

PEOPLE WITH LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND CULTURAL ISOLATION



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COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The Bay Area is home to a deeply diverse population, with more than 160 languages spoken across urban and rural areas. While this richness is one of the region's great strengths, it also presents a significant challenge for emergency outreach. Individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) and those who experience cultural isolation represent two of the most persistent and consequential hard-to-reach populations, often overlapping, yet each requiring distinct outreach approaches. These residents are not only more likely to miss emergency warnings and preparedness messages, but are also often least able to act on information that is not communicated in a linguistically or culturally accessible way.

Together, LEP and culturally isolated populations represent the Bay Area's most foundational community engagement challenge. These barriers are deeply structural, shaped by immigration patterns, racism, underinvestment in language access, and broader social exclusion. Yet their solutions are often among the most actionable. Best practices include funding community-based interpreters, co-developing materials with cultural organizations, ensuring messaging is orally deliverable, and designing outreach that reflects lived experiences, not just demographic labels.

As the region continues to diversify, LEP and cultural isolation will remain dynamic and evolving concerns. Outreach strategies must therefore be flexible, place-based, and equity-centered. What works in Chinatown may not work in Watsonville; what resonates with a Spanish-speaking tenant group may fall flat with a Farsi-speaking senior community. By approaching these populations with humility, intentionality, and sustained partnership, public sector agencies can close some of the most stubborn gaps in emergency preparedness and risk communication.

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP) POPULATIONS

According to the Bay Area UASI Equitable Community Resilience Project Regional Vulnerability Report, the percentage of residents aged five years and older with LEP ranges from 3.6% in Marin County to 17.1% in Monterey County, with a regional median of 7.1%. This highlights the scale and significance of this issue across the region. In practice, this means tens of thousands of residents in every county may not be able to understand basic disaster instructions, evacuation alerts, or recovery resources when conveyed only in English.

CULTURALLY ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

Cultural isolation refers to residents who are not only linguistically disconnected but also socially and institutionally disengaged from mainstream systems of governance, media, and public services. This group may include immigrants, refugees, ethnic enclaves, religious minorities, or insular communities shaped by trauma, distrust, or



displacement. Cultural isolation is often amplified when communities perceive local governments as unfamiliar, unwelcoming, or even threatening.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

LEP residents may speak Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Russian, Arabic, Farsi, and dozens of other languages. These also include smaller Indigenous and non-written languages such as Mam and Mixteco, as well as Punjabi and other South Asian languages spoken within some agricultural and rural communities. While some jurisdictions have robust translation protocols, gaps remain, especially when outreach defaults to a "top languages only" model. Without clear guidelines or funding, agencies may overlook smaller language groups who still number in the thousands.

LEP-related barriers are often operational: poorly translated materials, reliance on written rather than oral communication, limited interpreter access at public meetings, or emergency alerts that reach only the largest language groups. Technological barriers compound the problem, as many alerts are text-based or app-based and not configured for non-English users. Outreach campaigns often presume digital literacy and fail to accommodate individuals who may rely on in-person interactions or culturally specific media.

San Francisco's Language Access Ordinance is considered one of the strongest in the country, mandating multilingual access to city services and public notices. However, not all jurisdictions have such protections. Even when translations are legally required, implementation varies; translated materials may not be distributed in the right communities or may use overly technical language. This makes trusted messengers and in-language media channels essential for LEP-inclusive outreach.

Recognizing these gaps, California Assembly Bill (AB) 1638, effective as of January 1, 2023, requires that emergency communications, specifically Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs) and Emergency Alert System (EAS) broadcasts, be translated into the most commonly spoken non-English languages in each jurisdiction. Importantly, the bill also encourages public agencies to apply language access standards to preparedness and outreach materials, not just real-time alerts. This includes translating evacuation guides, emergency kit lists, and hazard-specific preparedness messages, ensuring that LEP residents can take action before a crisis occurs. AB 1638 represents an important shift in policy toward equity; implementation remains inconsistent across the Bay Area, especially in jurisdictions lacking dedicated translation staff or localized language access plans.

Cultural isolation, which can accompany LEP, is less about literal translation and more about message relevance and messenger trust. A perfectly translated emergency alert may still go ignored if the format, tone, or source does not feel credible or culturally appropriate. For example, some cultures rely more heavily on oral communication and may prioritize information from faith leaders or family networks over official agencies. Others may resist engaging with formal systems due to past experiences with persecution, surveillance, or corruption in their countries of origin.

In the Bay Area, cultural isolation can be particularly acute among communities that are geographically clustered but socially siloed, such as recent refugee arrivals, ultra-orthodox religious communities, or tightly knit ethnic groups with few institutional ties outside their enclave. Community members may primarily consume ethnic media, shop in culturally specific stores, and participate in religious or cultural spaces disconnected from broader civic channels.

This disconnection poses unique challenges for emergency managers. For instance, culturally isolated communities may not attend public town halls, may avoid shelters due to unfamiliar food or gender norms, and may not respond to evacuation warnings if they fear being misunderstood or targeted. Outreach must therefore



extend beyond translation to build long-term relationships, co-create communication strategies, and engage trusted messengers.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

While several jurisdictions have made substantial strides in building language access infrastructure and community partnerships, much of the region's success depends on intentional collaboration with trusted cultural brokers, ethnic media, and multilingual organizations.

GOVERNMENT AND POLICY

Language access ordinances and protocols are strong in San Francisco, where the local language access ordinance mandates multilingual public services and outreach in the city's most spoken languages, currently including Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and Tagalog. Other counties, such as Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Alameda, have established internal language access guidelines, interpreter pools, and requirements for translated emergency messaging.

In response to California Assembly Bill 1638, some Bay Area counties have moved toward implementation by mapping language needs and adapting alert systems (e.g., reverse-911, Everbridge) to issue multilingual messages. Building on these local efforts, the Bay Area UASI Equitable Community Resilience Project has undertaken a regional approach to language equity in disaster planning, including developing multilingual templates, training emergency public information officers (PIOs), and identifying culturally specific outreach pathways for less commonly spoken languages.

The City of Concord's 2024 *Language Access Analysis & Strategy* offers a replicable model for integrating language equity into emergency communication planning. The study identified in detail key languages spoken in the community and recommended practical steps such as plain-language alerts, multilingual message templates, and the use of visual and universal design elements (e.g., icons, infographics, captioning). It also underscored the importance of pre-translated, behavior-focused emergency messages, avoiding reliance on real-time translation during crises when response time is critical.

Language Access Coordinators have been funded in some jurisdictions, supported by state and regional initiatives (including Listos California), to serve as liaisons between emergency management agencies and LEP communities. These coordinators work to ensure warnings, evacuation notices, and preparedness materials are not only translated, but also disseminated via culturally relevant and accessible methods.

EDUCATION, CAPACITY BUILDING, AND PARTNERSHIPS

Counties like Monterey, Contra Costa, and Santa Clara have collaborated with community colleges and nonprofits to create translation internships and interpretation partnerships for disaster materials, ensuring materials are reviewed by native speakers with cultural expertise rather than machine translated. In 2023, Monterey County Office of Emergency Services (OES) partnered with California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) to translate and disseminate preparedness materials in Spanish, Tagalog, and Mixteco, particularly targeting rural areas with large Indigenous and Filipino populations.



Community-based organizations (CBOs) are essential to bridging cultural divides. Groups such as Refugee and Immigrant Transitions (RIT), Vietnamese Voluntary Foundation (VIVO), Canal Alliance, and SIREN (Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network) regularly co-host culturally relevant preparedness events, often delivered in-language and co-facilitated by trusted leaders within specific ethnic communities.



Refugee and Immigrant Transitions (RIT) and Burma Refugee Family Network (BRFN) team up at community outreach event. Source: RIT Facebook page

In counties like San Mateo and Alameda, collaborations with ethnic media (e.g., Sing Tao Daily, Radio Bilingüe, KTSF (an independent television channel broadcasting primarily in Mandarin and Cantonese), and local Facebook community groups) have been formalized to rapidly disseminate emergency alerts in multiple languages using platforms familiar to each audience.

For populations with both linguistic and cultural isolation—such as non-literate refugees, older monolingual immigrants, or tight-knit communities with limited engagement with public agencies—local initiatives often rely on faith-based organizations, neighborhood associations, and health clinics to act as messaging conduits.

While gaps remain, especially for small language groups and oral-preference cultures, the region’s growing recognition of cultural context and its investment in multilingual preparedness point to a more inclusive path forward. Continued collaboration with in-language messengers, investment in culturally relevant materials, and support for ethnic media are all critical next steps.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Individuals with LEP and those who are culturally isolated often face persistent exclusion from emergency communications, not only because of language barriers, but also because outreach systems are not designed to reflect their values, communication norms, or institutional trust. To build effective, sustained engagement, jurisdictions can:

- Partner with multilingual CBOs, immigrant-serving organizations, and cultural associations that already maintain trust with LEP and culturally distinct communities.
- Collaborate with ethnic media, faith-based leaders, language access coalitions, and community interpreters to co-create messages and distribute them in culturally relevant ways.
- Work with refugee resettlement agencies, elder care providers, and Indigenous or diaspora-specific organizations that serve socially isolated or orally oriented communities.
- Invest in long-term relationships with cultural brokers, individuals who not only speak the language, but also understand the social dynamics, trauma histories, and communication preferences of their communities. Examples include bilingual faith leaders, community elders, or outreach workers who help bridge understanding between public agencies and their own cultural groups.
- Engage employers and worker networks that employ or represent immigrant and LEP populations—such as agricultural, construction, manufacturing, or service-sector businesses—to share preparedness information through trusted workplace channels and in appropriate languages.



Relationship-building must go beyond compliance with translation mandates; it requires co-design, humility, and trust over time, particularly for communities that have historically been excluded, surveilled, or ignored by government agencies.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Effective messages for linguistically and culturally isolated communities must be accessible, respectful, and responsive to the way people actually communicate, which may not be written, linear, or English-based.

Messaging should:

- Be translated accurately by native speakers or community reviewers, not solely by software or general-purpose translators. Messages must reflect dialect, tone, and cultural nuance.
- Include oral delivery options (e.g., audio recordings, community videos, in-person presentations), especially for elders and Indigenous language speakers with limited literacy.
- Focus on clear, behavior-oriented content: “Here is what to do,” “Here is where to go,” “This is free and safe.” Avoid technical jargon, acronyms, or overly abstract information.
- Clarify that services are available regardless of legal status, documentation, or insurance, and that no information will be shared with immigration or law enforcement.
- Reflect culturally appropriate framing, such as collective care, family protection, or guidance from respected leaders, rather than individualistic preparedness language.

Messages should not only be translated; they must be transcreated—that is, adapted so that the wording, tone, and delivery reflect the audience’s cultural beliefs, everyday realities, and communication habits while preserving the original message’s purpose and impact.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Linguistically and culturally isolated communities receive and share information through trusted, often informal channels that differ from mainstream outreach platforms. Effective communication strategies include:

- **Ethnic Media Outlets:** Partner with newspapers, radio stations, and television channels in languages such as Cantonese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Farsi, Russian, and Spanish. Focus on outlets that have strong community ties and a loyal listenership or readership.
- **Faith-Based and Cultural Institutions:** Work with churches, mosques, temples, and cultural centers that serve as trusted community spaces for in-language communication and gathering.
- **Multilingual Community-Based Organizations:** Equip groups like VIVO, Canal Alliance, and Refugee and Immigrant Transitions with materials and training to distribute emergency information via peer educators, family events, and service visits.
- **Promotores and Community Interpreters:** Fund and support culturally grounded health educators and interpreters who can communicate messages in both formal and informal settings.
- **Oral and Visual Media:** Use WhatsApp audio clips, illustrated flyers, community radio public service announcements (PSAs), and in-language videos on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, or Facebook.
- **Schools and Community Hubs:** Distribute materials through bilingual school liaisons, after-school programs, and family resource centers, especially in communities with high concentrations of LEP residents.

Promotores—also known as *promotores de salud*—are trusted community health educators or peer outreach workers who provide information, support, and connection to services within their own communities. They typically share culture, language, and lived experience with the people they serve, making them highly effective messengers for health, safety, and emergency preparedness outreach.



- **Healthcare and Social Services:** Embed translated materials into clinics, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) offices, rental assistance programs, and home visits, places where in-language support is already expected.

Outreach must be redundant, oral-friendly, and community-embedded, with repeated delivery across multiple settings. For culturally isolated groups, the goal is not just language access; it's cultural inclusion, through trusted messengers and familiar formats.

OUTREACH IN ACTION: Ethiopian Community Touchpoints in the East Bay

In the San Francisco East Bay, Ethiopian churches, restaurants, and stores form a vibrant communication network for residents who face language and cultural barriers. Churches are not only places of worship but also trusted gathering spaces where community members share news, offer support, and exchange information. When local agencies partner with priests and church leaders—figures who hold deep respect within the community—emergency and preparedness messages are far more likely to be accepted and shared.

Ethiopian restaurants and small markets play similar roles. Restaurant owners often act as informal community connectors, discussing current events with patrons or sharing safety information through conversation, posters, or local radio. Grocery stores and markets also serve as reliable touchpoints, where familiar faces and in-language materials make public safety information approachable rather than intimidating. Together, these culturally specific spaces create a grassroots communication network that allows agencies to reach linguistically isolated residents through everyday, trusted relationships rather than unfamiliar institutions.

IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The Bay Area is home to one of the most diverse immigrant populations in the country, with nearly 30% of residents born outside the United States. This includes naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents, undocumented immigrants, and individuals with refugee or asylum status. While these populations are deeply embedded in the region's social, economic, and cultural fabric, many face unique barriers to receiving and acting on emergency messaging, particularly recent immigrants, refugees, and others who have not yet developed strong local networks or familiarity with U.S. systems.

Immigrants as a whole may experience language isolation, limited familiarity with local emergency systems, digital disconnection, or a lack of culturally resonant outreach. Many also live in overcrowded or informal housing, rely on low-wage or gig employment, and move frequently. These factors heighten disaster vulnerability and complicate consistent engagement. In some cases, trauma from previous experiences in conflict zones or authoritarian contexts may also lead to heightened mistrust of government institutions or a reluctance to engage with public services, including disaster preparedness campaigns.

Across all immigrant groups, legal status is often unknown or mixed within households; therefore, outreach efforts should not hinge on proof of eligibility or legal residence. Effective messaging for these communities must prioritize language access (including less commonly translated languages such as Mam, Mixteco, Tagalog, or Farsi), trauma-informed practices, and clear assurances that receiving emergency information or assistance will not trigger immigration consequences. Collaborations with immigrant-serving community-based organizations (CBOs), ethnic media outlets, consulates, and faith-based networks are essential to building trust and ensuring that these populations receive accurate, actionable, and culturally appropriate information.

UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

Undocumented individuals face intensified challenges. Fear of deportation, detention, or surveillance can prevent people from enrolling in alert systems, visiting official websites, or going to public shelters, even when their lives are at risk. This fear is not unfounded, as immigration enforcement priorities and policies fluctuate over time, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty. Even when local jurisdictions have sanctuary policies, mixed messaging or a lack of trust may keep people from believing outreach is safe or intended for them.

REFUGEES AND ASYLEES

Refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom have fled conflict, persecution, or disaster, often arrive with few resources and face a steep adjustment curve. Many have limited English proficiency (LEP), unfamiliarity with U.S. emergency systems, and trauma-related mental health needs. Even after formal resettlement support ends



(typically 8-12 months), they may remain socially and economically isolated, especially if they settle in areas without strong ethnic community infrastructure.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

While each immigrant group experiences distinct challenges, several cross-cutting barriers shape how people receive and respond to emergency information. These challenges often overlap with those faced by other vulnerable populations, but they are amplified for immigrants and refugees by factors such as legal uncertainty, linguistic isolation, and varying levels of trust in public institutions.

UNDOCUMENTED INDIVIDUALS

Undocumented residents may avoid traditional social services or government programs where outreach materials are typically distributed. Outreach tied to housing, healthcare, or schools may miss them entirely if they are disengaged from those systems. Many live in overcrowded or informal housing and work in labor-intensive jobs with limited protections, conditions that reduce both time and capacity for preparedness activities. In emergencies, fear of being identified or questioned may deter them from seeking help or entering official shelters. These fears are not unfounded, given changing immigration enforcement policies and past experiences of discrimination. Outreach efforts that do not account for these concerns—by using trusted community partners, anonymous information-sharing channels, or explicit reassurances about legal safety—risk leaving this population behind.

REFUGEES AND ASYLEES

For refugees and asylees, experiences with state actors in their countries of origin may create deep-seated mistrust of police, military, or government authorities, even well-intentioned ones. Outreach that relies on law enforcement as spokespeople may therefore be ineffective or counterproductive. Many refugees also arrive with LEP, trauma-related mental health needs, and unfamiliarity with local emergency systems. Those from oral or non-written language traditions may require alternative communication formats—such as in-person explanation, visuals, or community storytelling—rather than written materials. Even after formal resettlement support ends (typically within a year), social and economic isolation may persist, especially in areas lacking established ethnic or cultural networks.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Many local governments and CBOs have taken steps to support inclusive emergency preparedness and response efforts.

GOVERNMENT AND POLICY LEADERSHIP

Language access coordination has improved in several jurisdictions. San Francisco's Language Access Ordinance mandates multilingual services for public-facing departments, including emergency communications in Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, and Russian. Similarly, Santa Clara County and San Mateo County require that alerts be sent in multiple languages and that interpretation be provided at public meetings, emergency shelters, and press briefings.

The Bay Area UASI Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program has supported projects to enhance LEP-inclusive communication infrastructure. This includes planning tools and training for multilingual outreach, as well



as regionally coordinated public information protocols designed to reach smaller language communities during wildfires, earthquakes, and other regional disasters.

COMMUNITY AND GRASSROOTS PARTNERSHIPS

Several cities and counties partner with immigrant-serving nonprofits and legal aid groups to build trust and serve as conduits for emergency information. Organizations such as the International Institute of the Bay Area (IIBA), Canal Alliance (Marin County), Centro Legal de la Raza (Alameda County), and Asian Law Alliance (Santa Clara County) have worked on disseminating translated materials about wildfire safety, COVID-19, public charge protections, and tenant rights during emergencies.

Listos California has funded numerous regional CBOs, including Asian Americans for Community Involvement (AACI), Promotores Unidas, and Refugee and Immigrant Transitions (RIT), to lead grassroots disaster preparedness education in immigrant communities. These efforts often involve home visits, culturally tailored curricula, and materials in non-written languages, such as Mam and Mixteco.

In Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, which have high concentrations of Indigenous farmworker immigrants from southern Mexico, local agencies have partnered with Binational Center for the Development of Oaxacan Indigenous Communities (CBDIO) to deliver wildfire preparedness messages in Triqui, Zapotec, and Mixteco.

Nonprofits and county agencies have also collaborated to provide “Know Your Rights” training alongside disaster preparedness workshops, helping immigrants understand how to navigate emergencies without fear of immigration enforcement. For example, some shelters and recovery centers explicitly communicate that immigration status will not be checked, and that IDs are not required to receive assistance.



Disaster preparedness informational video in Mixteco by Listos California
Source: listoscalifornia.org/resources/

EDUCATION NETWORKS AND ETHNIC MEDIA OUTREACH

Several school districts with high immigrant enrollment, such as Oakland Unified and San Jose Unified, have incorporated emergency communication protocols for families with LEP, using multilingual robocalls, SMS alerts, and translated flyers sent home with students.

Emergency managers in multiple jurisdictions have partnered with ethnic media outlets, including Vietnamese-language radio stations, Chinese-language newspapers, and Spanish-language digital platforms like Telemundo 48, to extend the reach of preparedness messaging and real-time alerts.

Despite these efforts, gaps persist, particularly for newly arrived asylum seekers and undocumented individuals living in informal housing or without access to services. Building and sustaining partnerships with immigrant-led organizations, maintaining multilingual capacity, and reducing fear through consistent rights-based messaging remain critical to ensuring immigrant communities are not left behind in times of crisis.



TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Immigrants and refugees in the Bay Area represent an incredibly diverse set of communities, with differences in language, legal status, culture, migration experience, and trust in public institutions. Many are embedded in tight-knit cultural or religious networks but may avoid government systems due to fear, trauma, or lack of familiarity. To build effective communication pathways, jurisdictions can:

- Partner with immigrant-serving CBOs, legal aid groups, and cultural centers that provide services such as English as a Second Language (ESL), housing navigation, and family support.
- Collaborate with refugee resettlement agencies, mutual aid networks, and grassroots groups that support recently arrived individuals and undocumented populations.
- Work closely with consulates, ethnic media outlets, and cultural brokers that maintain deep ties to specific language or diaspora communities.
- Support trusted messengers, including *promotores*, youth leaders, and faith-based organizers, to serve as outreach conduits, especially in communities with limited institutional trust.
- Engage employers and worker organizations—particularly in industries such as agriculture, construction, hospitality, manufacturing, and home care—as key partners in sharing preparedness information through trusted workplace channels, orientation materials, and bilingual safety trainings.

Promotores—also known as *promotores de salud*—are trusted community health educators or peer outreach workers who provide information, support, and connection to services within their own communities. They typically share culture, language, and lived experience with the people they serve, making them highly effective messengers for health, safety, and emergency preparedness outreach.

For undocumented immigrants, partnerships must be trauma-informed and centered on non-enforcement, with clear boundaries that public safety communications are separate from immigration enforcement.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Messaging for immigrants and refugees must be culturally relevant, linguistically accessible, and reassuring. It should also reflect the lived experiences of individuals who may fear institutional contact or misunderstand local emergency systems. Effective messages should:

- Be translated into relevant languages, using community-vetted terms, not just direct translation. Consider both dominant languages (e.g., Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Tagalog) and underrepresented ones (e.g., Mam, Mixteco, Dari).
- Be offered in both written and oral formats to serve those who speak but do not read the language.
- Emphasize that emergency services are available regardless of immigration status, and that public alerts, shelters, and disaster assistance will not trigger deportation, surveillance, or legal consequences.
- Avoid legalistic or technical language, instead focusing on actions people can take: “You do not need ID to go to a shelter,” or “This service is free for everyone.”
- Address specific fears around police presence, data privacy, or use of public benefits during emergencies, including simple explanations of programs like the Public Charge rule and what does not count against it.

Messages should reflect dignity, belonging, and community safety, not just compliance or warning.



COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Immigrants and refugees receive and share information through culturally embedded, non-institutional channels. Effective outreach requires trusted messengers and repeated delivery. Recommended communication channels include:

- **Culturally Specific CBOs and Mutual Aid Groups:** Distribute multilingual preparedness guides and safety messages through groups like Canal Alliance, SIREN (Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network), RIT, and AACI.
- **Faith-Based Organizations and Temples/Churches/Mosques:** Collaborate with religious leaders who serve as moral and community anchors in immigrant enclaves.
- **Ethnic Media and Social Platforms:** Use radio, newspapers, and digital channels in the language and style preferred by each community, including WhatsApp audio clips, WeChat messages, or Facebook Lives hosted by community leaders.
- **School Districts and Family Resource Centers:** Share information with immigrant families through bilingual flyers, robocalls, and parent liaison programs.
- **Legal Aid Clinics and Immigrant Advocacy Networks:** Provide clear safety messaging during intake and legal counseling sessions, especially during wildfires, floods, or extreme heat.
- **Worksites and Community Hubs:** Reach people through immigrant-rich workplaces (e.g., restaurants, construction sites), labor centers, laundromats, ethnic grocery stores or neighborhood markets, and other high-traffic locations in immigrant communities.
- **Promotores and Cultural Brokers:** Train and support outreach workers from within the community—such as bilingual faith leaders, community elders, ethnic media hosts, or local business owners—to host workshops, home visits, and small-group info sessions in trusted, informal spaces.

For undocumented immigrants in particular, the credibility of the messenger is as important as the message itself. Emergency outreach must never be tied to eligibility verification, law enforcement, or government data collection, and must offer anonymous, opt-in, and oral delivery options wherever possible.

OUTREACH IN ACTION: Outreach Through Informal Work Networks

Many undocumented day laborers and migrant workers from Mexico and Central America form tight-knit communities around their workplaces, often gathering near food trucks, hardware stores, or parking areas to eat, rest, and share information. These informal hubs are central to daily life and provide rare opportunities for social connection in an otherwise transient work environment. Recognizing this, outreach teams have shifted from traditional channels to “meeting people where they are,” using these everyday spaces as communication bridges.

In one campaign, a local organization partnered with a popular taco truck owner, a trusted and well-known presence among day laborers. The truck distributed Spanish-language preparedness flyers and played short, recorded safety messages between songs, transforming an ordinary lunchtime stop into a vehicle for community education. Outreach staff also visited other gathering sites to offer materials, answer questions, and connect workers with local resources. By embedding messages in these familiar environments, agencies have successfully reached populations that are often invisible to formal systems and built lasting trust through culturally grounded, face-to-face communication.

OLDER ADULTS

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Older adults represent a wide and diverse segment of the Bay Area population. They range from active retirees engaged in civic life to isolated individuals with chronic health conditions or limited mobility. Not all older adults have outreach barriers; many are well-connected through neighborhood associations, senior centers, or digital platforms. However, a significant subset experiences barriers that make them vulnerable to being missed in emergency outreach. Factors such as limited technology use, fixed incomes, living alone, physical or cognitive disabilities, and linguistic isolation can all contribute to reduced access to timely and actionable risk communication.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

In the Bay Area, the aging population is growing rapidly. Many seniors live independently in apartments, mobile homes, or single-family residences, including those located in earthquake-prone or high-risk fire areas. Others reside in assisted living facilities, skilled nursing homes, or with family members. Some are aging in place in neighborhoods that have been gentrified around them, which can lead to social isolation, especially if neighbors have moved away or community services have been reduced or shifted. Older adults who are caregivers themselves (e.g., for spouses or grandchildren) may have limited time or capacity to attend preparedness events or track public alerts. Those with limited English proficiency (LEP) may struggle to access translated materials or trust unfamiliar sources.

Digital connectivity is a major differentiator. While many older adults use smartphones and social media, others, particularly those over 75 or from immigrant backgrounds, may rely on landlines, printed newspapers, television, or word of mouth for information. Outreach that assumes internet access or app use (e.g., Nextdoor, emergency notification apps) may exclude this group. Physical impairments such as hearing or vision loss can also limit access to traditional messaging unless accommodations are built in (e.g., large-print flyers, TTY lines, or in-person visits). Furthermore, some may experience cognitive decline, dementia, or memory loss, which affects how messages are received, retained, and acted upon.

Barriers to effective outreach are compounded for those who live alone, especially in rural or unincorporated areas, or in high-rise housing without active tenant associations. During past emergencies in the Bay Area, including public safety power shutoff (PSPS) events, wildfires, and heatwaves, older adults have been disproportionately affected due to a lack of transportation, mobility challenges, and social isolation. Some people hesitate to evacuate because they fear leaving behind essential items such as medication, assistive devices, or pets. Others may not receive or understand alerts in time to act. Those living in public housing or Housing and



Urban Development (HUD)-assisted units may not have access to resilience programming or preparedness materials unless a third-party provider steps in.

Cultural and generational factors also matter. In some communities, older adults may be reluctant to engage with government programs or may defer to younger family members for information. Others may feel shame or stigma about asking for help. Ultimately, while older adults are not uniformly hard to reach, the risk of being missed increases significantly for those who are lower-income, isolated, living with disability, or experiencing language barriers.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

While not all older adults are hard to reach, Bay Area counties have begun to recognize the needs of those who are, and several initiatives aim to ensure that older adults are included in preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.

COUNTY AGING SERVICES AND CASE MANAGEMENT NETWORKS

Aging and Adult Services departments across multiple counties (including San Francisco, Alameda, and Santa Clara) have integrated emergency preparedness into their case management and outreach work. Social workers, in-home support providers, and case managers are often trained to discuss emergency plans, distribute preparedness materials, and assist clients in registering for emergency alert systems, such as AlertSF, AC Alert, or AlertSCC.

Meals on Wheels programs, operated by organizations like Meals on Wheels San Francisco and Peninsula Volunteers, Inc., serve as trusted outreach channels. In some cases, these organizations have added emergency preparedness flyers to meal deliveries, conducted welfare checks after disasters, and coordinated with emergency management to identify clients in high-risk areas during planned power shutoffs or wildfire events.

In Santa Clara County, the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) partners with the Council on Aging Silicon Valley to incorporate emergency planning into existing wellness check programs. Staff and volunteers are trained to initiate “preparedness conversations” and help clients assemble go-bags and identify emergency contacts.

COMMUNITY-BASED AND LOCAL ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

In San Mateo County, the Commission on Aging and Age-Friendly Cities initiatives have promoted disaster readiness by hosting preparedness fairs at senior centers, partnering with Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) programs, and working with libraries and community centers to offer accessible preparedness workshops.

Neighborhood networks and block captains, including in San Francisco’s Neighborhood Emergency Response Team (NERT) and Berkeley’s CORE (Community Emergency Response) program, frequently include older adult volunteers. Many of these volunteers are trained to assist others in their buildings or neighborhoods. These programs also focus on preparing seniors who live in high-rise or multi-unit housing, where mobility and evacuation support may be limited.



*San Francisco’s Neighborhood Emergency Response Team (NERT) is a free training program teaching basics of personal preparedness and prevention.
Source: sf-fire.org/nert*



Resilience hubs and community centers, such as those supported by the City of Oakland's Emergency Services team, have begun to factor older adults into their outreach design. For example, the West Oakland Senior Center has hosted resilience events tailored to seniors, offering bilingual preparedness materials, transportation assistance, and engagement opportunities to co-design more accessible services.

HEALTH AND ACCESSIBILITY PARTNERSHIPS

Public health departments in some jurisdictions have worked to ensure that cooling and heating centers are accessible to seniors, both in terms of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance and geographic proximity. During heatwaves and air quality events, 211 Bay Area has played a role in directing older adults to nearby resources and coordinating transportation, sometimes through paratransit or senior ride services.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Older adults in the Bay Area represent a highly diverse population; some are well-connected and civically engaged, while others live in isolation, face mobility or health limitations, or are disconnected from digital systems. To reach older adults effectively, jurisdictions can:

- Partner with Aging and Adult Services departments, senior centers, and home-delivered meal programs (e.g., Meals on Wheels) that already maintain consistent relationships with older residents.
- Coordinate with in-home care providers, case managers, and adult day health programs that support older adults with physical, sensory, or cognitive limitations.
- Engage senior housing providers, tenant councils, and resident services staff in subsidized or age-restricted housing.
- Include older adults themselves in planning and outreach design—particularly in communities of color, LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other gender- and sexuality-diverse) seniors, and low-income or immigrant elders—to ensure materials reflect lived experience and varying levels of independence.
- Address outreach disparities among hard-to-reach seniors. Prioritize relationship-based approaches for non-English-speaking elders, those without digital literacy, or individuals who live alone without strong local support networks. These groups are least likely to receive alerts or access emergency resources without direct, personal engagement.

Existing regional networks offer natural partners. Every Bay Area county has an Area Agency on Aging (AAA) or Aging and Adult Services Department that funds or coordinates local senior-serving programs. These agencies maintain rosters of trusted community-based partners—such as Meals on Wheels providers, adult day health centers, and case management nonprofits—that can serve as direct communication channels during emergencies. Many jurisdictions also participate in Age-Friendly Cities and Counties initiatives and senior coalitions (e.g., Aging Services Collaborative of Santa Clara County or the San Mateo Commission on Aging), which provide ready-made forums for collaboration, message testing, and coordinated outreach.

Relationship-building with older adults should prioritize trust, respect, and continuity, especially for those who are socially or geographically isolated.



DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Effective messages for older adults must be clear, accessible, and delivered through formats and voices they trust. Messaging should:

- Use plain, large-font language and avoid jargon, acronyms, or overly complex instructions.
- Emphasize safety, reassurance, and clear steps, such as what to do during a power outage, how to prepare medications, or who to call for assistance.
- Include information on accessible evacuation procedures and continuity planning for individuals with mobility devices, oxygen tanks, pets, and those with medical needs.
- Normalize the need for preparedness while affirming independence (e.g., “Stay ready, stay in control” rather than implying helplessness).
- Be available in multiple languages, with audio or visual versions for those with vision or hearing impairments.
- Messages should also address common barriers: living alone, fixed income, difficulty with transportation, or hesitancy to ask for help.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Older adults access information in a wide variety of ways: some are tech-savvy, but many rely on analog systems or personal relationships. Effective communication channels include:

- **Senior Centers and community-based organizations (CBOs):** Share preparedness materials during congregate meal programs, social events, or resource fairs.
- **Meals on Wheels and In-Home Services:** Include flyers and emergency planning checklists with meal deliveries, home health visits, or wellness checks.
- **Healthcare Providers and Pharmacies:** Disseminate messages through trusted clinical relationships, such as during checkups, vaccination clinics, or prescription pickups.
- **Public Housing and Senior Living Facilities:** Post materials in common areas, host preparedness talks, and train resident leaders or staff to support emergency communication.
- **Libraries, Churches, and Community Hubs:** Use bulletin boards, group meetings, or local newsletters to share timely and accessible guidance.
- **Print and Radio Media:** Reach older adults through local newspapers, mailers, and non-digital radio broadcasts, especially in rural or low-connectivity areas.
- **Family Caregivers and Faith Networks:** Encourage trusted intermediaries to help with alert sign-up, emergency kit assembly, and evacuation planning.

Outreach should be respectful, accessible, and low barrier, recognizing that older adults are a highly diverse group. They differ widely in age, health, cultural background, digital access, and household circumstances. Effective strategies meet them where they are, physically, culturally, and socially, and engage through the people and networks they already trust.



OUTREACH IN ACTION: Meals on Wheels: Reaching Older Adults with Trusted Emergency Preparedness Information

Meals on Wheels of San Francisco exemplifies how community-based organizations can effectively reach older adults—many of whom are isolated or have limited access to technology—by leveraging trusted, one-on-one communication channels. Their outreach model is built on consistent personal contact through meal delivery drivers and volunteers who provide flyers, letters, and phone calls directly to clients' homes. Recognizing that about half of their clients are not comfortable with digital tools, the organization relies heavily on traditional methods such as mail, personal telephone calls, and printed inserts in meal deliveries. They also supplement these with automated “robocalls” to share information and are exploring new AI-enabled systems that can distinguish between landlines and mobile phones to ensure more reliable contact.

A notable best practice is the organization’s disaster kit distribution program, in which drivers deliver emergency kits containing shelf-stable food, water, and key preparedness information directly to clients. This practice, begun during COVID-19, provides clients with supplies to build their own readiness for major emergencies.

Meals on Wheels also collaborates with city and county partners (such as the San Francisco Department of Aging and Adult Services and Department of Emergency Management (DEM)) and can help amplify official guidance and information. During past crises (like major fires or local building emergencies), they have served as a pre-approved emergency food vendor, ensuring that vulnerable populations continue receiving meals and information even amid disruptions. Their investment in infrastructure, including a generator funded to preserve food and sustain operations during power outages, further demonstrates their own operational resilience, enabling them to continue serving their communities.

The organization’s success underscores several broader lessons for emergency managers: the value of meeting people where they are (in their homes, via trusted messengers), the need to simplify preparedness information, and the importance of ongoing partnerships between local governments and social service providers. By tailoring communication to clients’ linguistic and technological needs—and by serving as a consistent, familiar point of contact—Meals on Wheels plays a critical role in bridging the gap between emergency planners and older adults, ensuring that life-saving information reaches those most at risk.



LOW-INCOME WORKERS AND HOUSEHOLDS

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Low-income workers and households represent a significant segment of the Bay Area population, despite the region's overall wealth and innovation-driven economy. The high cost of living, particularly in areas such as housing, transportation, and healthcare, means that even individuals working full-time jobs may struggle to meet their basic needs. Many of these households fall above the federal poverty line but below the threshold of true financial stability in the Bay Area, where the income required for self-sufficiency often far exceeds state or federal benefit eligibility criteria. As a result, many residents live paycheck to paycheck and are one missed shift or rent payment away from serious hardship.

These households comprise a diverse range of workers, including service industry employees, childcare workers, custodians, caregivers, retail clerks, ride-share drivers, warehouse workers, and others in essential yet often undervalued roles. Many work multiple jobs or irregular hours. Others may be seniors or individuals with disabilities on fixed incomes. While they are often geographically dispersed, they share economic vulnerabilities that impact their ability to prepare for, respond to, or recover from emergencies.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

A core barrier for this population is resource scarcity. People in low-income households may not have the financial cushion to purchase emergency supplies, invest in backup transportation, or take unpaid time off to attend preparedness events. Information about risk or resources, even if received, may feel irrelevant if the household lacks the means to act on it. Additionally, long working hours, night shifts, and unstable schedules limit the ability to attend community meetings or stay updated on alerts, especially if communications are shared during business hours.

Housing insecurity compounds these issues. Many low-income residents are renters or live in overcrowded, informal, or temporary housing, conditions that complicate evacuation plans, increase displacement risk, and reduce access to mailers or address-based alert systems. Households may share utilities or lease informally, meaning they won't appear in official databases used for outreach. And because they may move frequently, it's harder for agencies to maintain consistent contact.

Digital access is another concern. While smartphone ownership is high even in lower-income brackets, many households lack reliable broadband or use prepaid phone plans that limit internet use. This makes it more difficult to access detailed preparedness resources, sign up for notifications, or receive digital alerts during emergencies. Language access is often an overlapping barrier, especially in immigrant households.



Low-income households may also have a limited relationship with local government or emergency management agencies. Outreach efforts that rely on written materials, English-only messaging, or attendance at formal events may fail to connect. Furthermore, many community-based organizations (CBOs) serving these households operate with limited funding and are not always integrated into emergency planning networks, reducing their ability to serve as trusted conduits for preparedness messaging.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Low-income workers and households across the Bay Area face compounding risks in disasters. These include economic precarity, lack of insurance or paid leave, housing instability, and limited access to reliable transportation or digital communication tools. Although these individuals are among the most vulnerable to climate-related events, displacement, and service disruptions, emergency outreach systems often fail to connect with them effectively. Recognizing this, a range of Bay Area programs and partnerships, particularly those embedded in social service delivery, have begun integrating emergency preparedness and response messaging.

PUBLIC AGENCY INTEGRATION AND SERVICE-BASED OUTREACH

County Human Services Agencies, including those in Alameda, Santa Clara, and San Mateo counties, play a central role in connecting with low-income residents through programs such as CalWORKs, CalFresh, and Medi-Cal. Some departments have integrated preparedness resources into their intake and eligibility renewal processes, offering flyers, translated alert sign-up guides, and shelter information alongside benefits paperwork.

211 Bay Area, available regionwide, acts as a critical link for low-income residents seeking food, housing, or financial assistance. Operated by local United Way affiliates and community-based partners, 211 not only connects callers with social services but is increasingly integrated into emergency management systems to provide real-time disaster updates, shelter information, and referrals in multiple languages.

COMMUNITY AND NONPROFIT PARTNERSHIPS

Community Action Agencies and anti-poverty organizations, such as Sacred Heart Community Service in Santa Clara County and Community Action Marin, have begun incorporating emergency preparedness education into workforce development and family stabilization programming. These efforts often use *promotores* or peer advocates to connect with hard-to-reach populations through trusted relationships.

Listos California, a statewide initiative housed within the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), has funded dozens of Bay Area community-based organizations to reach low-income populations through culturally relevant preparedness education. Partners have included health clinics, legal aid centers, immigrant justice groups, and housing advocates.

In San Francisco, the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) outreach teams have partnered with food banks, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clinics, and community health centers to distribute translated disaster readiness kits and collect input from low-income residents about perceived risks and unmet needs.



211 outreach flyer available in multiple languages

Source: 211bayarea.org/about-211-bay-area/outreach-kit/



HOUSING, WORKPLACE, AND ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIPS

Affordable housing developers and housing authorities, such as MidPen Housing, Mercy Housing, and the San Francisco Housing Authority, have been engaged by local emergency managers to distribute alerts, conduct wellness checks, and host preparedness events for residents. In some cases, property managers serve as communication liaisons during wildfire season or public safety power shutoff (PSPS) events.

Some jurisdictions have piloted direct outreach through workplace channels, especially in collaboration with major employers, unions, or economic justice groups. For example, Santa Clara County has partnered with Working Partnerships USA and labor coalitions to reach frontline workers with multilingual disaster preparedness materials and COVID-era safety messaging.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Low-income workers and households face compounding risks in emergencies, including housing instability, transportation limitations, and a lack of a financial cushion to absorb disruptions. These communities are often deeply engaged with social service systems and grassroots support networks, but may remain disconnected from traditional emergency outreach channels. Jurisdictions can:

- Partner with trusted CBOs, economic justice groups, and social service agencies that support working-class families, essential workers, and people living paycheck to paycheck.
- Collaborate with food banks, workforce development centers, community health clinics, and family resource hubs that regularly engage with low-income residents.
- Work with public benefits offices (e.g., CalFresh, Medi-Cal, WIC) to integrate emergency preparedness into service enrollment and renewal processes.
- Support and compensate peer outreach workers, tenant organizers, *promotores*, and other trusted messengers to deliver preparedness guidance in culturally relevant and accessible formats.

Relationship-building must prioritize meeting people where they are, physically and financially, and must avoid framing preparedness as an individual responsibility divorced from structural conditions.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Effective messages for low-income households must be highly practical, nonjudgmental, and explicitly designed to acknowledge limited resources and time. Messaging should:

- Focus on small, achievable preparedness steps that don't require major upfront investments (e.g., "Set aside a few bottles of water each week," or "Keep important documents in one easy-to-grab folder").
- Provide clear, simple instructions that don't assume digital access, car ownership, or English fluency.
- Include guidance about how to access free or low-cost emergency resources, such as local cooling centers, emergency food, or transportation services, during a crisis.
- Avoid using aspirational or individualistic language (e.g., "Be ready!") that can feel unrealistic or alienating in the context of economic hardship.
- Emphasize community-based solutions (e.g., checking on neighbors, sharing information, or accessing mutual aid networks) to reflect collective resilience.



Messages should be reviewed with input from low-income community members to ensure tone and guidance are culturally appropriate and realistically actionable.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

To reach low-income workers and families effectively, emergency communication should be integrated into the service systems, community hubs, and physical spaces that these groups already rely on. Effective channels include:

- **Social Service Agencies and Public Benefit Programs:** Work with CalWORKs, CalFresh, General Assistance, and rental assistance programs to share preparedness flyers, SMS alerts, and intake scripts that include emergency planning information.
- **Food Banks and Meal Distribution Sites:** Disseminate materials through food pantries, pop-up distribution events, and school-based meal programs, particularly in linguistically and visually accessible formats.
- **Affordable Housing Providers and Tenant Associations:** Post flyers in multi-unit buildings, distribute preparedness kits, and host workshops in partnership with property managers or tenant unions.
- **Community Clinics and Health Navigators:** Provide preparedness messaging during routine health appointments, vaccination clinics, or mobile health outreach.
- **Workforce Development and Job Centers:** Collaborate with job training programs and economic justice organizations to incorporate emergency planning into financial empowerment or job readiness curricula.
- **Transit Hubs and Essential Worksites:** Post visible signage and distribute translated materials at bus stops, laundromats, day labor corners, or night shift workplaces.
- **Peer Networks and Promotores:** Train local leaders and service navigators to deliver messaging through trusted one-on-one conversations and small-group workshops.

Promotores—also known as *promotores de salud*—are trusted community health educators or peer outreach workers who provide information, support, and connection to services within their own communities. They typically share culture, language, and lived experience with the people they serve, making them highly effective messengers for health, safety, and emergency preparedness outreach.

Outreach must accommodate unpredictable schedules, irregular housing, and competing daily priorities. Messaging should be concise, repeated across multiple formats, and grounded in the realities of working-class survival, offering support, not judgment.

PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

People experiencing homelessness in the Bay Area include those living unsheltered in tents, encampments, vehicles, or outdoors, as well as those staying temporarily in emergency shelters, navigation centers, or transitional housing. This population is highly visible in urban centers such as San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose, but also exists in smaller cities, suburban greenbelts, and rural roadside areas throughout the Bay Area UASI region. While point-in-time counts offer a partial snapshot, the number of people cycling in and out of homelessness throughout the year is significantly higher than official estimates suggest. Many individuals experience chronic homelessness due to disability, trauma, or systemic barriers, while others fall into temporary or episodic homelessness due to sudden job loss, domestic violence, or medical crises.

Throughout this section, we refer to this population as people experiencing homelessness, while recognizing that the term unhoused is also widely used and may better reflect how individuals describe their own experiences. Our use of language is not intended to reinforce stigma, but to reflect the diversity and fluidity of housing instability in the Bay Area.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

This group is often considered one of the hardest to reach in emergency outreach, yet also one of the most at-risk during disasters. People without stable housing lack permanent addresses, making them invisible to many notification systems and service delivery pipelines. They may live in non-traditional or geographically dispersed settings, such as under freeway overpasses, in parks, on boats, or in isolated encampments tucked into industrial zones or along creeks. These areas are rarely canvassed during routine outreach and are hard to access rapidly during crises. Additionally, some unhoused individuals may not own or regularly use cell phones, have limited access to electricity or chargers, or cycle through disconnected phones with different numbers. As a result, conventional digital outreach (e.g., texts, apps, social media) is unlikely to reach them.

Barriers to communication are not only technological but also relational. Many unhoused individuals distrust law enforcement, city officials, or medical institutions due to prior experiences of criminalization, displacement, or neglect. This distrust can lead them to avoid shelters, ignore official messages, or fear that engagement with authorities may result in arrest or forced relocation, especially during sweep operations. Outreach efforts that rely on institutional voices may therefore be ignored or met with suspicion. Additionally, the day-to-day realities of survival (e.g., finding food, water, safe sleeping spaces, or addiction management) often take precedence over



abstract threats like earthquakes. Emergency preparedness messaging that fails to acknowledge this context may not resonate.

Mental health conditions, substance use disorders (SUD), and trauma are disproportionately common among people experiencing homelessness. These factors can impair cognitive processing, decision-making, and the ability to follow detailed emergency instructions. Messaging for this population must therefore be extremely clear, repeated through multiple channels, and ideally delivered by trusted messengers or peers. In-person communication, such as through street outreach workers, harm reduction teams, or mutual aid groups, is often the most effective, although it can be resource-intensive. Unhoused individuals face unique risks during emergencies: encampments may be in floodplains or fire zones, access to emergency shelters may be limited or unsafe, and a lack of transportation can make evacuation impossible.

Importantly, the visibility of homelessness can obscure its complexity. Many people experiencing homelessness are part of families, are LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other gender- and sexuality-diverse) youth, are recently released from incarceration, or have jobs but cannot afford rent. These intersecting identities shape how, when, and why they engage with, or disengage from, emergency systems. Outreach efforts must account for this diversity rather than treating the unhoused population as a monolithic group.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Outreach to people experiencing homelessness in the Bay Area is a persistent challenge due to transience, survival-driven priorities, distrust of institutions, and limited access to phones or the internet. However, numerous local partnerships have emerged to bridge these gaps through tailored strategies and place-based services.

The Bay Area's experience demonstrates that effective outreach to people experiencing homelessness hinges on local partnerships, trust-building, and an honest reckoning with the systemic barriers this population faces. Involving unhoused residents in preparedness planning and treating them as partners, not just recipients, can significantly increase the success of emergency communication efforts.

CROSS-AGENCY COORDINATION AND SERVICE-BASED OUTREACH

Many counties rely heavily on collaborations between emergency management departments, Continuums of Care—federally designated planning and funding bodies established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that form coordinated networks that manage homelessness programs—and homeless service providers to reach unsheltered individuals with preparedness and response messaging.

- In Alameda County, the Office of Homeless Care and Coordination collaborates with public safety and public health departments to disseminate extreme weather alerts, fire warnings, and COVID-19 updates to service providers and street outreach teams.
- San Francisco's Department of Emergency Management (DEM) partners with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) to share disaster preparedness information across the city's shelter network. During wildfire smoke events and extreme heat days, the city uses navigation centers, encampment response teams, and drop-in clinics to distribute masks, water, and flyers with information about air quality, cooling centers, and accessible shelter options.
- In Santa Clara County, collaboration among emergency managers and providers, such as Destination: Home and PATH (People Assisting the Homeless), embeds preparedness messaging within street medicine programs and supportive housing services.



These partnerships turn existing service infrastructure into communication lifelines—trusted systems that combine practical aid with information sharing.

ON-THE-GROUND AND PEER-LED ENGAGEMENT

Several cities, including Oakland, San Jose, and Berkeley, have deployed outreach teams during crises to go tent-to-tent and RV-to-RV with megaphones, translated materials, and real-time alerts. This on-the-ground approach has been essential during wildfire evacuations and flooding threats, particularly in encampments located along creeks or under freeways.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) also play a critical role. Groups like LavaMaeX, Dorothy Day House, Homeless Outreach Program Integrated Care System (HOPICS), and LifeMoves have piloted initiatives to combine hygiene access with safety information, posting waterproof posters near shower trailers, using mobile service vans to share printed evacuation maps, or recruiting peer navigators to explain public safety alerts in plain language.



*LavaMaeX community event and outreach.
Source: LavaMaeX Facebook page*

TRUSTED COMMUNITY SPACES FOR TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Importantly, resilience hubs and faith-based organizations (e.g., churches providing meal services) have often become informal communication nodes. These trusted spaces facilitate two-way dialogue: not only do they provide timely alerts, but they also gather input from unhoused residents about unmet needs or barriers to accessing shelter, transportation, or medical continuity.

Despite these efforts, outreach remains uneven and highly dependent on the relationships and presence of individual service providers. Inconsistent cell phone access, fear of enforcement, and fragmented housing options mean many unhoused residents still fall through the cracks. Emergency messaging that is not designed with their realities in mind (e.g., failing to address pet needs or medication access) is often ignored or mistrusted.

To strengthen future efforts, several jurisdictions are exploring scalable solutions, such as text-based alert systems tailored for clients of homeless programs, expanded use of peer-led disaster education, and coordination with public defender's offices and encampment liaisons to distribute real-time information in a non-threatening way.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

People experiencing homelessness often fall entirely outside of formal communication systems, lacking mailing addresses, reliable phones, or digital access. Trust must be built through consistent, street-level relationships. Jurisdictions can:

- Collaborate with homeless service providers, street outreach teams, day centers, and drop-in clinics that work directly with unsheltered residents, including those living in encampments, RVs, or vehicles.
- Coordinate with Continuums of Care, public health departments, and harm reduction organizations that serve individuals with co-occurring mental health, SUD, or medical conditions.



- Support peer-led and client-trusted messengers, including outreach workers with lived experience of homelessness, who can share information without triggering fear or institutional distrust.
- Develop low-barrier alert systems. Integrate text-based or low-bandwidth alerts into existing homeless service programs, allowing residents to opt in through providers they already trust.
- Maintain interdepartmental coordination between emergency management, homelessness services, behavioral health, and housing programs to ensure emergency messaging is integrated into existing care systems.

Relationship-building must be grounded in respect, consistency, and non-coercive approaches. Outreach should affirm safety and autonomy, not assume compliance or institutional enrollment.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Messaging for people experiencing homelessness must be clear, action-oriented, and sensitive to the specific fears and barriers this population faces. Effective messages should:

- Use plain language and visual cues (e.g., icons, maps, photos), especially when literacy, cognitive load, or stress may impair comprehension.
- Be trauma-informed. Avoid alarmist or punitive language (e.g., "mandatory clearance") and instead use supportive framing ("Safe shelter available nearby with no ID required").
- Emphasize that emergency resources are free, do not require ID or sobriety, and are not linked to law enforcement or code enforcement actions.
- Reflect real-world conditions in messaging. Emergency information should acknowledge practical barriers such as pet care, medication storage, and the need to safeguard personal belongings. Messages that feel realistic and empathetic are more likely to be trusted and acted upon.
- Offer practical, nonjudgmental guidance: where to go for clean air, water, cooling/warming centers, accessible shelters, transportation, or help with pets or belongings.
- Be repeatable. Design materials to be shared through conversation, handouts, or signage without relying on digital access.

Messages should be developed in partnership with outreach providers and people with lived experience of homelessness to ensure they are relevant and non-stigmatizing.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

For people experiencing homelessness, effective communication must happen in person, through trusted service networks, and at the physical locations where they live and seek resources. Recommended channels include:

- **Street Outreach and Encampment Teams:** Equip outreach workers with waterproof materials, maps, and real-time alerts to share directly with unsheltered individuals during site visits.
- **Drop-In Centers and Day Services:** Post flyers and share safety instructions at locations where people receive food, showers, or basic services.
- **Mobile Health and Harm Reduction Vans:** Include preparedness materials and verbal guidance during regular street rounds or pop-up clinics.
- **Emergency Shelter and Navigation Centers:** Distribute preparedness kits and conduct brief "what to do in an emergency" trainings for clients during intake or meal service.
- **Public Spaces and Resource Sites:** Post signage in areas where unhoused people gather, such as underpasses, libraries, transit hubs, and parks, using simple graphics and QR codes for those with phones.



- **Peer Navigators and Mutual Aid Groups:** Support peer educators to share messages directly within encampments or informal networks, especially during heat waves, storms, or evacuations.
- **Community and Faith-Based Meal Programs:** Integrate preparedness messaging into meal lines, food pantries, and outreach events.
- **Resilience Hubs and Day Centers:** Use these trusted community spaces as ongoing two-way information points for updates, resource distribution, and feedback during disasters.

Because many people in this population move frequently or avoid official systems, outreach must be redundant, relationship-driven, and delivered where people already are. Above all, emergency messaging for people experiencing homelessness must center dignity, safety, and trust.

OUTREACH IN ACTION: Santa Clara County's Multi-Pronged Approach to Extreme Heat Preparedness

Santa Clara County's Office of Supportive Housing (SCC OSH) demonstrates how a proactive, partnership-driven model can deliver lifesaving information during extreme heat events. Guided by the principle of *meeting people where they are*, SCC OSH coordinates early, consistent, and community-based communication with outreach providers and advocates who already have trusted relationships with unhoused residents. The office sends early alerts to service networks, shares multilingual safety guidance, and encourages field teams to help clients enroll in AlertSCC, the county's official emergency notification system that sends real-time warnings about severe weather, evacuation orders, and other public safety threats directly to phones, email, or text.

Equipping partners is central to this approach. SCC OSH provides outreach teams with cooling supplies—such as water, ice packs, and towels—and designates pickup locations for efficient field distribution. The office also convenes coordination calls to align messaging, prevent duplication, and confirm available cooling centers with local jurisdictions such as the City of San José. Beyond immediate response, SCC OSH invests in capacity building by helping shelter providers develop emergency plans and conduct training. This community-centered model shows how early coordination, direct enrollment in AlertSCC, and trusted partnerships can transform public health alerts into tangible, lifesaving action.

RENTERS AND THOSE IN INFORMAL HOUSING UNITS



COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Renters and individuals living in informal housing units include those who do not own their homes, as well as those residing in unconventional, unpermitted, or insecure housing arrangements. In the Bay Area, where housing costs are among the highest in the country, even middle-income earners, service professionals, and dual-income households often rent. While renters are commonly associated with low-wage or economically vulnerable populations, the region's affordability crisis has blurred these lines. Many renters are low-wage relative to the Bay Area median household income, making them equally susceptible to housing insecurity. Additionally, a growing number of people live in informal or precarious housing setups, such as converted garages, backyard units (ADUs), recreational vehicles (RVs) and vehicles, subdivided apartments, or shared spaces like basements and attics. Others may couch-surf or move frequently due to unstable arrangements.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

These housing circumstances create multiple barriers to effective emergency communication and preparedness. First, renters are not typically included in official databases that may be used for outreach, such as property ownership records or utility account registries, meaning entire populations may be excluded from door-to-door notifications, mailing lists, or evacuation orders. Informal units may not appear on maps or in address-based alerting systems, such as Reverse 911. In large multi-unit complexes, management companies may be the sole point of contact, and messages may not reach individual residents.

Those in informal or unregistered housing may be especially disconnected. They often live in units that violate building codes or lease terms, so they may avoid contact with government agencies for fear of eviction or exposure. Language barriers, digital exclusion, and mistrust of authority compound these challenges. Furthermore, residents in these units may lack access to preparedness resources like renters insurance, secure storage for emergency supplies, or landlords willing to retrofit or earthquake-proof properties. During disasters, these homes are often the first to be damaged or evacuated, but they are often the last to be prioritized for aid or recovery.

Renters and informally housed individuals are also more likely to experience transience. They may move frequently due to rent increases, annual leases, evictions, or shifting job situations, making it difficult to maintain consistent communication over time. Alert systems that rely on opt-in registration (e.g., Nixle, AlertSF) often miss this group entirely. Lastly, many of these individuals lack strong ties to neighborhood institutions, such as schools, homeowner associations, or civic groups, that typically serve as conduits for disaster-related information. Without



embedded social networks or trusted messengers, they remain at the margins of both preparedness outreach and post-disaster assistance.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Several Bay Area counties have made efforts to reach these populations by partnering with tenant rights groups, housing justice coalitions, and local service providers. With continued partnership between housing advocates, tenant unions, public agencies, and culturally rooted organizations, the Bay Area can enhance outreach to renters and those in informal housing, ultimately supporting safer, more informed, and more resilient housing communities.

TENANT ENGAGEMENT

In San Francisco, the Rent Board has collaborated with the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) and community-based organizations (CBOs) to incorporate disaster preparedness into tenant education workshops. Meanwhile, Just Cause (Causa Justa) and the Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco have incorporated emergency alerts and displacement protections into outreach to renters facing housing insecurity or harassment.



Members of the Southeast Tenants Association. Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco's tenant-led movement.

Source: hrssf.org/seta

Alameda and Santa Clara Counties have both coordinated with local legal aid organizations and neighborhood coalitions, such as East Bay Housing Organizations (EBHO) and SV@Home, to integrate emergency communications into broader tenant engagement campaigns. These messages are often distributed via door-knocking campaigns, pop-up resource fairs, or by housing navigators who maintain contact with residents in informal or at-risk housing.

REACHING RESIDENTS IN INFORMAL AND AT-RISK HOUSING

Recognizing the invisibility of informal units, some cities (e.g., San Jose and Oakland) have partnered with grassroots organizations to reach residents in RV parks, vehicle dwellings, or backyard units. For instance, Working Partnerships USA has included climate resilience and heat safety materials in tenant organizing efforts and has helped disseminate alerts to low-income families living in unpermitted units.

COMMUNITY NETWORKS AND RESILIENCE HUBS

During Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) public safety power shutoffs (PSPS) and the COVID-19 pandemic, resilience hubs, food banks, and mutual aid networks in places like East Palo Alto, Richmond, and Watsonville emerged as trusted points of contact for tenants disconnected from traditional channels. These hubs often served multilingual populations and shared emergency messaging related to shelter options, rent relief, and safe relocation resources.

COUNTY-LEVEL FORWARD PLANNING

At the county level, San Mateo County's Office of Sustainability has included renters and informal housing residents in its equitable climate resilience planning efforts, emphasizing the need for targeted outreach and culturally competent messengers. Their pilot programs have explored options such as mailing safety information



to addresses known to host ADUs (accessory dwelling units) or encouraging landlords to post evacuation info in common areas.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Renters and people in informal housing often lack the visibility and stability that emergency communication systems rely on. To reach these groups, jurisdictions must proactively engage tenant-focused organizations and grassroots housing advocates. Recommended approaches include:

- Partner with tenant unions, legal aid providers, housing rights groups, and neighborhood organizers that support renters facing instability, harassment, or informal living arrangements (e.g., garage units, backyard ADUs, RVs, or converted basements).
- Collaborate with affordable housing developers, resident services coordinators, and property management companies to build consistent channels for distributing emergency information to tenants.
- Encourage property managers and landlords to connect renters with local emergency networks. These networks, such as neighborhood associations, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) groups, or road associations, may otherwise only engage homeowners. Renters on private roads, in gated communities, or in neighborhoods managed by a homeowners' association (HOA) are often excluded from these critical communication loops.
- Collaborate with code enforcement and housing navigation teams to identify areas with concentrations of unpermitted units or high tenant turnover, and to develop preparedness messaging that minimizes the risk of displacement or scrutiny.
- Respect tenant privacy and housing insecurity by avoiding any outreach that could be interpreted as code enforcement or immigration-related activity. Build trust by prioritizing tenant safety over compliance.

These relationships should be built in advance of emergencies and grounded in tenants' rights, safety, and autonomy.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Effective messaging for renters and people in informal housing must account for common fears (e.g., eviction, landlord retaliation), language diversity, and the absence of traditional household structures. Messages should:

- Avoid assuming formal lease agreements, property ownership, or a single point of household authority — renters often live in shared or sublet spaces with informal arrangements.
- Emphasize that shelters and emergency services are available to everyone, regardless of documentation, lease status, or utility account status.
- Provide actionable tips for people living in crowded, converted, or high-risk units (e.g., "If you live in a garage unit or RV, plan your evacuation route in case of fire or flooding").
- Include information about tenant protections in emergencies (e.g., anti-eviction protections during disasters, tenants' rights to repairs or safe conditions).
- Be translated into multiple languages and tested with community partners to ensure tone and wording are clear, reassuring, and culturally appropriate.



Framing should emphasize renter dignity and agency, favoring empowering messages (“Protect your household”) over compliance-based ones (“Comply with safety orders”).

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Because renters, particularly those in informal or unregistered housing, are often missed by official property-based systems, outreach must rely on community, service, and peer networks. Effective channels include:

- **Tenant Rights Organizations and Legal Clinics:** Partner with groups like Just Cause (Causa Justa), Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco, and East Bay Housing Organizations to distribute preparedness materials and rights-based safety guides.
- **Affordable Housing Complexes and Resident Services:** Work with resident coordinators, property managers, and community rooms in subsidized housing to host preparedness events and distribute alerts.
- **Pop-Up Resource Fairs and Door-to-Door Campaigns:** Use tenant organizing canvasses, food distributions, or rental assistance events as opportunities to reach those in informal units or under the radar of public systems.
- **Faith Institutions and Community Hubs:** Disseminate materials through churches, laundromats, libraries, and mutual aid sites, especially in neighborhoods with high renter density.
- **Public Health and Social Service Programs:** Integrate emergency messaging into CalFresh enrollment, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clinics, or rental assistance programs where renters already engage.
- **Text Messaging and Flyers in Common Areas:** Post translated flyers in mailrooms, entryways, laundry rooms, and bulletin boards, especially in multi-unit housing without central management.
- **Neighborhood and Road Associations:** Collaborate with HOAs, neighborhood watch groups, and private road associations to ensure their emergency plans include renters and informal residents. Provide templates or toolkits that encourage homeowner-led groups to welcome and inform renters, particularly in areas prone to wildfires or those with limited access to resources.
- **Peer Educators and Housing Navigators:** Train tenant leaders or trusted volunteers to act as preparedness messengers and alert residents to evacuation notices or hazards.

Because renters may move frequently, live in hidden units, or share space with unrelated households, emergency communication must be redundant, multilingual, and non-threatening. Outreach should center housing stability and affirm that all residents, regardless of formal status, deserve safety and access to information during emergencies.

PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL, SENSORY, OR MOBILITY DISABILITIES



COMMUNITY CONTEXT

People with physical disabilities are a diverse group that includes individuals who use wheelchairs, walkers, or mobility scooters, those with limited limb function or dexterity, and people living with chronic conditions that affect stamina, strength, or physical coordination. While many are fully independent in daily life, physical and environmental barriers can sharply magnify their risk during emergencies, especially when accessible communication, transportation, and sheltering systems are not in place or fail to operate equitably.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Physical disabilities can affect a person's ability to evacuate quickly, navigate stairs, or access standard public transportation. In multi-story buildings or older apartment units without elevators, evacuation may be impossible without help. Temporary power outages can strand people who rely on motorized equipment, oxygen, or elevators. During wildfires, earthquakes, or storms, debris, inaccessible transit routes, or shelter setups can all prevent a person with a physical disability from reaching safety or accessing services.

Many emergency systems still assume a level of mobility and independence that excludes people with physical impairments. Even well-intended outreach efforts may not account for how these individuals receive information (e.g., when they are unable to leave home to attend an event or access a flyer posted in a community center). Emergency planning, alerts, and drills may not uniformly incorporate mobility-specific perspectives, despite legal mandates such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requiring such inclusion.

Common issues include inaccessible physical outreach spaces, a lack of American Sign Language (ASL) or tactile interpretation for deaf-blind individuals, online materials not formatted for screen readers, and messaging that doesn't account for how some people may experience time delays or mobility assistance before they can respond. Moreover, outreach sometimes treats "disabled" as a generic label, without understanding the specific requirements of people with spinal cord injuries, neuromuscular diseases, or prosthetic users.

In the Bay Area, many people with physical disabilities live independently but are underserved by emergency systems that are not designed with their needs in mind. This is especially true for those who are also low-income, live in rent-controlled units, or rely on underfunded in-home support services. Additionally, the region's aging population means the share of residents with mobility-related impairments is expected to grow.



BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Several efforts across the region are helping bridge these gaps through inclusive planning, disability-led partnerships, and infrastructure improvements. These efforts reflect a growing commitment to universal design principles, equitable outreach, and the inclusion of disability-led organizations in emergency planning. As disasters become more frequent and complex, building on these partnerships will be essential to ensure that residents with physical, sensory, or mobility disabilities are fully informed, prepared, and supported throughout all phases of emergency management.

EMBEDDING ACCESSIBILITY IN LOCAL EMERGENCY PLANNING

Santa Clara County has taken a leading role in embedding accessibility into emergency preparedness, including through the Office of Disability Affairs, which works with the county's emergency managers to ensure inclusive outreach and planning. The County supports accessibility toolkits, offers ASL-interpreted preparedness videos, and has coordinated training with service providers that support individuals with disabilities. They have also collaborated with the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) to ensure that accessible transportation options are incorporated into evacuation planning.

In San Francisco, the Mayor's Office on Disability works closely with the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) to review alert systems, shelter accessibility, and public-facing emergency materials for ADA compliance. In recent years, the city has supported community briefings in ASL, produced low-vision-friendly and screen-reader accessible versions of emergency content, and coordinated drills that test the accessibility of evacuation centers and communication formats.

INTEGRATING ACCESS AND FUNCTIONAL NEEDS (AFN) IN COUNTY PROGRAMS

Several Bay Area jurisdictions, including Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Mateo Counties, have integrated disability-specific needs into their AFN registries and outreach materials. These registries, although voluntary, enable emergency planners to proactively contact individuals with mobility impairments, sensory disabilities, or chronic conditions that may impact their ability to evacuate or shelter in place.

INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS AS TRUSTED PARTNERS

Independent living centers across the Bay Area, such as the Center for Independence of Individuals with Disabilities in San Mateo and the Silicon Valley Independent Living Center, provide critical outreach and support to individuals with disabilities. These centers often distribute preparedness kits, offer personal emergency planning assistance, and serve as trusted messengers for individuals who may not be reached through mass communication methods. Many also advocate for inclusive public alert systems and shelter accommodations.

PROGRAMS SUPPORTING POWER-DEPENDENT AND MEDICALLY FRAGILE RESIDENTS

The Disability Disaster Access and Resources program, piloted in California and supported in part by Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), has operated in parts of the Bay Area to provide backup power resources, communication support, and personal preparedness planning to individuals who depend on electricity for mobility or medical devices. This program also connects clients with community-based organizations (CBOs) that can assist with evacuation planning and accessible transportation arrangements.



ACCESSIBLE EVACUATION AND COMMUNICATION PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships with paratransit providers have been essential in places like San Mateo County, where the Office of Emergency Services works with Redi-Wheels to support accessible evacuation services. Similar collaborations exist in Marin and Contra Costa Counties, though capacity and awareness vary.

In Sonoma County, outreach to deaf and hard-of-hearing residents during wildfires has been strengthened by partnerships with Deaf Counseling, Advocacy & Referral Agency and local ASL interpreters. These partners help disseminate critical messages in ASL via social media and assist in hosting accessible community briefings during fire season.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Reaching individuals with physical, sensory, or mobility disabilities requires partnerships with organizations that center disability rights, accessibility, and lived experience. Jurisdictions can:

- Collaborate with independent living centers, disability advocacy groups, and regional AFN coordinators who work directly with people with a wide range of disabilities.
- Build ongoing relationships with service providers, including paratransit systems, in-home support programs, assistive technology vendors, and housing providers that serve individuals with disabilities.
- Coordinate with the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) to align local outreach and planning with state-level guidance, training, and accessibility standards.
- Involve people with disabilities directly in planning, evaluation, and outreach development, not just as recipients, but as advisors, co-designers, and leaders.
- Establish communication protocols with disability services agencies to ensure clients receive preparedness and emergency information tailored to their specific needs.

Trust is built when individuals with disabilities are treated not as passive beneficiaries of aid, but as experts in their own safety and equal participants in emergency planning.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Emergency messaging for this population must accommodate various formats, communication methods, and functional abilities. Effective messages should:

- Use plain, concise language and present key instructions in multiple formats, written, visual, audio, and tactile, where appropriate.
- Provide specific guidance for individuals who use mobility devices, service animals, or durable medical equipment (e.g., instructions on evacuating when elevators are unavailable, and information on charging devices during a power outage).
- Include visual and auditory alerts for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, as well as screen-reader-compatible materials for those who are blind or have low vision.
- Offer checklists and planning tools that address common barriers, such as access to medication, backup power, accessible transportation, or shelter accessibility.



- Avoid treating disability as a vulnerability; instead, focus on how preparedness tools can support autonomy and independence.

Messaging should be reviewed by individuals with a range of disabilities to ensure accessibility, accuracy, and empowerment.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Individuals with disabilities interact with a variety of service networks and technologies. Outreach should use layered and accessible channels, such as:

- **Independent Living Centers and Disability Advocacy Organizations:** Share materials and host workshops in partnership with groups such as the Silicon Valley Independent Living Center, the Center for Independence of Individuals with Disabilities, and others.
- **Paratransit and Accessible Transit Providers:** Disseminate emergency messaging through booking systems, vehicle signage, and driver training, especially during PSPS or evacuation orders.
- **Housing Providers and Care Facilities:** Coordinate with senior housing complexes, HUD-assisted units, and group homes to ensure residents receive clear, accessible guidance during emergencies.
- **Assistive Technology and Home Health Providers:** Equip vendors and care teams with preparedness materials and checklists that help clients maintain access to devices, medication, and communication tools during a disaster.
- **Public Health and Human Services:** Integrate emergency communication into Meals on Wheels deliveries, IHSS visits, and other routine disability services.
- **Digital Formats:** Ensure online alerts and preparedness resources are compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), including alt text, captions, transcripts, and screen reader compatibility.
- **Public Alerts and Press Conferences:** Include ASL interpretation and captioning in all live emergency communications. Provide simultaneous visual formats (e.g., maps, pictograms) where possible.

Outreach must assume that not all people can read, hear, see, or move in the same way, and that accessible design benefits everyone. Planning ahead with disability-led organizations ensures that messages reach people not just in theory, but in practice.

OUTREACH IN ACTION: Building Capacity for Accessible Communication

California's Office of Access and Functional Needs (OAFN) within Cal OES is a statewide leader in ensuring emergency communication is accessible to all. Working with local governments, community partners, and disability-led organizations, OAFN integrates the needs of people with disabilities into every phase of emergency management. Its guide, *Integrating Accessible Social Media Content within Emergency Communications*, helps agencies apply universal design principles—such as captions, transcripts, alt text, plain language, and high-contrast visuals—to improve usability for people with sensory disabilities and enhance clarity for everyone.

OAFN also offers monthly training sessions on creating accessible Office documents, PDFs, and forms, helping practitioners produce materials that are readable by assistive technologies. Its Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Library provides templates, guidance, and best practices on accessible sheltering, evacuation, transportation, and communications. Together, these tools build statewide capacity for digital inclusion and ensure that critical emergency information reaches people with physical, sensory, and mobility disabilities as a core part of California's emergency management system.

PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS AND COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS



COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Many Bay Area residents live with serious mental health conditions or cognitive disabilities that may impair their ability to receive, interpret, or act on emergency communications. These individuals are often served by behavioral health systems, disability services, or social service providers, but are frequently overlooked in mainstream outreach efforts. While these groups may have some overlapping access needs, their barriers and solutions are distinct enough to merit targeted strategies under a unified framework.

People with Serious Mental Health Conditions

This group includes individuals living with diagnoses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and others that affect emotional regulation, perception, and decision-making. In emergency situations, stress and disruption can exacerbate symptoms, increasing the risk of confusion, fear, or detachment. Some individuals may actively avoid contact with authorities or be reluctant to evacuate due to paranoia, past trauma, or anxiety.

People with Cognitive Impairments

This population includes individuals with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, dementia, traumatic brain injury, or developmental delays. These individuals may require different communication approaches due to challenges in processing information, understanding cause and effect, or responding to rapidly changing conditions. Many rely on caregivers or support workers to help them navigate daily life, which makes those intermediaries essential links for emergency preparedness and alert systems.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

For those with serious mental health conditions, emergency outreach may be complicated by co-occurring issues such as homelessness, substance use, or social isolation. Communications that rely on rational risk-benefit reasoning or structured instructions may not resonate or may trigger distress. Additionally, continuity of care and access to medication during a disaster are critical for many in this group. Interruptions in treatment, whether due to clinic closures, transit disruption, or displacement, can quickly lead to a crisis.

Cognitive impairments may influence mobility, sensory processing, or attention span, meaning that alerts must be not only cognitively accessible, but emotionally and physically accommodating. For example, flashing alerts may be distressing to a person with autism, while verbal-only messages may not be effective for someone with limited verbal processing skills.



BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Across the Bay Area, counties have taken initial steps to bridge emergency management with behavioral health and developmental disability services, though practices vary.

BEHAVIORAL AND MENTAL HEALTH COLLABORATION

Most counties, including Alameda, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Contra Costa, have integrated their Behavioral Health Departments into emergency planning structures and are exploring ways to embed emergency communication within ongoing care models.

One promising approach has been including emergency preparedness information in county mental health case management. For example, San Francisco and Alameda County have piloted efforts where behavioral health clients receive personalized emergency planning guidance from their clinicians or peer specialists, often during routine visits. Materials are adapted for different cognitive and literacy levels, and include simplified checklists, visual guides, or tailored plans co-created with clients.

Several regional resilience hubs and nonprofit collaboratives have also incorporated mental health accessibility into their outreach. In Santa Clara County, disability and mental health advocates were engaged in designing multilingual preparedness toolkits and sensory-friendly outreach events. Organizations like FACES for the Future, Caminar, and Mental Health Association of San Mateo County provide both clinical and peer support models and have partnered informally with emergency planners to circulate messages during extreme weather and public safety power shutoffs (PSPS).

Peer-led organizations such as Peers Envisioning and Engaging in Recovery Services (PEERS) in Oakland and National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) chapters across the region are seen as essential conduits. These groups offer culturally responsive, lived-experience-informed support and have experimented with mental health-informed disaster workshops and outreach.



Mental Health Association of San Mateo County's Friendship Centers are a safe and inclusive environment for adults with mental illness offering community-based activities and events.

Source: mhasmc.org/programs

Developmental and Cognitive Disability Partnerships

For people with developmental disabilities, agencies like the Regional Centers (e.g., Golden Gate Regional Center, San Andreas Regional Center) are critical partners. While their core mandate is service coordination, they are increasingly included in emergency discussions, especially around mass care planning and continuity of support. Some regional centers have provided emergency kits and communication boards for non-verbal clients and have coordinated with adult day programs on evacuation protocols.

Some jurisdictions, including San Mateo and Marin Counties, are exploring the development of behavioral health emergency annexes and conducting inclusive preparedness drills that simulate responses for clients with cognitive impairments or psychiatric needs. These exercises often involve collaboration between emergency managers, care providers, and disability advocates.



REGIONAL COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION

At the regional level, there are growing calls to establish memorandum of understanding between public health, emergency services, and behavioral health providers that outline roles in messaging, shelter support, and medication continuity. This includes ensuring Mobile Crisis Teams, Psychiatric Emergency Services, and Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams are integrated into response protocols, especially for outreach during evacuation or mass disruption events.

By continuing to foster collaboration between emergency planners, clinical providers, peer advocates, and supportive housing agencies, the Bay Area can develop stronger, trauma-informed, and neurologically inclusive outreach that meets the needs of individuals with mental health conditions and cognitive impairments.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Individuals living with serious mental health conditions or cognitive impairments often rely on support systems that fall outside typical emergency communication channels. Reaching these populations requires close collaboration with care providers, disability service organizations, and trusted peer networks. Jurisdictions can:

- Partner with behavioral health departments, community mental health centers, regional centers, and supportive housing providers that serve people with psychiatric disabilities, developmental disabilities, or traumatic brain injuries.
- Collaborate with peer-run organizations, drop-in wellness centers, and supported employment programs that engage individuals with lived experience in outreach and care.
- Engage caregivers, case managers, and direct support professionals who assist with daily tasks, many of whom are essential links between clients and public information systems.
- Include people with disabilities and mental health lived experience in designing and testing outreach strategies, recognizing them as experts in their own access needs.

Building trust with this population requires consistency, compassion, and acknowledgment of the barriers they face, including stigma, institutional trauma, and limited access to digital or written information.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Outreach messaging must account for variations in cognitive processing, emotional regulation, and comprehension ability. Effective messages for this population should:

- Use clear, simple, concrete language with visual support and repetition, avoiding figurative language, abstract warnings, or long lists of tasks.
- Break messages into manageable steps and focus on what the person needs to do immediately (e.g., “Go inside now,” “Call your support person,” “Bring your medicine”).
- Be trauma-informed: avoid language or imagery that could trigger fear, confusion, or past traumatic experiences, especially among those with PTSD or psychotic disorders.
- Provide reassurance and a calm tone, while also validating that emergencies can be overwhelming and it’s okay to ask for help.
- Include planning guidance for caregivers, roommates, or service providers, such as medication continuity tips or how to support someone in distress during evacuation.



Messages should be tested with people who experience cognitive disabilities and mental health conditions to ensure accessibility and emotional safety.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Reaching people with mental health conditions and cognitive impairments requires coordinated outreach through both formal systems of care and community-based, peer-driven networks. Effective channels include:

- **Mental Health Clinics and Case Management Programs:** Partner with county and nonprofit programs to embed emergency preparedness into routine appointments, wellness check-ins, and therapy sessions.
- **Regional Centers and Developmental Disability Services:** Work with service coordinators to provide clients and caregivers with visual emergency guides, laminated checklists, and accessible safety plans.
- **Peer-Led Organizations and Drop-In Centers:** Collaborate with groups like PEERS, NAMI chapters, and wellness recovery centers to co-create and distribute plain-language, stigma-free materials.
- **Supportive and Transitional Housing:** Train property managers and resident advisors in how to share alerts and guide residents with cognitive or psychiatric disabilities through emergency instructions.
- **Caregivers and Direct Support Professionals:** Equip in-home caregivers, in-home support services providers, and family members with tools to help prepare and support individuals before, during, and after a disaster.
- **Accessible Digital and Print Materials:** Ensure all messaging is available in multiple formats, including low-reading-level print, picture-based guides, audio recordings, and documents compatible with screen readers.
- **Behavioral Health Crisis Response Teams:** Coordinate messaging through mobile crisis teams and mental health outreach workers who already build relationships with high-need clients and can deliver information face-to-face.

For individuals who may struggle to follow instructions, experience paranoia, or require repeated reminders, outreach must prioritize clarity, calm, and relationship-based delivery, encompassing not just alerts but also reassurance, continuity, and connection.

OUTREACH IN ACTION: FireClear and TsunamiClear: Supporting Cognitive Accessibility Through Visual Design

People living with cognitive impairments or mental health conditions may struggle to process dense or abstract emergency information—especially under stress. Complex maps or jargon-heavy instructions can trigger confusion or decision paralysis. The TsunamiClear and FireClear programs show how simple, familiar visuals can make emergency guidance more cognitively accessible. TsunamiClear, developed with Cal OES and research partners, uses high-contrast schematic maps that replace dense Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data with major landmarks and direct evacuation routes. Studies found that users recalled evacuation information more accurately and for longer than those receiving written or audio-only instructions, and the standardized design across coastal communities reduces cognitive load by avoiding the need to relearn map formats.

FireClear applies the same principles to wildfire preparedness, filtering maps to essential information and helping users build mental “cognitive maps” of evacuation routes before an emergency. In Marin County, maps are also printed and mailed to residents, ensuring people who rely on tangible materials, caregivers, or offline formats can access the same guidance. Together, these initiatives show that designing emergency information for cognitive accessibility benefits the entire community—turning visual design into a life-saving tool for equity and preparedness.

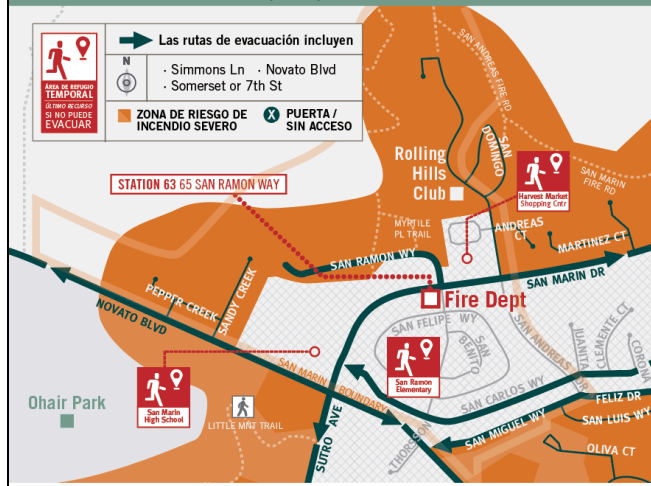


TsunamiClear Map.

35 SAN MARIN Conosca su salida.

¡Escanee este código QR para descargar su mapa de vecindad en su teléfono o tablet!

Familiarícese con las rutas principales fuera de su vecindario en caso de una evacuación.



CONSEJOS DE SEGURIDAD DE EVACUACIÓN

¿Qué ponerse?

Use gafas, guantes de cuero y zapatos pesados/botas; proteja su piel con ropa larga de algodón; proteja las vías respiratorias y la cara con una máscara N95 y pañuelo. Use un sombrero para proteger el cabello de las brasas.

¿A dónde ir?

Evite las laderas. Diríjese a un lugar del valle en auto, lejos del fuego si es posible.

Sólo por si acaso...

Ir a pie o en bicicleta solamente si no existe ninguna otra opción. Refugiarse en interiores o en un coche es generalmente más seguro que estar expuestos afuera.

ALERTAS DE EMERGENCIA E INFORMACIÓN SOBRE INCENDIOS

LOS INCENDIOS PUEDEN DARSE REPENTINAMENTE Y SIN ADVERTENCIA. LOS GERENTES DE EMERGENCIA INTENTARÁN NOTIFICAR A LOS RESIDENTES CUANDO LA EVACUACIÓN SEA NECESARIA. PERO ESTO NO ES SIEMPRE

FireClear Map—Spanish/Español.



Your neighborhood zones

Note where you and your family members live, work and go to school. Then mark down these locations on this map.

Kentfield

Download the individual zone map for alert and warning information and further sources.

ZONE AREA
1 Kentfield

ZONE AREA
2 Kent

ZONE AREA
3 Goodhill

ZONE AREA
4 Woodland

ZONE AREA
5 Murray

KENTFIELD FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT www.kentfieldfire.org

CENTRAL MARIN FIRE DEPT www.centralmarinfire.org

www.firesafemartin.org

Fire Dept

DESIGN AND FIRECLEAR MAP PROVIDED BY CLAUDE JANNICHEN
 DESIGN NETWORK FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

FireClear Map—English.



FARMWORKERS AND DAY LABORERS

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Farmworkers and day laborers include agricultural laborers, both seasonal or migrant and year-round, and informal day laborers who are hired for construction, landscaping, domestic work, or other manual tasks. In the Bay Area UASI region, these workers are vital to regional food systems and urban infrastructure. Farmworkers are concentrated in counties such as Monterey, Napa, Sonoma, and Santa Cruz, while day laborers can be found in both suburban and urban areas across the region. Many individuals in this group are undocumented, speak limited English or speak Indigenous languages, and live in informal, employer-provided, or overcrowded housing. They may be employed through cash-based or unregulated arrangements, without benefits, legal protections, or consistent work schedules.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Although the nature of their work varies, both farmworkers and day laborers share significant barriers to emergency outreach. Their jobs are often physically isolating; they work in fields, vineyards, or on job sites far from town centers. Their housing situations are often temporary, poorly mapped, or unregistered. Many do not engage with mainstream media or opt in to alert systems. For migrant or seasonal workers, their time in a community may be short and inconsistent, which can reduce their familiarity with local emergency resources and communication channels.

The foremost barrier is language and cultural isolation. Many farmworkers speak Spanish or Indigenous languages such as Mixteco, Triqui, or Mam, for which translated emergency materials are rare. Similarly, day laborers may speak only limited English and may not consume official media or digital information. Trust is another major challenge. Many individuals in this group avoid contact with government agencies out of fear of deportation, wage theft, or retaliation. Outreach lacking cultural fluency or perceived as punitive may be ignored or actively avoided.

Housing precarity is also a defining issue. Workers may live in employer-owned housing, labor camps, trailers, cars, or shared apartments with little stability. Many addresses are not recorded in public databases, making address-based alerts and door-to-door outreach ineffective. Day laborers, in particular, may sleep in different locations from one day to the next or rely on informal community connections for temporary housing. In disasters, these housing arrangements may be the first to flood, burn, or be evacuated. Yet, traditional outreach zones may not cover them.

Access to technology can also be limited. Some workers may not own a smartphone or may rely on pay-as-you-go phones without data access, making them less likely to receive text alerts or follow local agencies on social



media. Others may use phones primarily for messaging apps like WhatsApp, which official agencies rarely use. Compounding this is the fact that many workers are not formally affiliated with any local organization or system. This means that even community-based alerts may miss them if outreach does not deliberately target work crews, day labor corners, or agricultural employers.

Finally, the structure of employment itself can hinder preparedness. Farmworkers and day laborers often have little control over their schedules, limited access to sick leave, and may fear retaliation if they take time off for preparedness training or evacuation. In some past disasters, agricultural workers were expected to remain in fields during wildfires or extreme heat events. Without direct, trusted communication channels, these workers may be placed in harm's way without access to safety information or services.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

HEALTH PROMOTERS AND WORKER ADVOCACY NETWORKS

Promotores and health outreach networks are among the most effective vehicles for reaching farmworker communities. Organizations such as Salud Para La Gente in Watsonville and Community Bridges in Santa Cruz County train and deploy *promotores*, trusted community health workers, to provide health education and social support in agricultural communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these networks distributed health guidance, personal protective equipment (PPE), and even emergency rental assistance, showing their capacity to deliver complex and time-sensitive messages in culturally competent ways. Emergency preparedness content can be layered into this trusted channel.

Promotores—also known as *promotores de salud*—are trusted community health educators or peer outreach workers who provide information, support, and connection to services within their own communities. They typically share culture, language, and lived experience with the people they serve, making them highly effective messengers for health, safety, and emergency preparedness outreach.

Legal aid and labor advocacy organizations also serve as key intermediaries. The Monterey County Legal Services for Seniors, California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), and the Day Worker Center of Mountain View have experience advocating for the rights of low-wage and immigrant workers. These groups often serve as the first line of support when workers are displaced by floods, wildfires, or heat waves, and they are already positioned to convey resilience information, especially when it includes labor protections or tenant rights during emergencies.

CULTURAL CONNECTION

In San Mateo County, climate equity and resilience collaboratives have explicitly included farmworker voices. For instance, the county has partnered with Ayudando Latinos a Soñar (ALAS) to disseminate wildfire safety information and emergency preparedness materials in Spanish and Indigenous languages spoken by the local agricultural workforce. This partnership also led to the development of culturally relevant training sessions and alert sign-ups at farmworker housing sites and food distribution hubs.



Salud Para La Gente in Watsonville disrupts mask donations during COVID-19 pandemic. Source: Salud Para La Gente Facebook

RESILIENCE HUBS

Resilience hubs, community-serving facilities that support residents during disasters, are emerging as promising outreach models. In Sonoma and Napa counties, several resilience hubs have prioritized engaging with farmworkers. These hubs



often co-locate services such as cooling centers, language access support, and emergency alerts in areas already frequented by agricultural workers and their families.

Despite these efforts, coordination between emergency management and organizations serving farmworkers remains inconsistent. Much of the outreach work is ad hoc or is grant-dependent. Strengthening this infrastructure means recognizing these community-based organizations (CBOs) and worker centers not only as service providers but also as frontline communicators in disaster situations.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Farmworkers and day laborers often live and work on the margins of the formal economy, facing language barriers, housing insecurity, and deep-seated institutional distrust. Reaching them requires long-term, culturally rooted relationships with the organizations and leaders who already serve and advocate for them. Formal partnerships, funding mechanisms, and inclusion in emergency planning processes would go a long way toward closing outreach gaps. Jurisdictions can:

- Partner with *promotores* (community health workers), farmworker-serving nonprofits, labor advocacy groups, and worker centers that have strong, trusted connections in agricultural and informal labor communities.
- Collaborate with public health departments, mobile clinics, and legal aid organizations that regularly engage with day laborers and seasonal workers.
- Establish ongoing contact with employers, labor contractors, and agricultural cooperatives, not to shift responsibility, but to ensure emergency information is distributed equitably and accurately on worksites.
- Support grassroots leadership among workers by funding and training peer educators to share preparedness and response information in their own languages and through their own networks.

Relationship-building must explicitly address the power dynamics and fears (e.g., of deportation, retaliation, or eviction) that shape how and whether these workers engage with public systems.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Effective messaging for farmworkers and day laborers must be linguistically accessible, culturally appropriate, and grounded in the realities of their working and living conditions. Strong messages should:

- Be translated into Spanish and Indigenous languages commonly spoken in the region (e.g., Mixteco, Mam, Triqui, Zapotec), with oral formats used where literacy or written fluency is limited.
- Use simple, direct language with a focus on actionable steps (e.g., “If you smell smoke, stop working and go to your nearest evacuation point”).
- Emphasize that emergency services (including shelter, alerts, and transportation) are available regardless of immigration status or legal documentation.
- Include clear information about how to receive alerts, get help without ID, and protect family members or roommates in informal housing.
- Be reviewed or co-created by worker advocacy organizations and *promotores* to ensure trustworthiness and cultural resonance.



Messages should also highlight how to prepare when daily survival (e.g., food, wages, and rent) is already precarious. Framing should validate those pressures and offer realistic actions, not idealized plans.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

To reach farmworkers and day laborers effectively, emergency communication must meet workers in the spaces they inhabit and use their trusted information networks. Effective channels include:

- **Promotores and Peer Educators:** Train and support trusted community health workers to share messages verbally in the field, during community events, or through household visits.
- **Worksites and Employer Channels:** Provide translated, easy-to-understand posters, evacuation maps, and heat/smoke warnings at fields, packing houses, job pick-up sites, and construction zones.
- **Worker Centers and Legal Aid Clinics:** Collaborate with organizations like Centro Laboral de Graton, Day Worker Center of Mountain View, and California Rural Legal Assistance to distribute materials and hold preparedness workshops.
- **Mobile Health Units and Agricultural Clinics:** Share preparedness messages during health visits, vaccination clinics, or outreach events where workers already receive trusted services.
- **Ethnic Media and Radio:** Disseminate emergency alerts and preparedness tips through Spanish-language and Indigenous-language radio stations, WhatsApp audio clips, and local newspapers.
- **Food Banks and Mutual Aid Networks:** Include flyers, checklists, or laminated guides in food distributions, especially in rural or agricultural towns.
- **Community Places, Events, and Churches:** Leverage popular gathering spaces for information-sharing, such as Sunday services, soccer leagues, or health fairs, where trusted messengers can speak directly to groups.

Outreach should never assume smartphone access, consistent internet, or formal mailing addresses. Messaging must be in-person, repeated, and grounded in mutual respect, not just information delivery, but relationship-building and care.

OUTREACH IN ACTION: Mobile Loudspeaker Outreach for Farmworker Safety

To overcome barriers of distance, literacy, and trust among agricultural workers, one outreach organization adopted a familiar communication method from rural Latin America: the mobile loudspeaker. The team outfitted a pickup truck with large speakers and drove through the fields playing Ranchera music, interspersed with short, clear safety messages in Spanish and Indigenous languages. During heat waves, the messages reminded workers to stay hydrated, seek shade, and recognize signs of heat illness, blending practical advice with the comfort of a recognizable soundscape.

This creative, low-cost strategy transformed emergency messaging from a bureaucratic announcement into something culturally resonant and welcoming. By pairing music with in-language communication, the team captured attention, built trust, and ensured workers received vital safety information directly in their work environment. The approach illustrates how culturally familiar formats and sensory cues can bridge language and trust gaps, turning emergency outreach into an act of care rather than compliance.

DISCONNECTED AND SYSTEM-INVOLVED YOUTH

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Disconnected and system-involved youth include foster youth, children involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, youth experiencing homelessness, and out-of-school or disengaged adolescents who are no longer connected to educational or social institutions. In the Bay Area, thousands of young people fall into these categories. Foster youth may live in county-supervised placements (e.g., foster homes, group homes, transitional housing), while others may be couch-surfing, in shelters, or navigating life independently after aging out of care. Youth who are not enrolled in school or who have dropped out often lack stable adult guidance, consistent addresses, or trusted access points to official systems. These overlapping factors make them especially hard to reach in disaster outreach and emergency communications.

In emergency planning, youth are typically assumed to be part of a family unit or tied to a school system, two assumptions that don't hold for this group. Disconnected youth may not have caregivers who monitor alerts or help with preparedness. Many move frequently between placements, group living environments, friends' homes, or street locations. Some avoid institutions entirely due to mistrust, trauma, or survival needs, making their engagement through formal channels even more challenging.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

A primary challenge in reaching disconnected and system-involved youth is the instability of housing, caregiving relationships, and institutional ties. Youth in care may be moved across county lines, placing them outside the jurisdiction of the systems responsible for their preparedness. They might not be enrolled in school or have any designated adult responsible for relaying emergency information. Even in group settings, communication protocols vary widely; some individuals may receive alerts via staff, while others may not. For teens living independently, transient living situations and limited access to phones or the internet mean they are unlikely to be signed up for alerts and are rarely engaged through standard outreach.

Trust and trauma also pose serious barriers. Many system-involved youth have experienced significant neglect or abuse and may be skeptical of government messaging, particularly when delivered by law enforcement or unknown officials. Their ability to interpret or act on warnings can be impaired by mental health challenges, developmental needs, or simple inexperience in navigating adult responsibilities. For example, a 19-year-old who has aged out of foster care might not know how to register for alerts, where to go during an evacuation, or how to refill medications in a crisis.

Until recently, many foster youth lacked access to digital tools. California programs, such as iFoster, have expanded phone and hotspot availability; however, not all youth are covered, and connectivity remains a



challenge in shelters or unstable settings. Similarly, out-of-school youth may not have a consistent device or data plan to receive alerts, particularly if they work informally or live off the grid. As a result, these youth can fall through the cracks of systems that assume routine contact, stable homes, or active school enrollment.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

While emergency preparedness is rarely integrated into youth development or reentry programming, Bay Area organizations are already creating the trusted relationships and communication pathways needed to reach disconnected and system-involved youth.

TRUSTED NETWORKS AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Organizations such as the Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center (LYRIC) in San Francisco, the RYSE Center in Richmond, and Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY) in Santa Clara and Alameda Counties serve youth who are impacted by the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. These organizations provide mentorship, leadership development, housing navigation, and education support, making them critical touchpoints for trust-based outreach. Some have piloted health and safety messaging, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and could expand to include emergency preparedness with appropriate resources.



*LYRIC's Youth Development programs empower LGBTQQ+ youth to become confident, capable leaders.
Source: lyric.org/youth-development/*

In San Mateo County, the Youth Commission and Foster Youth Advisory Boards have been tapped to co-design materials relevant to young people, particularly those in transitional housing or reentry programs. These groups offer a direct channel to amplify youth voices and enhance the credibility and cultural relevance of outreach campaigns.

INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAMMATIC PATHWAYS

California's statewide iFoster program, which distributes smartphones and data plans to current and former foster youth, has opened the door to direct digital outreach. Although not specific to the Bay Area, many local counties, including Alameda, Santa Clara, and Contra Costa, participate, creating an opportunity for emergency managers to explore partnerships for delivering alerts or preparedness content through devices already in use by youth.

Additionally, school reengagement programs and community schools offer another pathway. Organizations such as Youth Uprising in Oakland and Bay Area Community Resources (BACR) in multiple counties provide wraparound services for youth who are disconnected from formal education. These programs could become access points for preparedness outreach, especially when paired with trusted adult mentors or peer leaders.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Disconnected and system-involved youth, including foster youth, those in the juvenile justice system, youth experiencing homelessness, and those who are disengaged from school or employment, face heightened vulnerability during disasters. Many also fall into the category of transitional-age youth: young adults who have technically aged out of formal systems but remain economically or emotionally dependent.



While preparedness-focused collaboration with youth-serving systems remains limited and often underfunded, the Bay Area's strong network of community-based and transitional support programs provides a foundation for meaningful engagement. To build effective outreach relationships, jurisdictions can:

- Partner with youth-serving organizations that specialize in supporting justice-involved, foster, unhoused, or opportunity youth, including transitional housing programs, mentoring networks, and restorative justice initiatives.
- Collaborate with school reengagement programs, LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other gender- and sexuality-diverse) youth centers, and extended foster care programs (e.g., California Assembly Bill (AB) 12 in California), which support youth beyond age 18 who are still in school or living independently for the first time.
- Engage in transitional support programs, such as Independent Living Programs (ILPs), Guardian Scholars, and community college initiatives, for current or former foster youth and first-generation students.
- Fund and support peer outreach roles for youth with lived experience, allowing them to co-create and deliver messaging in ways that feel relevant, empowering, and authentic.

These partnerships must recognize trauma histories, system distrust, and the reality that many of these youth are navigating adult responsibilities without stable adult support.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Outreach to disconnected and system-involved youth should be strength-based, developmentally appropriate, and grounded in safety, autonomy, and relevance. Effective messaging should:

- Use plain language, storytelling, and visual formats to communicate preparedness as a tool for self-protection and personal growth, not institutional compliance.
- Normalize preparedness as part of becoming independent: "Just like you learned how to budget or cook, here's how you plan for emergencies."
- Be direct about how to access help without a caregiver, ID, or a permanent address, including instructions on how to evacuate, obtain emergency shelter, and refill medications.
- Address real barriers these youth face, such as fear of losing housing, navigating care for pets, or keeping essential documents safe in unstable housing.
- Include examples that reflect the lived experience of couch-surfing, sharing unstable rentals, attending school while unhoused, or working to stay in transitional housing programs.

Messages should reinforce that emergency systems are available to everyone, and that young people do not need to prove adulthood, compliance, or worthiness to stay safe. Messages should also avoid adult-centric language, institutional tones, or assumptions about stable households or caregivers.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Disconnected and system-involved youth often engage through peer relationships, youth-led organizations, and service networks tailored to their specific realities. Effective outreach channels include:

- **Youth Advocacy and Peer-Led Organizations:** Collaborate with groups like LYRIC, RYSE Center, FLY, and foster youth advisory boards to co-design content and share resources.
- **College and Community College Support Programs:** Utilize financial aid offices, Guardian Scholars, first-generation student centers, and Basic Needs Hubs to distribute emergency kits, guides, and checklists tailored to students with unstable housing or foster care backgrounds.



- **Drop-In Centers and Transitional Housing Programs:** Provide trauma-informed preparedness guidance to staff who support youth with emergency shelter, case management, or food access.
- **Street Outreach and Mobile Teams:** Equip youth outreach workers, mobile clinics, and van-based programs with accessible, youth-friendly materials and verbal scripts.
- **Food Pantries and Resource Closets:** Share printed guides, wallet cards, and flyers through free food programs, clothing giveaways, and hygiene product distributions.
- **Social Media and Messaging Apps:** Use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, or Discord to share brief, engaging videos or graphics, ideally created in partnership with youth peers.
- **Alternative Schools and Reengagement Sites:** Work with continuation schools, General Educational Development (GED) programs, and career pathway sites to integrate emergency readiness into life skills or wellness programming.
- **Juvenile Probation and ILP Caseworkers:** Ensure probation officers, ILP navigators, and housing case managers are equipped with the tools to help youth create basic emergency plans.

Outreach must affirm youth identity, promote agency, and avoid institutional tones. Transitional-age youth are resilient and resourceful; emergency communication should recognize those strengths and offer tools that align with their goals for independence and self-sufficiency.



JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Justice-involved individuals and families include individuals who are currently incarcerated, on parole or probation, recently released from jail or prison, or otherwise navigating reentry into society after involvement in the criminal legal system. It also includes their families, who may be economically or socially impacted by a loved one's incarceration. The Bay Area is home to numerous reentry programs and probation/parole populations across counties, with significant numbers concentrated in cities like Oakland, Richmond, San Francisco, and San Jose. While public safety agencies and emergency managers may not consider this population in routine outreach efforts, they represent a substantial and uniquely vulnerable segment of the community, particularly in high-risk neighborhoods that already face overlapping inequities in housing, health, and employment.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Many formerly incarcerated individuals live in transitional housing, substance use treatment centers, or with family in crowded or unstable housing arrangements. Some individuals may lack government-issued identification or have limited digital access, which complicates their ability to receive official alerts, sign up for services, or engage with preparedness resources. Additionally, families of incarcerated individuals may not know how to get information about the safety of loved ones during a disaster, particularly if communication with jail or prison facilities is cut off.

The justice-involved population is often disconnected from traditional outreach systems due to institutional distrust, unstable housing, and social stigma. Those returning from incarceration may not be aware of local alert systems or may not prioritize preparedness given more pressing survival needs such as securing employment, housing, or treatment services. Some may avoid interaction with authorities due to fear of surveillance, parole violations, or immigration consequences, making government-led outreach difficult unless paired with trusted messengers.

Transitional housing programs and halfway houses vary significantly in the level of disaster preparedness training or information they provide. Residents may not be registered for emergency alerts, lack personal devices, or share phones, making individualized communication difficult. Furthermore, probation and parole offices are inconsistently integrated into local emergency planning processes and are often under-resourced in their ability to act as information conduits.

For currently incarcerated individuals, barriers are even more severe: jails and prisons are physically isolated, operate on distinct communication systems, and often do not share real-time emergency alerts with inmates or their families. During COVID-19, wildfires, and extreme heat events, incarcerated people in the Bay Area



experienced delayed evacuations, limited protective measures, and inconsistent access to emergency information.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Bay Area jurisdictions are increasingly recognizing that reentry, rehabilitation, and restorative justice networks can play a vital role in keeping justice-involved residents and their families informed, connected, and supported during emergencies.

COMMUNITY-BASED REENTRY AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PARTNERS

In the Bay Area, several reentry and restorative justice organizations play a vital role in engaging justice-involved residents. Root & Rebound, The Gamble Institute, and Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ) all work with formerly incarcerated individuals and their families to support housing, employment, legal advocacy, and healing. These programs often maintain long-term relationships with clients, and some have incorporated wellness messaging, particularly during public health emergencies, indicating a potential foundation for integrating preparedness content.

Family support organizations, such as the Time for Change Foundation (which operates in parts of the East Bay) and Centerforce (serving clients across the Bay Area and statewide), also provide critical services to family members of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals. These organizations could act as intermediaries for preparedness outreach, especially when messages address family-specific concerns such as child reunification planning during emergencies or continuity of benefits.

SYSTEM-LEVEL COLLABORATION AND CASE MANAGEMENT

County reentry departments and collaborative courts (such as reentry courts or behavioral health courts in San Francisco, Alameda, and Santa Clara Counties) present another opportunity. These systems regularly communicate with clients and have begun to acknowledge the importance of holistic care, including safety and housing security during emergencies. However, few have formalized relationships with emergency management.

Several Bay Area probation and parole departments already engage in case management and community supervision, often through regular check-ins and service referrals. These interactions provide potential channels for distributing preparedness materials, particularly when coordinated through county health departments or emergency management agencies. San Mateo County, for example, has piloted multi-agency collaboration between probation, behavioral health, and social services, offering a potential template for integrating disaster resilience into case management practices.

Despite growing recognition of these organizations as trusted conduits, formal integration with emergency preparedness remains in its early stages. Bridging this gap will require intentional partnerships, training, and investment, acknowledging that justice-involved communities are not only vulnerable to disaster impacts, but also essential partners in community resilience.



TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

People who are currently or formerly incarcerated, along with their families, often live at the intersection of stigma, surveillance, housing instability, and institutional distrust. Building relationships with this community requires collaboration with systems and organizations that support reentry, legal advocacy, and family stability.

Jurisdictions can:

- Partner with reentry service providers, probation and parole departments, behavioral health courts, and housing navigation programs that work directly with justice-involved populations.
- Collaborate with peer-led and restorative justice organizations that center lived experience and already support individuals navigating release, recovery, and reentry.
- Work with family support groups, especially those serving children of incarcerated parents or offering wraparound services to affected households.
- Ensure that probation officers, court liaisons, and reentry counselors are trained and equipped to deliver emergency information as part of ongoing client support.

Trust-building must be long-term and non-punitive. Outreach should emphasize community safety and resilience, not compliance, enforcement, or risk management.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Messaging for justice-involved individuals and their families must be rooted in trauma-informed principles and an understanding of how institutional harm may shape information uptake. Effective messaging should:

- Emphasize that emergency alerts, shelters, and services are available regardless of legal status, parole conditions, or documentation, and that accessing support will not trigger law enforcement action.
- Include information about where to go for help if legal documents, medications, or critical belongings are lost during an evacuation or disruption.
- Use language that avoids criminal justice framing (e.g., “at-risk” or “offender”) and instead centers personal safety, community care, and preparedness.
- Be co-developed or reviewed by individuals with lived experience of incarceration or system involvement to ensure relevance and trustworthiness.
- Address family-specific concerns, such as how to stay in contact with loved ones during incarceration, what to do if communication with facilities is disrupted, and how to reunite during a disaster.

Messages should be distributed consistently and repeatedly, acknowledging that this population often moves between temporary, transitional, and unstably housed situations.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Reaching justice-involved individuals requires a combination of institutional partnerships and community-rooted networks. Effective channels include:



- **Reentry and Legal Support Organizations:** Collaborate with groups like Root & Rebound, Centerforce, and community reentry programs to integrate preparedness messaging into housing support, employment programs, and legal clinics.
- **Probation, Parole, and Collaborative Courts:** Work with supervising officers and program staff to provide clients with printed guides, alert registration help, and planning support.
- **Family Resource and Advocacy Centers:** Share materials through organizations that support the children and families of incarcerated individuals, particularly those that offer mental health or educational support.
- **Transitional and Supportive Housing Sites:** Equip staff at halfway houses, sober living homes, and supportive housing with emergency protocols, printed alerts, and resource flyers.
- **Peer Mentors and Reentry Navigators:** Fund and train formerly incarcerated individuals to serve as outreach messengers, sharing information in shelters, at community events, and during job training sessions.
- **Correctional Facilities:** Coordinate with jails and prisons to ensure access to real-time alerts for incarcerated individuals and provide families with guidance for contact during disasters.
- **Public Defenders and Court Clinics:** Provide preparedness materials during legal proceedings or at court-based service hubs where individuals may already seek support.

Outreach must reinforce that emergency systems are for everyone, including those who have been impacted by the justice system, and should never require disclosure of sensitive information, such as legal history, housing status, or personal documentation, to access life-saving resources.

GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED AND DIGITALLY DISCONNECTED PEOPLE

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Despite its reputation as a global tech hub, the Bay Area is home to a surprising number of residents who are geographically isolated or digitally disconnected. Geographically isolated and digitally disconnected individuals and households include those in remote coastal, agricultural, and mountainous areas, such as West Marin, the rural Napa and Sonoma valleys, inland San Benito and Monterey counties, and the forested ridges of the Santa Cruz Mountains. These communities may be many miles from emergency services or town centers, often with poor cell coverage, unreliable landline service, and no broadband internet.

Just as significant are those who live in dense urban areas but remain disconnected from modern communication infrastructure due to cost, literacy, age, or choice. In neighborhoods like East Oakland, Bayview-Hunters Point, or parts of East San Jose, broadband adoption remains uneven. Residents may lack smartphones or computers, be unfamiliar with apps or alert systems, or rely heavily on traditional analog communication methods. Elderly residents, low-income families, new immigrants, and unhoused individuals may all fall into this category of digital disconnection, regardless of their physical location.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

The primary barrier for these groups is access, whether to physical infrastructure or the necessary means and familiarity required to utilize digital technology. Rural isolation presents practical challenges: sirens may not be audible, radio reception is limited, and alert systems often fail to reach areas with no cell towers or power. During emergencies such as wildfires, earthquakes, or severe storms, entire communities may be cut off due to road closures, flooding, or debris. In these cases, traditional notification methods, such as mailers or phone trees, are too slow or unreliable. Emergency responders may not be able to reach these areas quickly, and mutual aid efforts may lack coordination without two-way communication.

In urban environments, digital disconnect manifests differently. Some people are not signed up for emergency alerts because they've never heard of them or don't understand how to register. Others may not trust official systems or feel that they aren't "for them." Outreach via social media, mobile apps, or government websites often fails to reach seniors who don't use digital devices or immigrants unfamiliar with English-language platforms. As a result, public safety messaging becomes fragmented, reaching tech-savvy populations but bypassing others entirely.

These information gaps have major consequences. During fast-moving disasters, individuals who never receive an evacuation alert or safety notice may be left behind or make dangerous choices. Even during periods of blue-sky planning, this communication divide undermines preparedness efforts. People without regular access to



technology miss out on educational campaigns, hazard mitigation resources, or civic opportunities to participate in planning.

In the Bay Area, this disconnect is compounded by cultural and linguistic barriers. Reaching individuals who are geographically isolated or digitally disconnected requires high-touch, community-embedded strategies like door-to-door canvassing, printed flyers in multiple languages, and partnerships with local institutions (e.g., churches, clinics, agricultural cooperatives). It also demands a reevaluation of assumptions about how people receive and respond to emergency information.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Several Bay Area efforts are beginning to address these gaps by blending analog communication tools, place-based outreach, and inclusive alert systems with cross-sector partnerships.

COMMUNITY HUBS AS COMMUNICATION ANCHORS

Resilience hubs in Oakland, San Francisco, and Marin County serve as decentralized community anchors, offering in-person information and resource distribution. These hubs often provide multilingual flyers, preparedness guides on paper, and disaster kits tailored for households without internet access or mobile devices. During Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) events and wildfire evacuations, some hubs have functioned as communication relays, offering charging stations, posting printed alerts, or providing verbal briefings to residents who don't use or trust digital systems.

LOW-TECH AND LOCALIZED COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

Marin County, home to both rural coastal towns and urban centers, has invested in low-tech outreach methods for its western communities. The county uses fire station bulletin boards, ham radio, and neighbor-to-neighbor volunteer networks to alert residents during wildfires or flooding. In West Marin, the West Marin Disaster Council and Fire Safe Councils coordinate with the County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to pre-distribute printed materials and preparedness plans. Many of these areas depend on sirens or phone trees, making these human-scaled systems essential lifelines.

In Santa Cruz County, emergency management partners with schools, food banks, and community clinics to distribute printed materials in multiple languages. This strategy ensures outreach to digitally disconnected residents, especially agricultural families, older adults, and Indigenous immigrants, who rely on in-person touchpoints. Similarly, Santa Clara County integrates emergency messaging into Meals on Wheels deliveries, ensuring that homebound seniors and others without online access still receive alerts, shelter information, and safety tips during extreme heat or power outages.

Several counties, including Monterey and Napa, have partnered with local radio stations and faith-based groups to share emergency updates through trusted offline channels. Radio remains one of the most reliable tools for reaching residents in the Salinas Valley and remote wine country during wildfires, power outages, and storms.



Radio Indígena is utilized as a powerful and effective outreach and organizing tool for the indigenous, immigrant, and farmworker communities.

Source: mixteco.org



BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE THROUGH DATA AND PARTNERSHIPS

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and local broadband coalitions have worked with Bay Area counties to identify digital dead zones and support efforts to bridge the digital divide. Though primarily focused on long-term broadband equity, these efforts have created maps and datasets that emergency managers can use to prioritize analog outreach strategies in vulnerable areas.

Recognizing that people who are physically isolated or digitally disconnected are often excluded from preparedness campaigns, some jurisdictions are experimenting with door-to-door outreach teams, especially ahead of fire season. In Sonoma County, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and bilingual volunteers distribute evacuation route maps, printed alert instructions, and backup communication options (like National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA] weather radios) to residents in canyons and hillsides.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

People who are physically remote or digitally disconnected often rely on hyper-local networks, analog systems, and word-of-mouth rather than formal emergency channels. To effectively engage this population, jurisdictions can:

- Partner with local fire departments, postal workers, agricultural cooperatives, CERT teams, and rural schools, which are institutions that maintain direct, recurring contact in geographically isolated areas.
- Build relationships with senior centers, food banks, and community organizations that serve urban residents without reliable internet, cell service, or digital literacy.
- Support local volunteer networks, local radio clubs, and other community-based organizations (CBOs) already embedded in disconnected communities, especially in rural valleys, mountainous areas, and low-income urban neighborhoods.
- Maintain contact with local leaders, including *promotores*, librarians, and multi-lingual outreach workers who are familiar with the needs and communication norms of disconnected populations.

Promotores—also known as *promotores de salud*—are trusted community health educators or peer outreach workers who provide information, support, and connection to services within their own communities. They typically share culture, language, and lived experience with the people they serve, making them highly effective messengers for health, safety, and emergency preparedness outreach.

Relationships should be grounded in consistency and practicality. Outreach efforts must go where people already are and respect their communication preferences and limitations.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

For digitally disconnected populations, effective messaging must be designed for analog delivery and personal interpretation. Successful messages:

- Use plain language and large print formatting, accompanied by visual illustrations that support low-literacy or multilingual audiences.
- Avoid assuming internet access, smartphone use, or familiarity with apps. This means no QR codes as the only option, and no relying on "click here for more info" or "click here for frequently asked questions (FAQ)."



- Emphasize specific, locally relevant actions ("Turn on your battery-powered radio for updates" or "Pick up a map of evacuation routes at the library") rather than general advice.
- Include options for those without cars, phones, or digital alerts, such as posting times for fire station briefings or instructions on how to listen to NOAA radio stations.
- Are available in the languages most used in the community, including Indigenous or oral preference languages where relevant.

Messages should be reinforced through repeated analog delivery, including in-person, mail, and community radio.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

This population must be reached through low-tech, analog, and hyper-local communication methods. Effective channels include:

- **Local Radio Stations:** Partner with community radio stations (especially those serving non-English and rural audiences) to broadcast real-time alerts and preparedness education, particularly in areas with limited cell coverage.
- **Libraries and Community Centers:** Distribute printed materials and host preparedness workshops in trusted gathering places used by people without digital access.
- **Fire Stations, Post Offices, and Public Bulletin Boards:** Use physical posting sites in rural towns and unincorporated areas to share printed evacuation routes, shelter updates, and hazard warnings.
- **Faith-Based Organizations and Local Markets:** Share flyers, checklists, and event announcements in churches, temples, mosques, and family-run shops, which are often trusted venues for disconnected communities.
- **Meals on Wheels and In-Home Support Services:** Integrate emergency messaging into service delivery for homebound seniors, people with disabilities, and isolated adults.
- **Amateur Radio Networks and CERT Programs:** Collaborate with local emergency volunteer groups to support message relay and check-ins during power outages or communications disruptions.
- **Door-to-Door Outreach and Printed Mailers:** During blue-sky periods, plan to have printed outreach materials delivered through trusted messengers or direct mail, especially in areas with known low connectivity.

Preparedness strategies for disconnected people should not require digital sign-up, Global Positioning System (GPS) location, or broadband access. Outreach must prioritize analog tools, in-person contact, and repeated, visible information in the spaces where people already spend time.



INDIVIDUALS WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS (SUD)

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

People with a substance use disorder (SUD) include individuals actively using substances such as opioids, methamphetamine, alcohol, or other drugs, as well as those in recovery or relying on medication-assisted treatment (MAT). In the Bay Area, the opioid and methamphetamine crises have deeply impacted communities across all counties, contributing to thousands of overdoses, hospitalizations, and emergency responses annually.

This population encompasses individuals from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. While SUD often overlaps with homelessness, many individuals with SUD are housed, living in supportive housing, transitional programs, or unstable arrangements such as couch-surfing or short-term motels. Others may be marginalized due to poverty, housing instability, or intersecting behavioral health conditions. They are often overlooked in traditional emergency preparedness efforts, frequently subsumed under the broader category of “mental health” or “vulnerable populations,” which can obscure their specific challenges and needs.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

People with SUD can be hard to reach because they may live outside conventional systems and routines. Some may reside in hidden encampments, move frequently between informal living situations, or maintain irregular contact with service providers. Many are not enrolled in mass notification systems, do not have reliable phones or digital access, and may prioritize immediate substance access or treatment needs over abstract safety messaging. For example, a person experiencing withdrawal or actively seeking substances may not register an emergency alert or may be unable to respond to evacuation instructions.

Disasters and emergencies pose distinct risks for this group. The disruption of MAT (such as methadone or buprenorphine), syringe access, or harm reduction programs can lead to withdrawal, relapse, overdose, or medical crisis. If clinics close due to wildfire smoke, power outages, or earthquakes, as has happened in parts of the Bay Area, individuals who rely on daily medications may be left with no options. This fear can deter evacuation or shelter use, particularly when people assume they won't be able to access the care or supplies they need to manage their condition.

Trust is another significant barrier. Many people with SUD have experienced criminalization, stigma, or mistreatment by police, medical staff, or public institutions. This creates deep reluctance to engage with government-led outreach, especially during crises when law enforcement and emergency personnel are more visible. Others may avoid shelters or public spaces where drug use is prohibited, fearing arrest, withdrawal, or judgment.



BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Local partnerships across the Bay Area are taking innovative steps to reach people who may otherwise avoid emergency services.

HARM REDUCTION AND PUBLIC HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS

Many counties rely on partnerships between public health departments, harm reduction coalitions, and MAT clinics to reach individuals with SUD. For example, San Francisco's Department of Public Health (SFDPH) coordinates with the Drug Overdose Prevention and Education (DOPE) Project. This is one of the nation's longest-running naloxone distribution programs, and it is used to disseminate emergency alerts and harm reduction supplies to people who use drugs. During heatwaves, poor air quality days, or public health emergencies, the DOPE Project and its partners include preparedness flyers, shelter location info, and basic emergency kits in their outreach efforts.

Similarly, Santa Clara County's Behavioral Health Services Department integrates disaster preparedness into its network of treatment providers, including methadone clinics and community mental health centers. Providers receive updates from emergency management and are expected to pass critical alerts on to clients, particularly those who receive daily medication. These connections have proven essential during PSPS and COVID-19 surges, when continuity of care was a life-or-death issue for many clients.

Organizations such as the Harm Reduction Coalition of Santa Cruz County, Needle Exchange Emergency Distribution (NEED) in Berkeley, and the HIV Education and Prevention Project of Alameda County (HEPPAC) are central to the region's outreach efforts. These groups are already embedded in unsheltered communities and informal networks of people who use drugs. By leveraging these existing relationships, they can distribute preparedness messaging that is culturally competent and realistic, accounting for substance dependence, stigma, and mistrust of official systems.



*Needle Exchange Emergency Distribution (NEED) in Berkeley.
Source: berkeleyneed.org*

INTEGRATING CONTINUITY OF CARE INTO EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Some Bay Area jurisdictions are beginning to formalize relationships between emergency management and behavioral health agencies, recognizing that many individuals with SUD are not in traditional housing or on communication grids. During declared emergencies, mobile health teams and street medicine providers often take on the dual role of medical responders and messengers, informing clients of evacuation routes, shelter options, or clinic closures.

In Contra Costa County, MAT providers coordinate with public safety to ensure continuity of access to methadone and buprenorphine in the event of clinic disruption. Disaster drills now include planning for alternate medication pickup sites and communication plans tailored for this population. Additionally, the county's Coordinated Outreach Referral, Engagement (CORE) teams are used to reach unsheltered people with behavioral health needs during emergencies and share time-sensitive messages directly.



PEER NAVIGATORS

Peer involvement has also been identified as an essential strategy. Several organizations, including LifeLong Medical Care and Bay Area Community Services (BACS), have developed peer navigator programs in which individuals in recovery serve as outreach ambassadors. These peers often hold greater credibility and can deliver messages in a nonjudgmental way that resonates with those actively using substances.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Effective outreach to individuals with SUD requires strong partnerships with harm reduction organizations, recovery programs, and public health providers who are trusted by this community. Emergency managers should:

- Partner with harm reduction programs, syringe access services, mobile outreach teams, and peer-led recovery groups that maintain consistent contact with people who use drugs.
- Build relationships with MAT providers, including methadone and buprenorphine clinics, who play a critical role in continuity of care during emergencies.
- Coordinate with behavioral health departments and nonprofit housing and treatment providers to integrate preparedness messaging into case management, recovery planning, and outreach.
- Train and compensate peers in recovery or active use to act as messengers and community educators, recognizing their lived experience as a source of credibility and connection.

These partnerships should center on dignity, harm reduction, and a nonjudgmental approach to safety. They must be maintained consistently, not only during visible crises.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Messaging for people with SUD must be trauma-informed, stigma-free, and realistic about the barriers and priorities this group faces. Effective messages should:

- Acknowledge that disruptions to treatment, medication, or supply access can be life-threatening, and include practical steps to plan for continuity (e.g., “Ask your MAT provider how to get medication during a power outage”).
- Avoid moralizing or shaming language. Messages should focus on harm reduction, safety, and maintaining health, rather than emphasizing abstinence or compliance.
- Include information about which shelters or facilities allow entry without ID or sobriety requirements, and which offer medical or mental health support.
- Be brief, specific, and visually clear. Use icons, simple wording, and repeated formats to support those managing cognitive load, withdrawal symptoms, or mental health challenges.
- Emphasize that emergency assistance (e.g., shelter, transportation, medical aid) is available regardless of housing status, insurance, or substance use.
- Reinforce continuity and inclusion through message content:
 - Emphasize how to maintain access to MAT and syringe services if usual sites are closed.
 - Clearly state that emergency shelters and services do not require sobriety or identification.
 - Use non-stigmatizing, harm reduction–based phrasing that focuses on safety and health.
 - Co-develop messages with harm reduction providers and peers to ensure cultural credibility and accuracy.



Messages should be developed in collaboration with harm reduction providers and reviewed by peers to ensure they are credible, relevant, and respectful.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Individuals with SUD may live unsheltered, in transitional housing, or be disconnected from digital systems, making high-touch, relationship-based communication essential. Effective channels include:

- **Harm Reduction Organizations:** Leverage syringe access programs, safe consumption sites, and mobile harm reduction vans to distribute printed emergency information and verbal safety messages.
- **Street Medicine and Mobile Outreach Teams:** Equip health outreach teams with preparedness guides, alert system info, and crisis contact cards to distribute during regular rounds.
- **MAT Clinics and Recovery Centers:** Work with methadone and buprenorphine providers to ensure clients receive preparedness planning tools and know how to maintain treatment during emergencies.
- **Peer Navigators and Recovery Coaches:** Fund and train individuals with lived experience to serve as messengers, distribute materials, and assist others in creating simple and realistic emergency plans.
- **Public Restrooms and Drop-in Centers:** Post waterproof flyers and provide handouts in locations where people access hygiene resources, food, or temporary respite.
- **Overdose Prevention Programs:** Utilize the same trusted messenger networks to incorporate emergency messaging into naloxone distribution training or fentanyl awareness campaigns.
- **Low-Barrier Shelters and Resilience Hubs:** Ensure these spaces allow for SUD-inclusive engagement, including flexible entry policies, safe storage options, and clear, visible preparedness signage.

Because many in this group avoid formal systems due to fear of judgment or legal consequences, communication must be rooted in trust, relevance, and compassion. Messaging should meet people where they are—physically, emotionally, and socially—and never require sobriety, documentation, or enrollment to receive life-saving information.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Domestic violence and human trafficking survivors are highly vulnerable populations whose safety often depends on remaining invisible to systems. This group includes individuals—primarily women and children, but also LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other gender- and sexuality-diverse) people, men, and undocumented individuals—who have experienced intimate partner abuse, coercive control, sexual exploitation, or labor trafficking. In the Bay Area, where housing costs, immigration challenges, and income inequality can heighten dependency on abusive partners or exploitative employers, survivors can fall through the cracks of outreach systems. Some are in emergency shelters or transitional housing. Still, many continue living with abusers due to a lack of safe alternatives or are in hiding, moving frequently between motels, cars, or acquaintances' homes. Others may work in domestic, agricultural, or service labor under coercive conditions that further isolate them.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Safety, invisibility, and distrust of institutions are primary barriers to reaching survivors. Emergency alerts and resource communications typically assume people have access to a personal device, are willing to identify themselves, and live in stable, recognized households. None of these assumptions may apply to survivors. Those fleeing abuse or trafficking may deliberately avoid signing up for services that require personal data or geolocation. In the Bay Area, this is exacerbated by the high rate of underreporting, especially among immigrant communities who fear legal repercussions or deportation if they seek help.

Shelters and victim services organizations in the region play a crucial role in connecting survivors to information and support; however, not all individuals are aware of or connected to these services. Many domestic violence survivors are still residing in dangerous environments and may be monitored by their abuser, limiting their ability to access or act on emergency messaging. For trafficking survivors, especially those in labor situations (e.g., domestic workers or massage parlors), outreach is complicated by employer control, language barriers, and physical isolation.

The Bay Area's decentralized structure also presents jurisdictional gaps. A survivor may have accessed support in one county, but reside or work in another, meaning alert systems may miss them altogether. Even if they receive messages, trauma-related cognitive effects, common among survivors, can impair their ability to comprehend and act on emergency instructions unless messaging is trauma-informed and repeated across trusted channels.



BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Outreach to survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking requires extreme care, discretion, and coordination with trusted service providers. In the Bay Area, outreach to these groups most often happens through domestic violence shelters, legal aid organizations, trafficking survivor services, and culturally specific women’s advocacy groups.

TRUSTED SERVICE PARTNERS AS LIFELINES

Organizations such as the Asian Women’s Shelter (San Francisco), La Casa de las Madres (San Francisco), Next Door Solutions (Santa Clara County), and Community Violence Solutions (Contra Costa and Marin Counties) have extensive experience supporting survivors through trauma-informed and culturally responsive services. While their primary missions are not emergency management, these organizations are increasingly seen as essential conduits for preparedness and response information.



Next Door Solutions’ Impact Day event giveaways
Source: *Next Door Solutions Facebook page*

Emergency planners working with this population are encouraged to avoid public messaging that may endanger or expose survivors. Instead, they rely on indirect dissemination through trusted case managers, legal advocates, and shelter staff. Some organizations have piloted “safe info cards,” which are small, discreet preparedness guides that fit in wallets and include hotline numbers, evacuation guidance, and reminders about key documents. These have been distributed through health clinics, domestic violence court programs, and transitional housing offices.

SAFETY-FIRST INNOVATION AND LOCAL COLLABORATION

In Alameda County, Bay Area Women Against Rape (BAWAR) has collaborated with emergency managers to support opt-in emergency alerts designed specifically for domestic violence survivors. These alerts prioritize safety and discretion, using anonymous messaging systems that do not disclose location data or identifiable sender information. Instead, they deliver crisis-relevant updates, shelter access details, and time-sensitive safety information in ways that empower survivors without putting them at further risk. This model reflects the importance of survivor-centered design in emergency communication systems.

Some counties, including Alameda and San Mateo, have begun cross-departmental collaborations among emergency management, human services, and victim advocacy agencies to ensure that survivor-serving organizations are included in planning and communications. In San Mateo County’s community engagement process, local officials explicitly named domestic violence survivors as a priority group and recognized the need for private, trauma-informed methods of engagement. A few jurisdictions, including San Francisco, have offered closed-door briefings or printed materials for shelter staff that include emergency plans tailored for survivors, with guidance on evacuation safety, maintaining anonymity, and service continuity.

EXPANDING SURVIVOR-CENTERED COORDINATION

For trafficking survivors, outreach has been even more limited. However, organizations such as Motivating, Inspiring, Supporting, and Serving Sexually Exploited Youth (MISSSEY)—an Oakland-based nonprofit providing advocacy, direct services, and prevention programs for girls and gender-expansive youth who have experienced or are at risk of sexual exploitation—along with Huckleberry Youth Programs in San Francisco, which offers crisis



intervention and support for trafficked and runaway youth, and Freedom House in Santa Clara County, which provides safe housing and long-term recovery services for trafficking survivors, are working to expand outreach and protection efforts across the region. These groups often support minors and young adults who may not be connected to any official systems. Collaborations with local law enforcement or emergency managers remain rare but are growing as agencies better understand the barriers these individuals face, such as fear of exposure, mistrust of public systems, or lack of ID or documentation.

Statewide efforts like the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking Programs have encouraged local jurisdictions to integrate survivor considerations into shelter operations, including confidentiality protections, on-site advocates, and non-discrimination training for staff. Some Bay Area counties have received funding to support continuity of services during disasters, ensuring survivors do not lose access to critical supports due to evacuation or infrastructure disruption.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Building trust with survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking requires deep collaboration with organizations already supporting these communities. Outreach must be trauma-informed, survivor-centered, and designed to protect safety and autonomy. Jurisdictions can:

- Establish sustained partnerships with domestic violence shelters, survivor advocacy organizations, legal aid clinics, and culturally specific women's and LGBTQ+ groups that work with survivors of abuse and coercion.
- Include trafficking survivor support organizations, especially those serving labor trafficking and undocumented populations, in emergency planning efforts.
- Coordinate directly with program staff, case managers, and legal advocates who have established, confidential relationships with survivors and can serve as conduits for emergency information.
- Provide training and resources to survivor-serving organizations, enabling them to safely adapt and deliver emergency messaging as part of their ongoing support work.

To strengthen this work regionally, emergency planners could formalize relationships with survivor service networks and involve these groups in tabletop exercises, resilience hub planning, and communication strategy development, always with attention to privacy, consent, and survivor autonomy.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Messages intended for survivors must prioritize safety, discretion, and trust. They should also acknowledge the real and perceived risks survivors may face when interacting with emergency systems. Effective messaging should:

- Emphasize that emergency services, shelters, and alerts are available regardless of ID, immigration status, or housing situation.
- Include clear information about confidentiality protections, non-discrimination policies, and survivor rights during evacuations or public shelter use.
- Be available in formats that survivors can access without being detected or monitored (e.g., discreet wallet cards, app notifications that resemble unrelated content, or audio messages in women's health clinics).



- Be co-developed with survivor advocacy organizations to ensure language is empowering, culturally appropriate, and free from judgment or coercion.
- Avoid requiring sign-up or personal data submission to receive critical safety information.

For trafficking survivors, messaging may need to focus on labor settings, worker rights during emergencies, and safe contact methods that do not jeopardize the person's safety.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Because many survivors must avoid public identification or digital tracking, outreach should flow through trusted, discreet, and survivor-informed channels. Effective options include:

- **Domestic Violence Shelters and Survivor Service Providers:** Distribute emergency preparedness materials through staff and case managers at shelters, transitional housing, and survivor-serving programs.
- **Legal Aid and Advocacy Clinics:** Collaborate with immigration attorneys, restraining order clinics, and court-based advocates to share preparedness materials during intake, legal counseling sessions, or rights training sessions.
- **Health and Wellness Providers:** Use women's health clinics, prenatal care offices, community health centers, and behavioral health services as trusted sites for survivor-informed outreach.
- **Safe Public Spaces:** Place information in restrooms, salons, food banks, or children's program sites. These are locations that offer relative privacy and high foot traffic for women and families.
- **Faith and Cultural Groups:** Work with culturally specific faith-based organizations that survivors may already trust and engage with, particularly in immigrant and refugee communities.
- **Discreet Print Materials:** Use wallet cards, tear-away flyers, or small-format preparedness guides with crisis contacts, evacuation tips, and emergency phone numbers that don't signal their purpose to outsiders.
- **Encrypted or App-Based Channels:** In cases where digital outreach is possible, ensure it is opt-in, private, and clearly removable or disguised. Survivors should never be required to sign up or disclose their location to receive safety information.

Outreach must never put a survivor at risk or expose their status. Communication should be reviewed by survivor advocacy groups to ensure it does not unintentionally put individuals at further risk.



GIG AND NIGHT SHIFT WORKERS

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Gig and night shift workers are a growing segment of the Bay Area labor force, including rideshare and delivery drivers, warehouse employees, janitors, security personnel, food service workers, and others whose jobs are often part-time, contracted, or scheduled during off-hours. These workers frequently operate without traditional employer-based benefits or consistent communication channels. Many are immigrants, people of color, and lower-income residents juggling multiple jobs or caregiving responsibilities. In the Bay Area, gig work is prevalent across all counties, from food couriers in San Francisco to overnight warehouse workers in the East Bay logistics corridor.

Unlike conventional full-time workers, gig and night shift workers often lack a central workplace, a human resources (HR) department, or a union structure through which emergency information is typically disseminated. Many work independently or in isolation, often residing in communities far from their job sites and commuting long distances. This group also often overlaps with other hard-to-reach populations, including individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), renters, and those without access to employer-based safety nets.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Gig and night-shift workers make up a significant portion of the Bay Area's labor force but often fall outside the communication systems that reach traditional employees. Their irregular schedules, multiple job sites, and reliance on app-based or contract work make consistent outreach and emergency notification especially difficult.

Disconnection from conventional communication systems is the central challenge. Gig workers are often excluded from workplace alert systems and continuity planning because they are not classified as traditional employees. Night shift workers, especially those laboring during late-night or early-morning hours, may sleep during the day and miss daytime alerts or community events. Their atypical schedules make participation in preparedness workshops, town halls, or even text-based drills especially difficult.

Moreover, many gig workers lack stable schedules or incomes, contributing to housing insecurity or residence in shared, informal, or unpermitted units. This instability makes location-based alerts (e.g., county-wide Nixle or federal emergency alert systems) unreliable in terms of both receipt and comprehension. Some may hesitate to enroll in alert systems due to privacy concerns or fear that personal data might be shared with employers or government entities.

In the Bay Area, language access is a key concern: many gig economy platforms rely on English-dominant apps and notifications, while many of their workers are monolingual speakers of Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, or other



languages. Without multilingual push notifications or emergency alerts integrated into the platforms themselves, many workers miss time-sensitive warnings.

Trust may also play a role; some gig workers may feel less connected to government agencies or may not perceive emergency management as addressing their specific circumstances. Additionally, fatigue and physical strain from night work can reduce a worker's bandwidth to process complex or dense preparedness messaging.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

While few emergency management efforts have explicitly targeted this group, several existing networks, city programs, and community-based organizations present opportunities for inclusive outreach.

WORKER ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

One promising avenue is through worker advocacy groups that support low-wage, informal, or app-based workers. Organizations such as Gig Workers Rising, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) United Service Workers West, and the Restaurant Opportunities Center of the Bay Area have organized campaigns, distributed safety information, and built trust within segments of the workforce that often fall outside formal labor protections. These groups can be leveraged to disseminate disaster readiness materials and gather worker-informed feedback on barriers to accessing emergency information.

Several municipal departments focused on labor standards enforcement, such as the San Francisco Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE) and the Oakland Department of Workplace and Employment Standards, regularly engage with workers and employers. While their focus is often wage theft or safety compliance, these agencies maintain contact lists, conduct outreach at job sites, and could play a larger role in sharing preparedness content tailored to shift workers.

Worker centers and employment support programs, such as Centro Laboral de Graton in Sonoma County and the Chinese Progressive Association in San Francisco, support immigrant and low-income workers, many of whom are employed on night shifts or in gig economy roles. These centers serve as trusted anchors for worker education and legal assistance, representing untapped channels for integrating emergency preparedness messaging in linguistically appropriate and culturally relevant formats.



*Chinese Progressive Association community outreach event.
Source: Chinese Progressive Association Facebook page*

LESSONS FROM PUBLIC HEALTH AND ESSENTIAL WORKER OUTREACH

During the COVID-19 pandemic, public health departments across the region learned to tailor outreach to “essential workers” who often worked overnight or without consistent schedules. Health departments in counties like Alameda and Santa Clara experimented with multilingual posters in delivery zones, mobile pop-ups at transit stations during off-hours, and peer outreach among rideshare and delivery networks. These lessons can inform disaster messaging strategies, such as delivering alerts via text/SMS, gamifying preparedness through worker apps, or placing materials in gas stations, fast food outlets, and rest areas frequented at night.



TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Gig and night shift workers often fall outside of traditional employment systems, making relationship-building more complex, but no less essential. To effectively reach this group, jurisdictions can:

- Partner with worker advocacy groups, labor organizers, and worker centers that already have trust among low-wage and app-based workers (e.g., janitors, delivery drivers, security guards, warehouse workers).
- Coordinate with unions and professional associations representing contracted or off-hours workers in industries like cleaning, transportation, logistics, and hospitality.
- Collaborate with municipal offices of labor standards or economic development to identify opportunities for outreach through employer networks, permit processes, or contractor registries.
- Include worker leaders, shop stewards, or peer navigators in outreach planning, and compensate them for co-designing and delivering messages tailored to nontraditional workforces.

Outreach efforts should recognize and affirm the dignity of shift-based and app-based labor, avoiding assumptions about stability, literacy, or institutional trust.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Gig and night shift workers face unique risks, including disconnection from conventional channels, differences in wake-sleep patterns, and job-related mobility. Effective messaging for them should:

- Be concise and highly actionable, formatted for mobile viewing during short breaks or commutes.
- Emphasize that protective action is possible even with a variable schedule. For example, "Keep a flashlight and charger in your car" or "Sign up for alerts to know if roads are closed before your shift."
- Acknowledge realities like working through disasters, loss of income during emergencies, or fear of missing shifts, which may shape how workers assess risk.
- Reflect economic and schedule constraints by focusing on low-cost, time-efficient actions that fit unpredictable routines.
- Be translated into languages this labor force speaks (e.g., Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Arabic) and avoid workplace or civic jargon.
- Include examples that reflect gig worker settings (e.g., rideshare zones, rest stops, delivery routes) and night shift contexts (e.g., evacuating from a warehouse during a 3 AM shift).

Be reviewed by workers or individuals from the target audience to ensure that the tone, assumptions, and instructions are realistic.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Because gig and night shift workers often operate without stable worksites, rely on phones, and move across jurisdictions, outreach must be both mobile and embedded in places they frequent. Effective channels include:

- **Worker Centers and Advocacy Organizations:** Disseminate materials through groups like Gig Workers Rising, SEIU United Service Workers West, and Centro Laboral de Graton, which are trusted by workers in precarious or off-hours jobs.



- **Transit Systems and Rest Stops:** Post messages and QR codes at transit hubs, 24-hour gas stations, park-and-ride lots, and along major commuting corridors.
- **Job-Related Digital Platforms:** Partner with gig economy apps (e.g., Uber, Lyft, DoorDash) to deliver push notifications or safety tips to workers during hazard periods or provide jurisdictions with the ability to offer opt-in safety alerts.
- **Places Open Late:** Share outreach through convenience stores, fast food outlets, diners, and gas stations that are open overnight and frequently visited by this population.
- **Coworker Word-of-Mouth and Peer Educators:** Train and fund peer messengers to share emergency resources and preparedness tips with coworkers or fellow drivers, especially in communities of color and immigrant neighborhoods.
- **Unions and Worker Networks:** Use union newsletters, WhatsApp groups, Slack channels, or shift-change meetings to distribute alerts and preparedness guides.
- **Public Health and Labor Departments:** Include outreach in routine health and safety inspections, permit processes, or workforce development programs.
- **Timing matters:** emergency communication for this group should not assume a 9-5 rhythm. Evening and overnight push messages, SMS alerts, or announcements timed with shift changes are more likely to be effective.

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUEER (LGBTQ)+ COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The LGBTQ+ community in the Bay Area includes individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, non-binary, intersex, and other gender diverse identities. While the region has long been considered a haven for LGBTQ+ individuals and is home to rich histories of activism, culture, and community, the community is not monolithic. It spans all races, ages, income levels, and neighborhoods, including both highly visible and more isolated or closeted members. Subgroups such as transgender people, LGBTQ+ youth, seniors, people of color, and those who are also unhoused or low-income often face distinct vulnerabilities and systemic barriers.

Throughout this outreach primer, we use the abbreviation "LGBTQ+" to refer to gender and sexuality diverse communities. Jurisdictions, organizations, and individuals may use a different variation of this abbreviation that reflects their community's language, identity, or cultural norms.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Despite the Bay Area's progressive reputation, LGBTQ+ residents still experience marginalization, including housing insecurity, employment discrimination, health disparities, and disproportionate involvement in the foster care or carceral systems. Many LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly trans women of color, report feeling unwelcome or unsafe in traditional service environments, including emergency shelters, clinics, or police interactions. These lived experiences directly influence whether people trust and engage with preparedness and response systems.

The primary barrier is a mistrust of institutions and the lack of inclusive, affirming outreach. Historical and ongoing discrimination, especially in law enforcement, healthcare, and social services, can make LGBTQ+ individuals hesitant to rely on official channels during emergencies. For example, a trans person may avoid evacuation shelters due to a fear of harassment, misgendering, or denial of gender appropriate facilities. Research and firsthand accounts from past disasters indicate that LGBTQ+ people have, in some cases, faced discrimination or unsafe conditions in emergency shelters. These experiences shape how the community prepares (or doesn't) for future emergencies.

Another significant barrier is underrepresentation in planning and messaging. Many public safety and emergency materials do not explicitly acknowledge LGBTQ+ needs or contain inclusive language. For instance, forms may not accommodate preferred names or gender markers, and messaging may assume traditional family structures (e.g., "mothers and fathers" or "husband and wife") that do not accurately reflect diverse households. This erasure can alienate LGBTQ+ individuals from preparedness efforts and compound feelings of invisibility.



Intersectionality also plays a key role: LGBTQ+ people who are also immigrants, people of color, youth, or low-income may face overlapping challenges that make outreach more complex. For example, LGBTQ+ youth who are unhoused may be disconnected from formal systems altogether, and older adults may live in isolation, especially if estranged from their biological family.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

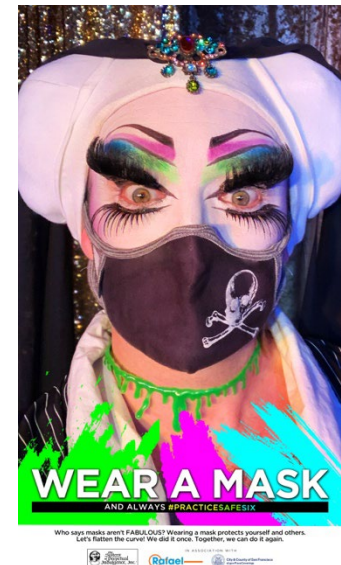
The Bay Area has long served as a hub for LGBTQ+ culture, advocacy, and community infrastructure, with San Francisco historically recognized as one of the most LGBTQ+-inclusive cities in the world. This visibility is supported by a robust network of LGBTQ+ organizations, clinics, and cultural institutions that can serve as valuable partners for emergency outreach.

ESTABLISHED LGBTQ+ INFRASTRUCTURE AND PARTNERSHIPS

One of the region's leading organizations, Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center (LYRIC), provides leadership training, wellness services, and peer-to-peer education for LGBTQ+ youth in San Francisco. LYRIC has previously collaborated with city agencies on campaigns related to COVID-19, housing, and civic engagement. Their youth-led model of information dissemination and community leadership represents a promising outreach avenue for emergency preparedness messaging tailored to queer youth, particularly those who are disengaged from traditional educational systems.

The San Francisco (SF) LGBT Center serves as another vital node, offering economic development, housing navigation, mental health referrals, and cultural programming. Its broad reach across age groups and its trusted status make it a key partner for disseminating information during emergencies, especially to LGBTQ+ individuals facing housing instability or systemic discrimination. The Center's existing partnerships with local departments, including the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development, create opportunities for integrated communication efforts.

The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a San Francisco-based charitable and activist order known for their "drag nun" personas, have played a significant public health role since the early HIV/AIDS crisis, using humor and visibility to deliver harm-reduction messaging. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they partnered with the City and County of San Francisco to promote mask-wearing through bold, playful posters and social media materials that framed masking as an act of love and community care. Their trusted presence in LGBTQ+ neighborhoods, nightlife communities, and street-outreach settings helped the City reach audiences less responsive to traditional government messaging. The collaboration became a model for how culturally rooted messengers can make urgent public health guidance more accessible and resonant.



Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence mask campaign in association with the City and County of San Francisco.

COUNTY-LEVEL INCLUSION EFFORTS

In Santa Clara County, the Office of LGBTQ Affairs, housed within the Division of Equity and Social Justice, is the first of its kind in the nation. This demonstrates how cross-departmental collaboration can institutionalize LGBTQ+ inclusion. While its primary work includes policy advocacy and program coordination, the Office has supported language access and resilience efforts that could be adapted for emergency preparedness messaging.



In the East Bay, groups such as the Gender Health Center, the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center, and the Rainbow Community Center of Contra Costa County provide mental health services, support groups, and crisis counseling. These organizations have strong local ties and are positioned to integrate emergency communication into their trusted programming, whether via printed materials, community events, or peer counselor scripts. Such partnerships are particularly important for reaching queer and trans people who may be wary of institutional engagement or feel unsafe in general public shelter settings.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Trust is foundational to effective outreach with LGBTQ+ communities, especially given historic and ongoing marginalization. Jurisdictions can:

- Build relationships with LGBTQ+ serving organizations, including community centers, youth programs, housing and health advocates, and cultural groups. These organizations already serve as trusted anchors.
- Prioritize engagement with subgroups most likely to be disconnected from mainstream systems, such as transgender people, LGBTQ+ youth, and older LGBTQ+ adults.
- Establish recurring communication and co-design opportunities with queer-led organizations, ensuring they are not only brought in during crisis response but also included in planning and preparedness phases.
- Offer support and compensation for LGBTQ+ leaders and peer educators to act as outreach partners, especially in designing inclusive sheltering, safety messaging, and mental health resources.
- Relationships should be sustained year-round, not just during Pride Month or in reaction to emerging threats.

Equitable outreach requires more than visibility; it demands sustained collaboration with queer-led organizations, a trauma-informed understanding of past and present harms, and resources to ensure that emergency messaging reaches LGBTQ+ communities not just where they are, but as they are.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Outreach messaging for LGBTQ+ audiences should affirm identity, reflect lived experience, and explicitly acknowledge past harms that shape institutional distrust. Effective messages should:

- Use inclusive and affirming language, avoiding assumptions about gender, family structure, or pronouns.
- Address safety concerns common among LGBTQ+ individuals in emergencies (e.g., fear of discrimination in shelters, loss of access to hormone therapy or HIV medication, lack of privacy).
- Highlight services that are non-discriminatory, affirming, and safe for queer and trans people, including information about gender-inclusive facilities or rights protections during emergencies.
- Share preparedness stories from LGBTQ+ role models, emphasizing resilience and community care to build connection and credibility.
- Be co-developed with LGBTQ+ community partners, not simply adapted from general messaging.



Messages should acknowledge the unique risks queer and trans people face, such as being estranged from family networks or experiencing targeted violence. They should also reinforce that emergency support is available without judgment or gatekeeping.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

To effectively reach LGBTQ+ individuals, communication should be disseminated through trusted networks, inclusive spaces, and peer-informed channels. Effective options include:

- **LGBTQ+ Community Centers:** Disseminate materials through centers like the SF LGBT Center, Oakland LGBTQ Center, and Rainbow Community Center, which already serve as hubs for information, services, and peer connection.
- **Youth and Peer-Led Programs:** Partner with organizations like LYRIC or Gender & Sexuality Alliance (GSA) networks in schools to co-create and distribute materials tailored for queer and trans youth.
- **Healthcare Providers and Clinics:** Share materials through LGBTQ+-inclusive providers, including HIV/sexually transmitted infection (STI) clinics, gender-affirming care providers, and mental health centers.
- **Queer Nightlife and Cultural Spaces:** Post flyers and QR codes in clubs, drag venues, cafes, bookstores, and art spaces, many of which double as information-sharing hubs within LGBTQ+ communities.
- **Social Media and Messaging Apps:** Use platforms frequented by LGBTQ+ users (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Discord, Reddit) and consider outreach via dating or community apps where appropriate (with care to avoid stigma).
- **Mutual Aid and Informal Networks:** Collaborate with grassroots mutual aid groups and queer-led resilience efforts that operate outside formal institutions but hold significant influence.
- **Supportive Faith or Spiritual Organizations:** For those who are religious or spiritual, LGBTQ+-affirming congregations or interfaith groups can serve as a meaningful source of support.

Information should be available in multiple formats (visual, oral, written) and accessible regardless of housing status or digital connectivity, especially for LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness or disconnection from formal systems.

PEOPLE WITH LOWER EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



COMMUNITY CONTEXT

People with lower educational attainment include adults who have not completed a high school diploma or equivalent, as well as individuals with limited literacy or numeracy skills. While the Bay Area is known for its high concentration of college-educated residents, many neighborhoods across the region have significant proportions of adults with lower educational attainment, particularly in parts of Oakland, Richmond, Vallejo, East San Jose, and rural or agricultural areas in counties like Monterey, San Benito, and Sonoma Counties. These residents may have completed school in another country with different academic standards or may have exited the school system early due to poverty, immigration barriers, caregiving responsibilities, or other structural inequities.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Emergency outreach strategies often presume a baseline of reading comprehension, digital fluency, and familiarity with government or institutional systems, which may be limited for this population. Educational attainment often correlates with economic precarity, language access needs, and employment in higher-risk, lower-autonomy jobs. It also intersects with other forms of marginalization: many individuals in this group are monolingual in a language other than English, are undocumented, or come from communities historically underserved by public agencies.

One major barrier is that emergency communications, especially preparedness materials and alerts, are often written at a reading level that is too high or use jargon unfamiliar to individuals with lower formal education. For example, instructions to "shelter in place" or "evacuate to the designated reception center" may be unclear without visual support or plain language. Similarly, preparedness websites and online resources may assume digital literacy or access to broadband, excluding those with limited internet use or reading proficiency.

Outreach that relies heavily on written materials, such as mailers, flyers, websites, or app-based notifications, may fail to resonate or be understood. These individuals may be less likely to attend official meetings, read emergency handbooks, or interpret evacuation maps, especially if they have had negative prior experiences with institutions. There is also a higher likelihood that they will rely on informal networks or oral transmission of information. This means that accurate messaging must be embedded in trusted relationships and conveyed in accessible ways, such as through pictograms, videos, or in-person explanations.



BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

In the Bay Area, agencies and community partners have begun weaving emergency preparedness into programs and environments where practical, accessible learning already takes place.

EMBEDDING PREPAREDNESS IN EVERYDAY LEARNING

Across the Bay Area, outreach that serves individuals with lower educational attainment is often embedded in broader programming for economic mobility, workforce development, or adult education, rather than through emergency management channels alone. Several adult education programs and literacy organizations are natural partners for preparedness messaging. For example, public libraries and community college non-credit programs in counties like Alameda, Santa Clara, and Contra Costa frequently offer English as a second language (ESL), General Educational Development (GED), and life skills classes that could include disaster preparedness as a practical life competency. Libraries have increasingly positioned themselves as trusted resilience hubs and are already used as cooling centers, information distribution points, and Wi-Fi access points during emergencies.



Listos California's infographic style flyer available in multiple languages.
source: listoscalifornia.org/resources

Programs like Listos California have helped bridge the gap by embedding emergency preparedness into simple, community-friendly formats that do not require advanced literacy. Their use of visual guides, infographics, and oral presentations has made them an accessible and trusted source for communities who might otherwise struggle with complex written materials. Local community-based organizations (CBOs) in the Bay Area have used Listos toolkits in workshops for parents, day laborers, new immigrants, and tenants in subsidized housing, many of whom have limited formal schooling.

Faith-based organizations, neighborhood resource centers, and community clinics also reach many adults with low educational attainment as part of their health and social service programming. These entities often use face-to-face interaction and spoken word communication rather than written handouts, which aligns well with this population's communication preferences. For example, *promotores* in Latinx communities have successfully included emergency preparedness in their nutrition, vaccination, and tenant rights outreach.

REACHING PEOPLE THROUGH VISUAL AND TRUSTED CHANNELS

Bay Area emergency managers have not consistently or explicitly targeted this population group in standalone outreach, but some are beginning to recognize the need for more visually oriented, story-based, and culturally contextual messaging. Agencies piloting inclusive materials have used cartoons, diagrams, and simple checklists designed for a sixth-grade reading level or lower. In San Francisco and Oakland, these materials have been shared at street fairs, food pantries, and Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) centers, locations frequented by diverse community members regardless of educational background.

To improve outreach to this group, there is growing interest in training frontline service providers, such as caseworkers, job counselors, and food bank staff, to deliver bite-sized preparedness guidance during routine interactions. These personnel often have ongoing relationships with individuals who may not respond to traditional government alerts or may feel intimidated by overly technical language. By equipping these trusted intermediaries



with clear, simplified materials, agencies can expand the reach of preparedness messaging in a way that respects people's dignity and learning needs.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

To effectively reach people with lower educational attainment, outreach should be embedded in trusted service environments where learning, support, and daily life intersect. Jurisdictions can:

- Partner with adult education providers, GED programs, workforce training centers, and community colleges offering non-credit courses, particularly in lower-income or immigrant communities.
- Collaborate with organizations that offer social services, housing support, or healthcare to adults with limited formal schooling, using those relationships to layer in preparedness messaging.
- Build relationships with local libraries, faith-based groups, and community hubs that regularly engage individuals who may not feel comfortable in formal institutional settings.
- Collaborate with *promotores*, peer educators, and frontline service staff (e.g., food pantry workers, case managers) who already have established trusted relationships with community members and can effectively share preparedness information in person, in plain language, and through culturally familiar interactions.

Promotores—also known as *promotores de salud*—are trusted community health educators or peer outreach workers who provide information, support, and connection to services within their own communities. They typically share culture, language, and lived experience with the people they serve, making them highly effective messengers for health, safety, and emergency preparedness outreach.

These relationships should be designed to reflect dignity and mutual respect, avoiding any framing that equates limited schooling with limited intelligence or interest in safety.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Messaging for this group must prioritize clarity, visual learning, and cultural relevance over technical language or formal documents. Effective strategies include:

- Use plain language at a sixth-grade reading level or below, avoiding acronyms, abbreviations, jargon, and abstract phrasing.
- Create messages with strong visual elements (e.g., pictograms, step-by-step illustrations, photographs) and utilize repetition to enhance retention.
- Include clear, specific actions instead of general advice. For example, "If the power goes out, use your phone flashlight and call 211 for updates," rather than "Follow your emergency plan."
- Design materials with input from community members to ensure language, tone, and examples are grounded in their lived experience.
- Normalize preparedness by framing it as a practical life skill, not a bureaucratic task (e.g., "Protect your family in five simple steps" rather than "Develop your household disaster plan").

Materials should be delivered orally or demonstrated through in-person workshops, short videos, or peer-to-peer conversations.



COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Reaching individuals with lower educational attainment requires low-barrier, familiar, and non-intimidating communication methods. Effective channels include:

- **Adult Schools and Community Colleges:** Share materials through ESL classes, job training programs, and life skills workshops. Partner with instructors and navigators who can integrate preparedness into their curriculum.
- **Public Libraries:** Distribute flyers, host events, and offer one-on-one support in multiple languages. Libraries are trusted, free, and accessible to many adults with limited formal education.
- **CBOs:** Work with organizations that serve low-income families, day laborers, immigrants, and others likely to be under-reached by traditional outreach.
- **Faith-Based Organizations:** Many adults with limited schooling rely on religious communities for support and guidance. Churches, mosques, and temples can be powerful outreach partners.
- **In-Person Community Spaces:** Post simple flyers and pictorial instructions in laundromats, neighborhood markets, DMV offices, bus stops, and waiting rooms, especially in areas with low digital access.
- **Healthcare and Social Services:** Partner with clinics, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) offices, CalFresh programs, and other services where people regularly engage with trusted staff.
- **Peer Educators and Promotores:** Train trusted community members to deliver safety information through workshops, home visits, or outreach tables, ideally in the recipient's preferred language and style of communication.

Multi-modal delivery is key: information should be available in printed, visual, and spoken formats, with built-in repetition and opportunities for clarification. Digital content should be simple and mobile-friendly, with videos or voiceovers in multiple languages.

TOURISTS AND OTHER VISITORS



COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The Bay Area attracts tens of millions of visitors annually. Tourists and other short-term visitors—including business travelers, conference attendees, and people passing through the region—make up a transient but substantial portion of the Bay Area population at any given time. This group includes both domestic and international travelers staying in hotels, short-term rentals (e.g., Airbnb), or with family and friends. Popular destinations, such as San Francisco, Napa Valley, Silicon Valley tech campuses, and coastal communities, draw millions of visitors annually. These individuals may not be familiar with local hazards, such as earthquakes, wildfires, poor air quality, or tsunami zones, and often lack access to the standard communication channels used by permanent residents. In the Bay Area, tourism and business travel are significant contributors to the regional economy, with visitors concentrated in high-density areas such as downtown San Francisco, Silicon Valley hotels, and wine country retreats. During an emergency, these areas can quickly become overwhelmed if public messaging fails to reach the visitor population effectively.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Because visitors are not tied into local alert systems, not subscribed to Nixle or other opt-in notifications, and may not follow local government social media, they are extremely vulnerable to missing time-sensitive warnings. They also tend not to know evacuation routes, shelter locations, or how local authorities typically communicate during a crisis.

The primary barrier is unfamiliarity with the local risk environment and communication infrastructure. Many visitors do not understand the severity of Bay Area hazards or how quickly conditions can shift. For example, a business traveler attending a conference in Oakland may not be aware that nearby wildfires can lead to air quality emergencies. A family visiting from the Midwest may not realize that a tsunami alert could impact their coastal day trip. Even if they do receive wireless emergency alerts (WEA)—geographically targeted, text-like messages sent to compatible cell phones to warn the public about imminent threats to their safety, such as severe weather, missing children, or other critical emergencies on their phones—they may not recognize the issuing agency or know how to respond to the information.

Another challenge is language and cultural context. International visitors and others from outside the region may not be able to interpret abbreviations or acronyms used in emergency messaging (such as “PG&E” (Pacific Gas and Electric), “AQI” (air quality index), or “red flag warning”). Printed instructions in hotel rooms may be outdated or oversimplified, and short-term rental hosts are not typically required to provide emergency information in a structured way.



Transience also complicates response logistics. Visitors often lack access to private vehicles, local social networks, or stockpiles of essential supplies such as food, water, or medication. In a sudden emergency, they may not know where to go or whom to ask. Business travelers staying in corporate lodging or attending large-scale events may rely on their employers or event organizers for guidance, but these structures are not always prepared for emergency coordination.

BAY AREA INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Bay Area jurisdictions are taking steps to address the communication gap for visitors and short-term residents by building partnerships across the travel, hospitality, and transportation sectors.

AIRPORT AND TRANSIT GATEWAYS

Local emergency management agencies have recognized this challenge, though comprehensive systems are still emerging. In San Francisco, the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) works closely with SF Travel, the city's official destination marketing organization, to distribute emergency information through hospitality networks. Hotel staff, visitor kiosks, and airport signage are utilized to disseminate preparedness guidance and encourage registration for AlertSF, the city's emergency notification system. Messaging is also disseminated through digital displays and airport loudspeakers during events such as extreme heat, high winds, or wildfire smoke advisories.

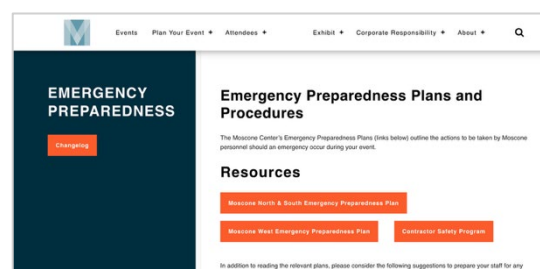
In San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, home to the San Francisco International Airport (SFO) and Norman Y. Mineta San Jose International Airport (SJC), airport authorities play a key role in communicating real-time emergency information to travelers. Both airports coordinate with the local Office of Emergency Services (OES) and public health agencies to display warnings on terminal screens, use public address systems, and distribute multilingual materials during events such as air quality alerts or COVID-19 surges.

Several regional transportation providers—BART, Muni, Caltrain, and AC Transit—also contribute to emergency messaging for visitors who may be navigating the region without local contacts or private vehicles. These agencies coordinate messaging with county emergency managers during system disruptions, natural disasters, or civil disturbances. Still, gaps remain in multilingual support, mobile push notifications, and tailored preparedness guidance for short-term visitors.

HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AS A COMMUNICATION NETWORK

In the private sector, some hotel chains and major event venues have begun including emergency contact cards or evacuation instructions in their guest orientation materials. The Moscone Center in San Francisco, a major convention hub, has developed internal emergency protocols that include coordination with city services and basic safety messaging for attendees during large-scale events. However, these efforts are largely voluntary and not yet standardized across the region.

Tourism bureaus, hospitality industry associations, and event organizers represent potential partners for expanding emergency outreach. With training and coordination, concierges, front desk staff, rideshare operators, and local tour guides could serve as informal messengers, especially during localized emergencies that require rapid situational awareness among non-residents.



*Emergency Preparedness plans on Moscone Center's website.
Source: moscone.com/emergency-preparedness*



VISITOR-FOCUSED PREPAREDNESS TOOLS

Looking ahead, Bay Area jurisdictions may benefit from developing visitor-specific preparedness resources, such as QR code-based guides available at transit hubs, hotel lobbies, and attractions. These guides provide multilingual, visually accessible instructions for what to do in earthquakes, wildfires, power outages, and other local hazards. These tools, coupled with partnerships across the hospitality and travel sectors, would help close a key gap in the region's emergency communication strategy.

TAILORING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

While tourists and business travelers are not permanent residents, they are present in large numbers and concentrated in particular areas. Building proactive relationships with the institutions and industries that host them is essential. Emergency managers should:

- Coordinate with entities that regularly interface with visitors, including hotels, airports, tourism bureaus, event venues, and transit authorities.
- Partner with hospitality associations, airport authorities, and short-term rental platforms to develop shared expectations for visitor-facing emergency communications.
- Collaborate with business networks, including local chambers of commerce, large employers, corporate event venues, and coworking spaces, to distribute preparedness materials specifically tailored for business travelers.
- Encourage employers to include regional emergency guidance in visitor orientation packets, HR onboarding, and corporate travel briefings.

These relationships help ensure that emergency messaging reaches non-residents through systems they already use and allow for rapid activation during events that affect tourist-heavy areas.

DEVELOPING MESSAGES

Messaging for tourists and business travelers should assume limited familiarity with local hazards, response systems, or terminology. To improve clarity and actionability:

- Use plain language and visual instructions instead of acronyms or local jargon (e.g., explicitly explain terms like "AQI" as "air quality index" or "PSPS" as "public safety power shutoff, not just defining them, but what they *mean*").
- Emphasize protective actions tailored to visitors (e.g., "If you're staying in a hotel and hear the siren, remain indoors and check the front desk or alert system for instructions").
- Translate messages into multiple languages commonly spoken by international visitors (e.g., Spanish, Mandarin, Japanese, French, German).
- Include clear opt-in instructions for local alert systems specifically for short-term stays (e.g., "Text 'AlertSF' to 888-777 for updates while in San Francisco").

Provide targeted materials for business travelers, such as evacuation guidance for conference venues, emergency signage in coworking spaces, and continuity resources for employers hosting out-of-town staff.



COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Tourists and business travelers navigate predictable physical spaces and digital ecosystems that can be leveraged for effective outreach. Effective channels include:

- **Hospitality Touchpoints:** Hotels, motels, and short-term rentals should provide emergency guidance in guest rooms and check-in packets. Work with front desk staff and concierge teams to ensure they're trained to share local hazard information and alert sign-ups.
- **Transit and Airport Hubs:** Display real-time emergency messaging through digital monitors, audio announcements, and signage at major travel nodes (e.g., SFO, SJC, BART, Caltrain).
- **Visitor Centers and Kiosks:** Stock multilingual flyers and post laminated instructions in high-traffic destinations such as state parks, museums, and tourism offices.
- **Destination Venues:** Coordinate with high-traffic destination sites, such as theme parks, wineries, beaches (e.g., Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk), and iconic recreation areas (e.g., Pebble Beach Golf Links, Golden Gate Park), to post signage and share digital alerts with guests.
- **Workplace and Event Sites:** Business travelers should receive information through workplace intranets, conference apps, facility signage, and HR emails. Collaborate with convention centers, hotels hosting corporate events, and large employers to distribute pre-scripted alerts and evacuation protocols.
- **Digital Platforms:** Explore partnerships with platforms used by travelers, including Airbnb, hotel booking engines, Google Maps, and TripAdvisor, to display emergency instructions and hazard alerts to users in the region.
- **Coworking Spaces and Business Lounges:** These can be key outreach points for transient professionals. Provide printed guides, alert sign-up QR codes, and facility-specific emergency instructions.

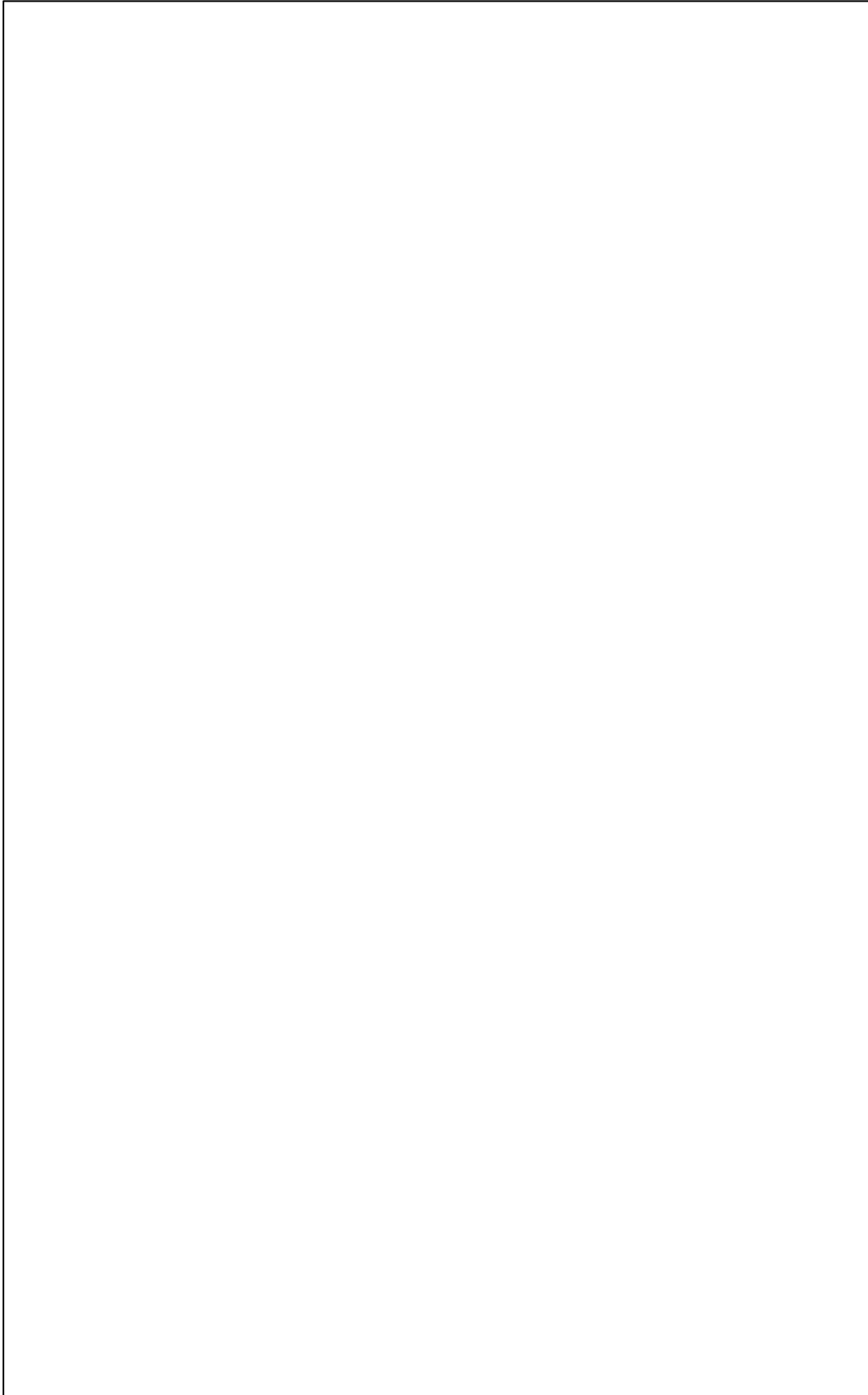
A layered communication approach that reaches visitors where they are and anticipates their informational disadvantages will ensure this transient group receives critical guidance during emergencies. By aligning message delivery with the physical and institutional environments visitors already navigate, emergency communication can effectively reach this mobile population, even during short stays.

OUTREACH IN ACTION: Tourism as a Resilience Partner in Sonoma County

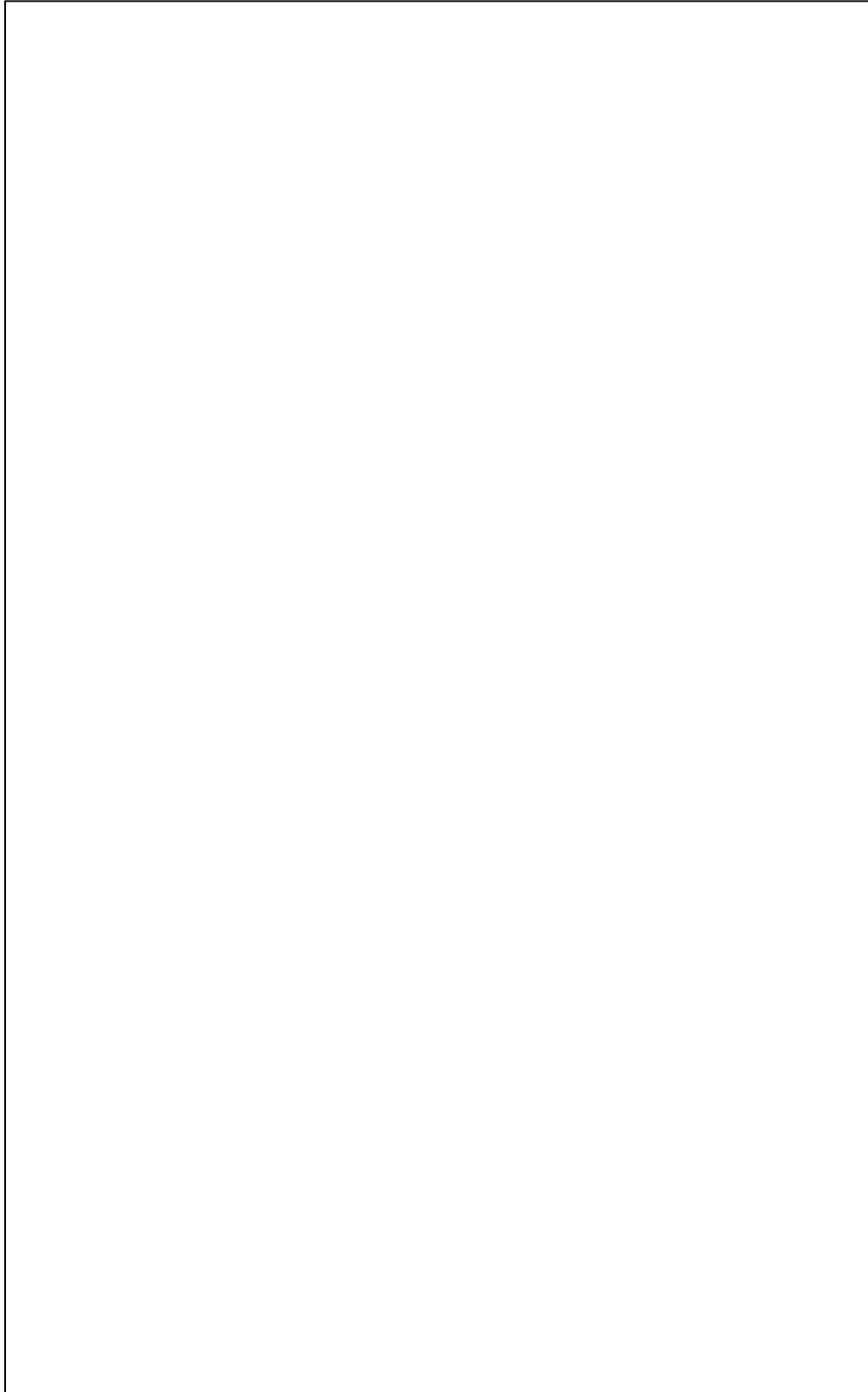
With millions of annual visitors, thousands of short-term rentals, and numerous hotels and attractions, many are unfamiliar with local risks, alert systems, or evacuation routes—making proactive, consistent, and accessible communication essential. Collaboration among the Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management (DEM), Sonoma County Tourism (SCT), and the Sonoma County Hospitality Association shows how local government and the hospitality sector can jointly integrate visitor safety into emergency operations and outreach.

SCT holds a dedicated seat in the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC), serving as the primary conduit for relaying emergency information to hotels, vacation rentals, and tour operators. Its representative helps track stranded visitors, monitor lodging capacity, and ensure consistent, accurate messages reach visitors quickly.

The partnership also weaves preparedness into the visitor experience. A hospitality ambassador program trains hotel staff to share evacuation guidance, distribute materials, and provide language-appropriate safety information. Hotels and vacation rentals are encouraged to include “just-in-time” information—such as wildfire tips, emergency contacts, and evacuation guidance—in guest binders and visible bilingual signage. These efforts help visitors make informed decisions without creating alarm, positioning preparedness as an act of care and good hospitality.



Sonoma County Emergency Management Alert & Warning Poster for Tourists—English.



Sonoma County Emergency Management Alert & Warning Poster for Tourists—Spanish/Español.