Best Practices and Resource Consideration for Individuals who have Access and/or Functional Needs Returning to Work & School During the COVID-19 Response

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Compiled by:

The South Eastern Pennsylvania Regional Task Force Access & Functional Needs Subcommittee

Introduction:

This document has been compiled by the South Eastern Pennsylvania Regional Task Force Access & Functional Needs Subcommittee to use as a reference during the COVID-19 response, reopening phase.

These considerations, best practices, and resources are meant to serve as a reference only, and the Subcommittee defers to the Pennsylvania Department of Health, CDC, and local Health Department guidance in all matters.

This document has been compiled using input and expertise from the Subcommittee members who participate in this group regularly. These members come from a diverse background of the government, non-government, and education sectors who advocate for and serve the Whole Community every day and who are considered experts in their fields.

For more information about the Southeastern Pennsylvania Regional Task Force please visit https://www.montcopa.org/3337/Southeastern-Pennsylvania-Regional-Task- .

Respectfully,

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Accessible Messaging & Communication:

Public Messaging and Communications to and from your agency should always be accessible, however during a Pandemic it is especially important that your messaging be clear and obtainable. By assuring that your communications are accessible the expectations and guidance for returning to work and school will be clear and more likely to be followed. Considerations for accessible messaging include but are not limited to the below:

- o Language considerations for messaging and screening processes.
- o The need to see facial expressions during screening processes for message inflection for individuals who are deaf or who are neurologically diverse.
- o The use of accessible icons or story boards.
- o Use of interpreters (Certified, when possible.)

The SEPA Regional Task Force has compiled the below resources pertaining to the above identified considerations as well as the below best practices for possible inclusion into agency or entity plans:

❖ **Best Practices:**

1) Work with your area's Intermediate Unit or Health department to determine which languages are most prevalent in your community and take steps to provide messaging in those languages wherever possible.

2) Include the option for facial coverings that have a clear window or face shields for educators or individuals involved in messaging or communications, as well as for individuals who regularly interact with individuals who are deaf or who are neurologically diverse.

3) Accessible icons or Story Boards are a good way to assure that individuals who are unable to read are still receiving information.

4) When working with Interpreters, assure that they are aware in advance of any screening or additional COVID-19 policies that your agency has in place if providing onsite services. In some cases, Interpreters may also ask that your agency provide a mask or PPE to their Interpreters as priority is not given for PPE supply purchasing to these agencies.

❖ **Resources & Links pertaining to Accessible Communications**

Visual Stories & Story Boards
https://hospitals.jefferson.edu/departments-and-services/center-for-autism-and-neurodiversity/resources.html.html

https://paautism.org/resource/coronavirus-resources/

Clear Mask Use:
https://www.myodp.org/mod/book/view.php?id=25106&chapterid=184

Communicating with Children:
https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Talking-With-Children-Tips-for-Caregivers-Parents-and-Teachers-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/PEP20-01-01-006

COVID-19 Resources (Multiple Languages)
https://www.colorincolorado.org/coronavirus-resources-schools

https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Translated.aspx

https://covid19healthliteracyproject.com/#languages

Link to WHO ASL Video
https://youtu.be/jdxm7zKW4HI

Link to DHCC ASL Video on COVID-19
https://dhcc.org/covid-19-coronavirus/

Accessible Communication Best Practices & Resources from AFN Subcommittee Members:

From Jule Ann Lieberman, Temple University

If an image can have an alt. text added recommendations are as follows:

The title of an alt. text is typically ignored by a screen reader, enter descriptive text into the description edit box.

Information that is provided should be relevant to the message you wish to convey; you don't have to describe everything if it has little meaning to the image.

What is important about this image? Is it important to name individuals in the photo or would a general description suffice to express the message intent. I usually say when asked this question; what would you say to someone to describe this over the telephone? Some social media will attempt to add a description alt. text, however remember this may have little context for which the description is derived, best alternative is to provide an alt. text yourself if possible.

From Lauren Alden, Liberty Resources
https://usability.yale.edu/web-accessibility/articles/social-media

https://rootedinrights.org/how-to-make-your-virtual-meetings-and-events-accessible-to-the-disability-community/?fbclid=IwAR3hG1Ci5FHIhjZLrtuNaGFVecZSEfV-DGvtO31gA2cOfT5W69eZi4Uuc3g

From Caitlin McKenney, Temple
Image Accessibility in Social Media
Alt Text and Photo Captions
When posting images to social media, it is appropriate to also include a written description. This makes the content accessible to your followers with visual impairments. It also provides a placeholder for content that is slow to load.

One form of description is called alt text. This feature is specifically used by screen reading software. Below are instructions for adding alt text on popular social media sites.

- Twitter: twitter help center
- Facebook: facebook help center
- Instagram: instagram help center

Tips for writing alt text and image descriptions can be found on the Perkins eLearning website. In many instances you will want to use both the formal alt text feature – which is hidden to anyone who is not using a screen reader – and also include an image description within the body of your text.

General Tips
Perkins' guide to texting etiquette is also very applicable to social media. For instance, avoid excessive punctuation marks or over-using emojis. No one wants to listen to the screen reader say "smiling face with heart-shaped eyes" five times in a row.

Some other points to keep in mind:

- Use capitalization to clarify multi-word hashtags: #EasierToRead instead of #easiertoread
- Be mindful of color contrast, especially on infographics. Are the different fields distinct enough for someone who is color-blind to understand the content?
- Try to find verify the accessibility of content you share from other pages. Add an image description as a comment if one is not already present.

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Mask Wearing Considerations:

Mask wearing considerations specific to individuals who have access and/or functional needs include but are not limited to the below considerations:

o   The need to see facial expressions for message inflection for individuals who are deaf or who are neurologically diverse.
o   The inability to tolerate mask wear due to age, sensitivity, or behavioral health needs.
o   The inability to wear a mask due to physical or medical conditions or devices.
o   A physical inability to cover the mouth or nose due to lack of muscle control or other physical disabilities.
o   Face Shield use in place of Mask wear.

The SEPA Regional Task Force has compiled the below resources pertaining to the above identified considerations as well as the below best practices for possible inclusion into agency or entity plans:

1)   Providing clear education and messaging within your agency that there are individuals who may need assistance to cover their nose and mouth and individuals who are unable to wear a mask due to physical, emotional, or medical considerations. Provide them with general guidance on what the agency expectation is to address and accommodate these individuals to greatly decrease negative experiences that can arise from interactions with these individuals.

2)   Assuring that clear expectations and resources for mask wearing and other types of mouth/nose coverings goes out to returning students, individuals, and workforce members well in advance of re-openings is essential to identifying possible barriers to mask wearing as well as identifying potential accommodations. Identifying the types of masks/coverings and providing success stories of other individuals in your agency will go a long way in assisting others to work through barriers. (**See resources below.)**

3)   Include the option for facial coverings that have a clear window for educators or individuals involved in messaging or communications, as well as for individuals who regularly interact with individuals who are deaf or

who are neurologically diverse. In this case a face shield can take the place of a mask, per PA DOH & CDC guidance.

4) Mask wear for children under the age of 2 is not currently indicated **(See guidance below).** Additionally, individuals who are unable to wear masks due to sensitivity, behavioral health needs, medical conditions, or medical devices should be considered in plans for reopening. Accommodations for individuals who are unable to wear masks should be on a case by case basis in coordination with medical and care providers involved with the individual's care. Accommodations should be focused on enhanced social distancing and PPE considerations for individuals who are able to tolerate mask wearing and who will be working or learning with these individuals.

5) Inclusion of considerations for individuals who have an inability to wear or apply a mask due to physical differences or deformity should be considered in plans for reopening. Accommodations should be on a case by case basis and should focus on aiding individuals who may need help covering their nose and mouth and using alternatives to masks such as neck gaiters or other cloth coverings.

❖ **Resources & Links pertaining to Mask Wearing Considerations:**

Clear Mask Use:
https://www.myodp.org/mod/book/view.php?id=25106&chapterid=184

   o Masks are not recommended for Children under age 2 (Pg. 3, OCDEL EI Reopening Document, 20200702 & Order of the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Health Requiring Universal Face Coverings)

Face Shield Use:
https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guidance/Universal-Masking-FAQ.aspx

Helping children wear masks: https://cgrc.org/wearingmasks/

Jefferson Center for Autism and Neurodiversity Resources on Mask Wearing:

https://hospitals.jefferson.edu/departments-and-services/center-for-autism-and-neurodiversity/resources.html.html

Adjusting to Wearing a Mask and Communication Tips:
https://paautism.org/resource/desensitization-mask-communication/

Screening Considerations:

Screening individuals to enter your agency's building or area for signs or symptoms of COVID-19 is currently recommended by most Health Departments and the CDC. Considerations specific to individuals who have access and/or functional needs include but are not limited to the below items:

o Language considerations for messaging and screening processes.
o The need to see facial expressions during screening processes for message inflection for individuals who are deaf or who are neurologically diverse.
o The inability to tolerate lines or waiting periods due to sensitivity or behavioral health needs.
o Fear of screening processes due to sensitivity or behavioral health needs.
o Challenges in mobility for individuals moving through screening areas.
o Accommodating individuals who are blind.
o Accommodating personal care assistants and other companions or professionals who assure independent living.
o Accommodating Service Animals during screening.

The SEPA Regional Task Force has compiled the below resources pertaining to the above identified considerations as well as the below best practices for possible inclusion into agency or entity plans:

❖ **Best Practices:**

1) Providing clear education and messaging within and from your agency in the languages most prevalent to the individuals that your agency serves is paramount to assure that screening moves quickly and cleanly. Ideally messaging will be written, spoken and follow accessible guidance with icons. (See resources below).

2) Include the option for facial coverings that have a clear window for individuals who are performing screening will assure that individuals who need to see facial expression to communicate and receive messaging effectively are accommodated.

3) Consideration for rapid screening options for individuals who cannot tolerate waiting in lines or need space to pace or move should also be included in planning. By having a process pre-identified these individuals will be better served and move through screening components more effectively.

4) Providing the individuals who will be preforming screening with basic training about the Whole Community and alerting them to the fact that some individuals may experience fear during the screening process will help stop issues before they arise.

5) Considerations for screening areas should assure that individuals who use tools for mobility such as wheelchairs, walkers, and canes can move easily through the screening process. This can be easily done by managing electrical cords, unnecessary furniture, and clearly marking any uneven surfaces. Additionally, keeping to a width of 36inches of clearance between spaces will allow for most mobility devices to pass unhindered. Assure that if there is a waiting area for screening, a place for individuals to sit is provided and included in the regular sanitization process.

6) Consideration for individuals who are blind should be given when creating the screening area by managing electrical cords and removing unnecessary furniture. As some individuals who are blind will use walls and other hard surfaces to navigate. Walls and hard surfaces should be included in regular sanitizing efforts.

7) Steps to assure that individuals who are accommodated by personal care assistants or other individuals who provide direct assistance are not separated during the screening process should always be taken. This

should be included in the education process for screening staff and screening should be adjusted as needed to assure that these individuals are accommodated together while maintaining safe social distancing.

8) Service animals should be admitted with individuals through the screening process in the same manner as they typically have been accommodated by your agency in the past. Currently there are no specific requirements for screening of service animals for COVID-19.

9) Adding all trigger switches for doors to the list of regularly touched items for sanitizing will assure that they are not accidentally missed during cleaning.

❖ **Resources & Links pertaining to Screening Considerations:**

Training on Access and Functional Need Awareness:
https://www.train.org/main/admin/course/1083869/?activeTab=reviews

https://www.train.org/pa/course/1091289/

Clear Mask Use:
https://www.myodp.org/mod/book/view.php?id=25106&chapterid=184

Guidance for Service Animals:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/animals/service-therapy-animals.html

Guidance for Calming Techniques & Anxiety
https://dbhids.org/news/coronavirus-mental-health-philadelphia-launches-mindful-together-as-pandemic-has-spiked-stress-anxiety/

Guidance from Jefferson Center of Autism and Neurodiversity about Screening:

https://dbhids.org/news/coronavirus-mental-health-philadelphia-launches-mindful-together-as-pandemic-has-spiked-stress-anxiety/

Social Distancing Considerations:

Considerations specific to individuals who have access and/or functionals needs include but are not limited to the below items when ensuring appropriate Social Distancing techniques:

- Limited mobility due to use of assistive devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, and canes.
- Consider locations and distances of pre-installed safety mounts for wheelchairs.
- Proximity of personal care assistants and others who may provide direct assistance to individuals.
- Considerations for individuals who are unable to follow direct instructions to socially distance.

The SEPA Regional Task Force has compiled the below resources pertaining to the above identified considerations as well as the below best practices for possible inclusion into agency or entity plans:

❖ **Best Practices:**

1) Assure that areas are clear of obstructions that may hinder individuals who have limited mobility to appropriately social distance by managing wires and other obstacles such as furniture.

2) Consider identifying specific times for individuals who use mobility devices to move through common areas that are separate from individuals who do not so that they have more room to maneuver and social distance can be maintained.

3) Consider leaving doors that are not accessible open to limit barriers for individuals who use mobility devices.

4) Assure that pre-installed safety mounts allow for safe social distancing and consider using only mounts that allow for safe social distancing.

❖ **Resources & Links pertaining to Social Distancing:**

Guidance from Jefferson Center of Autism and Neurodiversity about Social Distancing:
https://hospitals.jefferson.edu/content/dam/health/PDFs/departments/autism/SocialDistancingBooklet.pdf

Barrier Use Considerations & Access to Hand Sanitizer, Soap, and Water:

Considerations specific to individuals who have access and/or functional needs include but are not limited to the below items when considering barrier use and access to hand sanitizer and soap and water:

- Assuring that Plexiglas barriers, hand sanitizer, soap, and paper towels are easily accessible from a seated position for individuals who use a wheelchair.
- Clearly marking Plexiglas or other clear barriers for individuals who have low vision.

The SEPA Regional Task Force has compiled the below resources pertaining to the above identified considerations as well as the below best practices for possible inclusion into agency or entity plans:

❖ **Best Practices:**

1) Assure that barrier considerations include placing at least 1 barrier for use in a seated position for individuals who use wheelchairs.

2) Clearly marking Plexiglas or other clear barriers for individuals who have low vision using a high visibility or reflective outline will assure that individuals are more likely to note that a barrier exists.

❖ **Resources & Links pertaining to Barriers**

OSHA COVID-19 Device Use
https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/

ADA information from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws

❖ **General COVID-19 Resources Compiled by the SEPA RT AFN Subcommittee Attached.**