

Course Summary

IS-0242.b - Effective Communication

Lesson 1: Understanding Communication Basics

Course Goal

Being able to communicate effectively is a necessary and vital part of every emergency management professional's job. This course is designed to improve your communication skills.

This course is part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Emergency Management Institute's independent study Professional Development Series.

The **Professional Development Series** includes a series of Emergency Management Institute independent study courses that provide a well-rounded set of fundamentals for those in the emergency management profession. Many emergency managers build on this foundation with additional training, education, and exercises to develop their careers.

Additional information about the Professional Development Series can be found at <http://training.fema.gov/emiweb/pds/>

Course Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, you should be able to:

- Identify factors that contribute to and detract from effective communication.
- Develop a strategy for ensuring that emergency communications meet the needs of the whole community, including those with access and functional needs.
- Identify strategies for communicating effectively in emergency situations.
- Identify strategies for improving your oral presentation skills.

Lesson Overview

The remainder of this lesson presents information about basic factors that contribute to effective communication.

At the completion of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Indicate the value of empathic listening and effective feedback.
- Indicate how speakers' and listeners' nonverbal cues impact communication.
- Identify vocal factors that contribute to effective communication.
- Indicate how actively engaging the audience contributes to effective communication.
- Assess your current communication skills.

Effective Communication

Effective communication is essential in the workplace. The average worker spends 50 percent of the day communicating, and one-fourth of all workplace mistakes are the result of poor communication.

As an emergency management professional, you need to be a skillful communicator to achieve your objectives. Your role may involve communicating one-on-one or in small-group discussions; making public presentations at briefings, community meetings, and press conferences; taking part in media interviews; and issuing announcements and warnings.

You must be able to reach a broad audience that includes response partners and other colleagues, private sector and nonprofit organizations, the media, and a very diverse public.

Effective communication is essential before, during, and after an incident. During routine operations, strong communication skills enable you to engage in collaborative planning and promote safety awareness in the community.

During an incident, communicating clearly and accurately can help to reassure survivors and assist them in making responsible choices.

Following an incident, effective communication helps create a common understanding of the situation so the whole community can work together toward recovery.

This course will help you understand what effective communication entails and identify ways to improve your communication skills.

Effective Communicators

As you can see, being an effective communicator involves establishing a personal connection with the audience and using basic communication tools to reach that audience.

To communicate effectively—whether your audience is a single individual or a large group—it is helpful to understand the basic skills that form the building blocks of effective communication.

Let's begin with a brief look at what happens when two people communicate.

The Communication Process

Oral communication is fluid and dynamic, and is shaped by both the speaker and the audience. Even in its simplest form, communication is a two-way process in which several things typically happen:

- You send a message using your voice and nonverbal cues.
- The other person listens, interpreting and personalizing the message, and gives feedback verbally and nonverbally.
- Meanwhile, you are listening to the verbal feedback and attending to the nonverbal cues in order to gauge how your message was received and to understand the other person's response.

The process is then repeated in the typical flow of conversation.

Communication Basics Overview

This part of the lesson will focus on four basic communication skills shown below.

1. Listening
2. Communicating Nonverbally
3. Using Your Voice
4. Engaging the Audience

Listening

Attending, or listening, is critical for successful communication. In fact, almost half of our communication time is spent listening. Listening entails much more than just hearing sound.

- **Hearing** is a sensory experience that gathers sound waves indiscriminately. We can hear something without choosing to listen.
- **Listening** is a voluntary activity that includes interpreting or processing that sound.

Barriers to Effective Listening

Barriers to effective listening can be external or internal. External roadblocks can include distracters such as noise, an uncomfortable temperature or seating, or an inappropriate location. Try to be aware of external roadblocks and offset them if possible.

Internal roadblocks include conditions or reactions within the speaker or audience, such as:

- Emotional interference or defensiveness.
- Hearing only facts and not feelings.
- Hearing what is expected instead of what is said.
- Not seeking clarification.
- Stereotyping.
- The halo effect (letting a loosely associated factor influence one's perception).
- Resistance to change or automatic dismissal (e.g., "We've never done it that way before.").

Listening Tips

When listening, always:

- Keep an open mind.
- Maintain eye contact and show interest.
- Listen for the central themes.
- Consider the speaker's nonverbal behaviors and tone of voice.

While listening, you should avoid:

- Being judgmental.
- Interrupting the speaker.
- Formulating a rebuttal.
- Distorting the message based on your own beliefs.

Active Listening

Active listening involves listening with empathy and paraphrasing. When you listen empathically, you don't just hear words. You attend to thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. Empathic listening is highly active and takes practice.

When you paraphrase, you ensure clear understanding by restating main points in your own words. Paraphrasing also provides important feedback that helps speakers gauge how well they are getting their message across as intended.

Using the following active listening techniques will help you to improve your listening skills.

- Decide to listen and concentrate on the speaker.
- Use your imagination and enter the speaker's situation. Concentrate and try to imagine his or her frame of reference and point of view.
- Observe the speaker's vocal inflection, enthusiasm or lack of it, and style of delivery. These are essential components of the message. If you are speaking face-to-face, pay attention to the speaker's facial expressions and other nonverbal cues for more insight into the message.
- Listen without interruption. Note key phrases or use word associations to remember the speaker's content.
- Use paraphrasing or clarifying questions to confirm that you received the intended message. Paraphrasing demonstrates that you listened by:
 - Summarizing—restating the speaker's statement and feelings.
 - Using your own words—not parroting back what was said.
 - Remaining neutral—expressing neither your agreement nor disagreement (verbally or nonverbally).
- Check your perceptions of how the speaker is feeling—are you putting the text of the message in the appropriate emotional context?

Nonverbal Communication

Your nonverbal gestures speak volumes.

Body language alone—including facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and tone of voice—accounts for more than 90 percent of the message we send to others. Our words account for only 7 percent of the message.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Your actions speak so loud I cannot hear what you are saying.”

Understanding Nonverbal Cues

Nonverbal clusters are several related nonverbal signals that work in concert. Generally, the presence of a nonverbal cluster is more significant than a single signal because it reflects changes in attitude and state of mind.

For example, yawning by itself could mean a listener is unreceptive to your message, is sleep-deprived, or simply has been sitting still for too long.

Yawning in combination with fidgeting and lack of eye contact, on the other hand, could mean much more, including that your message is not getting across and the person is bored.

If you understand nonverbal cues, you can use them to reinforce your message.

You can also use nonverbal understanding to “read” your audience and gather real-time feedback about whether you are communicating successfully.

Mixed Messages

When nonverbal cues don’t match the spoken words, the result is mixed messages.

Often, nonverbal cues contradict or supersede verbal messages, and listeners instinctively react with mistrust and caution. Mixed messages can indicate that the speaker:

- Is experiencing conflict.
- Is not sincere.
- Is not committed to the message.

Offline Activity: Focusing on Nonverbal Cues

Instructions: To better understand how well your nonverbal message syncs with the verbal, after completing this lesson, ask a colleague to videotape you the next time you’re presenting to a group. It can be as simple as turning on a smartphone video camera during a meeting. Or, if you prefer, videotape yourself when practicing for a planned presentation.

Then, play back the recording with the sound turned off, focusing on your nonverbal language. Consider these questions:

- Does my body language reinforce my message?
- Are there any mannerisms of which I wasn’t aware?
- Does my facial expression, posture, or use of hands send any unintended message?
- How could I improve my nonverbal language to communicate more effectively?

Using Your Voice

Think of your voice as an instrument. When used effectively, it can convey your message and engage your listeners. This is especially true when presenting to a group—for example, at a briefing or in a community meeting.

When making presentations, you need to control the volume, pace, tone, inflection, and enunciation. Always speak loudly and clearly, even when using a microphone. Standing rather than sitting helps you project your voice.

Be sure to vary the pace of your presentation while not going too fast or slow. People who speak in a monotone should not be surprised when audience members begin nodding off.

Sound confident by using a downward inflection to end a sentence. For example, don't say, "More and more people are concerned about community preparedness than ever before?" You're telling, not asking.

Pauses are important. Pausing before and after you make an important point causes people to listen more carefully. In addition, pausing makes your presentation sound more conversational and helps you avoid using fillers such as: . . . like, . . . um, or . . . ya know.

While you are presenting, make sure to take care of your voice. Have plenty of water to drink and avoid caffeine, since it can dehydrate your vocal area. And remember: breathe deeply.

Using Your Voice Effectively

Public speaking doesn't come naturally to everyone, but it is a skill that can be learned. Understanding the basics and practicing will make most of us better speakers. It's also helpful to begin small (e.g., a small group and informal setting) and work up to greater challenges.

When presenting to an audience, be sure to:

- Use clear and concise language.
- Speak loud enough to be heard.
- Vary the pace of your presentation.
- Slow down for important points.
- Use the pause.
- Avoid speaking with a monotone voice.

Projecting Your Voice

To make yourself heard, imagine that you are talking directly to the person who is farthest away, not the person in the front row. Standing up makes it easier to create volume. The following techniques can help you project your voice:

- If the room is large, use a microphone.
- Use short phrases and slow your pace.
- Lower your pitch to reduce stress and to make your voice carry.
- Don't try to talk over noise or side conversations.
- Rest your voice between presentations and take a drink of water.

Avoiding Fillers

At transition points, or when you hear yourself adding a filler:

- Pause. (Remember . . . pauses will feel longer to you than to your audience!)
- Take a breath.
- Gather your thoughts.

Offline Activity: Using Your Voice

Instructions: After completing the online portion of this lesson, you can complete this activity using the video you created earlier. This time, turn the volume on and listen to yourself without looking at the video screen. Ask yourself these questions:

- Does my voice project well enough to be heard clearly at the back of the room?
- How are my pitch, tone, and pace? Would lowering the pitch help me project better and sound more confident? Are the tone and pace varied enough to sustain interest?
- Overall, does my vocal demeanor match the message I am trying to convey?
- What improvements could I work on to communicate more effectively?

Engaging Your Audience

An important part of communication is being able to engage the audience. There are times when telling alone will not achieve your goals.

The first step is to understand the audience and tailor your presentation and approach to them. Meet them where they are, on comfortable ground, so they can personalize your message.

Engaging the audience also requires that you observe nonverbal behaviors. Observing lets you know when you need to adjust your pace or clarify. For example, if you see individuals shaking their heads and crossing their arms, you may want to say, "It looks as if there is not complete agreement. Can someone present another point of view?" Don't just ignore nonverbal communication.

You must be able to listen accurately. Paraphrasing is one way to demonstrate that you are listening. Paraphrasing also shows respect for another person's point of view.

Asking questions that invite input is the key to encouraging interaction. You will get more interaction by using open-ended questions that require more than a simple "yes" or "no" answer. After asking a question, don't be afraid of silence. Wait for someone to respond. Avoid the tendency to answer your own question.

This presentation reviewed strategies for actively connecting with your audience by engaging and involving them, listening and paraphrasing, observing nonverbal behavior, and asking questions.

Strategies for Engaging Your Audience

To summarize, the ability to engage your audience—whether an individual or a group—is a key element of effective communication. Basic strategies for engaging an audience include the following:

- Understand your audience, and use that understanding to tailor your communication.
- "Read" your audience and be sensitive to nonverbal cues.
- Listen carefully, using paraphrasing to confirm your understanding.
- Use questions to encourage interaction and allow time for audience response—even if it means remaining silent.

Asking Questions

Asking questions can help you evaluate what listeners are thinking and how they are receiving information. For encouraging interaction, open-ended questions are more effective than direction questions.

Type	Description	Uses
Open-Ended Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires more than a "yes" or "no" answer. ▪ Usually begins with "what," "how," "when," or "why." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To stimulate thinking and decisionmaking. ▪ To encourage discussion.
Direct Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires a simple "yes" or "no" answer or statement of fact. ▪ Often begins with "is," "can," "how many," or "does." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To confirm facts. ▪ To stop a discussion.

Effective Questions

It is important that questions are clear, simple, and concise. Focus each question on a single issue.

Avoid Confusing Questions That Require More Than One Answer

"When presenting information is it more important to use verbal or nonverbal information, and what is the best way of reinforcing verbal points with visuals?"

Better Question

"What is an example of how you've used both verbal and nonverbal information to reinforce an important learning point?"

Handling Responses

When you ask open-ended questions, you hope to receive lots of answers and comments. To encourage participant responses:

- Acknowledge all responses in a positive manner. Never ignore a response or comment, and never judge a person's response or declare that an answer is wrong.
- Avoid the tendency to answer your own question. Instead, wait a few seconds, so that someone can respond. If too much time passes, then rephrase the question.
- If a response is unclear, ask a clarifying question and allow sufficient time for the person to rephrase or clarify the response.

More Tips for Engaging the Audience

Additional ways to get your audience involved include:

- Clear your mind of all distractions.
- Try not to place a barrier, such as a lectern or podium, between you and the audience.
- Avoid standing in a fixed position, slouching, fidgeting, or shifting your weight.
- Use natural and spontaneous gestures and positive facial expressions.
- Avoid nonverbal behaviors that could be seen as negative or judgmental.
- Don't be afraid to let your conviction and passion for the subject matter show.
- Demonstrate enthusiasm through your voice, facial expressions, and body movements.
- Draw people in by walking toward them.
- Avoid distracting behavior such as looking at your watch, or jingling change.

Lesson Summary

This lesson presented an overview of basic communication skills. You should now be able to:

- Indicate the value of empathic listening and effective feedback.
- Indicate how speakers' and listeners' nonverbal cues impact communication.
- Identify vocal factors that contribute to effective communication.
- Indicate how actively engaging the audience contributes to effective communication.
- Assess your current communication skills.

Lesson 2: Communicating With the Whole Community

Lesson Overview

This lesson presents strategies for ensuring that you communicate effectively with the whole community, including those with access and functional needs.

At the completion of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Analyze your community to identify groups requiring consideration when preparing and delivering communications.
- Identify factors that impact communication requirements.
- Identify strategies for communicating effectively with the whole community.
- Identify aspects of communicating with respect.

Communicating With the Whole Community

Communicating effectively with your community means communicating with the *whole* community.

Communities are diverse. They include people of all ages and varied cultural backgrounds, individuals with disabilities, and people with other access and functional needs such as limited English proficiency or literacy limitations.

How can you successfully communicate with such a diverse audience? The first step is to know your audience, including any factors that may impact how you communicate with them. Once you understand your audience, you will be better able to communicate in a way that takes advantage of their communication strengths.

Be sure your messages are clear and understandable. This benefits your entire audience.

Next, tailor your message delivery to the needs of the community, especially those with sensory disabilities or language limitations. One way to tailor your message is to provide information in multiple formats so that accessing it does not depend on a single sense or ability of the user. Another approach is to translate materials into multiple languages at appropriate reading levels.

It is important to be sensitive to cultural differences in the way we communicate, including nonverbal cues, and to communicate in a way that bridges those differences.

Next, consider ways to get your message out that will enhance the likelihood of its being received by specific populations. Teaming up with organizations in the community can help.

And finally, communicating with respect will improve your ability to reach the whole community, including those with disabilities and other access and functional needs.

The Whole Community Audience

In emergency management, communication responsibilities are typically quite varied. Your responsibilities may include:

- Educating the community on emergency preparedness.
- Keeping people informed about emergency plans, issues, and events.
- Issuing alerts and warnings.
- Providing accurate information during incidents.
- Sharing information with response partners.
- Engaging the community in dialogues about disaster recovery.

Your target audience can be described generally as “everyone who can benefit from the information.”

Reaching the Whole Community

Although up to this point we have focused primarily on oral communication skills, you have a wide variety of communication tools at your disposal, including, among others:

- Print-based materials.

- Web-based content.
- Broadcast media (television and radio).
- Telephone and face-to-face interaction with individuals.
- Large-group forums such as public meetings.
- Social media.

We'll look more closely at the various communication media in the next lesson. For now, let's consider ways to ensure that your message—regardless of the medium—is appropriate for the whole community.

Community Diversity

Communities are diverse. They include people of all ages, diverse cultural groups, and individuals with access and functional needs. Access and functional needs are factors that impact an individual's access to information and needed programs and services. These factors include, but are not limited to:

- Disabilities that impact hearing, vision, speech, cognitive skills, and mobility.
- Limited English proficiency.
- Literacy limitations.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that over half the population have some type of access or functional need, and almost 20 percent have disabilities. Further, they project a rapid increase in diversity. Many factors are contributing to the increasing diversity of communities. Examples of these factors include:

- The growing population of people with disabilities living in communities instead of institutional settings.
- The Baby Boom generation reaching their seniority, resulting in a growing senior population.
- Greater international migration contributing to more ethnic and linguistic diversity of the population.

Community Awareness and Effective Communication

It is important to know the composition of your community and to understand what that composition means for the way you communicate.

Understanding the community is not a one-time event or analysis. Because communities are constantly changing, the process must be an ongoing effort to stay in tune with the capabilities and needs of the population.

Understanding the Needs of Your Community

Review each task below to learn how you can better understand the communication needs of your community:

- **Understand community complexity** so you will know who your audience is. For example, learn about your community's demographics, and educate your emergency management staff. Potential sources of information include:
 - Census information.
 - Jurisdiction profiles compiled by emergency planning teams.
 - Social service agencies and organizations.
 - Faith-based organizations and houses of worship.
 - Advocacy groups.
 - Chamber of commerce and business leaders.
 - English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programs.
- **Know the languages and communication methods/traditions in the community.** Consider not only what languages people speak and understand, but how they actually exchange new information and which information sources they trust. Be aware of myths and stereotypes.
- **Find out where the real conversations happen and decisions are made.** Decisions are not always made at the council level, but often at venues such as the community center, neighborhood block

parties, social clubs, or places of worship. Tap into these opportunities to listen and learn more about the community. Develop strategies to reach community members and engage them in issues that are important to them.

- **Implement outreach interventions**, such as establishing relationships with multi-lingual volunteers to help interact with the various groups, and forming alliances with disability advocacy groups.

Formal and informal community leaders such as community organizers, local council members and other government leaders, nonprofit or business leaders, volunteer or faith leaders, and long-term residents have valuable knowledge and can provide a comprehensive understanding of the communities in which they live.

Communicating With the Whole Community

Below are four key actions that will help you communicate effectively with the whole community:

- Action #1: Ensure message content is clear and understandable.
- Action #2: Tailor message delivery to specific needs.
- Action #3: Identify alternate avenues for communication.
- Action #4: Communicate with respect.

Action #1: Ensure Message Content Is Clear and Understandable

As a baseline, all communications should be clear, user-friendly, and age appropriate.

- Be clear. Using plain language benefits most people. Avoid jargon and acronyms, passive voice, and complex structures.
- When presenting information orally, apply the basic communication skills related to listening, nonverbal cues, voice, and engaging the audience.
- Identify your audience, and make sure your presentation is age and education appropriate. Materials and presentations for children will not be the same as those for adults.
- Make sure the format is user-friendly, with an easy-to-follow format. Using symbols and graphics can add clarity and eliminate extra verbiage.

Action #2: Tailor Message Delivery to Specific Needs

Segments of the population often have specific needs that, when met, enable them to participate fully in the exchange of information.

Let's look, for example, at communicating with people who have:

- Sensory disabilities.
- Language or literacy requirements.
- Cultural factors that affect communication.

Sensory Disabilities

In the context of this course, sensory disabilities refer those that impact the channels of communication due to loss of hearing, vision, speech, or cognitive functioning.

Every individual is different. For example, a person with a vision disability may be blind or have low vision; the vision loss may have been present at birth, progressive, or caused by trauma, or might be happening gradually with aging.

Individuals with sensory disabilities may not be able to communicate their needs or ask for information, hear verbal announcements or alerts, see directional signs, communicate their circumstances to emergency responders, or understand how to get assistance due to their disability.

They may require auxiliary aids and services or language access services (such as interpreters and adapted materials) to participate effectively in communication.

Communicating With Persons Who Have Disabilities

A guiding principle for serving individuals with disabilities is access to effective communication.

- People with disabilities must be given the same information provided to the general population.
- Communication with people with disabilities must be as effective as communication with others.

Laws Related to Accessible Communication

A number of laws have been enacted to protect the rights of people with access and functional needs. Below are examples of laws that specifically address accessible communication.

Law	Provisions
Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (as amended)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prohibits discrimination during disaster relief and assistance activities and extends those protections to include race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency, and economic status.
Rehabilitation Act of 1973	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities. ■ All entities that receive Federal financial assistance are required to effectively communicate with people who have communication disabilities including hearing, vision, or cognitive disabilities. ■ Federal electronic and information technology must be accessible to people with disabilities. An accessible information technology system is one that can be operated in a variety of ways and does not rely on a single sense or ability of the user.
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and ADA Amendments Act of 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ State and local governments must give people with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from all of their programs, services, and activities. Requirements include ensuring effective communication with people who have hearing, vision, or speech disabilities. ■ Telecommunications Relay Services must be made available to individuals with speech and hearing impairments to the fullest extent possible and in the most efficient manner. ■ Any television public announcement that is produced or funded in whole or in part by the Federal Government must be closed captioned.
Telecommunications Act of 1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ People with disabilities must be given access to products and services such as telephones, cell phones, pagers, call-waiting, and operator services.
Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA) of 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Extends Stafford Act protections to all populations, including individuals with disabilities, persons with limited English proficiency, children, and the elderly.

Alternate Formats

Whether information is print-based, oral, or Web-based, appropriate media should be used to ensure information is communicated in alternate formats. Examples include:

- Sign language interpretation of spoken presentations.
- Video captioning.
- Downloadable large-print versions of materials.

- Braille versions of materials.
- Web content with screen reader capability.
- Recorded narrations describing visual materials.

Language and Literacy Factors

Language and literacy factors impact the disaster experience because communication is vital to effective response activities.

Immigrants, migrant workers, undocumented workers, tourists, and exchange students may have language barriers. In addition, many individuals may have literacy barriers, including those with limited English proficiency, hearing or learning disabilities, older adults, and others. An estimated 20 percent of American adults read at or below the 5th grade level.

A 2013 study of print- and Web-based emergency preparedness materials collected from local and national sources found that half of the materials tested in the 10th grade to college range, and nearly all were above the 5th grade level.

Be sure your disaster-related materials are written at appropriate reading levels and provided in languages spoken in your community.

Cultural Factors in Oral Communication

Individuals' cultural heritage may affect not only language, but also how they:

- Transmit and interpret nonverbal cues.
- Respond to different styles of communication.
- Interact during communication.

Such impacts may be even more pronounced in older generations. Failure to discern attitudes, beliefs, values, and rules implicit in different groups could disenfranchise some citizens and work against the community's goal of whole community preparedness.

Cross-Cultural Meanings of Nonverbal Cues

Often, when misunderstandings occur between people from different cultures, it has little to do with what they said—it's how they said it, what they did when they said it, or even whom they said it to. Nonverbal language can have meaning that is culture-specific. Consider the following examples:

Eye Contact

Eye contact has different meanings among different cultures. In the United States, maintaining strong eye contact indicates that the listener is attentive and interested in the message. In some Asian cultures, looking directly into a speaker's eyes indicates disrespect, while lowering the eyes is considered polite manners.

Gestures

Gestures considered as good gestures in one country may be seen as offensive in others. Examples include "thumbs up," pointing, open-palm "stop" gesture, curling the index finger in a "come here" motion, a-OK (index finger and thumb forming a circle), finger snapping, and looking at one's watch or wrist.

Touching

When, where, and how often we touch each other has cultural significance. Americans tend to touch each other less than members of many other cultures. We need to be especially sensitive to cultural differences regarding contact.

Timing

The timing of verbal exchanges—the pause between the conclusion of one person speaking and the other replying—is also culturally influenced. Some people interpret a long wait before a reply as lack of attention. However, in some cultures, a pause before replying indicates a polite and considered response.

Personal Space

Within each culture, there are expected personal distances for different types of relationships. For example, studies indicate that Americans prefer these proximities:

- Personal distance (between friends and intimates): 1.5 to 4 feet.
- Social distance (for social and business transactions): 4 to 12 feet.
- Public distance (among strangers in public): 12 feet or more.

In other cultures, these distances may be different. Nonverbal communication can be confusing when comfort zones are violated.

Bridging Generational and Cultural Communications

Using the strategies below, you can demonstrate that you respect generational and cultural differences among community members—and build powerful relationships as a result.

Approach others with interest and openness. Approach generational and cultural differences with interest, not fear or negativity. Take interest in the interests of others. You can learn fascinating things about other people if you choose to do so.

Speak slowly and clearly. Focus on slowing down your speech. Try not to rush your communication. Remember, it takes more time to correct miscommunication and misunderstanding.

Ask for clarification. If you are not sure you understand the meaning being communicated, politely ask for clarification. Avoid assuming you've understood what's been said.

Check your understanding frequently. Check both that you've understood what's been said and that others have fully understood you. Use active listening to check your own understanding (e.g., "So what you are saying is . . ."), and use open-ended questions to check other people's understanding.

Avoid generational or cultural idioms. Language is contextual and has cultural implications. Examples of idioms include sports or other expressions, such as: "ace in the hole" and "a long row to hoe." As a general rule, if the phrase requires knowledge of other information—be it a game, generational event, a metaphor, or current social media—recognize that this reference may make your communication more difficult to understand, or even worse, offensive.

Be careful of jargon. Watch the use of TLAs (Three-Letter Abbreviations) and other language or jargon that may not be understood by others.

Be patient. Cross-cultural communication may take more time.

Be sensitive to whether you are understood. Watch for "puzzled" looks from your audience. Most people show it on their faces when they don't understand. Look for changes in body language.

Learning About Your Community's Cultures

It's not realistic to become an expert on every culture that you may encounter. However, it **is** reasonable for you to learn about the populations that make up major parts of your community.

Take the time to learn the basic customs of the ethnic groups in your community.

Tips for Learning About Your Community's Cultures

- **Tune in.** Making yourself aware of key cultural and other differences that you will need to address during an emergency will help you learn what to expect of the groups and whether your message is being communicated.
- **Research.** Read news articles about the groups represented in your community. Frequently, these articles can provide good insight into the people and the behaviors that are part of their cultures. (This strategy is especially helpful when you are new to a community or are from a different part of the country.)
- **Network.** Talk to the leaders of the cultural groups in your community. You will find that most will be pleased that you care enough to make the effort and will be very willing to share key attributes of their culture with you.
- **Participate.** Many communities sponsor special days on which the various cultures represented in the community can share their food, artwork, and other entertainment with their neighbors. Take the time to attend these events. Pay careful attention to what you see and hear.

Action #3: Identify Alternate Avenues for Communication

When selecting how to communicate with and educate your community, it is wise to use multiple formats and media to reach the widest possible audience.

You should also identify distribution methods that will ensure everyone in the community gets the message. When conducting communication and education activities, include:

- Social, cultural, and religious groups.
- Advocacy groups.
- Ethnic radio and television stations that broadcast in their native languages.
- Children, to educate their parents.

And when disseminating information through public forums, be sure the facilities are accessible by those who use wheelchairs or other assistive devices.

Action #4: Communicate With Respect

Practice basic etiquette when meeting people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs. For example:

- Do not shout at a person with a hearing disability unless asked to do so. Speak in a normal tone but make sure your lips are visible. The same holds true for people with limited English proficiency.
- When meeting someone with a visual disability, identify yourself and others with you (e.g., "Jane is on my left and Jack is on my right."). Continue to identify the person with whom you are speaking.
- If the person's speech is difficult to understand, do not hesitate to ask him or her to repeat what was said. Never pretend to understand when you do not.
- Find a place to sit and talk if a person has decreased physical stamina and endurance, which is preferable to standing during the entire interaction.
- Place yourself at eye level with the person when conversing. Some ways to accomplish this without drawing attention to yourself are sitting on a chair or standing a little farther away to reduce the steep angle of the sightline. This is effective when interacting with all people who are sitting as well as persons with short stature.
- Talk directly to the person with the disability, not to a person who accompanies them. Doing otherwise implies that you doubt their ability to understand.

Using Inclusive Language

Language influences behavior. Inclusive language is a powerful ingredient for achieving successful outcomes that are beneficial for the whole community. Consider the following language guidelines when referring to people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use people-first language. Place the emphasis on the individual instead of the disability. ■ Use language that is respectful and straightforward. ■ Refer to a person's disability only if it is relevant. ■ Remember that individuals are unique and have diverse abilities and characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Avoid terms that lead to exclusion (e.g., "special" is associated with "separate" and "segregated" services). ■ Avoid judgmental, negative, or sensational terms (e.g., brave, courageous, dumb, super-human). ■ Avoid making assumptions or generalizations about the level of functioning of an individual based on diagnosis or disability.

Lesson Summary

This lesson presented strategies for ensuring that your communication meets the needs of the whole community. You should now be able to:

- Analyze your community to identify groups requiring consideration when preparing and delivering communications.
- Identify factors that impact communication requirements.
- Identify strategies for communicating effectively with the whole community.
- Identify aspects of communicating with respect.

Lesson 3: Communicating in an Emergency

Lesson Overview

This lesson presents strategies for communicating effectively in emergency situations. At the completion of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Indicate how day-to-day communication differs from communication during an incident.
- Identify strategies for communicating effectively in an emergency situation.
- Select the most appropriate form of communication for a given situation.
- Indicate how social media and other communications technology can be used to communicate with members of the community.

Communicating in an Emergency

During an incident, communication with the community becomes especially critical. Emergency communications may include alerts and warnings; directives about evacuation, curfews, and other self-protective actions; and information about response status, family members, available assistance, and other matters that impact response and recovery.

Well-conceived and effectively delivered emergency messages can help ensure public safety, protect property, facilitate response efforts, elicit cooperation, instill public confidence, and help families reunite.

The extent to which people respond to a warning message is influenced by many factors, including individual characteristics and perceptions, whether the message comes from a credible source, how the message is delivered, and the message itself.

You have many communication tools to choose from, including in-person events, print and broadcast media, and Internet and social media. Each has advantages and limitations depending on your communication objective and the intended audience.

Whatever communication tools you use, be sure your emergency communications are clear, contain specific and adequate information, are in sync with other information being disseminated, and are accessible to the whole community.

Lesson Topics

Delivering effective emergency communications is an essential part of emergency management. This lesson presents information about three aspects of communicating in an emergency:

1. Emergency Communication Challenges
2. Tools for Emergency Communications
3. Creating Effective Emergency Communications

An Essential Resource for the Community

Studies show that during an incident, information is as critically important to people as food or water. Not only can accurate information mean the difference between life and death, it can provide reassurance that response and recovery are truly underway.

Key Functions

Public information during an incident serves many important functions. It can:

- **Save lives and reduce injury.** Knowing the proper protective actions to take enables people to reduce their risk.
- **Protect property and the environment.** Understanding how to mitigate risk to property and the environment may lessen the damage inflicted by disasters.
- **Facilitate the tactical response** by calming fears and managing expectations. People who know what to expect are more likely to follow instructions and allow responders to do their jobs.
- **Educate, inform, and change behavior or attitudes.** An educated public is more likely to prepare for emergencies and be ready when they occur.
- **Seek the public's cooperation.** Whether the need is for volunteers to help with sandbagging, citizens to cooperate with investigators, or residents to evacuate their homes, public information is an instrument that can help make it happen.
- **Instill public confidence.** Providing timely, accurate, and understandable information builds confidence in emergency management's competence.
- **Provide information to help families reunite.** Public information about shelter message boards, hotlines, survivor registries, and other linkages can help reunite families and enable them to move forward with their recovery.

Characteristics of Emergency Communications

Emergency communications differ from routine communications in several ways:

Barriers

It is more difficult for people to hear messages during an emergency. Stress, change of routine, and lack of sleep all can be hurdles to overcome when communicating during emergencies.

Timeliness

If official answers are not available, rumor and speculation quickly fill the information vacuum. Then, not only must you disseminate correct information, but you also need to counter any misinformation that circulated. To use media in a timely fashion, learn local media news cycles and deadlines.

For example, if news occurs at 4:00 p.m., you can most likely get it on the radio immediately, on television in time for the evening report, and into the next morning's edition of the local paper. Online news outlets can be updated at any time.

Required Response

Emergency warnings differ from other kinds of messages because their purpose is to elicit a specific response from the public, rather than merely raise awareness or provide knowledge.

Factors That Affect Response

Successful warnings are those that are taken seriously and responded to in a timely and effective manner. Multiple factors may have an impact on whether people respond to a warning, including:

- **Individual characteristics**—Age, education, language, access and functional needs, family composition, and length of residency, among others.
- **Perceptions**—Previous experience with a hazard and perceptions of proximity and risk.
- **Message source**—Who issues the warning, credibility of the warning source, and the level of trust in that source.
- **The message itself**—Accuracy, clarity, timeliness, consistency, and specificity of the message, and focus on immediate needs.

The Medium and the Message

A key decision in planning emergency communications is how you will get the message to the audience. This decision is influenced by several factors, including:

The Audience: Select media that have the greatest likelihood of reaching the intended audience:

- Are you sending your message to the general public?
- How many people does the information need to reach?
- Does your message apply only to people living in a specific geographic area?
- Is your message intended for emergency management personnel only?
- What is the primary language of the intended audience? Are there other languages that must also be accommodated?
- Where does this audience usually obtain news—TV? Radio? Newspapers? Community venues? Online? Social media?

Urgency: Match the speed and frequency of the media to how quickly and long your audience needs to know:

- Is this information related to immediate safety?
- Is this referral information for future recovery?
- Should urgency take priority over style and format?
- When do various media air, publish, or broadcast information?
- How long will this information be useful to the audience?
- How many times do you think your audience needs to see or hear your information before they act on it?

Reliability: Ensure that your choice of media is reliable during the emergency:

- During *this emergency situation*, which media are functional?
- Are the radio, television, and newspaper companies functioning normally?
- Are residents currently located at their normal mailing addresses?
- Is mail delivery interrupted?
- Are there widespread power outages that affect some or all media outlets?
- Can you identify public places where your audience can assemble?

Appropriateness: Choose appropriate media to enhance comprehension:

- Is your message too sensitive to send via fax?
- Is your audience geographically concentrated enough to make a public meeting possible?
- Can you make your point on a billboard?

Resources: Consider your resources in your media choice:

- Which staff will you need to implement this media approach?
- Can your budget afford a televised public service announcement?
- Can you deliver an effective public speech?

Communication Tools

During an incident, a wide variety of communication tools are available to provide vital information to the community.

This section of the lesson will focus on the various tools available and factors to consider in choosing among them.

Choosing the Right Communication Tool

Choosing the right communication tool is a matter of getting the right information to the right people at the right time so they can make the right decisions. Remember, the most effective communication tool is one that:

- Reaches the target audience.

- Gets information to the audience when they need it, for as long as they need it.
- Can be expected to deliver the message reliably.
- Enhances comprehension of the message content.
- Can be accessed within resource limitations.

Most often, you will use a combination of methods to deliver a consistent message to the whole community.

Communication Tools and Methods

Tools and methods for emergency communications include:

- In-person events—briefings and public meetings.
- Print media—newspapers and magazines.
- Broadcast media—television and radio.
- Internet and social media.

The following screens present information about advantages, limitations, and requirements of each.

In-Person Events

In-person events such as media briefings and public meetings can be used to get information to the media and the public. When properly planned and executed, these events can be a powerful tool to aid you in communicating the messages you want disseminated to the public while guiding the news media to important information for the public.

Advantages:

- Interactive, allowing participants to voice their questions and concerns and giving you the opportunity to respond.
- Can be targeted to specific populations.

Limitations:

- Require the ability to stay on message when the audience becomes vocal.
- May expose you to difficult questions.

Requirements:

- An appropriate, accessible venue.
- Public address equipment.

Print Media

Print media such as newspapers and magazines can be used to disseminate information that is not time-critical. These media are especially effective for presenting indepth analysis of developing situations and for educating the public about preparedness. Most newspapers and magazines have Web sites where they will also post your story.

Advantages:

- Allow for more detail and indepth treatment of the subject.
- Permit a variety of approaches—e.g., news story, interview, background piece.

Limitations:

- Take longer to get the message out.
- May be filtered through another spokesperson.

Requirements:

- Details and background information.
- Access to subject-matter experts.
- Access to photo opportunities.

Broadcast Media

Television and radio can be used to disseminate information quickly, through the Emergency Alert System (EAS), Public Service Announcements (PSAs), and news programs. More indepth features can also be presented. Stations that broadcast in other languages can be used as an avenue to reach specific populations within the community.

Advantages:

- Immediate broadcasting of urgent messages.
- Varied programming.
- Can reach a wide audience and be tailored to specific populations.

Limitations:

- Reporting may be less detailed, especially on television.
- Messages may be filtered through a reporter or other spokesperson, and may be edited or cut to fit available time.
- Listener/viewer must choose to turn on the TV or radio in order to receive the message.

Requirements:

- Television—visuals, sound bites, staging area.
- Radio—audio sound clips, recorded interviews, recorded PSAs.

Internet and Social Media

The Internet and social media can provide immediate message dissemination and a wide variety of formats. A Web site can incorporate many different types of media and accessibility features, but the recipient must choose to access the site or have signed up for automated message feeds. Social media provides almost instantaneous messaging to those who have access.

Advantages:

- Internet—Updated quickly, can incorporate varied media (e.g., print, photos, graphics, audio, video, live streaming).
- Social media—Very flexible; messages can be short and quick.
- Individuals can opt into notification systems that push messages to the recipient.

Limitations:

- Internet—Updates may only be at certain times.
- Social media—Limited control once the message goes out.

Requirements: Vary according to the medium and type of message.

Coming to Terms With New Media

The key to using emerging technology is staying on top of what is out there, because “new” media is a relative term and technology doesn’t slow down for anyone.

Ultimately, new communication technology is all about speed. People have an expectation of being engaged and involved and they don’t want to wait for it. They expect that their government agencies will not only be transparent and responsive, but that the response will be customized to the incident and as rapid as the flow of electrons.

Social Media	Description
Blog	A blog (a contraction of the term Weblog) is a Web site, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog. Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, Web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs.
Citizen Journalism	Citizen journalism is based upon public citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information. The availability of technology such as smartphones with cameras and video capability makes it possible for individuals to report breaking news often more quickly than traditional media reporters.
Micro-blog	A micro-blog is a form of multimedia blogging that allows users to send brief text updates (say, 140 characters or fewer) or micromedia (such as photos or audio clips) and publish them, either to be viewed by anyone or by a restricted group that can be chosen by the user. These messages can be submitted by a variety of means, including text messaging, instant messaging, email, digital audio, or the Web.
Photo Sharing	Photo sharing is the publishing or transfer of a user's digital photos online through both Web sites and applications that facilitate the upload and display of images. The term can also be loosely applied to the use of online photo galleries that are set up and managed by individual users, including photoblogs.
Podcast	A podcast is a series of visual or sound files that are distributed over the computer by syndicated download, through Web feeds, to portable media players and personal computers. Though the same content may also be made available by direct download or streaming, a podcast is distinguished from most other digital media formats by its ability to be syndicated, subscribed to, and downloaded automatically when new content is added. Like the term broadcast, podcast can refer either to the series of content itself or to the method by which it is syndicated; the latter is also called podcasting. The host or author of a podcast is often called a podcaster.
Really Simple Syndication (RSS) Feed	RSS (abbreviation for Really Simple Syndication) is a family of Web feed formats used to publish frequently updated works—such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video—in a standardized format. An RSS document (which is called a "feed," "Web feed," or "channel") includes full or summarized text, plus metadata such as publishing dates and authorship. Web feeds benefit publishers by letting them syndicate content automatically. They benefit readers who want to subscribe to timely updates from favored Web sites or to aggregate feeds from many sites into one place. The user subscribes to a feed by clicking an RSS icon in a browser that initiates the subscription process. The RSS reader checks the user's subscribed feeds regularly for new work, downloads any updates that it finds, and provides a user interface to monitor and read the feeds.
Smartphone	(See Citizen Journalism.)
Social Networking	<p>Social networking sites are online communities that connect people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others.</p> <p>The most popular social networking sites have groups, which offer chat boards for members. There are also professional social networking sites with sections for jobs. All social networking sites allow users to find people they know among the members, or look for other members with similar interests or affiliations. These sites make it easy to establish networks of contacts.</p>
Video Blog	A video blog, sometimes shortened to a vlog or vidblog, is a form of blog for which the medium is video. Entries are made regularly and often combine embedded video or a video link with supporting text, images, and other metadata. Vlogs also often take advantage of Web syndication to allow for the distribution of video over the Internet using either the RSS or Atom syndication formats, for automatic aggregation and playback on mobile devices and personal computers.

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