



**NEW JERSEY  
OFFICE of EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT  
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER  
FIELD GUIDE**



**NOVEMBER, 2014**

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

AAR	After Action Review
AFN	Access and Functional Needs
DEP	Department of Environmental Protection
EAO	External Affairs Officer
EMAC	Emergency Management Assistance Compact
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
EPI	Emergency Public Information
ESF	Emergency Support Function
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
HAZMAT	Hazardous Materials
HERC	Health Educators Risk Communicators
HIRA	Hazard Identification and Risk Analysis
ICS	Incident Command System
IC/UC	Incident Commander/Unified Command
IT	Information Technology
JIC	Joint Information Center
JIS	Joint Information System
LEPC	Local Emergency Planning Committee
NIMS	National Incident Management System
NJESF	New Jersey Emergency Support Function
NJOEM	New Jersey Office of Emergency Management

NJSA	New Jersey Statute
NRF	National Response Framework
OEM	Office of Emergency Management
PDA	Preliminary Damage Assessment
PIO	Public Information Officer
PST	Public Safety Telecommunicator
RACES	Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SOE	State of Emergency
VOST	Virtual Operations Support Team

## **INTRODUCTION**

The New Jersey Office of Emergency Management believes that effective public information is an essential component of the disaster life cycle. When community members receive public information in a timely, accurate and accessible manner, lives and property are saved.

The **NJOEM Public Information Officer Field Guide** is designed for those who assume the public information role during adverse conditions. New Jersey's Public Information Officers are highly proficient in carrying out their day-to-day responsibilities. However, disasters bring a unique and challenging set of circumstances. We developed this Guide to help PIOs become more fully prepared to navigate those challenges. Resources have been added for those who desire additional information and training.

We urge Public Information Officers to work closely with emergency management officials in their community before disaster strikes, and to seek out partners that can help amplify critical messages.

Comments and suggestions for future revision of this Guide can be sent to njoemweb at gmail dot com.

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# **1 PURPOSE OF FIELD GUIDE AND THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER**

## **1.1 PURPOSE**

All community members require accurate and timely information about disasters so they can make good decisions for themselves, their families, and loved ones during adverse conditions.

Incidents may occur at any time and can grow into major emergencies or disasters. These events require Public Information Officers (PIOs) and External Affairs Officers (EAOs) from municipalities, counties, and the state to quickly coordinate resources and messages to meet the informational needs of the public and to assist public officials in decision-making. In some situations, federal agencies may also be involved in message coordination.

This Guide provides basic information for PIOs about the disaster process and information on how different levels of government coordinate emergency public information when a disaster occurs. Information is also provided on a variety of other topics and activities throughout all phases of the emergency management cycle to enhance PIO preparedness and effectiveness.

## **1.2 AUDIENCE, APPLICATION, AND APPROACH**

This Guide focuses on PIOs who work for municipal and county governments in the state of New Jersey. Emergency management is a full-time focus for some of these PIOs. Other PIOs have concurrent duties and still others will be responsible for communicating emergency public information only during an emergency or disaster.

General emergency management terminology and key concepts are described to assist PIOs in navigating their role and maximizing information dissemination during a disaster situation. The main body of this Guide is organized to reflect the four-phase emergency management cycle, which includes preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. Each section addresses different aspects of the PIOs role, responsibilities, and activities and provides specific information applicable to each phase. Organizing the Guide by emergency management phases allows individual PIOs to focus on the information that will be most helpful to them in their specific role.

## **1.3 OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

PIOs fulfill a vital role in every phase of the emergency management cycle. A well-informed public is better equipped to make good decisions on behalf of themselves and their families and loved ones. This alleviates the burden on first responders and allows them to focus on those needing the most assistance during an incident of any size.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), “The PIO gathers, verifies, coordinates, and disseminates accurate, accessible, and timely information on the incident’s cause, size, and current situation; resources committed; and other matters of general interest for both internal and external use” (FEMA 2007).

Internal audiences include elected officials, organizational leadership, and fellow employees. Members of the general public, businesses, community organizations, and the media that reach them are examples of external audiences.

Specific responsibilities during each phase of the emergency response cycle emerge from the PIOs role and are briefly discussed in the following sections.

#### **1.4 PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION**

PIOs are responsible for two broad categories of information: public information and emergency public information (EPI). In its Public Information Officer Awareness Course (G289), FEMA defines each as follows:

- **Public Information** is “collected, assembled or maintained” by a governmental unit in connection with the conduct of public business that is made available to the public.”
- **Emergency Public Information** is “specific life- and health-saving information that is developed and disbursed before, during or after an emergency; the information includes the situation’s severity and action steps that should be taken to people and communities to prevent harm and damage.” A range of natural, technological, and human-caused hazard events are possible in New Jersey and may prompt a need for EPI.

EPI, the focus of this Guide, includes the full range of external affairs communication functions, including public information, community relations, and intergovernmental affairs. It is helpful to understand both the hazards that may impact a community and general emergency management terms.

#### **1.5 EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT TERMS**

As a PIO, it is important to understand how emergency responders and community leaders are using language, in order to interpret it accurately to the public. Understanding key terms will also be helpful when interacting with emergency management officials.

New Jersey is prone to a wide range of potential emergencies and disasters that include natural, technological, or civil disasters. Natural hazard events include weather events such as hurricanes or nor’easters. Technological events may include situations such as hazardous materials incidents or explosions. Civil disasters, or human-caused events, include acts of violence or terrorism. Such events may be localized in nature and easily managed by emergency responders, but may

also have the potential to become much larger events. Understanding the severity of an event, as well as the nuances between incidents, emergencies, and disasters terms is an important responsibility of the PIO.

“Incident” generally refers to the triggering set of events and circumstances that can escalate to an emergency or disaster.

The words “emergency” and “disaster” are used in everyday conversation but have specific meanings in emergency management. According to the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management’s (NJOEM) [glossary](#), an emergency is a dangerous event similar to a disaster, but can be controlled within the scope of local resources.

The New Jersey Statutes Annotated (NJSA) App. A:9-33.1 states that “Disaster shall mean any unusual incident resulting from natural or unnatural causes which endangers the health, safety or resources of the residents of one or more municipalities of the State, and which is or may become too large in scope or unusual in type to be handled entirely by regular municipal operating services.”

In addition to the key terms, it is helpful to understand emergency management concepts and resources.

## **2 KEY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS FOR PIOS**

### **2.1 EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CYCLE**

The four-phase disaster cycle of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery is the most widely accepted framework for describing, organizing, and executing emergency response. PIOs, especially those not assigned to first response agencies, may find their involvement concentrated in the response and recovery phases of events within their jurisdictions. However, those experiences may lead them to become interested in the preparedness and mitigation phases as their communities move beyond recovery and begin planning for future disasters.

### **2.2 PROGRESSIVE RESPONSE TO INCIDENTS**

Emergencies, regardless of cause, affect a local community and its resources first. In New Jersey, the management of public information in an emergency or disaster follows the response model of an integrated effort based on the lead of the most immediately affected governing unit.

If that event overwhelms municipal capabilities, the municipality will request county support. If the county resources are overwhelmed, the county will request state support. Finally, if the state resources are insufficient, the Governor will request federal assistance. The request to the federal government may be for help with response, recovery, or both.

A PIO needs to explain to the public how the different parts of government work together during an emergency or disaster. Accurate information about municipal, county, and state roles can help manage public expectations and foster support for the efforts of local agencies.

### **2.3 NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM**

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security developed the National Incident Management System (NIMS) to create a standardized approach to incident management, no matter the size or complexity of the emergency. The Incident Command System (ICS) is part of the NIMS. The ICS is an organizational tool for organizing the command, control, and coordination of an emergency response. The NIMS and ICS make it possible for responders to work together smoothly no matter their discipline or employing agency.

Basic knowledge about the ICS is key to understanding the flow of information and decisions in any emergency, regardless of whether the incident stays completely local, escalates into a state of local disaster emergency, or if the Governor declares a state of emergency.

Not all PIOs have daily responsibilities for EPI or emergency response. However, regardless of specific daily responsibilities, it makes sense to become familiar with the NIMS and ICS because they are the structure for coordinating any size emergency or disaster response.

The PIO is key member of command staff under the ICS. There are multiple avenues to becoming more knowledgeable about the NIMS, ICS, and the role of the PIO:

- Become familiar with the ICS by taking a [free 3hour on-line training offered by FEMA](#).
- Talk to the County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) Coordinator to learn about the local training schedule. Attendance at local training sessions allows PIOs to meet other key local contacts.
- Click on the [“Training”](#) page on the [New Jersey OEM website](#).
- Explore on-site FEMA training opportunities at the [Emergency Management Institute](#).

### **2.4 EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLANS AND ANNEXES**

Emergency operations plans (EOPs) describe a jurisdiction or organization’s central operational plan for responding to emergencies. EOPs generally outline roles and responsibilities; lines of authority; and the framework for the protection of people and property. EOPs also identify necessary resources and address coordination with other jurisdictions. Emergency plans must address the needs of unaccompanied minors; people with disabilities, older adults, [people with access and functional needs](#); and/or those who have limited English proficiency.

EOP Annexes focus on specific operational activities that are carried out under the broad guidance of the EOP, e.g. Mass Care or External Affairs. In New Jersey municipal EOPs generally follow the basic plan with a functional annex format.

Under the NIMS and the National Response Framework (NRF), these annexes are called “emergency support functions” or ESFs for short. ESF 15 specifically addresses external affairs; the same number is assigned to external affairs in all NIMS- and NRF-compliant plans, no matter the jurisdiction. ESFs contribute to coordinated efforts and mutual aid by establishing common language and frameworks for important operational activities.

The New Jersey State EOP includes New Jersey Emergency Support Function (NJESF) 15A- External Affairs, integrating public affairs, community relations, and intergovernmental affairs.

The PIO should review the jurisdiction’s EOP with the OEM Coordinator, focusing especially on the Public Information Annex, or ESF 15 External Affairs.

## **2.5 MUNICIPAL, COUNTY, AND STATE HAZARD IDENTIFICATION AND RISK ANALYSIS**

Knowing what dangers may affect a jurisdiction is a good way to start preparing for possible emergency or disaster events. A hazard vulnerability analysis is an assessment process whereby a governmental unit identifies potential hazards based on natural, technological, and human-made characteristics of the defined area. Risk assessments seek to project the likelihood of a hazard occurring. Both are basic components of a jurisdiction’s overall EOP.

These analyses contain information about topics and events that a PIO may encounter. It is important to consult the municipal and/or county EOP and hazard mitigation plan and review the community hazard identification and risk analysis to learn potential risks to the community.

The [2014 New Jersey State Hazard Mitigation Plan](#) provides a detailed overview of the risks and hazards that can affect New Jersey. Information about the risks and hazards to a community will Guide public information activities during the preparedness and mitigation phases and provide a preview of the topics that a PIO might confront during an emergency or disaster.

## **2.6 STATES OF EMERGENCY**

Under N.J.S.A. App. 9-40, a local State of Emergency (SOE) declaration can be issued when the municipal emergency management coordinator, in consultation with the mayor, determines that a municipality has exceeded its capacity to respond to a situation, and needs assistance to maintain order and control while containing the incident. Such a declaration authorizes the city to issue and enforce orders and implement procedures to protect public health and safety. The city will turn first to adjacent municipalities for additional assistance and then to the county. If and when the county declares a SOE, it must communicate that information to its residents.

However, a PIO can request assistance from other PIOs even if there is no SOE. A PIO may reach out directly to PIOs on his/her contact list or make a request through the county OEM coordinator. The Governor of New Jersey also has the authority to declare a state of emergency.

“The Governor of New Jersey can declare a state of emergency when he/she believes a disaster as defined by statute has occurred or is imminent enough to require State aid to supplement local resources in preventing or alleviating damages, loss, hardship or suffering. This declaration authorizes the Governor to speed State Agency assistance to communities in need. It enables him/her to make resources immediately available to rescue, evacuate, shelter, provide essential commodities and quell disturbances in affected municipalities. It may also position the state to seek federal assistance when the scope of the event exceeds the State’s resources” (NJOEM 2001).

During large-scale events, the State EOP may be activated or the State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) may be opened before a SOE is declared. Activation of the State EOP will result in the activation of NJESF 15A to Guide EPI functions. The Joint Information System (JIS) described later in this document will go into effect, regardless of whether a physically-located Joint Information Center (JIC) is established. Through the JIS, NJESF 15A assures the coordinated release of information when there is a Disaster Declaration in effect.

Even if the state has activated the JIS, a municipal or county PIO will continue to have the lead responsibility for disseminating local information such as road closings, shelter or distribution points for resources. The state JIS can assist in amplifying those messages.

More detailed information about SOEs in New Jersey can be found on the [NJOEM website](#).

If a disaster exceeds the capacity of the state’s resources, the Stafford Act (PL 93-288) outlines the steps for a state to request and receive a Presidential disaster declaration. The Governor must first submit a request to FEMA, followed by a preliminary damage assessment (PDA) to determine the scope of the disaster and the impact on people and public facilities. Based on the Governor’s request that includes the PDA, the President can declare either a major disaster or emergency. Depending on the type of declaration, a number of programs become available to assist with response and recovery efforts.

More detailed information about the federal disaster declaration process is available on the [FEMA Website](#).

Following a Presidential Disaster Declaration, the PIO will continue to be the lead for municipal or county information, while coordinating with the state and federal governments through the JIS under NJESF 15, or under a jurisdiction’s Public Information Annex.

There are other types of events that may trigger public information and emergency public information needs. A few examples are listed below. These are not intended to be inclusive of all situations that a PIO may encounter. There are many additional scenarios that may require the PIO to become involved with providing emergency public information to the public.

### **2.6.1 BOIL WATER ADVISORY**

A Boil Water Advisory is issued by a local water agency or public water utility in consultation with local public health departments and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. However, a PIO may get media calls if an advisory is issued. If contact information is available, a PIO can easily refer those calls to the appropriate source of information. PIOs may also be asked to assist in disseminating those advisories through his/her communication networks.

PIOs should check with the local public water supplier and public health department to obtain more details about how boil water advisories are issued in their areas. Additional information is also available from the [New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection](#).

### **2.6.2 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES**

New Jersey experienced an H1N1 influenza pandemic in 2009; and Ebola outbreaks were occurring as this manual was being written. Public health agencies have emergency preparedness and response duties that reflect their unique responsibilities, particularly in the arena of infectious disease. Local Health Departments contribute to Emergency Operations Plans and participate in emergency management exercises. During public health emergencies, it is likely that public health agencies will serve as lead spokespersons. However, it is important to learn more about public health and emergency response, and build working relationships with public health officials that will be vital when the community experiences an emergency or disaster.

Some public health departments have PIOs who specialize in public health emergency and risk communication; some may have personnel who are combined health educators risk communicators (HERCs). The local public health department can provide information about how it manages emergency public health information communication and what responsibility the PIO may have.

### **2.6.3 UTILITY OUTAGES**

It is common for PIOs to receive calls from the public and media asking about utility outages. [Utility providers](#) are the best source for up to date information about utility outages.

## **2.7 COORDINATION OF EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION AMONG JURISDICTIONS**

Accidents, emergencies, and disasters that begin in one jurisdiction can expand and rapidly involve other jurisdictions. As incidents expand, so does the need to coordinate EPI among the involved cities, counties, and state. Coordination with other PIOs prior to a disaster will help alleviate the challenges brought on by disasters, such as:

- Standard communication equipment used by community members and practices for communicating with the public may be disrupted during a disaster (NJESF 15A (III)(B)(3)). For example, cell towers can be disabled, electrical power lost, and cable systems damaged by various types of disasters.
- During the initial stages of a disaster response, there may be conflicting information that requires correction by the EPI system (NJESF 15A (III)(B)(7)). There may be contradictory information among eyewitness reports disseminated through social media, or from traditional media outlets, if events are happening rapidly.
- Communication resources for delivering emergency public information and other messages within the affected area may be inadequate (NJESF 15A (III)(B)(4)). If electrical power is out, reports disseminated through television and radio may not reach all citizens. At the same time, wireless carriers may become overwhelmed with cellular traffic affecting the digital distribution of information. A PIO must prepare for all contingencies.
- There may be an overwhelming need for public information both within and outside of a disaster area (NJESF 15A (III)(B)(6)). In addition to residents who have family living out of state, a number of travelers pass through the state every day. A disaster will create widespread interest outside of the state and local informational sources will be taxed to meet public information needs.

The following section provides additional PIO guidance for specific phases of the disaster cycle: preparedness, response, recovery, mitigation.



### **3 PREPAREDNESS PHASE**

#### **3.1 PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND ACTIVITIES DURING PREPAREDNESS PHASE**

The preparedness phase of a disaster provides important opportunities to learn, train, and build relationships with the people, agencies, and media who will be key partners during the response phase. There are also multiple opportunities to encourage members of the public and community organizations to improve their level of preparedness.

During this phase, the PIO's role is to:

- Assess his/her own readiness, professionally and personally.
- Use public information and public awareness strategies to educate and inform your key audiences about hazards.
- Encourage planning and actions that will help people and organizations cope with emergencies and disasters, and, through those activities, become a credible spokesperson.
- Establish media contacts and conduct outreach.
- Learn about the organization and the organization's disaster partners.

#### **3.2 KEY PLANS AND DOCUMENTS**

The PIO should work with the Office of Emergency Management to become familiar the following plans and documents:

- EOP (each municipality and county in New Jersey is required to have an EOP)
- ESF 15 External Affairs or the Public Information Annex to the EOP
- Hazard and risk vulnerability analysis (likely in the hazard mitigation plan)

Hard and/or digital copies of PIO-related sections of plans and procedures should be included in the PIO go kit (discussed later).

#### **3.3 LEARNING ABOUT THE NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM**

Information was provided about obtaining NIMS and ICS training in the first section of this Guide. The preparedness phase is the optimal time to learn about the organizing principles of these important structures for responding to emergencies and disasters.

Because the ICS, as part of the NIMS, is designed to be an all-hazards tool, public safety and other service agencies in the jurisdiction may be using ICS on a daily basis. If so, this provides opportunities to observe the system in action while responding to service calls rather than experiencing or observing the ICS in action for the first time during an emergency or disaster.

### 3.4 KEY CONTACTS AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

A PIO should begin now, in a “blue sky,” non-emergency situation, to assemble a list of key contacts. Contacts include:

- The [NJOEM Facebook page](#)
- The [NJOEM Twitter account](#)
- The [RSS feed](#) for the NJOEM blog READYNJ Alerts and Updates
- Key Contact names
  - Positions and agency/organization
  - Desk and mobile numbers including after-hours contact numbers (some individuals may have more than one phone number)
  - Email addresses
- Agency/organization websites and back up contacts in case the primary contact cannot be reached

A PIO may want to have both hard and digital copies of the contact list, and may also want to consider keeping copies in his/her car and at home. Contacts should be updated every 6 months.

NJSA App.A: 9-33 et seq. requires the appointment of county and municipal emergency management coordinators. In addition, each municipal police department is required by a [directive](#) from the New Jersey Attorney General to identify a PIO for that department.

It is important to identify the other PIOs attached to local governments and police departments in the area. When there is an incident, emergency, or disaster, the media will move quickly in an effort to get information, but they may not know who to contact first; as a result, all PIOs will get calls. It is helpful to know the right PIO to contact for information updates, to extend assistance, or to redirect questions. A PIO should build these working relationships during the preparedness phase through public information activities and emergency management exercises.

The Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) is another important resource. LEPC members should be included on the contact list. This group is typically composed of representatives from law enforcement, fire, public health, public works/engineering, environmental protection, and other organizations that can be called on to respond to an emergency or disaster involving all types of disasters.

The PIO should also develop relationships with PIOs from private, non-governmental organizations that have formal roles in response and recovery, e.g., the [American Red Cross](#) and or the [Salvation Army](#). Forming these relationships in advance will help a PIO connect more quickly in an emergency and give working relationships an important head start.

This is also the time to build a media contact list. It is important to develop working relationships with the media who will disseminate EPI during an emergency or disaster. The media contact list

should include traditional media (print and electronic), emerging digital media distributors, hyperlocal news reporters and specialized media that serve specific segments of the community, e.g., Spanish language media. When possible, a PIO should include and/or keep media informed about preparedness activities and/or exercises. Citizen-journalists in the community are another important resource and should be included on the contact list.

### **3.5 EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT EXERCISES**

All jurisdictions conduct emergency management exercises to practice for disaster situations. PIOs and other emergency management practitioners repeatedly describe how exercises help build the working relationships that they depend on during an event. Participating in exercises builds skills as different scenarios are practiced. This is also a way to learn about the other agencies and meet the people who will be partners when there is a disaster. The county or municipal OEM coordinator can provide [information](#) about training and exercises that may be available locally.

### **3.6 COMMUNICATING WITH THE WHOLE COMMUNITY**

The NJOEM is committed to Whole Community Planning, which means that emergency and public information planning should account for the needs and preferences of all community members, no matter their personal circumstances or abilities.

Some residents do not or cannot receive emergency public information through standard communication channels. A PIO needs to be knowledgeable about the demographics, circumstances, and needs of all people in their jurisdiction so that s/he can anticipate and plan for emergency public information access.

Advance planning and the development of working relationships helps meet inclusive EPI needs. Each county in New Jersey has an [Access and Functional Needs](#) (AFN) liaison. A PIO should reach out to these individuals to begin the advance work and take the time to meet them individually. Contact information for AFN liaison should be included in the key contact list. AFN liaisons are important advisors, as PIOs plan to meet the communication needs of all people in the community, especially those who may not receive public information through traditional means, those who do not have English as their first language, those who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing, or those who have other specific communication needs that will make it difficult for them to respond to EPI. The AFN Liaisons are also sources of information about existing communication conduits and trusted individuals and organizations in the community who can help convey or forward information during an emergency or disaster.

In addition, NJOEM website contains [GIS maps](#) from FEMA that document the percentage of individuals with disabilities by county and subdivision.

Ideally, a PIO will want to have the following information readily available before an emergency:

- Local and regional ethnic and non-English media outlets, both print and electronic. Explore whether these outlets are also using social media.
- Professional interpreters and translators, preferably known to the target community. The New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing provides a [directory](#) of American Sign Language Interpreters, through its Interpreter Referral Service.
- Trusted community and faith-based organizations that can be conduits of information.
- Medical supply companies, home health, and personal care agencies that can also be conduits of information.

It is important to practice and be prepared to use multiple methods for issuing emergency notifications and information throughout an event.

- A variety of audible and visual alerts will increase the likelihood that messages will reach individuals with sensory communication challenges.
  - Large type in Arial and sans serif fonts are most readable for those with vision impairment.
  - Use different audio formats such as CDs and MP3 files to make information available.
  - Braille may be appropriate for preparedness information and materials that are available to the public in the recovery phase.
- Print and web-based information including information viewable on mobile devices should comply with [Section 508](#) of the Rehabilitation Act.
- Simple pictures or pictograms to accompany text will assist individuals with low literacy and those for whom English is a second language.
- The availability of interpreters and translators and/or multiple language options at:
  - press conferences and public briefings;
  - hotlines and message lines; and
  - to assist with translating/interpreting media releases and other written materials.
- Social media is pervasive in almost every community, including non-English speaking and low income communities. Consider the platforms might be used to communicate with individuals who do not speak English or who are hearing impaired, e.g., YouTube or other streaming technology may make it possible to communicate directly without the use of translators and interpreters. Audiences who are distrustful of authority may find some messages more credible when deliver directly through social media rather than being filtered through traditional media.
- Closed-caption and use American Sign Language Interpreters for video streams with audio content.

- Specific information about where to look and what to look for if a website is provided for more information.

### **3.7 TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS**

Reliable translators are a specialized resource and are typically difficult to find on short notice. If a PIO knows that communication with non-English speaking people will be required, s/he should work to identify professional interpreters and to establish those business relationships prior to an immediate need. Once these relationships have been created, identify materials and standard messages that can be translated in advance.

Although some agencies keep a list of employees who speak different languages, experienced PIOs caution that this informal approach to translation can inadvertently result in inaccurate translations that lead to confusion or even misinformation.

Community- and faith-based organizations can be a credible conduit of information to non-English speaking communities. These options are best explored in advance of an incident.

### **3.8 GET STARTED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA**

A PIO should start with the jurisdiction's information technology (IT) department to determine what social media Guidelines apply to the organization. Most governmental agencies have policies on establishing new accounts; and IT is a good resource for information about practice and policy. It is possible that the agency will not have specific guidance for using social media during a disaster. Appendix D provides a summary of common social media policies and procedures tailored for the public, and EPI responsibilities of municipal and county PIOs.

FEMA offers a free on-line independent study [course](#) about social media in emergency management (IS 42).

Social media is an excellent way to quickly distribute information in a disaster. PIOs can “share” to the jurisdiction's Facebook accounts and/or retweet on the Twitter account. If messages are retweeted, include @username of the source to give credit and to reassure friends and followers that the information is from credible sources.

Monitoring social media is just as important as using it to disseminate EPI. PIOs may be concerned about having sufficient resources to monitor social media during an emergency or disaster. There are several options to explore during the preparedness phase.

Some jurisdictions use public safety telecommunicators (PSTs) to process 9-1-1 calls and dispatch first responders. NJOEM has successfully used a team of PSTs to monitor social media during disasters. The local law enforcement agency can provide information about whether this is a possibility, or if there are other options to assist with social media monitoring. Capabilities

will vary by jurisdiction. A PIO will want to confirm that selected PSTs are familiar with social media monitoring platforms like Hootsuite and Twitterfall.

Social media can be monitored from any geographic location. If the Governor has declared a State of Emergency (SOE), the state may request assistance from other states under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). Municipal or county PIOs can request social media monitoring assistance. Contact the County OEM coordinator and he/she will coordinate with the State; if the State is unable to provide the needed assistance, other states can be asked to provide support under the interstate EMAC.

There are software applications that can monitor social media. [Virtual Operations Support Teams](#) (VOSTs) are another approach being developed by emergency management agencies to assist with social media monitoring. VOSTs are composed of volunteers who share their digital skills with emergency management agencies and teams; this model originates from wildfire events in the western United States.

PIOs should meet with leadership to discuss how to respond to requests for assistance made on social media. It is highly likely that direct requests for assistance will be directed at social media accounts during a disaster. It is important to know in advance how requests for emergency assistance from social media outlets will be monitored and addressed. This social media monitoring policy should be posted on the website and social media accounts.

Super Storm Sandy brought the need for social media in disasters to the forefront in New Jersey. The NJOEM PIO anticipated the need for assistance in social media monitoring in advance of the storm's landfall. Arrangements had been made for NJ State Police PSTs to conduct social media monitoring; this advance planning enabled the EAO to focus on other critical tasks. As traditional communications were disrupted in some areas during Super Storm Sandy, PSTs began to receive direct requests from the public for assistance on social media. The PSTs on duty applied their training and experience, and transitioned from monitoring to emergency response activities.

This [article](#) titled *Online Public Communications by Police and Fire Services during the 2012 Hurricane Sandy* provides analysis of social media and other online communication between the public and fire and police agencies during that event. The authors describe how some agencies adapted to the unfolding communication crisis, and provide examples and offers commentary on developing policies and procedures and recommendations about future work.

Appendix C provides a sample of social media policies and procedures that account for the special responsibilities and requirements of emergency management and response.

### **3.9 PRE-SCRIPTED MESSAGES**

Pre-scripting certain types of messages can save time during a disaster. While many disasters bring unique aspects that cannot be pre-scripted, there are categories of EPI that will be predictably needed under certain circumstances, e.g., messages about driving during hazardous conditions. Based on the hazard identification and risk analysis (HIRA) for the jurisdiction, a PIO should evaluate whether advance development of messages is feasible. Advance development provides the opportunity to think carefully about the message the PIO wants to convey, with time to edit and reflect. Pre-scripting also allows translation services to be obtained in advance.

In addition, the technique of message mapping can be applied to more complex messages, such as in risk communication situations. In 2007, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency published a report titled [\*Effective Crisis and Risk Communication during Water Security Emergencies\*](#) that provides an in-depth look at how to conduct message mapping. Appendix B provides a simple message mapping template.

### **3.10 EMPLOYEE MEDIA ACCESS POLICIES**

Media access policies define how employees are authorized to interact with the media. During a disaster, first responders and other public employees are working hard to address the situation, and members of the media are working just as hard to get information to their readers and viewers.

Before the advent of citizen-journalists and the widespread availability of social media, directions to employees about how deal with the media were usually simple: “no comment.” Today, employees and formal spokesperson can encounter someone with a camera and recording ability at any turn.

“No comment” statements can prompt some reporters to become more insistent. Remind employees that they can also say something like “I’m sorry I can’t help you but you can talk to (insert name or position) for more information,” and then direct the reporter to the location where that individual may be found.

At some public safety agencies, employees are permitted to speak factually about what they are doing in response to an event. They are cautioned to avoid expressing opinions, speculating or hypothesizing, or commenting on circumstances outside the responsibilities of their agency.

In consultation with the appropriate elected leaders and administrative staff, the jurisdiction may want to develop or refine a media access policy. Municipal or county employees will need to be informed about the policy if one is adopted or revised.

A comment redirecting a reporter to the PIO is ideal, but the high-stress realities of emergencies may still result in difficult exchanges between responders and reporters as each work to do their job.

### **3.11 PIO SAFETY AND WELFARE PLAN**

A PIO is a type of first responder during adverse conditions. S/he will be one of the first called to duty in advance, or as an event unfolds. In addition, PIOs will continue to be on duty through the recovery phase of the event. It is important for the PIO and his/her family to be prepared for the possibility of long hours and possible separations, especially if an evacuation is implemented. NJEOM has a [Guide](#) to getting started with family disaster preparations. In addition, FEMA has also developed a publication about preparedness targeted to the special needs of [first responders](#).

Depending on the types of hazards that could affect an area (e.g. widespread power outage), a PIO may want to consider having enough supplies for his/her family to be self-sufficient for up to two weeks. Colleagues in law enforcement and firefighting may have ideas and tips about how they plan for the safety and welfare of their families.

If the PIO is confident about his/her family's safety and comfort, it will be easier to concentrate on the job demands a disaster brings. In addition, a PIO should prepare for his/her professional role during an emergency.

### **3.12 PIO GO KIT**

A "go kit" or disaster kit is a collection of basic items that a PIO will need to do his/her job in the event of an emergency, to include field work. The kit includes work-related and personal items. Designate a specific backpack or briefcase for the go kit. Based on the specific hazards in the region, a PIO may want to keep a go kit in the car and at home. Supplies should be checked twice a year to be sure the kit is fully stocked.

In its *Basic Guidance for Public Information Officers*, FEMA recommends including the following items:

- Copies of applicable plans from the jurisdiction and any other cooperating agencies
  - Local EOP
- Office supplies such as pens, paper, post-its, stapler with staples, tape and other supplies you commonly use
- Laptop computer, tablet, and smart phone accessories. It is unlikely that extras of these digital tools are available to keep in the go kit, but having duplicate sets of accessories can be the difference between being functional or on the sidelines. Consider the following:
  - Chargers, power cords, and surge protectors if not built into the power cord.



- Memory devices such as jump or thumb drives and CDs. Consider having materials on two different forms of memory for redundancy in case a computer does not have an available USB port or CD drive.
- Portable printer and paper. If a printer can be operated on batteries, include batteries.
- Replacement printer cartridge.
- Contact lists—a PIO may prefer hardcopies, but should consider keeping copies on a flash drive as a backup. These lists should be updated annually to be sure that in an emergency the most up-to-date contact information is available.
  - Agency and elected officials
  - Formal non-governmental partners such as the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army
  - Media, including ethnic media
  - Community organizations such as faith-based organizations, human service providers, and any group that can act as an informational conduit to the community
  - Translators and interpreters
- Dictionary and thesaurus (digital and hard copy)
- Associated Press Stylebook
- Digital camera and accessories
- Agency letterhead and business cards with 24/7 contact information
- Templates, pre-scripted messages or message maps. Again, it may be helpful to have both hard copies and content on a jump drive.
- Copies of agreements with resources or businesses that will be important in a disaster (hard and digital copies)
  - Other PIOs
  - Translation and interpretive services
  - Printing companies

A go kit of personal items is also advised. The kit should be tailored to specific needs and include at least the following:

- Spare glasses and contacts
- Prescription medications and basic first aid supplies
- Hand sanitizer, including wipes and paper towels
- Basic hygiene items
- Energy bars and water
- Weather gear appropriate to your climate and the seasons
- A change of clothes
- Sturdy shoes

New Jersey has experienced prolonged states of emergency and disaster. Experienced PIOs also recommend including a sleeping bag, pillow, and air mattress in your personal go kit. It is important to consider different scenarios that may occur and what additional items may be required for each.

### **3.13 JOINT INFORMATION CENTER PREPARATIONS**

The Joint Information Center (JIC) is a physical location where communication activities are coordinated.

To function effectively, a JIC will have all the necessary equipment and capability to support the full scope of PIO activities during a disaster or emergency. To expedite responsibilities, locate the JIC near the EOC. Advance determination of the JIC location will facilitate equipping and stocking the area. It will also allow consideration of how well the location will also serve the needs of media in the event the JIC is activated.

## **4 RESPONSE PHASE**

### **4.1 PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER ROLE, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND ACTIONS DURING A DISASTER: COLLECT, VERIFY, AND DISSEMINATE INFO**

During an emergency or disaster, the PIO will be working within the ICS framework and reporting to the Incident Commander as he/she collects, verifies, and disseminates information to affected audiences. The PIO will be applying his/her skills in written and oral communication to distribute accurate and timely information before, during, and after an emergency so that members of the public have specific life- and health-saving information. The PIO should also describe the severity of the situation and provide actions steps to be taken by individuals and communities. He/she will not only be working with traditional media, they will likely encounter citizen-journalists and communicate directly to the public through the use of web-based platforms, including social media.

As FEMA succinctly puts it, the PIO's role is to get "the right information, to the right people, at the right time" so that people make "the right decisions at the right time."

If a PIO is assigned to a municipality, and a local SOE is declared, s/he will work closely with elected and agency leaders to provide EPI to residents. This action is critical when protective actions, such as evacuation or shelter-in-place orders, are issued.

If the County issues a State of Emergency, the County PIO will take the lead in providing the public with EPI. For example, if a County declares an SOE and issues an evacuation order in advance of the State, the County, through its PIO, will be the lead communicator to the public. The Municipal PIO should amplify the County's message within his or her own community. The

NJOEM EAO will also amplify both municipal and county communication efforts through her/his channels.

When the Governor declares a SOE and the State EOP is activated, the State will take the lead in developing messages and working with media. Local PIOs should amplify these messages.

The local PIO will also remain the lead for public information regarding the situation in his/her own jurisdiction; and will continue to distribute locally specific information such as road closures, trash collection procedures, debris removal procedures, and the availability of local supplies. In addition, the PIO will continue to disseminate information if a situation develops locally that immediately threatens the health and safety of the public.

Counties may issue evacuation orders before the State. If a county initiates an evacuation, the county PIO will be responsible for taking the lead for providing EPI related to the evacuation. All available tools to disseminate the information, including social media and traditional media outlets, should be used. The NJOEM EAO can help amplify the messages.

In the event of a Presidential Disaster Declaration, local PIOs will continue to provide information pertaining to their area. They will also assist with the disaster recovery by disseminating information regarding availability of disaster assistance, such as the location of FEMA's Disaster Recovery Centers or the FEMA registration number. FEMA typically provides press releases, flyers, social media messages and other information the local PIO can share.

#### **4.2 THE JOINT INFORMATION CENTER IN THE RESPONSE PHASE**

As a municipal or county PIO responding to an emergency or disaster, a PIO may find it useful to co-locate with other PIOs during the response. Being in the same physical location enhances collaboration, improves the coordination of information and analysis, and provides a more efficient mechanism for responding to the breadth of EPI needs.

The JIC should be located close to the EOC to facilitate communication with the command structure. It should also be able to accommodate media briefings.

In 2013, the National Response Team released its Joint Information Center [Model](#), providing detailed guidance on establishing, operating, and demobilizing JICs. It provides the following list of JIC functions.

- Be the first and best source of information.
- Develop, recommend, and execute public information plans and strategies on behalf of the Incident Commander/Unified Command (IC/UC).
- Advise the IC/UC concerning public affairs issues that could impact response.

- Ensure the various response agencies' information personnel work together to minimize conflict.
- Gain and maintain public trust and confidence.
- Gather information about the crisis.
- Capture video and photos of the crisis for release to media and to support the response.
- Write and communication emergency public information regarding public protective actions, evacuations, sheltering, and other public safety messages.
- Ensure the timely and coordinated release of accurate information to the public by providing a single release point of information.
- Facilitate and manage control of rumors.
- Monitor and measure public perception of the incident.
- Inform the IC/UC of public reaction, attitude, and needs.

### **4.3 JOINT INFORMATION SYSTEM**

The JIS is a *process* that is used to coordinate state, county, and municipal public information resources to meet the EPI needs of all individuals affected by an emergency or disaster. The JIS integrates information and messages among all the involved agencies to promote coordinated, consistent, timely, and reliable public information. Through the JIS, PIOs apply their expertise to advise Incident Command about public information plans and strategies, carry out plans, and provide advice about public affairs and information issues that may affect response activities. The JIS plays an important role in identifying and counteracting rumors and misinformation. The JIS interacts through email, phone contact, and the Internet regardless of whether a physical JIC has been established.

To learn more, review the Public Information Annex or ESF15 in the municipal or county EOP. The County OEM can also assist in learning about regional plans for the JIS.

The JIS operates regardless of whether a JIC has been opened. PIOs can coordinate information virtually, via email, conference calls, and other technologies.

### **4.4 REQUESTING ASSISTANCE**

A PIO should alert the OEM Coordinator if assistance is needed during or immediately following an event. For example, a PIO may need assistance with language translation or with monitoring social media accounts. The Coordinator will either help identify PIO resources in the immediate surrounding area, or contact higher levels of government with a request to provide the requested support. Contacts established with other PIOs during the preparedness phase will be important sources of support when operating in a disaster or emergency.

#### **4.5 POTENTIAL PUBLIC INFORMATION TEAM MEMBERS**

The Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) is a standby radio service that can be utilized during emergencies. RACES members are licensed amateur radio operators (sometimes called “ham” radio operators) who volunteer to provide backup emergency communications, working with local, county, or state emergency management. In New Jersey, each county has its own RACES Team. The RACES website contains [RACES chapters](#) in New Jersey by county.

While the PIO may not have direct contact with RACES in his/her PIO role, RACES members are considered part of the jurisdiction’s communications team and have had special training to fulfill that role. RACES support can be especially important when cell towers are down and electrical power is out. The NJOEM describes the [role](#) of RACES during a SOE declaration.

#### **4.6 ACTIVITY LOG AND SMOOTH SHIFT TRANSITIONS**

Keeping an activity log (such as [ICS Form 214](#)), or log book during an emergency or disaster creates a record of activities. It also facilitates follow-up, and enables smooth coordination when a PIO is working with other PIOs and/or operating across shifts.

Shifts should be planned so they overlap, to allow time for debriefing about completed and pending tasks. The outgoing shift lead should inform the incoming shift lead about what work was completed, e.g., media releases completed, interviews. Also, it is important to communicate to the next shift about what items are in process or upcoming, e.g., requests for interviews that have not yet been confirmed or media briefings.

#### **4.7 WORKING WITH MEDIA**

Members of the media are working to get information to the public during an emergency or disaster. This partnership will function more smoothly if the PIO understands the media’s information gathering challenges, while respecting their role as important conduits to the public.

PIOs will work within the ICS to provide the media with access to elected officials and other spokespersons, while providing accurate information. PIOs should ask media representatives about their deadlines and other requirements. It is important to keep the lines of communication open, consistent with the PIO’s role and responsibilities as a member of the command staff. Answers and information should be provided promptly. During fast-moving events, PIOs should supply updates regularly to the media, and treat all outlets fairly.

#### **4.8 EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER ACCESS FOR MEDIA**

The PIO will receive media requests regarding EOC access when an event occurs. A policy can be developed in advance, or the question may be considered in the midst of a disaster. Regardless of the situation, the PIO should consult closely with leadership and colleagues before making commitments for EOC tours.

Physical access to the EOC by media may create security concerns. However, EOC access may also increase the level of transparency regarding how the event is being handled. These experiences indicate the importance of having a well-defined policy that, at a minimum, limits access to the EOC by people not directly involved with the response effort.

PIOs may wish to establish a prescribed area in the EOC for media interactions with defined time limits. All members of the media should be informed if this option is chosen.

#### **4.9 WORKING WITH CITIZEN JOURNALISTS**

Citizen journalists are typically defined as members of the public, unaffiliated with a traditional news outlet (TV, radio, print) who collect, report, analyze, and distribute news and information about events of interest to other members of the public. Anyone with a smart phone can record video and audio and almost instantaneously post the video and audio files to the Internet, with or without additional commentary.

Some citizen journalists partner with traditional media outlets to provide content. Information gathered by citizen-journalists is also a means of disaster intelligence for those managing the event. Citizen-journalists use all types of technology, mobile devices, and social media to distribute their content. More information about citizen journalism in New Jersey is described on The Citizens Campaign [website](#).

Hyper-local media/journalism focuses on smaller segments such as a specific town or even a specific neighborhood. Some hyper-local media outlets are completely run by volunteers, and others may be supported by the sale of local advertising.

Citizen-journalists and hyper local media are growing throughout New Jersey. PIOs should continuously monitor the people and platforms that are reporting events in their jurisdiction. During a disaster, they can be an important component of situational awareness and an important conduit of information back to their readers and followers.

The presence of citizen-journalists also means that the PIO, or personnel from the jurisdiction, may be recorded on video and/or audio at any time, with the content being instantaneously transmitted. The PIO and his/her colleagues will be highly visible during and after a disaster. At the same time, professional and citizen journalists will be working even harder than usual to gather news. The PIO should consider passing along the following tips to agency leadership and colleagues:

- Conduct yourself in a professional manner at all times, adhering to agency standards of conduct, accepted protocols, and decorum.
- Always identify yourself as a member of the agency.

- Avoid public statements that reveal non-public or unconfirmed information about incidents, emergencies, or agency matters.
- Protect the identity of individuals involved in incidents or emergencies until family members are notified.
- Avoid statements about members of the public, elected officials, agency leadership, or colleagues that could be interpreted as critical, demeaning, discriminatory, or otherwise unprofessional. This includes the use of inside jokes and terms and gallows-type humor.
- Follow the agency’s media access policy.

#### **4.10 COMMON MEDIA QUESTIONS**

Professional and citizen-journalists will want to gather information that describes *what* has happened, what will happen *next*, and *why* the event happened. By anticipating likely questions, the PIO can begin to organize his/her information and thoughts in preparation for interviews and other communication activities.

Questions will likely fall into the following categories:

- The “what,” “when,” “where,” and “how” of the emergency or disaster
- Who has been or will be harmed, including casualties
- What damage has occurred
- Details about the response effort
- Who is leading the response efforts
- What elected officials are making decisions
- What will happen next

FEMA’s Public Information Officer Awareness Course G289 boils the expected questions down to three broad categories:

- What happened?
- What are you doing about it?
- What does it mean to me?

There are other categories of questions and endless variations. PIOs should anticipate these topics of interest and develop a list of questions to prepare leadership and themselves for interactions with media. In addition, NJOEM’s [media resources and links for journalists](#) may provide additional ideas about preparation.

#### **4.11 MEDIA RELEASES**

Media releases are one type of written communication tool commonly used during an emergency or disaster. Releases are factual reports of an incident or activity that are newsworthy. Releases include information that is factual, accurate, and verified—all facts should be attributed. Media

releases should be written in the third person, using concise language. Media releases should avoid jargon and acronyms; use common words and simple sentences, and be written in short paragraphs in an active voice.

Media releases are organized like newspaper articles with the most important information first, followed by supporting information, and finally background information.

Another variation on media releases are social media releases. A PIO can use the agency's website to post multiple forms of media to supplement the traditional text-style media release; e.g. video, audio clips, and pictures can be posted with links to additional information.

#### **4.12 SPOKESPERSON TIPS**

Preparing for and executing news briefings and conferences and interviews during emergencies and disasters are part of the PIO's responsibilities. The PIO will be preparing others to act as spokespersons and, in some instances, may be called on to address the media. Being a spokesperson is a demanding but crucial role in any disaster. People need understandable explanations and directions at this time; they also want to hear directly from their leadership to be reassured that they are engaged and actively working to protect the public.

PIOs can obtain specialized information about the spokesperson role through the following courses offered by FEMA:

- [IS 29 Public Information Officer Awareness Training](#)
- G289 Public Information Officer Awareness Course (offered periodically throughout the state; check the NJOEM training [calendar](#))

PIOs should take advantage of any media training opportunities for their leadership and themselves. Some organizations present training opportunities; and there are consultants who specialize in media training and coaching.

PIOs should also become familiar with the subject matter experts (SMEs) in the agency, and among partners. There may be situations when a SME from another discipline is needed or PIOs in the network may ask for SME referrals. In a disaster, the public will likely need more information that can be supplied by one source. Work through the JIS and the contact network to find credible spokespersons and cross-amplify messages.

The following steps are not exhaustive, but can help preparations for a public statement or interview.

First, it is important to determine the appropriate spokesperson. That person may be an elected official, the Incident Commander, or the PIO. Next, the PIO should decide what the EPI objectives are and any other public information objectives that may apply. He/she should identify



the audiences and give thought to the questions they will have and what information they need to know. In addition to the general public affected by the incident, the audience may include other elected officials, non-governmental partners, businesses, and other community institutions like schools. The PIO should develop talking points and supporting materials that will reinforce the information provided.

The PIO should seek clearance or approval for the content, consistent with the lines of authority and communication in effect under JIS. Once clearance is granted, the PIO can proceed to prepare the identified spokesperson. If there is a statement to be read, the spokesperson should read it through silently and then out loud. The PIO should provide feedback to strengthen delivery and pose likely questions to the spokesperson so he or she can practice answers, using any talking points that have been developed. It is important to remind the spokesperson to:

- Pay close attention to the interviewer or audience.
- Speak in everyday language.
- Avoid abbreviations and jargon.
- Know the main points and stick to them.
- Use positive but realistic language.
- Speak to what his or her organization is doing—avoid comments, especially blaming ones, about other organizations.
- “Know when to stop.” If the point has been made, do not artificially fill the air time (Jordan-Meir 2011).
- Summarize key points.

The PIO should caution the spokesperson about the following:

- Avoid speculation or responding to hypothetical questions, i.e., “what if” questions
- Decline to comment on second hand information of any kind.
- Maintain a professional demeanor—spokesperson should be aware of their own hot buttons and internal signals that they are losing their “cool.”
- Do not lie.
- Never say anything “off the record.”

While there is no specific personality type that is best, an effective spokesperson is self-aware and able regulate his/her how reactions while in the spotlight.

- A spokesperson:
  - Has enough knowledge and experience to speak fluently about the subjects involved. He or she also knows when to say “I don’t know but I’ll find someone who does.”
  - Is a careful listener and is alert to invitations to speculate, guess, blame, or otherwise deviate from candid and factual/objective information.

- Conveys both empathy for those affected by the disaster and commitment to the response and recovery process.
- Is candid about known information and options for action that help people make good decisions during the disaster.
- Limits his/her comments to the scope of his/her agency or jurisdiction.

#### **4.13 RUMOR CONTROL AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

Rumors are a natural co-occurrence with emergencies and disasters; they can be considered an outgrowth of the intense need for information during an incident. Social media makes it possible for rumors to spread farther and faster. While social media is also considered to be self-corrective, a PIO will want to respond with corrections and updates so that the public is receiving the best information.

The first step is to issue verified information as quickly as possible, while coordinating with other PIOs and working within the JIS. Where verification is pending, the PIO should let friends and followers know when accurate information is expected to be available about the rumor’s topic.

It is important to have adequate resources for social media monitoring (see earlier comments about types of monitoring support). The PIO must know what is being said so he/she can decide how and when to respond.

Research has shown that naming and publicizing rumors is a legitimate method for undermining the rumor; this puts the agency and PIO back in control of the information. A possible approach is to keep a rumor log on the website. The PIO may want to organize rumors by categories to make it easier for a member of the public to identify what he/she is looking for. Include the date and time it was identified. As soon as information is available that clarifies the misinformation, it should be posted immediately. This transparent approach will also reinforce the agency’s credibility as it deals with misinformation head on.

### **5 RECOVERY PHASE**

#### **5.1 PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER ROLE, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND ACTIVITIES DURING RECOVERY PHASE**

The commencement of the recovery phase often overlaps with the response phase. Even as first responders continue rescue and other emergency activities, people, organizations, and communities who are no longer immediately threatened begin planning and taking action to return to normal or to create their “new normal.”

As soon as appropriate, the PIO should inform the public when the danger has passed. Additional topics to be communicated include:

- Advice to the public about protective actions to be taken, e.g., availability of tetanus vaccine and dangers of mold
- Updated summaries of the emergency or disaster, including impacts
- Reports on actions being taken by governmental units and other recovery partners to assist the individuals and the community
- Information and sources of information about clean-up and repairs
- Information about how recovery programs work, gaining access and requirements for those programs
- Debris removal information, if applicable

## **5.2 KEY PARTNERS AND CONTACTS**

A PIO should continue to work closely with other PIOs as well as response partners. The contact list will likely expand as the PIO discovers new organizations and partners through the recovery effort.

## **5.3 DEBRIEFING FROM RESPONSE PHASE**

After Action Reviews (AARs) are an important part of the debriefing. These are structured discussions that encourage responders to identify what “went right” so those practices can be reinforced. In addition, there’s a non-evaluative opportunity to consider “what can be done better” so that lessons learned can be captured and process improvements made. AARs are typically organized by the ICS planning section and the PIO function should be included.

To prepare for AAR, a PIO should monitor media reports and track public inquiries and social media to determine how well information was understood. It is important to review the activity log to quantify the volume of EPI activity and identify any trends that may indicate areas for improvement and highlight areas where information was successfully conveyed and prompted protective actions.

PIOs should participate in any AAR opportunity and consider organizing one with fellow PIOs to focus specifically on the execution of ESF 15.

## **5.4 JOINT INFORMATION SYSTEM AND JOINT INFORMATION CENTER IN THE RECOVERY PHASE**

The Incident Commander will seek a recommendation from the PIO before making a final decision to demobilize the JIC. This will typically occur at some point in the recovery phase when media interest begins to decline. The PIO should inform the media about the demobilization and provide information about where updates about the recovery will be found, e.g., websites or through social media posts.

A tip sheet on demobilization is available in the [National Response Team Joint Information Center Model](#).

## **5.5 SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE RECOVERY PHASE**

Social media accounts will continue to be excellent methods for disseminating information about recovery efforts and programs.

## **6 MITIGATION PHASE**

### **6.1 PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER ROLE, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND ACTIVITIES DURING MITIGATION PHASE**

FEMA defines hazard mitigation as any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to life and property from natural hazards. Another way to understand hazard mitigation is as the prevention component of the emergency management process. Mitigation activities will occur immediately following a disaster and before another disaster strikes. Activities are often structural in nature, such as elevating a building from flooding or installing wind shutters, but also include non-structural actions such as ongoing public awareness programs or regulatory policies.

The PIO's role in the mitigation phase is largely associated with dissemination of public information. A PIO, should consult with and offer to provide support to the local or county OEM coordinator as mitigation activities are implemented.

If a federal disaster declaration occurs, there may be access to federal programs for assistance for mitigation activity. If there are specialized mitigation programs available for residents, organizations, and businesses, PIOs can play an important role in assuring that the information is clearly and widely communicated to target audiences.

Mitigation activities may also occur before a disaster strikes. One example is a public information campaign. The PIO may spearhead dissemination of information to reduce risk throughout the community, including ensuring storm drains are cleared before rain events or securing outdoor items, such as patio furniture or propane tanks, that may blow away in wind events.

Recent disasters have heightened the importance of mitigation for all New Jersey residents. As PIO, there is an opportunity to contribute to this important phase of public information.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

PIOs play a unique and critical role in all four phases of emergency management. But they do not carry this responsibility alone. In addition to team members in the jurisdiction, PIOs can reach out to other PIOs in governmental units, including the state, for mentoring and assistance.

They can also leverage the knowledge and experience of PIOs from non-governmental partners and businesses.

Members of the public have an increasingly important role in protecting themselves, their families, and neighbors. PIOs can have a direct impact on how well the public prepares itself. The PIO's role in providing emergency public information enables members of the public to make good decisions in difficult situations. The more effective they are in fulfilling the emergency public information function, the more likely that important response resources can be concentrated for the most impact during an emergency or disaster.

## **8 REFERENCES**

FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency). Basic Guidance for Public Information Officers (PIOs). 2007. Page 10.

Goepfert, M. 2001. When Disaster Strikes: Managing Municipal Response Operations. New Jersey League of Municipalities Magazine. April.

Jordan-Meir, J. 2011. The Four Stages of Highly Effective Crisis Management: How to Manage Media in the Digital Age.



## APPENDIX A—ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Training

- G289 Public Information Officer Awareness Course
  - <http://www.ready.nj.gov/programs/training-schedule.html>
- Additional training information can be obtained New Jersey NIMS home page (click the training tab)
  - <http://www.nims.nj.gov/>
- New Jersey Office of Emergency Management trainings
  - [http://www.ready.nj.gov/programs/field\\_training.html](http://www.ready.nj.gov/programs/field_training.html)

### Web-based Training

- FEMA IS 29 Public Information Officer Awareness Training
  - <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/courseOverview.aspx?code=is-29>
- FEMA IS 230b Fundamentals of Emergency Management Training
  - (<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/IS230B/IS230bCourse.pdf>)
- FEMA independent study course about social media in emergency management (IS 42).
  - <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/courseOverview.aspx?code=IS-42>

### Web-based Resources

#### *New Jersey*

- Resources and links for local government officials
  - <http://www.ready.nj.gov/plan/local-officials.html>
- The New Jersey State Hazard Mitigation Plan
  - [http://www.ready.nj.gov/programs/mitigation\\_plan2014.html](http://www.ready.nj.gov/programs/mitigation_plan2014.html)
- New Jersey laws and directives
  - (<http://www.ready.nj.gov/about/law.htm>)
- Frequently asked questions about States of Emergency in New Jersey
  - are available at [http://www.nj.gov/njoem/soe\\_faq.html](http://www.nj.gov/njoem/soe_faq.html)
  - <http://www.ready.nj.gov/plan/state-of-emergency.html#disaster>
- Preparedness information from the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management
  - [http://www.state.nj.us/njoem/preparedness\\_league.html](http://www.state.nj.us/njoem/preparedness_league.html)
- Public utilities in New Jersey
  - <http://www.state.nj.us/bpu/assistance/utility/>
- American Sign Language Interpreters - New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
  - <http://nj.gov/humanservices/ddhh/services/>

- New Jersey Attorney General directive regarding Public Information Officers in law enforcement agencies
  - <http://www.state.nj.us/lps/dcj/agGuide/exec69.htm>
- New Jersey GIS maps regarding people with access and functional needs
  - (<http://www.ready.nj.gov/plan/special-needs.html>)
- RACES capability in New Jersey by county
  - <http://www.qsl.net/races/links.html>.
- Role of RACES during a SOE declaration
  - [http://www.nj.gov/njoem/soe\\_faq.html](http://www.nj.gov/njoem/soe_faq.html).
- Family preparations
  - <http://www.ready.nj.gov/plan/kit-plan.html>
- NJOEM's media resources and links for journalists
  - (<http://www.ready.nj.gov/media/resources.html>)
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (water supply issues)
  - <http://www.nj.gov/dep/watersupply/pdf/wu-advisories.pdf>
- New Jersey Access and Functional Needs (AFN) liaisons
  - <http://www.ready.nj.gov/about/association.html>

### ***Federal***

- Federal statutes relevant to emergency management
  - [http://www.ready.nj.gov/about/law\\_fedlaws.html](http://www.ready.nj.gov/about/law_fedlaws.html)
- Federal disaster declaration process
  - [http://www.state.nj.us/njoem/press\\_fedaids.html](http://www.state.nj.us/njoem/press_fedaids.html)
- Preparedness targeted to the special needs of first responders
  - <http://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/RRTToolkit.pdf>
- Center for Disease Control crisis and emergency risk communication resources
  - <http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/>
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act compliance (for print and web-based information)
  - <http://www.section508.gov/other-relevant-laws>
- The National Response Team Joint Information Center Model
  - [http://www.nrt.org/Production/NRT/NRTWeb.nsf/AllAttachmentsByTitle/SA-1084\\_NRT\\_JIC\\_Model/\\$File/Updated%20NRT%20JIC%20Model\\_4-25-13.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.nrt.org/Production/NRT/NRTWeb.nsf/AllAttachmentsByTitle/SA-1084_NRT_JIC_Model/$File/Updated%20NRT%20JIC%20Model_4-25-13.pdf?OpenElement)

### **Social Media**

- [NJOEM Facebook page](#)
  - <http://www.facebook.com/READYNEWJERSEY>
- [NJOEM Twitter account](#)
  - <https://www.twitter.com/ReadyNJ>
- Subscribe to the [RSS feed](#) for the NJOEM blog READYNJ Alerts and Updates



- <http://readynj.wordpress.com/>

## **Other**

- Non-governmental organizations that have formal roles in response and recovery
  - [American Red Cross:http://www.redcross.org/nj](http://www.redcross.org/nj)
  - [Salvation Army:http://newjersey.salvationarmy.org/](http://newjersey.salvationarmy.org/)
- Effective Crisis and Risk Communication during Water Security Emergencies. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 2007 - [\*Effective Crisis and Risk Communication during Water Security Emergencies\*](#)
- *Online Public Communications by Police and Fire Services during the 2012 Hurricane Sandy*  
[https://www.cs.colorado.edu/~palen/palen\\_papers/HughesStDenisPalenAndersonPoliceFireSandy.pdf](https://www.cs.colorado.edu/~palen/palen_papers/HughesStDenisPalenAndersonPoliceFireSandy.pdf)

## **Definitions**

- NJOEM's glossary of terms
  - is available at [http://www.state.nj.us/njoem/press\\_glossary.html](http://www.state.nj.us/njoem/press_glossary.html)

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## APPENDIX B—MESSAGE MAP TEMPLATE

A message map is a template for systematically developing a message and its supporting points. The template can be used in advance to develop pre-scripted messages or in response to an emergent event. In addition to saving time during a real event, pre-scripting provides the opportunity to obtain professional translations. Additional information can be found in [\*Effective Crisis and Risk Communication During Water Services\*](#) from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Topic:

---

Question to be answered or directive to be delivered:

---

---

Audience and stakeholders (may be multiple so consider unique informational needs):

---

Messenger or spokesperson:

---

Methods or channels for delivery:

---

Message #1:

Supporting Fact

Supporting Fact

Supporting Fact

Message #2:

Supporting Fact

Supporting Fact

Supporting Fact

Message #3:

Supporting Fact

Supporting Fact

Supporting Fact

## **APPENDIX C—MEDIA RELEASE TEMPLATE**

### Traditional

- Format
  - Use organizational letterhead or some other form that clearly identifies your organization.
  - Prominently display your contact information in the upper right hand corner. Include a directive to not distribute your contact information to the general public.
  - Include a headline to signal the receiver about the contents; include what has happened and who is affected.
  - Consider assigning numbers to your news releases, especially if you may be issuing more than one a day.
  - Include the date and time of release.
  - Identify the end of the release by stating “End” or through the symbols “#####.”
  
- Content
  - Provide the most important information first, consistent with news writing:
    - What happened
    - When did it happen
    - Where did it happen
    - Who has been affected and who is taking action
    - What action is being taken
    - What is known about why
    - What will happen next
  - If the release contains critical information for public health and safety, lead with that.
  - Provide a quote from the Incident Commander or Elected Official in Charge.
  - Describe the resources being used to respond.
  - Attribute information.
  - Follow the Associated Press style.

### Social Media News Release

If you have access to the Internet during the emergency or disaster, you may want to post your news release on-line. This allows you to take advantage of additional capabilities such as posting pictures and videos; audio MP3 files with interviews or information, including RSS feeds if available; links to your agency and NJOEM’s Facebook and Twitter accounts; and links to other resources and other functionalities.

The content elements from a traditional release are still the foundation for a social media style news release.

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## APPENDIX D—SOCIAL MEDIA OPERATING PROCEDURES

The following examples of social media operating procedures must be tailored to specifically reflect the agency, personnel, and applicable policies of the user. Placeholders signal locations in the text for inserting your agency's name.

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Introduction
  - A. Reason for Policy
  - B. Purpose of Social Media Use by (insert agency name)
  - C. Guiding Principles
  - D. Scope
  
- II. Policies and Guidance Incorporated by Reference
  
- III. Social Media Platforms
  
- IV. Account Management
  - A. Creation of Official (insert agency name) Social Media Accounts
  - B. Security
  - C. Maintenance of Accounts
  - D. Monitoring of Accounts
  - E. Public Comments on (insert agency name) Social Media Sites
  - F. Disablement of Accounts
  
- V. Official Use of Behalf of (insert agency name)
  - A. Personnel Roles and Responsibilities
  - B. Procedure for Social Media when (insert agency name) PIO/EAO is On Leave or Unavailable
  - C. General Guidelines for Creating and Posting Content on Social Media, including Blogs
  - D. Social Media Use during EOC Activation
  - E. 24/7 Social Media Monitoring when EOC Activated
  
- VI. Citizen Journalists, the Press, and Performance of Duties in the Public Arena
  
- VII. Personal Use of Social Media

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Reason for Policy

The (insert agency name) has developed this policy to provide guidance to all agency personnel about the use of social media in fulfilling official duties under all operating conditions.

As appended to the agency's Public Information Annex or Emergency Support Function (ESF) 15, these procedures Guide the use of social media to meet external communications needs of the public whenever the (municipal)(county) government responds to a catastrophic, natural, technological, or civil disaster and any other event requiring an emergency response.

In addition, (insert agency name) personnel can now expect that members of the public as well as the media will utilize social media and other digital technologies to transmit text and/or to record and disseminate images and audio of emergency situations, and include information about agency personnel as they fulfill their duties in emergency settings. Agency personnel should also expect they will be recorded or communicated about in other venues like public meetings and training sessions. Awareness of these technologies and professional decorum is important to agency credibility.

Finally, social media activities of (insert agency name) personnel on personal time may have implications for the agency's reputation. While the agency recognizes the right of personnel to express their views as private citizens, social media has redefined the boundaries of private time and conduct.

This document provides guidance on the use of social media by (insert agency name) personnel.

### B. Purpose of Social Media Use by (insert agency name)

The (insert agency name) Public Information Officer (PIO) or External Affairs Officer (EAO) routinely uses social media to inform the public about events or circumstances that threaten the life and safety of the public and is actionable as well as any other information related to the agency's mission. Social media contributes to situational awareness during time-sensitive events and emergencies, can identify and respond to rumors and inaccurate information, and can allow engagement with the public in defined circumstances. Social media is also used to disseminate information from partners (i.e., other municipal, county, state and federal agencies, and voluntary agencies like the American Red Cross) to augment knowledge of the situation at hand.

Additionally, power interruptions or destruction of infrastructure during events and emergencies can interfere with many traditional methods of communication. Social media provides another conduit for directly funneling important information to the millions of New Jersey citizens with smart phones, tablets, and other devices that connect to the Internet.



### C. Guiding Principles

The following principles for social media use reinforce the (insert agency name) values of (insert appropriate language from agency mission or other guiding principles):

1. Respect for the privacy of New Jersey citizens
2. Accuracy in information shared, including commitment to self-correction
3. Timeliness in distribution and updating of information
4. Transparency in sources used
5. Accountability for personal actions whether acting in an official or personal role
6. Respect for the integrity of agency stakeholders and partners
7. Civility maintained where the public comment accepted

### D. Scope

This policy applies to enlisted and civilian staff of both management and operations at (insert agency name) as they conduct their duties in the field, the office, the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), or any other location where their mission occurs.

This policy also provides guidance to (insert agency name) enlisted and civilian staff regarding their use of personal social media accounts, including blogs. The agency expects employees to avoid conduct that, disseminated through social media channels, impairs the credibility of the agency, damages working relationships or misleads the public in any way (discussed in more detail in Section VII, Personal Use of Social Media).

## **II. POLICIES AND GUIDANCE INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE**

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the following policies and guidance:

1. (insert agency name) mission statement
2. (insert agency name) code of ethics or code of conduct
3. Public Information Annex or ESF 15A (External Communication)
4. General Guidelines on Internet use for (insert jurisdiction or agency) employees
5. (insert jurisdiction) Open Records Act and e-discovery requirements
6. Records retention policies governing (insert agency or jurisdiction)

### III. SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The following information briefly describes the purpose and benefit of the social media platforms currently in use by the (insert agency name)(insert position). These descriptions will be updated and expanded as new platforms and applications evolve and are adopted.

#### Facebook

(Insert agency name) has a Facebook account under the agency's name: (insert account address). Facebook allows instant and direct communication with people (called fans or friends) in a particular social network. Partner agencies and volunteer organizations are among the fans following (insert agency name) account.

Facebook has numerous benefits:

- It provides instant communication.
- Although posts will go only to those who are fans or friends, those individuals or entities can “share” the information through their networks, thus amplifying geometrically the reach of a message.
- The service is free to the agency and to its fans and friends.
- It is available for communication 24/7 and does not require an intermediary (like traditional media outlets) and is not dependent on the intermediaries timing or priorities.
- Photos, videos, and audio can be imbedded into posts to enhance the power and/or depth of a text-based message.
- The (insert agencyname) PIO/EAO can post information from any location with a smart phone.
- Facebook is most closely associated with smartphones. However, certain functions of Facebook can be activated on feature phones thus expanding its potential reach into the general population.
- Facebook is used among all ethnic groups and by the deaf/hard of hearing community. Depending on individual capabilities, individuals with low vision may also be able to use Facebook.
- Facebook allows the agency to enable functions so that the public can comment, thus becoming an engagement tool. These settings also allow the agency to delete comments consistent with any adopted policy.

#### Twitter

(Insert agency name) has a Twitter account @(insert account handle), with extended emergency notifications capability through its Twitter Alerts account. Twitter Alerts will be used to:

- Warn of imminent dangers.
- Disseminate preventive instructions.
- Issue evacuation directions.
- Distribute urgent safety alerts.
- Communicate information on access to essential resources.
- Communicate information on critical transportation and utility outages.
- Conduct rumor control.

In addition to instant communication with followers, those who do not follow [@\(insert agency handle\)](#) can search for it, and see all previous information released (tweeted) by the agency. Twitter's system of hashtags (#) also allows Twitter users to search for and find information being disseminated related to a particular event. Twitter's benefits include:

- It provides instant communication with followers.
- Through hashtags like #njstorm, users that are not otherwise connected as followers can share common information about an event or situation. As a result, individuals who are not followers of [\(insert agency name\)](#) can become aware of information being disseminated by the agency and others utilizing the hashtag.
- Twitter is commonly accepted now as an important tool for situational awareness, rumor monitoring, and identifying emergent events.
- The hashtag system makes Twitter especially useful for improving situational awareness of an unfolding event.
- [\(Insert agency name\)](#) Tweets can be re-Tweeted by followers and the agency can Retweet posts from its trusted partners, e.g., Mount Holly National Weather Service.
- Tweets are limited to 140 characters a message; URL shorteners make it possible to “drive” users towards websites or blogs that have more detailed information.
- Twitter's 140 character messages can be delivered to feature phones as SMS texts. People with smart phone can receive additional types of information, including photos and video.
- Twitter also has an alert function that users can enable. This function will trigger a vibration or audible alert when information from certain sources is posted, e.g., [\(insert agency name\)](#).
- The platform is free to the agency and users.
- Twitter is used by the deaf and hard of hearing community and by all ethnic groups, including Spanish-speakers.
- Different technology and different optional privacy settings make Twitter a more open network than Facebook.
- Twitter does allow for direct, private messaging between accounts that both follow and are followers of each other. Some emergency communication specialists have identified this function as another source of back-up communication between agencies if there is massive failure of communication infrastructure.

- Twitter alerts get immediately delivered as notifications, text messages, or also e-mails, to all subscribers.
- Twitter alerts have a distinct look to stand out on people’s timelines, embedded Tweets, and public Tweet links.
- Twitter alerts accounts are exempted from spam rate limits.

## **Wordpress Blog**

([Insert agency name](#)) blog is an important tool for disseminating longer and more complex sets of information. The agency’s blog can be accessed at (insert web address). Blogs typically operate on a longer time cycle, comparable to a magazine, while Facebook’s and Twitter’s time cycles are more “play-by-play.” Social media posts can “drive” people to the blog for more detailed guidance or information about a situation.

The benefit of a blog is its accessibility to anyone with a device connected to the Internet.

**Liking and Following other accounts:** The social networking features allow users to “like” and “follow” other users, thus automatically receiving posted information. As a general rule, ([insert agency name](#)) will “follow” and “like” other federal, state, county and municipal emergency management and government agencies and officials; public safety offices; appropriate publications; and news outlets. The PIO/EAO will exercise discretion in deciding to “follow” and “like” personal accounts.

**Reliability of Information on Social Media:** Not all information posted on social media is accurate. However, it is also commonly accepted to be a self-correcting information network. Social media etiquette, ethics, and the values of openness and transparency direct people to correct their own information and other users will frequently inject new or more accurate information to correct the original error. Like all information found on the Internet, users must apply modern standards of Internet or digital literacy to make reasoned judgments about the reliability of posts.

## **IV. ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT**

### **A. Official ([insert agency name](#)) Accounts**

Official accounts must clearly identify the sponsoring agency, provide a link to the Department’s official website and, if possible, include traditional contact information like telephone number or email address for inquiries. The account will also include the ([insert agency name](#)) business hours and a notice that, under non-emergency circumstances, the account is monitored only during those business hours.

The (insert agency name) PIO/EAO will determine account settings appropriate with the agency's mission and the purpose or benefit to be gained by the agency's use of the platform. Account settings may include privacy settings and allowance for comments.

For platforms that allow the public to comment or react to content, include statements that:

1. Content submitted by the public does not represent the views of the agency;
2. Content posted by members of the public is subject to additional public disclosure;
3. The site is monitored and offensive content will be removed and archived by the account manager with a brief statement. (See Section D below for more information on monitoring.)

#### B. Security

Passwords for (insert agency name) social media accounts will be managed consistent with the agency's general policy on password security (insert link to specific agency policy on passwords). Passwords and any other credentials are limited to authorized personnel.

Staff will comply with security measures to protect any mobile device that is used to create and post content.

#### C. Maintenance of Accounts

The functions of social media platforms are constantly being updated. The (insert agency name) PIO/EAO will monitor changes in those functions, and, as account manager, make adjustments in settings to be consistent with other policies and the guiding principles for the agency's social media activities. As new social media platforms emerge, the PIO/EAO will evaluate their functionalities in relation to (insert agency name) public information goals to determine whether additional accounts will be added.

Content on social media sites is subject to the New Jersey Open Public Records Act. The PIO/EAO will develop procedures to remove and archive content that is removed for violating this policy so that it can be retrieved as needed. These procedures will include record retention schedules consistent with agency requirements.

#### D. Monitoring of Accounts

Social media accounts will be monitored to:

1. Track general trends and information related to the agency mission, including information posted by partners.
2. Identify and respond to inappropriate posts.
3. Identify and respond to rumors.
4. Identify requests for information (these will be referred to other agencies as appropriate).

5. Refer requests for emergency assistance to appropriate emergency response personnel and partners.;
6. Collect and convey field reports and damage assessments.
7. Collect and convey photographic verification; and requests for emergency assistance.

Monitoring will occur as follows:

1. Under normal condition when there is no EOC activation, monitoring will occur during regular business hours.
2. If there is a heightened level of preparedness, monitoring will be extended as necessary.
3. When the EOC is activated, additional assistance may be requested from the county OEM coordinator. (see section on 24/7 monitoring during EOC activations).

Additional details are provided in the Official Use section.

The (insert agency name) PIO or EAO and his or her designees are authorized to use programs like Tweetdeck and Hootsuite to monitor and manage the agency's social media accounts and activities while on duty.

#### E. Public Comments Posted on (insert agency name) Social Media Sites

Social media is intended to engage and create conversations among users. Settings on social media platforms can be adjusted to either allow or block public comments. The (insert agency name) PIO/EAO will determine what comment functions will be allowed for the public on an account by account basis, consistent with the purpose fulfilled by a platform. Agency sites that allow comments will state that this function is provided as a moderated on-line discussion site for matters related to the agency's mission, not a public forum. This description and the policies below will be posted in the appropriate places for each social media platform used by the agency so that users can be informed about the conditions of their participation:

1. It is the policy of (insert agency name) to delete any public comment or block individuals who post comments that are off topic, inaccurate (rumor), a personal attack, discriminatory against protected classes and/or is judged to be hate speech, obscene, infringes on copyright laws, promotes illegal activity or, in the judgment of the PIO or EAO, any content that undermines the credibility of the agency, its ability to fulfill its mission or endangers the public in any manner. Individuals may also be blocked from agency sites for posting of offensive or inappropriate content.
2. Posts that are assessed to violate the policy will be preserved via screen shot then removed from the platform and stored consistent with the state's record retention policies, accompanied by a brief written description of the reason for removing the post or comment.
3. Any content posted by a member of the public is subject to additional public disclosure, in addition to the visibility on the social media feed in question.

4. Comments posted by members of the public do not reflect the positions, opinions or advice from the (insert agency name).
5. (NOTE: Carefully tailor this language to address agency policy) Requests for emergency assistance through social media will handled as if they were submitted through regular channels.

#### F. Disablement of Accounts

Accounts may be disabled for a variety of reasons, for example a platform may become technically obsolete or the intended audience may migrate to another platform. The account manager will inform the appropriate agency personnel of the intent to disable the account, make a plan for transitioning to another platform or reallocating efforts toward existing platforms and work with the agency information technology (IT) personnel to accomplish the necessary actions.

#### E. Breach or Disruption of Account Security

NOTE: discuss with agency IT and leadership how to handle a breach of a social media account security and the procedures for notification if tampering is detected.

### V. OFFICIAL USE ON BEHALF OF (Insert agency name)

#### A. Authorized Personnel Roles and Responsibilities

NOTE: Tailor this section to reflect the agency personnel and social media platforms specific to your agency.

The (insert agency name) PIO/EAO is the direct conduit to the media and the authorized manager, publisher, or creator of content for alerts distributed through (insert direct alert accounts, e.g., Nixle or reverse 9-1-1) and posting on the (insert agency name) social media accounts and blog. The responsibilities include:

1. Develop content consistent with posting Guidelines (below) and Guiding Principles in Section I.
2. Monitor social media for the purpose of situational awareness and to manage comments posted by the public.
3. In his/her absence, identify (insert agency name) personnel to create and manage social media accounts until the PIO/EAOs return.
4. If a press release is the foundation for a social media post, the press release content must be approved by the (insert applicable approving position or body) prior to inclusion in a social media post.
5. Contact and coordinate as necessary with social media representatives for municipal, county, state and federal partner agencies and non-governmental agencies (NGOs).

NOTE: tailor language that reflects the roles and responsibilities of the PIO/EAO and agency information technology staff in uploading social media content; this may require specification by platform or application.

Procedure for Social Media when (insert agency name) PIO/EAO is on Leave or Unavailable

In the event the (insert agency name) PIO or EAO is on leave or unavailable, the (specify position of responsible personnel) will identify alternate personnel to manage social media and other public information responsibilities, orient him/her with the information and tools to temporarily fill the PIO/EAO's role, and then transfer those responsibilities back to the official PIO/EAO upon his/her return.

Depending on the length of the PIO's/EAO's anticipated leave or absence, the PIO/EAO will work with (insert agency name) leadership to:

1. Specify the time frames requiring the (insert alternate agency and/or position) to assume public information responsibilities.
2. Specify the type of information to be conveyed to the public via social media, including:
  - Any information about an event or circumstance that threatens the safety of citizens, and that is actionable
  - Retweet and Share information from the (NOTE: develop list of accounts that alternate should amplify, e.g., Mt. Holly National Weather Service @NWS\_MountHolly)
  - Retweet and Share emergency management information from municipal, county and/or state agencies followed (specify applicable agencies and organizations)
  - Retweet and Share information from FEMA that directs or recommends action within the State.
3. Define any expectations regarding media inquiries or social media monitoring beyond regular working hours.
4. Provide the alternate PIO/EAO with contact information for the:
  - EMS Command in the jurisdiction
  - Information Technology contact(s)
  - EMS subject matter experts (include information about areas of expertise, their availability and, if known, whether they have had media training), to assist the alternate PIO/EAO on call, and other resources deemed appropriate.
5. The (insert agency name) PIO/EAO will provide user information and passwords to all accounts to be managed (NOTE: tailor this list to reflect your agency's accounts):
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - Blog
  - Other



When the PIO/EAO returns from leave and is ready to resume his/her duties, the alternate PIO/EAO will debrief the returning PIO/EAO to re-establish situational awareness and formally return responsibilities to normal operations. An informal After Action Review may also be conducted to contribute to the continuous improvement of procedures as experience accrues.

#### B. General Guidelines for Creating and Posting Content on Social Media, including Blogs

(Insert agency name) PIO/EAO will create or repost content related to any information about an event or circumstance that threatens the safety of citizens and that is actionable; additional content can be created and posted consistent with the agency's mission, such as preparedness and recovery topics. Guidelines include:

1. Create content that reinforces the agency's credibility and trustworthiness.
2. Create content that is useful to and can increase the safety of the public or contribute to recovery.
3. Create content that contributes to the public's ability to accurately assess risk and make good decisions.
4. Observe and abide by all applicable copyright, trademark, and service mark requirements.
5. Protect the privacy and identity of individual members of the public, including avoidance of photos, videos, statements, or descriptions for which consent has not been given or that are not in the public domain; the agency's video release form can be found at (insert link or information about where to obtain release).
6. Protect information about agency personnel, internal agency matters and any other information that is confidential or sensitive.
7. Protect information that could interfere with agency mission, morale and/or discipline.

In addition to creating original content, the PIO /EAO may also share on Facebook and retweet the following:

1. Information provided by other New Jersey state agencies followed by (insert agency name)
2. Information from the National Weather Service stations at Mt. Holly @NWS\_MountHolly and New York City @NWSNewYorkNY
3. Information from FEMA that directs or recommends action within the state
4. Any other content deemed consistent with the agency's mission on behalf of members of the New Jersey public

Social media icons, content, widgets, and tools from other partners may be embedded if they contribute to accomplishing the communication objectives for a platform.

As a result of the (insert agency name) PIO's/EAO's monitoring activities, content generated by the public may require a response in the following circumstances:

1. Removal of offensive or inappropriate content or blocking the creator of such content consistent with stated policy and with the technical requirements of the particular social media platform
2. Referral of questions or comments to other agencies with necessary expertise or jurisdiction
3. Response to requests for emergency assistance

The (insert agency name) PIO/EAO will take action as appropriate based on the nature of the content and consistent with agency policy.

#### C. Social Media Use during EOC Activation

During an emergency or EOC activation, (insert agency name) social media accounts will be updated as required, up to 24/7. Social media monitoring is integral to the situational awareness required for the creation of content that will meet the messaging objectives described in the Public Information Annex or ESF 15:

1. Provide public with guidance about protective actions.
2. Instill community confidence.
3. Reach all target markets.

Social media can also become a method for citizens to request assistance. Because of this possibility, social media monitoring during emergencies or EOC activations is ideally conducted by trained and experienced public safety telecommunicators (PSTs). (NOTE: tailor this section on monitoring to reflect actual capabilities in your agency).

The (insert agency name) PIO/EAO is the only authorized creator of content and messages for official social media platforms and the agency blog. Message development will be consistent with the protocol outlined in the Public Information Annex or ESF 15 with adjustments made as needed for the speed of transmission and independence from traditional news cycles and markets.

#### D. 24/7 Monitoring when EOC activated

NOTE: Tailor this section to reflect your agency's procedures.

(Insert agency name) EMS Command will alert the (insert agency name) PIO/EAP or alternate regarding potential EOC activations. In the event of activation, Twitter and Facebook accounts will be monitored 24/7. If needed, the (insert agency name) PIO/EAO will notify the county OEM coordinator and request that additional assistance for media monitoring.

To be assigned, each PST must have received 911 and Rapid Response training and have (numbers of years of experience) and/or (have been on duty during a state wide disaster or other major event).

Monitors are expected to:

- Monitor applicable keywords, hashtags and geo-located information.
- Alert other PSTs and keep the PIO/EAO informed of any issues discovered during monitoring.
- Identify rumors and/or inaccuracies that are being circulated.
- Work with the PIO/EAO to identify topics and information for messaging.
- Use agreed upon social media monitoring tools as appropriate (e.g., Hootsuite, Twitterfall, and others).

Monitors may also need to move from monitoring to response and action to meet needs that are identified through the monitoring process.

The PIO/EAO will periodically assess whether additional training is advisable for those personnel who may be required to assist with 24/7 social media monitoring.

#### E. Social Media Messaging Considerations

All messaging will be consistent with policies and Guidelines included in this policy as well as JIS Public Messaging Plan objectives in the Public Information Annex or ESF15. Messages will be built upon information from the EOC, information obtained through social media monitoring and deemed acceptable, information needs identified via requests coming into the Joint Information Center (JIC) and any other source acceptable to the PIO/EAO and consistent with policy.

The PIO/EAO has the option to establish event specific hashtags, preferably as early as possible in the event. The size of an event and the number of jurisdictions involved are important factors in deciding to establish an event hashtag. Members of the public will be encouraged to use the event hashtag in their posts to assist in monitoring the situation.

(insert agency name) knows that the public generates hashtags during events, some of which are widely adopted. The PIO/EAO will work closely with the social media monitors to identify hashtags and key words that emerge during an event. Depending on how widely these identifiers are being used, the PIO/EAO has the discretion to use dual-hashtags to communicate about the event.

#### F. Record Keeping and Maintenance

The PIO/EAO will develop a method for making an acceptable record of information that is posted and any responses made or actions taken in response to information obtained through social media. PSTs will be informed of the method and provided with the tools for making the required record.

### G. Integrating Social Media into JIC Operations

The (insert agency name) PIO/EAO will work closely with the Lead PIO and other JIC staff during an activation to share information obtained through social media monitoring and to incorporate other messages coming from the JIC into social media messages.

The PIO/EAO will convey rumors, public concerns and recurring questions to the Lead PIO, collaborate to determine the best responses and coordinate subsequent messages that can be disseminated through all channels. Depending on the circumstances, other partners may be consulted as well as informed about planned messages.

Information about rumors and misinformation will be relayed to the EOC leadership and others as appropriate.

### H. Coordination with EOC

Due to the wide variety of questions that can arise during an emergency, the PIO/EAO will utilize the ESF representatives in the EOC to assist in formulating timely and accurate responses to inquiries.

If the following incidents are discovered via social media, the PIO/EAO will alert the EOC Commander:

- Active shooter
- Immediate threats to life safety
- Posts for “help”
- Situations that appear to be escalating rapidly

PST monitors will be informed of these criteria, as well.

### I. Coordination with Inter-jurisdictional Agencies

(Insert agency name) PIO/EAO will not be the lead in every incident. Regardless, the EAO will work closely with social media leads in other agencies to share information about the event, respond to requests for emergency assistance, flag and respond to rumors and develop messages that will address public information needs. Requests for information not available to (insert agency name) or better answered by the lead or another agency will be directed to that agency’s social media account only if it is an active account.

### J. Post-event Hot Washes and After Action Reviews

A post-event hot wash will be held immediately following an event to measure performance and capture lessons learned. Areas of success as well as areas for improvement will be documented and included in the overall after action report along with applicable metrics.

## **VI. CITIZEN JOURNALISTS, THE PRESS AND PERFORMANCE OF DUTIES IN THE PUBLIC ARENA**

Social media tools and platforms can capture unguarded acts and words that are instantly transmitted to all corners of the world and then live on permanently in digital form. It is important that (insert agency name) employees uphold the creditability of the agency while in the public arena.

All (insert agency name) personnel should assume that a member of the public or the press may be recording video and/or audio or posting text information anytime they are performing their duties; examples of these duties include responding to incidents and emergencies, attending public meetings, attending or providing training, providing press briefings in the EOC, and working in the Joint Information Center.

As a result, all personnel are advised to:

1. Conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times, adhering to agency standards of conduct, accepted protocols and decorum.
2. Always identify themselves as members of the agency.
3. Avoid public statements that reveal non-public information about incidents, emergencies, or agency matters.
4. Protect the identity of individuals involved in incidents or emergencies.
5. Avoid statements about members of the public, elected officials, agency leadership, or colleagues that could be interpreted as critical, demeaning, discriminatory, or otherwise unprofessional. This includes the use of inside jokes and terms and gallows-type humor.
6. If approached by the media, (insert agency name) personnel are permitted to speak factually about what they are doing in response to the event or what they are doing to help New Jersey residents. Agency personnel are asked to avoid expressing opinion, speculating or hypothesizing or commenting on circumstances outside the purview of (insert agency name) operations.

## **VII. PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

(Insert agency name) recognizes the rights of its employees to express themselves as private citizens using social media platforms during their personal time.

All personnel should keep the following guidance in mind as they use their private social media accounts:

1. As a rule of thumb, “what happens at work stays at work.”
2. Do not talk about job-related circumstances including such as specific incidents, members of the public, agency operations, co-workers, or other governmental agencies (this list is not exhaustive).

3. Do not post text messages, status updates, videos, photos, or other information that make it possible to identify members of the public with whom personnel have had contact in the course of official duties.
4. Do not use your state email account or password with personal social networking sites.
5. Never assume that private identity cannot be linked to a professional role; a Google or LinkedIn search can easily connect one's private to public-facing identity.
6. (Insert agency name) encourages its personnel to amplify the agency's efforts to disseminate information by sharing Facebook updates and Tweets from the official agency sites.

Future Revisions

This policy will be revised as needed in response to changes in technology, public expectations, employment policies and practices and any other development affecting the use of social media.

Approval

This policy has been approved by and adopted on:

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Approver (Name and title)	Date
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