

ACCESSIBLE CLIMATE RESILIENCE · DISASTER RISK COMMUNICATION

Deaf Climate Resilience

Understanding risk requires both access and clarity

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World Federation of the Deaf · 2026

THE CENTRAL MESSAGE

Access is safety.

Information can be available and still not be accessible. Deaf people need to receive, understand, trust, and act on information at the same time as everyone else.

Why this matters

Climate events are increasing — extreme heat, wildfire smoke, flooding, power outages, poor air quality

Information is often confusing — technical, inconsistent, and not built for Deaf communities

Language shapes decisions — what we understand shapes whether and how we act

The biggest barrier is not Deafness. It is a system that was not designed with Deaf people in mind.

OBJECTIVE 1 · THE BARRIERS — AND THE LESSON

FAST · CLEAR · READY



FAST

*Information moves fast —
access comes late.*

- Delayed captions, missing ASL
- Interpreter too small; alert lacks context



CLEAR

*Technical language isn't always
signed.*

- warning · advisory · mitigation · cooling center
- If it isn't understood, people can't act



READY

*Build the system before the
disaster.*

- Point person, contracts, Deaf partners
- Access is infrastructure — not an add-on

Listening to the community

San Francisco Deaf Community Focus Group — in partnership with the SF Department of Emergency Management and the Office on Disability and Accessibility.

WHAT WORKED

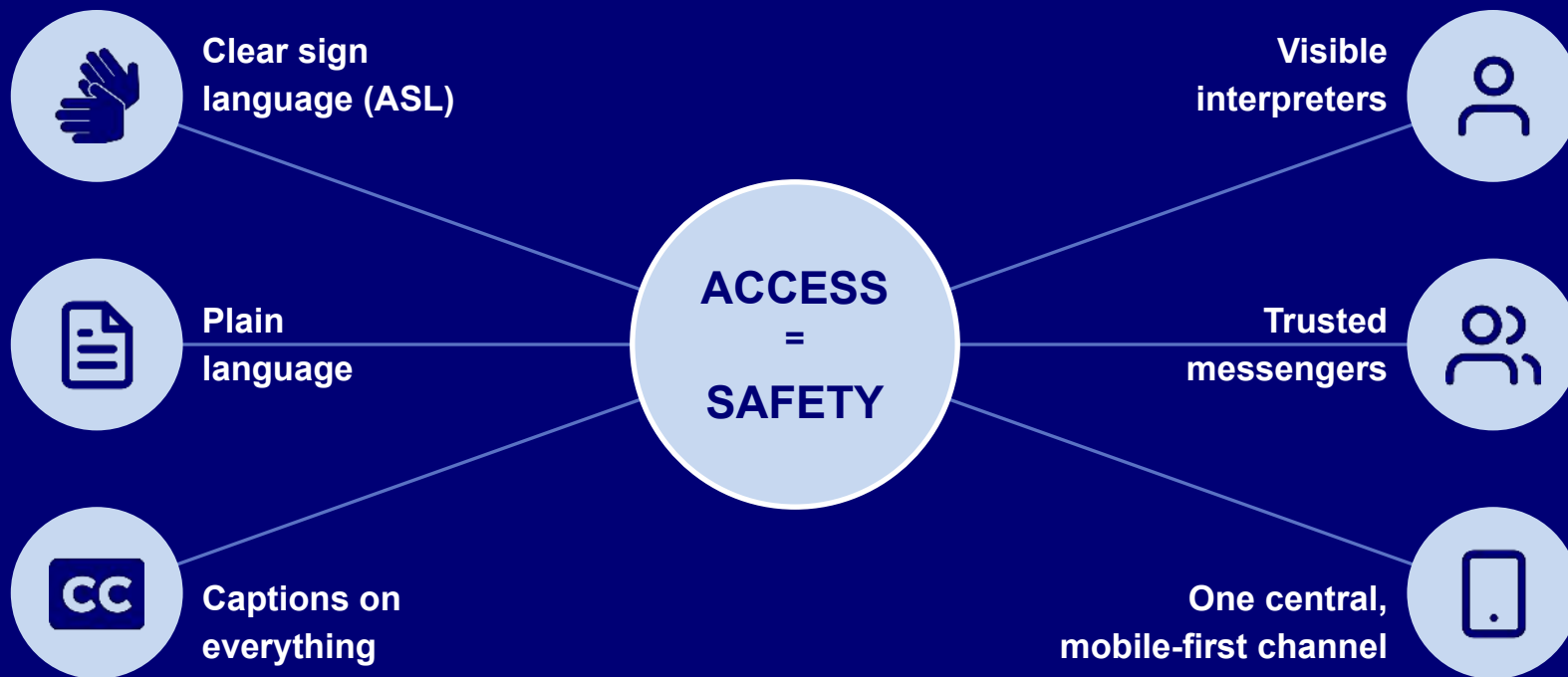
- AlertSF notifications
- ReadySF preparedness resources
- Social media updates
- Hazard maps and checklists

WHAT FELL SHORT

- Information too text-heavy
- Limited ASL integration
- Captioning barriers
- Alerts lack context and next steps

Strong opposition to AI-generated ASL as a standalone solution but can be seen as a tool — the community wants human-created ASL by Deaf presenters and fluent interpreters.

What accessible communication looks like



What the research shows

Statewide study of California's Offices of Emergency Services — how ready are they to communicate with Deaf and disabled communities?

34.5%

of offices recognize that
media events (press
conferences, PSAs) need
ASL interpretation

20%

reached out to Deaf or
hard-of-hearing organizations

Urban ► Rural

a persistent divide in ASL
contracts and captioned /
picture-in-picture readiness

Source: Engelman et al. (2025), California State University, East Bay · Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management

The real question

Not “**Do we have an interpreter?**”

But “**Is the system ready to deliver effective, culturally competent communication under pressure?**”

Accessibility cannot be a last-minute accommodation. Readiness means, before the emergency:

- A named point person
- Contracts with ASL interpreting agencies
- Trained staff and decision-makers
- Deaf community partners
- Captioning plans and qualified Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hearing interpreters
- ASL-ready materials on the shelf

Prevention, preparedness, resilience

Accessible emergency communication is not only about responding after a disaster.

Prevention — climate solutions that cut greenhouse gas emissions lessen the severity of extreme weather over time

Preparedness — accessible information helps Deaf communities respond safely to the impacts already here

Resilience — trusted spaces and trusted messengers, built before emergencies happen

Access is not separate from climate resilience. Access is what makes resilience possible.

San Francisco's Climate Action Plan

The City's roadmap to net-zero emissions by 2040 — cut emissions and prepare for the impacts already here.

WHERE EMISSIONS COME FROM

Transportation & Land Use



Building Operations



Other sectors



SEVEN SECTORS OF THE PLAN

- Energy Supply
- **Building Operations**
- **Transportation & Land Use**
- Housing
- Circular Economy
- Healthy Ecosystems
- Water Supply

Two sectors drive about 90% of the city's emissions.

Regenerative food & soil systems

Circular Economy — one of the Plan's seven sectors. One everyday system, directly connected to climate.

IN A LANDFILL



Organic waste



Methane + CO₂



Warming climate

COMPOSTED · REGENERATIVE



Compost



Healthy living soil

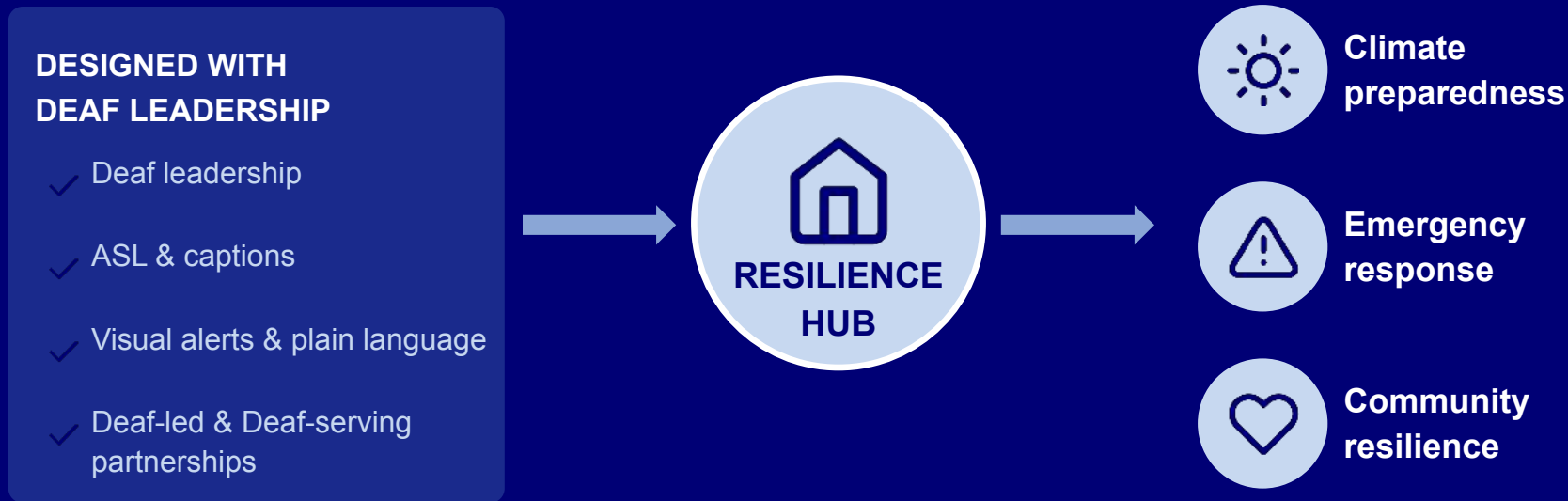


Carbon stored

*Living soil is a climate superpower — **it stores carbon, holds water, feeds microbes, and builds fertility.***

OBJECTIVE 3 · RESILIENCE HUBS & DEAF-LED PARTNERSHIPS

How hubs strengthen resilience



*An alert tells people what is happening. **A resilience hub helps people know what to do.***

Nothing about us without us

Deaf people are not only recipients of emergency information. We are experts, planners, messengers, and leaders.



Expertise — Deaf people know exactly where systems fail.



Trust — In emergencies, people act faster on messages from those they understand and trust.



Future — Plan with the whole community now — DeafBlind, Deaf Plus, Deaf people of color, immigrants, elders, youth, rural communities.

The people closest to the barriers are closest to the solutions. In public service I ask: who is not in the room? who will receive this too late?

From San Francisco to the world

A local case study with lessons that travel:

Design ASL access from the outset — not as an add-on after the message is written

Build readiness before the emergency — point person, partners, and materials on the shelf

Center Deaf leadership — the people closest to the barriers are closest to the solutions

These principles hold whether the hazard is heat, smoke, flood, or storm — and whether the community is in California or anywhere Deaf people live.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Understanding risk requires both access and clarity.

Deaf people should not have to wait, guess, or depend on others to interpret emergency information during disasters or share everyday climate action. We need accessible communication, trusted community spaces, and Deaf leadership built into disaster risk reduction before emergencies happen.

Thank You

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