

Engage for Change | **local**

*a conversation* in **Philadelphia, PA**

— May 21, 2019 —



**NDC**

**National Deaf Center**  
on Postsecondary Outcomes



## Overview of the National Deaf Center

The National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (NDC) is a federally funded project that works toward systemic change to increase the quality of services and access to meaningful postsecondary opportunities for all deaf individuals. Meaningful postsecondary experiences contribute greatly to deaf individuals' quality of life. However, deaf individuals face a number of misconceptions and challenges that impede their ability to use their skills and talents in postsecondary settings and beyond. We believe that change is possible and that local communities can contribute to that change. We are here to provide support and guidance. E-mail [help@nationaldeafcenter.org](mailto:help@nationaldeafcenter.org) if you have any questions.

## Purpose of Engage for Change | local

For change to be effective, a broad range of stakeholders must be involved in the process. Yet it can be challenging to bridge the gaps between individuals, the community, institutions, and policymakers. NDC is committed to bringing together all parties to create a successful model of how community involvement leads to improved postsecondary outcomes for all deaf individuals.

NDC uses the term *deaf* in an all-encompassing manner to include individuals who identify as Deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, hearing impaired, late deafened, and deafdisabled.

Conversations led by members of the community explore challenges and solutions on the local level. Discussion questions focus on brainstorming solutions to local-level challenges that community members can implement to strengthen postsecondary opportunities for deaf individuals in their community.

## This Report

This report summarizes key solutions and strategies that emerged from the discussions at the event, and it is intended to help the Philadelphia community address important challenges. The report concludes with a list of action items for community members to consider as they connect with their networks to continue this important work.

Consider forming workgroups to implement the strategies proposed at the event, connecting on an online platform, or starting an e-mail group.

# Solutions and Strategies

## TOP SIX RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE

1. Strengthen partnerships and collaboration across communities, agencies, and organizations.
2. Provide opportunities for deaf youth to develop self-determination and independent living skills.
3. Recognize and actively work to reduce intersectional barriers in the community and include those with different backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and ethnicities.
4. Establish a monthly event for community networking and physical gatherings.
5. Develop a mentorship program for deaf youth and hearing families that connects them with qualified deaf mentors.
6. Create a centralized, digital hub for resource sharing and information dissemination.

## SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Increase availability, accessibility, and awareness of resources.**

- Spread awareness about available resources and educate community members on how to access them.
- Send students and community members a monthly e-blast about resource developments.
- Encourage resource sharing across agencies and programs.
- Make resources accessible in a variety of languages and modalities.
- Understand audience differences (e.g., age, location) and tailor resources appropriately.
- Provide resources to fill identified gaps and disconnects in the system.
- Centralize resources through a digital hub and disseminate information through social media.

### **Strengthen community networking and community-based spaces.**

- Host a variety of accessible monthly events for networking opportunities.
- Foster collaboration between people of different genders, ages, and cultural backgrounds.
- Strengthen partnerships between deaf, hearing, hard-of-hearing, deafblind, late-deafened, and isolated communities.
- Increase awareness of and participation in community events through vlogs and social media advertisements.
- Establish community liaisons to strengthen partnerships with agencies, organizations, and businesses.
- Create a physical, safe community center with established expectations and rules for community gatherings.

**Support youth self-determination and independent living skills.**

- Begin life skills training early, starting in elementary school, and consistently through students' academic journey.
- Foster and support early self-identity development.
- Teach and practice healthy communication habits and patterns.
- Provide training and support in emotional and mental coping skill development.
- Expose students to a variety of postsecondary life settings, including legal, medical, and relational.
- Increase students' knowledge of self-advocacy and personal initiative development.
- Encourage students to ask questions, to be unafraid of failure, and how to learn from mistakes.

**Support families.**

- Connect families within the deaf community through mentorship, role models, and support groups.
- Encourage family participation in community events.
- Educate parents and families on the importance of supporting connections with the deaf community and identity development for their children.
- Initiate early and consistent outreach to families when they have deaf babies.
- Encourage supportive environments at home where there's an understanding of the deaf child's capabilities and potential.
- Strengthen communication access at home.







### **Improve postsecondary transition experiences.**

- Increase transition outcome accountability for students, parents, teachers, and administrators.
- Strengthen vocational rehabilitation professionals' relationship and involvement with students and parents.
- Increase students' and parents' awareness of postsecondary pathways and opportunities.
- Improve transparency of postsecondary processes, including applications, certifications, and training.
- Involve students in their individualized education programs and 504 plans.
- Provide opportunities for employment readiness development, including job coaching, apprenticeships, job tours, and interview skills training.
- Start transition planning for students as early as kindergarten.
- Educate students on financial literacy and financial support options, including Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Income, and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

### **Develop a system of support for deaf youth.**

- Connect students to a support system of peers, teachers, and community members.
- Expose deaf youth to a variety of professional role models with different backgrounds.
- Establish a Big Brother/Big Sister mentorship program connecting deaf youth with qualified adult deaf mentors.
- Provide opportunities for mentors to support deaf youth through emotional and independent living skill development.
- Invite mainstream students to participate in community events.
- Recognize, address, and reduce stigma against marginalized students.

### **Increase access to educational programs and options.**

- Provide tutors for STEM, reading, and writing skill development.
- Increase access to out-of-school options, including summer camps, college preparatory courses, and independent living skills workshops.
- Increase accessibility to guidance counselors.
- Increase access to educational services, including writing centers and advising sessions.

**Dismantle intersectional oppression.**

- Encourage recognition and acceptance of individual differences of community members.
- Address cross-cultural barriers and biases.
- Encourage intersectional collaboration in the community.
- Increase inclusion and involvement of people of color.
- Promote attitude of equity, inclusion, and support.

**Engage in strategic and long-term financial planning.**

- Identify and address budgeting issues for programs and services.
- Increase financial support for early transition planning, tutoring, educational programs, scholarships, and accommodations.
- Host discussions to examine financial priorities.
- Develop interstate collaboration for planning and support.

**Improve access to mental health services.**

- Design and implement mental health programs that connect community members with counselors.
- Host workshops and conferences focused on mental health care, support, and services.
- Provide accommodations for counseling sessions.



## Now What?

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Consider taking the following steps to continue working with your local community members.

- Reconnect with your core team and attendees.
- Find out when everyone is available for a follow-up meeting.
- Review the action plan template and think about which strategies you could implement.
- Attend a follow-up meeting to discuss your notes and ideas.
- Form smaller work groups to focus on the action plan you are excited about.
- Think about how you can contribute to the action plan. Small contributions matter!
- Do your part!
- Be ready to support others in your work group or other groups.
- Observe the process and continue to meet with your group to discuss progress.
- If results motivate you, continue to the next goal!

**Note:** In 1 to 3 months after the follow-up meeting, NDC will send you a brief survey to learn more about your progress. We are excited to see the outcomes of your work! We believe that small changes can, and do, make a difference.

## Drafting Your Action Plan

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A good action plan is clear and specific, incorporates your community's ideas, and takes advantage of available resources. A clearly articulated and specific action plan ensures that everyone on your team remains focused on the same goal, and it enables you to better evaluate your progress and support your efforts based on what you learn along the way. It can also help you communicate and engage with others.

In articulating your action plan, make sure to address the following.

- **What:** What problem do you want to solve?
- **Why:** Why is it important to solve this problem?
- **Who:** Who will benefit from the solution?
- **How:** How will you implement it?
- **Expected results:** What kind of change do you expect to see?
- **Action steps:** Who will be part of the solution, when, and how?

### Example

Suppose your local community believes that not enough internships are available for deaf youth. Employers say they are unable to find and hire deaf applicants, and employers lack knowledge of how to accommodate deaf interns. Here is an example of an action plan related to building skills for deaf youth and increasing their opportunities in your local community.



- **What:** Limited internship opportunities exist for deaf youth; employers lack knowledge about how to accommodate deaf interns; and deaf youth have little experience with finding internships, interviewing, and self-advocating.
- **Why:** It's important for employers to become more aware of accommodations so that they can hire deaf applicants, and it's important for deaf youth to grow more confident in self-advocating so that they can enjoy more social and professional opportunities.
- **Who:** Deaf youth, employers, and community networks
- **How:** Organize a day of training sessions and workshops, including the following:
  - Job coaching workshop for deaf youth
  - Accommodations 101 for employers
  - Testimonial panel for deaf youth, with employers in the audience
  - Networking opportunities
- **Expected results:**
  - Deaf youth will gain hands-on experience in finding internships, going through interviews, and advocating for their accommodation needs.
  - Employers will report increased knowledge of accommodation resources.
  - Networks between deaf individuals, teachers, parents, and employers will strengthen.
- **Action steps:**
  - Find partners for the event (e.g., local association for the deaf, vocational rehabilitation agency, transition specialists, deaf youth, families).
  - Choose a date and a venue (date, point person).
  - Develop an agenda (date, point person).
  - Invite stakeholders (date, point person).
  - Work with presenters (date, point person).

In putting together this series of workshops aimed at increasing internship opportunities in your local area, your goal might be to strengthen local networks, make local employers aware of how to recruit and retain deaf interns, and increase deaf youth's experience in obtaining and retaining an internship.





# Action Plan Template

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**Action Plan for:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What** *(What problem do you want to solve?)*

**Why** *(Why is it important to solve this problem?)*

**Who** *(Who will benefit from the solution?)*

**How** *(How will you implement it?)*

**Expected Results** *(What kind of change do you expect to see?)*

**Action Steps** *(Who will be part of the solution, when, and how?)*



## Resources

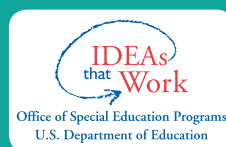
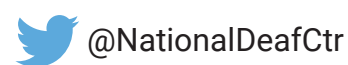
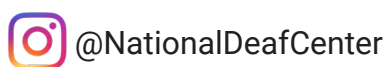
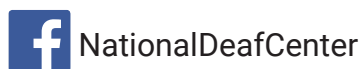
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NDC: [www.nationaldeafcenter.org](http://www.nationaldeafcenter.org)

NDC Listerv: <https://utlists.utexas.edu/sympa/info/nationaldeafcenter>

NDC Help Desk: [help@nationaldeafcenter.org](mailto:help@nationaldeafcenter.org)

Office of Special Education Programs: [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osep/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osep/index.html)



This document was developed under a jointly funded grant through the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs and the Rehabilitation Services Administration, #H326D160001. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the federal government. [www.nationaldeafcenter.org](http://www.nationaldeafcenter.org)