

# Emergency Preparedness Resources to Assist Individuals with Legal Blindness or Low Vision

## Massachusetts Commission for the Blind Orientation and Mobility Department

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# Emergency Planning Considerations to Assist People who are Legally Blind

## Public Information and Warning

- Scrolling written announcements on TV are commonly used but not accessible to individuals who are blind. When using TV to disseminate public information and warning, ensure both written and audio announcements are made.
- Individuals who are deafblind can't hear or see. Consider what support networks or providers can ensure messages reach these individuals? Work with consumer groups to identify ways to reach these individuals.
- All handouts should be produced in large-print 14-point or larger in an Arial font. (This document is 14 point Arial font.)
- Ensure websites where emergency public information is displayed are accessible to screen readers.
- Undertake outreach and testing before a disaster to find out how to get information to the public and determine who the system is missing. (Possible tools: Reverse 911 system, blast email alerts, and outreach to vision consumer groups.)
- Determine what you want residents to know before a disaster. Develop messaging and make this information available ahead of time if possible.
- Provide contact information for local emergency directors or coordinators so residents are able to self-identify any unique, individual needs.

## Public Shelter Considerations

### **Shelter Location:**

- Make plans to provide transportation to the shelter to residents who cannot drive themselves there. Wheelchair accessible vehicles should be available if needed.
- Ensure all shelter locations are wheelchair accessible.
- To the extent possible, shelter locations should be accessible by public transportation.
- If applicable, provide detailed walking directions to a shelter from a bus stop, train, subway, or other public location.

## **Shelter Facility Layout:**

- Train shelter “greeters” to serve as sighted guides. These guides should be able to provide an orientation of the facility to individuals with low vision or blindness. (Sighted guide tips are available on page 7 of this document.)
- Pedestrian channelizing devices need to be continuous, stable, and non-flexible. They must have a detectable base and have an upper rail. Supports should not protrude into the path of travel. Yellow tape & orange cones are not acceptable channelizing devices.
- Use yellow duct tape to tape down cords if in the path of travel.
- Shelters should have good directional signage. Signage should be large, posted high enough to be seen over tables, and have good contrast (for example, black on white). At a minimum, there should be signage directing individuals to the shelter facility, to the sign-in area, bathrooms, and dining area.
- Good lighting is very important as is the contrast of tables or areas that a person may need to navigate around. Have flashlights available to loan.

## **Shelter Registration and Printed Materials:**

- If individuals are expected to sign documents, have signature guides available. Also provide black pens, flair markers/ 20/20 pens (these are felt tip markers that deliver bold writing that is easier to see. They are inexpensive and commonly available). Blue ink should be avoided since it is difficult to read.
- Print materials
  - These should be large print, 14 point font or larger, in an easy to read font such as Arial.
  - Materials can be available electronically if a computer with a zoom function, screen magnifier, or screen reader is available.
  - Materials can also be made available in Braille. If printed ahead of time, materials should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

## **Shelter Equipment and Supply:**

- Shelter supplies should include long canes (for those whose canes were misplaced or damaged during an evacuation), flashlights and low vision devices such as magnifiers.
- Shelter Staff should be wearing similar clothing, vests or arm bands (bright colors) so one can easily identify staff to ask for assistance if needed.

## **Other:**

- There should be a plan to provide functional needs support to individuals who are diabetic and/or have other medical issues.
- There should be a designated service animal/guide dog relief area with a trash barrel and plastic bags.
- There should be dog food and access to veterinary care.

# Job Aids and Just in Time Reference Materials

## **Tips for Shelter Staff when Working with a Person with a Vision Impairment**

- Always identify yourself & explain your purpose.
- Ask individual who is visually impaired if assistance is required.
- Give clear directions.
- Use normal speaking voice.
- During meals, identify food and placement on tray.
- If you move something, place it back in original location.
- Offer guide assistance. Refer to guide techniques (see page 7) prior to serving as a guide.
- Never pet or touch a service animal/guide dog without asking for permission.



## Guide Dog “Do’s & Don’ts”

- Do not touch or pet a guide dog without permission of the Owner.
- Never distract a working guide dog.
- Never feed a guide dog.
- Correcting the dog is the responsibility of the Owner, if there is an issue that needs to be addressed about a dog’s behavior, discuss it with the Owner so he or she can resolve the issue.
- All Owners are expected to clean up after their dog & dispose of waste in appropriate trash barrels.
- Do not acknowledge the dog before you acknowledge the Owner.
- Guide dogs are allowed everywhere the Owner is allowed.
- Guide dogs are taught to follow. Ask if the Owner prefers to be guided or prefers to follow you.



# Guide Technique

## BASICS

**\*\* Always ask if assistance is needed! \*\***

**If so, to make contact:**

**INTRODUCE** yourself & offer your arm by saying, “**Please take my arm**” and brushing your hand or arm slightly against the Individual’s arm or hand.

**GRIP:** The Individual should take the Guide’s arm, just above the elbow. The grip should be firm enough to maintain, but not tight enough to cause discomfort to the Guide.

**STANCE:** The follower should stand one step behind the Guide. The Guide’s arm should be close to his or her side, not swinging.

**PACE:** Walk at the pace of the person you are guiding. Slow down at uneven surfaces, ramps, stairs, etc.

## ADDITIONAL TECHNIQUES

### STAIRS:

- Pause at the beginning of stairs and indicate if going up or down.
- Approach stairs (or curb) directly, not at an angle.
- Have individual use handrail, if available.
- Be sure first step is located by individual before going up or down. The Guide should always be one step ahead & not on the same step as the Individual.
- Maintain a continuous pace.
- Describe anything odd about the stairs, such as a curved staircase, unusually high, narrow, short or wide stairs, etc.

### SEATING:

- Describe anything unusual about the chair: Is it a rocking/swivel chair, does it have arms or is it without a back, or a bench, etc.?
- **Back of Chair Technique:** Guide Individual to the chair back, place your guiding arm on the back of the chair, allow the Individual to follow your arm down to the chair, allowing for the Individual to seat self. Indicate which direction the chair is facing,

- **Front of Chair Technique:** Guide Individual to front of chair so legs are against the chair. Bring guiding arm down to the seat chair, allowing Individual to locate the seat and seat self.
- If chair is located at a table, the Guide should bring the Individual to the back of the chair & indicate where the table is located in relationship to the chair. Allow Individual to seat self.

### **ENTERING/EXTING A CAR:**

- Describe location of seatbelts and type of vehicle (van, truck, SUV, car, 2 or 4 door), type of seating (bench/bucket), and if being seated in the back or front of vehicle, etc.
- The Guide should place the guiding hand on the door handle. The Individual should trail down the Guide's arm to the handle, open the door, contact the roof edge with other hand & seat self. (The Guide may wish to place own hand between the car roof ceiling and the passenger's head to prevent accidental banging of passenger's head, when entering vehicle.)

### **DOORWAYS:**

- When approaching a door, indicate to the Individual how the door will open and if Individual needs to hold door open while passing through. Indicate if Individual needs to step behind the Guide (see **NARROW PASAGEWAY TECHINQUE below**)

### **NARROW PASAGEWAY TECHINQUE:**

- When approaching a narrow space the Guide should place guiding arm behind back, and ask Individual to step behind Guide. Slow walking pace as needed. Describe situation as needed.

### **TRAILING TECHNIQUE:**

- This is a self-travel technique, used mainly indoors. The individual with the vision impairment will follow ("trail") a wall, railing, etc with the free hand. The technique may be used with a cane or without and may be used with *Protective Techniques*.

# Some Do's and Don'ts when Working with an Individual with Vision Loss

**If in doubt, ask the Individual!**

DO	DON'T
<p><b>DO</b> establish a point of contact when leaving an Individual alone.</p>	<p><b>DON'T</b> leave Individual standing in "free space."</p>
<p>When giving directions: Use left, right, according to the way the Individual is facing &amp; only if there is a understanding of these terms.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Or</p> <p>Use a voice cue or ask if the Individual would like to be taken via <b>Human/Sighted Guide</b> to destination.</p>	<p><b>DON'T</b> point or use expressions such as, "It's over there."</p>
<p><b>DO</b> keep doors &amp; cabinets completely <b>CLOSED!</b></p>	<p><b>DON'T</b> leave doors ajar! <b>DON'T</b> move items or furniture around!</p>
<p><b>DO</b> identify yourself when entering or leaving a room.</p>	<p><b>DON'T</b> assume the Individual will recognize your voice or hear one entering or leaving a room.</p>
<p>When assisting at a street crossing always ask if assistance is needed. If so, offer <b>Human/Sighted Guide Technique</b> or give a voice cue.</p>	<p><b>DON'T</b> grab Individual's arm, cane or touch dog guide.</p> <p><b>DON'T</b> jaywalk or cross the street in an unsafe manner when guiding.</p>

# Emergency Preparedness Tips for People with Visual Disabilities

(Adapted from the American Red Cross, [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org))

## Cane Users and Dog Guide Users

- Have back up canes at different locations such as work, home, etc. and packed in disaster kits.
- Be prepared to use alternative methods to negotiate your environment!

## Plan to Use Alternate Mobility Cues

- If you have some vision, place security lights in each room to light paths of travel. DO NOT use candles. Check out camping stores for battery operated fluorescent lanterns.
- Store high-powered flashlights (with wide beams)-LED lights are best with extra batteries. Light Sticks are also helpful.
- Plan on losing the auditory clues you normally rely on following a major disaster.

## Label Supplies

- If helpful, mark emergency supplies with large print, fluorescent tape or Braille (with print). Be sure your contact list is also accessible in print.

## Other items to consider storing in a Disaster Kit

- Talking alarm clock with batteries, or Braille watch, state/stylus, 20/20 pens, writing guide, and low vision items such as magnifiers, glasses, etc.
- Wind-up radio & flashlights
- Plastic Whistle, first aid kit (label items so one can read in preferred format.)
- Telephone/contact list in large print and/or Braille (if Braille reader). Have a plan on how to contact family members.

## Transportation Planning

- Develop a transportation plan (even if one has access to a car), using public transportation, neighbors, etc. in case of evacuation.

# Organizations Providing Services to People with Legal Blindness\*

## **Massachusetts Commission for the Blind**

[www.mass.gov/mcb](http://www.mass.gov/mcb)

617-626-7660

800-392-6450

Telephone Tape x7660

## **MAB Vision Community Services**

[www.mablind.org](http://www.mablind.org)

617-923-2790

## **Talking Information Center (TIC)**

[www.ticnetwork.com](http://www.ticnetwork.com)

800-696-9505

Radio Reading Service

## **Association of Massachusetts Educators of Students with Visual Impairments**

[www.amesvi.org](http://www.amesvi.org)

(AMESVI) Listserve

## **Carroll for the Blind**

[www.carroll.org](http://www.carroll.org)

617-969-6200

## **Northeast Regional Center for Vision Education**

[www.nercve.umb.edu](http://www.nercve.umb.edu)

Listserve

## **Lowell Association for the Blind**

[www.lowellassociationfortheblind.org](http://www.lowellassociationfortheblind.org)

978-454-5704

## **Sight Loss Services Inc.**

Serves Cape Cod & the Islands

<http://www.jwen.com/sls/>

508-394-4970

## **Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST)**

617-248-1360

Boston VA for Veterans who have vision loss

## Vision Consumer Groups

### **Association of Blind Citizens (ABC)**

[www.blindcitizens.org](http://www.blindcitizens.org)

[president@blindcitizens.org](mailto:president@blindcitizens.org)

### **Baystate Council of the Blind**

[www.acb.org/baystate](http://www.acb.org/baystate)

[baystate@acb.org](mailto:baystate@acb.org)

### **National Federation of the Blind**

<http://www.nfbma.org/>

[president@nfbma.org](mailto:president@nfbma.org)

### **Visually Impaired & Blind User Group (VIBUG)**

<http://www.vibug.org/>

[president@vibug.org](mailto:president@vibug.org)

### **Massachusetts Association for Parents of the Visually Impaired (MAPVI)**

<http://www.mapvi.org/>

## Deaf Blind Resources

### **Deaf-Blind Contact Center**

617-254-4925/v/TTY

Relay 711

[www.deafinonline.org](http://www.deafinonline.org)

[DBCCOffice@gmail.com](mailto:DBCCOffice@gmail.com)

### **Helen Keller National Center**

[www.hknc.org](http://www.hknc.org)

781-259-7100/V/TTY

### **Better Hearing Institute (Deaf only)**

[www.betterhearing.org](http://www.betterhearing.org)

## Guide Dog User Consumer Groups

### **Guide Dog Users of Massachusetts**

Baystate Council of the Blind

[www.acb.org/baystate](http://www.acb.org/baystate)

### **Massachusetts Association of Guide Dog Users/NFB**

[www.nfbma.org](http://www.nfbma.org)

\*This list is not inclusive. Additional resources include Independent Living Centers, Senior Centers, etc. You can also visit for additional resources: **Massachusetts Resource Directory of Agencies**, Perkins School for the Blind 617-972-7240

<http://www.perkins.org/resources/scout/ma-resource-directory/>

## Print Alternative Resources

### **National Braille Press**

Low-cost Braille books & magazines  
Boston, MA  
[www.nbp.org](http://www.nbp.org)  
800-548-7323

### **Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic**

Cambridge, MA  
[www.rfbd.org](http://www.rfbd.org)  
617-577-1111

### **WGBH Media Access Group**

Boston, MA  
[www.access.wgbh.org](http://www.access.wgbh.org)  
617-300-3600 (V/TTY)

### **The Caption Center**

Descriptive Video Service® (DVS®)  
WGBH National Center for Accessible  
Media (NCAM)  
[access@wgbh.org](mailto:access@wgbh.org)  
617-300-3400  
TTY: 617-300-2489  
V/TTY: 617-300-3600

### **Talking Information Center (TIC)**

Radio Reading Service  
Marshfield, MA  
[www.ticnetwork.com](http://www.ticnetwork.com)  
800-696-9505

### **Braille & Talking Book Library**

Watertown, MA  
<http://www.perkins.org/community-programs/btbl/>  
800-852-3122

### **Talking Book Library**

Worcester, MA  
[www.worcpublib.org/talkingbook/](http://www.worcpublib.org/talkingbook/)  
508-799-1730

## Additional References, Guides, and Resources

### **The Lighthouse Inc.**

[www.lighthouse.org](http://www.lighthouse.org)

800-829-0500

Resources:

- “Effective Color Contrast”
- “Making Text Legible”
- “Sound & Sight: Understanding Age-Related Changes in Hearing & Vision”
- “Vision Impairment & Hearing Impairment: What You Should Know & What You Can Do”

### **American Foundation for the Blind**

[www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)

Resources: “Tips for Making Print More Readable”

### **Royal Institute for the Blind**

[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

Resources: Handout on clear print guidelines

### **National Institute on Aging**

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/>

Resource: “Making Your Website Senior Friendly” To order call 800-222-2225 or go to <http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/making-your-website-senior-friendly>

### **Hard of Hearing Advocates**

PO Box 1184, Upton, MA 01568

[www.hohadvocates.org](http://www.hohadvocates.org); email: [hoha@charter.net](mailto:hoha@charter.net)

508-529-6526

Resource: “Hard of Hearing Awareness Kit for Hospitals & Medical Facilities” (Kit costs \$3.50)

### **Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing**

[www.mass.gov/mcdhh](http://www.mass.gov/mcdhh)

800-882-1155 (voice); 800-530-7570 (TTY)

Resource:

- The Savvy Consumer’s Guide to Hearing Loss
- A Guide for People Who Become Deaf or Severely Hard of Hearing: A Late-Deafened Consumer’s Perspective

### **National Institute on Deafness & Other Communication Disorders**

[www.nidcd.nih.gov](http://www.nidcd.nih.gov)

Resources: Hearing, Balance, Smell, Taste, Voice Speech Language

Orientation & Mobility Department, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind 617-626-7581 [www.mass.gov/mcb](http://www.mass.gov/mcb) Shelter Guidelines 9/16



## **Emergency Preparedness and Visual Disabilities Resources**

### **American Council of the Blind**

[www.acb.org](http://www.acb.org)

800-424-8666

*Emergency Preparedness and People who are Blind and Visually Impaired* Booklet

### **Hadley School for the Blind**

[www.hadley-school.org](http://www.hadley-school.org)

800-323-4238

Distance Course: *Safety in the Home*, Course addresses basic emergency and disaster planning, how to prepare for fire and weather-related emergencies. Course E-IL-921. 7 lessons.

### **June Isaacson Kailes, Disability Policy Consultant**

<http://www.jik.com/disaster.html>

*Emergency Evacuation: Taking Responsibility for Your Safety: A Guide for People with Disabilities and Other Activity Limitations.*, available on Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic (800-221-4792 GV 5200) or at JIK website.

### **Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Emergency Preparedness Network**

[www.tdi-online.org](http://www.tdi-online.org)

301-589-3786 (voice); 301-589-3006 (TTY)

*Emergency Responders and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community: Taking the First Steps to Disaster Preparedness.* version 1.0d: 2006 CEPIN Project "Are You Ready" Fact sheets

### **Center for Development and Disability**

<http://cdd.unm.edu/DHPD/index.asp>

*Tips for First Responders:* Laminated filed guide on information on how to assist persons with disabilities. Can be ordered at:

<http://cdd.unm.edu/DHPD/tipsEnglish.asp>

## **Emergency Preparedness Disability Related Sites**

### **Disability Resources**

[www.disability.gov](http://www.disability.gov)

### **National Council on Disability**

[www.ncd.gov](http://www.ncd.gov)

### **National Organization on Disability**

[www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)

### **Inclusive Preparedness Center**

<http://inclusivepreparedness.org/>

### **Disability Policy Consortium: *Personal Emergency Preparedness Plan***

[www.dpcma.org](http://www.dpcma.org) Boston MA 866-745-0917

### **Center for Development and Disability: *Tips for First Responders***

<http://cdd.unm.edu/products/tipsforfirstresponders.htm>

## **Pet Safety Emergency Preparedness Disability Related Sites**

### **Red Cross Pet Preparedness**

<http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family/pets>

### **Humane Society**

[www.humanesociety.org](http://www.humanesociety.org)