



Emergency Preparedness and Response: A Practical Toolkit for Local Leaders

Introduction

As a local elected official, responding effectively to crises —whether wildfires, floods, earthquakes, or other disasters —is one of the most critical responsibilities you will face. This toolkit provides key strategies and action items to help you navigate emergency response and recovery while ensuring the best outcomes for your constituents. Preparing for a crisis beforehand is one of the best things you can do to set yourself up for success in providing the best leadership for your constituents and community.

Pre-Crisis Preparation

1. Understand the emergency response structure
 - Identify your city or jurisdiction's emergency responders and other agencies outside your jurisdiction that may be involved in a crisis. For example, understand how both your local fire authority and CalFire operate.
 - Familiarize yourself with the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and Incident Command (IC) structures.
 - Know your Public Information Officers (PIOs) across different agencies—these individuals will be your go-to sources for accurate, up-to-date information and they will play an important role in communicating with your constituents. Note, however, that they are not a substitute for having direct access to the people you serve.
2. Participate in training & drills
 - Engage in emergency response drills and EOC training to understand roles and coordination efforts.
 - Work with the city manager and emergency personnel to review disaster response plans, including evacuation and sheltering logistics. Ask yourself



when the emergency and evacuation procedures were last updated.

3. Keep a stock of essential resources

- Ensure the city has stockpiles of necessary emergency supplies, such as masks for smoke inhalation.
- Confirm where these supplies are stored and who has access. Verify expiration dates to prevent waste.

4. Develop communication strategies

- Have pre-drafted emergency declarations ready for rapid execution.
- Establish a clear communication plan with constituents, including social media updates, emergency alert systems, and direct community engagement channels.

During a Crisis

During a crisis, it is essential to keep in mind that your first and foremost responsibility is to the constituents that you serve, so approach all decisions and actions through this lens. In a crisis people will be stressed and uneasy, so it is expected that you will face criticism, even for things out of your control. Focus on doing the best you can for your community, and make transparency, communication, and efficiency your top goal.

1. Establish immediate coordination

- Attend early morning IC briefings to stay updated on road closures, power outages, and emergency status. Knowing this information is one of the best ways you can serve your community so you can answer their questions.
- Regularly communicate with PIOs to assess any communication gaps and ensure the public receives timely information.
- Check in with city council members, community groups, and directly affected residents to understand and address their needs. Keep in mind that responding to their needs may require creative solutions. You or your staff may personally help with delivering supplies to residents, aid with getting them on the road, or other aspects to facilitate an immediate response.



2. Monitor and support emergency operations
 - Allocate city reserves or coordinate financial strategies to cover immediate costs.
 - Work with the city manager and economic development teams to assess the economic impact on businesses and city revenue.
 - Ensure that transportation resources (buses, metro contracts, city vehicles) are available for evacuations and supply transport.
 3. Engage state and federal representatives
 - Coordinate with federal representatives regarding Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG) and other emergency funding sources.
 - Understand the FMAG process and ensure the city's application is prepared promptly.
 - Maintain direct communication with state and federal officials to advocate for emergency aid and post-crisis recovery funding.
 4. Ensure evacuation & shelter logistics
 - Identify suitable locations for temporary shelters, prioritizing public buildings over private properties.
 - Coordinate with nonprofits (Red Cross, Salvation Army) for additional resources and volunteer efforts.
 - Address specific evacuation needs, including accommodations for animals (e.g., fairgrounds for horses).
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Post-Crisis Recovery

1. Damage assessment & funding requests
 - Work with city departments to assess infrastructure and transportation damage.
 - Identify long-term impacts, such as economic downturns due to property damage and business closures.
2. Mitigate secondary disasters (e.g., mudslides, flooding)



- Deploy resources to reinforce hillsides, clear culverts, and establish bulkheads in fire-damaged areas.
 - Review historical data on past disasters (e.g., Montecito mudslides) to implement proactive measures.
 - 3. Streamline permitting & restoration efforts
 - Work with the planning department to expedite rebuilding permits.
 - Monitor and ensure a fair yet efficient permitting process, avoiding unnecessary bureaucratic delays.
 - Be mindful of legal restrictions regarding direct involvement with planning staff—most council-manager systems require going through the city manager.
 - 4. Engage the community in recovery efforts
 - Hold town halls to provide updates and hear community concerns.
 - Partner with local NGOs, chambers of commerce, and stakeholders to distribute aid effectively.
 - Balance transparency and accountability with the need to maintain control of meetings and prevent misinformation.
 - 5. Coordinate with state & federal representatives for ongoing support
 - Maintain regular contact with congressional and senatorial offices for continued disaster relief efforts.
 - Leverage political relationships to expedite funding approvals and policy changes that benefit recovery.
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Final Considerations

- Stay Available: Disasters require 24/7 engagement—be prepared to work long hours to ensure effective response.
- Communicate with your loved ones: Times of crisis are demanding for a public official. Make sure you communicate with your family about what your responsibilities are so they understand why you may be gone for long hours. Plan for



different emergencies before they happen so your family is prepared to stay safe while you are attending to your responsibilities to the community.

- **Monitor Weather & Risks:** Stay ahead of potential follow-up disasters by tracking weather conditions and risk assessments.
- **Engage with the Media:** Provide timely and accurate information to the press; silence creates uncertainty and damages public trust.
- **Think Outside the Box:** Crisis response requires flexibility—use city resources creatively to address urgent needs.

By following these guidelines, local elected officials can lead their communities effectively through crisis response and recovery, ensuring that aid is delivered swiftly and efficiently.