

A Functional Needs Framework for Every Community  
Emergency Planning and Response for People with Disabilities



# Including People with Disabilities in Your Emergency Exercises

## A Checklist for Emergency Programs

This document is part of a series created by Disability Alliance BC in order to help local Emergency Programs in British Columbia integrate the needs of people with disabilities into their emergency plans. The series was developed for the **A Functional Needs Framework for Every Community** project, based on key areas identified by local Emergency Programs.

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Disability Alliance BC



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## INCLUDING COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Conducting inclusive drills and exercises is a best practice because it will better meet the needs of the whole community.

Inclusive planning enables emergency managers to test how existing plans will meet the needs of people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs. It helps emergency managers to identify planning gaps and make recommendations for improvement.

Inclusive planning also builds important relationships between emergency programs and community stakeholders by establishing a collaborative process for exercise design, conduct and evaluation.

- ✓ Provide opportunities for stakeholders to contribute, collaborate and participate in designing, conducting and evaluating the annual exercise.
- ✓ Identify roles and responsibilities for community stakeholders in the pre-planning, scenario development, logistics, communications, debriefings, exercise activities, post-exercise evaluation, and After Action reports.
- ✓ Include people with disabilities and functional limitations in as many roles as possible: Players, Controllers, Evaluators, and Observers, in order to identify and plan best practices for an accessible exercise.

### BUILDING YOUR EXERCISE DESIGN TEAM

Inclusive planning enables you to create exercises that are realistic tests of your planning assumptions and components.

#### CONSIDERATIONS

- ✓ Identify key agencies and leaders in the disability community in your area. Invite them to participate on the exercise design team.
- ✓ Select diverse disability organizations knowledgeable about a range of disabilities: sensory, developmental/intellectual, mobility, cognitive, mental illness.
- ✓ Invite organizations that represent other populations with functional limitations and access needs: seniors and people with low-literacy (for example, new immigrants).



- ✓ Clearly identify the design team roles and expectations of Subject Matter Experts on disability and functional needs.
- ✓ Ensure full participation by these stakeholders, by making sure that your meetings are held in accessible facilities that are easy to get to and by ensuring that you provide alternative formats of communication, if required.

**INCLUSIVE PLANNING ALSO BUILDS IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EMERGENCY PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS BY ESTABLISHING A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS FOR EXERCISE DESIGN, CONDUCT AND EVALUATION.**

**DESIGNING THE EXERCISE AND PRE-PLANNING**

- ✓ At the start, assess and address barriers to full participation from all participant stakeholders (this should include physical, organizational, communication and technological accessibility).
- ✓ Plan for costs associated with providing disability accommodations and include these costs in your exercise budget (for example, sign language interpretation).
- ✓ Keep in mind, if you are testing aspects of the plan specifically for accessibility, do not create artificialities in the exercise design that will sabotage realistic testing.
- ✓ Design scenarios and injects that include community members with a diversity of disabilities that are impacted by the emergency or disaster.
- ✓ Consider the impacts of routine injects such as primary communication failures and the affect this will have on people with communication disabilities and their ability to receive public emergency information.
- ✓ Consult the Subject Matter Experts on your Exercise Design Team to ensure Controllers and Evaluators know what they need to consider in the course of their duties regarding accessibility.

**PLANNING LOGISTICS**

When planning exercise logistics, careful consideration needs to be given to:

- location of the exercise
- disability-specific safety needs of participants
- accessible parking and site access
- signage on site

All of these can affect the ability of people with disabilities and functional limitations to attend and participate in the exercise.



When choosing an exercise location/facility ask these key questions:

- ✓ Is the site easy to get to by para-transit or public transportation?
- ✓ Is there accessible parking available?
- ✓ Are the paths of travel into and around the facility accessible?
- ✓ Is the facility single story, if not, is there an elevator?
- ✓ Will individuals be able to enter the facility through accessible doorways?
- ✓ Will the facility have automatic doors or appropriate door handles?
- ✓ Will the facility be illuminated with external lighting during darkness?
- ✓ Is the facility large enough with unobstructed space for wheel chairs?

DABC Resource: See, *Setting Up Accessible Reception Centres and Group Lodgings* in the A Functional Needs Framework series, for information on ensuring accessible facilities and sites.

## CONDUCTING THE EXERCISE

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- ✓ Consider having people with disabilities in the roles of Controllers and Evaluators, as well as Players and Observers.
- ✓ Have Evaluators evaluate the exercise for issues that directly impact people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs, to make improvements to the plan that is being tested.
- ✓ Make sure the layout and process of participant registration is accessible/barrier free.
- ✓ Hold the participant briefing prior to the exercise in an accessible space, including the pathways to the space.
- ✓ Make sure pathways to areas used in the exercise are free of barriers or obstacles (unless the obstacles are part of the exercise, such as debris from an earthquake).

### COMMUNICATION IS CRITICAL

- ✓ Identify the ways you will be communicating with participants throughout the exercise and make sure the appropriate technology and resources are in place.
- ✓ Before the beginning of the exercise, review the needs of all participants with key Players. Make sure they understand how to use alternative communication methods to increase accessibility, such as using megaphones and describing photographs.



- ✓ When working directly with participants during the exercise, be prepared to:
  - Repeat what you say, orally or in writing.
  - Be patient, flexible and supportive when interacting with all participants and addressing their concerns.
  - Take time to understand what the individual is communicating and make sure the individual understands what you are communicating.

DABC resource: See, *Making Sure People with Communication Disabilities Get the Message*, and *A Functional Needs Framework for Every Community: A toolkit for local governments*, for more tips on communication and interaction with people with disabilities

## **EVALUATING THE EXERCISE**

- ✓ The hot wash, evaluation forms, participant debriefings, and after-action meetings, all provide opportunities to receive feedback from community stakeholders on accessibility, including: pre-planning, scenario development, logistics, communications and exercise activities.
- ✓ Provide alternative communication formats for evaluation forms and debriefing meetings.
- ✓ Identify and discuss issues that address accessibility for people with disabilities.
- ✓ Recommendations for improvements should be included in the After Action Report. This is another opportunity to include disability Subject Matter Experts to create a realistic and achievable Improvement Plan which is a critical step toward inclusive planning. ■

