

Frequently Asked Questions: How to Engage Deaf Talent



1. Language – How do you authentically represent the Deaf community both in written and spoken language? Is disability-first (often known as identity-first or person-first) language preferred? Where is the community on this important use of language?

Some people who are Deaf may prefer to be recognized as **hearing impaired**, **hard of hearing** or as a **person who is deaf**. The same is true for the broader disability community – some identify as disabled, others as a person with a disability. Language is personal, and people within the Deaf and disability community will have different preferences. One of the biggest misconceptions is that we should be afraid to ask someone which type of language they prefer, for fear of offending someone. But the best practice is to ask – “what is the best way for me to address your disability?” “How do you prefer your disability to be included in your bio, etc.”

2. Rules of Engagement for ASL interpreters – How many is customary? Does gender matter? Does culture matter?

- General rule of thumb: if the event or meeting is over an hour, having two interpreters is customary and usually required, giving each a break and ability to rotate in for the other.
- It is always up to a Deaf and/or hard of hearing client to share their preference of the interpreter, i.e., gender, culture, age, etc. Often, they will have an already established relationship with an interpreter, so be sure to ask.

3. Is it more expensive to hire a Deaf actor based on accessibility needs?

The “cost” of cultivating an inclusive environment and creating diverse content is minimal compared to the payoff. That said, there are a few key budget items to keep in mind:

- Make sure to incorporate an accommodation budget or any budget to provide interpreter(s) for the Deaf and/or hard of hearing client, team member or actor.
- Interpreting fees will vary. Average is \$50-100 an hour, depending on the interpreter's credentials. For example: an interpreter's fee can be high based on their years of experience, certifications, and specializations in industries.
- Be sure to caption your video/content, and consider image and audio descriptions, as well.

4. Do the content creators/studios/networks/decision makers provide the interpreters or should you encourage the talent to recommend their own interpreters?

- Often, talent will already have an established relationship with a preferred interpreter(s) or be able to recommend interpreters from the community, and willing to provide the names for the content creators/studios/networks to hire the preferred interpreter(s)
- If a client is flexible and has no preference, content creators/studios/networks can seek for the best quality interpreter(s) to ensure the workflow is effective.

5. Describe how culture impacts ASL interpretation in storytelling.

- There are varied, nuanced, and unique ways to articulate ASL in interpretation, reflecting diverse, multicultural aspects of language. No one word will sign quite the same – that's the beauty of ASL. Just like the English language has dialects and accents, so does ASL.

[Click here for more information.](#)

6. What are the barriers or challenges to hiring diverse Deaf talent (i.e., BIPOC+, LGBTQIA+), both in front of and behind the camera?

- When accommodations, i.e., ASL interpreters, are not provided it can create a massive barrier between you and your target audience.
- Sometimes, hearing people make harmful assumptions about Deaf and hard of hearing talent, i.e., stereotypes, articulation in communication, view Deaf and hard of hearing as limitations or burdens.
- Too often, lack of representation and culture competence (combined with implicit biases) can cause harm in the process.

7. What is a Deaf consultant and why is it important to invest in one?

A Deaf/ASL consultant is someone who is Deaf and/or hard of hearing with an expertise and/or professional experience in the entertainment industry. They are hired to be part of the entire process, including casting, pre-production, production, post production and marketing to ensure the authenticity and representation are appropriate and reflects well.

- Investing in and hiring a Deaf/ASL consultant will help ensure authenticity in your storytelling, and reduce any potential negative feedback to the company, brand and even lawsuits.
- Tip: empower your consultants by giving them a creative title such as "Director of Artistic Sign Language" rather than simply "ASL Master" or "Consultant." You might even consider crediting them as a producer.

8. When including Deaf characters in stories, what topics should you be mindful of, considering the Deaf community represents a wide spectrum?

- No one size fits all. Intentionality is crucial to be mindful of while creating roles and storylines that portray by Deaf and hard of hearing person.

9. What are some vendors/organizations you recommend when looking to ensure authenticity in your stories?

Easterseals works with several advocate organizations that have experts available to ensure authenticity in your stories and on your sets. These include:

Disability:In

Easterseals

Ford Foundation

National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA)

Council de Manos

National Association for the Deaf (NAD)

Deaf Queer Resource Center (DQRC)

Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf (RAD)

Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD)

Gallaudet University

Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT)

California State University, Northridge (CSUN)

Boston University

Billion Strong

The Valuable 500

Partner with any thought leaders, influencers, experts from the Deaf and hard of hearing community

*partnering with one of the above organizations should not preclude hiring a Deaf consultant on set. It is key to partner with a Deaf consultant one-on-one.

10. What types of key individuals (i.e. consultants/interpreters) should be included in development and pre-production process in regards to stories related to the Deaf community?

- Deaf/ASL consultants should be available during the entire process.
- Hiring more than one consultant, depending on the specialization, expertise and professional experience in the entertainment industry or media-related industry can bring the most valuable contributions on the table.



Have more questions? Reach out!
We'd love to collaborate and support you on your projects.

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