

Accessibility Reminder: Assistive Listening at the Smithsonian

The central office of accessibility, [Access Smithsonian](#), strives to help the museums across SI provide consistent and integrated access to all our buildings, exhibitions, public programs, and digital endeavors. To ensure volunteers and staff have the most up to date information to best serve the public, Access Smithsonian will be sending updated guidelines and best practices on accessibility over the next year.

If visitors inquire about assistive listening systems, equipment, or devices at the Smithsonian, the following information can be delivered.

- The Smithsonian has a long and valued history of serving and collaborating with the d/Deaf and hard of hearing communities.
- We provide access for visitors who are hard of hearing or have hearing loss through one of the three types of assistive listening equipment currently available on the market. o Radio Frequency o Infrared o Induction Loop
- The Americans with Disabilities Act and Architectural Barriers Act standards do not specify which type of assistive listening equipment (Radio Frequency, Infrared, or induction loop) must be used. The Smithsonian selects the assistive listening equipment that works best within the environment in which it is located.
- Most museums
 - o Use Radio Frequency systems with neck loop attachments for docents and visitor services.
 - o Use Infrared in some auditoriums and Radio Frequency and/or induction loops in others.
 - o Have induction loops at information desks.
- We have consulted with experts in the field who acknowledge that the Smithsonian is one of the most complex environments for providing assistive listening to patrons. We are addressing this challenge strategically and systematically over the next five years to find the best form of assistive listening technology for each exhibit and situation and the one most compatible with current hearing aids.
- If a visitor or advocate voices displeasure with what systems or equipment are available,
 - o We have heard and appreciate your concerns and share in your desire to provide the best Smithsonian experience to all our visitors, including the d/Deaf and hearing loss communities.
 - o We believe we have developed a sound strategy for implementation of assistive listening across the Smithsonian and are systematically expanding access to the d/Deaf and hearing loss communities.
- Our commitment to these communities is unwavering and will continue.
- If visitors would like to continue this discussion, we encourage them to email the central office of accessibility, Access Smithsonian, at access@si.edu.