

# Dialogue



*The newsletter of the Human Resources Division, August 2012*

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## **The Employment Process & Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals–Part II**

By: Edgar Herrera, MCDHH

While historically, barriers to communication access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals prevented equal access in all aspects of life. Many Deaf and Hard of Hearing people are skilled professionals with college and post-graduate level degrees yet they still have difficulty finding employment, or having access to promotional opportunities. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is committed to tearing down barriers to employment and we are striving to become an employer of choice for individuals with disabilities. Sharing noteworthy articles, like this one is one way of increasing the level of awareness in the workplace around issues of disability and thus promoting a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

How to work with American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreters/Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART):

Keep in mind; the interpreter/CART is present for both parties, not just for the Deaf person, to facilitate communication. A CART provider, on the other hand, is there to provide communication access only for the hard of hearing or late deafened person; they do not “voice” for the hard of hearing or deaf person and cannot, therefore, be substituted for an ASL interpreter if there is none available. It is imperative that you directly address and maintain eye contact with the Deaf or hard of hearing consumer.

You may wonder whether having sign language interpreter/CART provider present is beneficial. Everyone in the room receives equal communication access when interpreters and CART providers are present, and no one is left out. This allows full participation by Deaf and Hard of Hearing staff. Writing back and forth is never an acceptable substitute for provision of ASL interpreters; remember that they are interpreting from another language and ASL cannot be written down.

Sign language interpreters are highly trained professionals. In order to become an interpreter, a student takes extensive courses in American Sign Language, Linguistics, and Interpreting. Similarly, CART providers are usually from a court stenography background and possess highly specialized skills. They can write at up to 240 words per minute at a 98% accuracy rate, something that even the fastest conventional typist cannot even get close to.



### **Communication Access Training and Technology Services (CATTS)**

CATT's acts as the initial information resource for the public related to issues of deafness and hearing loss. The CATTS Department offers information, technical assistance and recommendations related to all aspects of assistive technology for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals so that the organization is in compliance with the ADA and other applicable laws addressing communication access. We also provide workplace and home environmental recommendations on request, so that Deaf and hard of hearing employees and home owners/renters can be assured of knowing what is needed to make their environment accessible.

Please contact the CATTS Department with any questions related to reasonable accommodations. You can also schedule a free training for your staff on a variety of communication access topics and assistive technology.

MCDHH receives many inquiries related to obtaining and paying for hearing aids. It is important to note that we offer information and referral, but we do not provide hearing aids. You are a state employee, can contact the Group Insurance Commission (GIC) for information about coverage of hearing aids. The contact information for GIC is (617) 727-2310 or TTY (617) 227-8583 Group Insurance Commission

When our constituents contact us for assistance with hearing aids, we can provide information and referral to services for which they may be eligible. As a last resort, we have a small Assistive Technology Fund which can provide limited assistance with the cost of purchasing hearing aids based on financial need.

Earlier we discussed the importance of how individuals with hearing loss identify themselves, below are some helpful definitions.

#### **Common Definitions:**

- **“Deaf” and “deaf”:** according to Carol Padden and Tom Humphries in *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture*. We use the lowercase deaf when referring to the audio logical condition of not hearing, and the uppercase Deaf when referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language – American Sign Language (ASL) – and a culture. The members of this group have inherited their sign language, use it as a primary means of communication among themselves, and hold a set of beliefs about themselves and their connection to the larger society. We distinguish them from, for example, those who find themselves losing their hearing because of illness, trauma or age; although these people share the condition of not hearing, they do not have access to the knowledge, beliefs, and practices that make up the culture of Deaf people.



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- **“Hard of Hearing”**: describes a person with a post-lingual hearing loss who cannot understand as well as they were once able to. Hard of hearing people often benefit from hearing aids and assistive listening devices, speech reading, and do not generally know sign language since they are usually surrounded by hearing family members and friends. They do not consider themselves affiliated with the Deaf community even though there are areas of shared concern or advocacy.
- **“Late Deafened”**: usually means total post-lingual hearing loss resulting in audio logical deafness. A late-deafened person usually cannot hear at all, even with the most powerful hearing aids, or will benefit only from the perception of sound rather than the comprehension of speech. Late deafened people often gravitate towards the use of Cochlear Implants, and use visual display technology to represent the spoken word. They may have lost their hearing suddenly or gradually as a result of inherited causes, accident, illness, medication, surgery, noise or other factors.”
- **“Deaf Blind”** from Overview on Deaf-Blindness by Barbara Miles: "It may seem that deaf-blindness refers to a total inability to see or hear. However, in reality deaf-blindness is a condition with the combination of varying degrees of hearing and visual losses.
- **American Sign Language (ASL)** is fourth most used language in United States. ASL is a formally-structured language, with its own syntax, semantics, and grammar. As a matter of fact, unlike most foreign languages, ASL is a visual language, not written.

### **Reasonable Accommodations in the Workplace:**

When a Deaf or Hard of Hearing employee is newly hired, it is important to meet with the agency’s ADA Coordinator to determine which reasonable accommodations will best enable the new employee to perform the duties of the job. Self-Identification and Reasonable Accommodation forms are used to formally document and plan for communication access requirements.

Every agency must have an established policy regarding communication access. When scheduling meetings an interpreter or CART Provider need to be requested prior to the meeting. Due to the high demand of interpreters/CART, the request should be submitted as far in advance as possible. If no one is available, the meeting should be postponed. It is unfair to exclude the individual or expect participation without communication access present.

Providing notes is not sufficient. Scheduling in advance helps to cut down on impromptu meetings as much as possible.



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This is an example of providing reasonable accommodation through a change in policies and practices. Some examples of reasonable accommodations in the workplace:

- A desk should be facing the door so that a Deaf or hard of hearing office worker can see when someone is coming to visit them, rather than to have their back to the door.
- Telecommunications needs include a videophone for Deaf individuals, who use sign language as primary communication mode, or amplified/captioned telephones for individuals who are hard of hearing or late deafened. Conference calls can also be captioned for hard of hearing and late deafened staff. Deaf Blind individuals will need Braille technology and/or enlarged text.
- If travel is a part of the job, a Smartphone should be provided to allow the employee to communicate with the office remotely via email, text or video functionality.
- Many Smartphone's also incorporate GPS, which can help a Deaf or hard of hearing driver by eliminating the need to ask for directions.
- For meetings, an interpreter or CART Provider will need to be requested.
- Flashing lights for alarms and phones.
- Office lighting, wall colors & desk/cube location may also be reasonable accommodations.

### **Best Practices**

When offering a job to an individual who is Deaf, late-deafened or hard of hearing provide Self-Identification and Reasonable Accommodation forms along with CORI and other required documentation. If an employee acquires a hearing loss while already working for the Commonwealth, the agency's ADA coordinator may refer the individual to MCDHH for consultation on assistive technology including but not limited to telecommunications, assistive listening devices (ALDs) and visual alerts. Reasonable accommodations can then be determined on individual basis.

It is important to mention there are two ways of perceiving Deaf people who use ASL. Though they are considered to have a disability and are entitled to reasonable accommodations by law, the majority of Deaf people do not view themselves as disabled but rather as part of a culture/linguistic minority group.

Do not make any assumptions of a person's skill level in sign language or written English. Depending on their background, they may be fluent in sign language and not written English or vice versa. For example, some Deaf people grew up bi-lingual with both written English and ASL. While others may only use sign language and learned written English later in school and never become fully proficient.

While Deaf education today has made great strides and children are exposed to language earlier and achieving greater levels of fluency than in the past, the challenge still remains of being able to fully function in both the hearing and deaf communities. Attaining true bilingualism where they grow up to be comfortable as a Deaf person using ASL, and also fluent in English which is the language of the hiring majority in the U.S., would be ideal.



### Massachusetts Office on Disability Emergency Preparedness

By: Allan Motenko, MOD

In 2008, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Commonwealth convened the Massachusetts Task Force on Emergency Preparedness and People Requiring Additional Assistance. The mission of this task force was to evaluate the state of emergency preparedness for people who require additional assistance in time of emergencies. Amongst other things, the task force found that people with disabilities did not fully appreciate their responsibility or their role in being personally prepared and that local emergency planners were not including people with disabilities in the design and review of emergency plans. People with disabilities were skeptical that their local emergency planners were considering their needs and local emergency planners were fearful to come right out and ask people with disabilities what exactly their needs were.

To that end, the Office on Disability applied to the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) for Homeland Security funding to begin a process of outreaching into the community of people with disabilities. The original concept was to conduct 5-10 large meetings throughout the Commonwealth bringing together people with disabilities with their local emergency planners. What very quickly became apparent, however, is that all emergencies are local, and therefore, the only way to build trust between people was to hold small meetings.

At these meetings, individuals learn about the critical importance of being personally prepared for an emergency. Go-packs are distributed to attendees with disabilities. The go-packs are filled with essential items that an individual may need during an emergency, such as a flashlight, a first aid kit, emergency blankets, ponchos, and food and water. The go-packs also contain a personal preparedness booklet that each individual is encouraged to fill out to assist them in their preparation efforts. Emergency personnel receive “Tips for First Responders” to assist them in their interactions with people with disabilities. These meetings also provide a unique opportunity for individuals with disabilities to discuss their plans, fears and needs with their local first responders; in turn, the first responders discuss their local strategies to address the needs of individuals requiring additional assistance in times of emergency.

Since 2010, the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) has conducted over 50 personal preparedness meetings throughout the state and interacted with almost 3,000 people.



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MOD has handed out over 2,300 personal preparedness go-packs, 750 “Tips for First Responders on How to Interact with People with Disabilities in Times of Emergency”, and more than 2,500 personal preparedness planning guides. The success of the program has been noted by the waiting list MOD keeps from local groups that are asking to hold these meetings and by EOPSS with a reauthorization of the grant for the coming year.

Are you or a family member a person with a disability? Have you thought about what you should do to prepare for an emergency?

MOD will be holding a personal preparedness session on **August 28, 2012**, at One Ashburton Place in Boston. The hour-long session will begin at 10:00am in the Inspector General’s Training Room, Room 1306.

**To register**, please contact Jeffrey Dougan, Assistant Director for Community Services, at 617-727-7440 or [jeff.dougan@massmail.state.ma.us](mailto:jeff.dougan@massmail.state.ma.us). Individuals needing reasonable accommodations for the training should make their request to Jeffrey via phone or e-mail by 5:00 p.m. on August 20, 2012.

Please note that while registration for this session will be capped at 25 participants, MOD will be delighted to conduct future sessions at One Ashburton if interest warrants.

### Diversity Part II – Disability Awareness Training Update

By: *Sandra E. Borders, ODEO*

As you may recall, Governor Patrick launched the Model Employer Initiative for Persons with Disability in June 2009. Following the launch several focus group sessions were conducted with key stakeholders. During these discussions many of our stakeholders expressed the need for additional training.

In response and through partnership with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, U-Mass Medical School (MI-CEO Grant Team), Culture Coach International, Mass Office on Disability, HRD Training and Learning Development Group and HRD Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity we designed the Diversity Part II- Disability Awareness eLearning, Manager’s half day instructor led training; ADA Coordinators Training and a Train the Trainer Course.

On September 19, 2011 we launched the fully accessible eLearning for all executive branch employees, since the launch 14,228 or (32%) of our executive branch employees have completed the eLearning. Deadline for completing this training is **December 29, 2012**.



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Our initial offering for the half day managers training was October 3, 2011 and to date a total of 1,249 or (33%) managers have completed the training. The Deadline for completing this training is **February 28, 2013**.

The training is being positively received as expressed in several participant evaluative comments:

*“One of the best Commonwealth trainings I’ve attended in years”*

*“The Course was well thought out and had great material for managers to use”*

*“Much better than I expected... excellent training!”*

## ARE WE MAKING PROGRESS?

**Figure 1.** The Percentage of Self-Identified **Executive Branch Employees** from March 2007 to June 2012

<b>March 2007</b>	<b>1.7%</b>
<b>September 2009</b>	<b>2.4%</b>
<b>December 2009</b>	<b>2.6%</b>
<b>March 2010</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
<b>June 2010</b>	<b>2.6%</b>
<b>September 2010</b>	<b>2.7%</b>
<b>December 2010</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
<b>March 2011</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
<b>June 2011</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
<b>September 2011</b>	<b>2.9%</b>
<b>December 2011</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
<b>March 2012</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
<b>June 2012</b>	<b>2.8%</b>



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**Figure 2.** The Percentage of Self-Identified **Executive Branch Managers** from March 2007 to June 2012

<b>March 2007</b>	<b>2.2%</b>
<b>September 2009</b>	<b>3.2%</b>
<b>December 2009</b>	<b>3.4%</b>
<b>March 2010</b>	<b>3.5%</b>
<b>June 2010</b>	<b>3.5%</b>
<b>September 2010</b>	<b>3.7%</b>
<b>December 2010</b>	<b>3.8%</b>
<b>March 2011</b>	<b>3.8%</b>
<b>June 2011</b>	<b>3.9%</b>
<b>September 2011</b>	<b>4.2%</b>
<b>December 2011</b>	<b>4.1%</b>
<b>March 2012</b>	<b>4.1%</b>
<b>June 2012</b>	<b>4.1%</b>

**Figure 3.** The Percentage of Self-identified **Executive Branch Managers and Employees** by EEO-4 Job Category as of close of Quarter 4, FY12

<b>Management</b>	<b>11.7%</b>
<b>Professional</b>	<b>61.3%</b>
<b>Technician</b>	<b>3.3%</b>
<b>Office/Clerical</b>	<b>12.7%</b>
<b>Service Maintenance</b>	<b>2.9%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>8.1%</b>

**Note:** Other Positions include Protected Service Positions (sworn and non-sworn) and Skilled Craft Position.

