

# Emergency Shelter Communications Toolkit

A Field Guide for Accessible Communications



# Section 1, Introduction: Origin and history of project

- Funded through a grant from the Regional Catastrophic Planning Grant (FEMA)
- Subject Matter Experts (SME's) in disability – the majority of them people with disabilities themselves – served as the core of the Advisory Group.
- The Toolkit represents viewpoints from, and is written to be used, in both urban and rural communities.

## Section 2.0: How to Use This Toolkit

Advanced  
Preparation

- Section 3.0

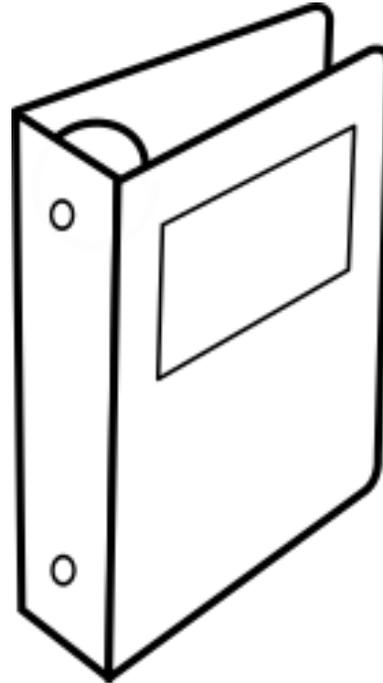
Activation

- Sections 4.0 and 5.0

Specific  
Barriers

- Refer to Table of Contents for appropriate section

We recommend using the files to create a Hardcopy Manual. All the files and instructions to do that are included.



# Binder Tips:

- Print on thick cardstock for durability
- Use section dividers to make finding important sections easier
- Dividers with pockets are great for storing other documents

# Section 3.0 Advance Preparations

- 3.1 Preparing the Shelter, Staff, and Volunteers to be Accessible for Individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- 3.2 Preparing the Shelter, Staff, and Volunteers to be Accessible for Individuals with a Mobility Disability
- 3.3 Signage Preparation
- 3.4 Preparing the Shelter, Staff, and Volunteers to be Accessible for Individuals with a Visual Disability

## Example:

# *Advance Preparation Accessible Communications Checklist*

### Advance Preparation Accessible Communications Checklist

- Paper, pens, and pencils are readily available, and/or are included in an on-site emergency kit.
- Access to online services, (high-speed required for video services)
- TTY's, amplified and/or captioned telephones
- Facility has a general audio PA system
- Facility is equipped with hearing loop technology (if installed in only certain areas, note those on *Inventory* list)
- Facility/shelter provider has MOU with interpreter service (record contact information on the *Inventory* list.)

## Example:

### *Advance Preparation Accessible Communications Checklist, cont.*

- Signage for way-finding, service provision, accommodations, etc. are available on-site
- A charging station for electronics related to communications has been identified (and identifying signage created)
- The facility has been appropriately assessed for physical accessibility
- Possible shelter staff have been trained to provide accessible communications and shelter services to people with disabilities
- Additional Accommodation Resources on-Site:

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# Section 4 Shelter Activation

When a site is being stood up as an emergency shelter, this section provides information and resources to assist accessible communications. It includes:

- Information on physical access
- Signage and mess/bulletin board prep
- Reminder to provide refrigeration for meds
- Accessible Communications Checklist to do a just-in-time assessment for situational and resource awareness

NOTE: The Training Files also include a 5 - 10 minute *“Just-in – Time Training for Emergency Shelter Staff”*

The *Assessment Checklist* should be completed prior to the *Just In Time Training*, and the results shared with Staff/Volunteers, so that they are aware of resources available and any plans for dealing with gaps and unmet needs.

# Section 5 Shelter Intake

This section contains:

- General intake questions to ask when assessing communication and accommodation needs.
- FAQ regarding access for service dogs and other service animals, based on the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).  
NOTE: Also review your locality's Service Animal Policy, if it offers additional protections.
- General information

# **Sections 6 through 12 each address specific disability (and language) issues**

- Mobility
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Low Vision and Blindness
- DeafBlindness
- Developmental
- Language Barriers
- Mental Health

## Section 6.0: Mobility

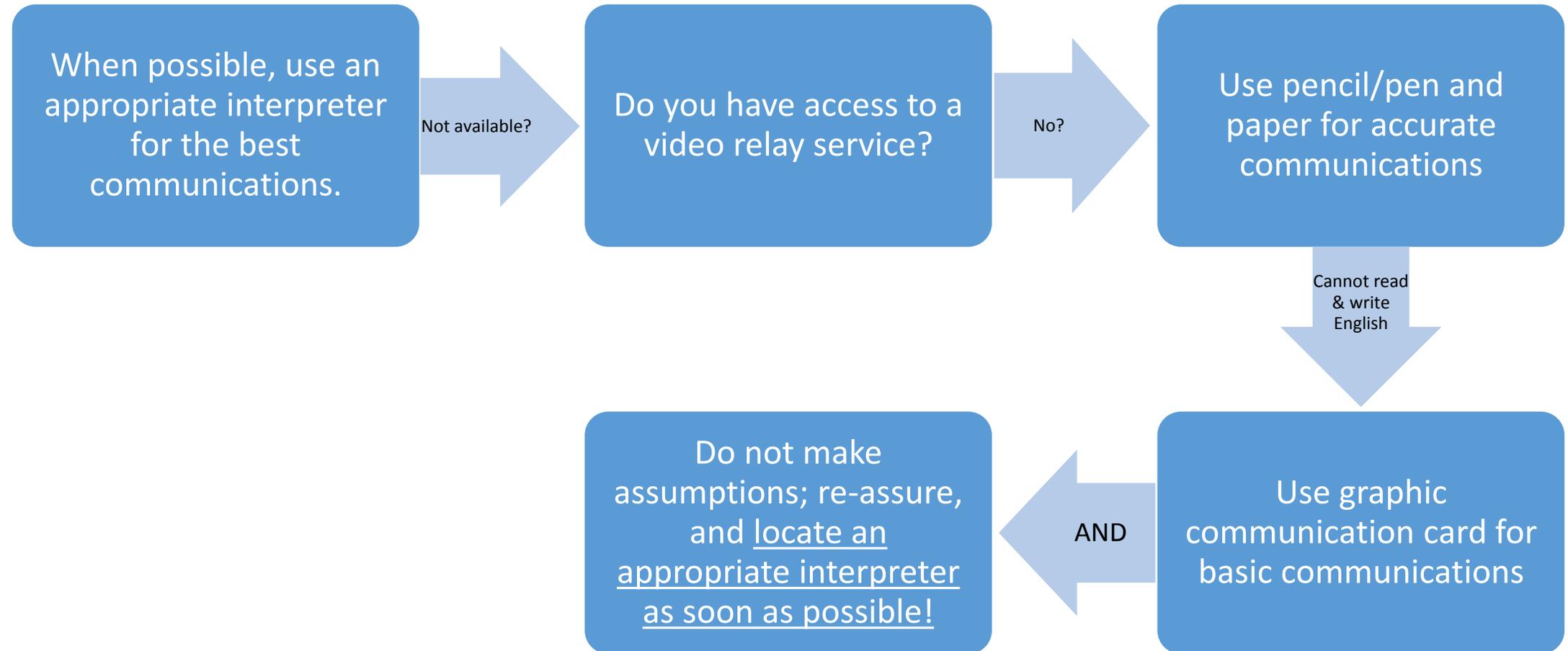
- 6.1 Interacting with a Person who has a Mobility Disability
- 6.2 Prioritizing electrical power usage/charging
- 6.3 Living in the Shelter – accommodations

# Section 7.0 Deaf and Hard of Hearing

- 7.1 Communications
- 7.2 Dispelling Common Deaf and Hard of Hearing Myths
- 7.3 Defining the Categories of Deafness
- 7.4 Identifying People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- 7.5 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Effective Communications
- 7.6 Barriers to Communication
- 7.7 Communication and Accommodations
- 7.8 Communication Strategies
- 7.9 Using Interpreters
- 7.10 Using Communications Assistance Real Time (CART) Captioning
- 7.11 Telecommunications Devices

## Example of Information provided in Section 7:

### Triage Steps to Successful Communication



# Section 8: Low Vision and Blindness

- 8.1 When You Meet Someone Who is Blind
- 8.2 Meeting a Guide or Service Dog Team: Some Words of General Advice (Inside and Outside of a Shelter)

## Example of Information provided in Section 8:

### Things to remember when assisting someone with low vision or blindness

Alert them when you make changes to the layout of a room.

When new signage or information is posted make a verbal announcement along with it.

Ask if they would like your assistance before jumping in to help.

## 9.0 Deafblindness

The word *deafblindness* may seem as if a person cannot hear or see at all. The term actually describes a person who has *some degree of loss in both vision and hearing*. The amount of loss in either vision or hearing will vary from person to person. Some individuals may have lost all sight but can still hear with the help of hearing aids. Others may have no hearing but their limited sight enables them to communicate with others through sign language.

## Example of information provided in Section 9:

In a true “must now move” emergency, using a finger, draw a huge “X” on the back of a person with hearing and/or sight loss while explaining the need to relocate immediately. After the, “X” go to the right of the person, make an “L” with your left arm and gently but with conviction, with your right hand reach across yourself to grasp the person’s right hand and place it in the space between your elbow and forearm and then move. If the person has a guide or service dog, pause just a moment to allow the person to drop the harness handle so that they can heal the dog as you guide the team to safety.

# Section 10.0 Developmental

- 10.1 Registration
- 10.2 Communication with Individuals with developmental Disabilities
- 10.3 Day to Day
- 10.4 Shelter Closing

# Section 11.0: Language Barriers

- Be patient
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Clarify that what you said has been understood
- Avoid Idioms
- Use a graphics communications card (see Section 13.2) and/or draw pictures to communicate ideas
- Be mindful of acronyms

# Section 12.0: Mental Health

Emergency Shelters should plan for:

- Providing a confidential space for private conversations between staff and shelter residents, when needed.
- Providing a Quiet Room – away from the main sleeping/living areas – for use by shelter residents, as needed.
- Establishing MOU's with local mental health providers, including non-profits and programs serving children, for use as staff in shelters when needed.

# Section 13: Signage and Materials

This section provides:

- Information on hanging signage
- Information on additional communication resources, such as braille and graphics communication cards
- Reproducible Shelter Signs for various locations/services within a shelter



Registration



# Toolkit availability, cost, and flexibility

- FREE
- CUSTOMIZABLE
- REPLICIBLE

Useful for more than just emergency shelters; the information contained in this Toolkit is helpful for Planners, PIO's, Preparedness Educators, and others!

**The Emergency Shelter Communications Toolkit is a free resource, which includes permission to customize, edit, and reproduce as appropriate for use.**

- A digital copy of the hardcopy Toolkit is available on the Washington State Emergency Department's website:

<http://mil.wa.gov/uploads/pdf/PLANS/appendix%20f.pdf>

- All of the digital Toolkit files, including instructions on making the hardcopy Manual, training modules, and the cover and spine sections, can be requested from:

[sheltercommunicationstoolkit@gmail.com](mailto:sheltercommunicationstoolkit@gmail.com)

# QUESTIONS?

Digital file requests, additional questions, suggestions, and feedback can be directed to: [sheltercommunicationstoolkit@gmail.com](mailto:sheltercommunicationstoolkit@gmail.com)

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