

USDA Office of Operations TARGET Center

How to Work with Sign Language Interpreters - A Fact Sheet for Mentors Who are Mentoring Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals

The USDA Office of Operations TARGET Center developed this fact sheet to assist mentors in communicating effectively with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing by working with sign language interpreters.

Working with a Sign Language Interpreter:

- Contact the TARGET Center for guidance on how to obtain a sign language interpreter.
- Avoid arranging short notice meetings, as it takes time to acquire an interpreter.
- Remain in constant eye contact with the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing, not the interpreter.
- Allow the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing and the interpreter to position themselves as needed.
- Usually, the interpreter will stand or sit at your side so that both individuals who are signing face one another.
- Remember, the interpreter is not part of the conversation, but rather he or she is your “conduit” so you may hear and be heard.
- Do not engage in conversation directly with the interpreter.
- Do not ask the interpreter’s opinion.
- Ensure that the meeting space has adequate lighting.
- Speak and gesture normally. Avoid the tendency to speak louder.
- If repetition is needed, use different words or rephrase your sentence.
- Be sensitive of a slight time lag in interpreting. Speak at a normal pace and follow the usual rules in conversation, allowing for pauses where appropriate.
- If the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing interjects, pause to allow the interpreter time to communicate the comment.

For additional information, questions or comments, please select the link, [Start My TARGET Experience](#).