

Improving Access for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Job Seekers



Tip Sheet for American Job Centers

Background

An estimated 48 million people in the United States identify as Deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or deafdisabled. Among those of working age, only about 54% are currently employed (National Deaf Center for Postsecondary Outcomes, 2023).

Improving employment outcomes for this population requires greater awareness among service providers—especially those at American Job Centers (AJCs)—about how to communicate effectively and inclusively. Understanding and addressing communication needs is essential for recruitment, service delivery, and long-term job success.

Deaf and hard of hearing individuals use a wide range of languages and communication methods. Some rely on spoken language, others on sign language, and many use a combination of visual, written, or assistive technologies. Some individuals speak for themselves but need support to understand others. Others may use interpreters or communication devices. Access to vocational rehabilitation services also varies among this population.

Objectives

This tip sheet, developed by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, provides American Job Center staff with guidance to support:

1. **Increased preparedness** to serve job seekers who are Deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or deafdisabled
2. **Improved language access** during intake and delivery of services
3. **Greater employment success** for Deaf and hard of hearing job seekers

Key Considerations

These key considerations support the most effective efforts to promote employment success for Deaf or hard of hearing job seekers:

- **Effective Communication:** Communication must be accessible, as required by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This includes providing accommodations such as video remote interpreting, captioning, or assistive listening devices.
- **Community Collaboration:** Partner with community organizations, state agencies, and schools that serve Deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Collaborations may include outreach events like field trips or open houses to raise awareness of AJC services, with interpreting and other types of needed accommodations being provided.

Best Practices

- **Discuss Communication Preferences:** Always ask clients about their preferred communication method. For example, someone may lipread during brief interactions but prefer an interpreter for longer or formal conversations. Intake forms can also be a valuable source of this information.
- **Promote Transparency:** Share a list of available accessibility resources with job seekers or post it visibly at the reception area.

The following list includes examples of tools and strategies that support effective communication. This list is not exhaustive; additional technologies and approaches may be available or preferred by the individual.



Writing or texting

Use pen and paper, mobile phones, tablets, or communication devices to write or type back and forth.



Speaking clearly

Speak at a moderate pace and enunciate clearly to support lipreading.



In-person interpreting

Schedule certified interpreters in advance—ideally 48 hours ahead. For clients who benefit from additional clarity, use a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI). For deafblind clients, consider interpreters skilled in Tactile American Sign Language or ProTactile. If an interpreter is not immediately available, AJC staff may begin the appointment by providing forms or information in accessible formats.



On-demand interpreting

Video remote interpreting (VRI) is useful for walk-ins, urgent appointments, or rural areas with limited interpreter access. VRI works on any internet-connected device with strong Wi-Fi. Services are typically contracted and billed by the minute.



Video relay services

VRS allows phone communication between a sign language user and a spoken language user with a sign language interpreter acting as an intermediary. These services are fully funded by the federal government. If you receive a call that begins, “Hello, this is VRS communication assistant #1234,” do not hang up. Be patient as interpretation takes a few extra seconds.



Real-time captioning

Captioning apps provide real-time speech-to-text on phones and other devices. Clients may type their responses or speak if preferred. AJCs should also enable captions on all waiting room televisions and ensure that all videos used in services are captioned.

Being Prepared

Take proactive steps to ensure your AJC is ready to serve Deaf or hard of hearing job seekers:

1. **Charge All Communication Devices:** Ensure devices used for communication access are functional and readily available.
2. **Establish Interpreter Contracts:** Have contracts in place for both in-person and remote interpreting services and know how to schedule them promptly.
3. **Train Your Team:** Make sure staff members know what to do when a Deaf or hard of hearing person walks in. Keep a quick-access guide with key contacts, device instructions, and service procedures.
4. **Provide Hands-On Training:** Ensure your staff receive regular training on how to interact respectfully and effectively with Deaf or hard of hearing clients.

Further resources

- Workforce GPS: WorkforceGPS.org – Includes webinars and tools
- Video Resource on Accessible Technology:
[Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)

Customizing This Tip Sheet

American Job Centers are encouraged to tailor this document to reflect their specific services and local resources. You can:

- *Add QR codes, contact emails, or staff names for requesting accommodations*
- *List technologies or interpreting providers used by your center*
- *Attach your own accessibility flyer or intake checklist*

