



NZSL Business Landscape

New Zealand
(2026 Snapshot)



Strategic Funding Proposal for Strengthening Deaf-Led NZSL Businesses in Aotearoa New Zealand

An overview of NZSL businesses, workforce, and development needs across Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Prepared for:

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Executive Summary

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is one of the official languages of Aotearoa New Zealand and the natural language of the Deaf community. According to Stats NZ, approximately **24,000 people in New Zealand**.

Protecting, strengthening, and sustaining NZSL requires coordinated investment in ***Deaf-led NZSL businesses, workforce development, student learning opportunities, and long-term national support systems***.

Across Aotearoa New Zealand, Deaf-led NZSL businesses play a critical role in delivering NZSL courses, training, and related services, while also supporting Deaf leadership, employment opportunities, and increased public use of NZSL within communities.

These businesses provide NZSL learning opportunities for a wide range of learners including students, families of Deaf children, professionals, workplaces, government agencies, and members of the public who wish to communicate effectively with Deaf people.

However, several NZSL businesses currently operate with ***limited infrastructure, minimal operational support, and increasing demand for services, placing significant pressure on their ability to sustain and expand delivery***.

Many Deaf business owners manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously, including business operations, administration, teaching, mentoring, and community leadership roles.

These pressures create significant challenges for the long-term sustainability and growth of NZSL services nationwide.

At the same time, demand for NZSL learning continues to increase across the country. This growing demand highlights the need for:

- greater access to NZSL courses nationwide
- workforce development and professional support for NZSL tutors
- sustainable investment in Deaf-led NZSL businesses
- improved student learning pathways and NZSL immersion opportunities
- increased numbers of NZSL interpreters including Deaf interpreters
- greater accessibility and public visibility of NZSL
- stronger national coordination and shared support systems across the NZSL sector

This report provides an overview of the current NZSL business sector and identifies key gaps, barriers, and development priorities affecting NZSL businesses, tutors, and students.

The report also outlines **strategic recommendations** aimed at strengthening the sustainability, capability, and long-term growth of the NZSL sector.

Key priority areas identified within this report include:

- strengthening NZSL business operations and infrastructure
- improving access to financial, operational, and marketing support
- nationally coordinated professional development, mentoring, and sustainable training pathways for the NZSL teaching workforce
- expanded NZSL learning opportunities for students nationwide
- development of NZSL hubs, community practice groups, and immersion opportunities
- improved sector-wide data collection and future planning

The **NZSL Business Network (NBN)**, a collective of Deaf-led NZSL businesses and leaders, has developed this proposal to seek partnership and funding support from the NZSL Board, New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association (NZSLTA), government agencies, community organisations, philanthropic funders, and other stakeholders.

Through **strategic collaboration and targeted investment**, this proposal aims to strengthen the national NZSL ecosystem, support **long-term sustainability and growth of NZSL services**, learning opportunities, and Deaf leadership across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Building a Sustainable NZSL Ecosystem

