

National Incident Management System Fact Sheet for Nonprofit Organizations

Introduction

Nonprofit organizations (nonprofits), such as community-based, faith-based, or national organizations (e.g., National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, American Red Cross), play vital roles in incident management regardless of size or type of incident. Integrating with governmental incident management efforts, to include planning, equipment, training, and preparedness exercises, will enable both governments and nonprofits to maximize their impact. The National Incident Management System (NIMS) supports this unity of effort and provides stakeholders across the whole community¹ with the shared vocabulary, systems, and processes to work together to meet challenges beyond the capacity of any single jurisdiction or organization.

How NIMS benefits Nonprofits and the Nation

Every day in the United States, organizations work together to share resources, integrate tactics, and collaborate. Whether these organizations are in a leading or supporting role, their efforts are magnified by the unity of effort enabled by NIMS's common approach to sharing resources, coordinating and managing incidents, and communicating information. NIMS can be used for planned events or incidents, to manage efforts preventing, protecting against, responding to, recovering from, and mitigating against all hazards. It can be applied both within your organization as well as externally to guide your organization's work with all levels of government (local, state, tribal, territorial, and Federal). NIMS provides stakeholders across the whole community with the shared vocabulary, systems, and processes to conduct well integrated, accessible and effective incident management operations.

While implementing NIMS is not mandatory for nonfederal entities², adopting NIMS procedures and terminology supports the integration of separate organizations' activities and resources into a community's overarching incident management efforts and strengthens our national capability to manage any type of event or incident. Effective

¹ "As a concept, Whole Community is a means by which residents, emergency management practitioners, organizational and community leaders, and government officials can collectively understand and assess the needs of their respective communities and determine the best ways to organize and strengthen their assets, capacities, and interests." For more information, read A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, Themes and Pathways for Action (FDOC 104-008-1, December 2011, https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1813-25045-0649/whole_community_dec2011_2_.pdf)

² State, local, tribal and territorial recipients and sub-recipients of federal preparedness, mitigation, and resilience (non-disaster) grants and contracts should check notices of funding opportunity (NOFOs) and contracts documents for grant and contract-specific NIMS implementation requirements. Additional information is available on [FEMA's Grants website, https://www.fema.gov/grants](https://www.fema.gov/grants)



FEMA

incident management of internal and external operations can make the difference between advancing or damaging an organization's reputation.

NIMS Guiding Principles

NIMS is the culmination of more than 40 years of efforts to improve interoperability in incident management, and reflects lessons learned from exercises and real incidents. It applies to all incident personnel, from the local command post to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Response Coordination Center. Incident management priorities include saving lives, stabilizing the incident, and protecting property and the environment.

To achieve these priorities, incident personnel apply and implement NIMS components in accordance with **NIMS Guiding Principles** of flexibility, standardization and unity of effort:

- Flexibility allows NIMS to be scalable and, therefore, applicable for incidents that vary widely in terms of hazard, geography, demographics, climate, culture, and organizational authorities.
- Standardization is essential to interoperability among multiple organizations in incident response.
- Unity of effort means coordinating activities among various organizations to achieve common objectives.

NIMS Implementation Recommendations for Nonprofits

FEMA recommends that nonprofits consider the following specific activities as they seek to adopt, implement, and improve their use of NIMS.

General

Adopt NIMS by having a valid legal authority indicate that NIMS is the system of choice for your organization.

1. Designate and maintain a point of contact (POC) to serve as the principal coordinator for NIMS implementation.
 - Engage with other NIMS POCs in your community, such as local emergency managers and first response organizations, and develop lists of contacts and capabilities.
 - Ensure POC lists are current, accessible, and maintained for accurate information.
 - The FEMA Regional NIMS Coordinators³ act as the subject matter experts regarding NIMS for the jurisdictions and organizations within their FEMA Region and can help find the correct people to engage in your community.

2. Participate in exercises.

³ For FEMA Regional NIMS Coordinator contact information, email FEMA-NIMS@fema.dhs.gov

- Nonprofits often provide critical incident-related services. Practicing together will ensure resources are effectively integrated into incident management activities. Consider participation in the National Exercise Program (NEP)⁴, a two-year cycle of exercises across the nation that examine and validate capabilities in all mission areas.
 - Develop After-Action Reports (AARs) which identify opportunities to improve NIMS implementation such as use of the Incident Command System (ICS), managing an Emergency Operations Center (EOC)⁵, and communicating using plain language and accessible formats based on your organization’s mission, resources, and needs. Your organization can use these AARs to improve your plans and training programs.
3. Promote training and credentialing of your staff and volunteers.
- Use the guidance contained in the NIMS Training Program⁶ to develop a training plan based on your organization’s needs.
 - Encourage members of your organization to participate in NIMS training according to their level of incident responsibility. Many of these courses are self-paced, accessible, free of charge, and can promote a more collaborative working relationship with public and private sector partners.

Resource Management

NIMS Resource Management guidance can help your organization with seamless inventorying and sharing of resources across organizational and jurisdictional lines.

1. Identify and inventory deployable incident resources within your organization and jurisdictional counterparts that are consistent with the national NIMS resource typing definitions and job titles/position qualifications, and available through the Resource Typing Library Tool (RTL)⁷. Resource typing definitions establish a common language for discussing resources by defining minimum capabilities for personnel, teams, facilities, equipment, and supplies. Resource typing enables communities to plan, request, and have confidence that the resources they receive have the capabilities they requested.
2. Use the Incident Resource Inventory System (IRIS)⁸ to identify and manage your inventory response assets. Share this information with your local emergency management authority and other response partners prior to an incident.

4 For more information about the National Exercise Program, visit <https://www.fema.gov/national-exercise-program>

5 Incident support is conducted in a wide variety of physical facilities and virtual structures. NIMS uses the term “EOC” to refer to all such facilities, including but not limited to traditional emergency operations/coordination centers.

6 For more information about the NIMS Training Program, visit <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/nims/implementation-training>

7 For more information about the Resource Typing Library Tool (RTL), visit <https://www.fema.gov/resource-management-mutual-aid>

8 For more information about the Incident Resource Inventory System (IRIS), visit <https://preptoolkit.fema.gov/web/nims-tools>

3. Coordinate allocation of goods and services with other nonprofits, neighboring jurisdictions, and the private sector to eliminate duplication of effort and resources.
4. Develop or participate in a qualification, certification, and credentialing program for staff and/or volunteers. The National Qualification System (NQS)⁹ provides national minimum qualifications for incident personnel.
5. Participate in mutual aid. Establishing memorandums of understanding and/or memorandums of agreements with other organizations or agencies prior to an incident can help identify capabilities and facilitate the sharing of resources and personnel.

Command and Coordination

NIMS command and coordination structures can help your organization integrate decision making and unity of effort among all incident personnel. FEMA recommends that organizations apply these structures to the four areas of incident responsibility:

1. ICS guidance to tactical activities and resource allocation on scene.
2. Incident support, typically conducted at EOCs¹⁰ through operational and strategic coordination, resource acquisition, and information gathering, analysis, and sharing.
3. Policy guidance and senior-level decision making organized by Multiagency Coordination Groups (MAC Groups).
4. Outreach and communication, including accessible formats, with the media and public using the Public Information Officers (PIOs) and Joint Information Systems (JIS)¹¹ to keep them informed about the incident.

9 For more information about the National Qualification System (NQS), visit <https://www.fema.gov/national-qualification-system>

10 For more information about Incident Support in NIMS, visit https://www.usfa.fema.gov/operations/nims/command_and_coordination.html

11 A Joint Information System (JIS) consists of the processes, procedures, and tools to enable communication to the public, incident personnel, the media, and other stakeholders.

Multiagency Coordination Systems (MACS) exist to coordinate these four areas across the different NIMS functional groups: ICS, EOCs, MAC Groups, and JIS.

1. Apply ICS as the standard organizational structure for on-scene incident management.
 - Regardless of the size, complexity, or scope of the incident, effective command and coordination helps save lives and stabilize the situation.
 - ICS enables effective, accessible, and efficient incident management by integrating equipment, personnel, procedures, and communication operations.
 - ICS is flexible and scalable to allow your organization to make changes to meet the needs of the incident.
2. Incorporate the NIMS Management Characteristics¹² into emergency plans and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).
3. Provide support to, or if requested participate as a representative of your organization in, any MAC Group established to support the management of the incident.
4. FEMA recommends nonprofits gather and share information with local EOCs, private sector partners and other organizations during an incident to enable efficient, accessible, and effective communication during an incident.

Communications and Information Management

NIMS Communications and Information Management guidance helps ensure your organization's information gets to who it needs to, when it needs to, and in a means they can understand.

1. Use plain language and clear text in accessible formats.
 - When communicating during an incident, eliminate overuse of acronyms and apply standardized and consistent terminology.
2. Maintain situational awareness picture.
 - Share information with other organizations to promote shared situational awareness.
3. Ensure your organization's information gets to the appropriate groups in a timely manner.
 - Develop and maintain procedures for incident information collection and sharing.
 - Prevent social media misinformation / rumor control.

¹² For a complete list of NIMS Management Characteristics, visit <https://www.fema.gov/2017NIMS>

Supersession

This document supersedes the *NIMS Implementation for Nongovernmental Organizations Fact Sheet* dated December 8, 2006.