



ESF #15 External Affairs

Rev. Final

Date: March 2025

ESF Coordinating Agency:

Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) / Public Information Office (PIO)

DPC Member Agencies:

Executive Chamber / Office of Communications
Communication Staff of Activated DPC Members
Intergovernmental Staff of Activated DPC Members
2-1-1 New York State

Non-DPC Member Agencies:

National Weather Service (NWS)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An Emergency Support Function (ESF) provides a planning structure for coordinating response activities during a disaster or emergency. Each ESF groups together functions needed for emergency response. ESF #15 serves as the author, coordinator, and distributor of all public information related to the incident, including emergency public information. The goal of ESF #15 is to provide accurate and well-timed information to the public and media. ESF #15 works closely with Federal, State, local, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other partners to promote effective external outreach.

SECTION I: General Considerations and Planning Guidelines

Introduction

ESF #15 coordinates Federal, State, local, NGOs, and partners to release public information related to an emergency or disaster. Public information related to an incident typically relates to preparedness, emergency response, and recovery activities. This information should be released in a coordinated manner and in an accessible format to help maintain public safety, reduce property and infrastructure damage, and aid in recovery efforts.

Purpose

The purpose of this Annex is to provide a framework for agencies to collect, analyze, and release public information related to an incident in a coordinated manner with federal, State, local, NGOs, and other partners. This coordination promotes information dissemination through collaborative channels so the affected populace including children and seniors, those with disabilities, those with access and functional needs, and individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) have equal access to information throughout the mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery stages.

The State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) has been structured into three distinct, but interconnected volumes. These are:

- Volume 1: All-Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Volume 2: Response and Short-Term Recovery
- Volume 3: Long-Term Recovery Plan

Critical Capability

ESF #15 supports the following Critical Capabilities in New York State: Public Information and Warning

The purpose of the CEMP is to identify the State's overarching policies, authorities, and response organizational structure that will be implemented in an emergency or disaster situation that warrants a State response. The CEMP serves as the foundational framework for the State's response levels and serves as the operational basis of which other ESF, functional, and hazard-specific annexes are built upon. These ESFs and annexes address a broad range of capabilities in response to the State's highest-rated hazards.

The purpose of ESF #15 is to ensure that the strategic and broad-based nature of the State CEMP to allow the State to adequately prepare for, respond to, and recover from incidents while providing emergency public information to all populations.

Scope

This ESF Annex applies to any incident that requires the coordination of public information for multiple agencies or partners when the State Emergency Operations Center (State EOC) activates. Once ESF #15 is activated, ESF #15 is the primary source of public information related to the incident. This allows for one central contact for the media with a trained spokesperson designated to deliver the State's message in an appropriate and accessible forum for both the hazard and the audience. ESF #15 works with all activated ESFs, State agencies, NGOs, and partners to release public information that is accurate, coordinated, timely, and accessible to the public. If local governments continue to release public information, then ESF #15 coordinates with local governments on any released public information.

In recognizing potential barriers, such as accessibility, that may prevent individuals from obtaining, visualizing, and comprehending information, ESF #15 will leverage a variety of platforms to aid in disseminating important information. These accessible outreach activities address the specific hazard for the public, including at-risk populations. These activities may require the use of language interpreters and translators. ESF #15 uses some of the following communications methods to release information:

- Press releases
- Social media posts (X, Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, YouTube, etc.)
- Media briefings (onsite and off-site) with the use of a certified American Sign Language interpreter as appropriate
- Press releases and social media posts translated into the primary language(s) of each affected community
- Emergency Alerts and/or Wireless Emergency Alerts issued through the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS)
- Public notice or information issued through alert.ny.gov or any other State public notice system
- Prepared material (flyers, fact sheets, brochures, etc.)
- Public service announcements
- Briefing packages for media briefings
- Pre-scripted information bulletins about hazards, preparedness measures, and protective actions in a manner accessible to all populations. These materials are made available in the top 12 languages spoken by LEP individuals in New York State, as determined by the most recent American Community Survey data and required by New York State Executive Law Chapter 18, Article 10, Section 202-a. These materials can be translated to other languages as needed.

Situation

A disaster situation can cause damage to infrastructure and property which may lead to disruptions to public safety and utility service. If utilities, such as electrical and telecommunication providers, experience widespread outages, providing public information through phone, internet, and television outlets may be challenging. At the same time, an increase in public interest regarding an incident, emergency response, or outage restoration

Linkage to other State Plans

ESF #15 is linked to the Radiological Emergency Preparedness (REP) Plan and the Emergency Public Information Appendix.

efforts could overwhelm public information staff. During this situation, a coordinated public information strategy is used to address these challenges and improve emergency response and public safety. A coordinated public information strategy is critical to ensuring all released information is in a clear, accessible format. Public information primarily consists of press releases, social media posts, and briefings related to the incident, incident response, and recovery.

While disasters do not discriminate, some populations are disproportionately impacted by them. These populations include but are not limited to individuals with access and functional needs (AFN), including those with physical mobility, sensory, intellectual, developmental, cognitive, or mental disabilities, those with chronic health conditions, older adults, children, individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and those with transportation challenges.

Approximately 3.9 million adults in New York State are identified as having a disability impacting their mobility, cognition, hearing, vision, independent living capability, and/or self-care capabilities. Additionally, there are millions of New Yorkers who do not speak English as their primary language and have limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. These potential barriers to communication reflect the need for heightened consideration and planning efforts to support effective, efficient communication and prevent suffering and/or loss of life.

Collaboration and coordination between ESF #15, ESF #6, and ESF #8 will be essential in disseminating critical information such as shelter locations, distribution center locations, and other emergency information to all impacted populations and communities, including individuals with access and functional needs. Coordination between ESF #15, ESF #6, and ESF #8 will also be essential in supporting the proper provision of services to support communications accessibility. Collaboration and coordination with other ESFs will occur as necessary and appropriate.

Planning Assumptions

Emergencies create great public interest and intense demand from the media for information. Providing accurate information based on confirmed reports is the appropriate response to that interest. The scope of vetted and unvetted information received by ESF #15 during an emergency is likely to exceed the resources of a State agency or local government. ESF #15 only releases vetted information and does not release information that is unconfirmed, speculative, or part of a law enforcement investigation.

ESF #15 operates under the following planning assumptions.

- The DHSES Public Information Office coordinates activated partners with the Executive Chamber's Office of Communications to manage ESF #15 and release public information related to the incident.
- Media interest during an incident could rapidly escalate and possibly overwhelm the communication staff of a single agency.
- Effective public warnings or alerting may require the use of multiple alerting systems to reach the greatest amount of people, including the general population, people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs (AFN).
- Assistance from communication or intergovernmental staff of federal, State, NGOs, and other partners may be requested.
- Partners may include:
 - The New York State Watch Center (SWC) for use of the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) to send an emergency alert or wireless emergency alert,
 - The NY Alert public notice system (maintained by Everbridge) to provide public notice or information,
 - The 2-1-1 New York State telephone line for information and referrals for different services including physical and mental health, work support, access to non-English language assistance, support for the elderly and disabled, child, youth, and family support, and suicide prevention,
 - The 511 New York portal for information on transportation services and conditions throughout New York State,

- Transportation agencies and authorities to issue alerts through variable message boards and other public notice means,
- The Division of State Police to vet sensitive law enforcement information,
- The Public Service Commission to inform the public of utility outages,
- The National Weather Service to publicize weather information and threats from natural hazards,
- The American Red Cross to publicize the status of any open shelters, and
- Any other support agencies as needed.
- Public information releases will be made available with consideration to the access and functional needs of the impacted community. All public information released by ESF #15 will be made available in the primary language or languages spoken by the impacted community.
- When a high-volume telephone call center is warranted to collect or disseminate public information, a public inquiry and/or disaster information hotline or call center will be established utilizing the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance Contact Center. These communication centers will include the use of language access lines, teletype device (TTY), telecommunications relay device (TDY), etc. to meet the needs of the greatest amount of people, including the general population, and people with disabilities and others with AFN.

Concept of Operations

- An incident occurs in the State that warrants activation of the State EOC.
- ESFs and agencies begin to report to the State EOC. State OEM may solicit input from the Coordinating Agency to determine which Member Agencies will be activated based upon the needs of the operation.
- Once activated, ESF #15 assumes responsibility for public information. The ESF #15 Coordinating Agency, the DHSES Public Information Office, coordinates with Member Agencies, and the ESF becomes the central source for providing information to the public and media. It is the mission of ESF #15 to disseminate accurate and timely disaster preparedness, response, and recovery information to the populace, regardless of language, culture, or disability.
- Releases of information are coordinated with and may occur through the Executive Chamber's Office of Communications.
- If warranted, ESF #15 may deploy a public information officer to support field operations such as a regional operations center, an established area command, or to support a State Incident Management Team.
- If a Joint Information Center (JIC) or virtual JIC is created in response to the incident, ESF #15 will activate, operate, and deactivate the JIC or virtual JIC.
- When an incident begins to subside, ESF #15 may reduce its activity and release staff. As recovery begins, ESF #15 members may resume day to day operations and may support any established Joint Field Offices or recovery efforts. ESF #15 members will continue to coordinate accessible public information efforts with the Executive Chamber's Office of Communications.

Policies or Authorities

- New York State Executive Law Article 2-B.
- New York State Executive Order 26.1 of 2006 (Adoption of the Incident Command System).

Annex Maintenance, Distribution, and Revision Process

The State OEM Planning Section has the responsibility for the development, review, and maintenance of all multi-agency response plans under the State CEMP. As required under New York State Executive Law Article 2-B, each ESF annex shall undergo an annual review and update on or before February 15th of each year and be posted online (if applicable) no later than March 31st of each year.

During the annual review by the Planning Section for its material, this plan is examined for both content and format. For updates that do not impact operational mechanisms or processes, the appropriate edits are initiated within the Planning Section and do not warrant external involvement. Plan updates will also be

conducted based upon experiences and lessons learned from exercises or real-world events, or through administrative changes in government. Planning Section updates and/or edits affecting operational capabilities, responsibilities, or otherwise impacting operations will engage stakeholders in a variety of ways, such as verbally, by document review, meetings, webinars, or any combination thereof. Final drafts will be socialized to all appropriate agencies/personnel upon completion.

SECTION II: Preparedness

Mitigation

Volume 1 of the State CEMP is the *State Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan*. Pursuant to the requirements of 44 CFR 201.4, the *State Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan* is required to focus on natural hazards that are likely to cause a substantial impact on the State. Mitigation planning efforts for technological and human-caused hazards are also recognized and are being implemented throughout the State as well. The State participates in federal, State and local mitigation programs and identifies ongoing mitigation opportunities. The State takes maximum advantage of available federal funding to implement mitigation measures at the State and local levels. Throughout the past several years, a substantial amount of funding has been invested in mitigating the impacts of various disasters in all parts of the State. Volume 1 addresses the overall State hazard mitigation planning process, risk assessment, strategy development, and plan maintenance. The *State Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan* was federally approved by the Department of Homeland Security/ Federal Emergency Management Agency (DHS/FEMA) in 2023.

Risk Assessment

The State's Threat Hazard Identification Risk Assessment (THIRA) is completed annually. The process involves the identification of scenarios that will most stress the State's capabilities and an assessment of those capabilities. Those capabilities are mapped to the core capabilities in each of these ESF Annexes created under the State CEMP. Further, the State has developed additional programs and methodologies to better understand risk at the local level. This includes a County Emergency Preparedness Assessment (CEPA), which the State has conducted in each of the 57 counties of New York, and New York City. The CEPA provides great insight as to the State's risk profile from a local-level perspective.

Training, Exercising, and Testing

ESF #15 staff members have a variety of training and exercise opportunities. Trainings and exercises include:

- Emergency management public information courses offered by FEMA's Emergency Management Institute,
- Joint Information System (JIS)/Joint Information Center (JIC) Planning for Tribal, State, and local PIOs training course (G0291), Public Information Basics (LO105),
- New York State trainings including Language Access Training and G-197 Integrating Access and Functional Needs into Emergency Management, and
- Various federal and State exercises that require testing public information capabilities, such as annual radiological exercises.

The State of New York sponsors and conducts a variety of training to improve knowledge and response capability. This includes varying levels of training in the Incident Command System, the Professional Development Series (PDS) curriculum, and EOC training. The State also participates in a wide variety of specialized training, including training to meet Federal program and grant requirements, such as the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG). Further, many State agencies identify training requirements within their own organization to meet the needs of the agency for that specific discipline.

The State of New York has incorporated the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) into its emergency management program. The HSEEP consists of both doctrine and policy for designing, developing, conducting, and evaluating exercises. The State has instituted the HSEEP into a host of exercise activities, including those that involve tests and activations of the State EOC. Further, some exercises are often

linked to a specific grant requirement, while others are conducted as part of ongoing or existing programs, such as those for the Radiological Emergency Preparedness Program.

The State also utilizes an exercise component as part of the planning process to test the effectiveness of an emergency management plan. These exercises vary in scope and cross several state-level plans or annexes. As a point of reference, the planning process that resulted in the creation of the State's ESF annexes included an exercise component.

Capability Assessment

As part of the THIRA process, the State was required to assess its capabilities under Presidential Policy Directive-8 (PPD-8). In doing so, the State assessed its Critical Capabilities using the construct outlined in the CEPA program. The assessment provided the State with information regarding statewide capability trends and potential gaps that can then be planned for and addressed. Those capabilities have been mapped or linked to each one of the ESF annexes under Volume 2 of the State CEMP.

SECTION III: Response

Alert and Notification

The State Watch Center (SWC) serves as the focal point for receiving or providing notification of incidents in the State. In response to an incident that warrants an increase in State response posture, the SWC will be used to notify agencies that the State EOC is activating.

Activation

State OEM will assess the potential needs and demands of an incident, and then determine if the situation can be remedied through maintaining Steady State posture or increasing posture to Enhanced Monitoring. If formal activation of the State EOC is necessary to effectively manage the response to the incident, the capabilities that are needed to support that activation will be identified, and agencies are notified to staff the State EOC using the ESF construct.

NYS EOC Activation Levels

Level 3 – Partial Activation
Level 2 – Full Activation
Level 1 – Full State/Federal Response

Flexibility will be key in activating this ESF. Not all incidents are the same, and not all activations of this ESF will require the full list of agencies to support the demands of the incident. Therefore, the representation of agencies that will be necessary to support the ESF may vary from incident to incident. The State CEMP identifies three activation levels of the State EOC. This ESF will activate to one of those levels as conditions warrant, with the NYS DHSES/PIO serving as the ESF Coordinating Agency. These are:

Level 3 Partial Activation:

- This level may be initiated to meet multi-agency coordination requirements deemed necessary for information, resources, and consequence management support efforts.
- Staffing may include several State EOC Command and General Staff positions, a select number of State ESFs, and initial representation from federal partners.

Level 2 Full Activation:

- This level may be initiated to meet increasing multi-agency coordination requirements deemed necessary for information, resources, and consequence management support efforts.
- Staffing may include all State EOC Command and General Staff positions, multiple State ESFs, and additional representation from federal partners.

Level 1 Full State/Federal Response:

- This level is initiated when it is necessary to meet significant multi-agency coordination requirements for information, resources, and consequence management support efforts.
- Staffing may include all State EOC Command and General Staff positions, most or all of the State's ESFs, and a federal/State Unified Command element.

Direction and Control

The State endorses the development of one response organizational structure that will include all responding agencies. State agencies and ESFs will be organized under the framework of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) Incident Command System as required by New York State Executive Order 26.1 of 2006 and Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5 (HSPD-5). As such, a variety of direction and control components may be utilized to manage and coordinate the State's resources in an efficient and effective manner and to provide interoperability between the local, and Federal response organizations.

The organizational structure of the State's ESFs is inherently different than the Federal construct under the NRF. With the exception of ESF #5 (Planning), ESF #7 (Logistics), and ESF #15 (External Affairs) the State ESFs will be situated organizationally in the Operations Section, and report directly to the Operation Section Chief (OSC), or Branch Chiefs if established. ESF #5 is assumed by the Planning Section in the State EOC, ESF #7 is assumed by the Logistics Section in the State EOC, and ESF #15 (External Affairs) is situated in the Command Element.

This ESF is assigned under the Command Element. The ESF Coordinating Agency is the primary contact person with leadership and the Member Agencies of the ESF. ESF #15 will provide incident management support and coordination under the primary/lead ESF agency. The ESF Coordinating Agency will verify the activities of the ESF are consistent with this Annex, and that Member Agencies are operating in unison to achieve the common goal or mission of the ESF.

Assignment of Responsibilities

ESF #15 is directed and controlled by the Executive Chamber or Command Staff during an activation. ESF #15:

- Shall be responsible for all public information related to an incident,
- Shall staff and manage any activated JIC or virtual JIC,
- May request communication staff from activated partners staff any activated JIC or virtual JIC, and,
- May request intergovernmental staff to coordinate the exchange of information and serve as a liaison with Federal, State, and local government or officials,
- Establish and manage joint information system procedures to:
 - Coordinate and authorize information for release,
 - Disseminate information through various media,
 - Communicate with the whole community, including at-risk, vulnerable, and AFN populations,
 - Interface with public officials and other executives, and,
 - Respond to public inquiries and provide rumor control,
- Shall establish liaisons with appropriate agencies to develop information delivery systems for populations with access and functional needs,
- Coordinate language translation and other necessary services to disseminate appropriate and timely information to those with access and functional needs as well as other underserved communities.

Each of the activated ESF #15 Member Agencies:

- Shall maintain its own authority to manage its public information obligations but shall coordinate such public information obligations with ESF #15,
- May be required to provide communication or intergovernmental staff to support ESF #15, and,
- Shall make all reasonable efforts to comply with requests from the DHSES Public Information Office or Executive Chamber Office of Communications in a timely manner.

In the event an incident impacts one or more of the following critical infrastructure sectors, the listed sector-specific agency or agencies may assume an enhanced role in ESF #15. These critical infrastructure sectors are defined by the Federal government as providing vital assets, systems, and networks to the United States. An enhanced role in ESF #15 may require an agency to assign a staff member to a joint information center, provide background or technical information, or provide enhanced information sharing. The DHSES Public Information Office or Executive Chamber Office of Communications may assign an enhanced role to any agency at any point before or during an incident.

Critical Infrastructure Sector	Sector-Specific Agency / Agencies
Chemical	Department of Environmental Conservation, Department of Health, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services
Commercial Facilities	Empire State Development, Dormitory Authority of the State of New York
Communications	Department of Public Service, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services / Office of Interoperable Communication
Critical Manufacturing	Empire State Development
Dams	Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services
Defense Industrial Base	Division of Military and Naval Affairs/National Guard, Empire State Development, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services
Emergency Services	Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, New York State Police
Energy	Department of Public Service, New York Power Authority, Long Island Power Authority
Financial Services	Department of Financial Service
Food and Agriculture	Department of Agriculture and Markets
Government Facilities	Office of General Services, Dormitory Authority of the State of New York, New York State Police, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services
Healthcare and Public Health	Department of Health, Office of Mental Health, Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, Office for the Aging, Office of Children and Family Services, Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, 2-1-1 New York
Information Technology	Information and Technology Services, Empire State Development, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services OCT Cyber Unit
Nuclear Reactors, Materials, and Waste	Department of Environmental Conservation, Department of Health, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, Department of Public Service
Transportation Systems	Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Thruway Authority, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services
Water and Wastewater Systems	Department of Environmental Conservation, Department of Health, Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, Department of Public Service

National Weather Service

- The National Weather Service’s enhanced role may also involve providing additional public notice through its public warning system.

Integration of Federal ESFs

The Federal Government organizes its response resources and capabilities under an ESF construct. Similar to New York State’s ESF construct, Federal ESFs are multi-agency operational components that serve as the primary means for coordinating Federal resources and capabilities into the State. The Federal ESFs bring together a wealth of capabilities of Federal departments and agencies and other national-level assets. In doing so, they are organized to provide the operating structure for building, sustaining, and delivering Federal response core capabilities in support of the State’s Critical Capabilities. Integration and coordination are key to leveraging the resources of each Federal ESF. As such, the State ESF #15 will serve at the primary integration point for Federal ESF #15. The table below summarizes Federal ESF #15 and indicates the response core capabilities that the ESF most directly supports. Detailed response capabilities and activities are listed in each Federal ESF Annex.

ESF #15 - External Affairs
ESF Coordinator: Department of Homeland Security / Public Information Office
Key Response Core Capability: Public Information and Warning
Coordinates the release of accurate, coordinated, timely, and accessible public information to affected audiences, including the government, media, NGOs, and the private sector. Works closely with State and local officials to support outreach to the whole community. Functions include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public affairs and the Joint Information Center• Intergovernmental (local, State, tribal, and territorial) affairs• Congressional affairs• Private sector outreach• All-Hazards Emergency Response Operations Tribal

SECTION IV: Recovery

Short-Term Recovery

There is no clear delineation of when disaster response activities transition into short-term recovery activities. As with all disaster and emergency-related activities, any transition to a new phase will be dependent upon the needs of the response and the identified needs of the individuals/communities affected. In general, disaster response addresses the immediate aftermath and life safety issues of a disaster or emergency, while short-term recovery activities begin as the need for immediate life-saving activities diminishes. At times, these phases will often overlap with one another.

Demobilization

Demobilization of agencies and ESFs from the State EOC will occur based upon operational needs and will be jointly determined by the OEM and ESF leadership. Based upon the needs of the operation, ESFs may begin to demobilize during the response or short-term recovery phase. However, it should be noted that agencies may be subject to a rapid recall for re-activation of the ESF if needed based upon operational needs.

Transition to Long-Term Recovery

As the urgency of a response lessens, and communities begin to focus their efforts on implementing recovery programs, the State’s focus will also shift to the long-term recovery needs of the affected areas. In Presidential Disaster Declarations, this will likely include the activation of a Federally established Joint Field Office (JFO). JFOs are established, operated, and maintained by the DHS/FEMA, and will include the temporary recovery organization structure put in place to support recovery. To properly coordinate effective integration of State and

Federal recovery activities, the State will organize in a similar structure to the Federal structure contained within the National Disaster Recovery Framework.

Implement Recovery Support Functions (RSFs)

As emergency response operations subside, federal and State government transition from ESFs to Recovery Support Functions (RSFs). At this point, most State agencies transition from an ESF role to an assigned RSF role.

In most cases, ESF #15's public information duties will not transition into any RSF. Instead, each ESF #15 Member Agency resumes its day-to-day public information duties. Day-to-day operations include providing public information support if the Member Agency has an RSF role. At any time during recovery, if directed by the Executive Chamber or Command Staff, participating ESF #15 Member Agencies may be asked to provide additional public information support to aid the recovery effort.

Attachments

- Emergency Public Information Appendix