



OREGON
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Emergency Plans and Drills Guidance: Community Collaboration

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School Safety and Emergency Management



Community Collaboration

Schools will not respond to an emergency in isolation. The wildfire that spreads and threatens school grounds; the earthquake that strikes and causes the school building to tremble; even an emergency that comes from inside the school itself—all of these and more will have our schools relying on the capability and capacity of others to help bring everyone to safety. Blind reliance on someone else’s capability is a poor approach. Schools should know who to rely on when disaster strikes, what they are capable of and how they operate so there are fewer surprises when the alarm eventually goes off.

In this first of six guidance sections, the “what and why” of community collaboration will be explained. Community collaboration is an absolutely critical component of emergency preparedness no matter what organization or level of government one might find themselves. There is a common refrain in school emergency management that goes: “the school owns the children, the fire department owns the fire, and the police own the crime.” This is a somewhat simple distillation, but it gets to the heart of the matter for school leaders who must consider their school’s ability to handle disaster and how to prepare the whole school for it. Taking this a step further, one could say that the teachers own the individual students, the county fairgrounds owns the reunification site, and the nurse owns the medications needed by some students. The individual tasks and collaboration points could be endless depending on the size and complexity of each community. All of these groups need to work together to ensure the safety of all involved—no one can do all of these things by themselves.

This guide will provide a reference for school leaders who need a starting point or who may want to fill in potential gaps in their current plan. This guide will address the following areas:

- Planning Team: who should be included in your Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) planning team?
- Collaboration on Drills and Exercises: plan together and act together.
- Memorandums of Understanding/Agreement (MOU/A): What’s the difference and why do you need them?

Emergency Plans and Drills Guidance: Community Collaboration

Planning Team

The very first step of the planning process is to form a collaborative planning team. But who should be on that planning team and why do they need to be there? There is no one-size-fits-all list of who should be included on your EOP planning team. However, there is a way to break this down in groups that may help identify who to bring in.

- **Internal Partners**: First consider who should be included within your own school building. Who should be on the planning team within your school district if you are planning for your district? Whoever is charged with developing the plan is an obvious first choice. The following is a list of others in your school or district who should be brought into the planning team, or at least consulted on their part during an emergency:
 - Facility manager: Their list of responsibilities is too long to detail here. This is a person you need in the room when discussing evacuation routes, HVAC management for air quality and safety, locking doors, and the list goes on.
 - Nurse: This crucial resource is going to know who is dealing with a temporary injury that might complicate evacuation. They will also know who requires life sustaining medication that should not be neglected.
 - Transportation: Don't plan on walking to your reunification site. And don't NOT plan on using your busses to get there.
 - Therapists, Coaches, Front Office Managers and other specialties: Anyone who may have knowledge, a skill or will be key to responding to an emergency should be included in the development and implementation of your school or district's EOP.
 - Teachers: Whether you have five or 95 teachers, bring some into the conversation. This is for two reasons: first, they need to know how serious their school or district is taking emergency preparedness and what they will need to do. Second, they will be able to explain or provide insight on any real interpersonal, technological or classroom challenges that might be overlooked—these are the people who will be responsible for the individual level response.
- **Emergency Responders**: You may be thinking first about your local police department and fire department. That would be a good start. But don't forget your county sheriff's office, your local public health authority, your community mental health programs, or your local or tribal emergency managers. Links to find your local public health authorities, mental health resources, and your local and tribal emergency managers can be found at the end of this document.
- **Other Community Partners**: This is a group that could be quite expansive depending on where you are at and who might be available. The first partners to consider in this group are those who manage or own potential reunification sites. If you have a major community-wide disaster you may need to evacuate your school grounds and you should not entirely rely on the next largest school in your district to do so. Be sure to have both a primary and an alternate reunification site in case the disaster that impacts you also impacts other areas in your community. Below are some considerations for other community partners starting with reunification sites:
 - County Fair Grounds: These are both a common and popular option for a reunification site because they are typically organized to accommodate large groups of people and traffic.

Emergency Plans and Drills Guidance: Community Collaboration

- Local Religious Institutions: These can be another attractive option to use for reunification because they also are set up to accommodate traffic flow and shelter for large groups of people.
- Parks or Civic Centers: If you are considering a local park for a reunification site, make sure it has shelter available for inclement weather. Civic centers or other community centers are also commonly used for reunification.
- Local Community Emergency Response Team (CERT): CERTs are commonly formed and used in communities all across the country—including right here in Oregon. These teams are volunteers who can come together during an emergency to assist community emergency response. A link to information and local contact information can be found at the end of this document.

Collaboration on Drills and Exercises

Once you have identified who to collaborate with for plan development, don't forget to include these same people in your drills and exercises. Drills and exercises of your emergency plan are not just for the teachers and students inside the school building. Including your emergency responders and other community partners in your drills and exercises will provide a more resilient preparedness stance for all involved. Law enforcement can learn the layout of your buildings so they can more efficiently respond to internal threats. Fire departments can identify internal and external hazards and provide guidance on how to mitigate those hazards. Below are some considerations for including your emergency responders and other community partners:

- **Drills:** A best practice is to bring in your emergency responders for your drills at the beginning of the year. But that doesn't mean they should be left out for all the others. Request to have law enforcement on hand for your first Lockdown Drill of the year so they know how the school responds and everyone in the school can learn how the lockdown is lifted. Request to have your local Fire Marshal in attendance for your first Evacuation Drill so they can ensure both your plan and your facility are in good order. Regardless of what drill is run, be sure to review what happened after the fact. Having your emergency responders present will provide another set of expert eyes who will be able to identify what went well and what you may need to improve in the future.
- **Table-Top Exercises:** Include any who can come for your table-top exercises. These should be used to conceptualize a response as well as to identify how the different roles and responsibilities work together during a response. If you are running an exercise with an early controlled release, you may want your transportation folks at the table. Likewise include your other community partners if you are exercising a response that would conclude with an off-site reunification. Use these events to learn from so that everyone involved understands where they need to be and what others are doing.
- **Full-Scale Exercises:** Everyone who can be involved should be involved with these exercises. These exercises should be used so everyone can actually see what the evacuation looks like, where the busses will stage and what real-world challenges might be present during a relocation and reunification.

Emergency Plans and Drills Guidance: Community Collaboration

Memorandums of Understanding/Agreement

Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) or Memorandums of Agreement (MOA) are a necessary part of community collaboration. These documents both ensure we are deliberate in our efforts to prepare collaboratively, and they codify the roles and responsibilities of ourselves and our community partners. But what is the difference?

- An MOA is used to cooperatively work together. This is the more formal of the two. An MOA will commit each party to identified duties or obligations. Parties are bound by the terms of the agreement. For example, a school district may sign an MOA with local law enforcement on key control access to school facilities.
- An MOU is used as a bilateral statement of each party's position, interest, activities or duties. An MOU will include what each party might do. For example, a district may sign an MOU with a local religious institution to use their facility as a reunification site should the need arise. Such an MOU might stipulate conditions that should be met prior, during and after a reunification event but may not require the local religious institution to host a reunification at any time.

MOUs and MOAs are particularly important for a school or district's reunification sites. The reunification site should know in advance that a school or district plans on using that site for reunification. There are a number of reasons for having an MOU or MOA signed in advance of the need for a reunification site. A reunification site may have conflicting obligations to the community in event of a major disaster or it may not be able to accommodate a reunification. A reunification site should also be aware of both the impact and requirements of providing a place to reunify students and families. School and district staff, along with emergency responders will be the primary work force behind relocating and reunifying students. However, none of those will likely have keys to the reunification site or know ahead of time what areas to use and what areas are off limits without prior coordination.

Other considerations for MOUs or MOAs are for external partners who may be coming in to use school district facilities or grounds. These could include youth or community organizations, fire or other community emergency response staging, and even emergency sheltering organizations such as the American Red Cross. Ensure MOUs or MOAs are signed before they are needed so all parties know their responsibilities and expectations.

Visit ODE's SSEM page with resources to develop high-quality EOPs to find a training presentation on writing MOUs or MOAs. That same page also includes a sample MOU. Links to that page can be found at the bottom of this document under Resources and Guides.

Emergency Plans and Drills Guidance: Community Collaboration

Resources and Guides

- I Love U Guys Foundation: The Standard Response Protocol.
 - <https://iloveguys.org/The-Standard-Response-Protocol.html>
- FEMA: A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, Themes, and Pathways for Action.
 - https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/fema_whole_community_120211.pdf Review strategic guidance around Whole Community concepts.
- Readiness and Emergency Management (REMS): Collaboration and Community Partnerships: Strategies for Effective School and Higher Ed Emergency Operations Plan Development.
 - https://rems.ed.gov/docs/CollaborationFactSheet_508C.pdf
- Building Safer Schools and Communities: Findings and Recommendations from the Joint Task Force on School Safety and Justice.
 - <https://www.cgcs.org/Page/1661>
- Readiness and Emergency Management (REMS) Developing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) for Enhancing Emergency Preparedness in the School Setting.
 - <https://rems.ed.gov/trainings/coursemou.aspx>
- National Association of School Psychologists. Rethinking School Safety: Communities and Schools Working Together. Link to download file:
 - https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/Advocacy%20Resources/Rethinking_School_Safety_Key_Message.pdf
- Readiness and Emergency Management (REMS). Building Multi-Disciplinary Core Planning Teams. Link to download file:
 - https://rems.ed.gov/docs/Zip%20Files/PlanningTeams_508C.zip
- Oregon Department of Education Resources for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans (EOP):
 - <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/grants/Pages/Resources-for-developing-high-quality-Emergency-Operations-Plans-%28EOP%29.aspx>
- Oregon Department of Emergency Management Local and Tribal Emergency Managers List:
 - https://www.oregon.gov/oem/Documents/locals_list.pdf
- Oregon Health Authority, Local Public Health Authority Directory:
 - <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/providerpartnerresources/localhealthdepartmentresources/pages/lhd.aspx>
- Oregon Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program information page and local contact list:
 - <https://www.oregon.gov/oem/community-preparedness/pages/cert-program.aspx>
- Oregon Health Authority Community Mental Health Programs:
 - <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/hsd/amh/pages/cmh-programs.aspx>