
Setting Up ALDs for a Meeting or Conference

AN002

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Application Note is to advise *assistive listening device (ALD)* users and operators how to properly set up equipment for a meeting or conference. This Application Note will present general recommendations and procedures on the setting up, testing and maintenance of assistive listening equipment. Since there is a vast variety of ALDs, for specific details the relevant user's manual should be consulted.

THE DAY BEFORE

The day before the meeting or conference is probably the most crucial period in the process. Potential problems or catastrophes can be avoided by setting up and testing the equipment in advance.

1. Set up all the equipment, both primary and backup, under real conditions. For example, if the meeting room will be set up in a specified configuration of tables, chairs, podiums, overhead projectors, etc. set up the room before testing the assistive listening equipment. This way it is possible to find if a flip chart will block the line of site to a *visual display system* to if the overhead projector creates unnecessary background noise when placed too close to an *assistive listening device*.
2. ALD receivers can be used with different

listening accessories such as head phones, ear buds, loops or silhouettes. Depending on the type of, or lack of, hearing aid, hard of hearing attendees will require different listening accessories. To save time and reduce stress on the day of the meeting, find out in advance what accessories will be used. Often it is possible to canvas hard of hearing attendees for their preferences in advance.

3. Many ALDs are battery powered. Therefore, it is very important that the batteries be fully charged before the meeting starts. More difficulties with ALDs are attributed to low batteries than any other cause. For more information on charging batteries see Application Note, AN001.
4. Ensure that all personnel are completely familiar with the equipment that they will be operating. They should also be made aware of any potential problems that may arise. There will be no time during the meeting or conference to learn how to use the equipment. If the equipment is not operating, this will create stress for both the operator and hard of hearing users.
5. Support staff are crucial to the smooth operation of a meeting or conference attended by hard of hearing people. The support staff are there to assist hard of hearing attendees on how to use the equipment, to look for potential problems, and to quickly solve them. As a general rule there should be one support

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- staff for every 25 to 30 hard of hearing
6. Ensure that the support staff are fully trained on the operation of the equipment and know how to deal with any potential problems. "What if" scenarios are sometimes helpful when training support staff how to resolve problems.

THE DAY

The day of the meeting or conference is generally very busy and hectic. This is where all the advance preparation will pay off.

1. Have hard of hearing attendees show up the meeting or conference early. This will give the support staff the opportunity to train the hard of hearing attendees in advance, thus reducing complications during the meeting itself. This time can also be used to outfit hard of hearing attendees with the appropriate listening accessory.

An alternative approach is to hold a short training sessions at the beginning of the meeting. This will not only benefit hard of hearing attendees, but also help to raise the awareness of "normal hearing" people to hearing access issues.

2. Ensure that the support staff are standing by to help, and are looking for potential problems with the assistive listening equipment.

1. Charge all batteries. There are some restrictions on charging batteries. In the case

attendees.

3. Have extra batteries on hand and ensure that those batteries are fully charged. If your equipment uses standard size batteries (i.e., "AA," "AAA," "9V," etc.) have some alkaline batteries as backup. As a general rule, you should have one set of spare batteries for every five pieces of equipment in use.
4. Have your backup equipment on-hand and ready to go at a moments notice. You should have at least one backup for every type of ALD used. Backups are really only practical for portable equipment such as infrared or FM receivers, or portable transmitters.
5. Note and write down any problems with the equipment. This may be used for future reference and training of support staff.
6. If possible, provide an evaluation sheet for hard of hearing attendees to fill out. Ask them how well (or poorly) the equipment worked for them, any problems they experienced, or what more could be done to improve their accessibility at future meetings.

THE DAY AFTER

Preparing notes the day after the meeting or conference provides an opportunity to evaluate the performance of the equipment and support staff, and to prepare for future events.

of Nickel-Cadmium (or NiCad) batteries, (which are the most common rechargeable

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type), charging them before they are fully drained can reduce their life (see Application Note AN001 for more information). For devices which use Nickel-Cadmium batteries, a log may be maintained indicating how long the device has been in use. When the device/batteries combination is approaching its specified operating time within 2-3 hours, leave the device on and allow it to fully drain the batteries. Then charge the batteries.

2. Have any equipment which experienced problems repaired or serviced immediately.
3. Compile the information from the evaluation sheets and hold a debriefing session with the support staff. This provides an opportunity to find out what worked and what didn't, and enables the team to be better prepared to meet the accessibility needs of hard of hearing people attending meetings or conferences.

TROUBLESHOOTING

In general, the failure of an assistive listening system can be traced to one piece of equipment. In other words, there is a bad link in the chain. The best approach for finding where the breakdown occurred is to go down the chain and replace each piece of equipment in turn. After each substitution check if the system operates properly. If the substitute equipment did not solve the problem, put back the original piece of equipment and go on to the next on in the chain. Continue this process until the faulty piece of equipment is found. For example, if an infrared

system doesn't work, replace the IR receiver first, then the microphone, then the amplifier/driver, finally the infrared panel.

CONCLUSIONS

Assistive listening equipment can be very effective at improving the access to information for hard of hearing people and their ability to exchange ideas at meetings or conferences. ALDs are complex pieces of equipment. Therefore, the equipment must be properly set up for the meeting or conference. Time must be spent in advance preparing for the event, ensuring that the equipment is working as it should. At all times the equipment must be properly maintained and serviced. Finally, having persons at the meeting or conference who are completely familiar with the operation of the equipment and potential problems is necessary to avoid disastrous situations.