

# The Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Minute

July 28, 2026

## Welcome!

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## Message from the Chief



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*Ingrid Silva presenting L. Vance Taylor with the Cultural Ambassador recognition at the Cal OES Disability Pride Month Lunch & Learn*

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All,  
Each July, we recognize **Disability Pride Month**, a time to celebrate the history, achievements, and contributions of people with disabilities while reaffirming our commitment to building communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. This month also commemorates the signing of the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** on July 26, 1990, a

landmark civil rights law that continues to advance accessibility, equity, and inclusion across our nation.

For those of us in emergency management, Disability Pride Month is more than a celebration; it is a reminder of why our work matters. Every day, we have the opportunity and responsibility to ensure that emergency planning reflects the needs of the whole community. The most effective plans are developed with the people you serve, not simply for them. Lived experiences, perspectives, and expertise help us create stronger plans, improve our response capabilities, and build more resilient communities.

As we observe Disability Pride Month, I encourage each of us to take time to recognize the many contributions people with disabilities make to every facet of society, to continue learning from one another, and to remain committed to advancing inclusive emergency management. Together, we are building a future where accessibility is not an afterthought, it is an expectation, and where no one is left behind.

Thank you for your continued partnership and dedication to this important work.

-Vance

**L. Vance Taylor**

Chief, Office of Access and Functional Needs  
California Governor's Office of Emergency Services

## 2026 World Cup Special Event Activation



*Photo collage from the State Operations Center featuring L. Vance Taylor and Dillon Lewis during the FIFA World Cup activation*

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From June 11 through July 11, 2026, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) activated the State Operations Center (SOC) to Level 2 in support of the FIFA World Cup 2026. As one of the largest planned events in California's history, the tournament required close coordination among state, federal, local, tribal, and nongovernmental partners to maintain situational awareness, coordinate resources, and support public safety.

Throughout the activation, the Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) worked alongside partner agencies within the SOC to help ensure access and functional needs were considered in planning, coordination, and operational efforts. OAFN provided technical assistance and subject matter expertise to support the needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, children, individuals with limited English proficiency, and anyone with an access and functional needs.

OAFN remained engaged with internal Cal OES programs and external partners by monitoring emerging issues, sharing situational awareness, and supporting inclusive planning throughout the activation. This collaboration helped ensure that access and functional considerations remained integrated into statewide emergency management operations during this worldwide event.

Whether supporting planned events like the FIFA World Cup or responding to emergencies and disasters, OAFN remains committed to advancing inclusive emergency management by integrating access and functional needs into all phases of emergency management.

## **Recap - 5th Annual National AFN Symposium**

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The 5th Annual National Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Symposium brought together emergency managers, disability organizations, community partners, and government agencies from across the country. During the two-day event, participants shared ideas, resources, and best practices for integrating access and functional needs into all phases of emergency management.

Hosted by the **California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES)** in partnership with the **Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management**, **New York University**, and **the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)**, the Symposium focused on the importance of working together with communities to build more inclusive emergency management. Sessions provided practical tools, training resources, and real-world examples that participants can apply in their own jurisdictions.

Caroline Thomas Jacobs, Director of the Cal OES, opened the Symposium by reaffirming California's commitment to advancing the mission of inclusive emergency management. She emphasized that California will continue to lead the nation by integrating access and functional needs into every aspect of emergency management and fostering a culture where inclusion is a cornerstone of all we do.

L. Vance Taylor, Chief of the Office of Access and Functional Needs at Cal OES, spoke about the "soul of emergency management," emphasizing that the profession is ultimately about people. He encouraged participants to view accessibility and inclusion not simply as compliance requirements to be addressed through technology, systems, and protocols, but as core values that guide emergency management and strengthen preparedness, response, and recovery by ensuring every member of the community is considered and supported.

Dr. Erroll Southers, Associate Senior Vice President for Safety and Risk Assurance at the University of Southern California (USC) and author of **Inside the Castle Walls**, drew on his distinguished career as a former FBI Special Agent, counterterrorism expert, and national security leader to share powerful personal and professional insights. He emphasized that emergency management is ultimately about people, reminding attendees that true preparedness is achieved when every individual has equitable access to safety, services, and the support they need before, during, and after disasters.

Linda Mastandrea, former Director of **FEMA's Office of Disability Integration and Coordination**, nationally recognized disability rights attorney, advocate, former Paralympian, and accessibility expert, shared insights on integrating accessibility into the planning and execution of large-scale events. Drawing on her leadership of disability planning for

the FIFA World Cup 2026, she demonstrated how embedding accessibility from the outset helps ensure major events are inclusive, welcoming, and successful for everyone.

The Symposium also featured two engaging panel discussions with expert speakers from local and state government, academia, and the private sector. Panelists shared practical strategies for strengthening inclusive emergency management through workforce training and demonstrated how integrating access and functional needs into emergency operations leads to stronger preparedness, more effective response and recovery, and more resilient communities.

To help participants continue the conversation, the Symposium organizers developed a comprehensive post-event resource package. The package includes recordings of every keynote address and panel discussion, and a curated collection of the resources, guidance documents, best practices, and reference materials shared by speakers throughout the event.

**[Click here to download the complete Post-Event Symposium Package.](#)**



Disability Pride Month colors shown on an image indicating July is Disability Pride Month

Everyone has a role in celebrating Disability Pride Month. Visit **[The Arc](#)** to discover meaningful ways to promote disability inclusion.

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