

# FAQ: National Qualification System Process

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## Introduction

The [National Qualification System \(NQS\)](#), is a process that strengthens the Resource Management component of the [National Incident Management System \(NIMS\)](#). The purpose of the NQS Implementation Objectives is to provide specific benchmarks and example activities for organizations and jurisdictions to use when implementing NQS and when discussing NQS implementation with their partners and other jurisdictions.

The objectives help to bring organizational qualification procedures, certification programs, and credentialing standards in alignment with the [NIMS Guideline for the National Qualification System](#).

Beginning in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, FEMA plans to leverage the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) Program to make the implementation of the National Qualification System a requirement for EMPG funding.

## NQS Implementation Objectives Common Questions

### WHEN WILL FEMA START REQUIRING NQS IMPLEMENTATION?

- NQS is recommended in FY21 for EMPG.
- NQS will be required starting in FY22 for all [EMPG-funded deployable personnel](#), as determined by each recipient organization and jurisdiction.
- Not all EMPG-funded personnel will be required to be NQS certified.
  - FY22 EMPG guidance is being finalized for release in Calendar Year (CY) 2022.
- The NIMS Implementation Branch (NIB) will continue to engage with the Grants Preparedness Directorate (GPD) and the National Preparedness Assessments Division (NPAD) to capture stakeholder feedback and ensure program support and evaluation is focused on the process for implementing NQS, rather than NQS directly.

### WHY DID FEMA DECIDE TO MAKE NQS A REQUIREMENT FOR THE EMPG PROGRAM BEGINNING IN FY22?

- NQS helps bring organizational and jurisdictional qualification procedures, certification programs, and credentialing standards in alignment with the [NIMS Guideline for the National Qualification System](#).
- NQS also supports the [National Preparedness Goal](#) by creating a network of qualified personnel for potential nationwide deployments and disasters by enabling organizations and jurisdictions across the country to work together during all incidents, regardless of size or type.
- Implementing NIMS across the nation is fundamental to building a culture of preparedness.



# FEMA

## **DOES MY ORGANIZATION OR JURISDICTION HAVE TO USE NQS?**

- Implementing NQS does not mean that an Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) must use NQS Job Task Position Qualifications (JTPQs) and Position Task Books (PTBs) except for deployable personnel, as determined by each organization.
- NQS does not replace existing personnel qualification and certification systems. AHJs that already utilize a personnel qualification and certification system are not required to switch to using NQS tools and guidance. As long as the system aligns with the NQS Implementation Objectives, the AHJ meets the requirements for EMPG.
- See below for a short list of examples of systems that align with NQS.

## **CAN AN ORGANIZATION OR JURISDICTION USE OTHER SYSTEMS THAT ALIGN WITH NQS?**

- Yes. Using a system that is aligned with NQS meets EMPG requirements. Examples include the All-Hazards Incident Management Teams Association Interstate Incident Management Qualifications System Guide (AHIMTA IIMTQS) and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group Incident Qualifications and Certification System (NWCG IQCS).

## **HOW WILL FEMA SUPPORT NQS IMPLEMENTATION?**

- The National Integration Center (NIC) continues to support NQS implementation with workshops and technical assistance. Contact the [NIMS Inbox](#)<sup>1</sup> with any questions or concerns, and the Help Desk team will provide support. Support can include emails, phone calls or even “formal” workshops where the NIB and Regional staff will provide information about NQS.

## **WILL FUNDING BE AVAILABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF NQS TECHNOLOGY?**

- No direct funding is available, but OneResponder, part of the National Resource Hub (NRH)<sup>2</sup>, is available at no cost to all jurisdictions to manage their personnel qualifications and inventorying.
- For more information on the NRH and OneResponder visit: [About - National Resource Hub - Preparedness Toolkit \(fema.gov\)](#)

## **DOES IMPLEMENTATION OF NQS APPLY TO SUB-RECIPIENTS (LOCAL AGENCIES)?**

- No. Reporting will be conducted at the State (i.e., recipient) level.

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<sup>1</sup> The NIMS inbox is [fema-nims@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:fema-nims@fema.dhs.gov)

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the NRH and OneResponder [About - National Resource Hub - Preparedness Toolkit \(fema.gov\)](#)

## **HAS FEMA CONSIDERED INTEGRATING NQS AND OTHER SYSTEMS?**

Yes. FEMA is currently working to develop the NRH as a “system of systems.” The NRH brings together various resource management systems to “talk” and share data and resource management roles. This will create a “system of systems,” utilizing the data and functions of the technologies to create a holistic resource management approach.

## **WILL A NATIONAL REGISTRY OF QUALIFICATIONS REPLACE THE NEED TO GO TO EACH INDIVIDUAL AHJ OR STATE, TRIBAL OR TERRITORIAL REPRESENTATIVE?**

- The [NRH](#) will support a national resource catalog where each organization or jurisdiction can manage its own resources. There will be no official “registry,” as each organization’s and jurisdiction’s data belongs solely to that organization or jurisdiction.

## **WILL NQS IMPLEMENTATION REPORTING BECOME PART OF THE ANNUAL STAKEHOLDER PREPAREDNESS REPORT (SPR)? IF SO, IN WHAT YEAR WILL THIS CHANGE TAKE EFFECT?**

- Yes. Reporting on NQS implementation will be part of the SPR in CY 2022.

## **IN FY22, HOW WILL FEMA MEASURE EMPG RECIPIENTS ON THEIR IMPLEMENTATION OF NQS?**

- NQS implementation by EMPG recipients will be measured in FY22 based on their use of the indicators found here: [National Qualification System Implementation Objectives Fact Sheet](#).

## **WHAT IS THE EXPECTATION FOR A TIMELINE TO MEET ALL FOUR IMPLEMENTATION OBJECTIVES AND THE REQUIREMENTS FOR EMPG FUNDING?**

- EMPG recipients should achieve or work toward achieving each of the objectives listed in the [National Qualification System Implementation Objectives Fact Sheet](#) to be considered NQS compliant. An AHJ that is working towards these objectives can meet the objectives or have a plan or process in place to meet the NQS objectives. Examples include the following:
  - Tracking qualifications using a system, Excel spreadsheet, or Access database.
  - Issuing PTBs to personnel that the AHJ determines must be NQS qualified.

## **WHAT WILL THIS SYSTEM BE USED FOR? WILL THIS BE A DATABASE OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL, AND IF SO WHO WILL USE IT?**

- NQS is a process intended for AHJs to use in managing their qualifications and resources.
  - Each organization owns its resources and processes and determines which deployable personnel will be NQS certified.
  - FEMA provides technical assistance for setting up this process but does not qualify/certify/credential personnel.
  - Grant recipients will not be responsible for ensuring that deployable personnel from agencies they do not have jurisdiction over meet NQS requirements.

### **FOR THE PURPOSES OF EMPG QUALIFICATION, WHAT DOES "IMPLEMENTATION" REQUIRE?**

- This depends on where an AHJ is within the qualification process. An AHJ can set up the process or NQS can supplement progress already achieved towards implementation.
- NQS Implementation Objectives discuss the planning and process—AHJs do not have to use the guidance and tools FEMA provides if they already utilize a process or system.

### **FOR THE PURPOSES OF EMPG QUALIFICATION, WHAT DOES "WORKING TOWARDS" REQUIRE?**

- As long as a recipient is making progress towards implementing NQS using the phased approach as outlined in the NQS Implementation Objectives, they have satisfied the EMPG requirements.

### **DOES "DEPLOYABLE" REFER TO "IN-STATE/TERRITORY/TRIBAL" DEPLOYMENT OR "OUT-OF-STATE/TERRITORY/TRIBAL" DEPLOYMENT?**

- Both. NQS is intended to apply for in-state/tribal/territorial response, as well as state-to-state mutual aid. The state or jurisdiction chooses which and how many positions must be NQS qualified. For example, an AHJ may decide only their Incident Management Team must be NQS qualified. NQS only covers those emergency management positions that are most frequently deployed. NQS Job Titles and Position Task Books do not cover all deployable emergency management positions, just the most frequently deployed.
- Deployable can also refer to intra-jurisdictional personnel. For example, if an AHJ has a designated emergency operations center (EOC) team, they "deploy" those personnel when the EOC is activated. Deploy does not necessarily mean a movement from one place to another. Virtual EOCs are a good example of this: Personnel are deploying to their roles in the EOC, although they may not be in the physical location of the EOC.

### **ARE AHJS REQUIRED TO FOLLOW THE NQS TASK BOOKS? IF NOT, WHAT OVERSIGHT WILL FEMA PROVIDE FOR THE QUALIFICATION PROCESS?**

- No. FEMA strongly encourages, but does not require, jurisdictions to use all NQS tools and resources. If choosing another qualification process, a jurisdiction should incorporate the minimum qualifications defined in the associated job title position qualification sheet for the deployable position.

### **ARE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE COMPACT (EMAC) DEPLOYMENTS AND FEMA DEPLOYMENTS REQUIRED TO FOLLOW NQS?**

- EMAC signatory states are not required to follow NQS unless receiving EMPG funding. For states that do not receive EMPG funding, all NIMS and NQS activities are voluntary.
  - NQS products are incorporated into the National Emergency Management Association's Mission Ready Packages (MRPs) used by the Emergency Operations System, which is required by the FY22 NIMS Cooperative Agreement in support of EMAC.

**WHAT RECOURSE DO ORGANIZATIONS AND JURISDICTIONS HAVE TO SUPPLEMENT LIMITED RESOURCES IN SITUATIONS WHERE NOT ENOUGH PERSONNEL HAVE THE APPROPRIATE CREDENTIALS?**

- Mutual aid under EMAC is negotiated as a contract between State Governors, who determine acceptable criteria for sending/receiving mutual aid support under EMAC. The States under EMAC determine the minimum acceptable support criteria.

**IF A JURISDICTION DOES NOT USE FEMA RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TOOLS (E.G., ONERESPONDER), WILL FEMA REQUIRE FORMAL APPROVAL OF THE JURISDICTION'S ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM?**

- No. FEMA is in the process of building out an Application Programming Interface (API) for third-party systems to connect to OneResponder if they so choose.

**DOES EMPG FUNDING APPLY TO ALL LEVELS OF EMPG RECIPIENTS, INCLUDING COUNTY LEVEL SUB-RECIPIENTS?**

- Yes. For purposes of the Implementation Objectives, “work toward” means that the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, United States Virgin Islands and Tribal Nations shall begin implementation efforts in FY22.
- All other organizations and jurisdictions may satisfy the requirement to “work toward” in FY22 by planning for phases 1 and 2.
- In FY23 all organizations and jurisdictions must be compliant in both phases 1 and 2.
- Phase 3 will start in FY24, and all organizations and jurisdictions may design, develop and conduct exercises in accordance with the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) for incident workforce personnel.
- EMPG applies to all levels of recipients, and implementation will be conducted in phases based upon jurisdiction type.

**DOES THE “INCIDENT WORKFORCE” INCLUDE ALL PERSONNEL INVOLVED IN MANAGEMENT, SUPPORT, AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DUTIES, INCLUDING ALL EOC STAFF AND FIRST RESPONDERS?**

- Yes. The AHJ identifies the incident workforce and it only applies to deployable positions.

**ARE ALL POSITIONS CATEGORIZED AS “INCIDENT WORKFORCE” REQUIRED TO BE IN COMPLIANCE WITH NIMS TRAINING PROGRAM STANDARDS?**

- Yes.

**DOES THE QUALIFICATION REVIEW BOARD (QRB) APPLY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL AND DOES IT INCLUDE ALL “INCIDENT WORKFORCE” POSITIONS?**

- If the AHJ is applying for the EMPG Grant, the QRB will be applicable to all levels involved. The AHJ determines the need for a QRB and for what positions.