

Deaf Equity Council Community Conversation
April 18, 2026

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Session began with confirmation of available ASL interpreting, DB interpreting and in-person captioning.

Speaker: We won't talk at you all day long. I want to tell you the plan and what we have been doing so we can learn different community things and you can tell me what you have going on. Today we are here for the Deaf Equity Council to take in your information you want to share. We want your participation. Some people just really like to talk a lot, others might like an opportunity to as well. As long as we are respectful. The DEC was founded and we brought in members:
[Show of hands]

>> Speaker (Davin Searls): There are other members who had conflicts and couldn't make it. We have 13 members right now on the DEC. Some from City of Rochester. Others from various towns in the county. Got together and set up this council to see what are the challenges Deaf people face. It is a long list.

From what we learned so far, we have been able to narrow it down to **five key areas of focus**. It's not that the other areas are unimportant. They are very important, but we can't address everything all at once. We identified five key areas and representatives will speak to those.

The DEC is just a baby organization. Just recently been established. We are still wanting to learn about government systems, county, city, figure things out. Also, we are meeting different department leaders in the area. And we want to see what changes we could make now and build on that.

The DEC can do some things and can't do others. Let's talk about that so we can find out what the community priorities are, so we can advocate. We can identify systems and policies and what rules and laws we can advocate for change. We can partner and make sure that the administration in the area, what falls under their responsibility.

Private companies, we can encourage, advise but can't do as much for change there. We can't force it. Also, laws don't change overnight. That takes time. At the state and federal level we can make changes, but that is not part of our focus.

So, before we do more, we would like to get community input and know your experiences, priorities, frustrations, and what solutions you have to offer. In summary, we hope when you leave today you will feel good that you provided input and give us things to think about. And reach out to others to talk about their experiences. The DEC is new. We want to make Rochester and Monroe County a wonderful place for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people to live.

We will have the working groups introduce their focus. Starting with **Employment**.

>> Speaker (Steve Lovi): Good morning, thank you for coming today. You are busy and have lots to do, but this means a lot to us. Thank you very much. In regards to the **Employment Group**, we are focused on several objectives and what we are trying to accomplish for the city and county. This is a collaborative effort and we have equal responsibilities together as a group. Some

examples of what we were looking at are interpreters in public settings, especially employment. Programs that are advertising for workforce development, Rochester has a lot of job fairs, employment fairs. We are concerned about accessing interpreters for those events supported by county and city so they have a legal obligation to provide them.

When someone shows up and there is no interpreter, we need to hear from the community. That is a systemic issue. People come for access. One challenge many people face is the interpreter request system, we want to change that. We believe all events sponsored by city or county should have an automatic request. We want to hear from you when it doesn't happen. And we also want to hear from you when it *does* happen. The positive information as well.

We want to help businesses supported by the city and county, those entities, apply for grants. At the bottom of the posting will be an accessibility statement. We want all the legal language included for access throughout the county. In looking at systems, this is not just an individual perspective. If there are consistent issues, those are systematic. The one-offs we can hear but can't resolve right away. But we will keep track of those issues and your feedback. You are our eyes in the community. And so that's important. I have a few questions to start, and I want your comments and feedback. [We have someone taking notes in back] Thank you.

So I'll start with a few simple questions. If you are uncomfortable answering, that's fine. If you have experienced that, let us know. If you are not ready to share, you can approach us after and we will document your comments and feedback. The first question is what would make the workplace more accessible for you?

>> Nicole Dugan: Shall I stand for sit? I'm Nicole. I am wearing a purplish jacket with hair in a ponytail. The hearing systems are in place. It is easy to require interpreters, but often my boss will ask for one and not have success.

>> David: I'm David. I think one challenge with answering is we have different levels of need. For myself, I need a qualified effective interpreter, but I ask and don't receive qualified interpreters who can work in my field. They have to consider the different needs of Deaf clients. We have to consider the individual needs.

>> Brad: Hi, I am Brad. To make the workplace more accessible, we need to have interpreters who can voice strongly. In job interviews, I need my thoughts expressed clearly, and interpreters are not always able to do that. It affects my ability to get a job.

>> Frank: My name is Frank. I go to a lot of different events and never know if there will be an interpreter. They say yes on the fliers, but I go and it's not accessible. That is a Deaf tax on me. For instance, I have this flier that says they will have interpreters.

>> Speaker: For employment, the companies say they will provide interpreting or not. So the people have the skills to do the job, but the system needs a way to hire employees and not be concerned about the costs of interpreting. That would be great.

>> David: This is David again. I want to tack on to that because pay is a big issue. Applying for jobs, historically, if they want me to pay for my own interpreter, I won't work for that company. Some companies will pay, but smaller ones won't and are less likely to hire Deaf people. They are not willing to provide access. And it happens a lot.

>> Linzie: I'm Linzie, I work at a Deaf organization. When I want to talk with a hearing person, we have to pay for interpreters, and we are a not-for-profit organization without a budget for that. But

we need interpreters. It would be nice to have a central budget that we could agree upon and have a listing of qualified interpreters and captionists to provide these services. And everyone knows this is a resource we can trust. But run by a central location so it's more available to some organizations.

>> Speaker: Thank you for your comments. Matt, would you like to add?

>> Matt: Hi, my name is Matt. I think the DEC should consider incentives for companies to hire interpreters, to make them more willing to pay for the service.

>> Speaker: Many businesses are private and therefore, the county and city have no obligation to spend for interpreters. You are speaking about incentives. Oftentimes, businesses are not aware of the tax incentives they can utilize. So our job could be to promote and disseminate that information to employers.

We have another work group, the Public Information Group, who is here, that we can partner with to promote that information to become more welcoming to the Deaf and find ways to reduce the impact on budget and hire interpreters.

>> Linzie: This is Linzie. I disagree. We live in Monroe County. If a business is private or public, that is not an issue. It needs to be accessible. Tax incentives or a budget ready to go, support for the people who live there. It's not about the business.

>> Speaker: So we appreciate the devil's advocate perspective. Very much appreciated. That helps us to maintain focus and look at different avenues as we look for solutions. That is the whole point of the DEC. That adds to our list of things we need to take action upon in the county. Frank?

>> Frank: Frank here. Hi, again. I have noticed that VRI, virtual interpreters, are more commonplace and they have gotten better for temporary interpreting moments. You don't have to pay for those. It is free.

>> Speaker: Great point. We have a work group called Policy Review Group. Bradley is heading. We will look into policies where we can clarify how and when to use interpreters for emergency situations in the county or city. We need a policy review. Bradley will share more about that. So that will be coming up soon.

>> Chaz: This is Chaz. I want to build on a couple comments. We need to remember that most jobs are with small businesses. Most of them don't have the budget to be able to pay more than they are already paying the person to do the actual job. That won't go away. I think the Deaf people who apply, their salary also that they are hired with has an added cost for access services. So in order to meet their business needs, it is more cost effective to hire a hearing person. It's not just tax incentives. It is an equal access opportunity.

>> Speaker: We understand these issues with small businesses, specifically in Rochester and the county. They apply for a small business loan or grant. We are looking at their applications for where the funding source comes from. Should we be required to put in that they need to hire people from the community and provide reasonable accommodations and interpreting services? EB wants to add. She is from the county.

>> Elizabeth Butcher: Hi, everyone. I am Elizabeth Butcher, EB. I don't want to take up a lot of time because this is your meeting. I want to respect that. But I want to let you know I am here as an advocate. I work for Monroe County. My role is ADA manager, which is focused on employment

within Monroe County and how folks outside the county can access our government resources. For example, the county clerk's office is where you can apply for a lot of resources we have available. If you go in and find it hard to communicate with the clerk, let me know. That is part of my responsibilities. There are other things that I have oversight in and that I review [accommodations] for our employees in the county. Some Deaf, many hearing, folks with other disabilities or injuries, back problems, etc.

I appreciate Linzie's comment. It's worth thinking outside of the box and coming up with other solutions. We know the law, the ADA, and those accommodations are not always well known. There have been changes since 2008. We have experts on the law, and we can use them as a resource. It's important because people think about the 1990 law, but it is outdated. It's improved since. Many people are unaware of those updates not present in the '90s and '80s.

I want to let you know of a few opportunities. We were recently working with a non-profit group, the EEC, Employment Equity Coalition. <https://rbj.net/2022/07/25/employment-equity-coalition-aims-to-improve-opportunities-for-people-with-disabilities/>

Many non-profits work with them to discuss individuals with disabilities and how to protect them in the workplace. The EEC has been advised about the DEC and has expressed support. The Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce recently was the meeting place for the EEC mtg, former Mayor Duffy was interested in seeing how we might be able to collaborate with private businesses who have employees with disabilities. So that is another example of an opportunity for us to connect with the community.

One idea that relates to what Linzie said is for businesses to have the responsibility to provide interpreters. However, based on number of employees, there are stipulations. We need to educate the companies on the requirements and how they can access the interpreters. Before, David mentioned the quality of interpreters and how everyone has different needs. And some work environments may require more highly skilled interpreters. How do we navigate that and place interpreters in the right place? So, we will be meeting with the Chamber of Commerce to provide education and resources and insight as to how to acquire interpreters and make your business Deaf-friendly and accessible. If someone needs an interpreter, we want these companies to be prepared and have processes to make it more effective and efficient so before it is a need, they know how to address it.

One process I suggested is similar to what my husband's law office did. In the past, he had four or five employees, a small firm. Less than 15 employees, meaning he does not need to provide certain accommodations. Yet he was still providing those interpreters and accommodations. He was able to do that because the members of the Rochester New York Bar Association had a supply of money available for providing interpreters and access. Regardless of which firm needed it. Monroe County knew it was a resource and they provided interpreters without it burdening one firm. The setup was not required by law, but the system was in place to provide the interpreters and have the budget available. I would love to see that kind of concept be applied and scaled up to more businesses here in the Rochester area. That is one small model that we could use to start making change across the community.

I don't want to take up much of your time, but I am here to be a resource and advocate. If you know of non-profits that maybe we could partner with or you see opportunity with, let me know. I am happy to connect with you all. Frank?

>> Frank: I don't know anything about the law you mentioned. 2008 ADA law. We could share that information. I am shocked to know this is in place and I was not even aware. You should get the word out.

>> Elizabeth Butcher: The ADA Amendment Act of 2008. Thank you. Appreciate it.
>> Speaker: Thank you, EB.

>> Susan: I'm Susan. I am enthusiastic to know about what our work groups are. That would be helpful to know those categories.

>> Speaker: We will go through those.

>> Susan: It would be nice to know the categories now. Could that be shared?

>> Speaker: There is a request to state the work groups. Bradley runs the **Policy Review Group**. That group looks at all the current policies within the City of Rochester and county. And many times, policies are set up and not inclusive of Deaf and Deaf feedback, the community is not included. So their task is to be involved before policies are established.

Then we have the **Data Collection Group**. We all know there is much lacking as far as data in the Deaf community. And they are responsible for collecting data points of various resources to document and verify our reasons that we establish this in Rochester.

The third group is **Public Information**. Amy Stornello is heading that up. And they are responsible for disseminating information. We want a central place to share community events and at the county level and letting people know if there are interpreters there or not.

Public Safety & Policing Group. Chris Campbell will head that up. Working with the fire department, sheriff's department and other city entities. And ambulatory services. One reason we set up this work group is to encourage people to get involved at the county and city level and make both those more accessible. And to hire more Deaf people. That is one priority to make available. On a civil service exam we are failing and unable to make that certification. We want to promote there are many jobs out there and talented individuals in Rochester. And those jobs could be an access point for an opportunity for career growth.

Are there any last questions for the **Employment Group**? We will turn it over to the next group, the Policy Group. Bradley, would you mind? Thank you for your feedback.

>> Brad: Hello, everyone. My name is Brad. I am the head of our **Policy Group** with Dora, focused on policy review. We would love more members. Today, I want to go over policies we are reviewing. No decisions have been made. If you have others we should focus on, we will have time for that.

Interpreters are a big concern making sure spaces are accessible and budgets are in place. If the budget runs out, how do we provide interpreters? We want a central budget for the city. New York State has passed Language First, meaning if you work for the government and request an interpreter, you don't need to provide proof you are Deaf. It's just a language necessity, rather than a disability accommodation. Like a Spanish interpreter. Personally, it would be great if all departments and events provided interpreters last minute. So we want more interpreters available. Like a 48-hour notice, not two weeks. We know that happens. They can't get interpreters last minute. So we want that in place to improve the pipeline of requesting interpreters.

Next one. *Legal policies*. We have made recommendations based off our conversations and discussions and values of language access that there needs to be a statement from the community regarding politicians or government leaders to recognize the DEC and our beliefs in being an effective working group, in having policy review, and in providing recommendations to the

government. We want to establish that official relationship.

We want to help with *rent assistance*. We have housing financial aid, and it's often not accessible in ASL. We want that more accessible. Anything regarding rent or housing, you have to call to request grants. So we want more accessibility. And it would be beneficial to have a full-time Deaf staff person to improve policy development.

We are trying to identify more ways to involve and work with the community. Two big strategies we have established here in Rochester. We recently learned about a 15-year plan for the city to invest in businesses across the city. We want to incorporate the Deaf community in that plan. And want to make recommendations to legislature, have more conversation with policymakers in Monroe County to be able to work with those who advocate for any kind of policy change that would be beneficial to the Deaf community. We have been discussing those strategic plans as well.

Monroe County Plan Forward:

<https://www.monroecounty.gov/planforward#:~:text=The%20Monroe%20County%20Comprehensive%20Plan,get%20involved%20and%20stay%20engaged!>

City of Rochester Rochester 2034:

<https://www.cityofrochester.gov/departments/planning/rochester-2034-citys-4th-ever-comprehensive-plan>

Did I miss anything? That is a summary. Would love your feedback and ideas.

>> Frank: I don't know if this is the right fit or not, but I've seen on Monroe County TV, sometimes the interpreter is in a small bubble and you can't see them. The camera turns and they disappear. I don't know why. The interpreter is so far away and tiny. It's hard to see them signing. They need them clear and large enough and need to be framed properly. It's embarrassing. We should be the model.

>> Speaker: Monroe County and Rochester, if any public announcements are made or the mayor announces, Frank said, you have to keep in mind it is Deaf friendly and the interpreters need to be big enough and seen clearly. Thank you. Great. Chaz?

>> Chaz: If I make a recommendation for emergency services, when there was a required water boil notice, I was unaware because it went out without sign language access.

>> Speaker: Any emergency notifications need to be accessible to the Deaf community. Did you want to add, EB?

>> Elizabeth Butcher: Yes, Monroe County established the Monroe Alert System. When there is an event, like a catastrophe, that system requires individuals to sign up. It's not automatic. It's important. You need to do that so you receive the notifications. Our emergency services department, the OEM, Office of Emergency Management, reached out asking how to communicate with the Deaf community.

<https://www.monroecounty.gov/monroeaalert>

I appreciate that they are learning and dialoging more and more. The DEC was established during that time. We agreed to hire in a CDI and had that in place for set of text alerts [frozen texts] standard alerts. If there is a severe storm warning or ice storm, those types of warnings with standard text, then that goes out in English in sms text to those who signed up. We have nine alerts recorded by a CDI into ASL. And now, if you sign up, you will receive that text in English, and a link to the signed version of that alert. That would be specific to situations that arise. We have a QR code we will disseminate so you can sign up and increase safety in our community. That is a recent change. It's important to have that become policy. We are working with the OEM.

We need to also figure out what services we can provide for Deaf and Blind. It's important for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind leaders to be involved and document their recommendations into policy. There is information over here on my table if you want to sign up.

>> Speaker: The 15-year plan, when did that start?

>> Speaker: 2019. Yes, with the former mayor, Warren.

>> Speaker: Rochester 2034. In 2019. They have five-year milestones. So we are in the middle of that strategic plan. Rochester 2034 is the 15-year comprehensive strategic plan for the city.

>> Speaker: So like, what is the plan? What's included? So, we haven't gotten what they have done, what are they still working on. Do you have that? [see previous web links]

>> Speaker: Yeah, I think it's a 500-page document. We haven't gone through it extensively. We all have access to that. We could learn about it more. There are details of the plan. I am not someone who knows them. But people are reading it and doing due diligence reviewing that policy.

>> Speaker: One thing that is important for Deaf services in Monroe County is to have a license. There is no input from people into RID. It would be nice if the client could have feedback. We could have a license, our own board to decide what access looks like for us. New York State does not require a law that interpreters be certified.

>> Davin Searls: This is Davin. Wonderful suggestion. Another idea is that right now, we are not 100% sure how Rochester will contract with interpreting agencies. For tax money purposes, less expensive is good, but for us, we need a minimum standard in place based on certain criteria. And not making decisions based only on cost.

>> Speaker: Yeah, something more to add. Also, there's different skill sets within different contexts, like legal interpreting. For one thing, I don't want a community interpreter in a legal interpreting setting because that's a serious impact on the people there. So there's a lot of different types of requirements. I just want to be clear, for good communication, the interpreter needs to - we need to know what kind of interpreter we're getting.

>> Speaker: Yeah, heard. I saw another hand over here.

>> Linzie: This is Linzie. I don't know if you realize, but Monroe County, their website does say that Rochester has the largest Deaf population per capita. It's right there on their website. And I think that's a great opportunity for us to really highlight if we have the most Deaf people, then we should be doing the best for our Deaf people. Not just saying yeah, we just don't have enough. Well, if you've got the most Deaf people in the community, you should be able to meet these needs. So, at least, you should be doing something more than what we're doing now to be the best. Because we have the most.

>> Speaker: Yeah. And I think that's where our Data Working Group comes in. So that we can get the evidence. So we can have the hard numbers to support our claims that we all know anecdotally from the Deaf community, but having that data to back us up is one of our goals. So, yes, I definitely agree with you there, Linzie. Over here, Frank?

>> Frank: So to bring in an interpreter, they need to know who I am and what kind of skills I require. We need measurements, so that we can make sure that the interpreter that is assigned is a good fit and not just send me any old interpreter who might not have the skills. I need. Yeah, minimum certification. We need metrics and accountability so that we can do some assessment

and make sure the interpreter is the right fit.

>> Susan: This is Susan. I want to make sure, in Rochester, we have a big Deaf community, and that they were not looking only at the interpreters but making the environment more visual as well. I'm a grandmother of three granddaughters, all of whom are hearing, CODAs. So I'm a Deaf grandmother. And when I go to the library for story time in Fairport, there's three different people that we work with. And they work to accommodate me as well, as a Deaf person, as a grandmother. And it shouldn't be just for me, but it should be for everyone. If they happen to know some signs, so I can fix the sign, make sure that it's clear. And they put the story up on the PowerPoint too to add in that visual. And there's some signs that they've added to that. But it's good when they're adding some visuals because that's a universal design for us. It benefits me, but it benefits other people as well, and not just me. So it's just something I want to throw out there.

>> Brad: Yeah, working with public information to create maybe guidelines of best practices for that universal design of how to make spaces most accessible and accommodating.

>> Davin Searls: This is Davin. Keep in mind that libraries are funded by the cities, the towns. So we don't have control over those. That's a limited opportunity for us. But here in the City of Rochester, the library, we can impact. We can't change, but we can influence. So we can try to set standard expectations and policies and recommendations. And what's the word I'm looking for? Like a white paper. Not a white paper, but guidelines, a list of things that we can share and encourage these organizations to follow. So even people living in different towns and cities can be encouraged. And then I think we can see change evolve.

>> Speaker: Yeah, I think we need to focus on a large scope and not just delegate that to one working group, but to have it be a collaborative effort across all the working groups. Because we're all impacted by that and can all influence that. I think PI, public information is a good starting point, but then, outreach to the community goes beyond that, and policy review, etc.

>> Speaker: Over here, David?

>> David: I'd like to see more policy related how to make spaces more accessible, especially city services, like the town hall. At some of them, I push the doorbell, for hearing people, and it's got a camera. So when they are saying who's there, I don't know it. Or there'll be a line and you have to take a number. Well, how am I going to know when we get to my number? So we need to consider how to make these kinds of changes to make spaces available for, accessible for everyone.

>> Speaker: Yeah, one of the conversations we discussed before was in public parks, how do we make the sidewalks a little bigger? How do we make spaces a little friendlier for signing communities? How do we maybe relocate those paths and the plant life around them?

>> Speaker: Something else I've seen is about policies with universal design so that everyone's being accommodated. You know, if you speak a different language, same problem with the doorbell, right? So New York is the top of the ~13 most used languages. We're only addressing one. Different tools and other ideas are things that people can share to make things accessible for Deaf people. But we also want to encourage them to be accessible for everyone. And if it's only Deaf people, it's harder to convince them, but we might be more persuasive if we include more populations.

>> Speaker: Yeah, over here?

>> Brian: My name is Brian. Just one example that it's not just for Deaf environments. I just want to give an example that like, I went to court for jury duty. And they have an interpreter there. And they choose two or three — yeah. So throughout the day, they pick a couple people for jury duty and then the rest of us have to wait. And by the end of the day, the person that they'd have to go up and discuss with the judge. And I was sitting there all day, and then they said oh, you've been dismissed because we can't find an interpreter for tomorrow. So we're just going to dismiss you. And that happens to other language groups as well, Spanish speaking folks and so forth, where they're just not included because there's no interpreter.

>> Speaker: Did you write that down, Dora? Because that's important, jury duty. So New York State also just set up a few months ago a Language First situation which, you know, there's only 10 states doing that. So that's good.

>> Davin Searls: Yeah, we're the first.

>> Speaker: I know the director of the jury. I am surprised that happened to you because I know the director of the jury. And, they're an excellent person, but I'm surprised that that happened to you, that you were dismissed. Personally, I've had health issues over many years, and yet being on the jury, I've always had interpreters provided. So I'm surprised that that happened to you. I also want to mention in regards to your experience with the interpreters at the library for a story hour, I've been here in Rochester for 40 years, I've been on many different committees and boards. And I'm on one council regarding interpreters. And I have seen some changes here in our community. But yeah, the library, I do work with the Irondequoit Library, and I've worked with them to provide interpreters for several different events.

We had one situation recently where the City Council had to be involved because there was some kind of situation where if the event was in the library, they would provide interpreters, but if it was outside of the library, they wouldn't provide interpreters. So the line of decision making was unclear, that many libraries would provide interpreters, but if they were outside of a certain area, then they weren't providing those interpreters.

So, the challenge is that it always requires money, it always comes back to budget. And many folks have made good points about tax incentives for that kind of businesses to provide interpreters. And yet, there's still resistance. So there's education. There was an event at the library for story time. And I told them we're going to need an interpreter. And yet, again, each library has their own system, their own budget, their own person who is willing or not to provide interpreters.

So it's up to us ask for it. And really, again, for us to have to do that work and educate them and try to get the interpreter. I've had to learn how to speak from experience. And you get what you ask for. Sometimes, you have to be pretty assertive.

>> Matt: This is Matt again. This might relate to the federal issues as well. And I want to talk about airlines, airports, because very often I'm lost in the airport. I'm like what's going on? I don't know. The airports are really the worst places for us to be. We're sitting and waiting and watching. And very often miss information. In Rochester, this is one place where we definitely can emphasize access in the airports. Announcements get missed. So really would like to see those be accessible with captioning for everyone.

>> Speaker: Yeah, I believe in Rochester we have a new light system in the airport and an app also that relays announcements. But maybe that's not enough, you know? It's not visually accessible. We can advocate for more improvement here in Monroe County. We may not be

directly at that level, but we can start to make influence.

>> Speaker (EB): I agree with what you're saying, Matt, and I think it's important. People are not always aware. We can do better. We actually do have something in place at the airport, but if people are not aware of it, what's the point? We do have a resource called Aira ASL. It's an app that you can get from the App Store. It is free. And it's a geofenced app. Meaning that if you're in the airport, there's sort of like a fence around the airport. It's free to get interpreting. And if you try to use the app somewhere else, it's not going to work, it's not free in that situation. It's important to get the word out and try, if you would, please try it. And if you don't like it, please let me know, so that I can communicate with the person in charge of the airport. He's may not be very Deaf aware, so he put it in place, yay, but I can reach out to let him know it's not being used much and give him feedback. If we don't know the feedback, then he can't be aware that it's not helpful for the Deaf community. So let people know, and also give me feedback.

>> Speaker: I'm want to add to what you just said with the app, Aira ASL app. In person, they might say, people might hear that oh, it's been delayed 20 minutes because people can hear that announcement. But we wouldn't know that without it being interpreted. There's no way for that to be communicated to us.

>> Speaker (EB): Yes, that's important because the company, A-I-R-A, that company functions for exactly that purpose, but then you have interpreters that you can walk around the airport with on the whole time. And if there's an announcement, you have to look for it. So that's a function that needs testing as well. So it's important to say yes, one-on-one interpreting is great, but what if you're just out and about and you're not getting access still? So that's something that we can document. But in the contract with the company, I've never tried it. I did try it like one-on-one with walking around. One-on-one was great, but just out and about in the airport, it wasn't as useful. So the function is not working the way we want it to yet.

>> Speaker: Thank you. In respect of time — you have one more comment?

>> Speaker: My son is past president of the airport and Rochester. You could send feedback to him as well. Could email him. I could have him come. He's coming tomorrow to Rochester for four days. So we could get in touch and — his name is Thomas, the vice president for the airport in New York.

>> Speaker: Thank you for letting us know that. We have a follow-up comment.

>> Speaker: So the Aira app, I love that. I've used it. You get to the gate, and then you're opening it up, then it's open and you can read. So it's my responsibility to let them know I'm Deaf. So you need to tell me, in the technology, that Aira app is really great. I've had a good experience with it. For the airport, it works everywhere in the airport. And I think other airports have it as well.

>> Speaker: We have a lot to, we a lot a lot of comments. Is there any new topics that we would like to discuss before we move on?

>> David: This is David. I'd like to see disability advocates in town and other local governments. Because when I go in to the School for the Deaf, different county and town institutions, it's an overwhelming experience already for anyone. And then we go in without access. So it would be nice to have someone responsible for working with these services to make them more Deaf-friendly and more publicly available.

>> Speaker: That is one of the topics we will, we have discussed. Thank you for verifying that that is a topic we need to further. Now, who would like to go next? I believe we're going to let the next work group come up. Amy, go ahead.

>> Amy Stornello: Hello, I'm Amy Stornello. **Public Information** work group-I'm the only one here right now. Hopefully, more will want to join in my committee. The point is we're talking about employment and focusing on the city and county, communication within the city and county. So, as we've already said, we want resources that are listed. We recognize that that we need those. And there's a gap in the services that are being provided.

Remember, during COVID, the Deaf community was not aware with everything going on with the health crisis. We would have the governor come up and we should have an interpreter signing and communicating with us. And this is an issue that we want to address for the future, because we would like that for all announcements. When there's an emergency, as we've already said, of course, we want more alerts than just the nine that have been set. Like Webster, near the Ginna nuclear power plant, if there's an emergency, how are we going to know? We don't want to die there, right? I want to know. I want there to be a plan in place so that we can be aware. Those are just a few examples.

So, in short, I work at RIT. I grew up here in the Rochester community. I've noticed over time that there are a lot of Deaf and Hard of Hearing people living here. And I want to reframe this question for all of you. So Deaf people might prefer to be in smaller groups, but we need to be visible. We need to get more visibility for the hearing world to take notice. Like, oh, look at all these. Because 40,000 Deaf people, well, where are we? We're involved in smaller groups. It's a step.

And Deaf Awareness Day, you have the Strong Museum Deaf Awareness Day, you have it at the Zoo with interpreters in place. That is fantastic. Again, that's just the start.

So, for example, last year, I have to admit, a family friend, the owner of Casa Larga, the winery in Fairport, I reached out and said, hey, consider doing a Deaf Awareness Night, and we can take over your patio for that. Did you know that they had that? That we have a Deaf winemaker? Who knew that, right? That person doesn't work there anymore. They have moved on. However, a couple of years ago in August, the owner was willing to bring that person back, hire them for one night. And it got a great turnout of Deaf people having a great conversation, drinking wine and beer and things. We did a tour. It was awesome. I just confirmed that they are willing to do it again. So they want to get access to those 40,000 Deaf people to come, all of them come out to Casa Larga. And this is a hearing business owner who was blown away by the available market. So, I'm presenting to Visit Rochester, probably about 150 people who work in the hospitality industry here in the community. Yeah, we got those people.

I've had to grab their attention, and guess what? There's an audience for you. So putting it out there for people to consider the Deaf demographic. Deaf Awareness Night, Deaf Awareness Day, do events. And that's just one example.

So recognize that we want a **central hub for communication**. That's something we've been talking about for a long time now. So we need to make that happen. I'm curious to know what are other concerns and issues that you can put on the table of things that you'd like to see? So put it out there.

And let me also add to Anne's comment about the library. I'm involved in another committee, a group, a board, blah, blah, blah, that the workers at the Webster Library, we work together and collaborate. So they are also aware about how to communicate with Deaf people, which is great.

That's a benefit for all of us.

I would encourage you to reach out to other hearing people and educate them. You know, it means more work for us. I know that. But the time is now to make this happen and get it out there. Consider running for public office. Get involved in the government yourself.

So, for example, I've sat down with the Webster Town Supervisor. And I just put it out there, hey, do you know any sign language? And they said oh, I've always wanted to learn. I'm like well, how many Deaf people do you have working here for the city, for the town? And I said, that'd be a great way for you to learn sign, is to have Deaf and Hard of Hearing people on staff. And he said oh, that's a good idea. And I said well, let's get on that, you know? I'm hoping that we'll see that that happens and we'll continue building those relationships with more and more communities. OK?

So what you got? Questions, comments?

>> Speaker: Sure. I'm curious if we're planning to set up a centralized website or what are the ideas for that?

>> Amy Stornello: So yeah, we are working on that. I'm thinking oh, yeah, I can totally set up a website. How hard could it be? Well, it costs \$200 a year to run a website roughly. So I'm reaching out to other friends. There's one person who is willing to donate the money for that. And I've confirmed two Deaf and Hard of Hearing co-op students from RIT who are willing to work on this specific project for the summer.

So the ball's rolling. I'm hoping that when we build the website, then we'll continue to evolve and grow. My vision is one central event calendar. But if you know of a Deaf awareness, so 40,000 people are ready to go to your Deaf awareness event. If any of you know of anything, it can get on there. So, again, there are just many business owners who aren't sure if they want to, or maybe they don't know who to reach out to, who to collaborate with. So, business owners, they just, they're not sure. So we want this to be a resource for hearing people, not just for us.

So if they want to learn sign, if they want to find connections, that would be a resource for them. Where are the Deaf-owned businesses and what are the resources? So there are many, many different Deaf organizations and people in the area that we can highlight. Yeah, that. So give me some more ideas.

>> Brian: Again, my name is Brian. Where we have the Deaf Festival happening June 6. That's a good place to advertise, to connect with people and to spread the word. Because a lot of people can see that. Hearing businesses can contact us too and they realize we're Deaf and we can have interpreters ready there already to communicate. And we're happy to accommodate there in person. It's great — if any questions, you can reach out to me.

>> Amy Stornello: So one challenge we have, as say, Deaf Women of Rochester, reaching out to people who are willing to volunteer to paint. So, what you're saying, Brian, that brings up talking about the Deaf Fest. There's a conflict with it. So we need to in conclusion, we need a reason, in a way, to recognize these conflicts. That's why we want the calendar.

>> Speaker: Paint, what? What was the painting about?

>> Amy Stornello: Well, we asked for volunteers to paint Camp Mark Seven. So we got it all set up. And then they, there was the Deaf conflict on the same date. So we had to cancel our painting

event. That's the reason we need a calendar.

>> Hilda: Hello, my name is Hilda. I have an idea in regards to the website. So, if we have this disseminate throughout the community, then there, I also want to mention that there are tours that don't have interpreters provided. It would be great to have a centralized location so we can request those interpreters and create equal access between the hearing and Deaf communities, rather than having just Deaf events and events specifically the for Deaf community. If you want a haircut or something like that, or you're going into a salon, it would be great to be able to connect to an interpreter and have that communication and have the opportunity. Instead of being limited to just writing back and forth with paper and pen. So, that way, Deaf people can feel that truly have equal access throughout the community, not just at the specific events.

If they want to communicate with friends, there are different ways than just writing on pen and paper. So that we have more immediate access. I want to have the feeling of no limitations on our access, right? The same feeling that hearing people get every day throughout their community.

>> Speaker: Earlier, you mentioned the cost for hosting that website. We can recover that cost by selling advertisements for businesses who want to have their clients see their business advertised there. Maybe a person who's working on maintaining that website could be paid that way, could become a paid role.

>> Amy Stornello: You're right. And my goal right now is to get it set up. That's what I'm focused on, get the ball rolling. The goal eventually is to be able to release it in August. So that's what we're doing right now. I do think it's a good idea to sell advertising, but at the same time, I don't want to scare the business owners. So trying to figure out where the balance is on that issue.

>> Speaker: Several different things. I think it's awesome what you're trying to do. I've known Amy for a long time. I've lived here for a long time. I've seen many changes. One thing I want to let you know is to say that there's a communication issue here.

We recently had a Deaf Health Fair hosted. And, to be honest with you, many people wanted to socialize, but they knew nothing about it, they didn't know the event was happening. And the reason being that a lot of the information was on Facebook. And on Facebook, many Deaf people that I know, they don't use Facebook. They don't even have access to Facebook for whatever reason.

So that's amazing to me that there's a lot of technology, but there's still miscommunication or communication doesn't happen. So I want to let you know that this is important. The time, the date, the information needs to be shared. I think technology is a wonderful tool. It's great. But are the consumers able to use Facebook or whatever website that is out there?

So that's something that we ought to keep in mind, that when we're trying to share information, what kind of media are we using to communicate this information? So please be mindful of that.

Another thing is that I go to many different places here in the Rochester area, and something I believe is that as a Deaf person living in Henrietta, when I go out, I have to ask, let's say, at a restaurant or a bar wherever, can you turn on the closed captioning? Oftentimes, there are no closed captions turned on, and I have to reach out to someone. And they say, oh, they're off because hearing people don't want the closed captions. They're blocking, you know? So they have them turned off. And I have to ask her do you mind turning them back on, please, for me? And so that's something we need to educate people and encourage business owners to know about that.

We also have many interpreters who go to different events. And we have Rochester Broadway Theater League, and I go there often. Like, for tomorrow I'm going for a show. And I've seen the change over the years where if I want to go there, there's not always services provided. And I have to let them know. Yes, but I do want to applaud you for your work.

>> Amy Stornello: Yeah. We do advertise different interpreted events. I want to see you there, all of you. I want the owners to see you there and realize it's a win-win. The owners know it, and when they provide it, it's a win for them as well. So it's a win for everyone. I do welcome more feedback from you, any comments. And I'll see you later.

>> Speaker (Ray): I have something for you to consider. And for folks at the county level to consider as well. So, in regards to the cost of the website, is it possible for the county to fund that? Rather than us having to create something separate and outside of that system, perhaps the county can fund that. Or that's a conversation you need to have with your work group, is how to make it work. And do we have to do something outside or independent? Or is there something that we can plug into? So, since 1972 to today, all of my homes that I've lived in, I've spent a lot of money on, and it hasn't come back to me. This would be great for my taxes to pay me back in a sense, if the county were able to provide something.

>> Speaker: Yeah, I do want to add, we do have the Monroe County DEI website, which is part of EB's responsibilities. Like the Red Wings games, when are they going to have Deaf Culture Day, that kind of thing. So they do have different resources on the Rochester DEI website. So September 11th is going to be Deaf Culture Day this year. EB?

>> Elizabeth Butcher: I want to respond to Ray's question. So, yes, we can have a Deaf related page on our website. The issue with that is the domain name is the issue - the domain name would be @MonroeCounty.gov. Meaning, how do you find the page? You have to really navigate to get there. If you use Google right now and put in "Deaf Equity," you'll find our page easily because there's no other Deaf Equity page anywhere. So it's very easy to find that. But MonroeCounty.gov slash or dash Deaf Equity is one that we have. But to set up a page for events like you're talking about would be monroecounty.gov slash and then a whole lot more, dash - whatever name you give it. If you want to move forward, we can do that. But if you're thinking we don't want people to have to navigate that much and have to type in the whole county website to get to it, I don't know that much about websites. Deaf Equity, I do know that we can change things like, if a member changes, I can go in and change that myself. I have that level of sophistication, but I can't make a big change to dress it up or anything. I can't provide access, but I can use my own county email address, but I can't share that. So, if you ask me could Monroe County pay for another domain, if that's what you decide, this is the domain we want, share that with me, and I'll be able to take it forward and see what's possible. It could happen.

>> Speaker: OK. So to continue, we do have other updates from other working groups. So just to be mindful of time, we're going to move on to those other working groups. But thank you all for your comments. Who's next?

>> Chris Campbell: Hello, everyone. My name is Chris Campbell. Been working with Chaz **Public Safety & Policing** Work group. All right. We'll go ahead and get started.

Our working group is focused on interacting with law enforcement officials and any traffic stops, 911 calls, emergency medical centers, etc. The scope of our working group covers, again, community police officers, policy, and accessibility, Monroe County Sheriff's Office, emergency responders, and accessing 911 dispatch. We also cover training programs for the Deaf and police encounters and DeafBlind folks as well. We also cover emergency alerts and public safety

messaging systems and formats. We have different patterns of systemic barriers, and so we want to invest in community safety and ensure there's not a lack of interpreters on call during traffic stops or anything like that.

We don't cover private security, like mall security or anything like that, but any public security entity. And communities outside of Rochester and Monroe County are not included. We also cover some legal cases with ongoing investigations here in the county.

We do have a few questions that our working group is curious about. What your experiences are in working with law enforcement and how we can improve that for Deaf people. What are some of the big risks that you see in our interactions with the police and emergency responders? What training should they have in regards to working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing people?

What does improve communication? If an interpreter is not available, what tools can we use? And what makes you feel safe here in Rochester or Monroe County? Where are the Deaf and Blind needs being overlooked when interacting with emergency responders or police?

So those are our questions. We'd like to open up the discussion. How long do we have, like 10 minutes? OK.

>> Speaker: Before we begin, there's several different perspectives here to consider. One, whether you're the person who needs help, if you're being arrested, or you're a community member who's seen something happen. Perhaps you're a family member who is seeing somebody in your family impacted. Perhaps you're the person who needs to save the life of a person while you're waiting for emergency services to arrive.

There are different perspectives and different areas that we touch on in this work group. It doesn't mean we'll have a solution for everybody, but those are the areas that we are looking to get some feedback on. And we're also curious about what you consider the most important or the biggest gap that we're now facing.

I can see everybody's responses in the audience and you're ready to comment. We've got a couple already lined up. So we'll start with the — who's in the corner here, Kelly?

>> Kelly: So you mentioned, I'm curious, are any of you involved? PAB, were you involved? Police Accountability Board.

>> Speaker: Yeah, so we can start talking about that, but we haven't gotten to a position where we started in dialogues with the Police Accountability Board, but we are aware of them. But we haven't really delved into our work with them.

>> Kelly: Well, I'm asking because they need training for our police officers, you know? There's ongoing gaps there. There's a lack. So, for me, as a victim and other women in Rochester, like domestic violence related issues, who's responsible to handle the communication? All those people are hearing. So that means Deaf people are oppressed even more. And so it's really a serious issue here in Rochester. And I don't know how to address it because now it's accepted as the norm that Deaf people, it's so normalized that Deaf people don't even call for help. So that's something that concerns me very much. We really need ongoing training for the Police Department.

>> Speaker: We'll make sure we'll capture that. Thank you for your comments.

>> Frank: Hello, my name is Frank. It's a fact that a Deaf person fell and injured their head and there was blood at the Deaf Club. They called 911 and several calls were made. And a Hard of Hearing or CODA were also on site and calling. And they didn't arrive for quite a long time. That person ended up passing away from that event. 911's response was saying they didn't have the address listed, which I call bullshit on. To not have the address on file is ridiculous. You have to.

>> Speaker: Was 911 texted or, in that situation?

>> Speaker: I'm unsure, but I know there are multiple calls to 911. The period of time that lapsed between those calls and the emergency services arriving was quite long. And that person ended up passing away.

>> Speaker: And when you had a domestic violence situation, did you call 911?

>> Kelly: Well, I've texted. Others have called. They don't come.

>> Speaker: They don't respond?

>> Kelly: They don't give it any attention, no. So it doesn't matter how you, it's a hearing environment from the outset, so it doesn't matter what the situation is, is what I'm picking up.

>> Speaker: Hmm. Thank you for that additional context.

>> Mary Karol: I'm Mary Karol, and I will second Kelly's situation. A similar thing happened within my own home. A mental health crisis with my son who is Deaf and we're a Deaf family. So we called 911 and let them know very clearly what was going on. He is having a mental health crisis. And the 911 operator typically will call the Town of Brighton because they have their own police, which is different than Monroe County Sheriff and different than the City of Rochester as well. Called Brighton, and I explained to 911, I said it's a mental health crisis. We need interpreters for access to communication. We need a mental health professional ready to go to make decisions about my son. And the police would not have the ability to assess or provide aid and to make determinations. We want someone qualified to make a mental hygiene transport. So, when the police got there, I said, is the interpreter on the way, and they said no, there's no one available on such short notice. I tried again. I said well, make a call before you come in. Because I don't want you coming in and talking to my son when he's already having a bit of a breakdown. And they said no one's available. They didn't make the effort.

And that happened three times within a seven-month period. So we had to really change our thinking - I had to shift about interpreting. And it did not help the perception for me to be that person, providing that role with the police. It's really important that all of the police need to work with mental health professionals and do their jobs. And for safety purposes. But also, they can't make the decision. I tried to explain my expertise and knowledge and share that with them. You know, that we want someone qualified who can meet all four of the — qualified to say he meets all four criteria, and they said no, we're not going to do it.

So that's where it's really critical for Monroe County Police and working together with private organizations as well different town, they need several — the system is broken in that situation.

>> Speaker: When they said that no, there were no interpreters available, did they explain why?

>> Mary Karol: Oh, no. No. And again, they probably felt awkward and unsure what to do. Oh, it's a Deaf person, and then, they're - I'm sure it was. And talk with the administrator at NTID. We know

who's responsible for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people and their well-being. There's an expert who can help my son. And they, you know, they were young, these officers, and they don't feel empowered. And then we are the ones who lose in that situation.

>> Speaker: I'm sorry that happened.

>> Speaker: So you mentioned police and everything, but I wonder have there been discussions regarding ICE?

>> Speaker: Add that to the list. It should be. Right now, we're in the process of figuring out what are the problems we want to address and we want to work on. I suspect that, as you all know, we can't solve everything. We have to prioritize. But to answer your question, we will add that to the list. Another comment in the back?

>> Speaker: ICE is federal, they're at the federal level.

>> Speaker: Yeah, but they're affecting our citizens. To her point, our job or our task with the county, right? But the thing is we're not talking about what can we talk about. I'm not sure, but we will regardless add it to the list. And who is next?

>> Speaker: I think David had his hand up next.

>> David: Yeah. So I don't have a lot of experience with the police, but I do have fear around them. I think, thinking about the inertia and the indifference of what can happen in those types of situations, of what has happened and how that would be documented and how that would be handed off and how there's no accountability. We all understand what those situations look like and how they can escalate and how people can be lost in the system. And I don't trust anyone to intervene on my behalf. Because where is the communication access? Where is the information access? If I'm in a situation with law enforcement, how do I navigate that kind of situation? You know? Once I'm in the system, who's going to advocate for me?

>> Speaker: Thank you for that comment.

>> Frank: This is Frank. I know there's a pattern with 911 and not being transparent. They're responsive when it's hearing involved, but not so much when signing is involved.

>> Speaker: It seems audism is at work here because there's always emphasis on hearing and yet there's a lack of understanding of Deaf culture and community. The woman in the back?

>> Speaker (Arlene): Yeah, I just came in and I'm just catching what's going on. But we're talking about 911, right? Well, OK. So I worked for the New York State government. And then next to Rochester Public Safety. So, in December, I left work, and on the way home, something happened and I got hit. And then they left. It was hit and run. I pulled over to check where — and my mirror was in the middle of the street. So I had to walk out there and pick it up so I'd have the part. And the drivers did eventually. And I'm like, well, there's a camera right there. The next day, I told my supervisor what had happened. And so I left early. Instead of calling 911, I went in person because it's right next door to my building. Very easy. And the guy at the desk was not very friendly. Seemed kind of arrogant. And I said, excuse me, I'm Deaf. I said it with my voice. Yo, hello, excuse me? So he was talking to me, and I said would you be willing to write with me? Instead of calling 911, maybe I should have called 911 instead of walking over there. Because, if I went, it's like, I'd have to go home, call 911, and come back to the same place.

So I sat and waited for someone to come, and no one ever did. I saw people coming in, being served, going out while I sat and waited. So I wasted, I don't know, 30-45 minutes of my time. I decided, again, went to the front desk there and said, I'm Deaf. And they said you have to wait, have a seat. And I said no, I'm not going to wait. You've seen this big line of people. You need to help me now. I need to make a report. So they called the relay services. They gave me an information like to call relay services. But like, why would I do that? So they gave me this blank thing. I'm like an accident happened. And police tend to write notes about the drivers, right? So they gave me this blank thing, and I said OK, well, if I fill it out, where do I submit that? They said mail it to Albany. And I said, why can't I turn it in here? So I just let it go at that point. It seemed pointless.

>> Speaker: Yeah, why would they send it to Albany?

>> Speaker: Yeah, they told me to send it to Albany, which makes no sense.

>> Speaker: Was that the State Police that you were talking to or county?

>> Speaker: It was right here. It was, I think it was Monroe County, or I think it was the city where this happened. So I was like, why Albany? Very far away.

>> SJ: So, hi, everyone. My name is SJ and I go to the University of Rochester Med Center. I know that they have their own team of interpreters for the med center. And they have like over 50 interpreters there for the hospital. But I'm wondering, does Monroe County Police have staff interpreters? Do they have a pool or a team of interpreters to call when a 911 situation happens?

>> Speaker: EB, can you answer that?

>> Elizabeth Butcher: From what I've heard, no.

>> Speaker: Perhaps that's a policy proposal.

>> Speaker: Yeah, maybe that'd be a good start to have 911 or the police have their own team of interpreters.

>> Speaker: Monroe County doesn't have any interpreters of our own. I think it'll be very important for Monroe County to hire some interpreters. It would empower us. But that's for the community to do the work to let them know that hey, we want interpreters there. If that's your opinion, then your voice matters more than mine.

>> Speaker: I was just saying, yeah, how can we do that?

>> Speaker: Through the DEC is one way, yes. Another way would be through Language Access complaints. There's a form that you can complain, submit a grievance. You can Google that. But yes, I think that would be the beginning of something.

>> Chaz: Yeah, just collecting data really.

We're just getting a little time warning. So we need to wrap up here. Maybe one more comment.

>> Speaker: So I've been involved in Rochester Deaf Fest. For, as an example, I met a woman named Renee Nicole, who is the police liaison for the Deaf community. She's no longer in that position anymore. There are two other ladies in that position who barely sign. And I believe don't understand any sort of Deaf culture. And communicating with them is pointless.

>> Speaker: If you could find the name of that individual, send it to us, please. Because we're looking for the same source of information. So yeah.

>> Speaker: I will look in my email and check.

>> Speaker: This is Mary Karol. There's one person, I'm not sure whether they work for the City of Rochester or the county. His name is Brian McCoy. He represents the Deaf community.

>> Speaker: EB is saying yes, he's the Sherriff's designee.

>> Speaker: ...individual and we have worked together to present for the next RID conference at the national level with police and interpreters working together, which will be in May. So that's one person I know of, but I have to warn you that there are so many people — I had to tell him that there are so many people who don't know of you. And he said, yes, I know. And I believe he's at Monroe County.

>> Speaker: Is that someone you've been in contact with?

>> Speaker: I've emailed and emailed that I've gotten no response, just so you know.

>> Speaker: Yeah, yeah, that's very frustrating.

>> Speaker: OK. Yeah, all right, we do have to wrap up. Last comment, Frank?

>> Frank: Who does 911? Who pays for 911? The State or Monroe County? Or who pays for 911?

>> Speaker: The county and city.

>> Speaker: Few different answers. So it seems the city and the county both pay for 911.

>> Frank: So that means our tax?

>> Chris: Yeah, really, each individual jurisdiction has to pay for their own 911 dispatchers.

>> Frank: So we are all paying for it, but there's still an issue. So I don't understand.

>> Speaker: Right. Right. I don't get it. Heard. OK.

So, thank you. That's all the time we have. We have to pass over to the next working group. Nicole, if you don't mind coming up? Looks like we have plenty of things to work on. Thank you for your comments.

>> Nicole Dugan: Thank you. Hi, everyone. My name is Nicole Dugan. And I'm working with the **Data Group**. We are last but not least. We're actually very important.

[Applause]

>> Nicole Dugan: Data applies to all of us. So I've seen some folks who arrived late. I just want to review what we learned from the previous working groups. So the Employment Group gave a review. And Entrepreneurship also gave their review. And the Policy Review Board. And the Communication Board. So we've gone through a few different conversations today. And we were just talking about police accountability with the working group.

So this working group is about what data we have and what gaps there are. So trying to identify what is there, what we're looking for, and what we need to implement.

If the city does not provide interpreters or we do not track the providing of interpreters, it's hard to prove that there's a problem and that interpreters aren't being provided. So that's one concern we have. We've been focusing on getting data for that. Tracking interpreter requests and whether or

not they're being filled.

NTID's office, they say we have like 90% of requests covered or something like that. But out in the city, we don't have anything like that. So that data is really important.

And also considering DeafBlind individuals, often we don't have good representation for DeafBlind people in our data sets. They're often overlooked. So we want to incorporate collection of data around their community as well.

We also want to talk about emergency alert systems and get data for that. Whether or not it's accessible. Do Deaf people know about the new alert system? Just last week, I think it was, they said how many people had signed up for the alert system. And we broke down the percentage of hearing versus Deaf people and compared that to the population of Rochester and the other population of the globe. I think, EB?

>> Elizabeth Butcher: I think at this time, it's 50 Deaf people of who have signed up. But it's greater percentage than the overall hearing population.

>> Nicole Dugan: Yeah, so 50, but then the hearing population of people who signed up is much more. So 50 Deaf people out of 40,000, I mean we definitely need more folks signing up for the alert system so that we can get more data on that. We have certain things in place, but they should be more accessible.

For now, there's a really common buzzword: Informed decision making. You know, how do we get the data so that we can apply it and make a decision that's informed? We don't, we want to actually use statistics and evidence that we have. And once we get that data, then who do we send it to, how is it analyzed? So there's a big disconnect between the data that we have and how it can actually be applied. Data will also help us a lot with our working groups to better be able to influence and advise and make recommendations on things like policy. So, if we say oh, we want this or we need that, the community needs this, they're going to ask OK, that's your opinion, what data do you have? So any evidence that we have to back up our claims is going to be much more effective in the long run.

So we've talked a lot about Deaf events here in the county, interpreter accessibility. And we're wondering if there's a way to collect data on Deaf events. Is there a catalog on Deaf awareness? Do people know about events that are happening in the city? Is there a centralized place where we can advertise that information, to outreach, and to be involved with the community more, to get more people to show up? Just to manage our data better too, then disseminate the information in a more effective way is also part of our strategy.

One other important point too is that it's very difficult to collect data. For instance, with the Deaf population here, they don't know that there are gaps maybe, and they don't know that there are opportunities for them to be involved in data collection. They might show up to an event, have fun, and then leave, and not realize that there was a chance to document that they were there.

So, maybe if you go to like a free music event, you might notice there's like an app or a website that says yes, I've RSVP'd, I'm going, I registered for this event, that sort of thing. So that becomes data for those event hosts to know how many people attended, etc. We need to do the same thing for Deaf events so that we can know how many people are showing up, are people aware of the events, are interpreters being provided?

So having a system of organizing and collecting data so that we can make more informed decisions is a part of our goal as well. So, yeah, we're not tracking interpreters. We want to start doing that to address the inequity that our Deaf community is facing here in Rochester.

So now I'm curious, does anyone have any thoughts or experiences they'd like to share regarding data collection?

>> Linzie: I think right now there's currently a group of latened hearing loss individuals, and then there's another group of Deaf individuals. It seems like that that data could be conflated, right? So many of those individuals are not requesting interpreting services. That's because they don't use ASL as their primary language source.

I'm curious, what types of protection will you have on that data collection, and what would that be used for? I'm not sure if that will be related to other types of research, but I think that would be important too. One example would be stem cell research.

>> Speaker: So, Linzie, just to clarify, you're asking about protections when working with data?

>> Linzie: Yes

>> Nicole Dugan: Yes. Our working group, we are looking for a way to not only collect the data, but also to have protections in place so that everyone's information is secure. And that is always the priority. And, you know, it's not just going to be stored in a Google Drive or something like that. We want to be very official with this. And, of course, we wouldn't store, collect medical information or anything like that. We just want to collect some data on the general population.

>> Brad: This is Bradley. So, as part of your scope, I'm wondering, are you going to survey how much each department utilizes interpreting services? When we're considering budget, how do we get that information? Is that part of your accountability to request those numbers from different departments to justify the need for, you know, if we did a centralized budget, we would need to know how much to request? Would that be a \$1 million budget, a \$2 million budget? What are your plans for that?

>> Nicole Dugan: Yeah, originally, we started by seeing what data is even out there in Monroe County, in Rochester, across the US. And we did find some data that we didn't know existed prior, but we also were able to identify gaps. So that is something that we're still in the process of. We need to focus on a little bit more of OK, what data do we have, and let's organize it. Let's create a centralized resource of what data we have so that we can address the gaps more effectively.

>> Speaker: Just wanted to add also that we're not just collecting data, but with a goal of improving community, county, and city services. To create data standards, the number of Deaf people, the number of people with signing, the number of people who are oral, we need all of that. We don't have a specific enough information, then it's not helpful for our goals.

>> Nicole Dugan: Yes. And to connect to what Linzie's comment was, is that, of course, we have a large Deaf population, but how many of them are signing and how do we provide services that accommodate everyone? Of course, there's a lot of Hard of Hearing or folks with hearing loss that don't sign. And so we want to make recommendations that are meaningful for everyone and can address all of those needs. And not marginalize any of the various groups within our Deaf community.

>> Frank: This is Frank. Can we connect with the census in any sort of way? I know that there's a lot of data collected on different racial groups. And I'm not sure if that type of information is collected. Are you CODA? Are you Hard of Hearing? Like, it would be nice to see those selections included on the census too. I pay taxes, and the census would be an easy way to capture that data. It's fairly weak in regards to our population. I know that with technology, there's really no excuse to not include it. And with AI, that's why I'm wondering if that couldn't improve the census.

>> Nicole Dugan: Yeah, the census is definitely something we've considered. It's a federal effort. In Monroe County legislature, I'd have to double check, but we do have a place where we collect census data on our population. And does that specifically address the Deaf community?

>> Speaker (EB): I don't think so. On the census itself, it asks if what spoken language do you use at home. You could put down ASL. But other than that, I don't know. There needs to be improvements made, for sure.

>> Nicole Dugan: Right, right.

>> Frank: This is Frank. One thing I learned, I live in Greece and the local fire department is a central hub. And I went in and provided my address and my license, and I said I'm Deaf and I'd like you to log this, right? So then, if anything happens, then you can come to my home. But that's not counted in any sort of census.

>> Nicole Dugan: Yeah, that's a good point. It seems that yeah, there are local fire departments that are willing to collect that data and yet, there's not a systemic approach to doing so. And hopefully, we can influence the county and beyond to be more standardized in their collection of data to better serve our community. So, that's a good point, yeah, that you can go to your local fire department and let them know you're Deaf and have them document that.

>> Frank: Maybe we could fine them for noncompliance.

>> Nicole Dugan: Is there another comment? Mary Karol?

>> Mary Karol: Yeah. I just wanted to add that I think data is very important for police, for firefighters, for medical, for EMS, EMT, for all of them to know where we are, so that when they arrive, they're going to that location, they know and to have services ready already.

>> Nicole Dugan: Yeah, agreed, definitely, yeah. Steve? David?

>> David: I think an important part of the data collection is the burden of report and who that lies on. Typically, as Deaf individuals, we will report, but it would be nice to see that accountability be shared as well. For example, if somebody says to me, you don't have an interpreter, I don't have an interpreter, and then I have to leave, and I would have to report it. But somebody within that place of business, it would be nice to have them reported as well. And perhaps in the Deaf community, we could say I was declined services because there was no access.

>> Nicole Dugan: Yeah, that's a good issue to consider. You know, we do have different ways of sorting our systems, and we don't necessarily want to put it on the Deaf folks to have to document that and then have it be put into a system that silos the information and doesn't actually cohesively address the quality of the services and the lack of services, etc. We know that there are many requests going through. Amy, of course, is making many, processing those requests. But how do we organize that for the whole community? So, OK, last final comment, Frank?

>> Frank: Another issue is just the licensing. I've just, that's been such a challenge. If a Deaf individual is in an accident and the information is listed on their license, perhaps when they arrive to the hospital, that will be helpful, and services will already be provided there. That way they would know ahead of time. And then I could, as a Deaf individual, arrive to the hospital with services right away. With all this technology, there's just no excuse.

>> Nicole Dugan: Yeah, that's a good idea. Thank you.

>> Speaker: Thank you so much, Nicole. Thank you. It is noon. I want to respect your time so you can leave soon, but I do want to close, I want to thank the DEC members and everyone who came today. I want to explain a few things. First of all, our working groups tend to overlap. We do not work in silos; we share information with each other. Kind of universal design. So, whatever experiences we have, we share with the other groups.

The second thing is if you would like or to consider joining a working group as a community member, it would be great if you could meet one of the facilitators, Nicole, myself, Bradley. Come up to any one of us and say, I would like to join your working group. We will get your contact. DEC will be meeting again in May and June, TBD exact dates.

We really value your feedback. We cannot be successful without you being our devil's advocates and joining our groups. We will listen to your opinions. And we would love to get this information out there. Please bear with us. This is our first year. We have set our goals. And we are working on promoting this. And we want to reflect your needs. So we wanted, the concept is to empower the community. And we are not selective in the groups. We are a community-based organization. We would love for community people to join our council. People who work, people who are part-time, people who are knowledgeable, who are friends, who just heard about this.

We have many other communities out there looking at us as an example. And we want to make this a place that people can learn from us. And we need your help for that. Thank you again for coming. Please grab something to eat before you head out. And thank you. Thank you so much, everyone.

[Applause]