

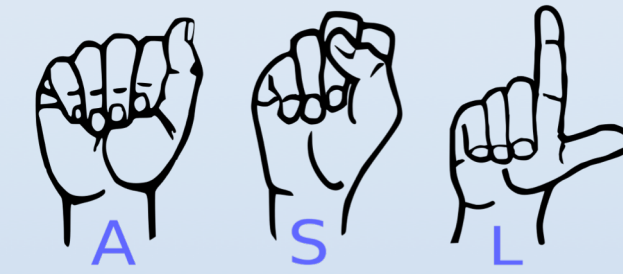
# DEAF ENTREPRENEURSHIP: How Policymakers Can Support Deaf Entrepreneurs

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## THE NEED

The many challenges deaf people face in American society today include:

- \*communication barriers
- \*lack of motivation
- \*lack of support
- \*lack of opportunities and resources
- \*lack of access to education/information (Atkins, 2011)



Given these, we can appreciate the difficulties faced by deaf entrepreneurs and those wishing to venture into business who consequently fail to achieve their dreams and goals. How can stakeholders - ASL speakers, non-ASL speakers, members of the deaf community and the rest of society - support deaf entrepreneurs? This project discusses grassroots ways in which policymakers, administrators, or deaf educators can adopt these measures and implement them in various social institutions which serve the deaf.

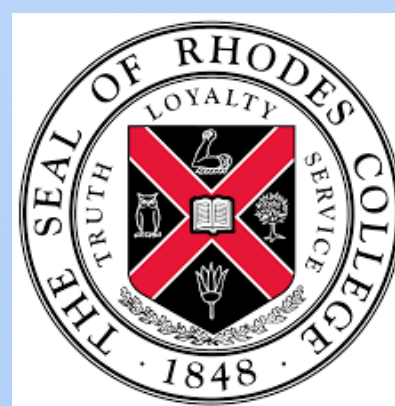
**It would be nice if the business community could... be willing to welcome our students into their companies (Forni, 2017, p. 1).**



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## OVERVIEW

Past research on deaf studies and entrepreneurship provides useful information about the important principles or policy drivers that can be implemented in the workplace. Both academic institutions and businesses have shown the need for better policies that can foster good working environments for the entrepreneurial deaf (Pressman 1999). For example, administrators at some schools which serve deaf students aim to become models for those in other similar schools around the country in preparing future entrepreneurs for the business world (Forni 2017). The superintendent of the New York School for the Deaf in New York City, as Bradley Porche believes it would be beneficial if the business community could see what the school does and be willing to deaf our students into their companies, to assure that they are being prepared for the business world (Forni 2017). The school knows deaf or hard of hearing employees have certain needs in the business world and they meet their needs.



**Past research leads to a conviction that three main principles are necessary for policymakers to consider to ensure support deaf entrepreneurs. These policy drivers are counsel (Pressman, 1999), accessibility (Punch, 2016 and mentorship (Bosma et. al. 2011).**



Figure 1

**Deaf Business Advocates at the the National Association for the Deaf offer counselling and foster entrepreneurial development through workshops and trainings. (NAD, 2018)**

## COUNSEL

With regard to counsel, Pressman (1999) recommends that counselors understand deaf entrepreneurs' personal, social and business backgrounds and demonstrate that a college degree is highly desirable, but not imperative, for an entrepreneurial career. Demographics and personal characteristics of deaf entrepreneurs and small business owners give an understanding of their personal, social and business backgrounds. Pressman recommends establishing small business development and resource centers, disseminating information, and developing specific training and follow-up materials for Deaf business owners and counselors as suggestions to support deaf entrepreneurs. For example, the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) offers deaf business advocates to provide counsel for entrepreneurs (Figure 1).

**Punch (1990) reports that the Americans With Disabilities Act has improved conditions for DHH entrepreneurs (p. 386).**



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Figure 2

**Through a contract with The Texas Board of Public Utility, Sprint offers a free TTY service. A deaf person uses a TTY to type his/her conversation to the relay operator who then reads the typed conversation to a hearing person. The relay operator relays the hearing person's spoken words by typing them back to the TTY user (Relay Texas, 2018, p. 1).**

## ACCESSIBILITY

To help provide accessibility for deaf entrepreneurs, Punch (2016) demands improvement at the corporate and organizational levels for both physical and communication accommodations such as rearranging furniture so that the person with hearing loss can see others better in the workspace, using e-mail or text messaging instead of normal telephone calls. Other alternatives include Teletypewriters (TTY) or video relay calls (Figure 2). Punch (2016) reports that although the Americans With Disabilities Act (1990) has improved working conditions for people with jobs who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH), the legal requirement to provide accommodations that are perceived as costly, such as sign language interpreting, may discourage some employers from hiring workers who are deaf. However, companies such as Sprint partner with local governments to provide free telecommunication accessibility services.



Figure 3

**The winning team of students at Rochester Institute of Technology receive 10 weeks of personalized coaching and mentoring through the NSF-corps program. They also get an additional \$3,000 in funds for prototyping, travel and for student stipends (Rochester, 2018, p. 1).**

## MENTORSHIP

On mentorship, Bosma et. al (2011) suggest programs that provide role models can offer practical support and guidance to deaf entrepreneurs and students in their business ventures. As an example, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) collaborates with the National Science Foundation (NSF) to host an annual entrepreneurship competition and assigns mentors for the winners (Figure 3). Role models and mentors are viewed as influential persons by a significant proportion of the entrepreneurs who use them in the start-up phase of their venture (Bosma et. al. 2011).

## CONCLUSION

When adopted in policymaking, counsel, accessibility, and mentorship can help ensure the success of deaf entrepreneurs in business or those trying to join the corporate world. The policy drivers help organizations create supportive environments for the deaf entrepreneurs they serve.

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