Introduction

When a disaster strikes, it can take communities by surprise, and the best way to recover from an incident is to prepare before it occurs. Preparedness is ongoing, and steady-state activities done in advance, such as developing emergency operations plans (EOPs) and guidance documents as well as collaborating and coordinating with community partners to develop resources across agencies, are integral to recovery and recovery planning alike. These activities, in support of effective recovery and increased resiliency, require K-12 schools and institutions of higher education (hereafter collectively referred to as schools) to collaborate with a variety of representatives from across the community. School safety officials should collaborate in advance to assess and enhance a combined set of resources supporting recovery capabilities using the local recovery frameworks. This collaborative work will also support everyday school safety.

The National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) provides guidance and tools to help guide the state and local pre-disaster recovery planning process.

The National Disaster Recovery Framework

The NDRF, one of the five national frameworks, is dedicated to supporting state, tribal, territorial, local and insular area governments, and communities, including school communities, impacted, and at risk of being impacted, by disasters. Similar to other national frameworks (e.g., the National Response Framework) and doctrines (e.g., the National Incident Management System), “the NDRF describes principles, processes, and capabilities essential for all communities to more effectively manage and enable recovery.” The NDRF puts forth guiding principles and strategies for addressing recovery core capabilities as well as a coordinating structure supporting working groups.

The guiding principles are strategies to help ensure that effective recovery is achieved and to provide a road map for working together before, during, and after a disaster (e.g., unity of effort, timeliness, and flexibility). The recovery core capabilities are the primary functions and services schools and communities will need to build or enhance and sustain during short- and long-term recovery. The core capabilities inform the coordinating bodies that are the Recovery Support Functions (RSFs) providing recovery resources through the Joint Field Office. The NDRF puts forth six RSFs: Community Planning and Capacity Building RSF; Economic RSF; Health and Social Services RSF; Housing RSF; Infrastructure Systems RSF; and Natural and Cultural Resources RSF.

- The Community Planning and Capacity Building RSF supports continual capacity building, planning, and implementation of recovery plans before, during, and after a disaster. During steady state, the state or local groups help coordinate recovery planning and related activities, including identifying points of contact, conducting risk assessments, and collecting and analyzing resources such as training materials and guidance documents. By participating in steady-state
recovery planning teams, education officials will have the existing relationships, be familiar with the processes, and have the foundation for developing incident-specific recovery plans.

- The Infrastructure Systems RSF works to protect and restore infrastructure systems and structures across the community, including school campus grounds and buildings. During steady state, education officials can participate in this group and help inform both the needs of its systems and the contributions that its systems can make to the overall community recovery. By participating in planning and continually conducting inventories and site assessments, schools will be well equipped to participate in the recovery processes.

- The Health and Social Services RSF helps ensure that critical services, such as health care, social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health services, are restored quickly and efficiently. Schools, students, and staff benefit from this RSF through the restoration of essential health care services, and school leaders can collaborate via the Joint Field Office to help ensure that the most urgent needs are prioritized and addressed.

State and Local Steady-State Disaster Recovery Planning Groups

PLANNING

By participating in the recovery planning groups during steady state, in advance of possible disasters, school communities will be better prepared in the event of a disaster; school safety officials will know their roles and responsibilities, be familiar with the working groups and related processes, and have an understanding of their resources needed for recovery. Most importantly, as a result, schools will have faster and more customized access to the resources deployed while better serving their community and resuming operations with safety as a priority.

It is important for education officials and their community partners, including those at the local, regional, state, territorial, and Federal levels, to remain connected and engaged through all phases of the recovery continuum to increase effectiveness, hasten the recovery process, and increase resilience in the event disaster strikes. The NDRF offers a collaborative structure that can support education agencies and local emergency managers as they work across the community to participate in steady-state recovery planning activities, as well as join recovery field activities during and after an incident.

A primary task of these RSFs during steady-state planning is to regularly participate in the Recovery Support Leadership Group to share information, coordinate resources, and examine policy issues related to recovery and recovery planning.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency outlines a six-step planning process and key activities for pre-disaster recovery planning:

1. Form a collaborative planning team
2. Understand the situation
3. Determine goals and objectives
4. Develop the plan
5. Prepare, review, and approve the plan
6. Implement and maintain the plan

Establishing recovery planning teams can increase a community’s preparedness and everyday well-being, and the team should include partners from the whole community, including education representatives. Once established, the team sets goals and objectives, develops the recovery plan, and defines roles and responsibilities to help ensure successful implementation of the plan. After the recovery plan is approved, the work of the team can continue. During steady-state planning, recovery planning team members may participate in capacity assessments to identify existing resources and potential gaps in resources. Team members can then coordinate new resource development, such as incident-specific recovery plans or emergency annexes, by leveraging the expertise within the group. They can also help to
establish relationships among members of the team and make connections to other key partners.

Education leaders, at both the local education agency and the state education agency levels, and local emergency managers may consider participating in steady-state disaster recovery planning groups to help ensure that they are ready in the event of a federally declared or significant disaster. Their working together in these groups will increase the capacity of both the schools and the community to plan for and engage in recovery activities, resulting in a more successful recovery.

Conclusion

Knowledge of the NDRF can support education leaders who wish to engage in recovery planning in their communities. Preparedness is fundamental to recovery, and steady-state recovery planning teams can help ensure that communities are ready to restore vital services, structures, and processes in the event a disaster occurs.

Resources


- National Disaster Recovery Framework, publication
- Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning Guide for Local Governments, publication

Further Reading — Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center Resources

- Recovery for Schools and School Districts, fact sheet
- Functional Annexes, Web page
- Emergency Management Functions, Web page

Further Reading — EOP Development

- Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans, publication

Endnotes
