

Prepared4ALL Playbook: Strategies for Disability Equity & Inclusion in Public Health

This playbook summarizes strategic advice from a national series of virtual Townhalls facilitated by the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from January-June 2021. The Townhalls included local disability organizational representatives and focused on strategies and experiences related to increasing disability inclusion in local emergency planning. The strategies here focus on how to build sustainable local partnerships, how to increase community and organizational capacity, and how to use adaptive thinking to keep moving. To learn more about our inclusion and equity work in the areas of vaccine confidence, emergency preparedness planning and other public health domains, visit the following websites:

Prepared4ALL: <https://nationalcenterdph.org/our-focus-areas/prepared4all/>

Vaccine Confidence: <https://nationalcenterdph.org/vaccineconfidence/>

National Center on Disability in Public Health: <https://nationalcenterdph.org/>

What is disability equity and inclusion?

Equity is about everyone getting what they need to live fulfilling and healthy lives. To reach equity, everyone must be valued equally, and we must work together to undo past and current injustices creating unequal differences in public health access and outcomes. Inclusion is about everyone having the opportunity to meaningfully participate in policy and practice. Inclusion emphasizes representation at every level by people most impacted by the policies and practices being developed—in this case, people with disabilities. While we focus here on people with disabilities as a subset of all communities, we acknowledge and celebrate that disability may be only one of many identities that an individual may hold. We also acknowledge that those identities may be marginalized in multiple ways, making it even more urgent to continue the work towards equity and inclusion to enact the goals of public health.

The Prepared4ALL Approach

Building partnerships and capacity requires forward motion. Our approach emphasizes maximizing existing community assets and opportunities while anticipating challenges and roadblocks.



Forward Motion Strategies

It's vital to keep the work of disability inclusion and equity moving forward. Even action that does not yield desired outcomes provides learning opportunities. In fact, strengthening disability inclusion and equity requires adapting quickly to change and encouraging others to pivot. Forward motion also requires in-the-moment and long-term reflection.

Pinpoint

Part of moving forward is identifying what's blocking movement. Pinpointing includes identifying problems or factors that impact how you move forward. This also increases overall situational awareness.

"I've noticed that even between public health preparedness and emergency management, there's so much different terminology. I think we need a glossary that explains those terms, especially as they relate to disability."

-Townhall attendee, 1/27/21

Advance

Advancing is about taking the next step, even if it's small. With an eye towards the overall goal, advancing is about making the most of what you have.

"Before COVID-19, people with intellectual developmental disabilities were not really considered in emergency planning in my area, but now I can tell you that they are. We are working with our state's Health Care Coalition to include people with intellectual disabilities and other diverse groups in the planning process. I've just started asking questions and trying to get people to think differently about who has needs during an emergency. Since COVID-19, it's become a bit easier to have these conversations."

-Townhall attendee, 2/24/21

Envision

Sometimes pinpointing the issue is not the hardest part of moving the work forward. Sometimes the hardest part is envisioning a solution. This is the work of imagining and planning how you will make change happen.

“What I see is that there are many siloed conversations. Folks have good intent and they do good work, but the issue is that these conversations are happening inside their institution or organization, and they're just not transferring across. So we realized that we needed to get different groups talking to each other. At our organization, we are having a cross panel discussion, where some of our self-advocates with disabilities are going to be speaking with healthcare providers. Discussing ideas collaboratively in the open will lead to more initiatives and better outcomes.”

-Townhall attendee, 3/24/21

Deploy

This step is about trying out a potential solution and seeing what happens. While it's important to plan, sometimes it's also important to take action and learn from it.

“During the initial onset of COVID-19, we worked with our colleges and universities who had access to 3D printers, and they were able to provide 3D printed surgical masks and face shields to us to distribute to the Centers for Independent Living, group homes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and special education schools in the state. We weren't sure how that would go, but it was huge, to be able to provide help in this way, and to find new partners and bring them into this public health work.”

-Townhall attendee, 5/19/21

Reflect (in the moment and long-term)

Reflection is central to forward motion. Reflection can and should happen in the moment as a part of responding to change, and also looking back over time to identify patterns and lessons learned for future work.

In-the-moment Reflection:

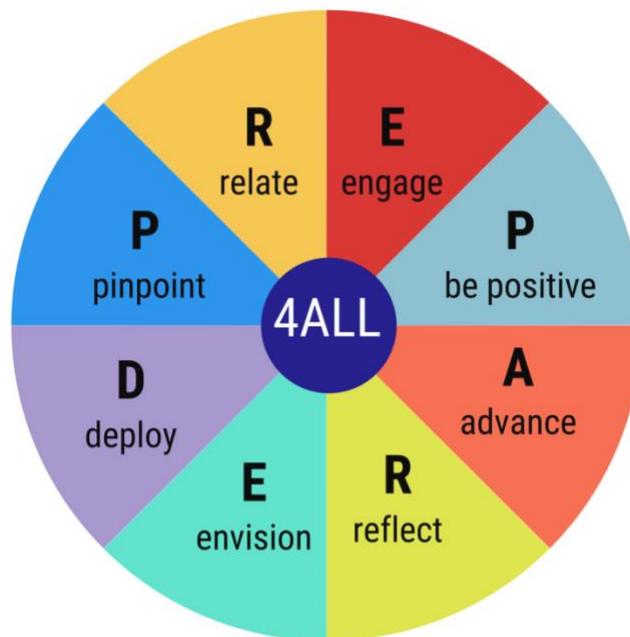
In response to one attendee sharing about spaces in emergency shelters that can address the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, another Townhall attendee asked: “How are you considering that people with disabilities may have other identities, like people who are Black, Indigenous or People of Color (BIPOC) or who are Lesbian, Gay, Trans, Bi, queer and more (LGTBQ+)? How might considering the intersection of identities impact spaces like emergency shelters? A lot of the time when we create these spaces, it's like, we recognize your disability, but we forget the other identities that you might hold.”

-Townhall attendee, 6/16/21

Long-term Reflection:

“Our county is doing an ADA transition plan right now. And they said to me, we have so many ‘Aha!’ moments right now that we never realized that we didn't see. So with emergency preparedness planning, in my municipality, they feel that they had been inclusive, but they don't know what they don't know, unless we put it out there and really let them know what they're missing.”

-Townhall attendee, 2/24/21



Partnership-building Strategies

Local partnerships can improve outcomes for people with disabilities and the whole community during emergencies, disasters, and pandemics. We know that these partnerships are best developed before disasters happen, but because local emergency planners and disability organizations might not know each other, partnership development may need to be intentionally fostered prior to an emergency.

Valuing collaboration

Emphasizing how and why partnerships are crucial to increasing disability inclusion and equity can help your partners see the value in working together.

“We have had great partners like our Centers for Independent Living and chapters of The Arc. We never reached out to home health agencies until COVID-19 hit, but they've been a real help in things like delivering food to people with disabilities. They provided COVID-19 testing kits and have shared information with their clients who have disabilities. They were also really good about letting us know when they had an access need that should be elevated to the state level. We were able to respond to those requests really quickly.”

-Townhall attendee, 5/19/21

Engage

Reaching out to potential partners is about getting buy-in. You may be able to form unlikely partnerships if you can help your contacts see how your work connects to theirs and how their mission connects to emergency preparedness. To do this, you'll need to understand what potential partners do and how they do it.

“We developed relationships with shelter operations, who wanted training on how to interact with people with autism. The partnership just kind of developed. Really, it was the connective tissue that we all have together, including the voices of people with disabilities saying, hey, we have a right to be safe too.”

-Townhall attendee (2/24/21)

Quick Tip: Make a list of your current partners. Then make a list of potential partners. Could any of your current partners introduce you to new organizations? Could you connect others? [Use our Kickstart Directory tool.](#)

Network engagement

Being a part of a larger network or coalition can often help accomplish your goals and move the work forward.

“We really started making a difference when we got involved with our local emergency management department through our county health department. That opened up a lot of doors to everyone who was the ‘boots on the ground’ and this is where our first responders were able to recognize what they didn’t know. We brought in the disability perspective to their work. For instance, we brought in ASL interpreters whenever they held a press conference.”

-Townhall attendee, 3/24/21

Relate

As you build new partnerships or strengthen existing partnerships, you’ll work to identify shared areas of work that fulfill your mission. Sometimes, your new partnerships will develop out of identified needs, setting the stage for future collaboration.

“We partnered with a statewide charitable feeding organization. They don’t necessarily work specifically with people with disabilities. But they understood the mission of, we have people with disabilities that can’t leave their house, but we can’t get transportation from the food bank to their house, so how can we get food to them? We always try to wrap the disability need around the partner’s mission.”

-Townhall attendee, 5/19/21

Resource sharing

Sharing resources is a great way to build partnerships. You may have information from your networks that can be vital for partners, and they may have information that you need, too! Offering to connect someone to a resource helps build partnership bonds.

In one meeting, Townhall attendees shared 12 resources to build on the conversation. Here are several examples:

- [Kaiser Family Foundation's survey on COVID-19 Vaccine Attitudes](#)
- [Project Guardian, a project for helping keep people with autism safe in Harris County, TX](#)
- [Article on burnout and self-care](#)

Successful collaboration outcome

Identifying and celebrating past wins can grow partnerships to the next level.

"In our area, disability was not a priority in the vaccine rollout and that was extremely frustrating. I had been advocating with the health department and we could not get tactile interpreters to work with our DeafBlind students because of the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) issue. Finally, the health department gave us 10 vaccine appointments specifically for our deafblind students and interpreters so that helped get the ball rolling. Then just yesterday, we had a meeting with the health department, and they asked us to partner with them to provide vaccines to the Deaf and hard of hearing population in our area! So that was a huge accomplishment."

-Townhall attendee, 3/24/21

Community & Organizational Development Strategies

As partnerships develop, communities and organizations can continue to develop their ability to make change. Sometimes this is called capacity-building.

Training

Training can take many forms, but increasing knowledge and skills is an important way to build capacity. Training may be formalized, like a curriculum-based training, or may be informal, such as sharing information during a meeting. Identifying training as a part of moving forward can lead to greater impact.

“I’m involved with a group that represents all of the Emergency Support Functions for our county. And they’ve done an amazing job over the last 12 months, coordinating all the pandemic responses. But I’m the only person out of that whole group of 50 people that has any familiarity with disability issues. I was thinking that it might be helpful for my organization to get training on disability issues and hear from others around the country.”

-Townhall attendee, 3/24/21

Staff capacity and effort

Dedicating staff time and effort to increasing disability inclusion and equity can be challenging, given the urgency of public health priorities. Yet it is an important part of making organizational and cultural changes.

Inclusion Ideas

- Prioritize hiring people most impacted by emergencies, such as people living with disabilities
- Ensure that organizations have at least one person trained on emergency preparedness issues
- Implement weekly organizational updates or tips on emergency preparedness planning

“Our organization is very invested in creating a safety-oriented working environment, so they have set aside work time to hold meetings on aspects of workplace safety. It really did start from the very top and we talk about these things as a natural part of things we do every day.”

-Townhall attendee, 4/21/21

Playbook in Action: Success Stories

Want to learn more about how others have used Prepared4ALL? Find success stories [here](#) and [here](#).

Get Involved

- Take our FREE online training! [Find out more here](#)
- You can join our virtual monthly Townhalls held every third Wednesday from 2-3pm ET ([Register here](#))
- If you are a trainee or student, join our [Prepared4ALL Trainee program](#)! You'll build leadership experience by supporting local folks working to strengthen disability inclusion in emergency planning
- We want to know how YOU'RE using Prepared4ALL! Submit your story here: <https://bit.ly/ShareYourVaccineStory>

Find us online

- [Addressing COVID-19 Vaccine Access and Confidence Among People with Disabilities](#)
- [Prepared4ALL](#)
- [National Center on Disability in Public Health](#)

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