

# Leading the Way



## Eight Strategies for Deaf Communities to Enact System Change



**Decisions** are made every day about deaf people's lives without involving deaf people. This needs to change. The lived experience and knowledge of deaf community members must guide policy changes, strategic planning, and programs that are designed to reduce barriers and increase opportunities for deaf people in the United States. Listening to community members, and letting them lead the way, is important. This is a core value of the work we do at the National Deaf Center (NDC).

Our **Engage for Change | local** project relies on an evidence-based model of system change that is led by communities. NDC hosts community conversations across the nation where participants brainstorm strategies for increasing the success of deaf people in their area. A team of researchers at NDC analyzed data from community conversations in six cities to identify eight strategies that were most important to local communities, described below. More information about this analysis can be found in a longer research paper published in the American Annals of the Deaf.

For each of the eight strategies summarized here, community members suggested specific activities. How could your community implement these strategies for changing the system to increase the success of deaf people? What kind of activities would be most relevant for your community?

## Strategies



### **Identify and engage in system change solutions.**

- Recognize the types of systemic oppression that affect marginalized deaf communities.
- Transform and create tangible solutions for systems, policies, and legislation to center deaf people.



### **Improve partnerships and resource sharing.**

- Share resources to create a central hub of knowledge and activity.
- Initiate interest with diverse networks and maintain comprehensive relationships.



### **Strengthen the transition process.**

- Improve transition programs in schools, including collaboration with state vocational rehabilitation agencies.
- Increase awareness of postsecondary goals and pathways to prepare plans.



### **Build communities of support for deaf youth.**

- Create and support mentoring programs and experiences for deaf youth.
- Increase student access to peer support and relationship-building opportunities.



### **Strengthen youth skills.**

- Strengthen self-determination and independent living skills.
- Increase knowledge of legal rights and political processes.



### **Support families.**

- Use early and continuous outreach to families as part of central hubs.
- Enhance languages and communication at home.



### **Improve access to programs and services.**

- Expand access to after-school programs for deaf youth like sports, clubs, camps, and internships.
- Increase the number of educational opportunities for deaf youth and support existing projects.



### **Provide professional development.**

- Provide culturally responsive training to effectively support marginalized communities.
- Educate professionals on the resources, accommodations, and technologies that deaf people need and use.

**This project is a reminder to all of us about the power of community.  
What can YOUR community do today to improve the lives of deaf people?**

#### **Learn more about community-led system change today:**

- Watch a **video summary in ASL** of this research study.
- Visit **Engage for Change | local** to learn more about this project.
- Read the full research article at the **American Annals of the Deaf**.

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