Why and How to Include People with Disabilities in Your Emergency Planning Process?

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Why Include Disability Specific Advisors?

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Summary

Why Include Disability Specific Advisors?

The internal expertise of emergency service organizations can be augmented by utilizing external qualified advisors with disabilities. Qualified advisors are those who understand and can think through issues from a disability perspective. These advisors can help an organization: take advantage of the wealth, depth and breadth of information available from the disability community, and effectively plan to include people with disabilities and activity limitations as well as prevent making a variety of sometimes-costly mistakes.

Unfortunately, the history of including people with disabilities has been, in large part, one of paternalism. Entire professions of "experts," have emerged who have taken control over basic life decisions away from people with disabilities. However, experience repeatedly demonstrates that, given the proper tools, people with many different types of disabilities can devise creative approaches to eradicate barriers that have stumped the so-called experts. For example, the newer, more popular and functional lightweight "sports" wheelchairs that are now widely used were designed by innovative wheelchair users, not the established wheelchair industry (Kaplan 1992). Including people with disabilities can be rich with recommendations that serve the mutual interest of an organization and its customers. People with disabilities and activity limitations can be excellent problem solvers.

Strategic planning and evaluation should include the diverse populations of people with disabilities and activity limitations in an organization's planning including procurement, and programs of emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation services.

Benefits include:

> **A process that includes qualified people with disabilities in, not token ways, but major significant and powerful ways, can result in exceptional improvements in an organization's understanding and responsiveness to the very diverse communities of people with disabilities.**

- o Listening and learning directly about the issues facing the disability community;

- o Utilizing expertise to develop accessible, inclusive and appropriate programs;

- o Allowing for free and frank discussion between an organization and knowledgeable advocates;

- o Providing respectful and targeted critiquing to help an organization be more successful;

- o Allowing for identification and resolution of issues in a cooperative rather than a confrontational environment;

- o Creating a forum for thoughtful people to discuss needs, concerns and obstacles to achieving mutual goals;

- o Allowing for the growth of disability advocates in understanding how an organization operates and continues to evolve. Knowledgeable and qualified people with disabilities and activity limitations can be one of an organization's best and most articulate allies;

- o Strengthens an organization's ability to include disability specific issues and to better plan, set priorities regarding existing and emerging policy issues, and how best to effectively deliver services;

o   Evaluating all levels of communications between an organization and people with disabilities;

o   Providing insightful input on strategies, policies and practices helps to pre-test, improve and strengthen public policy initiatives;

o   Applying best thinking to effectively include and serve people with disabilities for many years to come, and

o   Enhancing an organization's credibility and accountability with the disability and senior communities.

Who Are Qualified People With Disabilities?

Qualified people with disabilities include those who:

- Identify as people with disabilities and / or activity limitations,

- Have a user's perspective,

- Have personal experience with disability and disability advocacy,

- Can speak broadly on disability issues as opposed to only addressing their own needs,

- Are knowledgeable about cross-disability access issues (hearing, vision, mobility, speech, and cognitive limitations), and

- Are knowledgeable about a variety of physical, communication, and program access issues.

Qualified people should:

- Be connected to and involved with segments of national, state or local constituencies of the disability community, such as active involvement in broad based disability organizations (of and for blind, deaf, hard of hearing, learning disability, developmental disability, independent living, multiple chemical sensitivities, etc).

- Have in place and use communication arteries to facilitate two-way communication with the segments of the disability community they are representing (Kailes 2002).

In addition, other types of experience may be needed. For example, qualified advisors, trainers, contractors and consultants with disabilities may need to have:

- Disaster-related technical expertise.
- Advocacy experience, management experience, and training skills.

How Can You Recruit Qualified People With Disabilities?

Avoid Haphazard Random Recruitment

When asked to include perspectives from the disability communities on a project, board, committee, workshop, etc., organizations sometimes get less than adequate representation. This is because selecting representatives can be a haphazard and random process where planners don't take time to think through the type of representation desired. It is common for people responsible for recruiting representatives from the disability communities to automatically think of and choose a co-worker, colleague,

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neighbor, friend, or acquaintance who happens to have a disability or activity limitation. These individuals may or may not be qualified representatives.

Announcing, Selection and Recruiting Process

By establishing selection criteria for the type and diversity of representation you are seeking from qualified people, you can avoid create more targeted recruiting. A sound way to start is to:

Create a description of the:

- Goals and objectives of the group;

- Qualities of the representatives you are looking for;

- Projected time commitments needed from participants (projected number of meetings, length of meetings, preparation time, over what number of months, years), and

- Policies regarding expense reimbursement and honorariums.

Create an application for disability specific organizations to nominate representatives, as well as, back up individuals whom they would like to represent their organizations and constituents.

- The applicant organizations should document:

  - The qualifications of the two representatives they are nominating.

  - How these representatives will communicate with the constituencies they represent.

It is important to include people with disabilities in emergency services as contributors and collaborators, not just as people viewed as victims to be rescued. It is time to revise methods and embrace the approach "nothing about us without us!"

Send this recruiting announcement and application to disability organizations. If you do not know where to send this recruiting material ask a well established disability specific organizations to assist you. This organization can also assist you with your representative selection process. (See "Recruiting Resources" below for assistance in locating organizations in your community.)

Pay for Participant's Time and Expenses

Emergency services personnel sometimes incorrectly assume that people representing not-for-profit organizations are able to volunteer their time. Reimbursement of expenses and providing an honorarium demonstrates that you value these individuals' expertise and time. Offering a wage-replacement honorarium is especially important for people who have to use their personal time (verses job-time) to participate.

Be Prepared To Offer Accommodations

All meetings should offer both communication and physical access. Communication access involves providing content in methods that are understandable and usable by people with: reduced or no ability to: speak, see, or hear. Physical access means individuals with disabilities can get to, enter, and use meeting facilities (accessible: paths from public transportation drop off points and parking (curb cuts, ramps) rest rooms ,hotels and meeting facilities etc).

Before the first meeting be sure to inquire if any group member may need an accommodation in order to fully participate. Such items may include:

•Materials in alternative formats (braille, large print, disk, audio formats)

•Assistive listening systems

•Qualified Interpreters

•Computer-aided transcription services

•Audio visual materials which are captioned and audio described

•Accessible web sites

Summary

Planning for and not with people with disabilities reflects an old paradigm "a lot about us without us." It is important to include people with disabilities in emergency services as contributors and collaborators, not just as people viewed as victims to be rescued. It is time to revise methods and embrace the approach "nothing about us without us!" Beng diligent regarding seeking qualified representatives will yield positive payoffs.

References

Kailes, J. (2002). <u>Evacuation Preparedness: Taking Responsibility For Your Safety: A Guide For People With Disabilities and Other Activity Limitations</u>, The Center for Disability Issues and the Health Profession, Western University of Health Sciences, Pomona, California, http://www.cdihp.org/products.html.

Kaplan, D., De Witt, J., Steyaert, M. (1992). Laying the Foundation: A Report of the First Year of The Blue Ribbon Panel on National Telecommunications Policy. World Institute on Disability, Oakland, CA.

Resources

Arditi, Aries, "**Making Text Legible: Designing for People with Partial Sight**," Lighthouse International. 1999. www.lighthouse.org/print leg.htm

    This covers maximizing legibility for people with partial sight.

Kailes, J., **Accessibility Guidelines for Speakers,** March 1993, Revised July 2000, www.jik.com/resource.html

    A concise guide offering important tips in assuring access to the widest possible audience. Includes how to: make visual aids accessible through oral narratives and format; work with sign language interpreters; make soundtracks accessible through captioning; work with assistive listening systems; convert handout materials to alternative formats (braille, large print, disk, audio cassette); record material on audio cassette; and locate braille transcription, captioning, recording and duplicating services.

Kailes and Jones, "**A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings**." ILRU,1993. www.jik.com/resource.html

    The fundamental issues to consider when arranging a meeting that allows for attendance and participation of people with disabilities, divided into two major categories: (1.) the physical accessibility issues related to hotel, meeting facilities and the location of the meeting; and (2.) the accessibility of information that is presented and disseminated at the meeting.

North Carolina Office on Disability and Health with Woodward Communications **Removing Barriers: Tips and Strategies to Promote Accessible Communication**. 1999. www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh/communicate.html

    Addresses the basics in communicating with people with disabilities.

Sajka, J., Roeder, J. (2003). **PDF and Public Documents: a White Paper**, Version 1.1, published April 25, 2002, http://www.afb.org/section.asp?Documentid=1706

Addresses problems and issues with PDF web document access.

Recruiting Resources

Directory of Centers for Independent Living, State Associations of Independent Living, and Statewide Independent Living Councils. http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.htm   last accessed 03/1/08

National Association of Councils on Developmental Disability - http://www.nacdd.org last accessed 03/1/08

Directory of Consumer-Driven Services (CDS), a project of the National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse - http://www.cdsdirectory.org last accessed 03/1/08

About the Author

June Isaacson Kailes has a Disability Policy Consulting practice and is the Associate Director, Center for Disability Issues and the Health Professions Western University of Health Sciences, Pomona, California. June, since the early 1980s, is one of just a handful of people with disabilities who focuses a portion of her time on disability and aging related emergency. She works on emergency issues nationally and internationally, with community based organizations and with emergency professionals. Her work as a writer, trainer, researcher, policy analyst and advocate is widely known and respected.
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Several of her emergency preparedness publications include:

- *Emergency Preparedness: Taking Responsibility For Your Safety - Tips for People with Activity Limitations and Disabilities*, written for and

distributed by Los Angeles County, Office of Emergency Management, Emergency Survival Program,

- *Living and Lasting on Shaky Ground: An Earthquake Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities*, distributed by California Office of Emergency Safety,

- *Creating a Disaster - Resistant Infrastructure for People at Risk Including People with Disabilities* (published and used in several countries),

- *Emergency Evacuation Preparedness: Taking Responsibility for Your Safety A Guide For People with Disabilities and Other Activity Limitations,* available at http://www.cdihp.org/evacuationpdf.htm.

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