

Working with Blind Entrepreneurs who have Hearing Loss in the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program

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The National Research & Training Center on Blindness & Low Vision



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Purpose of Resource Guide

This resource guide was developed to assist Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program (BEP) staff working with blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss. It gives suggestions and strategies for accommodating these entrepreneurs in training activities, on-the-job, and at meetings. It also contains advice from blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss and from BEP staff experienced in working with this demographic. The guide can serve as one resource BEP staff can use when working with a blind entrepreneur with hearing loss for the first time. An additional purpose of this guide is to promote the fact that individuals with combined hearing and vision loss are and can be highly successful entrepreneurs in the Randolph-Sheppard Program.

The information provided in the resource guide is largely based on data collected from in-depth interviews with BEP directors ($n=16$), business counselors ($n=11$), trainers ($n=5$), and blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss ($n=12$). Findings from study participants were supplemented with additional information provided by two experts in the field of deaf-blindness. Given that the majority of the content was developed from interviews with BEP staff who have varying levels of experience in working with blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss, it is written from their perspective. Also, blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss who were interviewed had a wide range of visual and hearing loss, from relatively minor to profound. Therefore, the term “vision and hearing loss” and its derivatives are referring to this wide range.

At the end of the resource guide, there is a FAQ section and list of additional resources. If you have a question you would like answered or included, or have a helpful resource to include, please contact Jacqui Bybee, jbybee@colled.msstate.edu with these suggestions.

Introduction to Vision and Hearing Loss

Individuals in the Randolph-Sheppard Program have already been designated as legally blind, in other words they have a visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with best correction, and/or a visual field of 20 degrees or less. The greatest challenge individuals with vision and hearing loss face may be those related to the attitudes and misconceptions of the public. However, just as the Randolph-Sheppard Program was created, in part, to showcase the abilities of people who are blind, it too can function as a platform to showcase the capabilities of people with both vision and hearing loss as successful and hard-working business owners.

When a person has a severe vision loss, the presence of even a mild hearing loss can make communication difficult in noisy settings. What works best is when the person develops alternative communication methods and utilizes assistive technology to amplify hearing.

Common Communication Methods and Accommodations Used by Individuals with Vision and Hearing Loss

For a person with vision and hearing loss, as with any person, having effective communication strategies are a pre-requisite for success. The method of communication preferred by an individual with a vision and hearing loss varies widely based on individual preference, severity of loss, age of onset of loss, as well as the work setting and the type of communication (e.g. formal or conversational) being pursued. For example, a person who is born deaf with good

vision may be a fluent user of American Sign Language (ASL) and upon losing vision may prefer to use tactile sign language as a new primary communication form. On the other hand, a person who is born blind and uses braille to read, upon losing hearing, may prefer a communication system such as a refreshable braille device as his/her main communication method. Every individual's experience with sensory loss is unique, and therefore, the types and combinations of communication methods and systems that will work best will also be highly individualized.

The most common types of communication methods and devices used by blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss in the Randolph-Sheppard Program are listed below.

Types of Manual Communication

1. American Sign Language (ASL) – official language of Deaf people in America, which varies greatly from Standard English, with its own rules, word order, idioms and humor. ASL relies heavily on facial expressions and body language to convey meaning.
2. Tactile Sign Language – uses ASL but signing is done “hand-over-hand” where the receiver's hands are placed lightly upon the back of the signer's hands to read the signs through touch rather than visually. Adaptations to signing are made in order to accommodate for the restricted space in which signs can be made and for conveying information that is typically conveyed through facial expressions and body language.
3. Fingerspelling – each letter has a designated shape that can be made on the hand. Words can be spelled out using this method. This method of communication can also be made tactual.
4. Print-on-Palm – uses the index finger to draw block letters on the palm of the hand to spell out words. A person with no special communication skills can communicate with a person who has both a vision and hearingloss using this method.
5. Speech Reading – commonly referred to as lip reading. There is great variability in this method's effectiveness and accuracy and if a person's individual's vision loss worsens, speechreading may become more difficult.

Types of Assistive Technology Communication Devices

1. Braille Communication Device – a portable communication system that can be used in face-to-face interactions. The system has a refreshable braille display and Perkins keyboard wirelessly connected to a laptop or other electronic device via Bluetooth. The sighted person types on the laptop/electronic device and the information is translated and displayed on the refreshable braille display. Then the individual with the vision and hearing loss types a response using the Perkins keyboard and the message is displayed on the laptop/electronic device screen. Variations of this device are available and can include using two laptops, using JAWS screen reading software, and connecting to other devices such as a point-of-sale (POS) system. Some examples of these devices include Interprettype Deaf-Blind Communicator and FaceToFace Deaf-Blind Communicator.

2. Portable Braille Display – features a refreshable braille display and a Perkins-style keyboard. The braille display has many different size options (e.g., 14 to 80 cell versions) and the device can be hooked up to several other devices including computers, cell phones, and bill and coin counters.
3. Cellular Smartphone –several applications are available through smartphones for individuals who have vision and hearing loss. One example is Dragon Dictation which translates speech into text so someone who has no special communication skills can speak into the phone and have the message translated into text that an individual with a vision and hearing loss can then either read on the screen or use a refreshable braille display through Bluetooth to read. Another useful app, called Tap Tap, will cause the phone to vibrate any time a noise is detected. The sensitivity of the app can be adjusted for different needs. With new applications being developed every day, smartphones have become an important tool for people, regardless of vision and hearing loss.

Types of Devices to Assist with Hearing

1. Hearing Aid – a small electronic device that fits in or behind an individual’s ear to amplify sound.
2. Cochlear Implant (CI) – a small electronic device that produces sound by electronically stimulating nerves in the inner ear. The implant consists of an external portion that sits behind the ear and a second portion that is surgically placed under the skin. The sound created by a CI is not the same as organic sound and it requires a “re-learning” period for users in how to hear using the device.
3. Assistive Listening Device (ALD) – communication system comprised of a microphone, transmitter, and receiver and can be used to enhance one-on-one or group communication. The person speaking has the microphone and the individual with a hearing loss has the receiver, which is either connected via the individual’s hearing aid or headphones. The sound is transmitted either through wired connections or an infrared or FM system. Unlike hearing aids, which increase all sound, ALDs specifically amplify the person using the microphone. Wireless versions can be used over fairly long indoor distances, even between rooms.
4. Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART) – a system where everything that is said is "captioned" live. It can be thought of as closed captioning for non-broadcast settings, such as classrooms, meetings, and conferences. It involves a stenographer, a computer, translation equipment, and a computer monitor or projector. CART is beneficial for individuals with some usable vision. A modified CART system can be set up using a typist and two synchronized computers.

Use of an Interpreter

The role of a sign language interpreter is to facilitate communication between two or more individuals. Interpreters must hold a certification from their given state or the national certifying entity. When hiring an interpreter for services, it is important that he/she has experience in working with individuals with both vision and hearing loss.

According to Interpreter Code of Ethics, certified interpreters cannot interject their opinions and feelings, and must not speak on behalf of the consumer without his/her permission. Interpreters may not give more information than what is expressed by the consumer and must interpret all that is said to the consumer. In addition, when working with a person who has a vision and hearing loss, they must also interpret the visual and environment information. This may include body language, non-verbal communication, and other physical activity occurring in the setting.

When working with an interpreter in a classroom, business, or meeting setting there are several issues to consider. Here are some tips:

- Check with the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency's regulations as there are often rules that require selection of a certified interpreter from an agency with an approved contract;
- Select an interpreter who has experience working with people who have dual sensory loss or who is recommended by the individual who is receiving interpreterservices;
- Assignments lasting more than an hour will likely require two interpreters who will team interpret, allowing breaks for the interpreters;
- Review technical abbreviations and vocabulary with the interpreter and consumer beforehand and provide a list of unfamiliar terms so all parties will be better able to communicate clearly;
- In a group setting, the individual receiving ASL/interpreter services may want to address the group and let members know that the interpreter has an obligation to convey everything that is going on in the room and not just what is being said. Also, the individual may want to explain common etiquette when an interpreter is present, such as stating one's name before speaking and only having one person speak at a time. If the individual does not initiate addressing the group, encourage him/her to do so – it may help build group rapport and establish group etiquette.

Support Service Providers (SSP)

A support service provider (SSP) is a person who provides deaf-blind individuals or individuals who have vision and hearing loss with visual and environmental information, sighted guide services, and support services in their home, place of employment, and in the community. Many SSPs have sign language skill, but usually are not certified interpreters; their role is different from that of an interpreter, and thus cannot be used as an interpreter at meetings or for any formal communication. SSPs are not widely used by entrepreneurs with vision and hearing loss in the Randolph-Sheppard Program because SSP services are only available in select metropolitan communities nationwide. When an SSP is used, it is more common that an employee of the entrepreneur will be acting in this capacity.

Working with Vocational Rehabilitation

Recruiting Potential Entrepreneurs into the Program

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors and BEP staff should be working collaboratively in order to optimize the recruitment and involvement of potential entrepreneurs in the VR process. Having a strong BEP is mutually beneficial for both parties; for VR counselors in having a great outlet for successfully closing cases and for BEP staff in having a strong program that can

provide entrepreneurs with numerous opportunities for career development and growth. There are several strategies BEP staff can use to help enrich the collaborative relationship with VR counselors.

VR counselors are the source for referrals into the BEP, and therefore, it is advantageous for them to be well informed about the program, and its opportunities and benefits that are available to potential entrepreneurs on their caseloads. One way to ensure this is to attend agency staff's regular meetings and to present on the current status of the program. During these presentations, highlight new and existing facilities becoming available and currently being pursued, current trends in the program, share success stories, and express attributes of candidates you are looking for (e.g. business acumen, entrepreneurial spirit) and what benefits await VR consumers who choose to pursue the program. Get VR staff excited about the program so they want to refer their top and best qualified candidates to it. Market the program as an opportunity for their consumers to become their own boss and a business owner.

Using VR as a Resource to Accommodate Trainees and Current Entrepreneurs

Vocational rehabilitation plays a critical role in deciding on and obtaining necessary accommodations for both BEP candidates and licensed entrepreneurs. For example, the VR counselor and candidate work jointly in the development of an individualized plan for employment to identify and purchase services and accommodations based on the candidate's specific needs and preferences. If VR has a deaf-blind specialist or coordinator, getting that person actively involved in this process is highly recommended. If not, HKNC has regional representatives who can serve be valuable resources. Also, some states have cooperative agreements or Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between agencies for the deaf and blind. Utilizing all resources available will help ensure the best accommodations for individuals with both vision and hearing loss are provided.

Vocational rehabilitation is also an important resource when an entrepreneur currently in the program is experiencing a new or increased hearing loss. For example if the entrepreneur's case has been recently closed and VR services will be of short duration, post-employment services may be available, for example, to purchase a communication device and to provide training to effectively use the device. If more extensive services are needed, a new VR case can generally be opened to provide the entrepreneur those services needed to retain his/her employment.

Accommodations and Communication Strategies Used

Accommodations

In Training

There are several ways an individual with a vision and hearing loss can be accommodated during classroom training. According to the results from of the study, the most commonly used accommodations during training were ASL/tactile interpreters, assistive listening devices, and braille communication devices. Also, a helpful suggestion was to provide instructor materials to supplement lecture materials, preferably in electronic format, as it was the most accessible and versatile format for the widest range of individuals.

On-the-Job

There are several different ways to accommodate blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss on the job. For almost any circumstance, there can be some type of accommodation made to reach a viable solution. According to the results from the study, some of the most common accommodations used on-the-job by entrepreneurs with vision and hearing loss include braille communication systems, smart phone apps, and customized vibrating belt clips to indicate when customers have entered the facility.

Communication Strategies Used

BEP Staff

There are many different communication strategies that may be used by BEP staff to communicate with blind entrepreneurs who have hearing loss. If the blind entrepreneur has some usable hearing then standing closer or talking louder, slower, more clearly, and in a quiet environment may solve many communication issues. Summarizing the conversation, at its conclusion or sending a follow-up email summary, can help ensure that important points of the conversation were not missed by either party.

When utilizing an employee of a blind entrepreneur that has hearing loss to facilitate communication, there are several things to consider. It is recommended to facilitate as much direct communication as possible; the entrepreneur is the business owner and should be directly involved in all business-related issues (instead of relying on the employee to convey information and conduct business on his/her behalf). Even when the employee is facilitating communication, speak directly to the entrepreneur (as opposed to looking at the employee when speaking).

It is suggested, when conducting spot visits at the entrepreneur's facility, to utilize the preferred communication method of the entrepreneur (e.g. provide an interpreter, utilize the person's braille communication device, and/or select an off-peak time when there will be a quiet environment to meet). Also, different circumstances may call for different forms of communication. For example, if conducting a casual visit, then using a braille communication system may be the best option. However, if there is a lengthy topic to discuss such as a field report, then having an interpreter present may be a better option. If communication becomes difficult, such as the room being too noisy, then considering other options like texting or having an email conversation may be more preferable.

Customers

Excellent customer service is fundamental to running a successful food service business. The best way to assist blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss in achieving this level of service by ensuring they have the most appropriate accommodations and encouraging them to interact and engage with their customer base. Orienting the entrepreneur to the facility and the building, preferably with assistance from an orientation and mobility specialist, is a highly recommended priority. Also, encouraging the entrepreneur to introduce himself/herself to his/her customer base (e.g. workers in the building) can help potential customers get familiar and comfortable in communicating with the entrepreneur. Some customers may be hesitant to interact with an individual who has a vision and hearing loss because they are not sure what to do, how to act, or how to communicate with the entrepreneur. Also, if there is assistive technology being used to facilitate communication, such as a braille communication system, they may feel intimidated by

the process. Having the entrepreneur be proactive and open may greatly ease and speed the acclimation process.

Even for blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss who are not able to extensively communicate, there are still ways to deliver an excellent experience for their customers. For example, the entrepreneur can have signs around his/her facility saying “get free coffee if you smile” or “life is a journey, enjoy it.” Another example, if the entrepreneur is an ASL user, he/she might put up a few posters showing how to sign simple words in ASL so customers can choose to communicate in this way (e.g. coke, hamburger, apple, thank you, etc.). These simple strategies may greatly improve customer experience and satisfaction without any verbal communication needed.

Entrepreneurs with significant vision and hearing loss may use a variety of communication methods, including the use of assistive technology, to converse with customers. However, even without sophisticated devices, the entrepreneur can still effectively communicate with customers using techniques such as print-on-palm. For example, if a customer has lost money in a machine or did not receive the product he/she paid for, the entrepreneur can place his/her palm out and indicate for the customer to spell, using an index finger, which product he/she needs. This simple communication strategy can leave both the entrepreneur and the customer satisfied with the transaction.

Employees

Many blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss have employees who assist them with the operations of their facility. Some entrepreneurs have employees that double as communication liaisons for interacting with customers, BEP staff, and suppliers, and may also be their driver, as well. Employees can range from standard hires to spouses, family, friends, and SSPs.

Suppliers

Communicating with outside suppliers is another important component to running a successful business. Accurate communication is essential in ensuring that the right products in the correct quantities are being ordered. There are several communication methods that can be used by blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss when placing orders with suppliers. This includes communicating over the phone, through the Internet, by email, fax or having an employee place the order on the entrepreneur’s behalf. If placing the order over the phone, it is advantageous to have the person taking the order repeat it back in order to verify that the order was recorded correctly.

State and National Meetings

Accommodating blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss at state and national meetings is similar to methods used in a training setting. The two most commonly used accommodations are interpreters and assistive listening devices. Interpreter services and other accommodations for state BEP meetings should be provided by and paid for by the state BEP (this differs from services during training which may have been provided by VR case service monies).

At state meetings there are usually several times where group discussions are held. If the person is using an interpreter, the general guidelines for using an interpreter in a group discussion setting apply. If the individual is using an ALD, it is important that whoever is speaking is doing

so with the microphone. Making sure these guidelines are followed at state meetings is encouraged because all entrepreneurs whether blind, deaf, or both, need to be fully included and have complete access to all the important training and business development activities being provided at state and national meetings.

Considering Type of Facility

There are several things to consider when placing a blind entrepreneur with hearing loss in a new facility. One thing to consider is the comfort level of the entrepreneur on issues such as volume of customer interaction and using assistive technology to communicate in business settings. Understanding these comfort levels may help determine the type of facility that is best suited for the entrepreneur.

Another thing to consider are the different noise levels at given locations. When an individual uses devices such as a hearing aid, assistive listening device, or cochlear implant, understanding the different noise levels and types of noises in the working environment is important in ensuring that the entrepreneur is able to adjust to these environments comfortably. It is recommended that the entrepreneur, along with the business counselor, the VR counselor and/or deaf-blind specialist visit all locations being considered in order to evaluate the entrepreneur's communication skills, or identify any additional accommodations. Explore multiple sites to determine the best match of the entrepreneur's skills and abilities.

Additionally, as vision and hearing change over time, some entrepreneurs may feel that their current location is no longer a conducive or comfortable working environment due to these changes. At that point, the situation may need to be re-assessed to identify other communication strategies and possible assistive technology supports. Yet other entrepreneurs have changed to a different type of vending facility to accommodate changes with vision and hearing.

Another thing to consider is the potential customer base. Certain demographics may be more willing to adapt to different situations. For example, if you have a location that has a high volume, fast paced customer base that wants to have their transaction completed in 30 seconds or less, having an entrepreneur who only communicates through a braille communication system working the cash register may not be the ideal situation. In this circumstance, it may be more advantageous for the entrepreneur to have an employee working the register while he/she tends to other aspects of the business. Delegating resources in this way, in order to maximize customer satisfaction, is in-line with a true entrepreneurial spirit and such thinking is highly encouraged. Determining whether an entrepreneur is willing and able to financially and managerially take on an employee to perform such functions is something to analyze when considering placement options.

Additional Tips for Accommodating

Every person's needs are different, even among individuals with similar vision and hearing loss, therefore, finding the optimal accommodation(s) can be a challenging task and one that, because of its highly individualized nature, can have no set or standard protocol. Therefore, utilizing creativity and being proactive when accommodating and listening to the needs of the entrepreneur tends to be the best approach. It is also recommended to keep the goal in mind of finding accommodations that make blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss more independent and help empower them to be successful business owners.

Qualities of Successful Blind Entrepreneurs with Hearing Loss

Being a successful entrepreneur in the BEP is independent of disability – it is a matter of working hard, providing excellent customer service, having business acumen, and a proactive entrepreneurial spirit. One must be determined, motivated, driven, and assertive in order to run a successful business. If all of these qualities are present, then any person can be successful in the BEP.

Some specific suggestions for being successful include:

- Informing customers of the best way(s) to communicate;
- Having collaboration among the entrepreneur, VR/deaf-blind specialist, and BEP staff in finding the most effective and appropriate accommodations;
- Identifying communication barriers and proactively addressing them; and
- Empowering blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss to advocate for themselves in achieving effective communication methods and harnessing an entrepreneurial spirit in running their business.

Based on the results of the study, the few instances where individuals with vision and hearing loss were not successful as BEP entrepreneurs, communication barriers and/or any circumstances related to vision and hearing were never attributed, in whole or in part, to not succeeding. The two main reasons indicated as to why blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss did not succeed in the BEP was because their personality and/or skillset were not compatible with the demands of running a food service business or they did not have the proper level of support and/or staff to maintain and run their facility.

Advice from Blind Entrepreneurs with Hearing Loss

(The following are quotes from BEP entrepreneurs with hearing loss from the study)

- Showcase that you can accomplish all the same things as anyone else but you just do it in different ways;
- Think positive and when the going gets tough come across that barrier and come up with a solution. Learn to search for information and get help on your own, be proactive and independent in solving your problems, but if you need help, don't be afraid to ask for it;
- Whatever your handicap is, don't let it affect you and keep you from doing what you want to do. If people tell you can't do it, don't go that way, prove them all wrong and show that you can do whatever you want to do if you set your mind to it. That's the only way you're going to be proud of yourself.;
- When you first start out at a location, it will be difficult because it's a strange place and the people are not aware of how to communicate with you. Stick with it, it will get easier. Don't get discouraged if in the beginning it is hard;
- Sometimes you might think you can't do something but in reality you can probably do it better because you are going to try twice as hard to succeed;
- You have to go to the right source for the support and tools you need. You have to have patience too, nothing happens overnight; and
- If people have negative attitudes, block them out. Don't let people's attitudes hold you back.

Biggest Challenges for BEP Staff and Blind Entrepreneurs with Hearing Loss

BEP Staff (based on study results)

BEP staff members felt that training and working with blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss did present some unique situations for accommodation. However, an effective solution was always found, and once found, it was no different than working with any other entrepreneur in the BEP.

One of the biggest challenges stated by BEP staff was being able to secure and schedule interpreters when they were needed. Depending on the length of time an interpreter is needed, two interpreters may be required to interpret for one individual. BEP directors found this challenging when multiple individuals with vision and hearing loss needed interpreters at the same time (e.g. state meetings). Planning well in advance for these situations can alleviate this concern. Another challenge noted in the study was not knowing whether the interpreter or employee was conveying the information in the way it was intended. For this issue, it is important to remember that interpreters are certified in accurate communication translation, and employees engage in effective communication daily with their employer, the blind entrepreneur, so entrusting both of these parties to convey accurate information is appropriate and prudent.

Blind Entrepreneurs with Hearing Loss (based on study results)

While some entrepreneurs said that having a vision and hearing loss can make communication a little more challenging, they also indicated that it is nothing that is insurmountable or a hindrance to becoming a successful entrepreneur – it is just something that one learns to adapt to just like any other situation encountered in life. Entrepreneurs with a vision and hearing loss said that the most challenging aspect of their job is conducting daily business operations including the balancing act of maintaining proper inventory levels, keeping employees happy, and delivering excellent customer service – the same issues that any entrepreneur encounters when running a business.

Suggestions for Program Improvement

The most common suggestion for program improvement, based on study results, involved having more support for trainees with vision and hearing loss.. It was reported that during training some cohorts tend to form a relatively cohesive group, meeting outside of class and discussing, among other things, the topics they are learning in training. It was noted that some individuals with a hearing loss were at a disadvantage because they did not have an interpreter during hours outside of class and were not able to participate in the discussion and social activities happening during those non-class hours. Not being able to participate in these types of activities may lead to feelings of isolation. Also, discussing materials outside of class allows trainees to have a support network in which to ask questions and get clarification on things they may not have understood in class. Providing interpreter services for these occasions may be beneficial for blind entrepreneurs with hearing loss in gaining added value from having a support network.

Another possible solution is developing a national online support network, such as a listserv, for both entrepreneurs with vision and hearing loss and BEP staff working with individuals with vision and hearing loss. This would aid both entrepreneurs and BEP staff in obtaining and providing support to one another, getting advice, making connections, and building a collective knowledge for best practices in working with individuals with vision and hearing loss in the BEP.

The second most common recommendation for program improvement included offering educational opportunities for BEP staff to learn sign language. A realistic goal, would be to provide elementary instruction on sign language to BEP staff. This would allow BEP staff the ability to convey simple messages such as “have a good day” or “great job” in the communication style that is native to the entrepreneur. This effort is appreciated by both parties in being able to communicate in a common language.

Another frequent suggestion was to offering more education for BEP staff on dual sensory (vision and hearing) loss. BEP staff may not have experience in this area, and much like people who do not have experience with individuals who are blind, they do not know what to do or how to act. Providing education would allow BEP staff to be more confident in their interaction with an individual who has vision and hearing loss. Also, it would provide an outlet to educate BEP staff on the fact that accommodating individuals with dual sensory loss is not as difficult as it may seem.

It was also stated that some entrepreneurs are hesitant to address changes in their vision or hearing, in part, because of embarrassment, not realizing the severity of one’s loss, or fear that it may impact one’s status within the BEP. It was suggested that BEPs adopt an open-door policy where entrepreneurs can feel comfortable discussing changes in hearing, vision, and health. Leading by example can be an important first step in achieving this standard. Some suggestions for implementing an open-door policy include talking about accommodations and issues of losing hearing and vision at state and committee meetings. Coupling this with BEP staff inquiring about these issues on periodic spot visits will help individuals become more open and willing to discuss and address these changes.

FAQs

How can you train someone who is blind and hearing impaired if all your training materials are audio files?

The most accessible format for any material is electronic. Electronic documents can accommodate individuals with vision, hearing, and both vision and hearing loss. It is also an effective format for people with dyslexia and other common disabilities. Therefore, converting audio files to electronic files is the optimal solution. The easiest way to facilitate this is by hiring a transcriber. This one-time expense is well-worth having widely accessible training materials.

How do you help people feel comfortable interacting with an individual with a vision and hearing loss?

As with anything, comfort level with something that is new or unfamiliar is increased with exposure. In this vein, it is essential that entrepreneurs with vision and hearing loss interact and engage with their customer base on a regular basis and make them feel comfortable. Therefore, exposure is the key.

What was the most common cause of BEP trainees with vision and hearing loss not passing BEP training? Was it due to their dual sensory loss?

According to study results, there were several instances where BEP trainees with vision and hearing loss did not successfully complete training on their first attempt. All of the cases noted were similar in that the trainee chose not to have an interpreter their first time through training.

On their second time, however, when the use of interpreter was encouraged and adopted, all trainees passed. Many trainees did not utilize interpreters throughout training but instead used them as a source for supplemental information and additional assistance, as needed.

What is Deaf culture and what, if any, influence does it have on culturally deaf BEP entrepreneurs?

People who are born Deaf may include Deaf culture as a part of their core identity. Deaf culture views deafness as a cultural phenomenon, not a disability, where people who are Deaf have their own language, customs, traditions, social rules, humor and experiences. When Deaf people are together they are speaking their “native tongue”.

As with most multicultural situations, miscommunications and misinterpretations of speech and behavior are possible when working with a blind entrepreneurs who is culturally Deaf. One recommended way to avoid these concerns is by emphasizing and valuing an open two-way communication system where patience and understanding are practiced by both parties. If you have specific questions about Deaf culture and its influence on blind entrepreneurs who are culturally Deaf, please contact B.J. LeJeune at bjlejeune@colled.msstate.edu or 662-325-2001 for additional information and resources.

Resource List for Accommodations

Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults (HKNC)

Phone: (516) 944-8900 Ext. 253

Email: hkncinfo@hknc.org

Website: www.hknc.org

HKNC Regional Representatives offices:

Website: <http://www.hknc.org/FieldServicesREGREPADD.htm>

National Center on Deaf-Blindness

Phone: (503) 838-8754

Email: info@nationaldb.org

Website: www.nationaldb.org

Deaf-Blind Resource List - National Federation of the Blind

Website: <https://nfb.org/deaf-blind-resources>

Bapin Group

Video Phone: (510) 962-6026

Website: www.bapingroup.com

iCanConnect - The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program

Phone: (800) 825-4595

Web site: www.iCanConnect.org

American Association of the Deaf-Blind

Video Phone: (301) 563-9064

E-mail: aadb-info@aadb.org

Web site: <http://www.aadb.org/>

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