization field is widely referenced in the industry (see "The Localization Maturity Model," Aug06).

If we were to characterize the current state of the North American interpreting market using similar parameters, we would classify the market as moving from Level 2, the Discovery Phase, into Level 3, the Managed Phase. In the Discovery Phase, areas of inefficiency and scope of effort come into clear focus, and the expense of doing the job right starts to come into view.

At the Managed Phase, professionalization increases, stakeholders discuss the best models, and external and internal issues determine the velocity of change. At this stage, vendors – especially technology vendors – also frequently apply pressure in an effort to expedite change. They see themselves as change agents that have the know-how and resources to produce results. Yet conflicts can often arise at this stage, as diverse players struggle to carve out clearly defined roles for themselves.

In summary, the interpreting market is currently experiencing many changes, all of which are normal for an evolving profession – and in fact, some might argue are part of a typical set of steps that any profession must go through in order to reach the next level of maturity. While "skipping" a phase is not usually possible, we often advise organizations on the best ways to fast-track their transition from one phase to another.

So, what will help the interpreting profession move more swiftly along the path to maturity? One of the first steps is to take inventory and to develop a greater understanding of the fundamentals of the profession itself – to see the forest through the trees, so to speak. This study partially achieves that goal, as it provides a first-ever, in-depth holistic view of interpreting in the region.

As the data shows, the North American interpreting market is characterized by silos of interpreters spread out across many dividing lines – by geography, by industry, even by mode of delivery. However, the data also reveals that these divisions are largely artificial, because interpreters end up disregarding them in the end, for various reasons. The fragmented nature of the interpreting field can certainly be seen as a weakness. The real question is whether it can ever be overcome. This is a question that depends more on action than on research, and indeed, it is a question that only the stakeholders in the field can answer.

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About Common Sense Advisory

Common Sense Advisory, Inc. is an independent research firm committed to objective research and analysis of the business practices, services, and technology for translation and localization. With its buy-side research, Common Sense Advisory endeavors to improve the quality and practice of international business, and the efficiency of the online and offline operations that support it. To find out more about our research and how to subscribe:

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