

Guiding Principles

for Hearing Allyship

A Living Document

We need hearing people: accomplices actively engaging in the practice of allyship to the *sighted Deaf signing community*.* Sound like something you would be interested in? Here are five things we need you to do.

*We want to honor and respect members of the DeafBlind community and acknowledge that sighted Deaf people still have a lot of work to do related to our own allyship with our DeafBlind peers. DeafBlind people will have different guiding principles that are more specific to their experiences with vidism and distantism as it relates to marginalization by both hearing and Deaf individuals. [Read Disantism by John Lee Clark](#) for more insight, specifically about the sighted Deaf signing community. We feel that many of these principles can apply to Deaf individuals of varied backgrounds, we acknowledge that #3's focus on creating visual-centric spaces is exclusive to sighted people; when DeafBlind people are present, we would hope to create an inclusive "DeafBlind space" in the same way we expect hearing people to create a space for sighted Deaf people.

Versions of these guidelines in American Sign Language, other sign languages, and other written languages are desired. Please share if you are willing to create them and they can be linked to [here](#).

#1 - Listen to us.

The Deaf Community's collectivist needs take priority over your personal feelings. We don't need you to explain, justify, point fingers, or blame. Change is uncomfortable. Deaf people are a historically oppressed minority whose current status and suffering are directly tied to the actions (or lack of action) of hearing people. Don't take that anger and resentment personally; this is not about your feelings or personal opinions. It's about lifting up the community together.

When Deaf people are hurting, angry, downtrodden, bitter or downright mad we need you to listen. Just listen. We know you are a good person. We know you have a good heart. We know you are not intentionally causing harm. That isn't what this about. This isn't a personal attack. And even if it feels like one, or appears to be one at the outset, we need you to rise above it and understand the context of the emotion behind it. This is about unpacking and understanding the system we operate under; this is about recognizing implicit and systematic inequalities; this is about changing our awareness and how we think and speak and act. Put down your defenses and sit with us for a moment.

#2 - Nothing about us, without us.

Establish an equal, or minority, partnership with members of the Deaf community in any undertaking you endeavor that pertains to the Deaf community. Do not make decisions, initiate research, or provide instruction or workshops on Deaf-related topics without equal partnership with Deaf stakeholders.

Deaf people, with majority ownership in decision-making processes, can appropriately direct the trajectories of their community, education, and needed services. When working with Deaf people, ensure they are in equal partnership with yourself – or that you have minority ownership of the decision making processes. Your explicit long-term goal is to elevate more Deaf people into positions of leadership and ownership in these areas. Do not develop public policy, curriculums, articles, workshops, theses, lectures, and infographics without community partnership – you will achieve greater things with us at the forefront and to do so without us is to reinforce the subjugation of the Deaf community. If you want to do your work alone, as a hearing person, you should seek a profession that caters to hearing people.

This applies to all work done within Disabled or other marginalized communities. If you are working on matters that pertain to DeafDisabled, DeafBlind, or Deaf People of Color those people should be majority stakeholders in your efforts. Work done for others must be done with them and at their request.

#3 - Create, protect, value, foster, and embrace Deaf spaces.

Not everyone has access to sound: Deaf spaces are visual-centric and can be either [1] a physical space that belongs to the Deaf community regardless of who is present (e.g. a Deaf school, or a Deaf-related or sign language-related conference) or [2] any space that you share with Deaf people in public (e.g., a restaurant or museum).

Default to using a visual mode of communication when in a Deaf space. If you do not know sign language, come with the expectation and cultural humility that you will be communicating without your voice. When sound is used to communicate in a Deaf space we exclude the people the space belongs to from that direct connection to the interaction. To promote equity and equality we need you to eliminate what sets us apart: access to the sounds of communication.

Deaf people should never need to ask you to not use your voice, to use sign language, to gesture, or to use paper and pen to communicate in a Deaf space. You should be leading the way and doing this already. Leave sound behind.

1. Physical spaces: Some spaces belong to Deaf people and in these spaces you should communicate using a visual and accessible modality regardless of whether Deaf people are present. These spaces are far and few between and they should be safe havens where Deaf individuals can come and go without experiencing exclusionary, oppressive, phonocentric, or audist behaviors. A Deaf person belongs in a Deaf space and should never find themselves excluded by the use of sound.
2. Ad hoc spaces: When you are in the company of one or more Deaf people in hearing environments you are an accomplice who is prepared to educate and inform your hearing peers ways in which all of you can foster inclusive and accessible communication for the Deaf individuals in your group. Create a magical bubble.

Deaf people are part of a historically oppressed and marginalized community and may have developed a habit of either ignoring or not recognizing audism and oppressive behavior from the general public, their families, and friends. Many Deaf people have internalized the beliefs and actions of their oppressors; this

internalization does not give hearing people the right to perpetuate it.

#4 - Keep resources, opportunities, and political power within the community.

Do not take or exploit financial resources, employment opportunities, or positions of power in Deaf-related fields from Deaf people.

Self determination and collectivism are essential and Deaf people should have priority to work in Deaf-related fields always. As a hearing person, your active engagement and allyship is important, but not at the expense of the work a Deaf person could be doing on behalf of their own community. Deaf people suffer economic injustice and greater rates of unemployment and limited access to job opportunities – we need you to reverse this trend. If your goal is to elevate yourself to a position of power and influential status, seek these opportunities elsewhere.

- If you are already in a position that should be held by a Deaf person, actively work to mentor and grow the pool of eventual replacements and ensure that your successor comes from within the community.
- If you are in a position to hire, ensure that you have exhausted all efforts to recruit, develop internally, mentor, and publicize the position to Deaf people and address the fundamental inequities of hiring systems tailored to reward people of privilege, access, and opportunity; acknowledge that by simply applying “standard” hiring practices you are reinforcing the status quo and perpetuating implicit biases and excluding the very people we seek to elevate; hearing people will always look better on paper, will always have access to more experience and knowledge, will always have the upper hand; level this playing field for us
- If you are applying for a new position within the community, ensure that Deaf people have been sought after and prioritized (as above) before accepting the job; if no Deaf people are available for the position make it your goal to find your successor
- If you are applying for grants or other funding, the money acquired should go back to the community by hiring Deaf co-researchers, assistants, interns or similar. There are limited funds and resources available to the Deaf community. Hearing people and organizations should not benefit from them personally.

#5 - Take your allyship on the road.

Don't just sit there – do something. Use your voice, your power, and your privilege to elevate our community. Speak up and push back. Don't toe the line and settle into a place of comfort devoid of conflict. Bring light to our needs, values, and story to the broader public. Address hearing privilege, oppression, and audism with both your hearing signing and non-signing peers. Don't hide among us.

We need you to stand up among hearing professionals, sign language interpreters, school boards and teachers and administrators, hearing families, and in political organizations and movements. Take the power of your voice outside the safe confines of our community and bring our message to everyone. Help us affect positive change for our community. Do this work alongside us, aligned with our values, and at our behest – together.

And don't stop there. This isn't the only systematic injustice we (hearing people, CODAs, Deaf people) need

to rally against: DeafBlind people need us, People of Color need us, Queer people need us, Transgender people need us, and Disabled people all need us to engage. We all need each other. We all need to show up, listen, and then act.

We are consciously using the term [allyship](#) to emphasize that the principles outlined above serve as a framework for action – not as a final destination or a badge that you can achieve. There isn't a finish line, or a series of checkboxes to complete, or blank space on your CV that will indicate your work is done. This work requires active participation, engagement, unpacking, re-evaluating, and unlearning from all of us.

About these guidelines

Discuss #HearingAllyship on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

This text was created with contributions from Deaf people engaged in the practice of social justice in an attempt to reduce audism, phonocentrism, and shift the balance of power and privilege within the Deaf community. This is a living document that intends to address the underlying principles of hearing allyship -- to that end, we welcome contributions and input based on what is currently relevant.

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