Before spending money to join an association test it. Discover whether it truly represents translators or serves to block the public from direct access to individual linguists. The simplest test is a search to see whether those in charge use the internet to make their membership visible to the public. This you can discover using a search engine such as Google, Yahoo or Altavista. The language most in demand in the US is Spanish. So to test a local or regional association use a search string like:

"Spanish interpreter" Texas

Observe during this test that the giant translation agencies find a way to make their websites visible--so they obviously believe the effort is worthwhile. MITA, the DFW Metroplex Interpreters and Translators Association does turn up in about 40th place. Right at the top of their home page are tabs labeled Translators and Interpreters which lead the public straight to the linguist locator. AATIA.org did turn up in about 80th place, but also with the invitation to Find a translator or interpreter in plain view, top dead center. Now the association uses Google Adwords to direct the public to its member services.

A national association representing court interpreters would see that its linguist locator were visible to searchers keying in**"court interpreter" Spanish** or **"court interpreter" Chinese** … and sure enough the latter search turns up the Society of Translators and Interpreters of B.C. (Canada). One U.S. association turned up, but with a FAQ list rather than a linguist locator. This is probably a different type of association, dedicated to pooling labor, not representing individual freelancers.

There are associations which represent the interests of middlemen rather than individual translators. The Association of Translation Agencies may pop up on a "Spanish interpreter" search, but always with some boring article or high-dollar dog-and-pony show--never with the Translation and Interpretation Services Directory. If you use normal screen resolution to look at their home page you will not find a clearly visible invitation to FIND A TRANSLATOR. That is strategically placed off-screen and you can't see it unless you scroll down past the invitations to send money. A wee side button labeled "Services Directories" in tiny print is certainly not recognizable to the average member of the public. The layout may well represent the interests of some of their members--mass-production middleman agencies, diploma mills, mercenary management moguls, labor pool organizers and outsourced "testing" service companies--but never individual freelancers.

So the first 3 signs involve visibility. A good translators' association:
1. makes its web site and linguist locator visible to the public using internet search engines;
2. puts the home page URL in the telephone directory if possible, and
3. displays the linguist locator link prominently and clearly on the association home page.

Examples of good visibility practices can sometimes be seen at:
http://www.aatia.org/
http://www.chicata.org/
http://www.ncta.org/
http://www.abrates.com.br/ (click Procure um tradutor to go to a linguist locator).

Feedback and transparency are also important evaluation factors. Crooked software companies offering lousy products and no technical support avoid letting the public contact anyone. Good companies offer accessible feedback links and clear policies and specifications. By the same token some associations hire "staff" or salaried hacks to run a board-censored press. **Look for an association that:**

4. publishes newsletters containing controversial letters written by the

members, and has simple e-mail feedback links.

Translators' associations are democratic. Their bylaws provide mechanisms for petition and referendum voting using simple mail-in ballots, not complicated multiple-sheet "proxy" forms. Candidates nominated by their colleagues' petitions have their statements published together with those selected by some board of political apointees--before rather than after the election is over with. For each position there are alternative candidates to choose from, not single-party slates running unopposed**So a genuine translators' association also offers:**

5. a choice of candidates, including those nominated by their peers
6. candidate statements published without favoritism or discrimination, and
7. voting by simple mail-in ballots, honestly and verifiably counted.

If an association meets all seven criteria you can bet it is looking out for the interests of ALL its members, not just the powerful few. If you believe these evaluation criteria are sound and reasonable, and would like to act to put them into practice, the Freelance Party may want to back you as a candidate for office in the association in which you are eligible. If you prefer not to run we are also looking for volunteers to help with website development, problem-solving, collecting petition signatures and running election campaigns. Interested? Use the Questions form at: http://www.freelanceparty.org/