

# HOW to Share Research about Education and Employment with the Deaf Community

## WHAT is the Deaf community?

**T**HE U.S. DEAF COMMUNITY IS A SOCIOLINGUISTIC MINORITY GROUP OF at least 500,000 individuals who communicate using American Sign Language (ASL).<sup>1</sup> ASL is fully distinct from English – i.e., it is not “English on the hands.” ASL is a natural, formal language with its own syntax, morphology, and structure.<sup>7</sup> Members of the Deaf community identify as members of a cultural minority group with shared language, experience, history, art, and literature.<sup>2-4</sup>

The current tip sheet focuses on best practices for sharing research findings with culturally Deaf individuals who primarily use ASL. However, many of the strategies described below align with principles for universal accessibility and will, therefore, apply to a diverse range of hearing people and people with hearing loss.



## WHO are individuals with hearing loss?

The culturally Deaf community is just one segment of the larger population of individuals with hearing loss, which comprises 20% of the U.S. population.<sup>5</sup> Individuals with hearing loss vary greatly based on several factors, including but not limited to:

- Age of onset of hearing loss
- Amount of residual hearing and use of assistive devices
- Language(s) used (e.g., ASL, written English, spoken English, and/or other signed and spoken languages)
- Educational placement (e.g., Deaf school, mainstream hearing school)



Based on these factors, an individual with hearing loss may identify as:

- Deaf
- Deaf-Blind
- DeafDisabled<sup>6</sup>
- Hard of Hearing
- Late-deafened
- Late-onset hearing loss
- Hearing impaired

*(Note: The term “hearing impaired” is often used by individuals who do not consider themselves culturally Deaf. For most people in the culturally Deaf community, the term “hearing impaired” is considered a negative, deficit-focused word and is no longer considered an acceptable term.)*

How a person with hearing loss identifies may change over time. People undergo many changes in their beliefs and identity as they mature from childhood into adulthood. Some individuals discover Deaf culture for the first time as adolescents or young adults and make a conscious decision to become a part of the Deaf community.

## WHY is it important to share research findings with the Deaf community?

The culturally Deaf community is a diverse group of people with a wide range of abilities, educational backgrounds, and experiences with employment. Unfortunately, due to systemic barriers within our healthcare, educational, and employment systems, Deaf people are at high risk of early language deprivation,<sup>7-9</sup> lack sufficient language access in school, and lack communication accommodations in the workplace.

Because of these barriers, Deaf people generally attain lower levels of education than hearing people. In 2015, 83% of Deaf adults had completed high school, compared to 89% of hearing adults.<sup>10</sup> Only 18% of Deaf Americans completed a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 33% of hearing adults.<sup>10</sup>

This is important because increasing levels of educational attainment narrow the employment gap between Deaf and hearing Americans. In 2017, only 53.3% of Deaf people were employed,

compared to 75.8% of hearing people. This is an employment gap of 22.5%.<sup>11</sup>

## HOW should information be communicated?

The most effective strategy for creating Deaf-friendly dissemination materials is to engage Deaf community members in the development process. Deaf people can provide guidance and expertise about what does and does not work when communicating research findings to the Deaf community. Some general strategies are described here but they are best implemented in collaboration with culturally Deaf individuals.

### Video dissemination products



Typically, members of the U.S. Deaf community communicate using ASL. Therefore, the “gold standard” of research dissemination is through ASL videos, not written English products.

If you are starting with written English content, you will hire a Certified Deaf Interpreter or a Certified ASL Interpreter to translate the information from written English to ASL. After the translation is complete, you will arrange for the ASL translation to be filmed. This film can serve as an equivalent to the original written English content.

### The following universal access principles for videos should also be followed:

- i** All videos should be captioned. You can decide whether you would prefer to use open captions (i.e., the captions are always visible) or closed captions (i.e., the viewer can toggle the captions on or off). Be sure to include information about background noises and all other sounds in captions.
- i** Include a written transcript that is accessible via screen reader or the zoom function for Deaf-Blind individuals or Deaf individuals with low vision. Be sure to include information about background noises and all other sounds in written transcripts.

**i** Include alt text and video/image descriptions that are accessible for Deaf-Blind individuals or Deaf individuals with low vision. Helpful tips for writing alt text and image descriptions can be found here:

- ▶ [How to write alt-text](https://www.perkinselearning.org/technology/blog/how-write-alt-text-and-image-descriptions-visually-impaired): <https://www.perkinselearning.org/technology/blog/how-write-alt-text-and-image-descriptions-visually-impaired>
- ▶ [Describe content images](https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/describe-content-images): <https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/describe-content-images>

### **Written dissemination products**

If you are unable to produce an ASL dissemination product, here are some tips for making written English products more accessible and engaging for the Deaf community:

- ✓ Use plain English vocabulary and avoid technical jargon.
- ✓ Use short, to-the-point sentences or bullets.
- ✓ Use active sentence structure.
- ✓ Use visual aids to promote understanding. Include alt text or image descriptions to be more accessible for Deaf-Blind individuals or Deaf individuals with low vision.
- ✓ Double-check to make sure that the text in your document is compatible with screen reader software.

### **WHEN should dissemination occur?**

Open forums hosted in the Deaf community have highlighted Deaf people's frustrations with hearing researchers and their lack of appropriate follow-up - for example, researchers' tendency to not communicate study results back to the Deaf community or the community-at-large. Deaf community members have expressed bitter feelings associated with a long history of researchers entering the community to collect data, never to be heard from again.<sup>12</sup>

Given this history, it is crucial for researchers to commit to returning to the Deaf community at the end of a study to share their results and em-

phasize how these results will directly benefit the Deaf community. Additionally, we strongly recommend that important updates, progress, and research findings be communicated throughout the course of a project, rather than only at the end of a study.

### **HOW to disseminate?**

Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram are good places to outreach to the Deaf Community. There are many social media pages and groups that researchers can ask to share dissemination materials. Ideally, work with Deaf community members to come up with effective dissemination strategies. Perhaps have a live Red -Carpet or premiere event either on Facebook or YouTube or if possible, in-person. When using social media platforms to disseminate, ensure that your posts are accessible. Learn more about making accessible social media content in our tip sheet, [5 Simple Ways to Create More Accessible Social Media Content](#).

To share your research findings with the Deaf Community, your team will need to create a dissemination plan and budget for it early in the grant application. Preferably when first developing your budget.

### **KEY TAKE-AWAYS**

- i** If conducting research with the Deaf Community, include Deaf people in the research process from the beginning in some way (e.g., hire advisors, create an advisory board, hire Deaf people as part of the team, etc.).
- i** Keep the Deaf Community members you have included as participants in the loop every step of the way.
- i** Include your Deaf members in developing dissemination plans and products.
- i** The best final format for dissemination to Deaf Community is ASL video. Second best is printed product that is easy to understand and includes alt-text or image descriptions.

## Resources

- [National Association of the Deaf](https://www.nad.org/): <https://www.nad.org/>
- [National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes](https://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/): <https://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/>
- [Vera Institute of Justice](https://www.vera.org/publications/designing-accessible-resources-for-people-with-disabilities-and-deaf-individuals): <https://www.vera.org/publications/designing-accessible-resources-for-people-with-disabilities-and-deaf-individuals>
- [Helpful tips for developing written transcripts](https://www.w3.org/WAI/media/av/transcripts): <https://www.w3.org/WAI/media/av/transcripts>

### Videos:

- [Examples of written products translated into ASL](https://umassmed.edu/sparc/publications-and-products/products-in-asl/): <https://umassmed.edu/sparc/publications-and-products/products-in-asl/>
- [Sign Here: How to Conduct Informed Consent with Deaf Research Participants](https://youtu.be/HtPGWjNVeg): <https://youtu.be/HtPGWjNVeg>
- [Deaf Perinatal Study Summary \(in ASL\)](https://youtu.be/tEyF8O9DpU8): <https://youtu.be/tEyF8O9DpU8>
- [Signs of Safety Study \(in ASL\)](https://youtu.be/IYsIZHtHbhU): <https://youtu.be/IYsIZHtHbhU>
- [Engaging Deaf Research Participants](https://youtu.be/jr1IIMZb55I): <https://youtu.be/jr1IIMZb55I>

### Written:

- Deaf ACCESS: Adapting Consent through Community Engagement and State-of-the-Art Simulation: <https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1119&context=pib>
- Phase 1 - Community Forums Deaf ACCESS: Adapting Consent Through Community Engagement & State-Of-The-Art Simulation: <https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1113&context=pib>
- Signs of Safety: A Deaf Accessible Toolkit for Trauma and Addiction: <https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1101&context=pib>

## References

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- <sup>12</sup> Anderson, M. L., Riker, T., & Wilkins, A. M. (2021). Application of the truth and reconciliation model to meaningfully engage deaf sign language users in the research process. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 10.1037/cdp0000445. Advance online publication.



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