

## **Sound Advice: a group learning model**

*Sound Advice* is a volunteer, peer-led, information-sharing and hands-on training forum intended to learn about and practice using assistive listening systems and devices. A free, public *Sound Advice* gathering at The Shedd has been held monthly since January 2021, led by a core of Loop Oregon “regulars” with both drop-in attendees and periodic returnees welcome and highly encouraged to attend. The leaders have also conducted individual sessions at locations that have new hearing loop installations for the site’s constituents.

## **Why? What’s the Need?**

When The Shedd Institute, a performing arts and education venue, installed hearing loops in their performance and education spaces, they quickly discovered that few community members had any idea what they were for or how to use them. Moreover, individuals with hearing devices were routinely unaware if they even had a telecoil, how and when to access it to use assistive systems in public venues, nor that they had rights to effective communication under the ADA.

**Repetition is important.** The learning is compounded by re-hearing the same information, describing experiences in light of one’s new understanding from the previous session, and brainstorming strategies and considering additional personal equipment to provide better hearing access across daily life. These regular discussions dispel the sense of isolation, can help “hearing” partners understand challenges, and build advocacy.

## **Recommended set-up, equipment and materials:**

1. Hold the session in a hearing-looped space.
2. Do not turn on a PA system. Instead, provide receivers and earphones *to all* without a telecoil in their device, or who don’t know if they have a telecoil, or who don’t have a device at all.
  - ❖ Before starting, instruct each attendee on how to use the receiver and that *all* participants will need to use a microphone when speaking.
3. Recommended equipment and materials:
  - ❖ Receivers and earpieces/headphones;
  - ❖ At least one microphone for the group, plus a microphone for the leader;
  - ❖ Powerpoint or enlarged placard images of the 4 components of a hearing loop; [available on CHA website]
  - ❖ One or more portable hearing loops with an additional microphone for enhanced demonstrations;
  - ❖ Informational packet for first-time attendees; [with links to current CHA materials]
  - ❖ Sign-in sheet; name cards; any updated handouts.

## **Each session:**

We have found tremendous value from a regular routine of:

1. Having a leader with significant hearing loss who understands the self-empowerment assistive listening provides;
2. Having “regulars” who are “tech savvy” to help newcomers with their devices, phones, applications, etc.;

## Sound Advice Overview

3. Beginning with introductions and a short description of one's hearing loss history and status;
4. Repeating the basic curriculum each time so that there is thorough understanding about how a hearing loop assistive listening system works and the role of a telecoil to access all other ADA-compliant assistive listening systems;
5. Ensuring that new participants are given the bulk of time in the "Question and Answer" period;
6. Branching into other systems and devices and comparison of other technologies based on participant questions and interests;
7. Individual demonstrations using portable loops to deepen the experience and understanding.

### Follow Up:

Ideally, the leader sends a follow up email to all newer participants, often responding to their individual questions or concerns, and encouraging them to return in the future.

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### About the Center for Hearing Access

Founded in 2024, the nonprofit Center for Hearing Access is a national advocacy and education initiative of The John G. Shedd Institute. We champion and educate users, facility staff, audiologists, and hearing instrument specialists about all ADA-compliant assistive listening systems and other strategies to increase access to theaters, libraries, conferences, government offices, courtrooms, places of worship, and other public and private spaces. Effective hearing access can be life-changing for people with hearing loss to maintain community engagement.

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