



Vulnerable Populations Identification for Emergencies

10 Points

New Action - May 2016

This action was developed in partnership with the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management.

The primary responsibility of government is protecting the health, safety and welfare of the entire community. In today's environment, there are many ways to communicate preparedness and emergency information. By identifying local populations and vulnerable groups, a municipality can determine in advance the appropriate channels to get support services and information to these groups. A sustainable community makes every attempt to support its entire population, including those who are most vulnerable.

Vulnerable populations during emergencies are often defined as: *any individual, group, or community whose circumstances create barriers to obtaining or understanding information, or the ability to react as the general population. Circumstances that may create barriers include, but are not limited to age; physical, mental, emotional, or cognitive status; culture; ethnicity; religion; language; citizenship; geography; or socioeconomic status.* To fulfill its responsibility to protect the health, safety and welfare of the population, government must know, in advance, how it will meet the varied needs of each.

This action requires municipalities to have an understanding of what vulnerable populations exist within town and their risk factors during emergencies. A town will earn 10 points if it provides evidence that it has identified and regularly makes efforts to register individuals with disabilities and other access and functional needs using the State of New Jersey's "Register Ready-NJ's Special Needs Registry for Disasters", and identifies the ways in which the town will communicate with the full population of vulnerable individuals during an emergency via key community stakeholders and alternative communication techniques.

Why is it important?

During emergencies, barriers such as physical, mental, emotional or cognitive status; culture, language, socioeconomic status, age, and/or religion may put certain individuals or groups at risk, preventing them from receiving important information or getting out of harm's way.

While every municipality in NJ is required to have an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) which includes both an *Alert, Warning & Communication Annex* and an *Emergency Public Information Annex*, and each has a defined purpose of communicating with residents and businesses in the municipality, neither includes a section detailing specific communications communities within the municipality. Demographics of the community are not discussed. And, while each lists stakeholder and media contacts, there is nothing correlating population to the appropriate media type. In many EOPs, social media is completely left out, meaning the likelihood that younger populations are receiving emergency messages decreases.

As a supplement to, and in support of, a municipality's EOP, this action seeks to ensure that municipalities reach all vulnerable individuals with necessary information during emergencies. This would include taking advantage of available resources such as "Register Ready-NJ's Special Needs Registry for Disasters" to identify and keep track of residents with disabilities and other access or functional needs; and utilize alternative communication methods and community

stakeholders to get important warnings and updates to others who are at-risk.

Who should lead and be involved with this action?

The Office of Emergency Management, or for smaller municipalities, the Emergency Management Coordinator assisted by the Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator, should take the lead on this action.

The municipal planner can assist in defining community demographics with regards to vulnerable populations, assisted by public safety, municipal or county social services and health representatives. The municipal web or digital media professional should be involved to handle digital communication channel implementation and/or updates.

Also participating should be the municipal Public Information Officer (for smaller municipalities that is likely the Business Administrator), and the Police Public Information Officer in correlating demographics to communications methodologies. Municipal health officers, directors of social services, and faith based organizations are also key to disseminating emergency warnings and updates to vulnerable individuals throughout the community.

Timeframe

The time frame for this action is 3 months and up.

Project Costs and Resource Needs

US Census Bureau information is readily available online. Specific and localized information may also be available from county planning offices. Municipal planners should be well versed in the location of demographic data. A great deal of information about media types and usages by various populations is also available online.

If a municipality has completed the **Emergency Communications Planning Action**, resources developed as part of that action may be used to reach the defined populations in this action. If a municipality has not completed that action, there may be costs associated with developing the communications methodologies needed to reach the defined community groups of this action.

Because "Register Ready-NJ's Special Needs Registry for Disasters" is maintained by the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, there are no costs for a municipality to utilize the registry. Minor costs may be associated within the identification and marketing phases. This action may require additional resources for alternative communication methods including, but not limited to translation services, signing, screen readers, and web modifications to meet accessibility standards.

What to do, and how to do it ("How to")

Below we have listed the requirements for earning 10 points for this action:

1. Identify individuals with disabilities and other access and functional needs within the community and regularly make efforts to register them through "**Register Ready-NJ's Special Needs Registry for Disasters**", an online registration system for NJ residents with access and functional needs and their caregivers, so that first responders are aware of their presence and needs in case of emergency or disaster, and essential warnings and updates can be efficiently communicated with such individuals.

NOTE: A municipality will still qualify for points if it prefers to maintain its own similar database rather than utilize "Register Ready". Such a database should include at minimum, contact and location information of all vulnerable individuals and/or care givers and representatives of such individuals, description of special need and relevant necessary medical equipment.

"Register Ready" is made available to all municipalities, paid for by NJOEM at no cost to towns. The County OEM and Access and Functional Needs Coordinators have access to the back end of the "Register Ready" database and can give permissions to the appropriate municipal coordinator. The municipal staff member(s) appointed to administer the implementation of this action should contact their County Access and Functional Needs Liaisons or County or Municipal OEM Coordinators to discuss relevant maintenance and administration processes and other functions of the registry.

There are various ways people can register with “Register Ready,” including online (www.registerready.nj.gov) or by phone via NJ211. Towns should also consider their residents with limited or no access to Internet or phone and create a paper registration form (see Appendix 1: Monmouth County’s “Register Ready” application). A town can [download “Register Ready” brochures](#) on the program’s website, or request copies by contacting the NJOEM Access and Functional Needs Coordinator via lppboydk@gw.njsp.org or 609-455-9068.

It is recommended to use the same communication channels to market “Register Ready” determined for use by the municipality within the Emergency Communications Planning action, as well as other communication channels used by the municipality on a regular basis.

A testing exercise of the “Register Ready” system is recommended to ensure the correct contact information of vulnerable individuals has been collected and the system is ready to go during an emergency. Suggested language for a public notification test is “You are receiving this message because you registered for Register Ready, an emergency notification system. Please confirm receipt of this message by texting (or emailing/calling) _____.”

2. Keep an updated, internal list of key community stakeholders who can assist the municipality in circulating essential warnings and updates during an emergency to vulnerable individuals or groups whose circumstances create barriers to obtaining or understanding information. Such barriers might include age, religion, culture, language, ethnicity, geography, or socioeconomic status.

Community stakeholders will include those who are leaders within or service community and faith based networks, liaisons at special facilities (hospitals, schools, homeless shelters, nursing homes, local Centers for Independent Living, etc.), and local/county/state PIOs.

These community stakeholders can serve as an extra layer of communication (online, phone and door-to-door) to those vulnerable residents to ensure that important emergency alerts and updates are received by those in need.

3. Ensure that appropriate alternative communication formats, based on the needs of community residents, are used during public emergency announcements. Alternative communication formats may include but are not limited to the use of translation services for public, radio, televised and print notifications, American Sign Language during press conferences or other public or televised appearances, etc.

Technology is another consideration. In meeting the needs of people with disabilities and older adults, it is important that any online technologies (web, social media, email, etc.) meet current accessibility standards. For example, if a document containing emergency information is scanned and then uploaded to the web, it may not be usable by the blind. Scanned documents cannot be read by a screen reader. Simply creating a PDF using the built-in function in MS Word will create a PDF that can be read-aloud using Acrobat Reader. (In Reader, choose View > Read Out Loud > Activate Read Out Loud). Choosing a proper font color to create sufficient color contrast with a web page’s background color is another simple technique that will affect whether low vision or people who are color-blind can read web content.

What to submit to get credits/points

In order to earn 10 points for this action, a town must 1) identify individuals with disabilities and other access and functional needs within the community and regularly make efforts to register them through “Register Ready-NJ’s Special Needs Registry for Disasters”; 2) keep an updated, internal list of key community stakeholders who can assist the municipality in circulating essential warnings and updates during an emergency to vulnerable individuals or groups whose circumstances create barriers to obtaining or understanding information; and 3) ensure that appropriate alternative communication formats, based on the needs of community residents, are used during public emergency announcements.

The following documentation must be submitted each certification cycle as part of the online certification application in order to verify that the action requirements have been met. Towns must complete the downloadable [submission checklist](#).

1. Description of Implementation – Please use the text box provided on the submission page for this action to share a

summary of what has been accomplished and the impact it has or will have on the municipality beyond what was contained in the submission checklist.

2. Upload the following:

- a) A completed [submission checklist](#),
- b) Marketing materials used to register individuals with disabilities and other access and functional needs for "Register Ready" or an equivalent municipal database (#1),

IMPORTANT NOTES: There is a limit of six uploaded documents per action and individual files must not exceed 20 MB. Excerpts of relevant information from large documents are recommended. All action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submissions should not include any information or documents that are not intended to be viewed by the public.

Spotlight: What NJ Towns Are Doing

While we have not yet found a town that is doing everything included within this action, there are several examples of towns executing certain portions, as listed here:

Monmouth County - While managed at a county level, the Monmouth County OEM's use of Register Ready is a great example of how the program can be utilized. The department has a volunteer tasked specifically with registering individuals, keeping the database up to date, providing towns with local registrants so notifications can take place at the municipal level, and training for municipal OEMs on administering the Register Ready program. Registration efforts include utilizing the regional utility company's critical care list to target outreach, as well as personally signing up residents at county fairs, flu clinics, etc. [A hard copy registration form](#) is also provided through the department for individuals with limited online access.

Hamilton Township (Mercer County) - Hamilton Township has a ["Special Needs Assistance and Services" webpage](#) which includes a direct link to Register Ready NJ and other resources, while highlighting the work that the Township does to meet accessibility standards throughout town. The Township's Special Needs Advisory Commission also distributes Register Ready brochures at community events and has enabled residents to register by calling their HamStat call center.

High Bridge Borough (Hunterdon County) - High Bridge Borough [lists a number of ways to get information during an emergency](#), including registration for Register Ready NJ.

Resources

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

[ADA Best Practices Tool Kit for State and Local Governments](#) - 9-1-1 and Emergency Communication Services

[ADA Best Practices Tool Kit for State and Local Governments](#) - Emergency Management under Title II of the ADA

[People First Language](#) - The Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities has a useful guide on understanding developmental disabilities and using person first language

[Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) - a Federal law to ensure that federal agencies ensure that the electronic and information technology that it develops, procures, maintains, or uses is accessible to persons with disabilities.

[Read about](#) more resources to comply with the law

[FEMA's Access and Functional Needs Fact Sheet](#)

DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

[GIS mapping information: Planning For Emergencies Including The Disability Community: Spatial Mapping Project](#) - Noah's Ark Institute and BrightMinds Institute's look at maps of the northern New Jersey four contiguous counties of Hudson, Essex, Passaic and Bergen to provide a greater understanding of the disability community's population density within this region for emergency planning purposes.

[The Pew Research Center](#) is an excellent place to get information about communications methodologies utilized by

certain segments of the population. More resources: *How Social Media is Reshaping News*; *How People Get Local News & Information in Different Communities*; *Social Networking Fact Sheet*; *Closing the Digital Divide Between Latinos and Technology*

Other helpful articles:

How Americans Get News

Why Brands Need to Understand the Nuanced Differences in the Hispanic Market

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

IS-368: Including People with Disabilities & Others with Access & Functional Needs in Disaster Operations (online training)

IS-242.B: Effective Communication

NOTIFICATION ASSISTANCE TO VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS

Centers for Independent Living - Community based organizations in every county that provide advocacy, services and other resources to people with disabilities

NEW JERSEY OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Information for Individuals with Access/Functional needs

Public Information Officer Field Guide - specifically Section 3.6 Communicating with the whole community

Register Ready - **Brochures** are available in English & Spanish. Other resources are listed on **the website**. To register, visit: <http://www.registerready.nj.gov/>

WEB ACCESSIBILITY

W3C Web Accessibility Initiative

100 Killer Web Accessibility Resources: Blogs, Forums and Tutorials

Emergency 2.0 Wiki Accessibility Toolkit

Federal Social Media Accessibility Toolkit - tips for improving the accessibility of social media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Vine, and others)

Government Website Accessibility: Meeting the Mandate - a presentation at the 2013 GMIS Conference

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, open new opportunities for people with disabilities, and encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals.