



Planning Guide for Local Jurisdictions:

ADDRESSING PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN THE DISASTER PLANNING EFFORT

Summary of Steps (Steps at a Glance)

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DISASTER RECOVERY Homelessness Toolkit



LOCAL PLANNING GUIDE

STEPS	CHECK	INVOLVE	COLLECT	IDENTIFY	IMPROVE	PREPARE
	1: Find out what disaster planning has taken place	2: Get the right people together	3: Obtain data on your homeless population	4: Gather information about your provider network	5: Expand your plan	6: Define roles, maintain the plan, and prepare
Why you should do this step...	Some disaster planning probably has already taken place in your community. No need to reinvent the wheel. Find out who was involved and what was accomplished. Were homeless and vulnerable populations addressed? Were they consulted? Does the plan identify special actions for these populations such as sheltering, mass evacuations for people without vehicles, mental health services? Do not be alarmed if these populations aren't mentioned. Here is your chance to make that happen.	No individual has all the knowledge and skills needed to identify issues and solutions for homeless populations in a disaster. You will need to build a network of people who have deep understanding of your community, disaster planning, and homelessness. All communities have a Continuum of Care (CoC) organization that coordinates work to end homelessness (note that your area could be covered by a "Balance of State" CoC if there is not a CoC in your city or county). Work with the CoC leadership. Let homeless service providers know about existing disaster preparedness plans, involve them and their clients in developing knowledge about persons experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable populations, and gain their commitment to working on plan improvements.	Identify and review existing data from the Con Plan, the Continuum of Care, and qualitative accounts from local service providers, to get a clearer picture of the numbers, characteristics, and locations of homeless people in your community.	Your service provider network has skilled staff, facilities, and protocols for addressing homelessness that can support the disaster response. You will want to take advantage of these assets in your response. But a disaster can disrupt or overwhelm the organizations' operations. You need to understand the assets that are available as well as potential service gaps if a disaster hits.	After analyzing existing plans, creating a network, and using data to understand community needs and resources, you're ready to enhance your community's existing disaster plans to address any gaps that overlook homeless people and other vulnerable populations. You will need to have solutions tailored to your community, but you don't need to come up with everything on your own. Best practices gleaned from other communities are covered in Parts 2 and 3 of this Toolkit.	Do not let all your good work go to waste. Take immediate steps to prepare, including training, outreach, and public education. Clarify roles and sign agreements to codify them. Stay in touch with stakeholders. Community information will change over time, so update your plan regularly.
What you will get from doing this step...	An understanding of your community's gaps in planning for homeless and vulnerable populations in disasters.	A team that has the knowledge, skills, and commitment to plan an effective response to the needs of homeless and vulnerable people after a disaster.	Increased knowledge of your homeless populations, including location of outdoor camps, scope and size of substance use disorders, common mental and physical challenges, and other key information that will help you craft a plan that addresses the real vulnerabilities in the community. Without this knowledge, you risk leaving people out and putting them in danger.	An inventory of the capacity, skills, and services that your service provider network can provide to assist homeless and other vulnerable people during and after a disaster as well as information about potential gaps in the network post-disaster.	An improved disaster plan that effectively integrates the needs of homeless people and other vulnerable people.	A commitment to and practical approach for the community to assist persons experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable people in a disaster.



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The biggest issue you might face in completing this step...	Relevant resources might be scattered across various agencies and points of contact. Neighboring Community Development Block Grant Entitlement Communities may have overlapping plans. Consider state, county, and city plans. Cast a wide net to locate all the information you can on any existing plans and find out who is responsible for maintaining plans for your community.	Many team members are pressed for time and resources. As you assemble the team, communicate the urgency of this issue and a commitment to using their time wisely. Be clear about the challenges associated with disasters and homelessness and the role that each team member plays in addressing them.	Quantitative data does not tell the whole story, so other reliable sources will be needed to complete the picture. Contact service providers, people experiencing homelessness, and other experts to get their qualitative accounts of the obstacles homeless people face in your community. Include information on their travel patterns and problems they may face during and after a disaster.	Ensure that service providers' assessment of their post-disaster resources is realistic. Recommend conservative estimates, especially for large-scale disasters when service providers will need to attend to the well-being of themselves and their own families.	You do not want to create documents that sit on the shelf. To help ensure implementation, create action steps with clear lines of communication. Be specific. Include names of key contacts, titles and agencies, critical actions, responsible parties, and timelines.	Ongoing communication across the community's planning network can be difficult. Include disaster planning on the agenda of agency and community meetings to help keep formal and information relationships intact. Make sure you continue to listen to people who have experience being homeless.
If you can only do one part of this step, you should...	Identify who is responsible for disaster planning in your jurisdiction. Get in touch with that person or group to understand how homeless and vulnerable populations were included in earlier planning.	Hold at least one meeting where current planning documents are reviewed and the team identifies and adds missing topics.	Consult the local homelessness data expert to collect the most recent critical statistics about numbers, characteristics and locations of homeless people.	Create a comprehensive list of service providers, their contact information, and resources. You can use your Con Plan, CoC, and 211 provider to get a quick start.	Ensure the improved plan addresses the major issues that are key to disaster planning for homeless people: outreach, transportation, shelter, and services.	Appoint a different network member organization each year to be responsible for updating contact information, ensuring any Memorandums of Understanding or Memorandums of Agreement are up-to-date, and making other changes to keep the plan relevant.
Tools from this Guide to use for this step	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find Your Local Disaster Plans Assess Your Local Disaster Plans More Information for Disaster Planning Standard Terms: Disaster Planning and Homelessness Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify Your Stakeholders Meet with Your Stakeholders Get to Know Your Stakeholders Planners and Providers: Bridging the Gap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homelessness Data Sources Collect Data on Homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect Information about Your Provider Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate the Needs of Homeless People into Your Disaster Plan Sample Plans and Guidance Documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Execute an MOU Maintain Your Plan and Prepare Your Team



1.1 Find Your Local Disaster Plans

Ideally, there is a person, department, or unit in your jurisdiction with the responsibility for emergency preparedness. They are your best source. If emergency planning is new to you, finding your local plans is a good place to start.

Most states and local governments have responded to the federal call for disaster planning, adopting plans to address how the government will respond in the event of a disaster in the jurisdiction, and posting them online and/or making them available in public places frequented by residents (such as the local library).

Generally, these plans are based on FEMA's "Multi-Hazard Mitigation Planning Guidance."

- **Multi-hazard mitigation plan:** Per FEMA, this comprehensive disaster plan covers a wide range of mitigation efforts, including prevention efforts and long-term strategic efforts to mitigate potential hazards.
- **Emergency Operations Plan (EOP):** Per FEMA, this specific plan spells out the jurisdiction's immediate response to a disaster. It is sometimes a component of the multi-hazard mitigation plan.

TIP: Technical Assistance Available to Help!

The federal government strongly encourages states and local jurisdictions to develop and implement disaster plans. FEMA's guidance recommends that these plans address disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Both HUD and FEMA provide technical assistance and grants to help with the planning process. You can [request program assistance](#) on the HUD Exchange. Information on [FEMA Technical Assistance](#) is available on their website.

Key hints in identifying the Disaster Plan for your jurisdiction:

- While FEMA has distinct names for different types of emergency planning documents, **many state and local governments adopt a variety of names for the plan**, such as: hazard mitigation plan, multi-hazard mitigation plan, emergency preparedness plan, emergency response plan, disaster response plan, or emergency operations plan.
- In addition, **large jurisdictions may have more than one document** to cover the wide number of ways to look at disaster planning (hazard prevention; emergency response; recovery planning); smaller jurisdictions often only have one document.
- Often, **each level of government has its own disaster planning process and documents**— it is likely that the state, urban county, and large local governments (i.e., jurisdictions over 50,000) will each have one. Rural areas may or may not have their own plan, they might be covered in the state plan, or, they might not yet have developed a plan.

For contact information for state emergency management offices, see the FEMA website at:

<https://www.fema.gov/emergency-management-agencies>. For summary information about the FEMA-approved disaster plans in the nation, see the map at: <https://www.fema.gov/hazard-mitigation-plan-status>.



1.2 Assess Your Community’s Disaster Plans

Review your community’s disaster plans to see if they address the specific needs of homeless people and vulnerable populations. Plans could include a multi-hazard mitigation plan, an emergency operations plan, and/or other planning documents.

As you review your local plans, use the discussion and questions below to determine if local disaster plans have considered vulnerable populations and to identify gaps in past planning efforts. Note that this discussion will not provide you all that you need to improve the plans. The next steps in this Planning Guide will help you gather the information and resources you need to improve your local plans. For now, you want to identify what is there and flag potential gaps.

At a minimum . . .

The disaster plans should identify vulnerable populations. The plans should identify who is considered “vulnerable” in your community, and reference the provisions that the jurisdiction has made for those vulnerable populations. If vulnerable people are not specifically identified in the plan, they will be overlooked in the response and recovery. This oversight is dangerous to the vulnerable individuals and will also create challenges that will hinder the larger response and recovery effort.

Disaster plans must include specific arrangements for everyone in the community, including vulnerable people such as:

	Homeless individuals and families. This includes people living in places not designed for human habitation, those living in emergency shelters or transitional housing, and those fleeing domestic violence or other dangers. It also includes people in imminent danger of losing their housing.
	Persons with extremely limited physical or mental capacities with limited to no support, such as home-bound elderly and/or persons with disabilities, and individuals in group homes and/or rehabilitation centers.
	Very low-income households who lack the resources to secure alternative housing. This may include people living in motels, single room occupancy units, public housing residents and other housing for very low income people.



A stronger plan will address . . .

Stronger disaster plans will address the specific needs of persons experiencing homelessness. The plan should detail the steps that will be taken to accommodate the specific needs of homeless persons as they cope with the disaster and what entity is designated to take these steps. These needs include shelter, services, and evacuation support, as well as appropriate outreach and communication to homeless individuals and families. Key items to keep in mind are those that affect life and safety such as access to safe shelter, food and water, and medication.

Do existing plans address the specific steps that will be taken for homeless people with regards to the following:

Evacuation & Communication/Outreach. People experiencing homelessness have limited ability to be prepared for or respond to calls for evacuation – especially those sleeping on the street, in tent cities, or in other places not meant for human habitation. Common means of communication – emergency alerts by phone and text, radio, TV, and other outlets may not reach these individuals and families. They often do not hear or heed the early evacuation calls. Additionally, they have limited transportation and evacuation options. Does the plan identify specific notification and evacuation activities directed to homeless individuals and families and other vulnerable populations?

- Does the plan include active outreach to homeless people?
- How is transportation arranged for homeless individuals and families?
- Are specific agencies/entities assigned responsibility for ensuring the safe evacuation of homeless people and other vulnerable populations?

Shelter. In many disaster scenarios, homeless people living outdoors will have to move due to unsafe conditions and shelters will have limited occupancy (either due to an influx of newly displaced people or shelters themselves closing due to disaster damage). Do existing plans account for this increased need for emergency beds specifically to support the homeless population?

- Does the number of beds in disaster shelters take into account needs of homeless individuals and families and other vulnerable populations?
- Does the plan include training for shelter staff to identify homeless people and respond appropriately to their circumstances, which may include hygiene, mental health, and substance abuse issues? (When shelter staff are not prepared, people in need often get turned away.)
- Have disability accommodations in shelters been considered, such as wheel chair accessibility or service animals?
- Are there plans for transportation to shelter for people without access to transportation? Do these plans specifically account for people living on the streets or others who may have difficulty getting to the shelter?
- Are there plans to address the needs of families such as space to remain together, transportation to school, privacy for nursing mothers?

Services. As homeless persons are sheltered during the disaster, their existing supports will be disrupted. People with physical and mental illness may not have access to their medication. People suffering from drug addictions may have withdrawal symptoms. These can create life threatening conditions. Do existing plans account for the urgent services that will be needed to support homeless people and other vulnerable people?

- Does the plans address the staffing, services, and arrangements needed to provide support services for vulnerable populations?
- Are there provisions for medications, mental health support, and counseling?
- Are there accommodations for persons with substance use disorders and potential physical withdrawal symptoms?



1.3 More Information on Disaster Planning

FEMA provides a number of planning guides and fact sheets on its website that a jurisdiction can download and use to guide its disaster planning efforts. Additional resources are listed in the [Sample Plans and Guidance Tool](#) provided in Step 5 of this Guide.

To understand the big picture:

[Local Mitigation Planning Handbook](#), FEMA, March 2013.

- Provides guidance on the planning process and how to organize a disaster planning team.
- Critical tool if you are starting a disaster plan from scratch.

To develop a comprehensive hazard mitigation effort that includes prevention, response, and recovery:

[State Mitigation Plan Review Guide](#), FEMA, March 2015.

- Most commonly used guides by states and local governments.
- Lists the steps in the planning process and provides tips and guidance to each level of government on developing or updating hazard mitigation plans to meet the requirements of 44 CFR 201.6.
- A jurisdiction with an approved FEMA plan that complies with this guidance will be positioned for approval for FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant programs in the event of a disaster.

To develop a focused, immediate response to disaster:

[Developing and Maintaining Emergency Operations Plans: Comprehensive Preparedness Guide \(CPG\) 101, Version 2.0](#), FEMA, 2010.

- Primary FEMA tool that states and local governments use to develop emergency operations plans (EOPs).
- Includes very detailed plans that lay out exactly what happens in the immediate response to a disaster.
- Helpful document to look at if you need a reference tool to understand any component of your jurisdiction's disaster plan.

To understand the legal basis of the plans:

[Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as Amended](#), FEMA, April 2013.

- Describes the federal assistance programs for losses due to a disaster, focusing heavily on recovery efforts.
- Defines regulations that encourage states and localities to develop comprehensive disaster preparedness plans, to prepare for better intergovernmental coordination in the face of a disaster, and to use insurance coverage.

An overview of Federal Resources:

[Directory of Disaster Response and Recovery Resources](#), HUD, Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs, June 2009.

- Supports Continuums of Care in the development of disaster preparedness plans, understanding the disaster process, enhancing capacity for disaster response and recovery, and encouraging coordination between organizations involved in a disaster response.



1.4 Standard Terms: Disaster Planning and Homelessness Services

To integrate a homeless response into your disaster plan, it helps to understand the vocabularies used by disaster planners and service providers. These are common [Disaster Planning](#) and [Homeless Service Delivery](#) terms.

DISASTER PLANNING TERMS

Emergency/disaster situation, disaster, incident, event

These terms are used interchangeably throughout this Toolkit. FEMA provides very similar definitions for the terms **disaster**, **emergency**, and **incident**. These are occurrences or events—natural or human-caused—that require a response to protect life and/or property. An incident reaches the level of disaster when it results in severe property damage, deaths, and/or multiple injuries; it is “large-scale” when the response requires resources beyond the capacity of the local jurisdiction.

Examples of emergencies, disasters, or incidents include: terrorist attacks, terrorist threats, civil unrest, wildland and urban fires, floods, hazardous materials spills, nuclear accidents, aircraft accidents, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, tropical storms, tsunamis, war-related disasters, public health and medical emergencies, or other occurrences requiring an emergency response.

Disaster plans, emergency response plans, preparedness plan, hazard mitigation plans, emergency operations plans

These terms are frequently used interchangeably to refer to plans that outline the response to any large-scale crisis event, whether natural or man-made. FEMA defines two types of plans:

- **Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).** FEMA defines this plan as “an ongoing plan for responding to a wide variety of potential hazards. An EOP describes how people and property will be protected, details who is responsible for carrying out specific actions; identifies the personnel, equipment, facilities, supplies, and other resources available; and outlines how all actions will be coordinated.” This plan is focused on the *immediate operational response* of the jurisdiction when the disaster hits.¹
- **Multi-hazard Mitigation Plan.** This plan addresses “the effort to reduce loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters.... State, tribal, and local governments engage in hazard mitigation planning to identify risks and vulnerabilities associated with natural disasters, and develop long-term strategies for protecting people and property from future hazard events. Mitigation plans are key to breaking the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage.” A multi-hazard mitigation plan is focused on the *long-term planning effort* to respond to a disaster—including prevention efforts prior to the disaster, immediate disaster response, and recovery efforts post-disaster.²

¹ <https://www.training.fema.gov/programs/emischool/el361toolkit/glossary.htm#E>



In this guide, **emergency response plan** is used interchangeably with an EOP. **Disaster plan** is used as an umbrella term to be inclusive of any type of document that addresses what steps the jurisdiction will take in the event of any type of large emergency situation.

Evacuation, shelter-in-place

In the event of a disaster, residents have two choices: stay in their homes or other current location (**shelter-in-place**) or leave their homes to seek safer shelter elsewhere (**evacuation**). FEMA defines an evacuation as “the organized, phased, and supervised withdrawal, dispersal, or removal of civilians from dangerous or potentially dangerous areas, and their reception and care in safe areas.” It further recognizes that there are three kinds of evacuation: a **spontaneous evacuation** (residents leave the threatened area without any official word of a threat or instructions to do so); a **voluntary evacuation** (residents are warned of a potential threat or risk to property or life and are encouraged to leave); and a **mandatory evacuation** (residents are told they must leave because of the severity of the threat).²

FEMA

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (**FEMA**) is an agency of the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#), initially created in 1978. The agency's primary purpose is to coordinate the response to a disaster that has occurred in the United States and that overwhelms the resources of local and state authorities. See www.fema.gov

Preparedness, response, recovery

These terms generally refer to the phases and/or different types of responses to a disaster. When used together in this Toolkit, these phases are meant to represent the full range of potential responses. FEMA describes these terms as follows:

- **Preparedness.** Actions that involve a combination of planning, resources, training, exercising, and organizing to build, sustain, and improve operational capabilities. Preparedness is the process of identifying the personnel, training, and equipment needed for a wide range of potential incidents and developing jurisdiction-specific plans for delivering capabilities when needed for an incident.
- **Response.** Immediate actions to save and sustain lives, protect property and the environment, and meet basic human needs. Response also includes the execution of plans and actions to support short-term recovery.
- **Recovery.** The development, coordination, and execution of service and site restoration plans; the reconstitution of government operations and services; individual, private sector, nongovernmental, and public assistance programs to provide housing and to promote restoration; long-term care and treatment of affected persons; additional measures for social, political, environmental, and economic restoration.

HOMELESS SERVICE DELIVERY TERMS

Very precise definitions apply when operating a program funded under HUD’s Continuum of Care (CoC) or Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) homeless programs. This glossary provides simplified ‘plain English’

² <https://www.fema.gov/hazard-mitigation-planning>

³ <https://emilms.fema.gov/IS700aNEW/glossary.htm#E>



definitions for use by disaster planners and service providers. For technical definitions of terms related to these programs, please see [the CoC Program Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 578](#), and the [ESG Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 576](#).

The **Consolidated Plan** (Con Plan) is a three- to five-year housing and community development plan required of local governments and states receiving certain types of HUD formula grant funding. It is designed to help jurisdictions assess their affordable housing and community development needs and market conditions, and to make data-driven, place-based investment decisions. It is carried out through Annual Action Plans, which provide a concise summary of the actions, activities, and the specific federal and non-federal resources that will be used each year to address the priority needs and specific goals identified by the Con Plan. In the event of a disaster, plans for using certain federal recovery funds must be explained in the Con Plan.

Note, the Con Plan provides information on the nature and extent of homelessness, a description of each category of each homeless persons specified by HUD (chronically homeless, chronic substance use disorders, persons with HIV/AIDS, severely mentally ill, veterans, victims of domestic violence and unaccompanied youth). The plan also provides the number of persons experiencing homelessness on a given night, the number of persons who experience homelessness each year, those at-risk of homelessness, as well as a list of homeless service providers. It also indicates the total number of units and number of emergency shelter beds, transitional housing beds, and permanent supportive housing beds. This document identifies neighborhoods with concentrations of low- and very low-income persons, who may be vulnerable in the event of a disaster.

A **Continuum of Care (CoC)** is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for families and individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. HUD administers the majority of its funds for homelessness through the CoC Program, which: promotes community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; funds efforts to quickly re-house homeless individuals and families in order to minimize trauma and dislocation; promotes access to and effective utilization of mainstream programs; and optimizes self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Note that “a CoC” refers to the regional or local planning body described here, while “the CoC Program” refers to the specific HUD program to address homelessness.

A **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)** is a local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families and persons at risk of homelessness. Each CoC is responsible for selecting an HMIS software solution that complies with HUD's data collection, management, and reporting standards.

Homeless persons/population, persons experiencing homelessness, vulnerable populations

HUD's formal definitions of “[homeless](#)” and “[at risk of homelessness](#)” can be found in useful summaries on the HUD Exchange, or in the [CoC Program Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 578](#), and the [ESG Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 576](#). This Toolkit uses the following terms:



- **Persons experiencing homelessness** refers to people who are living in places that are not designed for human habitation, are living in emergency shelter or transitional housing, are without a safe residence because they are fleeing domestic violence, or are likely to lose their housing imminently. This guide uses this term interchangeably with **homeless persons**.
- **Vulnerable populations** refers to people who are not currently homeless, but are extremely vulnerable to becoming homeless – particularly after a disaster-- due to their economic, health, or social circumstances. This might include some senior citizens, people with disabilities, non-English speakers, people with substance use issues, very and extremely low-income people, undocumented workers, and others in precarious economic circumstances.

Homeless provider network, homeless service providers

Throughout this Toolkit, the individuals and agencies that provide support (shelter, food, medical care, etc.) to persons experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable populations are referred to as **homeless service providers**. This group will vary by jurisdiction, but it should include a wide range of organizations such as: operators of emergency shelter, transitional housing, or permanent housing for homeless individuals and families; agencies that provide street outreach and food programs; faith-based groups that provide support to extremely low-income persons; mental health service providers; medical service providers (public health clinics); and public housing authorities. Collectively, this group of providers is referred to as the **homeless provider network** in this Toolkit.

Emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent housing

HUD provides funding to assist persons experiencing homelessness under the CoC Program (see details in the CoC Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 578) and the ESG Program (see details in the ESG Interim Rule at 24 CFR part 576). The primary forms of shelter and housing assistance – which may or may not be provided in a given community – include:

- **Emergency Shelter (ES)** includes any facility whose primary purpose is to provide temporary shelter for persons who are experiencing homelessness in general, or for specific populations of persons experiencing homelessness.
- **Transitional Housing (TH)** includes housing that has as its purpose facilitating the movement of homeless individuals and families to permanent housing within a reasonable amount of time (up to 24 months).
- **Permanent Housing (PH)** means community-based housing without a designated length of stay and includes both permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing. To be considered permanent housing, the program participant must be the tenant on a lease for a term of at least one year, which is renewable for terms that are a minimum of one month long and is terminable only for cause.
- **Permanent Supportive Housing** is long-term, permanent housing that provides supportive services to help homeless persons with disabilities live independently.
- **Rapid Re-housing** assistance includes relocation and stabilization services and short- and/or medium-term rental assistance as necessary to help a homeless individual or family move as quickly as possible into permanent housing and achieve stability in that housing.



Supportive Services

Supportive services assist homeless individuals and families in the transition from the streets or shelters into permanent housing and assist persons with maintaining housing. The term “supportive services” includes a range of services such as case management, health and mental health care, and transportation. They can be facility-based or provided as street outreach (e.g., mobile vans for health care).

Street outreach

Street outreach programs proactively reach out to unsheltered homeless persons on the street and in places not meant for human habitation to connect them with emergency shelter, housing, or critical services. In cases where unsheltered homeless people are not willing or able to access emergency shelter, housing, or an appropriate health facility, the goal is to provide urgent, non-facility-based care.

Coordinated Entry

Coordinated entry means a centralized or coordinated process designed to coordinate program participant intake assessment and provision of referrals. Each CoC designs their coordinated entry system to meet the needs of the community. Access points can vary from a single point of entry to multiple points, from physically going to a shelter to calling a referral number. The agencies charged with administering the coordinated entry system can range from homeless service providers to government social service agencies.



2.1 Identify Your Stakeholders

Use this inventory to identify the stakeholders who will bring skills and knowledge about disaster response and homeless services to a collaborative disaster planning process.

At a minimum . . .

You should include people who understand disaster planning and people who understand the needs of and services available to homeless and other vulnerable people in your community.

Critical participants include:

✓	Stakeholder	Notes
	Continuum of Care (CoC) members	In most communities, the members of the CoC represent the full spectrum of stakeholders in the homeless assistance, prevention, and service delivery system. The participation of these members is critical to ensuring that the plan reflects a clear understanding of both the populations needing services and the capacity of providers to assist with disaster response. The CoC may already have a disaster planning committee in place.
	Local disaster preparedness/emergency response office representative(s)	Some communities may already have a designated office for disaster preparedness. In the absence of such an office, involve the appropriate executive(s) in the jurisdiction. These may be from the homeland security office, the City Manager, a County Executive, or the Chief of Police.
	Community development and/or housing office	This may include the Administrator of HUD Community Development Block Grant funds, including those with responsibility for data and mapping.
	State and local law enforcement	Identify who in law enforcement is responsible for preparedness training and emergency response.
	First responders	These include medical rescue units, fire departments, and any others with responsibilities related to emergency response, as defined in the disaster response plan.
	People who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness	People who have first-hand experience of homelessness can contribute insights and solutions that may otherwise be overlooked. Use the CoC as a resource to identify individuals who can help with this effort.



For a more inclusive planning effort . . .

Other stakeholders—including local public officials, the preparedness community, and service provider community—can offer additional insights, contacts, and resources. Additionally, for smaller communities or those that have already engaged in region-wide planning, stakeholders should include individuals from regional and state levels, specifically state and regional disaster preparedness and emergency response officers.

✓ Stakeholder	Notes
Local elected officials	Include those who participate in any community preparedness activities. Absent that, involve jurisdiction leadership such as the Mayor, City/County Manager, or Town or City Council members.
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) representative	This contact is available from the state or local disaster preparedness office or see: http://www.fema.gov/regional-contact-information .
Operators of emergency shelters	Identify all agencies that are not members of the CoC.
Operators of transitional housing and permanent supportive housing	Identify all agencies that are not members of the CoC.
Street outreach and feeding programs	Identify all agencies that are not members of the CoC.
Faith-based institutions that provide services to persons who are or are at-risk of experiencing homelessness	Identify all agencies that are not members of the CoC. Include faith-based institutions that provide social services in the form of case management and assisting clients with finding temporary or permanent housing.
Health care providers for the homeless or near-homeless	Identify all agencies that are not members of the CoC.
Mental health service providers	Include those who provide support to homeless persons with mental health issues.
Medical service providers, including hospitals and health care facilities	Include hospitals, public health clinics and facilities, and any individual medical professionals that are willing to volunteer assistance. Medical personnel are needed to treat injuries and prescribe medications for the general public, as well as the homeless population.
Substance use disorders programs	List those who provide support to homeless persons with substance use disorders. They are needed to assist persons suffering from withdrawal or other side effects related to their substance use during a disaster.
Public health officials	Include local and state health departments
Public Housing Authority (PHA) representative and other low-income housing providers	Residents of low-income housing represent a potential vulnerable population; PHAs and others may be able to provide housing resources.
HUD Field Office representative	The HUD Field Office can provide guidance, perspective, and/or access to technical assistance.



Other stakeholders to consider . . .

There are others in the community you should consider consulting as needed during the planning effort. It is imperative for large jurisdictions to have a basic knowledge of how to contact these individuals, even if they have not previously done so during their planning process.

✓ Stakeholder	Notes
Nonprofit leaders (non-CoC)	Include jurisdiction-wide nonprofits with the networks to reach large numbers of social service agencies and at-risk residents, such as the United Way, NAACP, Salvation Army, LULAC, and Urban League.
National Guard	It often assists with first responder duties and may provide transportation.
American Red Cross	First responders; able to provide a variety of emergency needs: food, shelter, clothing, and medical supplies.
Local Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) Board	Members include Catholic Charities, Jewish Social Services, and the Salvation Army.
National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD)	Member organizations represent a diverse group of highly-competent organizations that provide a wide range of skills in service. For information on national and local members, see: http://www.nvoad.org/ .
Humane Society, other local animal rescue groups, and private veterinarians	A comprehensive emergency response addresses the care of service animals and family pets to ease anxiety and facilitate evacuations.
Local business community representatives	This may include Chambers of Commerce and other business associations.
Utilities	Municipal authorities and commissions that provide one or more of the major utilities: gas, electric, water sanitation, telephone, and internet.



2.2 Meet with Your Stakeholders

To engage your stakeholders, build relationships, establish a shared understanding of this planning effort, and demonstrate a commitment to collaboration, you might find it useful to have a meeting or even a series of meetings.

Invitees. Invite all key stakeholders or at least representatives of each group – local officials, emergency planners, service providers, and people who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness. Ideally, a community official will participate to demonstrate commitment to this effort.

Agenda. See sample agenda below. Adjust it to your community needs.

At a minimum . . .

You will want to achieve the following meeting objectives:

- Get to know each other. Begin building relationships among key stakeholders that will support a sustained effort to improve local plans.
- Inform homeless service providers about existing disaster plans.
- Collect preliminary information on what needs people experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable populations might have in the event of a disaster.
- Develop a preliminary assessment of the resources that service providers could contribute in response and recovery.
- Begin to identify gaps in your plan that may cause people in vulnerable populations to be overlooked during response and recovery. Explore the severity and consequences of those gaps.
- Make sure that the service providers understand that having a Memorandum of Understanding with the emergency response system can be the key to receiving reimbursement for services provided post-disaster.

Ideally, you'll want to hold several meetings to . . .

- Achieve consensus on the scope and characteristics of the people that are the focus of this planning effort, including vulnerable populations.
- Identify steps needed to collect information and carry out these steps in a coordinated planning effort.
- Establish working groups, if needed.



Sample Agenda. The following is a sample agenda to be adapted, shortened, or adjusted based on your community. Covering everything on the agenda will take more than one meeting, so consider which sections you want to prioritize. Note that the numbered elements can be included on an agenda that is distributed in advance of the meeting. The lettered elements provide detailed content for the meeting planners.

- 1. Welcome and introductions (Local Official or designee as appropriate to your community)**
- 2. Meeting objectives (Planning Lead)**
 - a. Familiarize homeless service providers with the jurisdiction's current disaster plans
 - b. Solicit input from homeless service providers about how to prepare to meet the needs of homeless populations, in event of a disaster
 - c. Develop a planning process to improve understanding of the needs of people experiencing homelessness and to assess the ability of current service delivery system to address these needs
 - d. Establish next steps, who will participate, and a timeline for completion of the plan
- 3. What has been done so far: Key elements of existing multi-hazard plans (Chief Preparedness Official or other key member of disaster planning team)**
 - a. Handouts: *Standard Terms* and *Bridging the Gap* (from this Toolkit)
 - b. Types of disasters planned for (notice, no notice)
 - c. Likely types of disasters to hit the jurisdiction
 - d. How often and how severe are potential disasters
 - e. Likely impacts of disasters and potential disruptions to services (food, water, medicine)
 - f. Key players in disaster response
 - g. Mechanisms for communication to the public
 - h. Key elements of response and leadership
- 4. Discussion: Considerations to address the needs of homeless and vulnerable populations (Planning Lead with a representative from the local CoC)**
 - a. What are the needs of homeless and vulnerable populations before, during, and after a disaster?
 - i. Preparation for a disaster
 - ii. Notification of the disaster event
 - iii. Transportation in the event of evacuation
 - iv. Food
 - v. Shelter
 - vi. Medication needs for health and mental health issues
 - vii. Longer term housing needs
 - viii. Other?



- b. Who is affected in this planning effort
 - i. What do we know about the scope and nature of homelessness in our community?
 - ii. Who are the people affected? What are their characteristics?
 - iii. How are their needs currently being met? What are the current gaps in services?
 - iv. Who is vulnerable to becoming homeless after a disaster?

5. Discussion: What resources and expertise does the CoC and its network bring to the effort (CoC Representative)

- a. Staff
- b. Facilities
- c. Data (HMIS)
- d. Resources: food, water, medication, clothing, supplies
- e. Training and education
- f. Outreach capabilities
- g. Other

6. Next steps / planning process (Lead Entity)

- a. Other organizations that should be involved?
- b. What are the next steps for this group?
 - i. Data collection from existing sources (such as HMIS, HIC/PIT, AHAR)
 - ii. Data collection from the community (summarizing both resources and needs)
 - iii. Analysis of data and development of plans to meet the needs for people experiencing homelessness
 - iv. Outreach to other stakeholders?
 - v. Other steps?
- c. Assign working groups and leaders and develop a schedule. Examples of working groups include:
 - i. Definition of “vulnerable populations”
 - ii. Data Collection Team
 - iii. Data Analysis Team
 - iv. Lessons Learned: Review the other parts of this Toolkit and gather information from similar sized jurisdictions and/or jurisdictions that have faced similar disasters on how they created equal access for response and recovery resources
 - v. Build specific scenarios that re-emerge in disasters (if jurisdiction has faced previous disasters) and examine alternative solutions
 - vi. Make sure each working group has a clear charge and a timeframe for achieving its assignment. Working groups might work simultaneously or sequentially.



2.3 Get to Know Your Stakeholders

You can use a simple survey, like the one below, to collect preliminary information and reinforce the message that this planning will be a sustained, collaborative effort. This survey can be done on paper or electronically, it can be distributed narrowly or broadly, and it can be used as preparation or follow-up to a meeting.

Name	
Title	
Agency	
Email	
Phone	
What are the most pressing needs that homeless and other vulnerable people will face in the event of a disaster in our community?	
What is the best way you/your agency can help this planning effort?	
	Help assess needs of people experiencing homelessness in the event of a disaster.
	Help assess the capacity of the homeless service provider network.
	Help assess the capacity of the existing disaster response system to address the needs of homeless and other vulnerable people.
	Assist in data analysis.
	Participate in planning meetings.
	Network with other agencies to share the plan and solicit commitments for their assistance.
	Other: Please describe.



2.4 Planners and Providers – Bridging the Gap

Disaster planners and service providers need to collaborate to meet the needs of homeless and vulnerable populations during and after a disaster. That means they need to understand each other's backgrounds, perspectives, and processes.

Homeless Service Providers . . .

- Have information, resources, and commitments to their clients (including persons who are unsheltered) that can be useful in a disaster situation.
- Know their communities and some of the most vulnerable people. They know who needs help, what kind of help they need, and whether there are any special cultural or socioeconomic considerations when dealing with their clients. They know where people experiencing homelessness commonly sleep.
- Know the community-based resources (neighbors, small businesses) who are available to solve a problem quickly.
- Respond to emergency needs daily and sometimes face life and death situations. They often operate on shoestring budgets, with limited staff. Disaster planning may require time and resources that providers believe they cannot spare. Therefore, it will be important to demonstrate to providers the critical need for their contributions to the planning effort.
- Might not have financial resources to address emergency needs and will need help from disaster planners to identify resources to increase their services during a disaster.
- Have worked to develop the trust of their clients. Some clients have had difficult experiences with law enforcement or government officials in this country or in their homeland; some maybe undocumented. Others may have mental health issues that make them distrustful of strangers. Homeless service providers can be helpful in reaching and communicating with those in sensitive situations.
- Have clients that may need more support and time to recover than the general public after emergency response systems are shut down. The providers are in these communities for the long haul. Being part of disaster recovery will not be a short-term investment. They will be committed through recovery.
- Can bring in the voices of homeless persons. In these discussions, the knowledge of those who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness can be invaluable. They often have insights and solutions that escape those who have not experienced homelessness.



Disaster Planners know . . .

- They work within a highly organized hierarchy that clearly identifies roles and responsibilities. This structure imposes order in situations that are, by definition, likely to be unpredictable and chaotic.
- The disaster planning hierarchy clearly defines who has authority to declare an emergency and what steps each participating person or agency must take when an emergency is declared.
- Good planning creates a rigid protocol that details what each member of the disaster response team needs to do and when to do it—without wasting time trying to find answers.
- A disaster planning protocol is similar to a medical protocol. It must be followed strictly to avoid loss of life and property and to minimize confusion in a confusing situation.
- A disaster plan includes a communication protocol that ensures those in charge receive accurate information throughout the crisis and are able to communicate changes to the plan as the emergency unfolds. Communication protocols are strictly prescribed to ensure everyone is “rowing in the same direction,” information is passed quickly to everyone who needs it, and no one is left out.
- In an emergency, every minute counts. Disaster planners need to understand the lines of authority within each agency that will provide disaster services. They must be able to depend on their key points of contact to ensure service provider agencies complete all tasks they have agreed to carry out.
- The more comprehensive the disaster plan is, the more effective it will be in a real disaster. A comprehensive plan covers all possible scenarios, addressing what happens in each one and how each person involved responds. No detail is too small. The more planners know, the better they can make decisions in a disaster. This is why the participation of service providers is so important at the planning stage.
- Disaster planning is usually driven by local government, with input and support from state and federal resources. Governments represent large and diverse groups of people. Service delivery by government works best when there are fewer variations. Homeless service providers may be more accustomed to a flexible service delivery model. Too much flexibility in a disaster can result in chaos.
- Governments are typically stable and have more resources than homeless service providers. Homeless providers should specify the resources they will need to carry out their disaster response tasks.



3.1 Overview of Homelessness Data Sources

If homeless data is new to you, consider as a first step, contacting the person who is responsible for data collection in your community. This may be your local Continuum of Care Collaborative Applicant and/or local HMIS Lead Organization. You may also want to consult your ConPlan for data on the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program and on other vulnerable populations.

For a quick overview of the commonly used sources of data on homelessness, see below. [Homeless Management Information Systems \(HMIS\)](#) are the most robust source, described in the table and in detail, but useful data can also be found in the [Point in Time \(PIT\) Count](#), [Homeless Inventory Count \(HIC\)](#), and in the [Annual Homeless Assessment Report \(AHAR\)](#). All of these data sources are available on the HUD Exchange.

Overview of Key Data Sources on Homelessness			
	PIT & HIC	AHAR	HMIS
Overview	<p>HUD requires the Point-in-Time (PIT) count be conducted in all communities receiving CoC funds once every two years. Many communities choose to conduct this count of homeless individuals and families living in places not meant for human habitation (on the street, in emergency shelter, or transitional housing) every year. Each count is planned, coordinated, and carried out locally; to meet HUD requirements, it must be performed within the required timeframe, frequently the last week of January.</p> <p>The Housing Inventory Count (HIC) is an inventory of beds or units within a community that are dedicated to serving homeless individuals and families. To be included on the HIC, a bed/unit must only be available to those experiencing homelessness.</p>	<p>The Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) is a HUD report to the U.S. Congress that provides a nationwide estimate of families and individual experiencing homelessness, including information about the demographic characteristics of homeless persons, service use patterns, and the capacity to house homeless persons. The report is based primarily on Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) data about persons who experience homelessness during a 12-month period.</p> <p>The AHAR is an aggregate of all the individuals and families that have accessed HUD funded homeless services. Identified data (name, social security, etc.) are not reported. Every participating community can compare the local AHAR report to the national AHAR or peer communities to gauge their effectiveness.</p>	<p>CoCs use HMIS to collect standard data at the local level. The data can be used to produce an unduplicated count of homeless persons and understand patterns of service use locally.</p> <p>HMIS is the general name for the type of software that HUD requires each community use, but each community chooses its own specific software. HUD, HHS, and the VA all collaborate to establish a standard set of data elements, to allow for comprehensive analysis of homelessness across a community and the country.</p> <p>HMIS is used locally to collect eligibility, case management, and other data to assist service providers, policy makers, and project participants to end homelessness in their community.</p>
Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes individuals and families living on the street. Robust surveys include those who have not accessed services, providing a more comprehensive understanding of homelessness in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes sheltered and unsheltered persons Includes all homeless families and individuals that have accessed HUD funded services within the reporting year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gathered daily Covers sheltered and unsheltered persons Covers housing inventory and utilization



Overview of Key Data Sources on Homelessness

	PIT & HIC	AHAR	HMIS
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Client Demographic Housing/Project Inventory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Client Demographic Housing Inventory & Utilization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Client Demographic Client Detailed Information Service and Referral Housing Inventory & Utilization
Limitations	<p>The data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is limited to one day/night cannot be used to identify unique client/de-duplicate requires analysis that can delay publication by months or a full year counts are substantially impacted by weather or other factors on the night(s) selected PIT collection methodologies vary nationally based on community resources 	<p>The data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> covers one year (though AHAR reports can be accessed to analyze across years) is from HMIS excludes domestic violence providers high data quality requirements may prevent full participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HMIS data quality varies by community Each community selects the software product that meets their community's needs in addition to HUD's requirements HMIS data excludes information collected by domestic violence providers

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (HMIS)

Universal Data Elements (UDE). UDE's are mandatory for all projects participating in HMIS. Regardless of funding source, each project must collect the data to use the HMIS. Projects created in response to a disaster may have additional flexibility on initial use based on life/safety limitation. An example of a disaster data element set is available at <http://www.clientdatastandard.org>. UDE changes over time and includes such items as name, date of birth, race, disabling condition, client location and other data that help direct resources to the right place and person. To see the comprehensive list of data elements, see the [HMIS Data Manual](#).

Program Specific Data Elements. HMIS captures descriptive data on homeless families and individuals served known as Program Specific Data Elements (PSDE). This information can be very helpful in identifying the subpopulation and financial stability of the homeless population. Documentation of disabilities may help disaster responders to target resources effectively. The PSDEs include but are not limited to:

- Income and Sources
- Non-Cash Benefits
- Health Insurance
- Physical Disability
- Developmental Disability
- Chronic Health Condition
- HIV/AIDS
- Mental Health Problem
- Substance Abuse
- Domestic Violence



3.2 Review Data about Homelessness in Your Community

To plan effectively, you need to know the scope and nature of homelessness in your community. How many people do you need to account for? What are their demographics (ages, family status) and needs? Where are they currently living? Your CoC can help you gather this information from existing sources and their own experience. To understand the scope and nature of homelessness in your jurisdiction, you should review readily available data in community sources such as [HMIS, HIC/PIT, AHAR and your Con Plan](#). Consult your local data expert and/or your CoC for assistance. See also the [Overview of Homelessness Data Sources](#).

At a minimum . . .

Understand the need. 10? 100? 1000? 10000? The scale of homelessness varies in each community. Some communities, like New York City or Los Angeles, have tens of thousands of homeless families and individuals; whereas a rural community may have less than 100. While the scale may vary, often there are some common trends in needs. Understanding both the frequently identified needs and the total number of people will prepare you to plan effectively. Note this data changes over time and may change seasonally.

The basic data includes¹:

- The total number of homeless persons,
- The total number of individuals, and
- The total number of families and persons in families.

Keep in mind that after a disaster there will probably be a significant number of new homeless people who were doubled up or couch surfing and who may not be defined as “pre-disaster housed” in the mainstream response. Make sure you account for them and their needs. McKinney-Vento school data in some jurisdictions can provide an indication of families with such insecure housing although it tends to undercount.

Understand the locations you will need to address. The process of thinking through where you will find homeless people is essential to your planning. Do you have large wooded areas, river banks, encampments? Are there night-only shelters that put people on nearby on the streets during the day?

¹ Note that HUD-funded projects use their HMIS to understand how a unique individual accesses the homeless service system. While CoCs can report, at an aggregate level, the number of unique individuals and families accessing a project, obtaining identified data requires special authorization.



For a more robust effort . . .

A more robust effort will explore the characteristics of the homeless and their needs. This data is also readily available in existing data systems. Remember that the CoC has multiple data sources to get the most accurate numbers but other sources may be useful as well. For example, local schools can provide a count of homeless students.

This data includes information such as:

- The total number of persons sleeping on the streets and in places not meant for human habitation;
- The total number of persons in emergency shelters; and
- The total number of persons in transitional housing.

You should also review the ages of the homeless populations and the numbers of individuals with special needs, such as mental illness, chronic substance use disorders, victims of domestic violence, and runaway and homeless youth. In addition, consider special language needs.

The best data collection will include . . .

The best data collection efforts will further explore the actual locations of homeless people and service providers. Ideally, existing client and service location data could be used to produce a map to target recovery efforts. Consider:

- The locations of persons sleeping on the street (work with street outreach providers, police, and other homeless service providers);²
- The locations of emergency shelters;
- The locations of transitional housing, permanent housing,³ and other housing.

Work with HMIS experts, the CoC, and PHAs to obtain and map this data. Note that some domestic violence shelters do not want their locations publicized, so you should be aware of this and work with them.

² Some communities have begun to regulate persistent encampments of homeless individuals. Emergency planners should coordinate on likely flood zones and other vulnerabilities to ensure encampments minimize all possible risks.

³ Many CoCs use a scattered site project model that places subsidized units in neighborhoods throughout a community. From an emergency planning perspective this may limit a resident's knowledge of local landmarks, hazards, and evacuation routes. Project staff and emergency planners may want to consider simple guides that can be issued to participants or permanent signage within a unit.



4.1 Collect Information from Your Homeless Service Provider Network

You want to know what support, services, and resources your service provider network can provide in the event of a disaster, as well as the supports that they may need to keep their services functioning. Understanding how disasters may change the volume of need within a community can provide additional information for disaster planners. Networks of social service agencies are highly interdependent. Any gap in the network can limit the effectiveness of the overall system. A CoC may be able to provide this information to the planning team. In many cases, the 211 provider, who is often a member of the CoC, can provide this information.

At a minimum . . .

Develop an inventory of service providers. Collect names and contact information from all participating providers. You can create a form, using the fields below, or use a survey tool. You may want to enter this information into a spreadsheet that allows you to search and filter information. You may also want to post this information in a shared place so that all stakeholders in this planning and response effort can access it when needed (Note: be cautious and work with domestic violence providers when considering what information of theirs to post).

Organization Name	
Organization Street Address	
City, State, Zip Code	
Service Provided	
Population Served <i>Examples: Families or individuals? People with Disabilities, Runaway and Homeless Youth and Domestic Violence Survivors?</i>	
Emergency Preparedness Contact(s), Phone Numbers and E-mail Addresses <i>Collect at least two contact names per provider because it may be hard to reach people in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.</i>	#1 #2 #3
Staff Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills does your staff bring to the response? • Languages spoken? 	



A more robust collection effort will . . .

Include information about the scope of services provided and the needs of populations served. Your planning efforts will be better informed if you also collect information about the needs of the specific populations supported by the homeless service provider network. This information is readily available in the CoC's HMIS, which collects information about actual services provided and numbers and characteristics of people served. Work with your CoC to query HMIS to generate a report that includes the following elements.

<p>How many clients per organization?</p>	<p>Daily Monthly Annually</p>
<p>Numbers of children and adults, by age?</p>	<p># of children (under 18) # of adults (18-25) # of adults (26-50) # of adults (51-70) # of adults (70+)</p>
<p>Numbers of families and individuals?</p>	<p># of families # of individuals</p>
<p>Service utilization by month? <i>(To identify when shelters may be closed or in peak use)</i></p>	
<p>Size of subpopulations served</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic Health Condition • Physical Disability • Chronically Homeless • Severely Mentally Ill • Chronic Substance Use • Veterans • HIV/AIDS • Runaway and Homeless Youth • Domestic Violence Survivors 	<p># of families and individuals in each subpopulation category</p>



The best data collection will . . .

Address resources available for disaster recovery. The best planning effort will incorporate conversations with service provider leaders to get a clearer picture of the resources that they bring to the effort. Ideally, you will ask your service network about their level of disaster preparedness and the resources they can bring to a disaster response.

Resources & Disaster Preparedness

Staff resources:

Keep in mind that a disaster may prevent staff from coming to work.

Consider how many staff are likely to be available in the event of a disaster.

How many trained volunteers does the organization have?

Has the organization been involved in disaster planning with your local jurisdiction?

Does the organization have its own disaster response plan for their program participants?

Has the organization executed MOUs with partners to deliver or receive services in the event of a disaster, such as transportation for evacuation, supports for special needs or medical needs?

How long can standard resources (food, water, medication) last without additional deliveries?

What transportation resources does the organization have? Does it have a plan to transport program participants to safety if necessary?

Has the organization established (and provisioned) a location for program participants?

Does the organization have the ability to provide for special needs of program participants such as:

- Dietary needs
- Functional needs, including devices and equipment
- Mobility issues (barrier free access)
- Medical needs (e.g., prescriptions, supplies, and/or equipment)
- Pets and service animals



5.1 Ensure No One Is Left Out: Integrate the Needs of Homeless People in Your Disaster Plans

Use the knowledge of your stakeholders and the data you have collected to improve your disaster plans. Identify needs and likely gaps in services for homeless and other vulnerable populations and work with your stakeholders to identify solutions. This tool walks through an analytic process. You should adapt it as necessary for your community.

At a minimum . . .

The improvements to local disaster plans should accomplish three critical objectives:

- Establish a common understanding about who will be served and the scope of the effort,
- Define each participating entity’s responsibilities for homeless people in the event of a disaster, and
- Identify the lead entity responsible for coordinating key efforts.

Through these improvements, the plans will enhance the mainstream responses to a disaster so that they do not overlook or exclude homeless and other vulnerable people. The plans should address people who are homeless before the disaster as well as those who are vulnerable to becoming homeless because of the disaster, for example, people who are couch surfing or doubled up in housing. The plans should, at a minimum, include the following:

Critical background information: Provide terms and data to define the scope of the effort.	
	Definitions of “homeless populations” and “other vulnerable populations.”
	Demographic data on the current homeless population and a description of their needs.
	Demographic data on people who are vulnerable to becoming homeless after a disaster, e.g. people who do not own or rent a home but who are not identified as homeless because they find ways to stay sheltered by doubling up or sharing.
	Locations of people who will need specialized assistance and their specific needs in advance of, during, and following an emergency.
Lead agency and partners: List key players and their responsibilities (if no individual already exists in this role, identify someone willing to serve the function).	
Jurisdiction	
	Lead person/agency who will serve as principal organizer of the coordinated response efforts for local homeless and vulnerable populations. Clarify how this person fits into the broader disaster response efforts.
	Person(s)/agency responsible for coordinating key functions including warning and notifications, evacuation and transportation, and shelter and services.



Homeless service providers	
	Homeless service provider representative, and a back-up, that will coordinate with the jurisdiction's emergency response leaders/team during an emergency.
	List of all provider agencies that will assist with emergency response for homeless and vulnerable populations.
Jurisdiction services and supports to be provided: Specify the support that will be coordinated by the jurisdiction.	
	List of warning and notification measures intended to reach homeless people, including unsheltered homeless people.
	Identified evacuation routes that meet the needs of homeless persons. Include transportation arrangements that ensure pick-ups for people unable to utilize standard evacuation routes.
	List of facilities to be made available for shelter. Make explicit policy that shelters will be open to all individuals regardless of behavioral health or physical health issues.

Stronger plans will include strategies. . .

Stronger plans will include strategies for meeting the specific needs of homeless people and targeted training to support plan implementation. The plans should describe the community's approach to warnings and notifications, evacuation and transportation, and shelter and services. These may include medical, behavioral health, and other services critical to stabilizing homeless and vulnerable populations after the disaster. Ideally, the approach will focus on continuity of operations for existing services as well as plans to address surges in needs related to the disaster.

The table below provides a list of possible responses. You should choose the ones that are appropriate for your community. See the companion [Disaster Response Guide](#) for additional detail on how to put in place and implement these strategies.

Risk Analysis: The larger disaster plan will identify the types of disasters that can occur in your jurisdiction and the mainstream response. The effect of particular types of disasters on homeless populations may be different than the effect on mainstream populations, and therefore the risks are different. For example, unsheltered homeless people are particularly exposed to disastrous weather events. In developing your plan, you should:	
	Consider the different effects on homeless and vulnerable populations for each type of disaster your community may face.
	Identify circumstances that will likely pose the greatest risk to the health and safety of homeless and vulnerable persons.
	Identify areas of higher risk and prioritize resources to those areas where possible.



Preparation and Training: Describe any activities that must take place to prepare for a disaster. Your plan should include provisions to:

	<p>Develop preparedness exercises that embed practices to ensure inclusion of homeless people in the response. Exercises should be conducted to train case workers, emergency managers, homeless individuals and families, or anyone else who needs the information, and should address disaster response for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheltered homeless people (in shelters, motels, and other temporary housing), • Unsheltered homeless people (on streets, in encampments, in cars, and other), and • Existing support services such as existing shelter and food programs.
	<p>Deliver training exercises to prepare disaster workers to respond appropriately to persons who may present with mental health or physical health issues and to deal with other issues that some homeless persons may exhibit, such as distrust of authority. These disaster workers may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach workers (enlisting existing outreach workers in advance is a best practice), • Evacuation and Transportation personnel – drivers, first responders, and • Emergency shelter staff – intake, mental health specialists.
	<p>Develop informational materials (posters, fliers, emergency response cards), to be distributed in areas frequented by homeless persons, that include services that meet the needs of homeless persons such as transportation pick-ups near shelters or encampments. Establish easily identified and remembered locations that will have up-to-date information on the status of disasters, etc.</p>
	<p>Communicate regularly with key stakeholders to ensure preparedness acts are completed. Compile lessons learned to improve future trainings.</p>

For additional ideas on preparation and training, consult the [Response Guide](#).

Warnings and Notifications: Describe the steps the jurisdiction will take to ensure that homeless people receive the key information needed to prepare for and respond to the disaster.

Your plan should:

	<p>Include a timeline for communication that lists actions that can be taken immediately, as the disaster approaches (if it is one that gives warning), immediately after the disaster, and throughout the recovery period. Consider alternate timelines for different types of disasters (e.g., the timeline for a hurricane is different from that of an earthquake or a terrorist attack).</p>
	<p>Detail the list of duties for outreach teams, including the methods they may need to employ to make direct contact with homeless people and give them essential information on evacuation, transportation, and shelter support. It is most effective and efficient to draw on existing homeless outreach personnel for this work when developing your disaster response plans.</p>
	<p>Describe outreach methods to be deployed, such as the use of existing outreach workers to make contact, distributing emergency cards to homeless persons, calling shelters regarding their status and support needed, and coordinating with emergency personnel to ensure that services are being deployed in a way accessible to homeless people.</p>
	<p>Outline ways that technology can be used to reach homeless and vulnerable populations (e.g., a 211 emergency notification system to reach all shelters and homeless service providers or cell phone alerts to reach homeless persons with phones).</p>

For additional ideas, consult the [Warnings and Notifications Checklist](#) in the Response Guide. Also see the report, [Send Red Not Blue](#).



Evacuation and Transportation: Describe the jurisdiction’s approach to ensuring transportation for all affected people to safe locations. This means explicit inclusion of homeless people in mainstream evacuation plans, as well as additional supports to address any barriers specific to homeless populations. Your plan should:

	Identify the mainstream evacuation routes, destinations, as well as pick up points that are easily identified by, remembered by, and accessible to homeless persons. Ensure that evacuation staff have basic training in working with homeless people or that a trained outreach worker accompanies staff on routes.
	Identify additional routes to hard-to-reach areas if the mainstream evacuation routes will not reach all homeless and vulnerable populations.
	Identify alternative transportation arrangements such as bus vouchers or funds for fuel and parking locations for homeless individuals with cars.
	Address any rules guiding the evacuation that could create barriers to homeless people (e.g., Can they bring their belongings or pets? Is evacuation compulsory?).
	Establish a protocol to check with homeless service providers to ensure their evacuation plans are able to proceed.
	Include measures for ensuring ongoing communication with evacuees, especially evacuees in locations outside the community, so that people can be contacted after the disaster and return to the community. Remember that homeless people who relocate outside the community may not receive messages about when it is safe to return. Extra outreach may be needed.

For additional ideas, consult the [Evacuation and Transportation Checklist](#) in the Response Guide.

Shelter and Services: Develop a list of all places designated to serve as shelters in the event of an emergency, including their capacities and capabilities. Review the list and assess its adequacy given the likely surge in need for shelter from people who were both experiencing homeless before the disaster and people who are homeless because of the disaster. Keep in mind that a disaster may push homeless persons into shelters that are not equipped and staffed properly to meet their specific needs. To minimize loss of existing shelters and ensure sufficient capacity in disaster-focused shelters, the community should have procedures in place to ensure continuity of operations as well as to respond to the increased needs in shelters after a disaster.

Your plan should:

	Provide adequate capacity for households who were homeless before the disaster, as well as those who were made homeless by the disaster, for the duration of the disaster response and recovery (The Recovery Guide provides checklists to assist with this process).
	Identify the capacity and services of all potential shelters. Consider current shelters and their surge capacity as well as locations for new disaster shelters. Identify facilities that could be rapidly repurposed as disaster shelters (e.g., recent vacant acquisition, schools, etc.).
	Ensure that disaster shelters have services and staff ready to serve the needs of all displaced people, including the diverse population in the homeless community (e.g., families, individuals, youth, and veterans). If not all disaster shelters have supportive services, know which ones do, and plan to provide transportation as needed to those shelters. Providing supportive services will almost always require a pre-existing agreement with the CoC to provide trained workers to the temporary disaster shelters.
	Include the development of guidance for shelter staff on effective and inclusive ways to support all populations, including those with mental or physical health issues and those who may present as “different” to an untrained volunteer.



	Identify required training for professional staff serving homeless populations.
	Include measures for consistent and comprehensive data collection by disaster shelters during the disaster and immediate recovery that allow for continuous assessment of homeless needs. This and other data can be used to evaluate the response efforts. Establishing, in the plan, a uniform set of data points that will be collected from those coming into disaster shelters – and who will be collecting data from each shelter at a community level – can greatly facilitate post-disaster triage for recovery supports. By contrast, if each agency collects only its own relevant data, it results in a huge duplication of efforts and large inefficiencies.
	Articulate a commitment to serving all people impacted by the disaster. This may include making provisions in disaster shelter rules to accommodate people who have a physical illness, behavioral issues, lack identification documents, etc.
	Include a policy regarding households with pets. Some people may forgo shelter to stay with their pets, but inclusion of pets in shelters raises health and safety issues. Talk to local disaster response experts about policies on pets and shelter.
	Outline specific services provided in shelters that vulnerable populations may need such as medical services, mental health services, support for substance use disorders, basic amenities (e.g., clothing and toiletries), issuance of identification, and help with connecting to their support system (e.g. social workers, parole officers). (Note: Be sure to coordinate with parole officers and any other groups that you believe should be a part of the plan, before including them in the plan. A good time to do this would be during the “Identify Stakeholders” and “Meet with Stakeholders” stages of planning, but it could be done at any point.)
	Establish Memorandums of Understanding that are executed in advance and periodically renewed to ensure that services can be delivered by designated parties and that the parties can be compensated for their services.
For additional ideas, consult the Shelter and Services Checklist in the Response Guide.	

The best plans will include contingencies . . .

The best plans will include contingencies to respond to the unexpected. As every disaster is unique, and a jurisdiction’s homeless population is largely transient, unforeseen circumstances will arise. Additionally, an influx of ‘new’ homeless households, created by the disaster, can overwhelm disaster response efforts. Higher than anticipated damage, damage to communication and transportation infrastructure, secondary disasters (e.g. levee breaks, aftershocks), and other such situations can further disrupt systems. Ideally the plans will consider these types of disruptions and appropriate responses.

Contingency Plans: Consider contingencies to address needs in disaster response efforts that turn out to be larger and longer than expected. To address such contingencies, you can:

	Develop staffing plans that account for staff that are affected by the disaster and also that rotate individuals periodically to minimize burnout. Identify additional sources for staffing key functions.
	Identify organizations outside of the homeless service network (religious institutions, fraternal orders) that can provide support including volunteers, transportation, materials, and meals.
	Identify vulnerable emergency shelters (e.g., in a flood zone) and possible replacements.
	Develop plans for the return of homeless people to the community in housing or emergency shelter (not back to unsheltered locations). Consider the services, supports, and beds that will be needed.
	Include people living in assisted housing located in high-risk areas in your planning.



5.2 Sample Plans and Guidance Documents

Sample plans	
<u>Homeless Evacuation/Sheltering Plan: An operating procedure for Pinellas County</u>	Pinellas County, Florida developed a plan for evacuating and sheltering homeless people during a hurricane. It involves several community partners.
<u>Disaster/Emergency Plan Design for those with Functional and Access Needs: Homeless Populations by Coalition For The Homeless Houston/Harris County</u>	This plan provides an overview of important issues to consider when planning for the needs of homeless people during disasters and is in support of and ancillary to the City of Houston Emergency Plan and the Harris County Basic Disaster Plan.
<u>City of Seattle Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan</u>	Seattle set up a shelter task force that developed a comprehensive emergency management plan. The plan outlines specific roles and responsibilities for each agency and nonprofit involved and includes actions for preparedness and response.
Resources to inform your plan	
<u>Disaster Planning for People Experiencing Homelessness</u> by National Health Care for the Homeless Council	A strong resource for understanding the big picture. This article describes key issues facing people experiencing homelessness, provides vignettes of successful initiatives in communities, and lists broad strategies for communication, transportation and evacuation, sheltering, and health status.
<u>Send Red Not Blue: The Homeless Resident: Report and Recommendations on Working with Homeless Families and Individuals in Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery</u> by the Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPS), HUD	This report provides recommendations on how to improve communication between local homeless services providers, disaster preparedness planners, and homeless residents themselves. It draws on the experience of two communities that have had frequent hurricanes and served homeless families and individuals during a disaster.
<u>Directory of Disaster Response and Resources</u> by the Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs, HUD	This directory supports Continuums of Care in the development of disaster preparedness plans, understanding the disaster process, enhancing capacity for disaster response and recovery, and encouraging coordination.
<u>Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable People in Times of Disaster: A Guide for Emergency Managers</u> by California Governor's Office of Emergency Services	This guide was developed for emergency professionals based on lessons learned from the Loma Prieta earthquake about the impact of a disaster on vulnerable populations. It defines vulnerable populations and offers a framework for emergency management that responds to their needs.
<u>Planting the Seeds for Recovery: Disaster and Pandemic Planning for Nonprofits</u> by the County of Los Angeles and the Emergency Network of Los Angeles.	Provides a template for nonprofit organizations to plan for continuity of operations and emergency response. It includes a risk assessment instrument and forms for inventorying hazards, assets, and operational elements.
Templates and resources to share with community partners	
<u>Agency Emergency Plan Template</u> by San Francisco Community Agencies Responding to Disasters (CARD)	A template for planning organizational preparedness for community-based organizations. Addresses how to prepare staff and volunteers, address client needs, assemble emergency preparedness kits and supplies, prepare facilities, plan evacuations, and more.
<u>Ready for Anything: Disaster Planning for Runaway Youth</u> by Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services	Step-by-step guide for shelters on how to prepare for the support of runaway youth in a disaster situation. May be useful in planning for other vulnerable populations as well.



6.1 Execute a Memorandum of Understanding

Your disaster plans will document the roles and responsibilities of the many entities involved in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. However, to confirm and further codify these commitments, the local jurisdiction should execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the other entities participating in the plan.

An MOU can:

- Spell out specific roles and responsibilities and identify contact personnel. Likely responsibilities covered under an MOU include transportation services, shelter, case management, food and supplies, and other key support to the disaster response effort.
- Include any monetary consideration for undertaking specific assignments.

For the purposes of some FEMA reimbursements, a community-based organization (CBO) is required to have a pre-disaster formal agreement with the jurisdiction. This agreement must list the organization's specific responsibilities and roles within the broader framework of the community's emergency response plan and note whether the CBO is to receive reimbursement before or after the local government receives its reimbursement from FEMA.

For the purposes of HUD funds, an MOU is not the same as a subrecipient agreement. While an MOU can be executed prior to the disaster, a subrecipient agreement is a binding agreement that is executed between the HUD grantee and a subrecipient organization to establish the terms and conditions under which the subrecipient must expend its HUD funds. It describes the services to be provided, standards and requirements to be met, and conditions for reimbursement. In the context of disaster planning and response, such an agreement is executed upon receipt of HUD funds, presumably during recovery.

The following is an outline for a standard MOU. Note that this is simply an outline that must be fully developed, tailored for individual circumstances, and vetted by the organizations' legal counsel.



SUGGESTED MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING OUTLINE

1. **Designate Key Parties.** List names of the organizations included in this memorandum of understanding.
 2. **Background.** Explain why this agreement is being executed. For example, this MOU is intended to formalize a commitment of the signers to implement a strategy to ensure that homeless and other vulnerable people are accounted for in disaster planning and response.
 3. **Purpose.** Define the intent or goals of this agreement. For example, this MOU defines a relationship between the parties listed to ensure that in times of disaster, homeless and other vulnerable people will receive assistance to get out of harm's way and to recover from the disaster.
 4. **Expectations.** List the services to be provided by each of the parties in the MOU. For example, transportation, shelter, or coordination of efforts. Include any details about reimbursement and compensation.
 5. **Statement of Mutual Benefit and Interest.** Consider stating that all parties agree that it is to their mutual benefit and interest to enter into this agreement as it furthers their individual and collective missions.
 6. **Responsibilities.** List the agreed upon actions by the parties that will support this agreement, such as the formation of and participation in a steering committee, the commitment to creating a disaster plan, and an agreement to coordinate actions and resources.
 7. **Terms of the Understanding.** Terms include such items as a timeframe for the agreement, an effective date, the ability to extend the agreement, expectations for review of the agreement, and termination.
 8. **Authorization.** Appropriate authorities from participating parties must sign and date the agreement.
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6.2 Maintain Your Plan and Prepare Your Team

Once planning is done, preparation begins. Make sure that all stakeholders are aware of the plans and trained to carry out their responsibilities for implementation. Communicate with the team to ensure that agreed upon actions are taking place. This may include the development of outreach materials, training delivery, and preparedness exercises.

Also, circumstances will change over time. Organizations will change, grow, or disappear. People will come and go from the community. Market forces will affect the availability and affordability of housing. Facilities will open or close. Key participants in the planning process may move on. To help ensure that the collaborative disaster response that you have planned for actually occurs, you must keep your coalition together and continue to update your plans.

At a minimum . . .

To ensure that your disaster plans remain relevant to your whole community, including the most vulnerable, you will need to establish responsibilities, methods of tracking, and a schedule of meetings to:

- Maintain the plans and make adjustments to ensure they continue to be responsive to community conditions.
- Maintain relationships that were established during the planning process.
- Track progress on key actions detailed in the plans to ensure plan implementation.
- Make improvements to the plans as you implement them and learn from experience.
- Keep list of participants current.
- Train key team members on what they must do to implement the plans.



A more robust approach requires training and ongoing communication...

Prepare your stakeholders to implement the plan through active training.

- Train every stakeholder on the new plan and what to do when a disaster occurs – including individuals and families experiencing homelessness, police, firefighters, emergency responders, and other stakeholders.
- Work with local emergency planners to ensure that local emergency preparedness training efforts address the items in your plan and include your stakeholders.
- If needed, make use of training materials from the [Red Cross](#) and [FEMA](#).
- Also make sure that the organizers of local emergency planning exercises are aware of the potential impacts of their activities on local homeless people.

Maintain your momentum and your relationships. Keep your stakeholders engaged over time.

- Establish a leadership team that will be responsible to meet on a regular basis for the purpose of reviewing, updating, and revising the plans. This group should have representatives from all relevant sectors – community development, disaster preparedness, homeless service network.
- Conduct regular surveys of providers about changes to their staff, funding, and/or capacity. This can be done by electronic survey or through regular conversations between the leadership team and stakeholders.
- Determine how often this team must meet, how it will document necessary changes in the disaster plan, and how it will communicate these changes to the network of affected providers.
- Use a standing agenda to ensure you always cover all relevant items. See the [sample agenda](#) below.



Sample Agenda for Regular Team Meetings

This sample agenda provides a list of items that can be included in regular meetings.

1. Welcome and introductions

- a. Introductions: Names, organizations, roles
- b. Introduce any new members of the leadership team

2. Updates on the disaster plans

- a. Any recent events: a major incident or exercises, any lessons learned
- b. A change in a hazard or threat level
- c. Relevant changes to laws or ordinances
- d. Change in personnel or organizational structure
- e. Scheduled updates to the jurisdiction's Emergency Operations Plan
- f. Progress updates on preparedness actions
- g. Other developments?

3. Updates on service network

- a. Changes in the scope or nature of homelessness in your community
 - i. Increase or decrease in numbers
 - ii. Recent housing or business trends that affect homelessness
- b. Changes in service providers
 - i. Changes in organization leadership
 - ii. New providers in the area
 - iii. Losses of providers or services

4. Next steps

- a. New outreach needed?
- b. Is it time to update information about network needs and resources?