

Report to the Board of Directors

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MRID Transition Team

Contributors - Data Sources

First collection point: Select and targeted MRID Members via focus groups

Second collection point: Presentation materials from Darlene Zangara, Ph.D.

Third collection point: Feedback from MRID members Fall Conference 2017

MOTION 15:05:07: Move to establish an ad hoc committee to study the association structure and purpose, solicit input from members and make recommendations to the membership.
(Petri/Laurion)

Abstract

In response to Convention Motion 15:05:07, a task force was established to investigate the needs of the Minnesota Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and to make recommendations for the future focus and structure of the association. The Transition Team (TT) as it was called consisted of Megan Bolduc (Board Liaison) , Richard Laurion, Melissa Mittelstaedt, Bridget Sabatke and Katelyn Wells; Carrie Wilbert was a member until August 2016.



The TT conducted focus groups with MRID interpreter members with identifications in the following areas: Newer Interpreters, Lightly Seasoned Interpreters, Well Seasoned Interpreters, Interpreters of Color, Deaf Interpreters, Interpreters from St. Cloud, Educational interpreters, Interpreter Mentors, and Interpreters living in Greater Minnesota. The group identified additional information was needed from Deaf Consumers and other stakeholder groups working with interpreters.

The following is a report from the MRID Transition Team based on data collected from cross-sections of the membership

Method

Starting the work

The transition team convened by making a call to the membership. Applications were collected, and the group of board selected representatives began working on the charge set out by the motion. Time was spent discussing group norms and planning the best way to do the work of investigating the needs of MRID and making recommendations for future focus and structure. The group suggested methods to collect data such as: compiling priorities within the group, doing a survey to the membership, doing focus groups with various cross-sections of interpreters, and doing information collection at a conference. In the process, we brainstormed areas that we thought would come up in our focus groups but ended up leaning more on the data from the focus groups and the information gathered at the conference than the groups original suggested categories. At this point no survey has been done to confirm the results (discussed below).

Focus Group Participants

The transition team brain stormed different cross-sections of the Minnesota interpreting community and brainstormed a list of interpreters from those regions that could be contacted either to join the focus group, or to recommend other people from that group who would be willing to participate. Groups included:

- Novice Interpreters (4 participants)
- Lightly Seasoned Interpreters (4 participants)
- Seasoned Interpreters (3 participants)
- Interpreters of Color (3 participants)
- Interpreter mentors (5 participants)
- Deaf Interpreters (3)
- Interpreters from St. Cloud (10 participants)
- Educational interpreters (4 participants)
- Interpreters living in Greater Minnesota - was attempted several times but never completed

The transition team identified that additional information may be needed from Deaf Consumers and other stakeholder groups working with interpreters, this should be considered in the next steps of this process.

Collection Process

Focus Groups

Focus group participants were selected through personal knowledge of Minnesota interpreters and using the network of those interpreters to widen our range as well as the registry of members of MRID. The work of the transition team included: contacting participants, coordinating a date, time and place for multiple people to meet, sending a confirmation for the meeting, attending and note taking at meetings. Groups were convened either in face-to-face groups or online via video when necessary. Two or three members of the transition team attended each group with one person being a primary facilitator and other members taking notes

on the event. After reviewing the notes from the focus group process the broad categories that came out were: connection, inclusion, MRID structure/mission/vision, duties of MRID, professional development, and communication/outreach.

The most pervasive theme throughout the discussions was connection. The focus groups talked about the desire for more **connection** in three areas: 1. Connection between generations of interpreters. There was a clear desire for better relations between interpreters with more and less experience and different kinds of expertise as the way to move the field forward. 2. Improving the working and communication connections between Deaf interpreters and hearing interpreters. 3. Connection with other local organizations like MADC, MNCDHH, and RID.

Recommendations proposed by members were to create community included mentoring relationships facilitated through MRID by creating networking events, social events. Others suggested providing more volunteer opportunities in the organization specifically for newer interpreters or newer leaders to grow into the fold with MRID.

Closely related to connection was the concept of **inclusion** that was seen frequently from the various groups. Many members reported feeling disenfranchised from MRID. DIs feel excluded when English is used in shared spaces. Novice interpreters feeling unsafe to speak up at conferences because of rebuff in “words” or eyerolls. The opening note from interpreters of color is that they haven't engaged in MRID because they've never been asked (which is a symptom of much broader systemic issues). The St. cloud interpreters haven't had their emails returned. At one point, they put together their own professional development and all they wanted was a representative from MRID to come and greet the speaker that they flew in, and MRID didn't come through for them. These are just a few of the examples that were expressed by these groups. With valid reasons to feel disenfranchised, it seems as if reconnection with those groups

will require some new communication strategies, or further interventions, including direct outreach and accessible media. It was also suggested that the board discuss norms for email response times how to engage various cross-sections of interpreters. Three separate groups suggested doing more for the out-state regions including traveling board meetings, conferences and forums. Streamed board meetings were also suggested with the understanding that some interpreters in rural Minnesota do not have reliable internet, so this may not be effective. Another opportunity for MRID to feel more inclusive is by creating language norms to use ASL in a shared space. Also, it was identified that the membership would benefit from more training in power, privilege and oppression (PPO).

The next theme seen throughout the focus groups was related to MRIDs structure, mission and vision. There were not as many specifics offered in this area. The overall message was that members are open to the board structure looking different than it is at present, and possibly smaller or duties being divided differently. The groups that looked at the mission and vision said that the language seems vague and out of date for what the community needs now. The recommendation from the group of mentors was to start with exploring the MRID's values and building philosophy/mission/vision statements from there. Another suggestion for guiding principles for MRID included making more focused short-term plans, such as two to five year plans to allow MRID to stay more current and accomplish more goals.

The groups had many ideas about possible activities that MRID could perform for the community. One overall theme was that MRID is primarily viewed as facilitating conferences and not doing work beyond that. People reported being more willing to work with MRID if the activities were more meaningful. Visibility was one area where people saw a need for recruiting future interpreters and particularly interpreters from underrepresented communities. Advocacy

was another area that multiple groups identified. Advocacy may include working with MADC or MCDHH in lobbying efforts. Another suggestion is creating standard practice papers and/or white papers, particularly around social justice issues. Although this may or may not fit within the current mission of MRID, many interpreters identified the need for interpreters to advocate for other interpreters, whether that be in Education where interpreters may be isolated or in the press when issues arise.

Professional development was another category discussed in the focus groups. There were some conflicting opinions in this area. For example, seasoned interpreters felt that MRID having conferences was important to their development. Other groups felt that they had ample opportunities for professional development through various sources. That being said, the overall sentiment expressed was that conferences are still wanted, but they could be and do more for our community. There were MANY suggestions offered for topics that can be found in the focus group notes. This report includes some of the suggestions that best stretch to meet the needs in the other categories expressed above like community and inclusion. Participants want community, but it seems that would be best served as events outside of workshops. For workshops each group wanted a space to explore their specific issues, commonly mentioned were PPO and self-assessment skills. In addition, there was an expressed desire for topics that are specialized to each group- novice interpreters, CDIs, seasoned interpreters, interpreters of color, each wanting their own track. It was suggested that conferences be used as an opportunity to have more novice DIs and HIs (hearing interpreters) exposed to conference work and leadership.

The next theme was communication and outreach. The thoughts on this topic is that communication should be varied and broad. People wanted more information on items like board updates and governance. People want to know more about when elections are coming and what seats are available. Interpreters are engaging through emails. Novice interpreters reported enjoying getting the emails through multiple list-serves like MRID, MERGE and their IEPs. When there is technological outreach, it should be accessible through ASL and at least some communications should go out interpreters in Minnesota even if they are not members. For example, people who were no longer members in St. Cloud still wanted information about MRID so that they could reengage. It is reported that personal communication is still the most effective; this can be achieved by having out-state forums and conferences and visiting IEPs. The website was a popular topic for many groups. Members would like the website to house a registry, including other language/culture affiliations and whether or not members are willing to mentor.

Overall, groups felt that the website could be better utilized and more user friendly as a hub for information.

One theme that was expected but not seen was the desire for MRID to be an organization that facilitates mentoring. Although people said they would like networking and forums that could connect them to mentors, people did not reflect the desire for MRID to take on the business of mentoring that requires mentor training, building a structure, paying mentors, etc. Also, the mentoring group discussed how in the past, MRID has not been the engine behind mentoring, rather, other groups have done that. Although mentoring and closing the graduation-to-certification gap is a need in the field, it was not mentioned that MRID should be responsible for that beyond workshop topics and facilitating networking.

This section of the report discussed many themes found throughout the focus groups. It should be mentioned that one focus group seemed like an outlier. Although the small focus group may not represent this group widely, the seasoned interpreter group seemed to focus less on community and connection and more on the qualifications, assessment and licensure of interpreters. The information collected also shows that this group is most likely to rely on professional development through MRID than other sources. It is worth considering if those opinions are represented disproportionately at business meetings and whether they accurately represent the interpreters of Minnesota, and moreover, whether it quiets other opinions that do not feel as empowered.

Conference Activity

There was an information collection opportunity at the MRID Fall conference facilitated by Dr. Darlene Zangara. She had attendees write what it would look like if MRID was thriving and came up with some categories. Interestingly, those categories, although created separately from the focus group process, had the same themes, with the addition of viability/\$\$, and RID affiliation. The summary of the MRID experience can be seen at this link:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pPllIs-iQ9EOBp6Qz2j1Uu2r8S7fGI0EBFQbb9LCokQ/edit>

Next Steps

After having seen the information collected from the membership, here are some possible next steps for the MRID Board.

Recommendation 1

It is strongly recommended that the board continue to work with Dr. Zangara to identify the organization's life cycle and next steps to ignite membership involvement and to help the organization thrive. It is not enough, that MRID just start functioning well in the short-term, but that a structure is built that can make the organization relevant, responsive and sustainable through changes in leadership.

Recommendation 2

It is the common experience that members feel disenfranchised. This area stood out as the most important theme repeatedly heard from many groups. Solving this member concern would likely overlap with the work through Dr. Zangara. The Transition Team recommends putting sufficient energy into considering all stakeholders when making decisions like where conferences/events are hosted, how communications are conducted, and identifying group norms. "If you build it, they will come," does not seem sufficient at this time. Intentional outreach will be necessary to re-engage many members.

Closing

This has been a long process and the Transition Team would like to thank the multiple Boards and leadership for all of their patience and support while we worked on this undertaking. It has been a privilege to get to reach out to diverse members of our community and to hear their hopes and concerns. We hope that the information gathered is useful and is put into action in a way that is sustainable and cohesive through future leadership.