

Local Elected and Appointed Officials Quick Reference Guide

This resource highlights key concepts from FEMA's [Local Elected and Appointed Officials Guide: Roles and Resources in Emergency Management](https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/plan). For the full document, please visit: <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/plan>.

Introduction

Local elected and appointed officials—subsequently referred to as “senior officials”—balance many responsibilities and are expected to serve in numerous roles to support and lead their jurisdiction. During emergencies, the public may see senior officials as responsible for the success or failure of disaster response and recovery efforts.

Leading Communities Before, During and After Disasters

Senior officials make significant policy and resource decisions before, during and after disasters. In many ways, senior officials can make or break the success of disaster operations. Disaster response and recovery are more effective when senior officials are familiar with emergency management processes and have established relationships with their community's emergency managers.

- Senior officials typically make key policy decisions, collaborate with emergency managers and communicate key information to the public, including use of sign language, closed captioning and foreign language interpretation.
- Emergency managers work with relevant agencies and organizations to assess and mitigate risks, respond to emergencies and carry out recovery activities.

Understanding Potential Impacts on the Community

Local senior officials should be familiar with the potential impacts of threats and hazards such as floods, storms, earthquakes and wildfires, as well as less predictable incidents like active shooters, technological hazards, extended power outages or cyber incidents. Emergency managers can help senior officials learn about the threats and hazards most likely to affect the jurisdiction and the potential incident's impact on people, infrastructure and the economy.¹

¹ FEMA's [Resilience Analysis and Planning Tool \(RAPT\)](#) is a source of information that can assist local senior officials in formulating questions and help provide insights about their jurisdiction's threat and hazard profile.





Community Considerations

Understanding potential disaster consequences begins with knowing who in the area might be affected. It is vitally important for senior officials to understand the demographic composition within their communities such as individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs since they may require additional assistance during a disaster. See the last page of this quick reference guide for more information.

Key Roles

Senior officials have important roles during every stage of a disaster. Key elements are presented below. The [Local Elected and Appointed Officials Checklists](#) provide additional details to help senior officials prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters and emergencies.

BUILD RESILIENCE BEFORE A DISASTER



Work with the emergency manager to establish preparedness priorities and encourage all government agency heads, academic and nonprofit organizations and business leaders to coordinate and collaborate on the jurisdiction's mitigation, response and recovery planning efforts. FEMA's [Developing and Maintaining Emergency Operations Plans \(Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101\)](#) offers comprehensive information on how to develop effective plans.



Champion community risk reduction by adopting and implementing mitigation and adaptation strategies. Examples include implementing hazard-resistant building codes and land use planning.



Encourage individuals, families and businesses to develop emergency plans and be self-reliant in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.



Participate personally in emergency and disaster preparedness exercises to demonstrate support and practice executing legal and leadership responsibilities. Exercises also build familiarity with emergency management plans and staff.



Prepare for possible media interviews by working with the Public Information Officer (PIO) to build relationships with traditional and social media outlets and develop coordinated messaging.



Understand how continuity of essential private sector services and government operations will be maintained during disasters to minimize casualties and impacts, which may continue for long periods and require decentralized employee work locations.

RESPOND EFFECTIVELY DURING A DISASTER



Get informed quickly and stay in close touch with the emergency manager. Develop a regular meeting cadence with the lead emergency manager and appropriate individuals.



Trust and empower emergency management officials. Obtain assistance from other agencies, the private sector or neighboring jurisdictions, declaring a state of emergency, issuing emergency orders and assuring compliance with proper fiscal procedures.



Communicate quickly, clearly and effectively to the whole community, and work with the PIO and other partners to ensure coordinated and accessible communication.

RECOVER EFFICIENTLY AFTER A DISASTER



Identify opportunities to build more resilient communities through improved planning and smart infrastructure investments, including mitigation projects and adaptation strategies that reduce risk from future events.



Understand use of the financial and in-kind assistance programs available that will help both community members and the government.



Leverage the expertise and resources of various departments and partner organizations. Include personnel with planning, community outreach, housing, public works, education systems, economic development, natural resources and public health expertise. FEMA's [Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning Guide for Local Governments](#) provides more potential partners.



Clearly communicate with community members and set realistic expectations to help instill trust and confidence during the recovery process. The recovery process and programs can be complex.



Ensure all codes and regulations are enforced during the recovery process. Develop disaster financial management processes and procedures before an incident.

Mutual Aid

Mutual aid agreements facilitate rapid, short-term deployment of emergency support from public or private sector partners before, during or after incidents, especially if local resources are inadequate or overwhelmed. They can be local, regional, statewide or interstate in scope. Additional information can be found in FEMA's [National Incident Management System Guideline for Mutual Aid](#).

Federal Disaster Financial Resources

The federal government can support jurisdictional governments that respond to and recover from disasters. Additional information can be found in FEMA's Local Elected and Appointed Officials Guide.

Key Stakeholder Considerations

- **Individuals with disabilities.** Individuals with disabilities are protected by the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) against being denied participation in or receiving benefits from emergency plans. Senior officials can use their authority, contacts and influence to support people with disabilities living in the community in the planning process so that their needs are met effectively during disasters.
- **Individuals with access and functional needs.** Examples include, but are not limited to, individuals with disabilities, older adults and populations having limited English proficiency, limited access to transportation, or limited access to financial resources to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. A “One-Size-Fits-All” approach to emergency management planning, resourcing and information dissemination does not work for individuals with access and functional needs. Senior officials and civic leaders play important roles in developing plans and solutions that address the entire community.
- **Private sector organizations.** Including [private sector partners](#) in planning activities can improve and accelerate preparedness, response and recovery efforts. Senior officials may be helpful in connecting private sector businesses and emergency managers.
- **Voluntary and Non-Governmental Organizations.** These groups may respond to a disaster with available resources in accordance with the requirements of their internal policies and in cooperation with emergency management or senior officials. See FEMA’s [Engaging Faith-Based and Community Organizations guide](#) for more information.
- **Individual Preparedness.** A community’s ability to respond to or recover from disasters depends on the level of preparedness of every member. Basic individual preparedness requires enough resources to survive without outside help for several days. Senior officials should work with emergency managers to identify groups in the community that can help educate individuals, families and households about preparedness. Visit [ready.gov](#) for resources.



Case Study: Chatham County, Georgia’s Executive Leadership (Pocket) Guide

To assist with onboarding local elected and appointed officials, Chatham County Georgia developed a small, spiral-bound “Executive Leadership Guide” that outlines senior official responsibilities before, during and after a disaster. The Guide is organized with sectional tabs outlining specific information pertinent to senior officials in Chatham County from preparedness responsibilities through response and into long term recovery. The guide can be quickly referenced during an event to determine roles and responsibilities, as well as legal authorities. *“This Executive Guide really helped me during [Hurricane] Irma. It helped me stay on track and provided the right amount of information for me to convey to others!”* –Chatham County Elected Official. For more information, contact the Chatham Emergency Management Agency at CEMA@chathamcounty.org.

Local jurisdictions can also check with their state emergency management agencies for similar guides, which in turn can serve as potential templates for a local resource.