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Emergency Management Equity Working Group Meeting

Meeting Kick-off: Monday, July 22, 2024 1:00PM

8 members attended in person or sent a proxy. The members in attendance include: Donna Pletch (VDEM Region 1), Karen Brimm (VDDHH), Jamie Liban (VBPD), Steven Nelson (Member at Large), Jeremy Bennett (VACO), Lauren Roche (DARS), Megan Hall (VDEM VEST). Members who attended virtually were: Kate Archie (VDSS), Christine Faltz Grassman (National Federation of the Blind, Fairfax Chapter). Rebecca Heins attended in-person as a proxy for Kimberly Ligon (VDEM). Non-member attendees were: Dillon Taylor, proxy for EMEWG Chair Shawn Talmadge, Katie Carter (VDEM), Olajumoke Akinrimisi (VDEM), Jacob Hughes (VDEM), and Anna Mahan.

Brief opening remarks were made by VDEM Chief of Staff Dillon Taylor, proxy for EMEWG Chair Shawn Talmadge.

Discussion on adopting the charter:

Member Lauren Roche moved to adopt the charter, with Donna Pletch seconding the motion. The ayes won, with zero opposed. The EMEWG Charter was adopted.

Discussion regarding the remote policy:

FOIA council adopted changes to open meetings, giving an allowance for individuals with disabilities or those who are caregivers to count toward quorum if they attend the meeting virtually. Changes were also made to require cameras to be on during voting and important discussions, should attendees be joining virtually.

Lauren Roche, Statewide Independent Living Council, gave context to the on-camera abilities and breaks, saying that being off-camera is allowed for breaks but you need to be on camera during voting.

Donna Pletch, VDEM Region 1, brings up concern regarding low bandwidth during meetings being a barrier for some.

Discussion was had about exceptions.

Karen Brimm, VDDHH, brings up concern regarding getting a replacement for meeting who might not have ability to use audio and video equipment due to a disability, which limits their ability to be included.

Jeremy Bennett, Virginia Association of Counties (VACO): language comes from FOIA council, so he is OK with including the language as written.

Christine Grassman, National Federation of the Blind, Fairfax Chapter: Audio & visual requirement issue is marginalizing people who aren't comfortable being on camera. There should be an alternative texting option.

Lauren Roche: "all of those requirements are part of FOIA act – they have been legislated"

Donna Pletch: "we have to follow rules, but we can voice our opinion"

Lauren Roche: "this helps a lot get to quorum but it's not perfect". She will bring up in CIL.

Jeremy Bennet moves to accept remote policy with changes reflecting FOIA Council's new passed legislation around open meetings.

Donna seconds.

Ayes win, the remote participation policy with amendments will pass.

Jamie Liban (Virginia Board for People with Disabilities) gives a presentation highlighting overarching themes of the Virginia Board of People with Disabilities' assessment of VDEM, which is set to come out next month.

Discussion was had following her presentation regarding the presentation itself and strategic goals and objectives of the group:

Proposed Goals and Objectives for the 2024 Cycle of the Emergency Management Equity Working Group

- Collaborate with other groups within the inclusive emergency management sphere (e.g., FEMA ODIC, AFNAC, DEI Council, ADA Coordination, Centers for Independent Living, and other states) and advise leadership on emerging trends

- One group presents ~15-minutes at each meeting

- Produce one report or memo each cycle on an inclusive emergency management theme chosen by both the members and the state coordinator as Chair. Examples include:
  - Guidance on ensuring that the Whole Community approach to planning is inclusive
  - Suggestions to enhance grant awarding practices
  - The importance and role of an Access and Functional Needs Coordinator
  - Best practices on outreach to communities with varying needs

Donna Pletch: "thank you for requesting the Shelter Upgrade Fund be changed. Taking code that is funding and make sure it's not just available for power, but to make sure the money can be used to make shelters accessible. Localities do not have money to do upgrades."

Karen Brimm: "connected to shelter upgrade fund – evolve use of funds (to include more than just generators). Not so narrowed in focus. On local EM level, at VEMS (Virginia Emergency Management Symposium) conference – common theme is localities want people dedicated to this type of work, but not only do they not have funds, they don't have staff to get funds. We need to advocate for general assembly funding so that they can support emergency management."

Steve Nelson: "where is the crossover to just underserved communities, or is this just people with disabilities?"

Karen Brimm: AFN as a term under FEMA includes people with difficulty getting transportation, economically disadvantaged, very young, very old, ESL, etc. It's the intersectionality of why they have a lack of transportation. EMEWG was established to be protective of concerns of underserved communities, and they are more likely to be AFN folks. Helping these folks helps the whole community, "A rising tide lifts all boats." Inclusive planning is the foundation to all things.

Dillon Taylor: thanked Jamie for presentation, thanked Karen Brimm for what she did during COVID as the Access and Functional Needs Coordinator for the VEST. "We take this very seriously. AFN Specialist position is currently posted, Access and Engagement Manager is also listed, it is under the planning division. This will lead a team of 2 in the enterprise-wide planning piece. What this team has done will provide a roadmap to the Access and Engagement Team." Dillon's recommendation is to work with Nathan to start with the data slides to humanize these numbers that reflect disproportionate impacts on the AFN community.

Steven Nelson: Recommends developing a terminology guide to help locals.

Jeremy Bennett: "are these strategic goals feasible to complete in between each meeting?"

Jamie Liban: new VDEM position would play an important role in helping facilitate this work.

Donna Pletch: this would be members of the committee executing this work. There are certain rules and regulations to collaborate. No collaboration could happen on a shared document

Steven: feedback is a burden that prohibits the dialogue going and whatever we take on is limited in scope

Lauren Roche: the FOIA piece is applicable to an advisory group, sub-committee, any meeting that takes places. Even public agencies are subject. FOIA guidelines allow an electronic meeting in between each in-person meting. Additional meetings can be set up, but must be shared and open to the public.

Jeremy Bennett VACO: staffing capacity for VDEM we all have our own obligations, every other work group that I've been on, I take direction from committees or board members to work in between meetings. If this is manageable to work on reports with assistance, guidance, or direction. VDEM will be ones doing the work with guidance and assistance.

Donna: suggests longer meetings to get more accomplished

Steven Nelson suggests adding an hour to quarterly meetings. Would like to see the group produce a terminology guide to help localities.

Jeremy Bennet moves to adopt the 2024 goals and objectives.

Steven Nelson seconded.

Ayes have it, no one opposed. 2024 goals and objectives passed.

Discussion of topics for vote:

Steven suggested producing guidance/best practices for localities

Jeremy Bennett seconds the local perspective – guidance, where funding can come from, etc. and then as VDEM staff comes on board, their job is to provide available funding, best practices to apply, etc.

Donna: "I feel it's important to have shelter upgrade fund in the discussion. They can't apply if they don't know what they need to do."

Lauren Roche agrees. "Basic resources for grant writing might be all that some people need."

Donna: "some of this exists, we can just pull it together so they know what they should be trying to do, pick top 3, what can you achieve, etc."

Jeremy: once we have memo or report, it's easily distributed not only to emergency managers, but to county administrators, city councils, etc. There are people in this room aware of what's available.

Megan Hall: "one thing that's important is a holistic guidance for localities. Can we pull pieces for strategic planning of leadership position, as a commonwealth, this is where we are trying to lead towards, here is how the system is trying to work, that gives them tools & resources. That's an important piece to add to connect the dots. "

Karen: "it's possible that once we look at what Jamie puts in the report to pull nuggets for a short road forward. 'This is why this is important, we think this should be important to you as well. This is why we have taken the time to put it together.'"

Steven: "All for not reinventing the wheel if we can't help it. Recommended including language or descriptors."

Lauren: there are some great resources around language – Walter Cronkite School of Journalism is a great resource for appropriate terminology. Language is always changing and how people identify is always changing. It's important to keep language open. The best advice is to learn your audience.

Donna Pletch mentions that we typically use FEMA language.

Jamie: Guidance is number one, making sure everybody has the same sheet of music. Having said that, ensuring that the communities that are directly affected and are at the table, are able to review that guidance. The state has a critical opportunity to set the tone of efforts going forward. We have to ensure we have the folks at the table of the people directly affected.

Jeremy mentions that through the drafting and revision, we will have opportunities to take the draft to respective groups.

Karen: something to keep in mind, I came across documents that were out of date during COVID. If we do create something, have a mechanism to add updates so that it doesn't get sent out and forgotten.

Steven Nelson again emphasizes need for glossary of definitions.

Donna mentions that the AFNAC (Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committee) has definitions, and we should lean on them for definitions.

Donna Pletch moves to vote on the topic of writing general guidance to localities to help them with grant writing, etc.

Jeremy Bennett seconds.

Ayes have it, zero opposed. The group has voted on writing guidance for localities for the next two meetings.

Nathan Simpson, VDEM's contracted webmaster presented an update on the Ready Virginian tool The following is discussion had following the presentation:

Steven Nelson: "Can you define your target audience?"

Nathan: "Individual who comes on their own. Other sector of users would be referred by a user."

Jeremy Bennett: "this is great. When they're taking the assessment, two questions. Individual responses, that will give them a customized plan?" Yes. "2) FOIA – the data collected by the state produces an assessment – is that FOIA exempt?"

Lauren Roche: "this does look great. Thanks for showing it. I'm wondering if, would you be able to do the same thing with the zip code + 4?"

Nathan: It comes down to quality of available data sets.

Jamie: knowing where your local nearby accessible shelter is – in my review of localities, particularly when there was a tropical storm warning, information was hard to come by. Ability to locate my local shelter, and confirming if that shelter is accessible is very valuable for disability community. Accessible cooling shelters and centers are also available. There's very little information and 211 integration is pretty poor. How do we work together to make sure that the commonwealth ensures that people do have access to accessible shelters?

Donna: can we get around data issue by not asking specific information? I look at this as a blue-sky information. Not disaster-related information. This should remain static and the dynamic information come from another source.

Jeremy would like to see the tool link to local sites and local alerts.

Jamie: "for personal preparedness, knowing where my accessible shelter is is #1."

Jacob Hughes suggests trying to navigate asking questions "do you want information about" to get around asking specific information about disabilities. Brings up concern regarding listing shelters, because not all shelters open at the same time or are accessible, and we don't want people turned away.

Donna would like to see routing to local websites

Rebecca Heins: "people are going to use this in an emergency. So it is static, but linking to local information."

Jacob Hughes suggests linking up with 211.

Jeremy Bennett: when we are putting together best practices for localities: make sure we have a list of UPDATED shelters, ADA compliance, etc.

Anna Mahon SERCAP: under utilities and service providers – will water and wastewater be linked?

+Nathan: all have signup lists with priority restoration for power. How quickly can we validate data

Karen Brimm: "someone is coming to get info during an emergency" she suggests having a square to the side saying "if you are experiencing an emergency currently, please call 911 or 211".

The Word RESOURCES is nebulous. Is it tangible? Is it going to connect me with someone or give me something. She suggests using "Information".

Phrasing the questions to make it less PII: Do you or anyone in your household have a mobility disability?

What language do you speak is first? Espanol, Francais, etc.

To get to Limited English Proficiency – already trying to address LEP by using plain language to begin with.

Screen reader, keyboard navigation friendly, 508 Compliant – contact DBVI

Transportation: do you have access to personal transportation?

Lauren Roche:

Get away from people disclosing health information

Megan Hall: transportation issues – do we have a resource? Refer back to localities. They should be taking into account needs of citizens – make link back to localities. "If you need more information about transportation, contact ##"

Jamie Liban: Suggests integrating transportation plan with Hampton Roads into this. As much as you can prepare and collect ahead of time. Providing people with rights, services, or accommodations they are entitled to.

Donna Pletch: Hampton Roads Transportation Plan is 400 pages. It's an operational plan based on blue sky. They need to listen to locals and stay out of their way and provide guidance to their citizens.

Rebecca Heins: is there a way to integrate social media posts? **Nathan**: we wouldn't embed feeds but could link to

Lauren Roche: Navigation is the first thing that will burn people with disabilities out. Is there a way to get 211 info? It's where almost all of the coordination is. Getting 211 to understand that these resources are here and routing people here. If we become so well-versed, it's hard for offshoots.

Donna Pletch suggests getting 211 to do a presentation at a future meeting so we know their capabilities.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:34pm.