



California Governor's Office of Emergency Services

KEY ELEMENTS OF AN INTEGRATED EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN 2026



Cal OES
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE
OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Executive Summary

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) works in partnership with local jurisdictions and community organizations to ensure the considerations of individuals with access and functional needs (AFN) are fully integrated across all phases of emergency management.

California law requires jurisdictions to incorporate AFN considerations throughout their Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs). Each time a county updates its EOP, it must submit the plan to Cal OES for review to ensure alignment with applicable requirements and AFN best practices.

Through these reviews, Cal OES has identified key elements that support jurisdictions in strengthening inclusive planning and aligning their EOPs with AFN-focused best practices.

This document includes two complementary resources.

1. A guidance document that provides clear, actionable recommendations for integrating AFN considerations into EOPs.
2. An AFN Key Elements Checklist, designed as a practical tool to assess alignment with recommendations and identify areas for improvement.

Together, these resources are intended to help ensure AFN considerations are fully integrated, not treated as a stand-alone or symbolic component.

The guidance is organized around four core areas:

- Planning Process
- Emergency Communications
- Emergency Evacuation
- Emergency Sheltering

Using the guidance and the checklist during the planning process, jurisdictions can strengthen compliance and improve the effectiveness of their emergency operations. Integrating AFN considerations in advance leads to better outcomes, including reduced human suffering and loss of life, while also building public trust and strengthening community resilience.

Section 1: Planning Process

Effective integration of access and functional needs (AFN) begins during the planning phase and should be embedded throughout the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) creation process.

The following key recommendations reflect best practices for integrating AFN considerations into emergency planning processes.

#1: Establish an AFN Advisory Committee

Jurisdictions should develop and maintain an official Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Advisory Committee. The committee should include representatives from government and non-government agencies, community-based organizations, disability groups, and community advocates serving diverse AFN populations.

The committee should meet regularly, maintain a current roster, and operate with structured agendas. Input should be documented and retained to ensure it informs planning decisions. For additional guidance, jurisdictions should reference [*the Cal OES Jurisdictional Guidance for the Development of an AFN Advisory Committee*](#).

#2: Engage the AFN Advisory Committee Throughout the Planning Cycle

Once established, the AFN Advisory Committee should be engaged throughout the full planning cycle, not only during final plan review. This includes participation in EOP development, annex drafting, and after-action reporting. Early and consistent engagement allows jurisdictions to explain planning assumptions, identify barriers, and incorporate meaningful feedback.

3: Use Respectful, People-First Language

The language used throughout the EOP should reflect the dignity and respect of the communities served. Jurisdictions should remove outdated or potentially offensive terms, such as “special needs” or “hearing impaired,” and consistently apply people-first language. For example, “a person who is deaf or hard of hearing” should be used instead of labeling terminology. Language should be reviewed, as appropriate, with AFN Advisory Committees or subject matter experts and aligned with established resources such as [*ADA Network guidelines*](#).

Section 2: Emergency Communications

Effective emergency communication is critical to ensuring all members of the community receive timely, accurate, and actionable information before, during, and after disasters. Jurisdictions should ensure that communication strategies are accessible across multiple formats, languages, and platforms so individuals with AFN can receive, understand, and act on emergency information.

The following key recommendations reflect best practices for integrating AFN considerations into emergency communications.

#1: Utilize the AFN Advisory Committee to Strengthen Communication Strategies

Jurisdictions should leverage the AFN Advisory Committee to broaden, enhance, and validate emergency communication strategies. Committee members can help identify gaps, test message clarity, and ensure communication methods are accessible and culturally appropriate.

#2: Outline ASL Interpretation Policy Statement

Jurisdictions should include a clear policy statement within the EOP indicating that American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation will be used for all public-facing communications, including press conferences, town halls, and community briefings. Providing ASL interpretation ensures individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing have equal access to critical, time-sensitive information.

#3: Establish ASL Service Agreements

Jurisdictions should establish memorialized agreements to provide ASL services before, during, and after disasters. Agreements should be executable 24/7 and clearly define expected response times. Pre-established agreements reduce delays during emergencies and ensure consistent access to communication support.

#4: Outline Accessible Alert and Notification Features

Jurisdictions should clearly outline the accessibility features of their emergency alert, warning, and notification systems within the EOP. This includes capabilities such as closed captioning, alternative text, multilingual messaging, and sign language integration.

#5: Outline Accessible Digital Content Policy Statement

Jurisdictions should include a policy statement within the EOP indicating that all online content, including social media, will be posted in accessible formats. This includes ensuring compatibility with screen readers, use of alternative text for images, captioning for video content, and clear, plain language. For additional guidance, jurisdictions should reference the [Cal OES Integrating Accessible Social Media Content within Emergency Communications guide](#).

#6: Translate Pre-Scripted Emergency Messages

Jurisdictions should translate all pre-scripted emergency alerts and updates into the most commonly spoken languages within the community. Messages should also be made available in ASL. Translating pre-scripted messages enables rapid dissemination of accessible information during emergencies.

Section 3: Emergency Evacuations

Effective evacuation planning should account for the diverse needs of individuals with AFN. Jurisdictions should ensure evacuation and transportation strategies are inclusive, coordinated, and operationally feasible so all members of the community can safely relocate during emergencies.

The following key recommendations reflect best practices for integrating AFN considerations into evacuation and transportation planning.

#1: Utilize the AFN Advisory Committee to Strengthen Evacuation Strategies

Jurisdictions should leverage the AFN Advisory Committee to broaden, enhance, and validate evacuation and transportation strategies. Committee members can help identify real-world barriers, assess evacuation timelines, and ensure transportation resources align with community needs. Engaging partners in this process results in more effective and inclusive evacuation operations. For additional guidance, jurisdictions should reference the [*Cal OES Integrated Evacuation Planning for Jurisdictions and Individuals with Access and Functional Needs guide*](#).

#2: Develop a Standard Operating Procedure for Accessible Transportation

In coordination with the AFN Advisory Committee, jurisdictions should develop a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that clearly outlines how individuals with AFN can request and receive accessible transportation before, during, and after disasters. Clear, consistent procedures ensure individuals understand how to access services.

#3: Understanding Voluntary Disaster Registries

Voluntary disaster registries present a number of challenges, however, Cal OES recognizes that some jurisdictions may choose to explore, pursue, or implement them. If used, registries should have a clearly defined purpose, be regularly updated, and reflect a realistic view of what resources may or may not be provided to support the whole community. For additional guidance, jurisdictions should reference the [*Cal OES Voluntary Disaster Registry Planning Guidance*](#).

#4: Maintain Transportation and Evacuation Agreements in the EOC

Jurisdictions should maintain a list of all transportation and evacuation agreements with providers and vendors in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to support rapid coordination during incidents. Maintaining these agreements in a centralized location reduces delays, improves coordination, and supports efficiency.

#5: Establish Transportation Agreements Inside/Outside of the Jurisdiction

Jurisdictions should establish formal signed agreements with accessible transportation providers within the jurisdiction and in surrounding areas to support large-scale evacuations. Agreements should be executable 24/7, include on-demand accessible transportation services, and be structured to ensure no cost to evacuees. Establishing these agreements in advance helps ensure resources will be available when needed to support individuals with AFN. For additional guidance, jurisdictions should reference the [*Cal OES Integrated Evacuation Planning for Jurisdictions and Individuals with Access and Functional Needs guide*](#).

Section 4: Emergency Sheltering

Emergency sheltering operations should be inclusive, accessible, and designed to support individuals with AFN in maintaining their health, safety, and independence during disasters.

The following key recommendations reflect best practices for integrating AFN considerations into the sheltering planning and operations.

#1: Utilize the AFN Advisory Committee to Strengthen Sheltering Strategies

Jurisdictions should leverage the AFN Advisory Committee to broaden, enhance, and validate sheltering strategies and operations. Committee members can help identify service gaps, inform shelter design and layout, and ensure resources and services align with community needs.

#2: Pre-Identify and Assess Accessible Shelter Facilities

Jurisdictions should pre-identify potential shelter facilities and assess them regularly for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and applicable state accessibility standards. This includes identifying facilities that can be brought into compliance through reasonable modifications.

#3: Train Staff to use Assistive Technology

Jurisdictions should ensure shelter staff and volunteers are trained and comfortable using assistive technology and communication supports. This includes tools such as Video Remote Interpreting (VRI), telephonic language interpretation services, and other assistive communication devices. Staff familiarity with these tools reduces delays, improves communication, and supports individuals with AFN in shelter environments.

#4: Establish Wrap-Around Services Agreements

Jurisdictions should establish and maintain formal agreements or contracts to provide wrap-around services at emergency shelters. These services may include assistance with personal care, feeding, toileting, showering, dietary accommodations, access to durable and consumable medical equipment, accessible cots, and accessible transportation. Pre-established agreements ensure these resources can be rapidly deployed and support individuals with AFN to maintain health and independence.

#5: Maintain Shelter Agreements in the EOC

Jurisdictions should maintain a current list of all mass care and shelter-related agreements with providers and vendors. This information should be available in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at all times.

Conclusion

Integrating the considerations of individuals with AFN throughout Emergency Operations Plans establishes strong community partnerships and positions jurisdictions to support the whole community.

The recommendations outlined in this guide are designed to support jurisdictions in strengthening their capabilities and aligning with best practices. While approaches may vary based on local factors, the expectation remains consistent: AFN considerations should be integrated across all phases of emergency management.

AFN EOP Key Elements Checklist

This checklist is a practical tool for local jurisdictions to assess and strengthen how Access and Functional Needs (AFN) are integrated into Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs). It is intended for emergency managers, planners, and EOP authors.

The checklist is organized across four core areas:

- Planning Process
- Emergency Communications
- Emergency Evacuations
- Emergency Sheltering

Planning Process

#1: Establish an AFN Advisory Committee

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|--------------------------|--|
| ☐ | A formal AFN Advisory Committee has been established. |
| ☐ | Membership includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Government/non-government partners• CBOs• Disability organizations• Community advocates• Representatives serving diverse AFN populations. |
| ☐ | Committee meets regularly (e.g., quarterly, semi-annually, etc.). |
| ☐ | A current roster is maintained with structured agendas. |
| ☐ | AFN Advisory Committee engaged throughout the planning process (e.g., EOP, annexes, AARs, exercise design etc.) |

Refer to [Cal OES Jurisdictional Guidance for the Development of an AFN Advisory Committee](#).

#2: Engage the AFN Advisory Committee Throughout the Planning Cycle

- ☐ Engaged during product development (e.g., EOP, annexes, AARs, exercise design etc.)
- ☐ Input occurs throughout, not just on final review.

#3: Use Respectful, People-First Language

- ☐ Outdated terms removed (e.g., “special needs,” “impaired,” “vulnerable” etc.).
- ☐ People-first language used consistently:
 - “Person with a disability”
 - “Person who is deaf or hard of hearing”

Emergency Communications

#1: Utilize the AFN Advisory Committee to Strengthen Communication Strategies

- ☐ Communication strategies are validated by the AFN Advisory Committee.
- ☐ Communications amplified by AFN Advisory Committee partners.

#2: Outline ASL Interpretation Policy Statement

- ☐ EOP includes a policy statement indicating all public-facing communication events (Press conferences, Town halls, etc.) will have ASL interpretation.

#3: Establish 24/7 ASL Service Agreements

- ☐ Agreements are memorialized in writing.
- ☐ Executable 24/7.
- ☐ Defined response times.

#4: Outline Accessible Alert and Notification Features

- ☐ Closed captioning capability
- ☐ Alternative text functionality
- ☐ Screen-reader compatibility
- ☐ Multilingual capacity
- ☐ ASL capability

#5: Outline Accessible Digital Content Policy Statement

- ☐ EOP includes a policy statement indicating all digital content, including social media, will be posted in accessible (508 compliant) formats.

Refer to [Cal OES Integrating Accessible Social Media Content within Emergency Communications](#) guidance.

Note: Cal OES offers free monthly online digital accessibility training courses: Digital Accessibility Training Courses

#6: Translate Pre-Scripted Emergency Messages

- ☐ Messages are available in commonly spoken languages (audio or text)
- ☐ Messages are available in ASL.

Emergency Evacuations

#1: Utilize the AFN Advisory Committee to Strengthen Evacuation Strategies

- ☐ Evacuation strategies are validated by the AFN Advisory Committee.
- ☐ Evacuation plan amplified by AFN Advisory Committee partners.

Refer to [Cal OES Integrated Evacuation Planning guidance](#).

#2: Develop a Standard Operating Procedure for Accessible Transportation

- ☐ Outline a specific and consistent phone number or website.
- ☐ Partner with the AFN Advisory Committee to socialize the SOP throughout the whole community.
- ☐ SOP includes:
 - Request procedures for accessible transportation.
 - Operational triggers (e.g., evacuation warning or order is issued).
 - Dispatch coordination protocols (e.g., as outlined in checkbox 1).

#3: Understanding Voluntary Disaster Registries

- ☐ Clearly communicate services or resources are not guaranteed.
- ☐ Clearly outline registry is not a substitute for personal preparation.
- ☐ Use as a supplement to community partnerships.

Refer to [Cal OES Voluntary Disaster Registry Planning Guidance](#).

#4: Maintain Evacuation/Transportation Agreements in the EOC

- ☐ Current list of all transportation MOUs/contracts readily available in the EOC.

#5: Establish Transportation Agreements Inside/Outside of the Jurisdiction

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| ☐ | Agreements are executable 24/7. |
| ☐ | Agreements provide on-demand taxi-like service. |
| ☐ | Agreements provide evacuation services to evacuees at no cost. |
| ☐ | Agreements provide accessible transportation resources (e.g., vans with lifts). |

Emergency Sheltering

#1: Utilize the AFN Advisory Committee to Strengthen Sheltering Strategies

- ☐ Sheltering strategies are validated by the AFN Advisory Committee.
- ☐ AFN Advisory Committee partners encourage community to utilize shelters.

#2: Pre-Identify and Assess Accessible Shelter Facilities

- ☐ Assess all potential shelter facilities for ADA compliance.
- ☐ Determine if modifications are needed to enhance shelter accessibility.

#3: Train Staff to use Assistive Technology

- ☐ ASL Video Remote Interpreting (VRI).
- ☐ Telephonic language interpretation/translation lines.

#4: Establish Wrap-Around Service Agreements

- ☐ Agreements address personal care assistance services (e.g., feeding, toileting, assistance for showering, etc.).
- ☐ Agreements address specialized dietary considerations.
- ☐ Agreements address durable medical equipment needs (e.g., commodes, hospital beds, diapers, manual wheelchairs, canes, etc.).
- ☐ Agreements address accessible and bariatric cots.

#5: Maintain Shelter Agreements in the EOC

- ☐ Current list of shelter/mass care agreements readily available in the EOC.