



THE PARTNERSHIP
FOR INCLUSIVE DISASTER STRATEGIES

Inclusive Emergency Management: “With” Not “For” Disabled People

— www.disasterstrategies.org —

Introduction

Who is The Partnership

Who We Are: The Partnership

The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies is the only U.S. disability-led organization with a focused mission on equity for people with disabilities and people with access and functional needs throughout all planning, programs, services and procedures before, during and after disasters and emergencies.

Your Disability & Disaster Hub

Disability and Disaster Hub: What We Do



Support Disabled Disaster Survivors and Organizations

- Disability & Disaster Hotline
- Technical assistance and guidance



Strengthen Community Resilience

- Education and awareness
- Convener



Influencing Advocacy, Policy, and Systems Change

Agreements and Goals

Group Agreements

- Maintain confidentiality
- Ask questions
- Have fun!

Today's Goals

When you leave the training, you will be able to:

- Understand the difference between planning for disabled people and planning with disabled people and disability-led organizations.
- Identify common barriers that prevent disabled people and people with access and functional needs from fully participating in emergency planning, response, recovery, and mitigation.

Today's Goals

- Recognize the roles of Centers for Independent Living, disability-led organizations, and other community partners in emergency management.
- Learn strategies for meaningful engagement, co-design, and partnership with disability communities before disasters occur.
- Learn strategies for integrating disability inclusion and whole-community engagement across all phases of emergency management.

Disproportionate Impact of Disasters

**People with disabilities
are 2-to-4 times more
likely to die or be injured
in disasters than
non-disabled people.**

Disasters are Increasing

“In the near term, every region in the world is projected to face further increases in climate hazards ... [including] an increase in heat-related human mortality and morbidity; ... food-borne, water-borne, and vector-borne diseases and mental health challenges; ... and flooding in coastal and other low-lying cities and regions...”

- [Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report Summary for Policymakers, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#)

Public Health Emergencies Have a Disproportionate Impact on Disabled People

COVID “highlights the disproportionate impact of emergencies on populations with existing disparities. Public health emergencies ... disproportionately affect populations with existing disparities, including people of color and those living in poverty, in overcrowded housing conditions, with food insecurity, with disabilities...”

Public Health Emergencies Are Increasing

The severity of public health emergencies is [increasing](#), fueled by contagious disease threats, natural disasters, and human-made catastrophes like [opioid abuse](#). In 2024 alone, the U.S. faced 17 public health emergencies and at least three public health advisories.

- [Northwell Health](#)

Definitions

Disability

Under the ADA and the Rehab Act, people with disabilities are individuals with a:

- Physical or mental impairment that **substantially limits one or more major life activities**
- Record of having such impairment
- Regarded as having an impairment

Substantially Limits

Substantially limits “does not mean a severe condition, but it does mean a condition that creates an impairment when compared to most people. Determining whether a condition is substantially limiting must be done on a case-by-case basis.”

Example: A mild allergy to pollen is not a substantially limiting condition.

Major Life Activities

Under the ADA Amendment Acts of 2008, **major life activities** include

- Caring for oneself
- Performing manual tasks
- Seeing
- Hearing
- Eating
- Sleeping
- Walking
- Standing
- Lifting
- Bending
- Speaking
- Breathing
- Learning
- Reading
- Concentrating
- Thinking
- Communicating
- Working
- Major bodily functions

Major Bodily Functions

Under the ADA Amendment Acts of 2008, **major bodily functions** include

- Functions of the immune system;
- Normal cell growth; and,
- Digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions.

Access and Functional Needs: FEMA Definition

“Individual circumstances requiring assistance, accommodation, or modification for mobility, communication, transportation, safety, health maintenance, etc., due to any temporary or permanent situation that limits an individual’s ability to take action in an emergency.”

- [National Incident Management System, FEMA, 2017](#)

Who Has Access and Functional Needs

In addition to people with disabilities, this includes:

- People who are marginalized, stigmatized, or excluded
- Older adults
- Individuals with limited language proficiency or low literacy
- People with temporary and chronic health conditions
- Pregnant people
- People experiencing homelessness
- Individuals with limited access to transportation or the financial resources to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a disaster

Access and Functional Needs Fast Facts

- People with disabilities are one group within the broader category of people with access and functional needs.
- **People with disabilities are members of a legally protected class under the ADA and Rehabilitation Act.**
- **People with disabilities have rights that people with access and functional needs don't have.**
- You can have a disability and have other access and functional needs.

Access and Functional Needs

Please avoid referring to people as “AFNs” or use “AFN” or “access and functional” need interchangeably with disability .

Disability-Led Organizations

Disability-led organizations (DLOs): Majority of board and staff are disabled people.

- They may be cross-disability (e.g. Centers for Independent Living)
 - Cross-disability: Focused on issues affecting disabled people, regardless of disability type
- They may focus on a single disability (e.g. National Federation of the Blind, National Association of the Deaf, Autistic Self Advocacy Network).

Plain Language

“A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.”

- [International Plain Language Federation](#)

How to Write in Plain Language

- Be concise
- Be organized
- Be direct
- Be clear
- Use common words
- Define acronyms, abbreviations, and jargon
- Use a readability checker

Questions?

Planning “For “ vs Planning “With”

Planning “For” Is...

- Non-collaborative
- Top down planning
- Based on presumption of needs by “experts” without lived experience

Some Examples of Planning “For”

- Exercises that don't include disabled people as players
- Policies that separate disabled people from families
- Policies that don't allow disabled disaster survivors to bring personal assistants with them to shelters
- Registries

Registries are...

- Costly
- Based on the assumption that disabled people are always at home
- Create a false expectation that disabled people will be rescued

Planning “For” Disabled People

When you plan without disabled people, you:

- Are more likely to get things wrong, putting lives at risk
- May not plan most efficiently
- Miss opportunities to reach out to the disability community
- Might not be including trusted messengers
- May forget accommodations

Planning “With” Means Meaningful Participation

Sometimes disabled people are unintentionally tokenized.

Tokenize: “To hire, treat, or use (someone) as a symbol of inclusion or compliance with regulations, or to avoid the appearance of discrimination or prejudice.”

- Dictionary.com

Planning “With” Means Meaningful Participation

Way to avoid tokenizing disabled people:

- Invite the disability community to participate in planning, exercises, etc.
- Provide access to meetings, exercises, documents, events, etc.
- Listen to and follow the expertise disabled people bring to the table

Planning “With” Disabled People

When you plan with, you:

- Recognize: Lived experience with a disability = expertise
- Recognize disabled people’s leadership
- Provide access (e.g., ASL interpreters, physically accessible location, use language that is understandable to all, etc.)
- Assume that if disabled people aren’t participating, there may be outreach and other access barriers
- And more!

Planning “With” Disabled People

Include disabled people in planning because we:

- Have expertise
- Are accustomed to and good at solving problems
- Don't just identify problems, we identify solutions often in the most cost effective ways

**Nothing About Us
Without Us!**

Scenario 1

A public health agency wants to increase participation of disabled people so it asks the local Arc, an organization for people with intellectual disabilities, to send a person with intellectual disabilities to the next planning meeting.

Are they planning for or planning with?

Scenario 2

No one with a disability attends any of the emergency planning meetings so the planning committee sends a copy of the emergency plan to the Center for Independent Living (CIL).

Are they planning for or planning with?

Scenario 3

A planning committee wants to increase planning committee participation of disabled people. They:

- Meet with their local CIL to tell them about the committee
- Ask if they know of people who may be interested
- Find out if they have access needs
- Ensure plain language is used throughout the process

Are they planning for or planning with?

Questions?

Centers for Independent Living and Other Disability-Led Organizations

Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are:

- Disability-led
- Cross-disability
- Non-residential
- Locally administered
- Not-for-profit organizations

[Granite State Independent Living](#) (GSIL) is New Hampshire Hampshire's CIL

Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

Core services include:

- Information and referral services
- Peer support
- Individual and systems advocacy
- Independent living skills training
- Transition services: youth transition + nursing facility

CILs can and have been resources in disasters and public health emergencies.

Inclusive Disaster Planning Strategies

Centers for Independent Living may be able to:

- Be points of distribution
- Identify accommodations
- Collaborate in preparedness, response, and recovery efforts

Independent Living Philosophy

Reflects the Social Model of Disability that says:

- Disabilities don't need to be fixed; rather, society needs to remove barriers and create inclusive environments
- Ableism and disability bias need to be mitigated
- Disabled people should have the right to self-determination, equal opportunity, full participation, and equity

Other DLOs

Examples of DLOs include:

- National Federation of the Blind (NFB)
- National Association of the Deaf (NAD)
- Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)
- American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)
- Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE)

Barriers to Planning

Barriers for Disabled People

- Meeting invitations and documents that are not accessible, because they are neither screen reader accessible nor written in plain language
- Not being provided accessible communication supports and services such as:
 - Sign language interpreters, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captions
 - Material in accessible format (e.g., screen reader compliant, large print, Braille, etc.)

Barriers for Disabled People

- Not using plain language
- Inaccessible physical meeting places
 - Someone who is trained in access should assess restrooms, entrances, meeting areas, parking lots, signage, etc.
- Lack of accessible transportation to and from meetings
- Not having pre- and post-meeting support where needed (not legally required)

Question for You

What are other barriers?

Questions?

Strategies for Meaningful Engagement

Address Ableism

Ableism

- Oppression based on physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, sensory, or other ability or perceived ability.
- The belief that not having a disability is superior to having a disability.
- The belief that non-disabled people are superior to disabled people.

Address Ableism

For meaningful engagement, ableism must be addressed. Ableism can be mitigated through:

- Inclusion of disabled people
- Training
- Expectations of non-ableist behavior
- Modeling anti-ableist behavior
- Interrupting ableist behavior when it happens, and addressing it after the fact if needed

Plan and Partner with Disability-Led Organizations

- Include DLOs in ALL aspects of planning.
- Include organizations which represent people with all types of disabilities.
- Create opportunities for partners to convene and lead planning meetings, preparedness events, exercises/drills.
- Don't just invite DLOs to come to your table, ask to visit theirs.

Inclusive Disaster Planning Strategies

Invite people with disabilities to your table:

- Planning meetings
- Exercises
- Conferences

Know Your Legal Obligations

Be aware of and comply with legal obligations under the ADA/Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and other applicable disability rights law, including providing:

- Sign language interpreters and providing materials in accessible format
- Making modifications to policies including allowing service animals
- Programs and services in physically accessible locations

Legal Obligations

Don't assume that your agency is in full compliance.
Get support if you need it.

Questions?

Strategies for Integrating Disability Inclusion

Disabled Subject Matter Experts

Consider consulting with disabled subject matter experts.

While everyone with a disability is an expert in their own experience, not everyone with a disability is, or should be expected to be, a subject matter expert.

- Ask about an individual's qualifications when technical expertise is needed.
- Compensate disabled people for their time and expertise.

Involving Disabled People

Are people with a wide range of disabilities involved in your emergency planning process?

If not, connect with DLOs to analyze which barriers are preventing people with disabilities from attending and meaningfully participating your planning meetings.

Strategies to Address Potential Barriers

Developing an accommodations strategy that:

- Articulates that accommodations should be included in a budgets and RFP/NOFO responses
- Ensures that invitations and other electronic correspondence are accessible
- Provides detailed information about how to obtain sign language interpreters
- Encourages the use of plain language

Outreach Strategy

- Solicits feedback about accessibility and feasibility of meeting timing before and after meetings
- Hosts physical meetings are:
 - On bus routes at times when buses are running
 - In physically accessible spaces
- Ensure people can participate in meetings and events virtually

Inclusive Disaster Planning Strategies

Go to disability community tables.

- Invite yourself to our tables
- Start and continue to build relationships with DLOs
- Get on disability community mailing lists

Disability Community Tables

- Meetings (e.g., CIL annual meetings)
- Social events (e.g., Deaf club picnic)
- Rallies on a disability issues
- Public hearings with a disability-related agenda
- Commemorations of anniversaries of the enactment of disability rights laws (e.g. ADA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), etc.)

Disability Representation

- Avoid *being abled* as the default assumption
- Represent disabled people in graphics, videos, and other media when the subject matter is not disability
- Be aware that disabled people have other marginalized identities

What Works

- Disability community-informed planning for preparedness, response, and recovery
- Disability community-informed training for emergency responders and public health
- Real-time, real-people drills and exercises
- Acknowledgement of individual and community agency, mutual aid efforts, and resilience

Budget and MOUs

Make sure that there are:

- Line item in budgets to provide items with an attached cost both during emergencies and during the planning process.
- Contracts/MOUs in place to provide interpreters and other items with costs attached during the planning process

Scenario 4

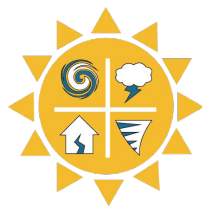
You are new to a public health department. Your supervisor has expressed concern that disabled people don't seem to be attending planning meetings and has charged you with increasing participation. What steps do you take?

What steps do you take?

Questions?

Resources

- [Granite State Independent Living \(GSIL\)](#)
- [Disability Rights Center - NH](#)
- [Northeast ADA Center](#)
- National Council on Disability: [Preserving Our Freedom: Ending Institutionalization of People with Disabilities During and after Disasters](#)
- The Partnership: [Some Considerations for Inclusive Planning](#)



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Thank you!

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