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Independent Partner: Who Writes the Checklist Buyers Use to Judge the Vendors?

Heather Grizzle · November 28, 2026

CoSET and the SAFE AI Task Force wrote the toolkit US buyers use to judge AI interpreting vendors. Its leadership includes vendor-affiliated people and publishes no conflict of interest policy. Eight questions for CoSET.

目录

1. The question buyers keep asking
2. What the toolkit is, and what it is for
3. Who CoSET says it is
4. Who is in the leadership circle
5. The partner on the other side of the table
6. Why this matters more for sign language than for most fields
7. What I am not saying
8. The questions
9. The same test, applied to us
10. What a buyer should do now
11. 资料来源
12. Tips
13. Support NCG

The question buyers keep asking

Every few weeks someone who buys for an institution asks me some version of the same question. A bank, a hospital or a transit authority is starting to look at sign

language AI, someone inside wants Deaf-led governance in place before anything is bought, and they want to know who is already doing this work and whether they can trust them.

I went looking, the way a procurement officer would, and the honest answer is that most of the field is producing principles, recommendations and consultations. Cambridge's Minderoo Centre has called for BSL-specific procurement standards and Deaf-led impact assessments. The British Deaf Association has called for a quality and safety framework. The European Union of the Deaf has published a fifteen-principle ethical framework and a template contract for signers. RNID and seven partner charities are consulting BSL signers. All of that is useful, and none of it is a procurement instrument a buyer can pick up and use against a named product.

In the United States, the closest thing to a procurement instrument is the AI Interpreting Solutions Evaluation Toolkit, Part A, released in August 2025 by the Interpreting SAFE AI Task Force in partnership with the Coalition for Sign Language Equity in Technology, known as CoSET. It is the document a bank, a hospital or a state agency in this country is most likely to be handed. So it is the document whose authorship a buyer most needs to understand.

This Insight does not claim to know anyone's intentions. Intentions are private. Structure is public. What follows is what CoSET's public structure shows, what it does not show, and the questions a careful buyer should put to it before treating its toolkit as independent.

What the toolkit is, and what it is for

Part A is a set of five checklists: organizational readiness, setting-specific guidance, a risk factor assessment, a vendor assessment covering ten evaluation categories, and RFP guidance with template language and criteria for procuring AI interpreting tools, including mandatory pilots and human backup. Its stated audience is the people who buy: language access directors, compliance and legal teams, CIOs and CTOs, procurement, finance and vendor-selection committees.

That audience matters. A checklist written for buyers does more than inform. It defines what a good vendor looks like, which questions get asked in an RFP, and which answers count as sufficient. Whoever writes the vendor assessment and the RFP language is, in a practical sense, writing the test the vendors will sit.

The release announcement described Part A as the first of three parts, and named Part B, Technical Specifications, as the next release, covering UX and UI controls, baseline model expectations and performance metrics. Fifteen months later, I could not find a published Part B. I also could not find a single public RFP, agency policy or institutional procurement record that says it used Part A to buy or reject a product. Procurement records are often not public, so that absence is not proof of non-use. It is, however, a long silence for a toolkit pitched as the field's practical compass.

Who CoSET says it is

CoSET began in 2023 as the Advisory Group on AI and Sign Language Interpreting, formed to bring Deaf expertise to the SAFE AI Task Force. It now describes itself as an independent partner to that Task Force. Its website says it formed at the RID conference in Baltimore with support from the Conference of Interpreter Trainers, which gave it a 2026 award, and that it has given about two dozen presentations, including to the FCC and other federal bodies. It runs on sociocracy, a circle-based governance model, and says it maintains Deaf oversight. Its footer says it is incorporated with a 501(c)(3) application pending.

What the website does not say is just as important to a buyer. It names no leaders, staff or board members. It names no funders, donors or sponsors. It contains no conflict of interest policy and no statement on vendor participation. A buyer reading coset.org cannot tell who runs the coalition or who pays for it.

Who is in the leadership circle

The names appear elsewhere. CoSET's event page on the fundraising platform Zeffy lists presenter biographies and places two people in its Leadership Circle, both co-authors of the toolkit.

One is Jeff Shaul, listed as co-founder and chief technology officer of GoSign.AI. GoSign.AI is a sign language AI company. In an October 2024 presentation to Colorado's Language Access Advisory Board, a state body that advises on language access, Mr. Shaul introduced himself on his first slide as GoSign.AI's CTO and as a CoSET member, and described GoSign.AI as a company specializing in sign language data collection for training AI models. To his credit, that affiliation was on the slide.

The other is Molly Glass, listed as having worked for the past three years as an ASL Specialist and Deaf Interpreter at Kara Technologies, a sign language AI company, as having joined CoSET's leadership team in 2025, and as a member of the SAFE AI Task Force. An employee is not an owner, and a Deaf Interpreter working inside a vendor may well be the person in that company pushing hardest for quality. Her presence in the leadership circle is not a finding of wrongdoing. It is a fact a buyer is entitled to know.

In March 2026, when the toolkit was presented on the Localization Today podcast, the two people speaking for CoSET were Ms. Glass and Mr. Shaul.

The event page carries no conflict of interest disclosure for either affiliation. It does sell continuing education: a recorded workshop on the toolkit carries 0.2 RID CEUs processed through Vancro.

The partner on the other side of the table

CoSET's partner, the SAFE AI Task Force, is open about being an industry body. Its 2024 descriptions list language services companies and technology vendors among its members, alongside interpreter associations, certifying bodies, health systems and governments. Its founding members include Katharine Allen of Boostlingo, a language technology company. Its communications director has used a MasterWord email address, and MasterWord, a language services company, publishes its own guide to evaluating AI interpreting solutions that draws on the SAFE AI guidance and closes with a section titled MasterWord Knows AI. The CEO of Jeenie, an interpreting company, announced her own appointment to the Task Force.

None of that is hidden, and industry participation in standards work is normal. Electrical codes, accounting standards and medical device rules are all written with industry at the table. What makes those systems trustworthy is not the absence of industry. It is disclosure, recusal, and someone independent checking the work.

Why this matters more for sign language than for most fields

In most procurement, the buyer can judge the output. A hospital can read a spoken-language machine translation back in English. A hearing procurement team cannot judge signed output at all. That is the whole problem this field exists to solve. When

the buyer cannot check the product, the checklist becomes the buyer's eyes, and whoever wrote the checklist decides what the buyer sees.

That is why the Deaf community has spent the last two years insisting on Deaf-led governance. The demand is not only that Deaf people be present. It is that Deaf people hold decision authority that is independent of the companies being judged. A coalition can be Deaf-led and still be vendor-entangled. Those are different questions, and a buyer needs an answer to both.

What I am not saying

I am not saying the toolkit is biased. I have not found a clause in Part A that favours GoSign.AI, Kara Technologies or any other company, and a checklist that asks for pilots and human backup is asking for things I would ask for too. I am not saying anyone acted in bad faith. I am saying that the coalition presenting itself as the independent Deaf voice in AI interpreting standards has vendor-affiliated people in its leadership, co-authoring the vendor assessment buyers use, without a published conflict of interest policy, published leadership, or published funding. Those are fixable gaps. They should be fixed before the toolkit is treated as independent.

The questions

These are the questions I would want answered before recommending Part A to any buyer. I am sending them to CoSET and will publish its answers in full, unedited, as an update to this Insight.

1. Who sits in CoSET's leadership circle today, and what is each person's current employer and any equity or paid relationship with a company that builds, sells or trains sign language or interpreting AI?
2. Does CoSET have a written conflict of interest policy? If so, will it publish it? If not, when will it adopt one?
3. When the vendor assessment and RFP guidance in Part A were drafted, did any author with a vendor affiliation recuse from sections that set criteria vendors would be judged against? Was that recorded?
4. Who funds CoSET? Has CoSET received money, in-kind support or sponsorship from any company that sells sign language or interpreting AI, including GoSign.AI and Kara Technologies?

5. CoSET describes itself as an independent partner to the SAFE AI Task Force. Independent of what, and how is that independence protected given that SAFE AI's membership includes language services companies and technology vendors?
6. Who in CoSET holds final decision authority over published guidance, and how many of those people are Deaf and hold no vendor affiliation?
7. Where are Part B and Part C, and who is writing the performance metrics in Part B?
8. Can CoSET name any institution that has used Part A to buy, reject or restrict an AI interpreting product?

The same test, applied to us

Any organization that asks these questions has to answer them about itself, so here are mine. NCG's SLAT Index is a different answer to the same buyer problem, so NCG competes with this toolkit for the same buyers' attention. NCG has opened governance records on both GoSign.AI and Kara Technologies, and GoSign.AI ended an engagement with NCG. In November 2026 I volunteered to serve in a CoSET circle. NCG takes no payment, equity or referral fee from any company it evaluates, and we do not publish findings about organizations that pay us. NCG's own Deaf review body is still being formed, and until its members are seated and named, we will not describe it as operating. Readers can weigh all of that against what I have written here.

What a buyer should do now

Use Part A for what it is: a sensible list of questions written in part by people who work for the companies being asked. Do not treat it as an independent assessment of any product, because it is not one and does not claim to be. Ask any vendor that cites the toolkit whether its staff helped write it. And before you sign, get the one thing no checklist can give you: Deaf people with no stake in the vendor checking the actual signed output in your actual setting.

Buyers keep asking who they can trust. The honest answer is that trust in this field has to be built on disclosure, because almost nobody buying can check the product themselves. That standard applies to vendors, to coalitions, and to NCG.

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Tips

If you have information about sign language AI procurement, deployment or governance, write to tips@novaracg.com. We treat tips as confidential. UK readers: writing to NCG is not by itself a protected disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. For free, confidential whistleblowing advice, contact Protect at protect-advice.org.uk.

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