



# 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](#).