



As we approach Hurricane season and South Carolina continues to experience several emergencies a year, it's more important than ever that broadcast media professionals and local reporting governments ensure that all citizens, including those in the disability community, are informed during broadcasts and alerts.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires media outlets and state and local governments to provide "effective communications." According to the CDC, South Carolinians with disabilities make up one-third of our state's population, making accessibility a life-or-death priority during emergencies. When disaster strikes, it's critical to provide accessible communication, so no population is left behind.

Accessibility doesn't need to be a costly or time-intensive process. Therefore, we have included a checklist of tips to help you make sure your content is accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities.

Use the checklist to assist with coordinating the details of your press conferences, audio or video media, social media, and written media communications to ensure that everyone is getting the same life-saving information without delay.

Emergency Broadcast Media Tips and Tricks for Preparing Accessible Press Conferences, Broadcasts, and Communications

In advance of your press conference, broadcast, and planned communications:

Develop and implement your ADA Communication Policy

Don't reinvent the wheel each time there is an emergency! Be prepared and maintain a policy of your own to guide communications including plain language writing, sign language interpreters, real-time captioning, and audio description. Use the tips below to help you develop a plan.

Remember, you need a plan that applies to all forms of communication, including but not limited to:

- [Television Broadcasting & Video Livestream](#)
- [Radio Broadcasting, Podcast, or other Audio Mediums](#)
- [Written Communications of any kind \(releases, news articles\)](#)
- [Social Media Communications of any kind \(video, text, image\)](#)

Prepare and use appropriate terminology

Make sure your reporting uses the correct language when referring to people with disabilities. Disability is not a bad word, so please use it. Words like handicapped, special needs, differently-abled, etc., are highly offensive and othering. When reporting about people with disabilities never use language that portrays a message of pity or incompetence.

[Check out our quick guide to Disability Inclusive Language for more.](#)

Write in clear and easily understood language, also known as plain language

Keep sentences short with only one point per sentence, and keep words on a third to fifth-grade level. This is called plain language and helps people with and

without disabilities easily and quickly understand your content. If you are needing to make multiple points, consider writing bulleted lists.

Establish a relationship with a qualified, local, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter and ensure they will be ready for all press conferences and emergency communications

You must provide equal and effective communication to everyone, including people who are deaf. Establish a relationship *now* with a qualified ASL interpreter in your area. For a list of interpreters in South Carolina, contact the [SC Association of the Deaf](#).

Have a plan for closed captioning

Closed captioning is required for all television programs. Not all people who are Deaf or hard of hearing rely on ASL, such as our senior citizen population. People without disabilities use closed captions, such as people or places of business who prefer to keep their devices on mute.

If you are livestreaming content online, consider hiring a live-caption service to ensure that your captions are accurate in real-time. Do not rely on auto-captioning services provided by livestream hosts as they are often inaccurate.

If you are creating content to be displayed later, ensure that all captions are accurate by editing before posting online or sharing elsewhere.

Prepare an audio description track for emergency stories in advance

Audio descriptions help people who are blind understand content such as photos, on-screen writing, images of warning signs, maps of evacuation routes, etc., that is displayed visually on screen. Audio descriptions should be created in such a way that, if visuals were removed, the audio content could stand on its own and allow the visuals to be completely understood.

Audio descriptions should not only be prepared for television broadcasting but for any video content including but not limited to playing recordings via livestreams or any social media video content of any kind.

In immediate preparation for your press conference or broadcast:

Use plain language when speaking; keep your message clear and concise

When speaking keep your sentences short and without unnecessary words or jargon. Use only one point/thought per sentence. Use easy-to-understand words - an emergency is not the time to showcase vocabulary.

Have your ASL interpreter present for all press conferences and in the camera frame at all times for any video content

Many people who are Deaf rely on ASL to obtain information in real-time. This can never be overlooked. Keep in mind that all camera angles must be set to keep the interpreter in the frame at all times, including but not limited to camera frames for television broadcasting, internet livestreams, and social media video content of any kind.

Double-check that real-time closed captioning is active and working correctly

It never hurts to double-check that everything is working correctly. Remember, people with and without disabilities often rely on close captioning. Real-time captioning can save lives!

Describe all visuals that do not have a pre-made audio description track

Audio descriptions are often the only way people with visual disabilities will be informed of visuals. Always adequately describe imagery orally to ensure that people who have visual disabilities understand important life-saving content, such as maps of evacuation routes, images of warning signs, or visuals of the disaster.

When implementing these tips, or if you have questions, it's always best to reach out to a disability-led organization with people with disabilities on staff, like Able South Carolina. **Contact us at advocacy@able-sc.org or by calling 803-779-5121.**