INTEGRATING ACCESS AND FUNCTIONAL NEEDS WITHIN LARGE VENUE SAFETY & SECURITY OPERATIONS

CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Cal OES
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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and its Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) work closely with community partners to identify and integrate the needs of all Californians before, during, and after incidents and events.

The term "access and functional needs" (AFN) refers to individuals with physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities, chronic conditions, injuries, limited English proficiency or people who are non-English speaking; older adults; children; living in institutionalized settings, low-income, homeless, pregnant or transportation disadvantaged.

Fully integrating access and functional needs within Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) is a best practice to help ensure the safety and security of all guests at large venues through inclusive plans, protocols, and procedures.

Large venues regularly host sporting events, concerts, festivals, and cultural expositions that bring the community, including individuals with access and functional needs, together. When venues host special events, such as the World Cup and the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the number of guests with access or functional considerations can increase exponentially.

Large venues strive to create environments capable of supporting the health, safety, security, and dignity of all guests at each of the events they host.

This document was created in coordination with large venue security professionals, industry experts, government and non-government partners, including representatives from the Cal OES Statewide AFN Advisory Committee, and is intended to support large venue operators with the guidance, best practices, and informational resources to integrate access and functional needs into their EOPs to better ensure the safety and security of guests.

Introduction

Large venues host sporting events, live performances in music, comedy, dance, and other cultural, artistic, and recreational happenings that bring thousands of community members together to be engaged and entertained. In doing so, they bring together guests from immensely diverse physical, intellectual, and cultural backgrounds that require a level of preparedness to fully address the needs of the whole community in attendance. To do this, large venues must work proactively, in partnership with the community, to integrate best practices for inclusion throughout all their operations.

The purpose of this document is to support large venues (e.g., stadiums, arenas, amphitheaters, motorsport sites, racetracks, etc.) to develop inclusive EOPs that address the safety and security considerations of guests with access and functional needs. This guide highlights the inclusive practices and procedures large venues should implement to establish a safe and secure environment for all guests before, during, and after the events they host. This means moving beyond basic compliance with local, state, and federal accessibility mandates by adopting voluntary innovative approaches to inclusive emergency management.

Integrating Safety and Security

Inclusive Planning

Large venue owners, operators, and staff may lack the subject matter expertise, perspective, or lived experience to fully integrate the comprehensive safety and security-related considerations of guests with access and functional needs into their emergency operations plans. When developing and revising their plans, safety and security officials from large venues should coordinate with community partners.

Large venues should follow best practices to develop partnerships that support their efforts to provide inclusive, safe, and secure environments for all guests, including Individuals with access and functional needs.

Establish an AFN Advisory Committee

To identify and address the safety and security considerations of all guests, large venues should create, partner, and confer with an Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committee. The AFN Advisory Committee, which can include community-based organizations (CBOs), disability organizations, and whole community representatives

with lived experience, should be engaged in an advisory capacity throughout the development or revision of all safety and security plans.

The AFN Advisory Committee is not a decision-making body. AFN Advisory Committee members do not vote or make executive decisions. Instead, they partner with venues to broaden, enhance, and inform existing or updated plans, policies, and procedures.

Engaging the AFN Advisory Committee throughout the development cycle of safety and security plans enables large venues to effectively integrate critical feedback that will enhance operations. This collaborative approach helps ensure operational strategies are thoroughly vetted and reflect the nuanced needs of individuals with access and functional considerations. Using an inclusive process also demonstrates a commitment to community partnership and equity.

Accessible Communication

Individuals process information differently, based upon factors such as background, disability, age, and language proficiency. It is essential to acknowledge that not everyone will be able to hear, see, read, understand, or process safety and security-related information the same way. If not addressed comprehensively, this can result in the harm, injury, or death of guests with access and functional needs. Therefore, effective communication strategies should accommodate a diverse range of considerations.

By adopting inclusive, effective, accessible communication practices, large venues can ensure all guests receive timely, accurate, actionable emergency information.

To achieve this aim, large venues should account for the following:

American Sign Language

Integrating American Sign Language (ASL) into the communication systems of large venues is essential for enhancing the safety, security, and overall experience of guests who are deaf or hard of hearing.

By incorporating ASL within all safety and security messages, alerts, warnings, and notifications, large venues can further the dissemination of clear, immediate, and effective emergency-related communication.

The inclusion of ASL interpretation within emergency-related communication empowers guests who are deaf or hard of hearing by enabling an enhanced preparedness posture before incidents and fostering a safer response following emergencies.

Ensuring that messaging is available with ASL interpretation furthers safety and security and creates an inclusive environment where all guests are well-informed.

Audio Announcements

Effective communication means different things to different people. For individuals who are blind or who have low vision, relying on videos to communicate important safety and security-related information is often ineffective. Instead, the use of clear, concise information, delivered at an appropriate volume that considers ambient noise levels is an effective method of delivering emergency-related communications.

Recognizing that not all guests speak, or understand, English, it is important that large venues provide audio announcements in multiple languages. Doing so helps ensure that all guests, including visitors and tourists, can fully understand important messages regarding event details, safety protocols, and emergency procedures.

In alignment with these best practices, large venues should consider the following actions:

- Broadcast audio announcements in both the primary and secondary languages commonly spoken in the region.
- Ensure that audio announcements are available and broadcast in the native language of both the home and away participants.

Embracing multilingual communications helps demonstrate a venue's commitment to welcoming and accommodating a broader audience, ultimately enhancing the safety, security, and atmosphere of the event for everyone.

Visual Aids

For guests with limited English proficiency, those with intellectual disabilities, and anyone who is deaf or hard of hearing, visual aids play a pivotal role in communicating safety and security information.

In emergency situations, visual aids such as flashlights, color-coded alerts, and pictograms can effectively guide guests to safety, provide real time updates, and communicate critical instructions. Visual aids also include clear signage, digital displays,

and visual alert systems – all of which are essential components of a comprehensive EOP.

By incorporating visual elements into safety and security plans and operations, large venues can enhance the effectiveness of their safety and security strategies while increasing compliance with accessibility standards.

Signage

Venue signage is vital for individuals with access and functional needs, aiding navigation and ensuring safety for all. Clear and informative signs help guide people with various abilities with essential information on accessible pathways, facilities, and emergency procedures empowering independent navigation and appropriate emergency responses.

To ensure inclusive and accessible signage throughout a large venue, consider and prioritize the following:

- Utilize video displays throughout the venue in multiple languages and formats to convey strong messaging and equip guests with navigation information on what to do and where to go, as well as how to ask for help.
- Ensure signage is visible from all angles and all heights.
- Incorporate universally recognized symbols and icons to convey information effectively.
- Install Braille and tactile signage at key locations such as restrooms, entrances, exits, and elevators.
- Implement clear wayfinding signage, including painted paths along walkways and in concourse areas.
- Provide points of contact for individuals requesting assistance during events.

Digital Messaging Systems

Providing safety and security information to guests at large venues in real-time enables them to take the appropriate protective or response actions needed to ensure their health and well-being. As individuals with access and functional considerations are disproportionately impacted by disasters, and as they may need additional time or resources to respond to incidents, empowering them with accurate, accessible, and timely information is vitally important.

Text messages, mobile apps, and email notifications are examples of digital communication technologies that can be utilized to provide up-to-the-minute

accessible information to all guests. These systems should also provide the capability for guests to convey needs or concerns relating to safety, needed medical assistance, or reasonable accommodations to appropriate venue staff.

Digital messaging systems should integrate:

- Accessible electronic formats
- Multi-language capabilities
- Videos containing ASL interpretation
- Emergency notifications, warnings, and alerts:
- Evacuation Instructions
- Reunification Areas
- The ability for guests to communicate AFN-specific considerations to venue staff

Leveraging these methods to provide real-time updates and notifications is a key component of an inclusive EOP.

Safety and Security Operations

Traditional safety and security processes, methods, and procedures were not designed for individuals who cannot walk, see, or hear.

Integrating the needs of individuals with access and functional considerations into the safety and security operations of large venues is essential to ensuring the well-being and health of the whole community during emergencies before, during, and after events.

> Large venues should develop scalable procedures and methods that enhance both safety and security while enhancing the overall event day experience for all guests.

Ensuring comprehensive integration entails planning and coordination to ensure that all individuals can safely, and effectively access and evacuate the venue during emergencies. This includes the implementation of inclusive design principles, specialized training for staff, and the utilization of adaptive technologies.

It also encompasses addressing a wide range of elements, including accessibility related to mobility, sensory, intellectual, and communication barriers. Addressing these considerations before emergencies occur helps to reduce human suffering and loss of life following incidents.

By prioritizing access and functional considerations within their operations, large venues not only improve upon the overall safety and security of their environments, but they also foster inclusivity and accessibility for all guests.

Security Screening

Screening is a foundational part of any large venue's security operation. While fundamental to maintaining the safety of all guests, not everyone can be screened in the same form or fashion. When done properly, screening promotes security without interfering with the independence or dignity of guests. Understanding the physical considerations necessary to screen guests with access and functional considerations without unintentionally violating their personal space, dignity, or causing injury is an essential component of inclusive security operations.

Screening procedures should be carefully implemented to ensure they address all guests respectfully and in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. When screening individuals with access and functional needs, it is paramount to:

- Maintain dignity and support self-determination.
- Provide reasonable accommodation for screening, as needed. For example, guests using wheelchairs may need to be screened using alternative inspection methods.
- Provide guests with the option of being screened in a private area.
- Use plain language to explain the process, procedure, and all available alternative screening options. This supports self-determination, establishes clear expectations, and helps minimize anxiety.
- Display and demonstrate how devices, tools, or instruments will be used prior to beginning the screening process.
- Actively narrate the screening process. This keeps guests who are blind or have low vision fully informed and provides reassurance and clarity.
- Utilize telephonic, in-person, or virtual language translation services and provide in-person or online access to ASL interpreters. This ensures guests with limited English proficiency and guests who are deaf or hard of hearing remain fully aware of the screening process.

Implementing these inclusive and respectful practices ensures security without impacting the dignity of guests with access and functional needs. This fosters a safe environment and promotes an atmosphere where all guests can experience events with confidence and respect.

Screening Service Animals

Some guests with access and functional needs will arrive at large venues accompanied by a service animal. Service animals are not considered pets and should stay with their owners at all times. According to the ADA, service animals are individually trained to assist individuals with disabilities, such as guiding individuals who are blind or have low vision, aiding those who are deaf or hard of hearing, or assisting someone with limited mobility. If it is unclear what service an animal provides, screeners may ask the following two questions:

1. Is the service animal required because of a disability?
2. What work or task has the service animal been trained to perform?

Service animals play a crucial role in maintaining the health and independence of many individuals with disabilities.

When screening service animals, it is essential for security personnel to:

- Ask the owner for permission before inspecting a service animal.
- Explain to the owner how the service animal will be screened.
- Screen service animals in the presence of their owners.

Security personnel are not allowed to inquire about a guest's disability, request medical documentation, ask for specialized identification cards or training documentation for the animal, or require it to demonstrate its abilities.

Inclusive Emergency Evacuation

Large venues typically incorporate a variety of scenario-based incidents within their EOPs that, when activated during an actual emergency, would lead to the systematic evacuation of some, or all, guests away from harm and into areas of safety or refuge. However, some evacuation protocols outlined within EOPs may not fully support the comprehensive mobility-related considerations of guests with access and functional needs.

During evacuations, ensuring the safety and security of all guests is a top priority. To successfully operationalize that priority, large venues should address a wide array of mobility, sensory, developmental, and intellectual disability-related needs, and language considerations. Not fully addressing these considerations before incidents occur can result in the in ability of guests with access and functional needs to evacuate safely.

Implementing accessible evacuation routes, clear and multi-modal communication systems, and trained personnel equipped to assist individuals with diverse needs are critical components of this approach.

By proactively incorporating access and functional considerations into evacuation plans, large venues help ensure all guests can move to safety in an equitable and effective manner.

Key areas to consider as part of inclusive evacuation operations include:

Elevator Access

During emergencies, standard operating procedures often restrict elevator usage; however, for guests using wheelchairs or other mobility aids, elevators are a critical resource to evacuate safely.

To maximize the use and availability of elevators during emergencies, large venues should:

- Designate and equip specific elevators with emergency power backup systems to provide functionality during power outages.
- Implement limitations on who can use elevators during emergency evacuations.
- Post clearly identifiable signage in multilingual formats directing guests to designated emergency use elevators.
- Ensure staff are available to guide guests with access and functional needs to elevators for evacuation.
- Provide visual and auditory instructions to keep users informed throughout the evacuation process.

Mobility Access

Guests with access and functional needs who use assistive devices such as wheelchairs, canes, walkers, scooters, or crutches to navigate the venue may need additional time or assistance to make their way through various points within the venue. This is especially true during emergency evacuations when routes may be crowded, unclear, or impeded by other guests or debris.

Ensuring that guests who use mobility-related assistive devices can safely move across and/or evacuate large venues takes thoughtful, inclusive advance planning that addresses:

- **Accessible Evacuation Routes:** Designated on-site accessible evacuation routes should be clearly marked and labeled using inclusive language and highlighted in print.

- **The Role of Venue Staff:** Most guests will be unfamiliar with the layout of the venue. Front of house staff play a pivotal role in assisting, as needed, people who use assistive mobility devices.

- **The Creation of Evacuation Assistance Teams:** These teams receive specialized training on the best strategies, approaches, and techniques to assist guests with access and functional needs, including those who use mobility assistance, before, during, and after emergency evacuations.

Sensory Access

Depending on their specific access or functional considerations, some guests may have trouble accessing evacuation-related information, following complex instructions, or navigating stressful situations. This makes providing accessible, easily understood, concise evacuation-specific directions essential for the safety of all guests.

Large venues should be prepared to address the needs of guests who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or have low vision, have limited English proficiency, or have intellectual disabilities. Doing so entails the incorporation of the following components within evacuation operations:

- Tactile paths and visual cues, such as flashing lights, pictograms, and digital signage should be embedded within the methods used to direct guests towards evacuation routes and resources.
- Clear, straightforward, and effective communication strategies that utilize plain language, accessible electronic content, American Sign Language, captioning, and multilingual formats should be integrated throughout every facet of the evacuation process.
- Providing evacuation-specific notifications through multiple accessible modalities, including text messages, loudspeakers, televisions, scoreboards, websites, and mobile applications.

Staff Training

Front of house staff should be trained to recognize and understand the diverse needs of individuals with mobility, sensory, cognitive, and linguistic challenges. It is important for front of house staff to understand that while they are a resource for all guests in attendance at their venue, they are also a potential lifeline for guests with access and functional needs.

Below are some training and resource considerations at large venues:

Training

- All front of house staff should receive disability etiquette training during the on-boarding process and on an annual basis thereafter.
- Training courses, drills and modules should be assessed to determine the inclusion of access and functional needs-specific considerations. Updates to make training inclusive should be made accordingly.
- Front of house staff should be trained on the methods and processes used to provide accessible language services and the use of assistive technologies.
- Front of house staff should be empowered to offer reasonable accommodations, as needed, that improve the safety and security of guests with access and functional needs.

Resources

- Front of house staff should receive tablets or smartphones with pre-loaded accessible communication applications, such as Video Remote Interpreting, and a pre-programmed phone number to access real-time telephonic language translation services.
- Front of house staff should have access, and be trained to provide, auxiliary aides such as headphones, handheld radios, and rumble packs.
- Company smartphone applications should incorporate accessibility-related information and resources.

Additional Considerations

- Front of house staff huddles should be conducted prior to each event to ensure all team members understand their roles and responsibilities to provide exceptional services to incoming guests, including those with access and functional needs.
- Front of house staff should perform their duties under the assumption that there are guests with access and functional needs in their sections.
- Front of house staff should monitor their sections for guests who may need additional assistance to maintain their safety and security or to enjoy their overall event day experience.

Essential Services and Resources

To enhance safety and security for individuals with access and functional needs, large venues should utilize on-site or third-party resources. Including wording within EOPs to highlight the importance of accessibility is important, but ultimately insufficient without the actual procurement of the resources needed to implement and operationalize those plans. Capabilities should be available either internally or externally, which means contracts should be in place before events occur.

Below are examples of resources that large venues should have agreements in place to implement:

- **American Sign Language Interpretation Services** to ensure guests who are deaf or hard of hearing can receive critical information in their preferred language during emergencies and routine operations.

- **Electronic Accessibility Services** to ensure compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act so guests who are blind or have low vision can access information.

- **World Language Translation Services** addresses the needs of non-English speaking guests, ensuring that a diverse audience understands safety and security communications.

Conclusion

Guests with access and functional needs are disproportionately impacted by incidents and events. As large venues proactively consider, and implement, additional inclusive best practices to integrate their emergency operations plans, they bolster the safety and security of all guests, including individuals with access and functional needs.

Successful planning entails a whole community effort. Engaging partners through an AFN Advisory Committee adds the benefit of additional perspectives and lived experiences that ultimately facilitates the creation of better plans and operations.

Incorporating American Sign Language interpretation and the use of accessible visual aids, audio announcements, and digital messaging systems in multiple languages helps to ensure all guests can receive timely and accurate information that empowers preparedness and leads to a more effective response to incidents.

When large venues integrate their security screening operations to provide reasonable accommodations for guests with access and functional needs, explain their processes using accessible communication methods, and never separate owners from their service animals – they improve safety and security while maintaining the dignity and self-determination of all guests.

Designing inclusive evacuation processes that designate the use of specific elevators for the priority evacuation of guests with access and functional needs, use back-up systems to light accessible paths of travel during power outages, and empower front of house staff to support mobility and sensory considerations enables the safe movement of all spectators before, during, and after emergencies.

Large venues should continually refine their emergency plans and reassess all safety and security operations to ensure they are fully inclusive of the access and functional needs of all guests.

Appendix A – Safety and Security Checklist

Item	Description	Complete?
Planning and Preparation		
Inclusive Emergency Plan	An AFN Advisory Committee has been developed.	☐
	Plans and operational protocols have been reviewed by the AFN Advisory Committee.	☐
	Feedback provided by the AFN Advisory Committee has been reviewed.	☐
	Plans comply with relevant accessibility laws and standards.	☐
Staff Training & Resources	Front of house huddle conducted, reviewing all members' roles and responsibilities.	☐
Infrastructure and Accessibility		
Accessible Routes	Emergency exists and evacuation routes are routinely monitored for accessibility.	☐
Elevator Procedures	Elevators have been designated for emergencies.	☐
	Elevators are equipped with emergency power backup systems.	☐
	Emergency elevators are identified and clearly marked.	☐
Signage and Visual Aids	Accessible evacuation routes are clear, high-contrast, and easy-to-read throughout the venue.	☐
	All signage is provided in multiple languages.	☐
	Braille and tactile signage are provided at key locations throughout the venue (e.g., restrooms, entrances, exits, elevators).	☐
	All accessible parking spots are available close to the venue.	☐
	Drop off locations have been identified and are kept clear.	☐
	Tactile, pictograms, and universally recognized symbols are implemented to provide accessibility-related information.	☐

Item	Description	Complete?
Communication Systems		
Digital Messaging Systems	Emergency alert systems, including visual (e.g., flashing lights), auditory (e.g., announcements), and text-based (e.g., SMS, email) have been implemented.	☐
	Alerts are available in multiple languages and formats, including ASL.	☐
	Real-time emergency updates via text messages and mobile apps are operational.	☐
	Two-way communication to receive help requests is operational.	☐
Audio Announcements	Audio announcements will be broadcasted in both primary and secondary languages commonly spoken in the area.	☐
	Audio announcements will be systematically amplified in other (written) formats.	☐
Television Screens	All pre-recorded and live broadcast messages/videos feature captions and ASL interpretation.	☐
	Emergency evacuation routes and procedures are displayed via video.	☐
Text Services	Service for guests to request assistance via text is provided.	☐
	Service for guests to report any safety issues or concerns via text is provided.	☐
	All texts are available in multiple languages.	☐
	All texts are available audibly and compatible with ASL interpretation.	☐
Accessible language	Information is provided in ASL.	☐
	Information is provided in multiple languages.	☐
	All information is available in 508 compliant electronic formats.	☐
	Front of house staff have accessible communication applications including access to real-time telephonic language translation services and Video Remote Interpreting.	☐

Item	Description	Complete?
Staff Training and Drills		
Comprehensive Training	Front of house staff have been trained to recognize and assist individuals with diverse needs, including mobility, sensory, cognitive, and linguistic differences challenges.	☐
	Training on evacuation equipment and assistive technology is provided.	☐
	Disability etiquette training is provided to front of house staff.	☐
Regular Drills	Emergency drills are being conducted involving scenarios including individuals with AFN.	☐
	The AFN Advisory Committee is included in After Action Reporting, Evaluation, and Improvement Plans.	☐
Service Animal Policies	Policies regarding service animals during emergencies have been implemented.	☐
	Areas for service animals and their owners during emergencies are identified and clearly marked.	☐
Pre-Event Information		
Website and Digital Communications	Accessible, multilingual safety and security information is provided on the venue's website.	☐
	Emergency procedures, screening processes, and contact information for assistance are outlined.	☐
Feedback and Improvement		
Post-Event Review	Feedback has been requested from individuals with AFN to identify areas of improvement.	☐
	Safety and security plans are updated regularly, based on feedback and new best practices.	☐
	The AFN Advisory Committee is included in all After Action Reporting, Evaluation, and Improvement Plans.	☐
Continuous Improvement	Best practices and technologies for enhancing safety and security for individuals with AFN are currently being monitored.	☐
	Ongoing training needs and infrastructure upgrades are being considered.	☐
	The AFN Advisory Committee meets regularly to advise, enhance, and broaden the capacities and capabilities of the venue.	☒

Appendix B – References

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Appendix C – Acronyms and Abbreviations

Table 1. Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AFN	Access and Functional Needs
ASL	American Sign Language
CBO	Community-Based Organization
Cal OES	California Governor's Office of Emergency Services
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
OAFN	Office of Access and Functional Needs