

Emergency Public Information Plan Assessment Tool



Introduction

This plan assessment tool is a resource to help you evaluate the degree to which you have planned and prepared emergency public information in response to an incident. It is intended for use by emergency preparedness planners and other personnel with responsibility for developing or updating an emergency public information plan.

The tool is designed to walk you through a general concept of operations that addresses various strategies pertaining to emergency public information. Each section includes a list of considerations for the given the strategy drawn from current subject matter guidance and best practices. Evaluate your plan against the items in the tool to ensure that your plan more fully addresses each strategy.

NOTE: While this tool was developed with local governments in mind, it is still applicable to other entities with emergency public information plans, policies, or procedures.

Concept of Operations

Strategy One: Notify the Public Information Officer

When an incident occurs, the public information officer (PIO) must be notified so that your organization can get ahead of the message. Does your plan include the following:

- A timeline and process for notifying the PIO
- Language addressing the need to identify multiple people to serve as PIO
- Multiple ways to contact each of these people



Strategy Two: Determine the Joint Information System Needs

A joint information system (JIS) provides the mechanism to organize, integrate, and coordinate information to ensure timely, accurate, accessible, and consistent messaging during an incident. The need for a JIS is determined by the complexity of the incident and its public information needs. Does your plan include the following:

- A description for how public information will be coordinated within your organization and with outside entities at any given readiness level (day-to-day operations vs. ramping up incident operations)
- Contact lists for public information officers of partner agencies outside of your organization, including but not limited to:
 - Elected officials
 - Emergency medical services
 - Fire services
 - Hospitals
 - Jurisdictions
 - Law enforcement
 - Local state offices
 - Non-profit entities
 - Political subdivisions
 - Schools and universities
 - Transit authorities
 - Voluntary organizations
- Methods for coordinating with these agencies, including but not limited to:
 - Conference call
 - Group email list
 - PIER system
 - WebEOC
- Guidance to help the determine if the incident’s public information needs may exceed an individual PIO’s capability

Strategy Three: Activate the Joint Information Center

Day-to-day incidents may be easily handled by the PIO out of his or her office. Larger-scale incidents, however, may require more complex and extended public information operations. In such cases, it may be necessary to activate a joint information center (JIC). The JIC is a central location that facilitates operation of the JIS. This is the location where personnel with public information responsibilities perform critical emergency information functions, crisis communications, and public affairs functions. Does your plan include the following:

- A trigger for activating a JIC
 - If so, what is it?
 - Is this trigger the same for all incidents (e.g., no-notice incident, public health incidents, and severe weather)?
- An identified authority (by position) that is able to approve activation of the JIC
 - Is there a backup/delegate to that authority?

- A primary and backup physical location for the JIC
- A detailed process for establishing physical JIC operations
- Guidance for how to operate a JIC when JIC staff are unable to be physically present?
- A process for identifying requirements for a JIC
 - Physical space
 - Security and access to the space
 - Layout
 - Equipment and technology
 - Network and communications access
 - Staffing
- A process for fulfilling these requirements
- Guidance for activating the first shift JIC staff
 - Time to report
 - Expected shift length
 - Location or methods of participating in the JIC
 - Method for communicating availability
- A process for notifying local and regional partners of the JIC activation

Strategy Four: Conduct JIC Operations

JIC operations will scale up or down depending on the incident complexity and/or public information demand. Does your plan include the following:

- A process for coordinating with public information staff who may not be physically present
- The work flow and timing of JIC operations
 - Does this tie into the Planning P?
- Guidance on adjusting JIC operations and the public information organizational structure based on changes in public information demand
 - Increase or decrease in number of staff
 - Re-tasking or additional responsibilities for staff
 - Shifting of responsibilities to meet changing needs
- An organizational chart for the JIC or a description of organization and assignment of responsibilities

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- Job aids for each position in the JIC (reference the Houston Urban Area Emergency Public Information Plan for a list of suggested JIC positions)¹
- Guidance for staffing the JIC to address rumor control and conduct media monitoring if the incident receives widespread media/public attention
- A description of how all information handled by the JIC is documented

Strategy Five: Gathering and Analyzing Information

Information gathering is a critical component of public information formulation and is frequently a section within the JIC organizational structure. In addition, the information should be analyzed for accuracy before being disseminated. Does your plan include the following:

- A pre-identified list of essential elements of information (frequently referenced facts or figures used to formulate emergency public information) for various hazards faced by your community/organization
- A description for how gathered information will be processed and shared within the JIC and with the rest of the operation
- Guidance for how the JIC handles non-public information (e.g., personally identifiable information, protected critical infrastructure information, Health Insurance Portability Privacy Act information (HIPAA))
- Methods for monitoring public opinion in your community
 - Rumor control
 - Media monitoring
 - Social media monitoring

Strategy Six: Disseminate Information

Once information has been analyzed and prepared, it should be disseminated within the operations and to the public and other stakeholders as appropriate. Does your plan include the following:

- Pre-scripted hazard or audience-specific information (e.g., media templates, warning messages)
- A system for coordinating messaging between the responding parties
- A method for ensuring that the message conveyed to the public is consistent among all responding parties

¹ Houston Urban Area Emergency Public Information Plan. January 2015. Available online at <https://www.piersystem.com/external/content/document/1532/1187703/1/Houston%20Urban%20Area%20Emergency%20Public%20Information%20Plan%20-%2020150414FINAL-SIGNED.pdf>.

- Guidance for disseminating emergency public information to the following stakeholders:
 - To the public
 - To the media
 - To first responders
 - To other response partners (e.g., EOC)
 - To the families of victims
- A description of methods and tools JIC staff would use to communicate internal incident information with each other
 - The rest of the response effort?
- A description of how information will be disseminated on social media
- A description of the social media platforms used by your organization and community and how and when they should be used
 - Who within the JIC is able to use these platforms (i.e., platform knowledge, technical experience, login access)?
 - Can control of your organization's accounts be delegated (e.g., during shift change)?
 - How is accountability and reporting maintained when control is delegated?
 - How information disseminated via websites and social media is approved?
- Guidance for coordinating with the media
 - Local and national media implications?
 - Accommodating media needs (e.g. staging area, news conferences)
- Stakeholder contact lists, including but not limited to:
 - Mass market media
 - Local media
 - Multi-Lingual Media
 - Non-traditional media
 - Community leaders/groups
 - Homeowner associations

Strategy Seven: Address the Whole Community

All the activities described in your emergency public information plan should be considered with universal access in mind. This should include all members of the community, regardless of any access or functional needs (e.g., deaf or hard of hearing, blind or low vision, no or limited English proficiency) *Throughout your plan, have you included the following:*

- Methods for disseminating public information in multiple languages and to multiple cultures
- Guidance for ensuring that all members of your community have equal access to emergency public information regardless of any access or functional needs

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- Language about staffing and technology used to gather emergency public information from and disseminate it to the whole community
- Guidance about how multilingual communication may impact the approval process
- Guidance for securing services to communicate with individuals with access or functional needs, if your organization does not have in-house specialty to provide these capabilities
- Guidance for addressing unanticipated communication needs from your community stakeholders (e.g., fielding calls from foreign consulates)

Strategy Eight: Integrate with Other Plans

During an incident, many different plans will be activated from the local level and up. The emergency public information plan should address how it integrates with other local, regional, and state plans. Does your plan include the following:

- Consideration of how other plans call for emergency public information:
 - Do they reference your plan?
 - Does your plan include their topic-specific issues?
 - Which other local plans should contain a public information element?
- Guidance for coordinating or incorporating with other JICs when the emergency response exceeds your local capacity or scope
 - Does your local plan reference or account for the Houston Urban Area Regional Emergency Public Information Plan?
- Language about warning
 - If not, is it a separate plan? How is it integrated?
- Guidance for including your plan and or emergency public information in local exercises and your local multi-year training and exercise plan

Strategy Nine: Demobilize the Joint Information Center

A JIC should only be established for as long as it is needed to supplement the PIO's capabilities during an incident. It may scale up as needed but should start to scale down as soon as the PIO is able to manage the incident without additional support. Planning for demobilization should begin at the start of the response to the incident. Does your plan include the following:

- Discussion about the thresholds and authority for scaling down or standing down the JIC or emergency public information efforts
- Guidance about the JIC's role in recovery efforts

- Guidance for how to demobilize JIC equipment, staff, and technology?
- Methods for continuing incident-specific emergency public information functions after the JIC is demobilized
- Guidance for notifying response partners that the JIC is being demobilized
- Guidance that specifies documentation actions for staff for demobilization

Strategy Ten: Socialize the Plan

After your plan is developed or updated, it should be shared with agencies and organizations that have roles and responsibilities in the plan. Does your plan include the following:

- Considerations for sharing the plan or key plan actions with all potential response partners, neighboring jurisdictions, and agency departments prior to the incident
- Guidance for sharing the plan with other plan owners locally or within the region
- Guidance for sharing plan actions with the community (e.g., media, community groups, voluntary agencies, non-profit entities, key industry partners)

Strategy Eleven: Conduct Training

After the plan has been socialized with stakeholders, training should be conducted to ensure that they understand how to respond to an incident using the plan. Does your plan include the following:

- Required and suggested training for each position within your JIC
- Guidance on just-in-time training for staff reporting to the JIC
 - How does just-in-time training augment or replace the requirement for formal training?
- Guidance for how training of JIC staff will be tracked or recorded

References

Consider listing the following reference documents in your plan.

- *Annex I – Emergency Public Information*. Texas Division of Emergency Management. June 2005. Available online at <https://www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/downloadableforms.htm#annexi>.
- *Comprehensive Preparedness Guide (CPG) 101 (Version 2.0), Developing and Maintaining Emergency Operations Plans*. Federal Emergency Management Agency. November 2010. Available online at https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1828-25045-0014/cpg_101_comprehensive_preparedness_guide_developing_and_maintaining_emergency_operations_plans_2010.pdf. CPG 101v2
- *Houston Urban Area Emergency Public Information Plan*. January 2015. Available online at <https://www.piersystem.com/external/content/document/1532/1187703/1/Houston%20Urban%20Area%20Emergency%20Public%20Information%20Plan%20-%2020150414FINAL-SIGNED.pdf>. Houston UASI EPIP
- *National Response Team (NRT) Joint Information Center Model: Collaborative Communications during Emergency Response*. U.S. National Response Team. April 2013. Available online at [www.nrt.org/production/NRT/NRTWeb.nsf/AllAttachmentsByTitle/SA-1084_NRT_JIC_Model/\\$File/Updated NRT JIC Model_4-25-13.pdf](http://www.nrt.org/production/NRT/NRTWeb.nsf/AllAttachmentsByTitle/SA-1084_NRT_JIC_Model/$File/Updated%20NRT%20JIC%20Model_4-25-13.pdf).