



How to Work with Your Local Courts: An Interview

How a Philadelphia judge, a local ATA chapter, and area interpreters developed a working relationship based on shared strategies that helped everyone involved build capacity, collaborate on programs, and support each other.

Since 1998, the First Judicial District Court of Pennsylvania has collaborated with multiple organizations and entities on a variety of initiatives to increase the capacity of its language access program.

For over 10 years, Deputy Court Administrator Janet Fasy has dedicated herself to the dissemination of language access regulations and best practices throughout the Commonwealth. In 2011, she initiated the First Judicial District Court Shadowing Program. The program has developed into a highly effective training program for court interpreters looking to become certified. It prepares interpreters for certification with practical knowledge and experience that is only available in the courtroom. Participants also benefit from access to the judiciary, court administrators, and various department representatives who utilize interpreters.

The Federal Judicial District Court reached out to the Delaware Valley Translators Association (DVTA), an ATA chapter, early in the planning stages to help with this initiative. As a board member of DVTA and co-chair of its Programming Committee, I wanted to learn more about this collaboration and what it involved. The opportunity to do so presented itself at last year's ATA Annual Conference in Chicago, where I was fortunate enough to interview members of DVTA and First Judicial District Court administrators after they shared their story with attendees during a panel discussion. The panelists were:

- Judge Ida Chen: First Judicial District Court of Philadelphia, Family Court
- Tony Guerra: DVTA president
- Magdaliz Roura: Spanish interpreter and program participant. (I'm pleased to report that Roura has since received her court certification.)

JUDGE CHEN, could you provide a brief description of the First Judicial District Court Shadowing Program? How did you connect with DVTA?

You might say that our relationship with DVTA got off to a thunderous start. I say this because our initial meeting just happened to take place on August 23, 2011, the day an earthquake hit the East Coast.

We had organized a lunch meeting with Anne Connor, DVTA's president at that time, and the rest of the board at a Philadelphia hotel. The earthquake occurred right in the middle of it! I remember saying, "Forget about the earthquake, let's keep on talking about our subject matter."

This is typical of me. I knew that DVTA could be really helpful, so I wanted to get to work establishing a relationship that would be mutually beneficial.

What triggered the idea in your mind about the need for such a program?

Beginning in 2006, only certified or "otherwise qualified interpreters" could work in the courts. But how would you ever be able to get a good idea of what goes on in the courts unless you have a chance to shadow someone?

Do you believe that the preparation offered by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) is adequate for students wishing to become certified?

AOPC has a solid, two-day orientation program where they provide an overview of how the courts work in Pennsylvania. People should understand, however, that this orientation is not a skills-training program that would lead automatically to state certification. Nevertheless, I believe that attending the orientation program is an important part of the process toward achieving state certification. I only wish this program was free, since more people could benefit from attending.

Is there a prerequisite for joining the Shadowing Program?

Well, yes and no. We prefer candidates to have already started the certification process, since we would like everyone to be in the pipeline to take the examinations. However,

after signing up, many people discover that they have overestimated their ability to handle the job, especially after seeing how challenging the work is and the ethical requirements and other rules involved. Our goal is to give everyone a good start so that all participants coming out of the program will be able to achieve certification.

Is there a cost associated with being part of the program?

The Philadelphia courts have generously provided us with resources to conduct this program without any cost to the participant. There's also no question in my mind that we could not have a viable program without the expertise and support of our full-time judiciary interpreters—Javier Aguilar, Elizabeth Basulto, and Enrique García.

What does the program involve?

Participants shadow during the morning and then attend a free seminar during lunch. Someone from the public defender's office or from the district attorney's office is often brought in to talk on a variety of subjects of interest to everyone, such as working with defendants in a criminal case or working with senior citizens who have been abused. Our goal is to acquaint participants with as many aspects of working for the judicial system as possible.

MAGDALIZ, what kind of commitment was asked of you when you joined the program?

The commitment to the program was for eight months. Every Wednesday morning we shadowed interpreters in action in family court and criminal court. There was a series of speakers at lunchtime who would come and enlighten us about various subjects, such as how to speak to a judge, how to ask a speaker to pause in the courtroom, how to interact with the staff, and matters relating to ethics.

How many participants shadowed at a particular time?

There were 10 of us at one time in a courtroom, while another 10 were in another courtroom. We would switch every month between criminal court and family court to experience different situations.

TONY, when were you first approached by Judge Chen?

In November of 2011, DVTA was first consulted about our potential participation in this novel program by a new board member and good friend to Judge Chen, Gabriela Jenicek. Subsequent to our agreeing to contribute our resources, we arranged for the now legendary ("earth-shattering") lunch meeting where we discussed the specifics. Judge Chen impressed us with her energy, vision, and the compelling passion for the program's goals.

How does DVTA select contributors to the program?

Working with DVTA's membership chair, we first look at members who are in good standing and who we can identify as active interpreters (not translators). The application procedure we set up ensures that applicants understand the importance and honor of being selected as a potential candidate, the extent of the commitment necessary, and the benefits of being involved with this unique opportunity.

Can you name some of the direct benefits DVTA has brought to the program?

By working with DVTA, the First Judicial District Court Shadowing Program has benefitted from our board's organizational support, our extensive geographical reach for resources in and beyond the Delaware Valley, and our reputation for attracting high-caliber language professionals to our membership.

Has the program attracted new members to DVTA?

DVTA was not the only resource tapped to provide participants. Many interpreters who were brought in from other agencies got to know about DVTA, along with the benefits and professional opportunities that come with membership.

As an ATA chapter, do you see ATA eventually playing a role in such initiatives?

The level of interest and enthusiasm demonstrated by attendees to our panel presentation at ATA's Annual Conference in Chicago made it very clear to me that this program could absolutely serve as a model for other regions. I knew that ATA could play a pivotal role in facilitating



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HOW TO WORK WITH YOUR LOCAL COURTS continued

How would you ever be able to get a good idea of what goes on in the courts unless you have a chance to shadow someone?

its deployment and success by offering a platform for us to tell our story.

In what ways do you see DVTA continuing to support the First Judicial District Court Shadowing Program?

We remain committed to the ongoing support of the development and visibility of this important initiative through the resources of our network, through our terrific staff and volunteers, and through our dynamic social media presence.

JUDGE CHEN, any closing thoughts?

One of the reasons I wanted to bring DVTA's involvement with the First Judicial District Court Shadowing Program to ATA's Annual Conference in Chicago was to highlight my belief that the courts, working alone, cannot deliver justice to all litigants. In order to bring about language access throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, we needed to collaborate with DVTA and its many talented members.

I'm proud that DVTA is playing a leadership role in collaborating with the First Judicial District Court to help its members obtain opportunities in their profession. A considerable number of interpreters,

including those who have already become certified, enter the field with no courtroom experience. Programs like this will effectively help to fill the experience gap for new interpreters.

RELATED LINKS

Delaware Valley Translators Association
www.dvta.org

First Judicial District of Pennsylvania
<http://courts.phila.gov>

Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts Interpreter Certification Program
<http://bit.ly/AOPC-certification>

Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania Interpreter Resources
<http://bit.ly/Pennsylvania-courts>



Carlota Dalziel is a state- and federally-certified court interpreter who lives in Pennsylvania and works in the Tri-State area, as well as in Washington, DC and New York City. After earning a degree in journalism and working as an English teacher for 20 years in her native Argentina, her husband's job took the family to Belgium, Mexico, and finally to the U.S., which has been their home for the past 20 years. She serves on the board of directors of the Delaware Valley Translators Association and is co-chair of its Programming Committee. In addition to ATA, she is also a member of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators. Contact: rc4dalziel@comcast.net or carlotadalziel@castilconnect.com.

