





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction.....	2
About this Report.....	2
Purpose.....	2
Audience	3
Organization.....	3
Limitations.....	4
Using this Report.....	4
How We Reach People: Principles and Practices for Effective Community Outreach.....	6
What is Community Outreach?.....	6
What Makes Community Outreach Effective?.....	6
Why Is Community Outreach So Challenging?.....	6
Eight Key Principles for Effective Community Outreach	7
1. Build and Sustain Trusting Community Relationships	8
2. Leverage Trusted Messengers, Role Models, and Community Anchors	9
3. Make Messaging Actionable and Easy to Understand	11
4. Prioritize Cultural and Linguistic Relevance.....	13
5. Center Accessibility and Inclusion.....	14
6. Communicate Regularly and Across Multiple Channels	15
7. Recognize Layered Identities and Experiences	17
8. Evaluate, Adapt, and Document What Works.....	17
Who We Need to Reach: Communities and Characteristics of the Bay Area.....	20
Readily Reachable Communities and Characteristics	20
Harder-to-Reach Communities and Characteristics.....	21
Analysis and Strategic Recommendations for the Bay Area	23
Analysis of Strengths and Opportunities	23
Strengths.....	23
Opportunities.....	23
Strategic Recommendations for the Bay Area.....	24
1. Build Regional Infrastructure for Trusted Messenger Networks	24
2. Invest in Multi-Format, Multi-Language Resource Development	25
3. Support a Regional Approach to Inclusive Alerting.....	25
4. Enhance Community-Driven Outreach Measurement, Evaluation, and Feedback Mechanisms	26
5. Scale and Replicate Proven Community Outreach Initiatives Across the Region	26
Bibliography.....	27



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The San Francisco Bay Area is one of the most demographically, geographically, and culturally diverse regions in the country. This diversity is a strength, but it also creates complex challenges in ensuring that all residents receive, trust, and act on emergency information. *Message Received: Effective Community Outreach and Engagement for Preparedness, Response, and Recovery in the Bay Area* offers a regional roadmap for building outreach systems that are equitable, culturally responsive, and effective across the disaster lifecycle.

The report underscores that outreach cannot rely on one-size-fits-all strategies. Trust grows when agencies meet people where they are through familiar voices, community institutions, and clear, empathetic, actionable messaging. It also emphasizes that individuals belong to many communities at once; effective outreach must account for these overlapping identities and lived realities.

At its core, effective outreach is about connection: listening as well as informing, reducing barriers to access, and building long-term relationships that strengthen resilience across the region.

This report is designed for public information officers (PIOs), community outreach staff, emergency managers, and partner organizations involved in preparedness, crisis communication, and recovery messaging.

It is organized into three main sections with a companion set of outreach primers:

- **How We Reach People: Principles and Practices for Effective Community Outreach:** Eight guiding principles define what makes outreach effective, from building trust and leveraging trusted messengers to prioritizing accessibility, cultural relevance, and layered identities.
- **Who We Need to Reach: Bay Area Communities and Outreach Considerations:** A high-level overview of both readily reachable groups and those needing expanded communication pathways. Eighteen communities and characteristics are identified as especially harder to reach due to language, cultural, socioeconomic, geographic, or institutional barriers.
- **Analysis and Strategic Recommendations:** Five cross-cutting strategies provide a regional blueprint: strengthening trusted messenger networks, investing in multi-format resources, developing inclusive alerting systems, enhancing measurement and feedback, and scaling proven models.
- **Outreach Primers:** Detailed profiles of 18 communities and characteristics that can make people harder to reach, including outreach barriers, trusted channels, and promising practices, to be used as practical reference tools. An accompanying [StoryMap](#) translates the report's findings into an interactive visual experience. It highlights key takeaways from and links to 18 outreach primers, illustrating how outreach challenges and trusted communication pathways vary—and often intersect—across the region.



INTRODUCTION

Communities across the San Francisco Bay Area are actively working to build resilience to a wide range of hazards, from earthquakes and wildfires to public health emergencies and infrastructure disruptions. Local governments, public agencies, community-based organizations (CBOs), and faith-based organizations (FBOs) are increasingly collaborating to inform, engage, and empower residents and visitors through proactive outreach programs. These efforts are crucial in fostering a culture of preparedness, promoting individual, family, and community safety, and ensuring equitable access to life-saving information and resources.

The Bay Area Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) region, which includes three major urban centers (San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose) and 12 counties from Sonoma to Monterey, is home to more than 8 million residents. It is one of the most demographically and geographically diverse regions in the country. The region's diversity is a core strength. Still, it also introduces challenges for ensuring that outreach programs, emergency public information, and communications are timely, accessible, and culturally relevant for all communities.

The region's emergency managers, communications professionals, CBOs, and FBOs have long identified a need for more *effective* community outreach across the disaster lifecycle: from preparedness education and resilience-building before an emergency or disaster, to crisis communication and emergency public information during an event, and recovery messaging and access to resources in its aftermath.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is one component of the Bay Area UASI Equitable Community Resilience (ECR) Phase 2 Project, which aims to enhance emergency preparedness and response throughout the Bay Area by prioritizing equity in community outreach. The ECR Project is funded by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), through the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program (RCPGP).

This report is accompanied by two complementary resources: **outreach primers** and a [StoryMap](#).

- **Outreach Primers:** Eighteen stand-alone profiles offer insights into communities and characteristics that can face barriers to outreach. Each primer provides community context, describes challenges and barriers to engagement, highlights existing Bay Area initiatives and partnerships, and suggests ways to tailor outreach strategies for more effective connection.
- **StoryMap:** The StoryMap brings this work online, offering an interactive overview of the 18 communities and characteristics, maps for several, and direct links to each primer. Click [this link](#) to access the StoryMap (current as of October 2025).

Together, these tools extend the findings of this report into practical, accessible formats for planners, communicators, and community partners.

PURPOSE

Grounded in FEMA's "whole community" approach—with a specific focus on historically underserved and often excluded or isolated communities, as well as residents who may seem well connected yet face hidden barriers to information or engagement—the purpose of this report is to:

- Define what constitutes effective community outreach and present a set of key principles for engaging with all communities.
- Identify and characterize "harder-to-reach" communities in the region.



- Examine community-level barriers and population-specific outreach challenges.
- Recommend scalable, inclusive, and equity-centered approaches to improving effective community outreach.

The report's overarching goal is to help the region build coordinated, culturally responsive, and equitable outreach programs. The aim is to ensure all Bay Area communities, regardless of language, income, ability, or background, are informed, prepared, and supported before, during, and after emergencies.

This report is informed by both theoretical and practice-based frameworks related to communication theory, behavioral change, and inclusive community engagement. It reflects insights gathered from research, case studies, and engagement with stakeholders around the region, including CBOs, local agency staff, and frontline messengers. The report is designed to support both policy and practice by offering actionable recommendations grounded in lived experience.

AUDIENCE

This report is designed to support public information officers (PIOs), community outreach staff, and their partners across the Bay Area UASI region who plan and deliver preparedness, risk communication, and behavior change campaigns. Audiences for this report may include:

- **City, county, and regional PIOs and emergency managers** who develop and lead outreach and resilience-building efforts.
- **Bay Area UASI jurisdictions and working groups** focused on community preparedness, equitable communication, and inclusive public engagement.
- **Community outreach program leads in public health, social services, and AFN coordination** who work with vulnerable populations and drive preparedness and response messaging.
- **CBOs, faith-based organizations, and nonprofit partners** that serve as trusted messengers for hard-to-reach communities.
- **Language access, disability access, and equity officers** working to ensure that outreach materials are linguistically appropriate and culturally responsive.
- **Policy and program development staff, researchers, and grant administrators** who use data-informed strategies to design, evaluate, and fund outreach initiatives.
- **State and federal emergency management partners (Cal OES, FEMA Region 9)** who can draw on these findings to guide regional coordination and support local efforts.

Ultimately, this report aims to equip Bay Area stakeholders responsible for public information and community engagement with tools and insights to strengthen coordination, effectiveness, and equity in outreach and preparedness campaigns.

ORGANIZATION

This report is organized into three main sections, supplemented by 18 outreach primers that provide community- and characteristic-specific information.

1. **How We Reach People: Principles and Practices for Effective Community Outreach**
Defines community outreach generally, explores outreach challenges, and presents a set of key principles for effective community outreach.
2. **Who We Need to Reach: Bay Area Communities and Outreach Considerations**
Explores the region's diverse communities, distinguishing between "readily reachable" groups and those needing expanded communication pathways.



3. Analysis and Strategic Recommendations

Presents a set of overarching strategic recommendations for the region to enhance equitable, effective community outreach.

Outreach Primers

The outreach primers are a set of 18 stand-alone documents that profile harder-to-reach communities and characteristics across the Bay Area. Each primer highlights communication barriers, trusted channels, and promising practices, serving as a practical reference tool for public information officers, emergency managers, and community partners. The StoryMap complements the primers by presenting this information in an interactive, visual format—helping readers explore where outreach gaps and opportunities exist across the region.

LIMITATIONS

Recognizing the limitations of this report and the outreach primers helps ensure the findings and recommendations are understood within the proper context.

First, data on outreach effectiveness are inconsistent across jurisdictions and organizations. Formal evaluation metrics for outreach programs are not standardized regionally, which makes direct comparison challenging. As a result, the identification of key principles, gaps and challenges, and promising practices in this report is informed by a combination of available data, practitioner experience, and subject matter expertise, and may involve a degree of subjective interpretation.

Second, access to some external sources was restricted. Peer-reviewed research, case studies, and industry reports were occasionally inaccessible due to paywalls or limited publication rights. These restrictions may have reduced the range of perspectives and examples included in the analysis.

Third, both the main report and the outreach primers represent a snapshot of the current environment in the Bay Area. Many of the programs, initiatives, and partnerships highlighted are subject to change over time due to shifts in funding, leadership, or community priorities. Similarly, external web links to resources, tools, and references provided in the report may change or become inactive over time.

Taken together, these limitations underscore that the report and outreach primers should be viewed as a practical, experience-informed guide rather than a definitive or exhaustive account of all effective outreach practices. Continued evaluation, updated research, and periodic review of program status and resources will be essential to ensure ongoing relevance and accuracy.

USING THIS REPORT

This report, along with its companion outreach primers and StoryMap, is designed to serve as a comprehensive resource and practical reference guide for public agencies, community- and faith-based organizations, non-governmental partners, and other stakeholders involved in emergency management and disaster preparedness outreach.

The materials are organized so they can be used together or independently—whether to design an audience-specific campaign, inform a grant proposal, shape a training module, guide program development, or serve as a quick-reference tool during outreach planning. The outreach primers provide actionable guidance for developing effective outreach strategies, identifying key partners, and tailoring communication approaches. The StoryMap offers a visual entry point for understanding the Bay Area's diverse communities, highlighting where communication barriers overlap and showcasing proven strategies for effective engagement.



Throughout this report, these text boxes provide references and resources for the reader to learn more and dive deeper into specific concepts.



Readers may choose to:

- **Read the full report to** gain an understanding of key concepts, including eight principles for effective community outreach and potential strategies to improve outreach across the Bay Area.
- **Use individual sections independently** for targeted purposes, such as integrating a specific principle into an outreach plan or adapting a Bay Area example for a local program.
- **Explore the [StoryMap](#)** for an interactive overview of the 18 communities and characteristics, including example strategies and regional context.
- **Explore detailed outreach considerations** for specific communities and characteristics using any of the 18 outreach primers.
- **Share specific excerpts** with internal teams, partner organizations, or decision-makers to focus attention on particular strategies or needs.



HOW WE REACH PEOPLE: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY OUTREACH

WHAT IS COMMUNITY OUTREACH?

Community outreach refers to intentional efforts by public agencies and community organizations to communicate with, engage, and empower people before, during, and after emergencies. It is not a one-time event or single channel; it's a continuum of engagement across the disaster lifecycle, helping individuals and communities plan ahead, respond appropriately, and recover effectively.

WHAT MAKES COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFECTIVE?

Effective community outreach does more than disseminate information. It reaches the right people, in the right way, and at the right time to motivate action. For this project, we define effective outreach as that which:

1. **Reaches the intended audiences**, especially those who have been historically underserved or are at greater risk.
2. **Reflects community realities** by being culturally and linguistically appropriate, inclusive, and accessible.
3. **Builds understanding and trust**, reducing misinformation and encouraging accurate interpretation.
4. **Leads to action**, such as preparedness planning, protective behavior during emergencies, or engagement with available resources.
5. **Fosters long-term relationships** between agencies and communities, grounded in mutual trust and credibility.
6. **Reduces disparities** by bridging information and access gaps across demographic, geographic, and technological lines.
7. **Includes measurement to inform and improve** by incorporating evaluation methods to assess reach, impact, and equity, enabling continuous learning and adaptation.

Ultimately, effective outreach is about connection. It's about meeting people where they are, listening to what they need, and ensuring every community, especially those often left out, has the tools and information to stay safe, informed, and resilient.

WHY IS COMMUNITY OUTREACH SO CHALLENGING?

Despite decades of research, field experience, and widespread acknowledgment of the principles of community outreach, many communities across the Bay Area and the country remain harder to reach with emergency preparedness, response, and recovery messaging. This disconnect is not simply due to a lack of insight or good intentions. In fact, many times, public agencies and organizations understand both the challenges and the

Since the 1940s, communication theorists have developed and refined models that depict the process of communication, identifying each of the components necessary for a message to be developed, sent, received, and acted upon.

David Berlo's *The Process of Communication* builds on previous models and posits that, in its simplest form, communication includes four basic components:

- **Source:** The entity that wants to communicate (or send) information
- **Message:** The information itself
- **Channel:** The medium (or method) used to deliver the information
- **Receiver:** The audience for whom the information is intended

This Source-Message-Channel-Receiver (SMCR) model can provide a framework for understanding the various factors communicators and outreach professionals must consider in designing effective outreach and messaging.



strategies that could improve outreach. The problem lies in a persistent gap between what we know and what we do. This gap is caused by deeply rooted structural, operational, and political challenges.

Structural inequities, such as disinvestment in marginalized neighborhoods, housing instability, and mistrust stemming from experiences with carceral or immigration systems, create real and enduring obstacles to communication. Even when messages are well-designed, they often fail to resonate because they do not come through trusted channels or reflect the lived realities of the audience.

Meanwhile, bureaucratic silos, underfunded community engagement efforts, rigid communication technologies, and a reliance on sometimes politicized digital tools all combine to limit the flexibility and inclusivity of outreach systems. These systems are often designed for scale and efficiency, not for nuance or cultural responsiveness.

At the same time, the lack of sustained political will and long-term investment in proactive engagement means outreach efforts are frequently reactive and short-lived. Outreach is often deprioritized outside of crisis periods, and many promising practices are never fully evaluated, institutionalized, or scaled. The result is a cycle in which agencies repeatedly attempt to "reach the unreachable" using tools and approaches that were never built with those communities in mind. **In short, we're often not missing the mark due to a lack of understanding; instead, a host of barriers prevents us from consistently applying what we know works and transforming that knowledge into lasting, community-rooted systems of communication and trust.**

“ Even after people decide to take action, many won't, or won't persevere long enough to succeed. Consider, for example, your most recent New Year's resolution.”

Edward Maibach, *Increasing Public Awareness and Facilitating Behavior Change*

EIGHT KEY PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Effective community outreach is rooted in more than just information sharing; it involves intentional strategies that build trust, foster inclusion, and promote long-term resilience. This report highlights eight guiding principles:



1 Building and sustaining trusting relationships



2 Leveraging trusted messengers, role models, and community anchors



3 Making messaging actionable and easy to understand



4 Prioritizing cultural and linguistic relevance



5 Centering accessibility and inclusion



6 Communicating regularly across multiple channels



7 Recognizing layered identities and experiences



8 Evaluating, adapting, and documenting what works



Together, these principles emphasize both the importance of trusted relationships and the recognition that people are layered—no one fits into a single community or characteristic, and effective outreach must reflect these overlapping realities.



1. BUILD AND SUSTAIN TRUSTING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Trust is the cornerstone of all effective community outreach. It cannot be rushed or manufactured during a crisis; it must be built gradually through consistent presence, mutual respect, and authentic collaboration.

For many communities, particularly those that have experienced historic marginalization or government neglect, trust must be earned over time through demonstrated accountability, humility, and relationship continuity.

While relationship-building strategies must be adapted to the demographics, histories, and cultural dynamics of specific communities, several overarching practices apply:

- **Lead with empathy and cultural humility:** Acknowledge past harms and remain open to community-defined priorities and perspectives.
- **Listen actively and continuously:** Do not assume what communities need. Ask, observe, and adjust over time. Involve community stakeholders early; do not merely ask them to review decisions after the fact.
- **Be visible outside of crisis events:** Trust is built in everyday interactions, not just when institutions need cooperation.
- **Follow through:** Small commitments (e.g., responding to questions, providing requested information, or attending local events) reinforce reliability and credibility.
- **Respect and support community infrastructure:** Work with existing leaders, institutions, and networks that communities already trust.
- **Close the feedback loop:** It is not enough to gather input; communities need to see how their feedback is used. Agencies should clearly communicate the decisions made, how community input influenced the outcomes, and the steps being taken next.

Effective relationships are reciprocal and sustained throughout the emergency management cycle, not just during preparedness or response. Outreach strategies should align with both short- and long-term goals and be shaped by community preferences for engagement. This means understanding whether an initiative is primarily intended to inform, consult, or prompt action, and choosing messengers, formats, and timing accordingly.



WANT TO
LEARN MORE?

- Facilitating Power's [*The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*](#)
- IAP2's [*Spectrum of Public Participation*](#)



AVOIDING TOKENISM AND SHARING POWER

Tokenism occurs when community engagement is performative rather than meaningful. For example, a single representative from a target audience or marginalized group may be invited to a planning meeting without granting them actual influence or integrating their input into final decisions. While such actions may check a procedural box, they ultimately erode trust, reinforce inequities, and signal to communities that their involvement is superficial or symbolic. Trusted community relationships and true equity require shifting from token consultation to shared power, where participants have decision-making authority, not just advisory roles.

Community members provide time, expertise, and lived experience, assets that should be recognized and compensated. Honorariums, stipends, food, transportation, and childcare are tangible ways to reduce barriers to participation and demonstrate respect. Equally important is meeting people where they are—literally and figuratively—by showing up in community spaces, partnering with trusted organizations, and being willing to “go to their table” rather than expecting them to always come to yours. This approach signals respect, reduces barriers, and builds the foundation for authentic collaboration.



2. LEVERAGE TRUSTED MESSENGERS, ROLE MODELS, AND COMMUNITY ANCHORS

In today’s communication environment, effective outreach depends less on formal authority and more on relational trust, visibility, and cultural relevance. As public trust in institutions fluctuates, people increasingly rely on trusted messengers, respected role models, and community anchors (individuals and institutions embedded within local networks) to interpret, validate, and amplify public information.

Trusted Messengers

Trusted messengers are individuals who already hold credibility within their community. These may include faith leaders, teachers, youth mentors, barbers, social workers, healthcare navigators, local business owners, and peer educators. Because they share language, experience, values, or history with their audience, they are better equipped than official spokespeople to convey timely, culturally grounded, and actionable messages.

Trusted messengers play a critical role in:

- **Building Trust:** People are more likely to heed guidance from those who understand their lived reality. In communities that have faced systemic neglect or marginalization, trust is often more relational than institutional in nature.
- **Expanding Reach:** Informal messengers amplify messages through personal conversations, WhatsApp groups, or community gatherings, reaching people who may not engage with formal channels.
- **Increasing Relevance:** Trusted messengers know the “how” and “when” of communication, tailoring delivery to the rhythms, language, and concerns of their communities.



WANT TO
LEARN MORE?

- Ad Council Research Institute’s [*2021 Trusted Messengers Study*](#)
- Stanford Social Innovation Review’s [*Finding the Right Messenger for Your Message*](#)

“It’s not just about the content, it’s also about the messenger. As government communicators, we often overestimate the influence of traditional government spokespeople (ex: elected officials) with the public. We hope that just because our information is vetted, the public will automatically find it credible.”

[*How to Find and Collaborate with Trusted Messengers*](#)



- **Fostering Action:** When preparedness guidance comes from someone embedded in the community, it feels less like a directive and more like mutual support. The messenger's endorsement can galvanize action and normalize safety behaviors.

Role Models

While trusted messengers typically disseminate information, role models inspire behavior change by embodying resilience, preparedness, or civic leadership. These may include formerly unhoused residents now serving as community safety volunteers, teens leading school emergency planning projects, or public figures who disclose their past trauma to encourage preparedness and healing.

Role models support outreach by:

- **Demonstrating Possibility:** They show that people like "us" can prepare, respond, and recover successfully. Their example carries social proof and motivation.
- **Combatting Misinformation:** Role models build confidence in reliable information sources and reduce the influence of misinformation.
- **Reducing Stigma:** In communities where preparedness is not normalized or where accessing services may feel shameful, role models humanize these actions, thereby reducing cultural or psychological barriers.
- **Connecting Emotionally:** Role models create emotional resonance and deepen message retention through storytelling, especially in preparedness education.

Community Anchors

Community anchors are places, programs, or institutions that provide stability, visibility, and consistent presence in the community. Unlike messengers or role models, anchors are often found in organizational settings (e.g., libraries, churches, mutual aid hubs, senior centers, cultural institutions, or neighborhood associations).

These anchors are crucial for:

- **Serving as Physical and Relational Hubs:** They are where people gather, receive services, or connect, making them ideal sites for in-person outreach, material distribution, or relationship building. In some jurisdictions, this role is formalized through resilience centers, designated community spaces that provide information, resources, and trusted support before, during, and after emergencies.
- **Maintaining Continuity:** In times of disruption, community anchors may remain trusted sources of stability, even if formal systems are compromised.
- **Co-Creating Engagement:** Anchors can co-host events, offer feedback on messaging strategies, and mobilize networks during preparedness or response campaigns.



BLUEPRINT

How to Identify Trusted Messengers, Role Models, and Community Anchors



Start with Mapping

Use social network mapping or community intelligence approaches to identify who people already turn to for information, advice, or support in daily life. Look for both formal leaders (e.g., clergy, program directors) and informal connectors (e.g., barbers, neighborhood organizers).



Consult Local Partners

Ask CBOs, FBOs, schools, health clinics, and service providers who they see as trusted voices. Engage access and functional needs (AFN) coordinators, promoters, and other cultural brokers who often straddle multiple networks.



Observe Community Spaces

Visit gathering spots such as libraries, senior centers, farmers' markets, resilience centers, and neighborhood associations. Note who facilitates conversations, organizes activities, or is approached by others for guidance.



Look for Overlap and Reach

Identify individuals or institutions who connect across multiple groups (e.g., a youth coach who is also active in a faith community). Prioritize messengers who can bridge different demographics or neighborhoods.



Validate with the Community

Don't assume. Ask community members directly who they listen to and why. Use listening sessions, focus groups, or informal interviews to confirm.



Formalize and Support

Once identified, invest in building long-term relationships. Provide training, stipends, and materials to equip them as part of a trusted messenger network.



3. MAKE MESSAGING ACTIONABLE AND EASY TO UNDERSTAND

Effective outreach does more than inform; it motivates people to act. In high-stress situations, such as natural disasters or public health emergencies, people often struggle to process complex or abstract information. For this reason, messaging must be designed for clarity, relevance, and immediate usability. The goal is to help individuals understand exactly what steps they can take to protect themselves, their families, and their communities.

The Message Design Dashboard (MDD), developed by FEMA's Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS), provides a practical tool for crafting clear, concise, and action-oriented 90- and 360-character alert messages for over 50 hazard types. It guides communicators to focus on the audience's immediate needs, define the key action being requested, and design messages grounded in crisis psychology and social science research. By using the MDD, outreach staff can quickly draft alert messages that adhere to the standards of clarity, brevity, and relevance.



EXAMPLE EVACUATION MESSAGE

WITHOUT MDD

"Due to changing fire conditions, residents are strongly advised to evacuate Zone SMC-E048 as soon as possible."

WITHOUT MDD

"San Mateo County Sheriff: Fire danger is increasing. Leave Zone SMC-E048 now. Take your family, pets, and essentials. Go south on Skyline Boulevard to the San Mateo Event Center at 1346 Saratoga Drive."

The second message is shorter, action-focused, and immediately usable, reflecting how the MDD can transform outreach under pressure.

Messages are most effective when they are:

- **Clear and Concise:** Use plain language, avoid jargon, and keep messages short.
- **Behavior-Oriented:** Frame messages around specific actions, and tie this to safety and well-being.
- **Focused:** Prioritize no more than three key actions per message to reduce cognitive load.
- **Honest, frank, and open:** Avoid euphemisms or overly technical explanations. Share what is known, what is uncertain, and what actions are being taken.
- **Visual:** Incorporate images, pictograms, or infographics to aid understanding, especially for multilingual or low-literacy audiences.
- **Compassionate:** Acknowledge fear, loss, and uncertainty in messaging. Messages that convey empathy can help build trust and encourage people to act, especially when facing unfamiliar or frightening situations.
- **Community-Vetted:** Messages should be tested with local audiences to ensure accuracy, cultural relevance, and credibility. Translation is not enough; messages must be adapted to reflect local dialects, norms, and values.



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s [Clear Communication Index](#)
- Vincent Covello's [Communicating in Risk, Crisis, and High Stress Situations: Evidence-Based Strategies and Practice](#)
- CDC CERC [Manual Messages and Audienceschapter](#)



Understanding and Acknowledging Natural Human Behavior

Recognizing human behavior—especially in high-stress situations like disasters and emergencies—is critical for designing effective outreach programs and messages. Considering the Eight Key Principles for Effective Community Outreach can help us acknowledge how people seek, receive, process, and act on information, while recognizing that people:

- Talk to friends or family, check multiple sources, and seek confirmation before acting. This is known as “milling.”
- Tend to seek out information that supports what they already believe, and they may discount messages that contradict their assumptions. This is known as “confirmation bias.”
- Underestimate their own personal risk (“it won’t happen to me!”). This is known as “optimism bias.”
- Look to the actual behavior of others before acting. This is known as “social proofing.”
- Choose and use specific media to fulfill certain needs. This is known as “uses and gratifications theory.”



4. PRIORITIZE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC RELEVANCE

Culturally and linguistically relevant outreach programs are not optional; they are essential to both equity and effectiveness in community outreach. California law requires public agencies, particularly those in public safety and emergency management, to proactively incorporate linguistic and cultural competency into their operations.

Evidence shows that outreach programs and messages adapted for cultural context and provided in people’s primary languages:

- **Improves comprehension** and reduces life-threatening misinterpretation during crises.
- **Builds trust** by demonstrating respect for community identity, traditions, and experiences.
- **Increases uptake** of emergency public information by making information feel personally relevant and actionable.
- **Counters misinformation** by leveraging trusted messengers and culturally familiar channels.

 **WANT TO LEARN MORE?**

➔ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [Cultural Competency Program for Disaster and Emergency Management](#)

In building culturally and linguistically community outreach programs, public entities, CBOs, and FBOs should consider:

- **Evolving from translation to transcreation:** Direct translation is rarely enough. Transcreation ensures that tone, idioms, imagery, values, and context are adapted to achieve a cultural fit.
- **Using multi-format messaging:** No single format will reach everyone. Effective campaigns provide information in various formats, including written, audio, visual, and oral, ensuring accessibility for all audiences. Visuals are especially critical for communities that speak non-written languages (such as Mixteco or Triqui). In Santa Cruz County, for example, partners have developed illustrated emergency guides for farmworker families that utilize color-coded icons, pictograms, and short videos, rather than text, ensuring that critical messages reach residents who cannot be served by written translation alone.



- **Considering appropriate reading levels:** Plain language is essential. Guidance for emergency communications generally recommends aiming for an elementary-school reading level (often described as between 3rd–5th or 4th–6th grade). Rather than treating this as a rigid standard, the key is to use short sentences, simple vocabulary, and clear formatting. Materials should be tested with community members to confirm that they are understandable and actionable.
- **Testing messages with target communities:** Pre-test messages with representatives of the intended audience. Rapid usability testing and community feedback help identify unclear or culturally inappropriate content before wide release, preventing mistrust and improving effectiveness.
- **Developing libraries of messages and resources:** A library enables a more rapid and coordinated response during a crisis, ensuring that trusted information is readily available in multiple languages and formats.



5. CENTER ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

Emergency management and disaster preparedness outreach efforts must serve *everyone* in the community, including people with disabilities, older adults, individuals with temporary or situational impairments, and those affected by systemic inequities. Accessibility is not only a legal obligation (see “Accessibility and Inclusion Mandates” below); it ensures that no group is left without timely, actionable information or access to resources.

Centering accessibility and inclusion means designing communications, outreach programs, and services from the outset so they are usable by people with diverse abilities, technologies, and life circumstances, rather than retrofitting them later.

- **Designed for Universal Access from the Start:** Build outreach materials, messages, and resources that follow universal design principles. This means they are usable by as many people as possible without adaptation. This includes using plain language text, captioned videos, audio descriptions, American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, large print, high-contrast visuals, alternative text (alt text), and screen-reader-friendly digital formats.
- **In Compliance with Accessibility Laws and Standards:** Meet or exceed federal and state accessibility and inclusion mandates, such as California accessibility standards for print and digital resources, outreach events, and public meetings.
- **Informed by Disaster and Inclusion Specialists:** Include representatives from disability advocacy groups, aging services, and equity organizations in outreach planning, implementation, and evaluation. Their insights help identify barriers and practical solutions before an emergency. Examples include the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers (CFILC) and its Disability Disaster Access and Resources program, the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Berkeley, the World Institute on Disability (WID) in Alameda County, and local Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) across the Bay Area. Partnering with these organizations ensures outreach reflects lived experience and practical expertise.
- **Delivered through Multiple Channels and in Multiple Formats:** No single channel or format reaches everyone. This approach is key to accommodating diverse preferences and needs.
- **Considerate of Intersectional Needs:** Recognize that disability often intersects with other factors, such as language, poverty, rural location, or lack of internet access, that compound barriers. Coordinate with cultural and linguistic outreach partners to address these overlapping needs.

WANT TO
LEARN MORE?

- Cal OES [Integrating Accessible Social Media Content within Emergency Communications](#)
- Bay Area UASI [Access & Functional Needs Planning](#)



- **Tested Before Deployment:** Conduct accessibility audits and usability testing with community members who have diverse disabilities and access needs. Test everything, from emergency websites and apps to flyers and social media posts, before they are used.
- **Embedded into Training:** Train emergency managers, public information officers, and field personnel on disability etiquette, inclusive communication, and assistive technology use. Include accessibility scenarios in emergency drills.

Accessibility and Inclusion Mandates

Adapted from the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) Office of Access and Functional Needs.

FEDERAL MANDATES

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990:

Requires equal access for people with disabilities, including programs and activities conducted or funded by the federal, state, or local governments.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:

Requires all entities that receive federal financial assistance to effectively communicate with people who have communication disabilities, including hearing, vision, mobility, or cognitive disabilities.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973:

Requires federal electronic information and information technology be accessible to people with disabilities. Under Section 508 (29 U.S.C. § 794d), agencies must give employees with disabilities and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to others.

STATE MANDATES

Government Code Section § 7405: Directs that state governmental entities follow Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act requiring accessibility of digital information and technology.

State Government Code § 8593.3: Requires jurisdictions to integrate access and functional needs within their respective Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs), and section (c) mandates they do so by including whole community representatives in the development process. Specifically, jurisdictions must indicate how they will serve the access and functional needs community by addressing several elements, including emergency communications and the integration of interpreters, translators, and assistive technology.

State Government Code § 11135: Requires state agencies and state-funded programs and activities comply with the protections under the ADA and provide full and equal access for people with disabilities to the benefits of those programs.



6. COMMUNICATE REGULARLY AND ACROSS MULTIPLE CHANNELS

Reaching diverse communities requires outreach that is not only culturally and linguistically relevant, accessible, and inclusive, but also strategic in its delivery. People access information through a wide variety of channels.

These channels are broadly defined to include communication methods (e.g., text, audio, face-to-face), physical locations (e.g., community centers, libraries), and platforms (e.g., social media, SMS, radio). Effective outreach programs must reflect this complexity.

Research shows that:

- Messages must be repeated often to increase the likelihood of awareness, comprehension, and action.
- Messaging should not depend on any one format or platform but be distributed across multiple, overlapping modes to maximize accessibility, reinforce messages, and reach historically underserved audiences.
- People choose and use specific media or channels to fulfill particular needs.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch [*Uses and Gratifications Research*](#)
- National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism [*Understanding Risk Communication Theory: A Guide for Emergency Managers and Communicators*](#)



A multi-channel approach ensures that information is more likely to reach individuals who may face barriers related to technology access, language, literacy, or institutional trust. Each channel plays a different role: social media can deliver urgent updates, printed flyers can reach those without internet access, community events foster two-way dialogue, and radio, SMS, or local newsletters can extend to populations outside mainstream networks. By diversifying the “where” and “how” of communication, public agencies can better meet people where they are, both physically and socially, thereby increasing the likelihood that individuals will engage with information in a way that aligns with their expectations and preferences.

Channels and Methods

Methods and channels to consider in designing effective community outreach programs include:

Traditional Mass Media:

- Local newspapers and magazines
- Local radio stations
- Commercial TV stations
- Community and local access television channels
- Multi-language media

Printed Resources:

- Flyers, brochures, and posters
- Direct mail postcards

Partner Publications and Mailings:

- Newsletters from community partners like churches, schools, libraries, community centers, senior centers, and local businesses
- Utility bill inserts

Social and Digital Media

- Major social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, TikTok, and LinkedIn
- Neighborhood-targeted platforms like Nixle, Nextdoor, and neighborhood online forums/email lists
- Email newsletters
- Podcasts

Community Events

- Preparedness fairs
- Community parades and festivals
- Farmers’ markets
- Neighborhood association meetings
- School assemblies and community events
- Pop-up informational tabling

Door-to-Door Outreach

- Volunteer or staff canvassers
- Residential brochures, flyers, or resource packets
- Doorstep question-and-answer sessions
- Translated materials and culturally relevant resources
- Community leader or block captain coordination
- Household contact information or alert sign-up forms



7. RECOGNIZE LAYERED IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES

No individual fits neatly into a single category or community. People’s lives are shaped by overlapping identities, circumstances, and characteristics—such as language, age, housing status, health, disability, income, immigration experience, or cultural background—that interact in complex ways. In practice, this means that outreach challenges rarely exist in isolation. For example, an older adult who is also a renter with limited English proficiency may face compounded barriers to receiving, trusting, and acting on emergency information.

Recognizing these layered realities requires moving away from one-size-fits-all assumptions. Outreach strategies should be flexible enough to address multiple needs simultaneously and adaptable enough to respond to the intersections where people live their daily lives. This perspective helps emergency managers and community partners avoid designing outreach around a “typical” audience that does not exist, while balancing the need to craft messages that reach broadly and do the greatest good, without overlooking those who face higher barriers to access.

Several practices can strengthen outreach by centering layered identities:

- **Use intersectional planning:** When designing campaigns, consider how multiple factors—such as disability, poverty, and language access—may overlap to shape outreach effectiveness.
- **Engage diverse voices in testing and evaluation:** People with lived experience of overlapping barriers can identify blind spots that single-issue approaches miss.
- **Design flexible communication strategies:** Provide materials in multiple languages, formats, and channels so individuals with varied needs can access and act on the same information.
- **Acknowledge complexity in messaging:** Where possible, avoid oversimplifying audiences. Outreach should communicate respect for the diversity of people’s lived experiences.

The companion outreach primers and StoryMap both illustrate how layered identities shape communication needs. For example, a Spanish-speaking older adult who is also a renter or a digitally disconnected farmworker may face multiple overlapping barriers to receiving and trusting emergency information. These resources highlight how communities intersect across language, housing, health, and technology divides, reminding us that outreach must be designed for complexity rather than simplicity.



8. EVALUATE, ADAPT, AND DOCUMENT WHAT WORKS

Measuring the effectiveness of outreach is a critical yet often overlooked aspect of program implementation. Many outreach programs operate without the staffing, training, or organizational support needed to carry out effective evaluation. Evaluation of outreach programs and messaging enables continuous learning, accountability, and meaningful improvement. A deliberate focus on measurement and evaluation should be integrated from the beginning of any outreach effort, not treated as an afterthought, and designed in collaboration with the communities being served. To be effective, evaluation must go beyond tracking activities. Instead, it should assess whether outreach efforts are actually leading to desired changes, such as increased preparedness, trust, or participation.

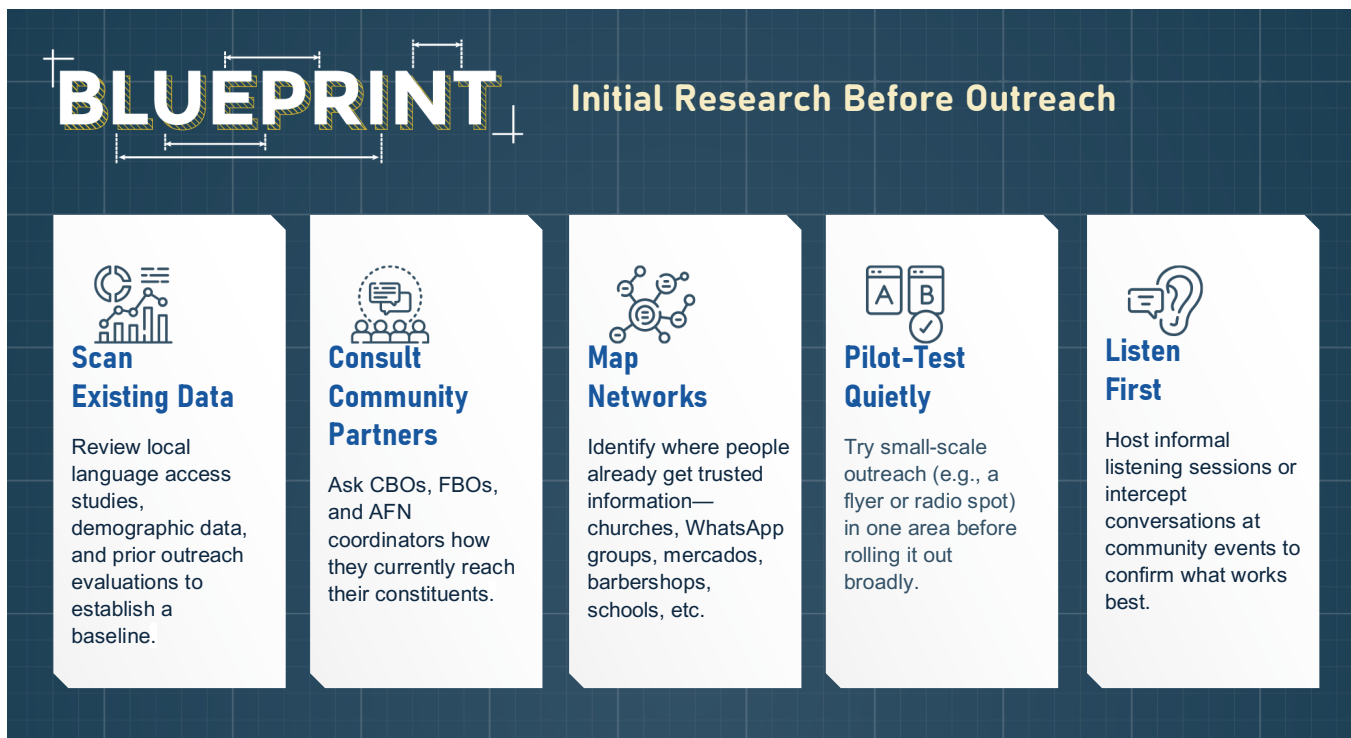
WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- [CDC's *Program Evaluation Framework*](#)
- [U.S. Digital Service's *The Digital Services Playbook*](#)
- [CDC's *Developing and Using a Logic Model*](#)

Evaluation does not need to be overly complex. The key is to make it intentional, aligned with agency and community goals, and responsive to real-world feedback. A practical approach to evaluation includes the following components:



- **Define Objectives Early:** Use logic models or theories of change to define the intended outcomes of outreach activities. Set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) goals to guide outreach design.
- **Research Before Reaching Out:** Before selecting channels, partners, or messengers, conduct preliminary research to understand how a community actually receives and shares information. This may include reviewing existing language access or equity studies, consulting with local CBOs and FBOs, mapping social networks, or holding informal listening sessions. Investing in this upfront work reduces the risk of selecting an ineffective or inappropriate strategy for the first contact, which can damage trust and make subsequent engagement more difficult.
- **Use Mixed Methods:** Quantitative tools, such as surveys, social media analytics, and participation counts, provide measurable insights. Qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and community listening sessions capture deeper feedback on impact, context, and relevance.
- **Measure Outputs and Outcomes:** Track both what is done (e.g., materials distributed, events held) and what changes as a result (e.g., increased knowledge, preparedness behaviors, trust in emergency services).
- **Understand and Act on the Data:** Gathering data and meeting reporting requirements is only the first step. By continually monitoring and assessing evaluation data, and identifying trends in reach and effectiveness, use what's learned to refine strategy, messaging, and delivery methods over time.
- **Engage Communities in Evaluation:** Involve community members not just as respondents but as partners in designing evaluation questions, collecting data, and interpreting results. This fosters ownership and surfaces insights that may otherwise be missed.
- **Document and Share Learnings:** Capture lessons learned throughout the process—not only successes but also what didn't work. Share findings with both internal teams and external partners to improve future efforts and build public trust.





MEASUREMENT TOOLS

While quantitative data reveals the "what" and "how many," qualitative methods help uncover the "why" and provide a deeper understanding of the impact of outreach efforts.

QUANTITATIVE TOOLS

Social media measurement tools: Social media analytics tools (e.g., [Hootsuite](#), [Sprout Social](#)) can provide insights into engagement and audience preferences. Individual social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, X, LinkedIn, NextDoor) offer analytics specific to their platform.

Email platforms: Email marketing platforms (e.g., [Mailshake](#), [Woodpecker](#), [HubSpot](#)) offer features for tracking open rates, click-through rates, and bounce rates.

Web measurement tools: Website analytics (e.g., [Google Analytics](#)) can help assess webpage performance and provide information on what information people are seeking.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools: CRM tools (e.g., [Salesforce](#), [Microsoft Dynamics 365](#)) are software solutions that help manage and analyze data and interactions across multiple platforms.

Survey tools: Survey options (e.g., [Qualtrics](#), [SurveyMonkey](#), [Google Forms](#)) gather direct feedback, assess message understanding, measure behavioral intent, and evaluate long-term impact through customizable questionnaires and data analysis features.

QUALITATIVE TOOLS

Interviews: Conducting one-on-one or small group interviews with members of the target audience can provide detailed insights into their perceptions, understanding, and responses to outreach messages.

Focus Groups: Facilitated discussions with a small group of individuals from the target audience can generate rich qualitative data on shared experiences, opinions, and interpretations of outreach efforts.

Participatory Observation: Researchers immerse themselves in the setting where the outreach is taking place to observe behaviors and interactions firsthand. This method can provide valuable contextual understanding.

Content Analysis of Open-Ended Feedback: Analyzing narrative responses from surveys or feedback forms can reveal recurring themes, sentiments, and detailed explanations of participants' experiences with the outreach.

Case Studies: In-depth examination of specific individuals, groups, or communities affected by the outreach can provide detailed qualitative data on the process, impact, and lessons learned.

Participatory Storytelling: Engaging community members in sharing their stories related to the outreach topic can provide powerful qualitative data on personal experiences, perceived impacts, and the meaning attributed to the outreach efforts.



WHO WE NEED TO REACH: COMMUNITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BAY AREA

Community outreach is central to public safety and resilience in the Bay Area, a region defined by its cultural diversity, geographic complexity, and wide range of hazard risks. Earthquakes, wildfires, public health crises, and infrastructure disruptions are just a few of the threats that demand coordinated, inclusive, and proactive communication.

For this report, “community” refers broadly to all those who live in, work in, travel through, or depend on the Bay Area. This includes:

- **Residents** in urban, suburban, and rural areas.
- **Visitors and travelers** who may be unfamiliar with local hazards or systems.
- **Commuters** who cross jurisdictional boundaries daily for work, school, or care.
- **Vulnerable or marginalized populations** within these groups, including people with disabilities, those with limited English proficiency, unhoused individuals, and others who may face structural or situational barriers to accessing information.

This inclusive definition reflects the reality that risk and responsibility are shared across jurisdictional lines, and that community preparedness must account for the full range of people who interact with the region every day.

READILY REACHABLE COMMUNITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS

Some groups are easier to connect with due to their specific circumstances, such as having stable housing, strong ties to a school or workplace, or high digital access. These communities usually hear emergency messages through existing systems, though tailored outreach still makes a difference.

In the context of public emergency outreach, “readily reachable” or “easy-to-reach” groups are defined by a set of **characteristics and community contexts** that make them more consistently connected to public information systems. While no community is reachable in all circumstances, the Bay Area’s outreach networks most reliably reach individuals and households that demonstrate the following factors:

- **Stable Housing and Residency:** Property-based systems can reach Bay Area residents with long-term leases or homeownership, especially in well-mapped neighborhoods. These include parcel mail, geotargeted alerts (like Nixle or Everbridge), and utility contact lists. This category encompasses a significant portion of the region's middle- and upper-income population, particularly in suburban areas such as Walnut Creek, Palo Alto, and Mill Valley.
- **High Digital Connectivity and Literacy:** The Bay Area is home to one of the most digitally connected populations in the nation. Communities with reliable internet, high smartphone ownership, and strong digital fluency are readily engaged through social media, emergency alert systems, agency websites, and community apps. This includes tech-sector professionals in the hubs of San Francisco, San Jose, and Oakland, as well as affluent urban and suburban neighborhoods with high broadband saturation.
- **Institutional Trust and Engagement:** Groups with high levels of trust in local and regional government, often due to consistent access to quality public services, are more likely to follow guidance from public agencies. This trust is common in communities that frequently participate in civic life (e.g., voting, town halls) and have positive experiences with public institutions.
- **Access to School and Workplace Networks:** Households with school-enrolled children, especially in well-resourced public districts, often receive school-based emergency messaging. Likewise, individuals in



traditional employment with strong Human Resources networks or union representation are more likely to receive timely workplace-based alerts, safety protocols, or recovery resources.

- **Civic and Community Ties:** Communities that regularly engage in local organizations, such as neighborhood associations, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), FBOs, or Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs, often have multiple communication pathways beyond official alerts. Volunteerism and local participation help reinforce and circulate emergency messaging.
- **Language Access and Resource Availability:** English-speaking households generally have the fewest barriers to official information, which is often produced primarily in English. These groups are also more likely to have the resources (e.g., transportation, insurance, financial savings) needed to act quickly on emergency instructions like evacuation or supply stocking.
- **Geographic Centrality and Access to Services:** Residents in more urbanized and transit-accessible areas benefit from proximity to infrastructure such as fire stations, libraries, schools, and community centers, which are frequently used for in-person outreach and the distribution of emergency materials.

Examples of readily reachable populations in the Bay Area include:

- Homeowners in suburban areas like San Ramon, Cupertino, or Lafayette.
- English-speaking families with children in well-resourced public schools.
- Tech workers and remote professionals with high-speed internet and digital fluency.
- Retirees living in structured senior housing with managed communication systems.
- Active members of civic groups, religious congregations, or local boards in communities.

HARDER-TO-REACH COMMUNITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS

By contrast, many communities across the Bay Area face conditions that make them much harder to reach. Some people and communities are much harder to reach during emergencies. This can be because of language or cultural barriers, limited internet or phone access, housing instability, or a lack of trust in public institutions. This report describes these as **“harder-to-reach” communities and characteristics**.

These groups are often underserved by traditional alerts and outreach methods. Sometimes they are excluded unintentionally by the way systems are designed; at other times, they may actively avoid official channels due to past negative experiences. Whatever the reason, reaching them requires more intentional effort—working through trusted messengers, using multiple formats, and meeting people where they already are.

Recognizing that being “harder to reach” does not imply resistance, lack of value, or disinterest in safety is also essential. Instead, it often reflects exclusion—by design, circumstance, or choice—from the systems that deliver critical information. To truly adopt a “whole community” approach, outreach must be designed not just for the average resident but all community members, including those on the margins, those mistrustful of institutions, and those disconnected from traditional communication channels.

For this study, we identified 18 harder-to-reach communities and characteristics across the Bay Area UASI region. Some reflect shared identity or community membership (e.g., farmworkers, justice-involved families, LGBTQ+ residents), while others represent circumstances or conditions (e.g., limited English proficiency, digital disconnection, housing instability). These categories are not mutually exclusive; many Bay Area residents experience multiple overlapping factors simultaneously, which compounds outreach challenges and underscores the need for layered, inclusive communication strategies.

To make these dynamics easier to understand, the 18 communities and characteristics can be broadly grouped into:



For this study, we identified **18 communities and characteristics that can have outreach challenges** across the Bay Area UASI region. Some reflect shared identity or community membership (e.g., farmworkers, justice-involved families, LGBTQ+ residents), while others represent circumstances or conditions (e.g., limited English proficiency, digital disconnection, housing instability). These categories are not mutually exclusive; many Bay Area residents experience multiple overlapping factors simultaneously, which compounds outreach challenges and underscores the need for layered, inclusive communication strategies.

To make these dynamics easier to understand, the 18 communities and characteristics can be broadly grouped into:

- **Language, culture, and immigration** (e.g., people with limited English proficiency, immigrants and refugees).
- **Age, health, and ability** (e.g., older adults, people with disabilities, individuals with mental health or substance use conditions).
- **Housing and economic insecurity** (e.g., low-income households, renters in informal housing, people experiencing homelessness, farmworkers, day laborers, gig and night-shift workers).
- **Social and justice-related factors** (e.g., justice-involved families, disconnected youth, survivors of domestic violence and trafficking, LGBTQ+ community).
- **Geographic, educational, and contextual considerations** (e.g., geographically isolated or digitally disconnected residents, people with lower educational attainment, tourists and visitors).

The **18 outreach primers available as companions to this report provide descriptions of each.**



ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BAY AREA

ANALYSIS OF STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Considering the key principles, challenges, and barriers summarized in this report, an assessment of the region's current approaches to community outreach identified several strengths. This section briefly describes these strengths and outlines opportunities for outreach professionals to capitalize on them to evolve towards more effective community outreach.

STRENGTHS

The Bay Area has several existing assets that provide a strong foundation for more equitable and effective outreach:

- **Regional Collaboration and Sharing:** Bay Area outreach professionals and PIOs regularly collaborate and share information across jurisdictional boundaries. The Bay Area Joint Information System (JIS) and the Bay Area UASI Public Information & Warning Work Group are two active forums that can be used and expanded to co-develop and share outreach strategies and materials for the whole community.
- **Community Partnerships:** The Bay Area benefits from deep, long-term relationships among trusted messengers, role models, community anchors, and CBOs. Partnerships can evolve from being purely transactional to being more deeply rooted in culturally competent collaboration, co-development, and the sharing of outreach programs and content. Bay Area jurisdictions have identified several ways to embed emergency preparedness outreach into everyday service systems for their communities (e.g., through public health, transportation, education, and social services). Outreach professionals can continue to incorporate emergency messaging into established programs and service delivery channels, rather than creating entirely new programs, by meeting people where they are—physically, emotionally, and institutionally.
- **Equity and Inclusion Focus:** Outreach programs in the Bay Area recognize the importance of equity and inclusion, and many programs and resources are designed with accessibility and language access in mind. Outreach should continue to mature and reflect cultural competency by recognizing ethnic media as critical infrastructure, baking accessibility checks into publication workflows, requiring ASL at all live events, etc.
- **Local Innovations:** Several innovative outreach efforts originally created for specific groups or jurisdictions offer promising models for replication. They show how localized innovation can serve as a blueprint for broader system change.
- **Emerging Measurement and Evaluation Efforts:** Many outreach programs measure and evaluate their effectiveness, at least at a basic level. The need for more comprehensive measurement and evaluation is well understood. Recognizing that most outreach programs face limitations in time, staff capacity, or organizational support, making it difficult to implement meaningful evaluation strategies, opportunities exist to mature outreach evaluation efforts to measure not just whether information was received but also if (and how) it was acted upon. Better measurement and evaluation will allow for outreach programs and materials to adapt to what works.

OPPORTUNITIES

At the same time, significant opportunities exist to strengthen outreach regionwide:

- **Regional Consistency:** Outreach strategies are often siloed by jurisdiction; a shared framework could improve reach and reduce duplication.



- **Trusted Messenger Infrastructure:** Many efforts depend on individual champions rather than sustained systems. Building a regional corps of trusted messengers could stabilize and expand this work.
- **Inclusive Messaging Resources:** Many communities still lack transcultural, visual, and trauma-informed materials. Coordinated investment could fill these gaps.
- **Evaluation and Feedback Loops:** Most programs measure activities, but not outcomes. A more robust and community-driven evaluation could improve accountability and impact.
- **Training and Exercises:** Opportunities remain to expand how training and exercises incorporate outreach testing, accessibility, and public information. The Bay Area Training and Exercise Program (BATEP) has previously offered related courses; however, its current role and capacity should be confirmed, and it may need to be strengthened.

STRATEGIES AND FRAMEWORKS

Research for this report explored a range of theoretical and practical models that can enhance outreach effectiveness. Many Bay Area jurisdictions and community partners are already applying elements of these approaches. The following frameworks highlight opportunities to build on that work, deepen existing practices, and bring greater consistency and impact to outreach efforts across the region.

Human-Centered Design (HCD): HCD is a structured framework that starts with deep empathy and iterative testing with end users. It includes working with community members to map user journeys and creating feedback loops to refine outreach efforts.

Social Network Mapping/Community Intelligence Models: Social network mapping allows outreach professionals and the community to together identify actual and desired information flows, recognizing who people go to for help, advice, or updates in daily life.

Narrative and Storytelling: Telling stories centered around actual people and communities can help an agency effectively communicate its message, foster empathy, and motivate people to act. Narrative approaches can be especially powerful for populations that distrust authority or are exposed to misinformation. Partnerships with FBOs can amplify storytelling by grounding messages in shared values, rituals, and narratives that resonate deeply with congregants and their broader communities.

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD): Many outreach programs are designed around vulnerability. ABCD flips this to an emphasis on starting with strengths and what communities already have, shifting outreach to a focus on capability and self-determination.

Participatory Budgeting and Decision-Making: While many Bay Area outreach programs recognize the importance of sharing power, opportunities exist to evolve and give community members direct influence over outreach priorities and budget allocations. This model also advocates for compensating community members for their time and expertise.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BAY AREA

While previous sections of this report provide specific, actionable recommendations for enhancing effective community outreach in general and with particular communities, the following set of strategic recommendations can guide future efforts across the entire Bay Area.

1. BUILD REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR TRUSTED MESSENGER NETWORKS

The most effective outreach efforts across nearly every population profile stem from collaborations with trusted CBOs and cultural brokers. These partners already serve the target populations and bring deep relational trust, cultural fluency, and logistical access. Many of the same people and programs—like *reres*, peer navigators,



LGBTQ+ advocates, tenant leaders, and FBOs—serve as communication bridges across multiple marginalized communities. The Bay Area region should consider:

- Hosting community-specific workshops to understand how people prefer to receive emergency information. Identify individuals and institutions that people already turn to for advice, comfort, and practical help.
- Mapping trusted partners in advance at the regional level and formalizing relationships with local partners who can help amplify messages.
- Coordinating and funding a regional trusted messenger corps, with specialized tracks for different community types (e.g., LEP, unhoused, FBOs).
- Developing a stipend model for community-based outreach workers to support preparedness and emergency communications year-round.
- Creating a shared resource pool of materials, translations, and message templates that trusted messengers can adapt and distribute locally

2. INVEST IN MULTI-FORMAT, MULTI-LANGUAGE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Successful initiatives use layered communication strategies that combine high-tech tools (e.g., SMS alerts, social media, language-access apps) with analog formats (e.g., flyers, in-person workshops, local radio). This redundancy ensures reach across literacy levels, languages, device access, and tech comfort. Many communities profiled in this report require messages that go beyond translation; they need to be adapted into visual, oral, and trauma-informed formats. The region can consider:

- Coordinating the creation of regionally standardized, culturally adapted emergency message toolkits, including pictogram-based guides, translated and transcreated videos and audio clips, oral storytelling-based scripts, and low-literacy and neurodiverse-friendly materials.
- Maintaining a regional language access and transcreation resource team that supports jurisdictions and partners in producing accurate, community-vetted materials.

3. SUPPORT A REGIONAL APPROACH TO INCLUSIVE ALERTING

Alerts and warnings still may leave out people who are undocumented, unhoused, digitally disconnected, or who speak uncommon languages. A regional approach to inclusive alerting is important because hazards are often regional in nature and populations are mobile across jurisdictional boundaries; however, it is challenging due to disparate alert and warning systems and policies. The region can consider:

- Advocating for uniform alert and warning plans and policies across counties that ensure that opt-in alert systems are as accessible and inclusive as possible, include emergency public information amplification through trusted messenger networks, and address the need for emergency alert and warning information in a variety of formats and channels.
- Piloting a low-tech emergency alert and warning model in one or more high-risk communities that combines oral messaging, peer delivery, printed tools distributed through service partners, and the use of radio, television, and ethnic media.

Central to each of these Strategic Recommendations is a recognition of the need to better include community members in outreach program design, development, execution, and measurement. Community members, especially those from historically marginalized or under-resourced groups, bring lived experience, cultural expertise, and trusted relationships that government staff often lack, and they should be compensated accordingly. Expecting community members to contribute their expertise for free reinforces inequities by asking those with the least disposable time and resources to donate labor.



4. ENHANCE COMMUNITY-DRIVEN OUTREACH MEASUREMENT, EVALUATION, AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

Effective outreach doesn't end with message delivery. Programs that incorporate feedback loops, such as community listening sessions and resident-led design, create space for continual improvement and responsiveness. Evaluation is conducted not just by counting messages sent, but by assessing trust, relevance, and outcomes. Community-led feedback ensures outreach efforts are relevant, trustworthy, and improved over time. The region can consider:

- Developing an outreach measurement and evaluation toolkit that includes guidance for gathering feedback from target communities, data collection and analysis approaches, plain-language survey templates, interview scripts, and focus group guides for jurisdictions to use in their outreach programs.
- Building partnerships with academia and the research community, who have the capacity to design rigorous evaluations for measuring behavior change or information uptake, but lack direct access to communities or field programs.
- Sharing outreach measurement data and lessons learned regionwide to identify common gaps and trends, and share strategies and resources.
- Funding "micro-grants" and technical assistance programs for CBOs, neighborhood associations, and other community groups to conduct outreach evaluations and present findings regionwide.

5. SCALE AND REPLICATE PROVEN COMMUNITY OUTREACH INITIATIVES ACROSS THE REGION

This report highlights several innovative community outreach programs and models. Adapting and expanding these proven programs for use in other jurisdictions and communities strengthens regional consistency, ensures equitable access to effective approaches, and allows smaller or resource-constrained jurisdictions to benefit from tested strategies without reinventing the wheel. The region can consider:

- Maintaining and updating an inventory of existing outreach programs across the Bay Area, using this report as a start.
- Providing small competitive grants to jurisdictions, CBOs, or FBOs to replicate proven outreach models in a different geographic or cultural context, or offering shared procurement, training, and technical assistance to jurisdictions implementing a replicated program.
- Hosting quarterly or biannual "Innovation Exchange" forums, virtual or in-person, where jurisdictions, CBO partners, and FBO partners present their outreach models, share evaluation results, and discuss adaptation challenges.



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