DAY 1 · AM

High-Profile Settings & NVC

Communications Training for Interpreters
Working in High Profile Settings

Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) | Friday, March 27, 2026

Topher Ávila, PhD & Christopher Tester, PhD

Morning Session | 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we gather on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded territory of the Indigenous peoples of this land. We honor their continued presence, stewardship, and sovereignty.

Tribal Nations of Massachusetts

- Ponkapoag
- Mashpee Wampanoag
- Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head / Aquinnah
- Nipmuc Nation
- Narragansett Indian Tribe

Morning Agenda

9:00 – 9:20
Introductions & Welcome

9:20 – 9:50
Icebreaker Activity

9:50 – 10:00
AhaSlides: Setting the Scene

10:00 – 10:15
Coffee & Restroom Break

10:15 – 10:30
Presenter Positionality

10:30 – 11:20
Core Concept 1: NVC

11:20 – 12:00
**NVC Structure & OFCR Applied**

Topher Ávila, PhD

él / he / they / elle

Topher Ávila, PhD is a filmmaker, BEI/RID Certified Deaf Interpreter, community organizer, curriculum developer, and writer. Rooted in his LSMASL Deaf familia, Topher carries those raíces/roots into everything he does today. Abolition, Disability Justice, and Language Justice inform his work, blending advocacy with artistic creativity.

Topher has worked as an interpreter since 2016, and May 2026 will mark ten years in the field. Topher holds the following certifications: BEI III-i, BEI IV-i, BEI V-i, BEI Court, and RID CDI. He's the only one Deaf interpreter to be recognized by BEI to be a BEI Court Mentor (so far).

In Topher's free time, he enjoys writing scripts, binge-watching TV shows, and mindfully laying in the grass at a park with his rescue dog, Fluffy.
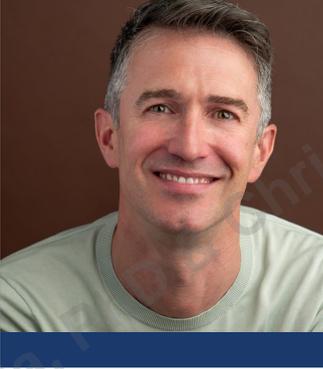
Christopher Tester, PhD

He/Him/His

Christopher Tester, PhD, is a Deaf interpreter, consultant, and founder of With Direction, LLC, a New York–based firm specializing in interpreting, translation, and accessibility consulting. His work focuses on Deaf-led interpreting practices, intralingual interpreting, and Deaf–hearing interpreter collaboration, with an emphasis on practical application in legal, institutional, and community settings.

Christopher is an internationally recognized researcher and educator and a member of International Association of Conference Interpreters, as well as a WFD-WASLI Accredited International Sign Interpreter. His training and consulting draw directly on his research and professional experience, with a focus on advancing interpreting practice and strengthening collaboration across teams.

Workshop Outline

Day 1 — Friday High-Profile Settings & NVC	Day 2 — Saturday Signposting	Day 3 — Sunday Intralingual Framework & SLA
● Introductions & Icebreaker	● Review: Day 1 core concepts	● Review all core concepts
● What is a high-profile setting?	● Signposting theory & functions	● Full taxonomy (5 categories)
● NVC / OFCR Foundation	● Cold pairing scenario activity	● Application scenario
● Team awareness & role clarity	● Intralingual taxonomy (intro)	● Finalize Working Agreement
● Work agreements introduction	● SLA / protocol development	● Closing reflection

← Topher: diagram version optional — Friday → Saturday → Sunday arc; not primarily DI/HI but to foster HI/HI teamwork beyond the DI/HI frame →

Quiz Time!

9:20 AM

ICEBREAKER!

Think of an interpreter you love working with

10 minutes | Pair discussion

1 Think of that interpreter and hold them in mind

2 Turn to a partner and describe who they are

3 Discuss: What 3 things make them so easy to work with?

AhaSlides   WORD CLOUD

Type your top one reason (briefly, in 1–3 words)

Your top 1 reason why you love working with that interpreter partner-team

Word cloud will appear live as participants respond. Debrief: What patterns do you see?

AhaSlides   POLL

Setting the scene. Let's see who's in the room

How often do you work in high-profile settings?

Rarely (1–2x/year)	Sometimes (monthly)
Regularly (weekly)	It's the majority of my work

AhaSlides

Core framing question. Think before you answer

Is interpreting in high-stakes situations the same as interpreting in high-profile situations?

YES — they are the same	NO — they are distinct

Debrief note: High stakes = significant consequence (medical, legal, mental health). High profile = visible, public, mediated context. Both can overlap — or not. Social media doesn't distinguish: it clips, posts, and circulates. Your presence in a high-profile space is always potentially public.

AhaSlides

From your own caseload, what does 'high profile' look like?

What are the most common high-profile job offers you receive?

Word cloud live. Common responses: press conferences, legislative sessions, awards ceremonies, gubernatorial events, news broadcasts, concerts.

🏆

Leaderboard

Results will appear here

No right or wrong answer. This shapes our entire three days

Based on your experience, what are some of the biggest challenges or issues you have been experiencing with high-profile assignments?

Two Terms. One Distinction That Matters

HIGH-PROFILE	HIGH-STAKES
• Public visibility	• Consequences of error affect life, liberty, rights, or financial security
• Broadcast or recorded	• Linguistically dense or technical
• Institutional prominence	• Time-critical — delays cause harm
• Media scrutiny	• High cognitive load
• Reputational stakes for the organization	• Ethically sensitive content

This training addresses settings that are both. That combination defines the level of preparation required.

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5 Characteristics

1 **Significant Consequences**
Misinterpretation affects life, liberty, financial security, or legal rights

2 **Linguistically Dense / Technical**
Specialized knowledge required — policy, legal frameworks, scientific or procedural language

3 **Time-Critical**
Delays or gaps in communication cause direct harm — information cannot be retrieved after the moment passes

4 **High Cognitive Load**
Rapid speech, multiple speakers, extended duration, topic shifts, unfamiliar terminology

5 **Ethically Sensitive**
Information requiring professional discretion — personal, political, or legally significant content

When Interpretation Fails, What Is the Cause?

When one or more system requirements are absent, degraded performance reflects a configuration failure, not individual interpreter incompetence.

Quality Input
Human interpreter feed, preparation materials, accessible source

Preparation
Advance materials: agenda, speakers, terminology, content frameworks

Monitoring & Support
A partner who can catch errors, feed vocabulary, share cognitive load

Breaks
Rotation every 15–20 min, accuracy declines predictably beyond this threshold

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AhaSlides

Reflection: Your Last High-Profile Assignment

How many of the 5 high-stakes characteristics were present?

0 = None · 5 = All five

How many of the 4 system requirements were in place before you started?

0 = None · 4 = All four

Debrief: Where both scores are low — that's the system gap this training addresses.

Coffee & Restroom Break

Please return in 15 minutes

10:00 – 10:15 AM

Our Presence in This Room

As presenters, we invite awareness of:
Our presence in the space
How do we show up today (energy, intention, access, power and so on)?

Our positionality:
Deaf / Hearing / CODA identities
Roles within power dynamics (presenter, participant, interpreter)

Centering Participant Comfort 👀
How do you prefer to engage? Sitting / standing / moving
What helps you feel: Comfortable? Respected? Ready to participate? Engaging? (Thoughts on AhaSlides?)

"Access work is sacred work." - Mónica Gallego

Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

Definition (Rosenberg, 2003): A process of communication grounded in compassion designed to support authentic self-expression and empathic understanding of others.

OFNR Framework (Rosenberg, 2003)

O	F	N	R
Observation	**Feeling**	**Need**	**Request**
Neutral description of the behavior. No evaluation or judgment	Your emotional or internal response to the situation	The underlying professional or personal need at stake	A specific, actionable ask, not a demand

NVC Applied: The OFCR Structure

Adapted for interpreting practice. NVC as an intrapersonal communication tool

O **Observation — What did I observe without evaluation?**
"My co-interpreter paused for 8 seconds without cuing me."

F **Feeling — What am I feeling without blame?**
"I felt anxious and uncertain about what was happening."

C **Consequence — What was the consequence for access?**
"The consumer was left waiting while I had no information."

R **Request — What specific change do I request?**
"Could we agree that you signal me before pausing?"

Note: In this training we use "C" = Consequence (not Need) — centering the impact on access rather than internal need alone.

NVC Scenario #1 Discussion

A team of two (2) interpreter are assigned to interpret a live televised press conference (emergency declaration) with state media coverage.

Either interpreters did not have much time to pre brief. They were not able to communicate what their needs and requests in their roles as team interpreters during interpreting.

What happened next is…

NVC Scenario #1 Discussion

The information is coming quickly, and one colleague begins feeding another colleague extra information (including fast and incomplete fingerspellings that the active interpreter couldn't catch humanly).

This makes it more challenging for the active interpreter to process and interpret the message adequately.

NVC Scenario #1 Discussion

The interpreters were able to debrief after the assignment.

The active interpreter told the feed interpreter, "You did not support me. You ignored me. You went on and on without me."

The conversation quickly escalated into a heated argument.

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Adapted for interpreting practice — NVC as an intrapersonal communication tool

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12:00 PM | Morning Close

Morning Locked In.

What we established this morning:

✔ The distinction between high-stakes and high-profile settings

✔ NVC as intrapersonal communication foundation (Rosenberg, 2003)

✔ The OFCR structure as an applied I-statement tool for interpreting teams

Afternoon Preview:

Achieving a Successful Team • Role clarity & awareness • Work agreements • Shared expectations

Lunch | 12:00 – 1:00 PM | Back at 1:00

Lunch Break

Please return in 1 hour.

12:00PM - 1:00PM

Topher Ávila, PhD & Christopher Tester, PhD

DAY 1 · PM

Achieving
Effective Teamwork

Communications Training for Interpreters
Working in High Profile Settings

Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) | March 27, 2026

Topher Ávila, PhD & Christopher Tester, PhD

Afternoon Session | 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Afternoon Agenda

1:00 – 1:20
Morning Recap: NVC & OFCR

1:20 – 2:00
Achieving a Successful Team

2:00 – 2:30
Reflection Activity: Team Dynamics

2:30 – 3:00
Role Clarity — AhaSlides

3:15 – 3:15
Short Break

3:15 – 4:00
How Do Roles Factor Into Team Dynamics?

4:00 – 4:45
Shared Expectations & Work Agreements

4:45 – 5:00
Day 1 Closing & Day 2 Preview

1:00 PM

GROUP DISCUSSION

Post-Lunch Thoughts

What's sitting with you from the morning?
What questions came up over lunch?

Morning Recap: NVC & OFCR

The NVC Foundation (Rosenberg)

O Observation

F Feeling

N Need

R Request

Applied in Practice: OFCR

O — Observation
What did you actually observe?

F — Feeling
What did you feel in that moment?

C — Consequence
What was the impact on access?

R — Request
What do you specifically need?

C = Consequence, not Need — we track the impact on consumer access, not just internal state.

Achieving Effective Teamwork

INDIVIDUAL FOUNDATION

- Self-awareness
- NVC / OFCR fluency
- Clarity of role & scope
- Personal ethical grounding

COLLECTIVE FRAMEWORK

- Shared work culture
- Team work agreement
- Explicit communication norms
- Pre-brief / debrief protocols

Two Awarenesses Every Team Needs

Self-Awareness → NVC

Knowing your own triggers, defaults, and communication patterns. NVC gives you the language to name what's happening internally — before you bring it into the team space.

Team Awareness → Work Agreements

Recognizing how your role, experience, and communication style interact with your teammate's. Work agreements convert that awareness into explicit, pre-agreed norms.

Interpreting teams must intentionally and collectively build shared work culture. Assumptions → miscommunication. Work agreements convert intent into structure.

2:00 PM | Individual + Group

REFLECTION ACTIVITY

Professional Peer Dialogue

8–10 minutes | Individual journal, then group discussion

- Think of a HIGH-PROFILE team assignment that did not go as expected
- What expectations or assumptions were in play?
- Where did miscommunication occur — and how?
- What could have been different if norms were explicit?

PICK ANSWER

Acknowledging our presence and positionality

Who is Deaf? Who is hearing? Who is CODA?

Deaf	Hearing
CODA	Hard of Hearing / DeafBlind / Other

LEADERBOARD

🏆

Leaderboard

Results will appear here

AhaSlides `SCALES`

Map the experience range in this room

How many years of interpreting experience do you have?

| 1–2 years | 3–5 years | 5–10 years | 10+ years |

Debrief: How does the range of experience in this room shape how we approach team dynamics today?

AhaSlides `PICK ANSWER`

Certification as one dimension of role — not the whole picture

What is your certification status?

| NIC / CDI Certified | RID Certified (other) |
| State-certified / screened | Not currently certified |

LEADERBOARD

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Leaderboard

Results will appear here

3:15 PM | ROLE DYNAMICS DISCUSSION

How Do These Roles Factor Into Team Dynamics?

Staff vs. Contractor

How does employment status shape how you show up to a team assignment? Does it change your sense of authority or obligation?

Deaf / Hearing / CODA

How does your audiological identity or lived Deaf experience influence your team role? Are these roles explicit or assumed?

Certification & Experience

What happens when team members have very different levels of experience or credential? Who holds the implicit authority — and should they?

Shared Expectations & Work Agreements

Ambiguity is a stressor. The antidote is explicit, pre-agreed communication — not assumptions about what your team 'should' already know.

1 **Express needs, don't assume them —**
Reduce assumptions → reduce defensiveness → improve communication efficiency

2 **Make explicit requests —**
NVC OFCR gives you the structure: Observation, Feeling, Consequence, Request

3 **Agree on norms before going live —**
Pre-brief = the minimum. A formal Working Agreement = the goal (built in Day 3)

4 **Debrief as a standard, not a luxury —**
Post-assignment debrief closes the loop — it's where the team learns to refine

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NVC Scenario #2 Discussion

You and your team interpreter are assigned to interpret a live televised Governor's State of the State Address.

What happened next is…

NVC Scenario #2 Discussion

You are currently on camera interpreting, while your team interpreter feeds you.

You noticed that throughout this process, your team interpreter keeps going back and making corrections while you are actively interpreting.

This breaks your concentration and disrupts your flow, causing you to drop some parts of the message.

CORE CONCEPT 1 | NVC APPLIED

NVC Applied: The OFCR Structure

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NVC Application

Choose a partner.

You are assigned to a televised platform interpreting assignment. Referral specialists were only able to share that the presentation will be history-related, focusing on the Salem Witch Trials.

The active interpreter will record themself and retain the recording.

Before beginning, conduct a prebrief using NVC (OFNR: Observations, Feelings, Needs, Requests).

After the assignment, conduct a debrief using NVC (OFCR: Observations, Feelings, Considerations, Requests).

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Short Break

3:00 – 3:15 PM | Back in 15 minutes

Introduction: Service Level Agreement (SLA)

What is an SLA? A pre-agreed framework between team members that defines the norms, signals, roles, and communication protocols your team will use — established before going live, not in the moment.

Your SLA covers:

Communication channels — How will you signal intra-team? When will you speak directly vs. use a pre-agreed gesture?

Role clarity — Platform interpreter vs. support interpreter — what does that mean for your specific assignment?

Signposting protocol — What signals mean what — agreed before you walk in the door (formalized in Day 2)

Feedback norms — How will you give and receive feedback — in real time, and in the debrief?

Day 1 Complete.

What you built today:

High-Profile Framing

Distinction between high-stakes and high-profile

NVC Foundation

Rosenberg OFNR — intrapersonal communication grounding

OFCR Structure

Applied I-statement tool — Observation, Feeling, Consequence, Request

Team Awareness

Role clarity, shared expectations, introduction to Work Agreement

Day 2 Preview: Signposting — Theory, Functions & the 3-Signal Protocol • Saturday, March 28

Slide 1

Thank you!

Slide 2

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

Workshop Outline

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NVC / OFCR Foundation	**Cold pairing scenario activity**	Application scenario
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One Word.

"What is one word that describes how today changed — or confirmed — the way you think about working on a team?"

Go around the room — every person, one word, no explanation needed.

Reminder: Day 2 is Saturday March 28 — bring your Working Agreement draft and your curiosity.

See you tomorrow | Day 2: Signposting