



City of San Antonio  
Developing an Emergency Plan for People with Disabilities  
Tuesday, February 20, 2018

The first community meeting was held at the San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind (310 Eads)

- I. **Introductions:** Deborah Scharven, Accessibility Compliance Manager facilitated meeting. City staff included Olivia Gaitan, Christine Zuniga and Abraham Robles (available for Spanish translations) from the Disability Access Office and James Mendoza and Samantha Hayes from the Office of Emergency Management. Athalie Malone and Rachel Cywinski from the City's Disability Access Advisory Committee were also present. ASL Interpreters were provided by Deaf Link/Vital Signs. There were a total of twenty-two (22) citizens who participated in the community meeting.
- II. **Presentation:** Deborah Scharven explained the purpose of the community meetings, to obtain community feedback to help develop the City's Emergency Plan for People with Disabilities. She provided a tentative time line for the plan development:
  - Phase 1- Community Engagement: February-April
  - Phase 2- Draft and Community Input: May-Aug.
  - Phase 3- Second Draft and Community Review: September-October
  - Phase 4- Final Draft and Community Review: November
  - Phase 5- Emergency Plan Released: December 15, 2018
- III. **Discussion Topics:** The attendees were broken up into six (6) small groups to discuss each topic then share their findings with the larger group. Issues/concerns/questions and recommendations are listed with the individual topics.
  1. **Notifications and Alerts**
    - Common concern was not receiving timely, detailed information about impending emergencies and current alerts.

- Those with visual impairments are not able to get accurate information from television news when information is scrolled across the bottom, radio makes receiving notifications easier but you may not be listening at the time an alert goes out. It was suggested to work with Owl Radio during times of alerts to help broadcast out information.
- For the Deaf community, media should be more aware of camera angles during emergency declarations/ news conferences, etc. In some cases an interpreter is present but the news does not broadcast them.
- More marketing needs to be done for the Office of Emergency Management's Alert SA notification alert program. The majority of the participants were not aware of the registry program and will be registering.
- Those who did know about the registry suggested that the program be more specific in the questions that are asked. The website to find Alert SA is not user friendly and those who use reader programs, such as JAWS are not able to read the information.
- Plain language should be used for alerts to help people better understand what is being said and what directions they should follow. For example, the word Evacuate may not be understood by all, so use the term leave your home.
- Continue to use social media to spread any alerts/notifications/information to more citizens.
- Have an easy to remember phone number that people can call with questions during emergencies so 911 will not be flooded with calls.

## 2. Evacuations

- Many neighborhoods have people who park on sidewalks, block sidewalks, these obstructions make evacuating more difficult, especially for people with visual impairments.
- Not all workplaces have a specific emergency plan- what do you do if you have to evacuate or shelter in place at work? Many places require ID badges to be scanned to open doors- what happens in an emergency?
- People who are Deaf will not hear sirens or alerts, how will they be notified to leave or to stay in their homes?
- More available information about emergency kits, what should be in them? Are there different items for different kinds of disasters? What do you need to take with you if you must evacuate?

- If door to door evacuations are occurring, how do people who are Blind know that an actual first responder is there? How to identify police officers- you may ask for badge number and call 911 to verify this is an actual officer. In times of evacuation there is not time for this. Have alert calls to individuals to alert them that a first responder will be coming to your residence soon.
- Officers may have ASL videos on their phone to show individuals who are Deaf that they are an officer.

### 3. Shelters

- Shelter staff and volunteers should have a basic understanding/sensitivity when working with people with disabilities. There should also be a basic understanding of service animal rules/regulations.
- Communication is important; all those in the shelter should receive the same information/orientation materials.
- People with disabilities should not be segregated or put in all one area; this can make those individuals targets for crime while sheltering. People with disabilities should also not be automatically placed in medical shelters; many of them do not need immediate medical attention.
- Is there an available list of pre-chosen shelters? There is not one because shelter locations cannot be determined until the location of the emergency/disaster is known.
- What are the reunification plans of families that may be split up during emergencies?
- San Antonio does not have many shelters during emergencies because most people will do to friends and families homes. San Antonio shelters rarely stay open overnight.

### 4. Recovery

- It is important for individuals to have their own pre-emergency plans. Where will families go/ reunite? What vital items are needed if you must evacuate?
- What kind of resources, and where to find assistance after a disaster? Grief counselling, help with insurance claims, home repair- who is responsible to these and how is help found? What resources are available?

IV. Questions/Answers

- Is there ongoing training for 1<sup>st</sup> responders/volunteers concerning working with people with disabilities?
- Are there any plans in place for jails/hospitals, etc. concerning emergency planning?

V. Next Meeting

- The next community meeting will be held on Thursday, February 22, 2018 3:30 PM at the Thousand Oaks Library, 4618 Thousand Oaks.

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