



DISASTER MANAGEMENT FUNDAMENTALS

Disaster readiness means proactively planning for how your public housing agency (PHA) will respond in a disaster situation. A fundamental best practice is to develop a disaster readiness plan, often called a continuity of operations plan, to ensure your PHA can perform essential functions and support residents during any disruption to normal operations.



Readiness

Key elements of a disaster readiness plan include:

- a list of critical business operations and prioritization of essential functions
- a directory of local partners and contact information
- a list of operational and financial records, including primary and backup storage locations
- protocol for resident communications
- temporary housing options
- guidelines for assessing damages
- predeveloped checklists and logs
- an established agreement with a PHA outside of your geographical location for operational support if needed
- clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders

Examples of roles and responsibilities:

PHAs develop disaster readiness plans, provide clear communications, assess damages, repair public housing stock, and submit waiver requests.

Residents update contact information, inform the PHA of reasonable accommodations, report damages, and apply for FEMA Individual Assistance.

State and local agencies coordinate locally, provide emergency first response, and initiate emergency operations plans.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) coordinates federally and assists local and state governments.

HUD provides technical assistance, processes waiver requests, and evaluates repositioning and/or demolition/disposition plans.

FEMA's [Continuity Plan Template and Instructions for Non-Federal Entities and Community-Based Organizations](#) is a useful tool for developing a disaster readiness plan.



Response

The first step is to implement the procedures in your readiness plan. Below are recommended steps to prioritize residents' needs and agency resources:

Assess your PHA's business operations and document the impacts on, and location of, public housing and housing choice voucher (HCV) families. Determine potential impacts to the public housing stock.

Monitor the safety and capacity of staff, residents, and properties. Partner with agencies for wellness checks.

Mobilize and coordinate with staff and partners.

Confirm and reinforce roles and responsibilities (include human service providers, [disaster-specific volunteers](#), and local emergency management offices).

Secure emergency shelter (e.g., [Red Cross](#) or [Salvation Army](#)) and temporary housing for residents (e.g., [FEMA Transitional Sheltering](#)).

Advocate for residents, especially those most vulnerable, and properties to access emergency and recovery resources from local, state, and federal agencies.

Communicate often and consistently.

Document damages (photos and videos), spending, and [procurement](#). This is critical in relation to insurers and disaster assistance providers (e.g., FEMA).

Inform HUD, [FEMA](#), [state/local emergency management office\(s\)](#), and other funders of disaster damages and impacts.

Offer to help others when you can and support your staff who may be balancing care for residents and their own families.

Use an established operational support agreement with a PHA outside of your geographical area, if needed.

Recovery

The primary goal during recovery is for your PHA to identify needs, then determine the resources available to meet those needs. When strategizing your recovery, document and formalize a disaster recovery action plan detailing how your PHA defines recovery and the milestones and timelines needed to get there. Ideally, the goal is to reestablish a stronger, safer, and smarter portfolio; returning your portfolio to its original state is a minimum recovery goal. You will need to identify potential funding sources (i.e., [FEMA Public Assistance](#) and/or [FEMA Individual Assistance](#) if a [major disaster declaration](#) was issued) as well as regulatory relief options ([disaster waivers](#)). Your state emergency management office may have additional information on resources available depending on the magnitude and severity of the event.

Communications

Effective communication during an emergency can be a matter of life or death. Communication best practices include the development and maintenance of a plan to provide a path for clear, consistent, and factual communications before, during, and after any event. The following key steps are critical when developing your PHA's communications plan:

Collect updated contact and emergency contact information (phone numbers and email addresses) at touchpoints like rent reviews.

Maintain a current tenant directory, including the names and ages of all household members.

Gather and document accommodation needs and relevant vulnerabilities.

Train all stakeholders in advance for pre- and post-disaster communications to ensure a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Notify residents how you intend to provide updates on information related to safety, evacuation (if applicable), reentry (if applicable), disaster-related resources, and other pertinent information.

Integrate equity into communication planning.

Be consistent with your agency's policies and procedures for people with limited English proficiency, disabilities, and reasonable accommodation requests.

Insurance is the primary financial resource for PHAs after any disaster. Per [24 CFR 965](#) and [Notice PIH-2016-13](#), outside of reasonable deductibles, PHAs should have adequate insurance, including flood insurance, to promptly cover the cost to rebuild or replace damaged or destroyed units.

Resources

- [PHA Disaster Readiness, Response, and Recovery Guidebook | HUD](#)
- [Interactive flood map | FEMA.GOV](#)
- [Hazus Program for estimating risks | FEMA.GOV](#)
- [Natural disasters and severe weather | CDC.GOV](#)
- [Plan ahead for disasters | READY.GOV](#)
- [FEMA mobile app | FEMA.GOV](#)
- [Public assistance for governments and nonprofits after a disaster | FEMA.GOV](#)

Resources to share with residents:

- [Individual disaster assistance | DISASTERASSISTANCE.GOV](#) (if a Presidentially declared disaster is issued)
- [Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster | NVOAD.ORG](#)
- [Disaster Distress Helpline | SAMHSA.GOV](#)

Disaster or Emergency Types

Larger disaster events may warrant a FEMA [major disaster declaration](#) (MDD) or [emergency declaration](#) (ED). MDDs and EDs are issued on a case-by-case basis after the governor, or equivalent of the respective state, commonwealth, territory, or tribal entity, requests a formal Presidential disaster declaration (PDD). PDDs are requests to the president, and the MDD and/or ED is the formal declaration to release federal assistance. Declarations are posted to FEMA's [Declared Disasters website](#).