Whole Community Planning: Incorporating Community Events Into Emergency Operations Plans and Coordinating With Partners

READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

Schools and institutions of higher education (IHEs) are an integral part of their communities; when a community experiences a major emergency event or incident, schools and IHEs in that community are also affected. Comprehensive emergency operations plans (EOPs) should, therefore, consider all threats and hazards that may occur within the building, occur within the community and could also impact the school/campus community, and impact an entire locality or region. K-12 schools (public, nonpublic, charter, etc.) and IHEs (2-year, 4-year, etc.) can create such an EOP by following the six-step planning process outlined in the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans*, *The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans*, and the *Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education*. These EOPs should be developed collaboratively with and coordinated with EOPs of community partners.

This fact sheet is intended for K-12 and higher ed planning and response teams to use to enhance their collaboration and coordination with community partners. It provides strategies for engaging in whole community planning and includes a local case study illustrating an incident within the community that impacted education agencies and lessons learned.

Strategies for Engaging in Whole Community Planning

The following actions will help education agencies to develop community partnerships and integrate their expertise and plans into the EOP:

- Invite community partners to serve on the planning team;
- Establish common terminology and implement the National Incident Management System (NIMS);
- Identify threats and hazards from the community;
- Develop memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with community partners; and
- Practice the plan together with community partners.

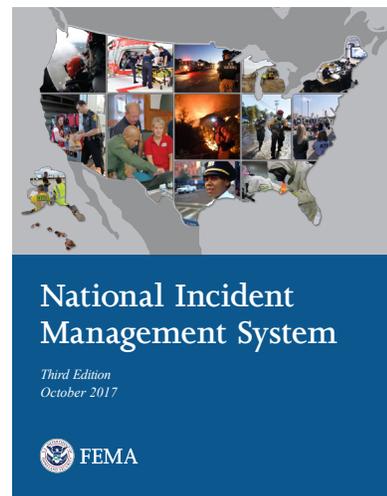## Invite Community Partners to Serve on the Planning Team

A high-quality EOP is supported by a collaborative process that includes multiple perspectives. The planning team, which is formed in Step 1, should include representation from various stakeholder groups in the community that may be involved before, during, or after an emergency. Planning team members should represent different stakeholder groups, such as local community partners with a responsibility in school/higher ed emergency management and with information on the community; these partners include local emergency management staff, emergency medical services personnel, fire officials, local public health practitioners, law enforcement officers, and community mental/behavioral health practitioners. Additional partners with a role in school/higher ed emergency management may also be members of the planning team; these include policymakers and local elected officials, business partners, community-based religious organizations, district and state attorneys general, disaster organizations, community-based youth organizations, local social services departments, the media, and Federal emergency management and homeland security officials.

> *The input and participation of community partners are critical throughout the six-step planning process and will help elevate the quality of the EOP, as well as help coordinate and integrate the EOP with local, regional, state, tribal, and Federal agency EOPs.*

Community partners should serve on core planning teams at all levels: school building, school district, and IHE. In addition, they may be invited to participate on the ad hoc planning team to contribute their expertise or resources, develop courses of action, or review certain components of the plan.

Establish Common Terminology and Implement NIMS

After the core planning team has been formed, the team members should form a common framework, or a shared approach to facilitate mutual understanding, and take time to learn one another's vocabulary, command structure, and culture. Organizational differences may affect the expectations of different members of the planning team, so it is important to acknowledge these differences at the start. For example, schools and IHEs often operate according to an academic calendar and daily schedule that differ from a typical business or government calendar and daily schedule. Establishing a common understanding about different planning team members' availability and schedules will help to facilitate effective planning and collaboration. Team members will also be able to communicate more effectively with one another. One common framework that is particularly effective in the context of school and higher ed emergency management is NIMS, which was developed to ensure that all first responders from different jurisdictions and disciplines can communicate and effectively work together when responding to disasters and emergencies. Implementing NIMS and integrating it into the EOP will help the education agency coordinate its efforts with community partners before, during, and after an emergency. For example, you will understand how your education agency fits into the larger network of agencies in the case of a community-wide emergency and the chain of command that is used at the local, state, and Federal levels during response.

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PLEASE NOTE: The tools and resources identified in this document are not intended as endorsements and are merely offered as examples that you may consider in your own planning efforts.

Identify Threats and Hazards From the Community

During Step 2, the planning team should consider its proximity to potential vulnerabilities that are within the community and also put the community at risk, such as interstate highways and major roads, industrial areas, transportation hubs (e.g., airport, port, bus station), petroleum gas pipelines, railroad tracks, business districts, major natural gas lines, and water sources. This information may alert the planning team to a range of hazards and threats that could potentially occur within the community and impact the campus: hazardous materials releases from major highways or railroads, dam failure, explosions at or accidental release of toxins from industrial plants, violence, radiological releases from nuclear power stations, and criminal threats or actions.

This sort of data may be collected in the site assessment, which examines the safety, security, emergency preparedness, and accessibility of education agency buildings and grounds and which should be conducted on at least an annual basis. Site assessments can help schools and IHEs understand their vulnerabilities. For example: Is there a bank at or near the campus? Is a large amount of money stored on campus for other purposes, such as athletic events or meal services? What material items does the education agency own that robbers may be drawn to, such as computers, televisions, and audiovisual equipment? Schools and IHEs need to consider their surroundings and cultivate relationships with area businesses or agencies in order to collaborate in the development of protocols, such as providing warning calls to area schools during an emergency that may impact the campus.
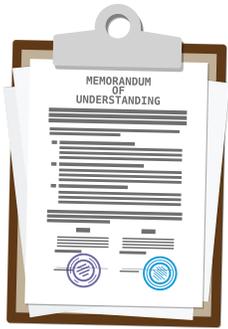
SITE ASSESS

The REMS TA Center's SITE ASSESS mobile application, a free site assessment tool, collects data on the surrounding area and neighborhood and is customized for K-12 and higher ed.

Although schools and IHEs cannot prevent community events from occurring, they can implement mitigation to lessen the overall impact of events on students, faculty, staff, and school and campus buildings and properties. For example, preventing an armed intruder from robbing a nearby bank is not the education agency's responsibility; a school or IHE can, however, mitigate access into and out of its campus to help deter the likelihood of an armed individual seeking shelter on its grounds, while also working to protect the school and campus community. These mitigation activities may be integrated into EOPs via threat- or hazard-specific annexes during Step 4, when planning teams develop or revise courses of action for before, during, and after an emergency event. It is equally important to develop functional annexes, as they could be activated in the case of a community-wide emergency. For example, the Communications and Warning or Notification Annex should address how the education agency's communications system integrates into the local disaster response communication network.

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Develop MOUs With Community Partners

Preparing for community events includes developing MOUs with community partners, such as nonprofit organizations (e.g., American Red Cross), government agencies (e.g., local office of public health), or neighboring education agencies. MOUs work to solidify a partnership while broadly describing how the entities will work together before, during, and after an emergency. They also support continuity with staff turnover and formalize roles, responsibilities, and protocols. While most commonly developed for recovery efforts, MOUs can fulfill any gap in safety, security, emergency management, or preparedness. Consider creating MOUs for the following purposes:

- **Information sharing** — disseminating alerts and notifications, internal communication, communication with external stakeholders, behavioral threat assessment data, site assessment data, etc.;

- **Counseling services** — providing trained counselors after a traumatic emergency event to support social/emotional recovery;

- **Vaccination/medication** — setting up and maintaining a vaccination clinic, distributing medication, etc.;

- **Evacuation** — securing an off-campus evacuation location, go-kits, and emergency supplies; transporting the school/campus community to the off-campus location;

- **Sheltering** — using the school/campus for a mass care community shelter, providing for the welfare of students at an off-campus location overnight, etc.; and

- **School resource officers or campus police** — providing officers, clarifying their role during emergency events, managing and training them, etc.

Schools and IHEs should not attempt to assume responsibilities for activities that are beyond their scope of control. When developing an MOU for the purpose of sheltering, consider the following:

- Recognize that shelter management should be the responsibility of local partners and experts;

- Determine whether or not pets will accepted to the shelter site(s);

- Include procedures and requirements for sheltering residents and their pets;

- Ensure interoperable communication among the various agencies staffing the shelter (e.g., American Red Cross, county human services agency, education agency, security personnel); and

- Obtain the supplies needed and that will be deployed in the event shelters are opened.

Practice the Plan Together With Community Partners

Emergency exercises provide opportunities to practice the plan as well as to identify gaps and weaknesses in the plan. To effectively execute an exercise (orientation, tabletop, drill, functional, or full-scale), include community partners and debrief together. Consider utilizing the experience of community partners by asking them to lead or co-lead an exercise. At the very least, invite community partners to participate in the exercise, as their expertise and perspective will be invaluable in coordinating efforts and capturing areas of improvement. Following the exercise, debrief and develop an after-action report that evaluates results, identifies gaps or shortfalls, and documents lessons learned.

School, school district, and IHE leaders should also consider inviting neighboring schools, school districts, and/or IHEs to participate in exercises and training opportunities. This can help ensure that their EOPs and preparedness efforts are coordinated, especially in the case of a community-wide emergency that they may be responding to together. For example, an IHE may serve as a large-scale vaccination site during a pandemic for the entire community, including administrators, teachers/faculty, staff, students, and families from the IHE and surrounding K-12 schools, school districts, and IHEs.

LOCAL CASE STUDY:
Chemical Fire in North Carolina

A fire and explosion at a hazardous waste facility in North Carolina began on a Thursday evening after school hours. School officials alerted families of eight schools that buses and schools in the affected area would not be operating the following day. Five schools, located in the area from which emergency officials evacuated residents, were shut down because of the chemical fire. Three additional schools were closed because they were utilized as emergency evacuation shelters for residents in the affected areas. The fire resulted in approximately 11,000 students missing one school day. Residents in the area were evacuated for 3 days, and schools continued to operate as shelters over the weekend until officials declared that residents could safely return home. Families and students were informed about the changes through the local education agency's (LEA) emergency alert system, which sent messages to all impacted households in a matter of minutes.

During the incident, the impacted LEA had an outdated agreement in place with local emergency management officials and shelter providers, but because of strong working relationships between school officials and emergency management officials, shelter protocols were established quickly. The LEA and local fire department subsequently revisited and updated all agreements to include a comprehensive MOU so that in the event of another incident roles and responsibilities would be clearly established. The new MOU included procedures and requirements for sheltering residents and their pets. The LEA also purchased five sets of digital two-way radios to be deployed solely in the event that shelters are opened in emergency situations in order to ensure interoperable communication among the various agencies staffing the shelters.

Conclusion

Emergency events that occur in the local community can be as difficult for schools, school districts, and IHEs to manage as incidents that occur within their walls and buildings. In order to develop a high-quality EOP, teams will need to think beyond their campus to the community in which they exist, collaborate with community partners, and coordinate their plans.

Resources

Further Reading — REMS TA Center

- [Implementing the National Incident Management System (NIMS): Practitioner-Oriented Strategies for Education Agencies](#), Fact Sheet
- [Recovery Planning for Schools and Institutions of Higher Education in the Immediate Aftermath of a Significant or Federally Declared Disaster](#), Fact Sheet

- [Natural Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) Recovery Planning Through the Lens of Preparedness](#), Fact Sheet
- [Emergency Exercises: An Effective Way to Practice and Validate Emergency Operations Plans](#), Fact Sheet
- [After-Action Reports: Capturing Lessons Learned and Identifying Areas of Improvement](#), Fact Sheet
- [Post-Disaster Reunification and K-12 Schools](#), Fact Sheet
- [Tool Box](#), Web Page
- [SITE ASSESS](#), Mobile Application

Training Opportunities — REMS TA Center

- [Understanding the Role of Community Engagement Specialists in Supporting School Safety Before, During, and After an Emergency](#), Webinar
- [Building State-Level Relationships to Support Education Agencies With Disaster Response and Recovery Planning](#), Webinar
- [Developing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) for Enhancing Emergency Preparedness in the School Setting](#), Online Course
- [Developing and Enhancing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) With Your Community Partners](#), Specialized Training Package

Further Reading — Whole Community Planning

- [A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, Themes, and Pathways for Action](#), Publication (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency)
- [Building a Learning Community & Body of Knowledge: Implementing a Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management](#), Publication (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- [Defining the Value of Campus Emergency Management Programs to Communities: Findings From a Critical Issues Forum](#), Publication (National Center for Campus Public Safety)
- [Preparedness Toolkit](#), Website (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency)

Further Reading — Coordination With Community Partners

- [Plan Integration: Linking Local Planning Efforts](#), Publication (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency)
- [Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning Guide for Local Governments](#), Publication (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency)
- [Community Recovery Management Toolkit](#), Website (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency)

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MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS
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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

(855) 781-REMS (7367)

info@remstacenter.org

@remstacenter

https://rems.ed.gov