

ASSISTIVE LISTENING TOOLKIT:

# HOUSES OF WORSHIP

**LISTEN**  
TECHNOLOGIES 

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# HEARING LOSS

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

According to the [National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders](#), approximately 17% of American adults report experiencing some degree of hearing loss. This means that tens of millions of people throughout the U.S. are unable to hear the spoken word as completely as they should. Compared to the relatively low percentage of individuals affected by physical or visual disabilities, this represents a large segment of the population who are not having their needs met. And the number of Americans dealing with a hearing impairment is on the rise due to aging, lifestyle and other factors that will affect most of us at some point.

Every day, individuals with hearing loss have difficulty listening to or understanding speech across a wide range of environments and activities, including:

- places of worship,
- meetings and gatherings,
- theaters and movies,
- public spaces (such as airports and municipal buildings),
- and while conducting business in shopping centers, pharmacies, banks, and more.

In these situations, assistive listening devices can make a world of positive difference, and in many public spaces they are also required as part of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

### WHAT IS ASSISTIVE LISTENING

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Visitors and congregants in houses of worship are often located a fair distance away from sound sources, such as speakers/presenters, musicians, etc. In addition, houses of worship are generally reverberant environments where sounds and noises from all around tend to echo or bounce throughout the space, making it more difficult to hear clearly. Assistive listening devices (ALDs) expand the functionality of hearing aids and cochlear implants by amplifying the sounds you want to hear in houses of worship while limiting interference from other sources of noise. These solutions minimize problems like background noise and poor acoustics, thereby delivering high-quality sound directly to users' ear(s).

In the most basic terms, assistive listening devices consist of four key components: a microphone to collect sound; a transmitter to send the signal across a distance; a receiver to intercept that signal; and any one of several different attachments to transmit the audio from the receiver to the user's ear, hearing aid, or cochlear implant. Additionally, each device should be equipped with its own volume control for users to adjust to their comfort level.

## THE NEED FOR ASSISTIVE LISTENING SOLUTIONS

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Often, when people develop hearing loss, they begin to withdraw from activities and public settings; they disconnect from the world and people around them because they can't hear or experience things the way they used to. They may stop attending worship services because they are no longer able to hear the messages of strength and encouragement, and as such their minds, hearts, and souls are unfulfilled. Even individuals with hearing aids or other equipment may feel left out because of the stigma associated with hearing impairment. For these reasons and many others, hearing loss is often referred to as "the invisible disability."

No doubt several of your congregants could benefit from assistive listening devices but are hesitant to ask for them. This may be because they don't want to call attention to themselves, they don't want to inconvenience anyone, or they may not know that accommodations exist to help them participate fully. As the leader of your house of worship, you can ensure that your congregation knows about the availability of assistive listening devices. By doing so, anyone experiencing hearing loss will know they are supported and welcomed, your congregational attendance and participation will improve, and more people will get to experience the power of your message.

The Assistive Listening Toolkit below was created specifically with houses of worship like yours in mind. The included resources will help you understand what's needed to accommodate individuals with hearing loss, and how to make them aware of the options available so that they can enjoy their experience in your house of worship.

## AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

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While houses of worship "generally" fall outside of ADA requirements, you can still benefit tremendously from understanding the intentions of the law. Signed into effect in 1990, the ADA prohibits discrimination against individuals with various impairments by requiring accessibility to a variety of public and private buildings. The ADA establishes requirements for new construction, alterations, or renovations to buildings and facilities, and for improving access to existing private facilities where goods or services are provided to the public. Essentially, owners of public facilities must remove barriers and impediments to full access or service, and must provide accommodations equal to, or similar to, those available to the general public. This includes making **assistive listening devices** (ALDs) available for individuals with hearing loss.

If your house of worship is in area where it must comply with the ADA's standards for assistive listening, it is wise for you to understand what must be provided to congregants with hearing loss. You may also want to understand the difference between the ADA and the AHJ, or the Authority Having Jurisdiction. It can overrule the ADA in some areas of the US, so it is important to know if there is an AHJ that has mandated the use of assistive listening equipment in your area, what kind(s) of devices have been mandated, and if those regulations apply to houses of worship in your area. In many places houses of worship are exempt, but it is wise to verify whether you are required to provide assistive listening devices under either of these regulations.

The most important concern, however, is providing individuals with hearing loss a welcoming environment when they visit your house of worship.

## WHEN HEARING AIDS ARE NOT ENOUGH

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Hearing aids and cochlear implants can work wonders to improve speech understanding in quiet environments and during one-on-one conversations. But there are some situations, like hearing someone who is more than a few feet away, hearing in noisy backgrounds, or hearing in poor acoustical environments, that remain problematic for those with hearing disabilities. These situations often arise in houses of worship and render hearing aids and cochlear implants insufficient for users' needs.

Our mission is to provide assistive listening tools and resources to organizations like yours, as well as advocate for broader assistive listening device adoption and awareness. There are great solutions and technologies available that houses of worship can provide for people who have hearing loss, giving their congregants a fuller, better experience.

## INCORPORATING ALDs WITH HEARING AIDS

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The recent ADA revisions, which took full effect as of March 15, 2012, state that "Twenty-five percent (25%) minimum of receivers provided, but no fewer than two, shall be hearing aid compatible." Hearing aid-compatible assistive listening devices (ALD) are those that work with telecoil (or T-Coil) equipped hearing aids and cochlear implant processors.

A neck loop is an insulated loop of wire worn around the neck that transmits the signal to the telecoil in a user's hearing aid through a magnetic field. Many people prefer to use neck loops because they have the opportunity to listen through both ears without having to wear headphones. Users with hearing aids or cochlear implants can use ALDs with headphones or ear buds if they choose to; however, they may prefer to take their hearing aids out when using the ALDs to avoid any potential feedback problems.

Another added benefit of telecoils is that they work with hearing loops. If a house of worship is using a hearing loop, a user only needs the telecoil in his or her hearing aid or cochlear implant in order to utilize the system. Using a telecoil with a hearing loop is seamless, unobtrusive, and wireless, and requires no additional equipment to be worn or used by congregants.

Individuals without hearing aids or cochlear implants can of course use assistive listening devices by wearing either headphones or ear buds as they choose.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I AM CONSIDERING AN ASSISTIVE LISTENING SYSTEM IN MY HOUSE OF WORSHIP?

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- Ask your congregation to complete a survey about their assistive listening needs. Be sure to ask about their experience during services, if they use hearing aids, and if those hearing aids are equipped with t-coils. You will find a sample survey in this tool kit, or you can create your own to hand out. You might also consider online tools like Survey Monkey to gather responses from your congregation via the internet.
- Understand the three different types of assistive listening technology available. Each of these technologies has advantages for your particular house of worship, and you should consider which one is the best for you and your members. You will find a wireless listening selection guide also provided in this toolkit.

- Request a demonstration of assistive listening equipment from Listen Technologies. Not only do we provide free demonstrations to help with the selection process, but we are the only provider of all three types—RF, IR, and Hearing Loop—of assistive listening technology.
- Determine the cost of assistive listening equipment that best meets the needs of your congregation. Listen Technologies offers assistance in this area as well with free consultations for expense and budgeting purposes. You may also consider fundraising efforts to help offset the cost of the assistive listening solutions that are best for your house of worship. Visit [www.listentech.com/about-us/advocacy/hearing-loss/](http://www.listentech.com/about-us/advocacy/hearing-loss/) , for information regarding advocacy.

## HOW DO I LET CONGREGANTS KNOW?

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- Display signs (digital or printed) letting congregants know that assistive listening devices are available.
- Provide reminders in your bulletins and/or programs about the availability of assistive listening devices and where they can be picked up for use.
- Include mention of your system in pre-service multimedia presentations.
- Regularly mention in your announcements that ALDs are available.
- Post a section on your website that you provide ALDs for people with hearing loss.
- Train your audio staff to be ambassadors for the assistive listening services in your house of worship.
- Host a demonstration of the assistive listening equipment for all of your congregants so they can see and understand the equipment in use.
- Make sure that you have a Best Practices Guide for your particular assistive listening system.

# SAMPLE SURVEY

## ASSISTIVE LISTENING SURVEY

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In an effort to provide for the audio needs of everyone in our congregation we ask that you complete the following survey about assistive listening. Assistive listening systems help those in our congregation who have trouble hearing the spoken word and make our services available to all of our members. Please return this survey as instructed.

1. Have you experienced any trouble hearing in our house of worship?  
(i.e. announcements, the message, etc.)  
YES  NO
2. Do you currently have or use a hearing aid(s)?  
YES  NO
3. Does your hearing aid(s) have a Telecoil, T-Coil, or, TV Mode Switch?  
YES  NO
4. Do you think that you would benefit from an assistive listening system?  
YES  NO

We want to make sure that all of our members can participate fully in our services and activities, and your responses will help us do that. Thank you for your input as we work to ensure that everyone can hear our message clearly.

# WIRELESS EQUIPMENT SELECTION GUIDE

## WHICH LISTEN WIRELESS LISTENING PRODUCT LINE(S) SHOULD I USE?

The answer may be one or a combination of Listen wireless listening solutions. All of Listen's product lines satisfy ADA and IBC requirements. Visit [www.listentech.com/legislative-compliance](http://www.listentech.com/legislative-compliance) for more information.

In many cases, venues will use Hearing Loop technology as the base system to satisfy end users with T-coil-equipped hearing aids, then supplement with Radio Frequency (RF) or Infrared (IR) systems to satisfy other needs including:

- Providing receivers that work inside and outside of a looped area. This is important because there are many spaces, even inside the main room, where receivers will not work.
- Providing a sufficient number of channels for other applications such as language interpretation.

The chart below provides more detail about each type and combination of product lines:

Features/Benefits	Standard RF	Standard IR	Digital IR	Hearing Loop
Six Simultaneous Channels	X			
Up to 4 Simultaneous Channels		X		
Up to 32 Simultaneous Channels			X	
Single Channel Solution				X
Large Transmission Area	X			
Lower Cost Solution	X			
Satisfy needs of T -coil hearing aid users				X
Satisfy needs of T -coil hearing aid users with LA-166 Neck Loop	X	X	X	
Ability to receive outside the looped area	X	X	X	
Secure Signal		X	X	
Unlimited Number of Adjacent Channels		X	X	
High quality audio, stereo 20Hz-20KHz			X	
Discreet user experience with T-coil hearing aids				X
Direct intelligible sound to hearing aid equipped with T-coil				X



# BEST PRACTICES: ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES IN YOUR HOUSE OF WORSHIP

## ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES CAN BE USED BY EVERYONE

While assistive listening devices aim to serve those with hearing loss, anyone can benefit from the clear, intelligible sound that they provide. People without diagnosed hearing impairments often experience some degree of hearing loss because of other factors, such as: allergies, sinus congestion/colds, lifestyle factors, or other environmental interferences. Assistive listening devices help overcome these common listening challenges.

More often than not, people are unaware of the improved experience that can be attained with an assistive listening device. This is one of the reasons why raising awareness about the benefits and availability of assistive listening devices is critical—so that people can improve their listening experience.

One way to raise that awareness is through simple communications and marketing efforts, both internally and externally. Internally, use staff meetings to demonstrate how your assistive listening system works and to report users' responses. Externally, post or share information about the availability of the ALS everywhere you currently advertise programs and events, including: ads, newsletters, emails, social media, and websites; then seek out additional places to promote the resources you offer. Using the ALS accessibility icon in print materials and on your website is another good way to inform everyone that the system is available. Remember, a large percentage of older adults have hearing loss, so be sure to invite those individuals to your worship services and let them know about your efforts to provide for their needs. By doing so, you reach a wider audience and create opportunities for increased participation and attendance. And these efforts demonstrate empathy, compassion, and understanding for a community that often struggles with being isolated because of their hearing loss.

## CONSIDER HOW YOU WILL MAKE ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES MORE AVAILABLE

Your congregants with hearing loss often do not ask for information about Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) simply because they may have trouble hearing the answer. This is why it is critical that the accessibility symbol for assistive listening devices is highly visible, both at your main entrance as well as wherever the devices are distributed. Additionally, it may be helpful to add the specific system frequency for visitors, so that those who have their own receivers may use them. If this information cannot be posted, be sure that your clergy, staff, and volunteers know the frequencies in order to answer this question as it comes up. If neck loops, silhouettes, written scripts, or other aids are available, provide this information as well.

## CONSIDER WHERE YOU WILL MAKE ALDs AVAILABLE

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Many houses of worship have a desk or counter where staff or volunteers distribute assistive listening receivers and other listening accessories. Some locations are permanent while others are portable. While a stationary location provides consistency for visitors and allows for storage, portable solutions have some advantages and allow distribution anywhere. What really matters is that people know where to find the ALDs and that they are placed where members need them.

## TIPS FOR SPEAKING TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE HEARING LOSS

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- Face the congregation so they can use visual cues to aid their understanding
- Speak into the microphone
- Ask members to speak one at a time
- Patiently repeat questions if a microphone is not available

## A LITTLE EDUCATION GOES A LONG WAY

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When distributing the ALD receiver, take a moment to ensure that users are familiar with how to turn the unit on and off, adjust volume, and wear the neck loop/headphones. This not only ensures that the equipment is used correctly, but also helps congregants feel comfortable requesting it on their next visit.

If someone is using a receiver with an induction neck loop, remind them to have their “T” switch enabled (for telecoil-equipped hearing aids and cochlear implants).

Keep a laminated copy of answers to frequently asked questions at the counter or desk where receivers and listening accessories are distributed.

## PROPER MAINTENANCE

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As with any piece of electronic equipment, ensuring reliability and availability for all ALD users requires some measure of maintenance. It is good practice to schedule time to periodically check equipment and charge batteries to ensure great service. It is also important to store your devices in a safe, secure place, so they are not susceptible to damage or theft.

Remember to clean your assistive listening devices and accessories regularly as well. It is recommended to use disinfecting wipes to clean all ALDs, earpieces, neck loops, and accessories as they are returned. Doing so prior to placing them back into storage instills confidence that the equipment is sanitary and properly cared for, allowing people to focus their attention on the message.

## CONCLUSION

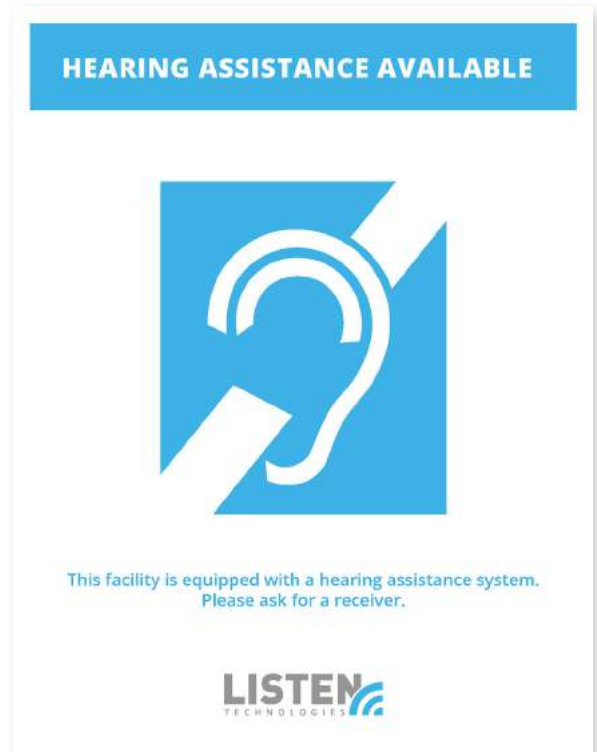
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Reaching out to those who feel disconnected from a community due to hearing loss is central to sharing the message of inclusion. Genuinely compassionate service involves being aware of and caring for the needs of everyone, especially those dealing with impairments. Make sure they are able to hear the beauty and emotion of the spoken word in your house of worship by providing them with the equipment they need to stay connected.

# SAMPLE SIGNAGE

An important part of accommodating someone with hearing loss at your house of worship is signage identifying the availability of assistive listening devices. More stylized signage is available to help houses of worship promote the availability of assistive listening devices in programs, digital signage, mailers and more.

[Click here](#) to download a zip folder of sample signs.



# SAMPLE COPY

## HOUSE OF WORSHIP BULLETINS

### **Bulletin Copy Option 1**

If you want to hear the spoken word more clearly, all you have to do is ask. We offer assistive listening devices to all of our members and visitors.

### **Bulletin Copy Option 2**

Our building is equipped with a Hearing Loop. Turn your hearing aid to the "T" setting to hear the spoken word more clearly.

### **Bulletin Copy Option 3**

Want to hear the word of God more clearly? Assistive listening devices are available to anyone who wants to listen.