

Tips for Communicating with People Who Are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing

NSF AdvanceRIT is committed to ensuring that activities and events are inclusive and universally designed for maximum participation. People who are Deaf or hard of hearing use many methods to communicate. Some use lip reading and speech, while others use sign language. Many individuals who experience a hearing loss may feel isolated and left out of social situations. The best way to communicate effectively with the people who are Deaf or hard of hearing is to ask them what they prefer and what you can do to help improve this process. Also ask them if an assistive listening device would be helpful. Here are some guidelines for effective communication:

Strategies:

- Remember that there are many ways to communicate! Speaking, signing, writing on a white board or paper, drawing a picture, demonstrating, and using the assistance of an interpreter.
- Identify yourself if you are signing and/or using the interpreter.
- **If sight lines are interrupted**, you may need to stand if you are signing and/or using an interpreter to be sure that you are visible to everyone in the room.
- Make sure you have the person's attention before speaking. Waving a hand, or a light touch on the shoulder or arm, is an acceptable way to get attention.
- Speak one at a time, be sure to identify the current speaker, and maintain eye contact.
- Make sure your face and mouth are clearly visible. Do not eat, smoke, chew gum or in any way cover your mouth.
- Pace of communication is important, especially when interpreter services are being used. Slow, steady communication will ensure everyone can participate fully in conversations.
- Be patient and take time to communicate. Saying "never mind" or "it's not important," may cause anger, frustration or hurt feelings.
- Provide materials, presentation and new vocabulary in advance whenever possible.
- If breakout group activity is planned, **consider in advance** the logistics regarding interpreter needs, possible use of technologies and resources available and/or use visual aids to enhance communication effectiveness.



Setting:

- Communicate in a well-lit and quiet environment with few visual and auditory distractions.
- Position yourselves so that all group members can see each other.
- Ask the Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing person to choose the best seating for his or her communication needs.
- It will be helpful to have a note taker to record minutes and notes for later reference.

Support Services:

- If you're using an interpreter:
 - It is helpful to meet with the interpreter about 15 minutes early to explain what will be covered. If possible, give a copy of handouts, overheads, and/or lecture or speech to be interpreted.
 - Remember to speak directly to the deaf person, not the interpreter.
 - Since the interpreter is a few words behind the speaker, give him or her time to finish, so that the deaf person can ask questions or join the discussion.
 - If a meeting will last more than an hour and a half, it is preferable to have two interpreters.

