

# Ensuring Children's Needs Are Addressed in Disaster Planning, Preparedness, Response and Recovery

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With approximately 74 million children under the age of 18 in the United States in 2011, children make up nearly one-quarter of the entire U.S. population. In December 2007, Congress and the President established the National Commission on Children and Disasters, a bipartisan body responsible for conducting an independent, comprehensive study to identify gaps in the nation's disaster planning, preparedness, response, and recovery for children.

The Commission was required to submit a report to the President and Congress providing recommendations for closing those gaps. An interim report was delivered in October 2009, and a final report in October 2010. This report, [available online](#), continues to guide a nationwide effort to better address children's disaster-related needs.

In response to and in support of these efforts, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) began partnering closely with the Commission in 2009. The Commission worked hand-in-hand with federal partners, nongovernmental organizations, pediatric experts, and external stakeholders to ensure that the needs of children were considered and integrated into disaster-related efforts initiated at the federal level.

## National Strategy for Youth Preparedness Education

Great strides have been made since 2009, to build and provide planning guidance, grants, tools, trainings, and technical assistance for state and local jurisdictions. Most recently, this includes the release of the National Strategy for

Youth Preparedness Education: Empowering, Educating and Building Resilience. The Strategy outlines a vision for a nation of prepared youth and provides nine priorities that partners at the local, state and national levels can take to help make that vision a reality. More than 25 organizations have already affirmed their support for the Strategy. Their affirmations include the identification of ways their organizations currently encourage, or plan to encourage, youth preparedness through their work, in alignment with the priorities outlined in the Strategy.

### Empowering the Nation's Youth to Support Community Preparedness

The creation and affirmation of the Strategy represents a tremendous opportunity to promote the youth preparedness movement. Together we can empower our nation's youth to play a role in helping communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. With the proper training, the prepared youth of today just might become our emergency management leaders of tomorrow.

To learn more about the National Strategy, to access resources for youth preparedness practitioners, and to receive individualized assistance regarding a youth preparedness program or initiative, please visit the FEMA Youth Preparedness Technical Assistance Center [website](#).

The creation of the National Strategy is just one of many endeavors undertaken over the past several years to establish a foundation for improving and building upon how

the United States addresses the disaster-related needs of children and their families. This foundation has proven to be invaluable, especially during disaster operations.

On many occasions, FEMA is helping to support disaster response and recovery efforts with the same organizations and individuals we've worked closely with since 2009. Moreover, some of the states and communities we've worked with in past disasters are helping FEMA and our national partners to support the needs of children and families who've recently experienced a disaster – a "paying it forward" approach.

### Additional Tools and Resources

Some additional tools and resources that have been developed to support state, local and tribal governments include:

- **Emergency Planning Guidance**
  - ◆ Developing and Maintaining Emergency Operations Plans: Comprehensive Preparedness Guide (CPG) 101 Version 2.0 (fundamentals of planning)
  - ◆ Various guidance documents focused on child care and educational facilities
  - ◆ Emergency Planning for Juvenile Justice Residential Facilities
  - ◆ Post Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach
- **Grant Guidance**
  - ◆ Homeland Security Grant Program Supplemental Resource: Children in Disasters Guidance

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## Integrating COAs into Emergency Operations Planning

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weaknesses, opportunities, and risks. Considerations that make for useful criteria include, but are certainly not limited to, characteristics such as timeliness, flexibility, environmental impacts, and cost. Once the work group has agreed upon the assessment criteria to be used, members should conduct their initial analyses independently to provide the greatest possible opportunity for individuals to introduce their own expertise and perspectives, while also minimizing the potential impacts of groupthink.

It is important to note that at this stage the COAs are not compared against one another; rather, the purpose of this step is to thoroughly understand each COA's operational requirements, implications, and potential for success. Once the work group members have conducted their independent analyses of all of the COAs, the work group should reconvene, discuss their findings, and generate a consensus analysis for each COA.

■ **Comparison.** Next, with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks of each COA thoroughly understood, the work group should collaboratively compare the COAs against each other to identify the one that is most effective. Many methods for scoring are available.

For example, numerical rankings are useful and easy to apply when the COAs' issues and implications are

well-understood and criteria need to be weighted for relative importance, whereas plus-minus-neutral comparisons can be more practical when time is of the essence and details about the COAs are lacking. For ease of communicating results, the COA comparison is typically documented using a matrix that allows the work group to "show its work." For a numerical approach, this might take the form of a table that illustrates each COA's score for each criterion, criterion weights if applicable, calculations, and totals. Similarly, plus-minus-neutral results and even qualitative narrative comparisons are often best displayed in matrix format for ease of comprehension.

### Value of The COA Concept

The COA approach works for planning problems at the strategic, operational and tactical levels, with the level of rigor depending on factors such as problem complexity and the time and resources available for the process. The key benefits of the COA approach are clear: it engages and informs senior leaders, demonstrates process integrity, and gives both planners and leaders an ownership stake in the process and its outcomes.

This value is perhaps greatest in novel, unfamiliar or complicated situations. That said, while there are many situations in which intuitive or protocol-driven decision making is adequate, even an expedient COA-based thought exercise can complement and validate nearly any decision process. ▲

## Meeting Children's Needs

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### ■ Response & Recovery Tools

- ◆ Commonly Used Sheltering Items (including infant & toddler supplies)
- ◆ Standards and Indicators for Disaster Shelter Care for Children
- ◆ Technical Assistance to reunite separated children with parents/legal guardians
- ◆ [Unaccompanied Minors Registry \(UMR\)](#)
- ◆ Public Assistance guidance for child care and educational facilities
- ◆ Provision of child care expenses under FEMA's Other Needs Assistance (ONA)
- ◆ Emotional/behavioral health resources

### ■ Technical Assistance for Youth Preparedness Programs

#### ■ Training to support:

- ◆ Emergency managers and implementers of children's programs
- ◆ Multi-hazard planning for childcare and educational facilities
- ◆ Community Mass Care and Emergency Assistance

### Find Out More

For a more comprehensive list of tools and resources, please see the Children and Disasters presentation posted on the National Mass Care Strategy [web page](#). This presentation and the appendices feature many more resources provided by the States of Missouri and New Jersey, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, Save the Children, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, and FEMA. ▲



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