

Communicating with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Community

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Content

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A note on culture and language. Many Deaf people, with a capital D, see themselves as part of a cultural and linguistic community whose language is American Sign Language, not as people with a medical loss. They often prefer identity-first language, Deaf person. Others, often those who are hard of hearing or who lost hearing later, may identify differently. Follow each person's own preference.

Key practices.

- Provide qualified interpreters for anything important, at no cost, and arrange them early. American Sign Language is its own language, not signed English, and a qualified interpreter matters.
- Do not rely on a family member or a child to interpret.
- When using an interpreter, look at and speak to the Deaf person, not the interpreter. Use you, not he or she.
- Offer real choices. Some people prefer interpreters, some video relay, some captioning, some writing back and forth. Ask what works for them.
- Face the person, keep your face visible, and speak naturally. Do not exaggerate or shout.
- Caption videos and provide transcripts.

What to avoid. Assuming everyone reads lips well, assuming written notes are always enough, or treating American Sign Language as a simplified version of English. None of those are true.

The respectful default. Ask the person how they prefer to communicate, and provide it. Access is not a favor; it is how the conversation becomes equal.

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Draft, structure, test, and distribute communication in usable formats using Communicating with the Deaf

and Hard-of-Hearing Community.

Identify affected communities, plan accessible influence, and report what changed using Communicating with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Community.

Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using Communicating with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Community to draft, structure, test, and distribute communication in usable formats.

Choose the sections of Communicating with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Community that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule.

Document the action taken from Communicating with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Community, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner.

For community engagement staff, use Communicating with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Community to draft, structure, test, and distribute communication in usable formats; plan accessible participation, make influence visible, and close the feedback loop with community partners. Start by provide qualified interpreters for anything important, at no cost, and arrange them early. American Sign Language is its own language, not signed English, and a qualified interpreter matters.

Use cultural and community context to ask better questions, never to predict an individual or treat a group as monolithic.

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

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