



Needs Assessment Findings August 2007

Public Information Officer, Joint Information Center, and Sheltering were identified in early 2007 as topics of special emphasis for EdTrAC and other training initiatives. To further inform training providers, a needs assessment was conducted in conjunction with the July Governor's Homeland Security Conference and during weeks following.

The survey instrument was developed and launched by SPPG with content support provided by the EdTrAC Coordinating Training Subcommittee and HSEMD staff. Survey Monkey was utilized to administer the survey and compile the data. Attendees at the Homeland Security Conference were asked to complete the survey, as were members of emergency management and first responder organizations statewide. The link to the survey and reminders were emailed to a broad set of stakeholders related to these issues.

This report includes a summary of the demographics of respondents as well as information regarding the current status and identified needs relative to the three topic areas: Public Information Officer (PIO), Joint Information Center (JIC), and Sheltering.

Fifty-one people participated in the needs assessment. Clearly, this is not a large enough sample to provide data generalizable to the larger population, but there are useful data to be considered for training and education efforts.

Of the 51 respondents, 46.2 percent (18) were county emergency management coordinators, 15.4 percent were law enforcement, 10.3 percent were local public health, 7.7 percent were fire, and others at lesser percentages. Twelve respondents did not provide this information.

Respondents reported a high number of years working in these areas, with 12 reporting more than 20 years, nine reporting 10-20 years, and six reporting 5 – 10 years. Five respondents reported working in the field less than one year, with three respondents reporting 1 – 3 years and three reporting 4 – 5 years. Thirty-eight people responded to this questions.

The 51 respondents represented 25 counties. Polk county had 4 respondents; 17 other counties had one respondent; five counties had two respondents; and two counties had three respondents.

Crosstabs were not run on these data.

Public Information Officer Findings

A series of questions were posed to elicit information about the position and role of Public Information Officer within various organizations. According to the 51 respondents, 84.3 percent of them have a designated PIO in their organization. Full time PIO's were 45.8 percent; 35.4 percent were part time.

When asked if their organization has used a PIO in an event, 68.6 percent (35 respondents) said it has, 23.5 percent (12) said it has not, and 7.8 percent (4) did not know. The same number of respondents reported they had received some PIO training, 68.6 percent, with 31.4 percent reported not having received PIO training.

Respondents who responded to the question about what organization provided their PIO training and what training the received provided a wide range of answers. Thirty-three people provided responses to this question. Among the most common responses were:

- G-290
- Advanced PIO training provided by Iowa Department of Public Health and Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division
- Military
- Through employer organizations: police, fire, Red Cross

When asked what gaps exist in current training, the following themes emerged from the 38 respondents:

- Practical training/exercises to allow people to practice the skills
- How to work effectively with the media
- Unifying PIOs into a single voice

Forty-nine respondents provided information on how they would like to receive PIO training. Fifty-five percent (27) indicated they prefer regional, in-person training, while 22.5 percent (11) prefer centralized, in-person training. Web-based training was preferred by 12.2 percent (6) respondents.

Access to training is good, but could be improved. Thirty-six of the 49 people (73.5 percent) responding to the question said their organization was able to access PIO training, while 10.2 percent were not. An additional 16.3 percent did not know about their organization's access to the training.

EdTrAC Implications

The Coordinated Training Subcommittee discussed the findings, agreeing that PIO training needs to be used in order to maintain the skills. A single training curriculum for all disciplines would address some of the gaps identified. Blended funding streams should be encouraged to allow this to occur. It was also suggested that PIO training and practical activities or exercises be incorporated into the G-290 course.

EdTrAC could support improving PIO preparedness through the following activities:

- Emphasize wider promotion of trainings with PIO content for all disciplines.
- Inform organizations and individuals that PIO training will likely be part of the next round of NIMS requirements.
- Include a PIO component in classroom training and include in all exercises.

Joint Information Center Findings

Survey findings regarding coordinated information and messages provided additional information that paralleled and could be considered in tandem with the findings from the Public Information Officer section.

Of the 49 respondents to the question, 77.6 percent (38) replied that their organization has coordinated with other agencies to share information with the media or public related to an actual incident. Those that had not coordinated were 16.3 percent; 6.1 percent did not know.

Fifty-one percent of respondents (25) reported that their organization has established or is part of a Joint Information Center (JIC). 32.7 percent are not part of a JIC; 16.3 percent did not know whether their organization was part of a JIC.

Fifty-one percent of respondents (25) also reported they have received JIC-related training; 49 percent have not. Twenty-seven respondents provided insights into the JIC-related training they have received:

- ICS and NIMS coursework delivered locally or by state agency
- HSEMD and IDPH trainings
- Emergency Management Institute (EMI) courses

Ideas for needed JIC training content was provided by 32 respondents:

- Basic information about JIC, e.g., purpose, how it operates, who is involved, when to open
- How to cooperate in messages and information across levels of government, e.g. local public health, Iowa Dept. of Public Health, and CDC.
- Relationship between role of PIO and JIC

It was clear from the comments of respondents that there is a great need for basic JIC information and practical training on the purpose and operations of a JIC.

Similar to the responses for PIO training, 53.2 percent of respondents (25) prefer receiving their training regionally, in person. Centralized, in person training was preferred by 19.2 percent, and web-based training by 14.9 percent. Training is accessible to 63.8 percent of the responding organizations; 12.8 percent were not able to access training, and 23.4 percent did not know.

EdTrAC Implications

The Subcommittee discussed the importance of providing PIO and JIC training in tandem. Working with the media in an incident seems to be challenging and intimidating for many agencies since they are not accustomed to being placed in the role of information manager.

The following were suggested for further discussion by EdTrAC at its upcoming meeting.

- Including JIC awareness in the basic PIO course.
- Include a Midwest-based example in training and exercises. Suggested the work of Dr. Hicks following the I-35 bridge collapse in Minneapolis.
- Involve local media in JIC training and exercise.

Item for discussion by EdTrAC at its September 6 meeting:

- Should EdTrAC include a member of the media as a member of EdTrAC?
- Should EdTrAC include the media on a special project, such as developing CD of JIC training?

Sheltering

Sheltering in Iowa has received attention in recent months with winter storms, spring storms, and summer flooding. With the strong independence of Iowans, sheltering can pose certain challenges when people are often unwilling to come to a shelter, and use of shelters is infrequent. Survey findings helped provide a clearer picture of sheltering and training needs.

Forty-two people responded when asked what types of facilities are typically used as shelter options in their communities. Respondents could select all types that apply.

The following organizations have managed shelters in the respondents' communities.

The following staff is available to manage and operate shelters in respondents' communities.

Current shelter options in respondents' communities serve populations differently.

	% Yes	% No	% Don't Know	# Responses
Individuals with disabilities	68.3	14.6	17.1	41
Non-English speakers	45.2	28.6	26.2	42
Individuals without transportation	58.5	19.5	22.0	41
Individuals with severe or chronic medical needs	31.7	43.9	24.4	41
Accommodations for individuals who bring pets	16.7	59.5	23.8	42

When asked about the areas of greatest need for information and support, those who actually have opened, staffed, or managed a shelter, the 23 respondents replied with two broad

responses. First, basic training and shelter equipment and supplies were cited, such as cots, privacy, and tracking systems. Second, ability to provide for the needs of people coming to shelters were important. Examples include pets, non-English speakers, addressing special needs not accepted in Red Cross shelters.

Communities prepare for sheltering primarily through including sheltering in a written plan (76.3 percent of the 42 respondents). In addition, 31 percent have provided the public with information about sheltering, 23.8 percent have conducted an exercise that included sheltering, 19.1 percent have provided training about sheltering, and 19.1 percent have engaged in other activities.

Funding for support and operation of shelters most frequently comes from donated services and goods, with 54.8 percent of respondents reporting receiving this type of support. One-third of respondents did not know about funding and resources for shelters. Public funding was reported by 19.1 percent of the 42 respondents. Private and personal contributions were each reported by 16.7 percent of the respondents.

Training

When respondents were asked if they had received shelter-related training, 31 percent of the 42 respondent had received training; 69.1 percent had not. Most training was provided through Red Cross, or HSEMD.

The type of training needed ranged from “basic concepts” to “extensive training is needed.” Such topics as opening, operating, and closing shelters were cited. Specific topics such as feeding, medical needs, and pets were noted as well. Information on how responder agencies should work with shelters and how needs of people who do not fit Red Cross-managed shelter criteria are provided for is also needed.

Forty people commented on their preferred method of receiving training, which mirrored the responses for PIO and JIC training. Regional, in person training was preferred by 52.5 percent and 27.5 percent preferred centralized, in person training. Web-based training was preferred by 17.5 percent of respondents.

Current access to shelter-related training is available to 69.2 percent of the respondents’ organizations, not available to 10.3 percent, with 20.5 percent not knowing about access to this training.

Organizations with agreements or partnerships in place for shelter management are split about evenly. Forty-five percent (18) report having an agreement in place; 42.5 percent (17) do not. The remaining 12.5 percent does not know if an agreement is in place. Of the 18 responding about the type of agreements, seven report an informal arrangement; six report a formal agreement. Most of those agreements are with Red Cross, with a few agreements with local government, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and the National Guard armories.

Communication and publicity about shelters are handled in communities through local media, particularly radio and television. Newspapers, flyers, NOAA, 211, and social service agencies were also cited.

When asked about barriers to establishing and managing shelters that meet the needs of the respondents’ communities, an array of comments were provided, including:

- Availability of electrical power and generators

- How to address special needs populations
- Physical space needs for shelters
- Human resources, including volunteers
- Funding
- Training
- Unwillingness of people to go to shelters

EdTrAC Implications

The Subcommittee observed the broad range of needs related to sheltering, emphasizing that the range of disciplines are involved at some level. Transportation, medical, public health, public works, animal, and more are often involved in some way with shelters. Law enforcement was noted as a key player in ensuring safety and security.

A basic sheltering training CD could be developed and provided statewide similar to the pandemic influenza training program developed in previous years. A “101” level course seems to be the best approach.

Suggested for discussion by EdTrAC at a quarterly meeting, focusing on content of preparedness training for sheltering and related disciplines:

- Pets
- Medical conditions
- Individuals with mental illness
- Clarifying criteria for coming to a shelter
- How to address sheltering in place (IDPH does a good job with its efforts)
- How shelters and shelter management relates to the ICS structure.