

## **Accessibility in Action**

### **October 9, 2007**

#### **Tip #16: Working with Individuals Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

There are approximately 28 million Americans who are deaf or hard of hearing. According to the National Association of the Deaf, the term “deaf” refers to individuals who are not able to hear well enough to rely on hearing as a means for processing information. The term “hard of hearing” refers to individuals who have some hearing loss but are able to use hearing to communicate.

#### **Communicating with Individuals Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing:**

- Gain the person’s attention before starting a conversation (i.e., tap the person gently on the shoulder or arm).
- Look directly at the individual, face the light, speak clearly, in a normal tone of voice, and keep your hands away from your face. Use short, simple sentences. Avoid smoking or chewing gum.
- If the individual uses a sign language interpreter, speak directly to the person, not the interpreter.

- If you telephone an individual who is hard of hearing, let the phone ring longer than usual. Speak clearly and be prepared to repeat who you are and the reason for the call.
- If you do not have a Text Telephone (TTY), dial 711 to reach the National Telecommunications Relay Service or Florida Relay Service, which facilitates the call between you and an individual who uses a TTY.

### **Accommodations for People Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing:**

- Allow the use of written notes.
- Allow the use of computer technology, i.e., email and instant messaging.
- Allow tape recordings of meetings.
- Allow the use of Web-based meeting software or video-teleconferencing.
- Allow the use of a portable computer.
- Reduce background noise.
- Separate the workstation from noisy equipment.

- Provide a visual or tactile alerting device/signal.
- Provide a headset designed for people who wear hearing aids.
- Provide speech recognition, if requested.
- Provide basic sign language training.
- Provide an assistive listening device (ALD), if requested.
- Provide an interpreter, if requested.

**Remember:**

- Relax.
- Treat the individual with dignity, respect and courtesy.
- Listen to the individual.
- Offer assistance but do not insist or be offended if your offer is not accepted.

## ACTION

- Review the suggestions in this tip with staff, volunteers, CSOs and partners (VSPs).
- Apply the suggestions in this tip to the appropriate situations.