The mission of The Shedd Institute's Loop Lane County Committee is to understand, educate and advocate for the installation and usage of hearing loop/telecoil systems in appropriate public and private spaces.

"Loop Your Life": An introduction to the personal hearing loop concept

Of the 3 most common assistive listening systems used in public spaces, a hearing loop is the one vastly preferred by community members with hearing loss for many reasons. A loop can be large and complex to fill a basketball arena or concert hall, or small and simple for their ticket kiosks. Although the USA is behind other countries in the number and locations of loops available, more and more are being installed every week.

However, loop users actually spend much more time in more personal or intimate settings than in these venues – up to 5,800 waking hours per year – and they obviously want to hear everywhere they are, all that time!

A small, portable, personal loop can help a person hear better at work, at play, in the car, at a doctor's appointment, in a store, at the museum, on an airplane, at the lawyer's office, with the grandkids, in a socially distanced outdoor book club, on Zoom, etc., – and right THROUGH today's Plexiglas panels.

The 4 critical parts of a "hearing loop" system of any size:

A "hearing loop" system requires 4 components, whether it is a large, room-sized loop, a small counter loop, or a portable loop. Simply put, they are:

1) A **copper wire** in the shape of a loop, which serves as an electro-magnetic antenna and creates the loop's field.
2) One or more **microphones** to pick up the desired sound.
3) An electronic "**driver**" to transmit that sound into the loop.
4) A tiny coiled wire, called a **telecoil** (or t-coil), inside a listener's hearing aid, cochlear implant, or special earphone receiver. [A hearing specialist must activate the telecoil program in a listener's device to directly receive the sound from the hearing loop.]

Hearing loops are usually permanently fixed in place, where the copper wire literally encircles the listeners in large room-sized areas such as houses of worship, concert halls, airport departure gates, or courtrooms, or in smaller spaces such as living rooms, cars, trains, buses, ticket kiosks, reception desks, or elevators.

Hearing loops can also be temporarily installed or portable, such as for temporarily looping conference rooms, speakers' panels, etc., or compact personal units designed more for 1 on 1 or small group communication and social settings. We have been experimenting with the Williams PLA90 device. Contacta also makes a portable loop.

The Williams PLA90 portable loop:

This 8"x8" unit has the loop, microphone, and driver built into the device.

A listener simply turns it on, places it in the correct proximity to both the speaker and the listener, and then activates his/her telecoil program to be able to hear through the loop.

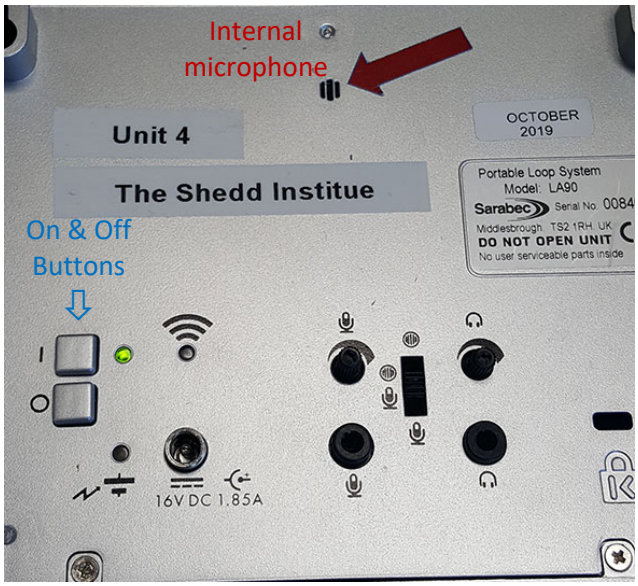
This device is marketed as a "counter top" loop, and it is very good for that use. However, The Shedd Loop Committee believes it can function even more powerfully for the listener's personal use with an added external microphone on a long cord to provide greater reach and coverage (benefits explained, below).

The Williams loop can remain plugged into an electrical outlet or operate for 6-7 hours on rechargeable batteries.

(*note:* there are other portable systems on the market, but we have found this set-up to be the most affordable and readily attainable on Amazon, easiest to use, and to have the best sound quality.)

To maximize utility and creative applications:

1) **Proximity & location:** To "be in the loop" the listener must be within 2-3 feet of either flat side of the device. The internal loop is vertical. The listener should experiment with the best placement. If the volume seems lower than usual, change the proximity or orientation of the portable loop for best sound. Trust that this system <u>works,</u> but <u>you</u> need to adjust it depending on your immediate setting and needs. For example,
    a. If you are very tall and standing up, try placing the device higher.
    b. If you are playing on the floor with a grandchild, move it lower. You might even want to tilt it depending on the angle of your head – there is a directionality for your t-coil.
    c. Although this is designed as a 1:1 device, we have found that 2-3 users can effectively use it simultaneously, such as for a small meeting. (Non t-coil users should sit to the narrow sides of the device which is "out of the loop" and becomes a dead spot).
2) **Built-in microphone:** the microphone is on the back side, towards the top of the device (red arrow), and should be facing the person whose voice needs to be picked up by the loop Thus, the front of the unit should face the listener.
    a. Because this is an "omni-directional" mic, it will pick up all sounds within a certain distance.
    b. Again, experiment where it is best to place both the listener and the device, given the venue. Restaurants are notoriously difficult to hear in, and people with hearing loss have often figured out the best spots in their favorite restaurants.
        i. BUT, a listener might find that switching sides of the table might actually work best when using the loop, i.e. so that the mic faces his/her companions and not the voices from other tables and other background clatter.
        ii. The listener can try using his/her "t-coil only" setting on their hearing aid/CI, rather than the "t-coil+mic" setting, to prevent the hearing device's microphone from picking up that clatter too!



3) **Portability:** Put the device in a little carrying bag and take it with you on all of your appointments with doctors, lawyers, insurance agents, etc. – anywhere that you want to hear accurately and better. *These people want your business*, and they want you to understand what they are saying to you.
    a. **Advocacy:** After a couple of visits from you, they will get smart and purchase two devices themselves – one for their reception desk and one for their office!! (~$300 each)
        i. You are NOT their only client who uses hearing aids!! That's a guarantee!
        ii. If they resist using your loop with you, take your business elsewhere!!
4) **Additional, external microphone:** the Williams loop can accept an additional microphone by using the jack on the back of the device. The external microphone is needed when you are in a group setting and a portion of the group is too far away for the internal microphone to adequately pick up all of the voices. *This feature is what our Loop*

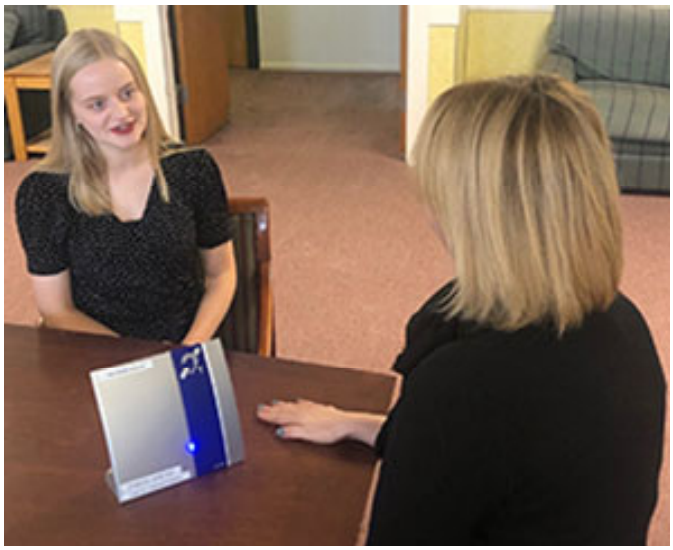
Committee believes is seriously underutilized, and we ask for your feedback and creativity to expand our focus to "loop your life"!

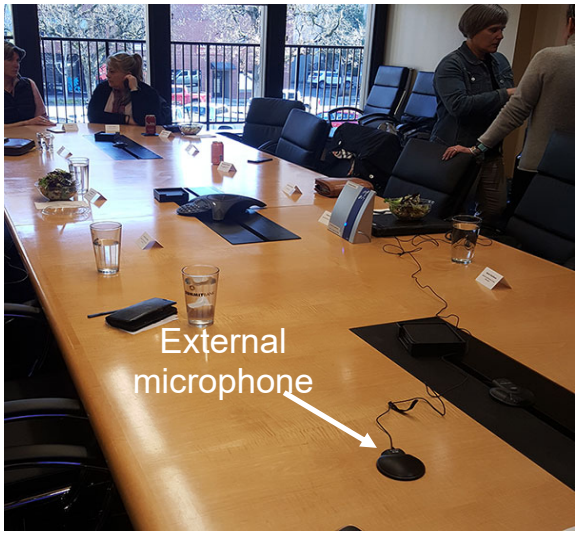
a. We have found an inexpensive, flat, table microphone with good audio quality that can be placed as far away as 8-10 feet from the speaker and still pick up the sound. Any microphone (e.g. lapel mic, gooseneck table mic) with a 3.5mm jack can be used. This one is a SoundTech CM-1000 3.5mm "conference" brand available on Amazon.

b. There is a microphone symbol on the back of the loop that has 3 settings: internal microphone only; internal + external microphone; and external microphone only.
   i. Most of the time the middle setting will be the most flexible. But again, experiment if you want to cut out one of the microphones from picking up sound.
   ii. There is also a volume control knob for the external microphone.

c. **SAMPLE USES:** We have used this set up, for example, at a very long conference table. In the photo below, it would probably have been more effective for the loop user to sit closer to the end of the table with the little flat mic stretched down the middle. But it was so powerful that it picked up all the speakers anyway.
   i. Others have used these at the **dinner table** and in the **living room** just while watching TV with someone. Using a cable you can patch into your computer for a Zoom meeting or into a TV at someone's house. Try it in restaurants, cars, airplanes, outdoor BBQs, etc. Grandkids can actually whisper into the mic and tell you secrets!!
   ii. Your friends <u>without</u> hearing loss don't always realize how physically exhausting it can be for you to have to <u>work</u> at hearing what someone is saying. Additionally, even the volume of a familiar voice of a spouse can vary daily depending on health, distance, fatigue. They will be excited to use this loop with you!

Please experiment with when and where you want to hear better and <u>let us know</u> what you learn!





For more information, questions, and/or to send us your feedback about how you have used your portable loop:
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