



**CRITICAL COMMUNICATION  
BEST PRACTICES FOR DIVERSE  
POPULATIONS: *SERVING INDIVIDUALS  
WITH ACCESS AND FUNCTIONAL NEEDS***

[www.everbridge.com](http://www.everbridge.com)

## Special Considerations for Diverse Populations

When preparing your emergency communication plans, it is important to consider the diversity of your population and any special needs of your residents. In most communities, there will be some individuals who would have challenges receiving or responding to emergency directives, or accessing services following an emergency. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “at-risk individuals have needs in one or more of the following functional areas: communication, medical care, maintaining independence, supervision, and transportation. At-risk groups may include children, senior citizens, and pregnant women as well as people who have disabilities, live in institutionalized settings, are from diverse cultures, have limited English proficiency or are non-English speaking, are transportation disadvantaged, have chronic medical disorders, or have pharmacological dependency.”<sup>1</sup> Considerations for access or functional needs populations can influence how you communicate with those residents during an emergency, what steps residents and responders should take when an incident or event happens, and what factors comprise an emergency in the first place.

In addition to mapping out what response access and functional needs populations will need to take during an emergency, including any special considerations for evacuation, temporary shelter, or sheltering-in-place, you also need to carefully consider how to identify and communicate with those individuals when an emergency occurs.

## Identifying and Communicating with Access and Functional Needs Populations

Emergency communication with citizens should be automated through a critical communication solution. Quick and reliable communication is essential to the operations of any municipality; the ability to quickly and reliably reach staff, emergency personnel, and citizens over any voice or text device – and confirm receipt of messages – can help protect life and property during an emergency.

### Gathering Information and Increasing Self Registration

While many municipalities import white pages data into the critical communication platform, this source of contact data is often incomplete, doesn't prioritize citizen contact paths, and typically only represents a small fraction of the existing population of an area. In order to reach as many residents as possible with critical information, community self-registration is critical. But getting your residents to sign up for alerts can be challenging, particularly across diverse populations.

Consider access needs related to registration: factors such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, or lack of internet access or proficiency can hamper the use of standard online opt-in portals.

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<sup>1</sup> “At-Risk Individuals” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, June 11, 2014. <http://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/planning/abc/Pages/atrisk.aspx>, accessed June 25, 2014.

Ensure that options for manual registration are readily available – allow residents to submit information through multiple channels, including by phone or by mail. In order to improve access to these materials, distribute them as widely as possible. Consider including registration forms in utility bills or other outgoing mailings, at public meetings and community events, and at community facilities, including hospitals, town offices, and libraries.

A sample Manual Opt-In Form available in both English and Spanish

<div style="text-align: center;">   </div> <p><b>EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM</b></p> <p><b>If we can't REACH you... We can't ALERT you.</b></p> <p>VC Alert is an emergency notification system that may be used to deliver alerts when there is a threat to the health or safety of residents.</p> <p>In addition to emergency information, you may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select to receive messages regarding crime alerts, road closures, public meetings or other community events.</li> <li>• Choose the locations you want to be contacted about – your home, your parents' home, your workplace, and your child's school.</li> <li>• Receive alerts on your home phone, cellular phone, work phone, email, text messaging, facsimile, or instant messaging.</li> </ul> <p>The VC Alert database includes some landline and cellular phone numbers. Please register online to ensure that we have your current contact information.</p> <p> <b>INTERNET</b> - Go to <a href="http://www.vcalert.org">www.vcalert.org</a>. Registering online enables you to opt-in for community notifications, in addition to alerts and warnings.</p> <p><i>If you do not have access to a computer, please register by:</i></p> <p> <b>PHONE</b> – Call 805-648-9283</p> <p> <b>MAIL</b> – Complete the form below and mail to: Ventura County Sheriff's OES, 800 South Victoria Avenue #3450, Ventura, California 93009</p> <hr/> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Phone Number _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>City _____ Zip Code _____</p> <p>Email _____</p> <p><b>For more information, please contact us at 805-648-9283 or via email at <a href="mailto:vc.alert@ventura.org">vc.alert@ventura.org</a></b></p> <p><small>You will be charged the standard fee from your phone provider for receiving the emergency alerts. The County of Ventura is not responsible for any charges that may be incurred as a result of receiving these alerts.</small></p>	<div style="text-align: center;">   </div> <p><b>EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM</b></p> <p><b>Si no podemos LOCALIZARLO... No podemos ponerlo sobre aviso.</b></p> <p>VC Alert es un sistema de notificación de emergencias que se puede usar para avisar a la comunidad de alertas cuando haya una amenaza a la salud o a la seguridad de los residentes.</p> <p>Además de la información de emergencias, usted puede:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elegir mensajes de alerta de crimen, cierres de carreteras, juntas públicas o eventos comunitarios.</li> <li>• Escoja las ubicaciones donde le gustaría recibir información – su hogar, hogar de sus padres, trabajo, o la escuela de sus niños.</li> <li>• Reciba alertas en su teléfono de casa, celular, teléfono del trabajo, correo electrónico, mensajes de texto, fax o mensajería instantánea.</li> </ul> <p>La base de datos de VC Alert incluye algunos números de teléfono fijo y celular. Por favor de registrarse en la red cibernética para asegurar que tenemos la información de su contacto actual.</p> <p> <b>INTERNET</b> – Visítenos en <a href="http://www.vcalert.org">www.vcalert.org</a>. Registrarse por internet le permite recibir notificaciones de la comunidad, además de alertas y avisos.</p> <p><i>Si no tiene acceso a una computadora regístrese por:</i></p> <p> <b>TELEFONO</b> – Llame al 805-648-9283</p> <p> <b>CORREO</b> – Llene y mande este formulario a: Ventura County Sheriff's OES, 800 South Victoria Avenue #3450, Ventura, CA 93009</p> <hr/> <p>Nombre _____</p> <p>Numero de Teléfono _____</p> <p>Domicilio _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Ciudad _____ Código Postal _____</p> <p>Correo Electrónico _____</p> <p><b>Para mas información, por favor contáctenos en 805-648-9283 o por correo electrónico en <a href="mailto:vc.alert@ventura.org">vc.alert@ventura.org</a></b></p> <p><small>Se le cobrará la tarifa estándar de su proveedor de teléfono por recibir las alertas de emergencia. El Condado de Ventura no es responsable de los gastos que pueden ocurrir por recibir estas alertas.</small></p>
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Traci Masau, Emergency Management for Nassau County, Florida, explains that attending community events and meetings, especially those catering to special populations, such as senior citizens, helps increase registration numbers for the county's emergency communication system. "We do a registration push prior to hurricane season each year. We like to use traditional means such as the local newspaper and the media, but since we're a small county, our newspapers are only published twice a week. We started using social media, and we use that quite frequently, but we do have a large population of older citizens who may not have access to the internet or social media," explains Masau. "So we also have made a point to attend community meetings and do in-person outreach. At every event we attend, we take an online sign-up instruction form we created, but also a paper form that residents can fill out and mail back to us to register for them."

### **Provide Support for Opt-In Processes**

To increase the reach of local staff, registration options should be made available in places where service providers are available to help, including healthcare facilities and assisted living environments. According to Masau, Nassau County works with healthcare providers and caretakers who can assist those with access or functional needs with the registration process. Brian Radcliffe, of South Central Task Force (a group of eight counties in South Central Pennsylvania), also enlists help to guide citizens through opt-in registration. But these aren't health care workers, explains Radcliffe; they're very special volunteers. "We have a Girl Scout leader in one of our communities who thought it would be a great idea to get her Girl Scout troops to set up a walk in center in the computer rooms at the high school," says Radcliffe. "They hosted an open house day for people who don't have Internet access to come in and have the girls take care of handling of registering them. The Girl Scouts who participated received service project credits."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Questions and Answers with South Central Task Force. Everbridge. 2013. [http://www.everbridge.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/QA\\_SCTF2.pdf](http://www.everbridge.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/QA_SCTF2.pdf), accessed June 25, 2014.

## Gather Data on Access and Functional Needs during Registration

In addition to ensuring that individuals are registered in the critical communication system, you can improve communication with them by identifying access or functional needs with their system profile. This option to self-identify can be offered through both online and manual sign up forms. Consider including questions during the registration process that identify:

- Specific access or functional needs
- Medical equipment, service animal, or medication considerations
- Housing situation and concerns, including ability to evacuate or feasibility of shelter-in-place
- Available help, including professional service providers or co-located family
- Specific needs in the event of an emergency.

Telephone Number (include area code) \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town/City \_\_\_\_\_

Check all the boxes that apply.

**B** **Blind** – Someone at this location is blind or visually impaired.

**COG** **Cognitive Impairment** – Someone at this location has a cognitive impairment.

**H/D** **Hard of Hearing / Deaf** – Someone at this location is hard of hearing or deaf.

**LSS** **Life Support System** - Someone residing at this location is physically linked to equipment required to sustain his or her life.

**MI** **Mobility Impaired** - Someone residing at this location is bedridden, uses a wheelchair, or has a mobility impairment.

**PI** **Psychiatric Impairment** – Someone at this location has a psychiatric impairment.

**SI** **Speech Impairment** – Someone at this location has a speech impairment.

**TDD** **Telecommunications Device for the Deaf** – Someone at this location may be using a TDD/TTY.

Please **remove** any existing indicators presently being displayed.

Please **change** existing indicators to the ones above.

*Sample Manual Registration form including access and functional needs identification*

If you are using an online registration form, you should include access and functional needs questions as a separate page in the registration form.

**Residence**

**Medical Condition / Disability**

**Home Health Agency**

**Dialysis**

**Dialysis Times per Week**

**Additional Medical Information**

- Anxiety/Depression
- Bedridden
- Contagious/Infectious Disease
- Diabetes
- DNR Order
- Emergency Alert Equipment
- Hearing Impaired
- Heart/Pacemaker/Electronic Device
- High Blood Pressure
- Incontinent
- Life-sustaining Medical Equipment
- Life-sustaining Meds
- Memory Impaired
- Mental Health Impaired
- Mobility Impaired
- Open Wounds that Require Dressing Change
- Other Issues
- Paralysis, Complete
- Paralysis, Partial
- Severe Arthritis
- Sight Impaired
- Sign Language/Interpreter Needs
- Special Dietary Needs
- Speech Impaired
- Wheelchair User

**Contagious/Infectious Disease (explain)**

**Mental Health Impaired (explain)**

**Special Dietary Needs (explain)**

**Other Issues (explain)**

**Evacuation Assistance**

**Evacuation Location**

**Living Situation**

**Dialysis Center**

**Oxygen Requirements**

- Concentrator
- Nebulizer
- Other
- Portable
- Respirator (Ventilator)
- Suction Machine

**Oxygen Frequency**

**Language**

- Arabic
- Chinese (Simplified)
- Chinese (Traditional)
- Danish
- English (UK)
- English (US)

*Sample Online Registration form including access and functional needs identification*  
Source: Everbridge

This ensures that those with additional needs can clearly see where to input this information, and that those without additional needs can easily omit this section, limiting their time on the form.

In all cases, your opt-in portal needs to conform to accessibility guidelines, including Section 508 compliance and support for field-level view/read/write access controls. Likewise, your critical communication system should provide for delivery of messages to access and functional needs recipients, including support for TTY (telephone typewriter or teletypewriter) and TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf) devices.

## Drafting the Right Messages and Templates

While registering citizens and capturing information about your diverse populations is important, the real value lies in the ability to use this information to send targeted messages to those individuals during an emergency. When creating message templates for potential emergency scenarios, consider what specific messages would be sent to access and functional needs populations. If functional or access needs mean that these individuals should follow separate procedures from other populations – for example, sheltering in place versus attempting to evacuate – they should receive a distinct message indicating those directives. This level of targeted messaging helps eliminate confusion during emergency situations, when message recipient comprehension is often lowered by stress.

In addition to sending out automated messages to multiple audiences during an emergency, your critical communication system can also be used to collect additional information from recipients about their emergency needs. Consider the additional services that might be needed by at-risk groups during an emergency.

<b>Example supplementary needs of at-risk groups:</b>		
<i>Dialysis</i>	<i>Oxygen</i>	<i>Senior Citizens</i>
Residents needing dialysis will need access to equipment, and may require assistance with transportation to medical facilities.	Residents who need oxygen support have various needs for power to run their filters and other equipment.	Senior citizens may have multiple functional needs, including limited mobility, and access to medications and medical equipment. They could need transportation and other services.

Polling messages can help identify specific needs, and will allow you to let response teams know which services and professionals are needed to move and assist residents. Polling messages can also identify functional needs if that information is not captured during registration, although this can make it harder to drill down to specific needs when time is of the essence.

In all cases, messages sent during an emergency should be short and concise. A good example of a polling message that can be sent during an evacuation scenario is as follows:

**We are preparing to evacuate your area.**  
**Our records indicate you are wheelchair or bedbound.**  
“Please Press 1 if you can evacuate on your own”  
“Please Press 2 if will need ambulatory evacuation”

In this example, it is clear that during registration and opt-in, this resident indicated they were either wheelchair or bedbound. Because you, through your critical communication system, are aware of this specific qualification, you can send these individuals a different message than the general population. This type of targeted messaging also shows the value of creating templates for potential events in advance. By pre-crafting messages, you can automate delivery of messages by contact group, allowing you to quickly deliver multiple, specific messages during an emergency.

### **Need-Based Thresholds for Emergency Scenarios**

An understanding of your access and functional needs population can guide your instructions to responders and citizens during an emergency – and it can also shape your definition of an emergency itself. For citizens dependent on power for their medical devices, who need access to chronic care services, or medically fragile populations that could be negatively affected by extreme temperatures, for example, the definition of a critical situation is much broader than for the general population.

It is important to consider the unique scenarios that would impact citizens within your population, and to ensure that you have a way to deliver targeted messages to them to provide instructions or confirm needs. Andrew Lockman, Emergency Services Manager for the County of Tulare, California, explains, “We have a variety of clients. If we have an excessive heat event coming up, we’ll actually survey our vulnerable populations – those who may be medically fragile or even those who may have a difficult time paying their utility bills. We’ll send them a polling message,” Lockman explains, “We can ask them, ‘Are you okay and are you running your air conditioner? Are you aware there is a heat event coming up? Do you have any needs?’ We can then pull a report and see which citizens have needs, we hand those off to the social workers, and the social workers make follow up calls. We’re trying to create more of a safety net within the community as much as we can through all the disparate users.”

## Understanding Access and Functional Needs in Context

Identifying and communicating with access and functional needs individuals is critical to emergency management – but understanding these populations in context of your unique geography and any potential threats can be crucial to effective response.

By defining the GIS location of individuals who identify as having access or functional needs, you can then plot those contacts on a map – allowing you to see citizens who may be impacted by unique geographic concerns, like lower elevation or limited access roads, or group concentrations of citizens who may need similar specialized services in an emergency. Finally, by layering threat and weather feeds, recipient feedback, and situational intelligence (including data from social media feeds) on top of this view, you can better anticipate the potential impact of disruptive events on both individuals and groups.

Associating in context information about access and functional needs with individuals and their locations can help make response teams aware of what services will be needed in the case of an emergency. This information can create a more accurate view of the level of staff and help required during specific emergency scenarios, as well as help guide overall response efforts when a crisis hits, allowing coordination and prioritization of resources to support those with additional needs.

Says Masau, “We’ve started using Everbridge [our critical communication system] to create a notification group of special needs registrants. We will use this notification group prior to an actual evacuation decision being made to make those individuals aware of the upcoming hazards, to make them aware that we have a tropical storm or hurricane coming in, and let them know that they need to take preparedness measures even before they need evacuation.”

“We wanted a system to reach as many residents as we could, as fast as we could, so that they’re aware of what’s going in our county. It’s just another means of making sure our residents are safe.”



## About Everbridge

Everbridge provides a unified critical communication suite that helps clients be better prepared, make better decisions, and respond quickly and confidently during disruptive events. When an incident happens, whether it's a natural disaster or an IT service outage, we automate communications to ensure that the right messages get to the right people at the right time.

Widely recognized by analysts as the market leader, Everbridge solutions are trusted by clients in all major industries and government sectors to connect with over 50 million people around the world.

### THE ONLY END-TO-END PLATFORM

- **Planning:** Everbridge is easy to set up, maintain, and organize, meaning that you're always ready for a quick, coordinated response. Everbridge ensures that the right messages get to the right people - with the most advanced opt-in portal on the market, streamlined integration with internal and external data sources, and simple group and contact management.
- **Assessment:** When trouble strikes, you need rich insight, presented simply - so you can quickly assess potential impact and make an informed decision to avoid loss. Everbridge offers the only solution on the market that meets these demanding requirements, with the most advanced interactive dashboard in the industry.
- **Response:** In critical situations, ease-of-use can mean the difference between an effective response and a mistake that carries serious consequences. Everbridge is engineered to be simple to use under pressure, with a user interface that accelerates time-to-message and reduces the likelihood of errors.
- **Delivery:** Even during large-scale disruptions, Everbridge stays on. The most advanced platform in the industry ensures that you reach your contacts - every time. And with worldwide coverage and capabilities, including globally local calling infrastructure and data storage, we're ready to support you wherever your people are in the world.

Visit [www.everbridge.com](http://www.everbridge.com) to learn more.