

Maryland Deaf Access Committee

Frequently Asked Questions

Want to be a better ally to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community?

Keep reading! And consider printing copies of this to keep at the literature table at your meeting

Tips for Communicating with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

- **Don't assume that Deaf people can lip-read.** Many Deaf people cannot lip-read, and even under the best circumstances, lip-reading is estimated to be about only 35% effective. You can ask if they can, but if there's no interpreter around, type out what you want to say on your phone in the Notes app (or something similar) and hold it up for the Deaf person to read. You can [click here to download the Cardzilla app in the Apple app store](#) - it's free to use and shows what you type in large, simple-to-read font. Cardzilla was created by a Deaf, queer engineer.
- **Can you finger-spell?** Great! Feel free to use that to introduce yourself with your name, as well as for other shorter answers. [Click here](#) to learn the ASL alphabet.
- **Make sure you have the attention of the Deaf person** before starting to talk to them, and maintain eye contact while talking. ASL is a visual language, so eye contact when having a conversation is a big part of Deaf culture. Turning away from a Deaf person while talking to them is discourteous, so be mindful of that.
- **Talk to the Deaf person, not the interpreter** when having a conversation with an interpreter present. Use "I/you" language when communicating with a Deaf person (as you would in a typical conversation with a hearing person), don't talk to/thru the interpreter, like "Tell them I said..." or "Can you ask them to..." etc.
- **If you want to know a specific sign for something related to your conversation, ask the Deaf person,** not the interpreter. Remember, the interpreter is only there to facilitate communication between you and the Deaf person, they are not there to teach you ASL. Also, **don't ask anybody how to sign curse words,** etc.
- If you want to learn ASL, here are some places in NYC you can start in-person classes – **always learn ASL from a Deaf person!**

[Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library](#)

<https://www.marylandcdl.org/sign-language-learners>

[Maryland School for the Deaf](#)

https://www.msd.edu/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=973035&type=d&pREC_ID=1293269

[The Governor's Office on Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)

<https://odhh.maryland.gov/>

Visit us on WWW.MDACAA.ORG

MarylandDeafAccess@gmail.com

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Tips for Making Your Meeting More Deaf-Friendly

- **If you're reading something aloud during a meeting - slow down!** We read aloud more quickly than we think we do, *especially* if it's something we read regularly (like a meeting script or announcement, etc) or anything we're familiar with (passages from the literature, etc). And while it might not be the first time *you're reading* it - it very well could be the first time *someone* in the room is *hearing* it, including newcomers and an interpreter. Being mindful of pacing benefits *everyone* - especially newcomers, who will be new to a lot of this information and AA jargon/sayings. It also makes the meeting more Deaf friendly by giving the interpreter a fair chance, rather than leaving them to do their best to keep up with your lightning-fast pace.
- **Make sure the meeting room is well lit.** ASL is a visual language, so lighting is an important consideration. In addition to the Deaf person and interpreter being able to see each other, it's important for the Deaf person to be able to see the person who's speaking - facial expression and body language are important parts of how information is communicated in general, but especially so with visual languages. This also helps everyone in the meeting, by allowing them to clearly see who's sharing, in case they want to approach them after the meeting.
- If possible, **arrange chairs in a circle**, rather than in rows. This is helpful to all because it allows *everyone* to see everyone else and is especially Deaf friendly because it allows the Deaf person to see whoever is speaking. It's much more difficult to see who's speaking (and sometimes not possible at all) if chairs are in rows, especially in larger rooms. Arranging chairs in a circle won't always be possible, but there are usually creative solutions to be found to increase sight lines, so brainstorm a little, if needed. If chairs can't be arranged in a circle, maybe you can split the seating in half, down the center of the space, and have the two sides face one another, rather than all facing one direction, etc.
- If it's not possible to change the seating arrangement, **consider having people come and stand at the front of the room when sharing.** Again, this not only makes the setup more Deaf friendly, but benefits everyone by letting them clearly see who's sharing.
- If your meeting uses a microphone, **please speak clearly into the microphone and encourage others to do the same** - including the chairperson, speaker, and *anyone* who speaks during the meeting. This is helpful to the interpreter who needs to be able to hear what you're saying in order to interpret, but (like all of these tips) also helps *everyone* in the room. Microphones need to be right up close to our mouths to pick up our voices (hold it a little closer to your mouth than you think you need to) - if you can hear your voice coming from the speaker system, it doesn't mean it's too loud - it means it's working and you're using the mic correctly! Be mindful of gesturing while holding the mic - if you move it away from your mouth, it can't work properly. People sometimes express a dislike for sharing with a mic or feel like they don't need it if they're sitting close to the front of the room. Encourage them to use the mic whenever you can, reminding them that using the mic allows *everyone* to hear more clearly, especially people in the back of the room who might otherwise miss their share.

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