



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES



Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems Guide

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
The Advantages of Planning for Disasters	3
Using This Guide	4
Planning for Disaster	6
Assess Agency Preparedness for Disaster	6
Develop a Child Welfare Agency Disaster Plan.....	10
Prepare to Manage a Disaster	29
Planning for Disaster: At a Glance	38
Responding to Disaster	39
Launch Initial Response	39
Coordinate Ongoing Disaster Response	45
Responding to Disaster: At a Glance	49
Recovering From Disaster	51
Manage Short-Term Recovery	51
Plan for Long-Term Recovery	53
Disaster Recovery: At a Glance.....	56
Conclusion	58
Appendix A: Additional Resources	60
Appendix B: Teaming Checklist	65
Appendix C: Resource Family Disaster Plan – Basic Template.....	67
Appendix D: Simple Disaster Activity Documentation Tool.....	69

Introduction

Because the need to ensure child safety and attend to child permanency and well-being continues during times of disaster, child welfare leaders and managers must ensure that they are sufficiently prepared to continue providing services under emergency circumstances. Preparing for a disaster can mean much more than planning to respond to floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural phenomena. Crisis situations may include such different situations as a sudden data breach or system failure, workplace violence, or public health emergencies. All of these disasters and others (both known and unknown) require a coordinated, systematic, and deliberate approach to disaster planning, response, and recovery.

The Advantages of Planning for Disasters

Across the country, disasters affect the routine ways child welfare professionals operate and serve children, youth, and families. As a result, it is especially important for those caring for vulnerable populations—such as abused and neglected children—to do what they can to prepare for these disasters.

The Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 requires title IV-B states and Tribes to develop plans in preparation for a disaster that include the following elements:

- ▷ Identify, locate, and continue the availability of services for children under state care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster
- ▷ Respond, as appropriate, to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster, and provide services in those cases
- ▷ Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster
- ▷ Preserve essential program records
- ▷ Coordinate services and share information with other states

In addition to disaster planning, child welfare agencies are working on other processes to help them build stronger systems that improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. These include systemic reforms that strengthen critical structures and systems to improve performance as well as federally mandated planning processes such as Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) and title IV-B Child and Family Services Plans (CFSPs) that identify steps to improving safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Read This Guide If:

You are working on preparing or revising your child welfare agency's disaster plan.

Learn More About:

- ▷ Aligning disaster planning with other federal processes
- ▷ Assessing readiness for disaster planning
- ▷ Creating a disaster plan
- ▷ Collaborating with partners, youth, and families
- ▷ Responding to disasters
- ▷ Planning for short-term and long-term recovery needs

Fortunately, many of the steps agencies might take to prepare for disasters can also strengthen systems critical to ongoing agency management. Conversely, reforming and strengthening systems through strategic planning may also improve disaster preparedness. For example, an agency may need to enhance staff access to technology to enable staff to access case information and meet with other staff members and even families from any location during a disaster—AND better technological systems could also improve the agency’s success in managing cases on a day-to-day basis or provide more flexibility for staff scheduling. By seeing where agency goals and the needs of disaster response align, the process of disaster planning can also be connected to other federally mandated processes (for more information about this integrated approach, see the Capacity Building Center for States’ (Center’s) brief, [“Strategic Planning in Child Welfare: Integrating Efforts for Systems Improvement”](#)).

Using This Guide

Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems: A Framework for Child Welfare Agencies, first published in 1995 and revised in 2007, was developed to help child welfare program managers and administrators assess and improve their disaster plans, think through the disaster response, and plan for disaster recovery. Additionally, members of the Children’s Bureau’s Training and Technical Assistance Network shared insights from their experiences with relief efforts following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the Gulf Coast States, and Central Office and Regional Office Administration on Children and Families staff provided input. The 2021 revision reflects new developments, lessons learned from more recent events, and examples in three distinct sections.

The first section, **Planning for Disaster**, addresses:

- ▷ Assessing agency preparedness
- ▷ Developing a plan
- ▷ Collaborating with partners (including federal and state agencies, community organizations, and youth and families)
- ▷ Defining the role of leadership
- ▷ Discussing new needs and roles
- ▷ Planning for communication
- ▷ Ensuring staff and family preparedness
- ▷ Planning for documentation, information, and technology needs
- ▷ Practicing the disaster response

The second section, **Responding to Disaster**, discusses:

- ▷ Coordinating the initial response (including considerations for initial steps during the disaster, response timeline, and consideration of staff and community roles)
- ▷ Coordinating an ongoing disaster response (including involving families and youth, evaluating workforce and family trauma needs, and documenting response activities)

The third section, **Recovering From Disaster**, examines:

- ▷ Managing short-term recovery
- ▷ Planning for long-term recovery
- ▷ Assessing strengths and needs of disaster response
- ▷ Reducing disparities in disaster recovery

Each section contains “Lessons Learned” and “Thinking Outside the Box” callouts to help disaster planning, response, and recovery teams think through and discuss each component of disaster management. Each section concludes with a checklist that gives a quick overview of the key points discussed in the content.

The following appendices contain additional information and tools to assist agencies with disaster management:

- ▷ Appendix A: Additional Resources
- ▷ Appendix B: Teaming Checklist
- ▷ Appendix C: Resource Family Disaster Plan – Basic Template
- ▷ Appendix D: Disaster Documentation Tool

Planning for Disaster

Disaster planning is not easy for anyone, but it is especially difficult to devote time and personnel to planning for future events while addressing the challenges children, youth, and families face every day. While planning ahead adds another dimension to an already difficult job, the time and effort are never wasted, especially when the effort can also bring about changes that strengthen the agency and improve outcomes. Planning can also save work after the crisis has passed, making recovery faster and smoother. While planning cannot avoid disaster, it can help mitigate the hardship it brings to agencies and to the children and families they serve.

Assess Agency Preparedness for Disaster

To prepare for all eventualities, an agency leadership and management team should assess how prepared the agency is to face a disaster. The team should also evaluate available resources for disaster planning and conduct a technology evaluation to better understand agency capacity if the need to work remotely should arise.

Evaluate Potential Disasters

One first step is to conduct an assessment of the types of disasters an agency might face. Brainstorm with staff and providers, drawing on their experience to identify potential disasters or crises in your geographic area and gathering their insights for how these events were handled in the past. Agencies should also consider preparedness for national disasters such as pandemics or terror attacks, as well as the possibility of facing types of events that they may not have experienced (e.g., a school or workplace shooting). Staff can gather information by requesting meetings with state and local emergency management agencies, police and fire departments, or state and local homeland security agencies to discuss potential disasters. Consider anything that could happen, no matter how remote. Exhibit 1 below lists examples of types of disasters.



Thinking Outside the Box

- ▷ What are some types of disasters that you and your agency have not yet experienced but that you might face? What would be the effect of such disasters?
- ▷ How can you use resources your agency already has during a disaster?
- ▷ At what specific points can disaster planning align with other planning or continuous quality improvement (CQI) processes?
- ▷ What other organizations or agencies have disaster plans? How can these be used to inform your agency's plan?

Exhibit 1: Types of Disasters

Natural Disasters

- ▷ Hurricanes
- ▷ Tornadoes
- ▷ Floods
- ▷ Droughts
- ▷ Tsunamis
- ▷ Landslides
- ▷ Earthquakes
- ▷ Winter/ice storms
- ▷ Extreme temperatures
- ▷ Fires
- ▷ Volcanic eruptions

Human-Caused Disasters

- ▷ Terrorist attacks
- ▷ War, armed conflict, civil strife
- ▷ Technological disruptions (e.g., electrical power blackouts/ brownouts, network disruptions, hacking, widespread electronic equipment breakdowns)
- ▷ Disruptions to critical community systems or lifelines (e.g., water disruptions or contamination)

Medical Disasters

- ▷ Pandemic or epidemic outbreaks (e.g., swine flu, ebola, COVID-19)

Consider both small scale events—such as illness in one unit or a flood that destroys one office, and larger disasters—such as a heat wave affecting the whole population or a hurricane destroying hundreds of homes. Provide for a flexible response based on the scope of the disaster:

- ▷ Minor disasters can be handled locally.
- ▷ Major disasters will require state and federal assistance.
- ▷ Catastrophic disasters will require massive state and federal aid.

Also consider the impact from disasters in other states, particularly nearby states, after which children and families might move into your state and need services. Finally, child welfare agencies might want to connect with state or local emergency management agencies to obtain or review the prepared Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) for their local area. (More information about THIRA can be found on the Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA] website at <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/risk-management/risk-capability-assessment>).

Prowers County, Colorado: Preparing for Fire

In 2004 the Prowers County, Colorado, offices were destroyed by a fire. Reflecting on the experience, Linda Fairbairn, the county administrator, said: “The critical message I want to convey is child welfare administrators need to think about the disasters that could happen in advance—and talk about it, plan, and practice. I realized afterwards I had overestimated the safety of our building. I never thought there might be a fire. When the fire happened, we had never had a fire drill or any kind of evacuation drill for the building. Our workers tried to put the fire out and then opened doors and windows, which made the fire spread faster, when they should have closed doors. So, make sure you do fire drills, and learn basic fire safety rules.”

Also, when fire broke out in the building, managers realized they had no way to do a buildingwide alert—each department within the building had its own phone system. They have since developed phone trees so there is an established procedure for notifying each department of a crisis.

Brainstorm Common Disaster Outcomes to Tailor Your Plan

A good exercise to start thinking through the impact that specific disasters can have on overall service delivery is to brainstorm the effects of common disasters experienced in the past (e.g., loss of workspace, technology disruptions, needs for tracking children and youth). This can include effects on staff; children, youth, and families; resource parents; agency providers; and partners.

Puerto Rico: Disaster-Proofing the Agency’s Internet Access

When Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico with sustained winds of 155 mph, uprooting trees, downing weather stations and cell towers, and ripping wooden and tin roofs off homes, the child welfare agency’s central office building was heavily damaged and unusable. Nevertheless, their internet-accessible child welfare information system was supported by an international provider with resources beyond the island that was able to get the system up and running the day following the storm. When system stability issues were discovered, the agency was able to move the system until those issues were resolved.

At the outset of the assessment process, disaster planning teams should brainstorm both anticipated disasters such as hurricanes or other natural events as well as events with little warning such as earthquakes, terrorist attacks, or pandemics. There is no way to anticipate all outcomes of every possible disaster, and agencies can get lost in the “what if” game. As a result, planners should focus on what the plan can and should address in the most common disasters and their effects on service delivery. Organize the brainstorming results into key outcomes affecting service delivery—for example, loss of workspace, communication interruption, or technology disruption. Consider how these outcomes can be addressed through disaster planning. A new tool, *Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems: Disaster Outcomes Planning Matrix*, can help your team think through the most likely outcomes of disasters they might face.

Assess Existing Agency Disaster Response Plan

After evaluating the potential disasters and disaster outcomes an agency might face, the next step is to assess the agency’s existing disaster response plan as well as statewide emergency management plans. These plans are mandated by the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 and are required to be revised yearly. If disaster plans exist on a departmental, organizational, local, or state level, any child welfare disaster plan should be consistent with these larger plans. Coordinating with state emergency management agencies allows child welfare agencies to coordinate more easily with other key human service agencies such as Medicaid and economic assistance and with the broad range of emergency responders, including police departments, fire departments, the Red Cross, and FEMA.

Assess Agency Technology Capacity

Modern technological tools such as mobile devices, video calls, and cloud computing provide excellent capacities for delivering and tracking service delivery as never before. However, such technologies require power and connectivity. In the wake of a disaster, such technologies may be scarce if not completely unavailable for a time. Part of planning for disasters is assessing the agency’s technology capacities, how the lack of such technologies can affect service delivery, and how technology can be used in response to a disaster. In addition, the agency should also consider mapping or listing functional relationships between different types of technology. For example, is there more than one system or platform necessary to issue payments to families or access information? If so, what are they and how do they relate to each other? If one system goes down can the function still be carried out?

Data systems should be assessed for backups that can be used to reestablish the system within a short period of time and regain connectivity to service providers. Backups should be in a distant location or at an adequately prepared facility that would likely not be affected by the disaster. Bringing the system up from the backup should be tested regularly to ensure viability.

Assessing mobile technology such as laptops, tablets, and cell phones should also be part of planning, as they provide staff the capability to work remotely and stay in communication. Agencies should consider whether they have resources in place to allow staff to continue working when there is no power due to disaster (e.g., extra battery packs or solar charged battery packs ready to go). Disaster planning teams should also have access to other technologies that become important during disasters, such as global positioning system (GPS) to find locations when street signs are down or the use of video conferencing technologies when in-person meetings are not possible. Finally, agencies should discuss how they would communicate with staff and families (and how staff and families would communicate with agency staff) if mobile towers are down for a period of time.

i

The Center has developed three resources with information on the materials and technologies that can support programs and practice during a disaster:

- ▷ [Knowledge Management Research: Telework in Child Welfare](#)
- ▷ [Knowledge Management Research: Virtual Meetings in Child Welfare](#)
- ▷ [Knowledge Management Research: Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Communication Planning](#)

The Center's [Building Capacity for Disaster Preparedness at a Child Welfare Agency](#) webpage contains links to additional resources that can help agencies plan for their technology needs in case of disaster.

Align Disaster Planning With Other Federal Processes

Integrating disaster planning with other agency processes, both federally mandated and internal, can help agencies find connections between processes, more easily share information, and realize efficiencies and align priorities with their planning, monitoring, and reporting. These processes include:

- ▷ Five-year title IV-B CFSP
- ▷ Annual Progress and Services Reports (APSR)
- ▷ Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)
- ▷ Family First Prevention Services Act-mandated prevention plans
- ▷ Agency-initiated CQI efforts and other change initiatives
- ▷ Court Improvement Program (CIP) strategic plans

While each of these processes has a specific purpose, they should be coordinated with each other and the disaster planning process to help states create and implement comprehensive, targeted, and sustainable long-term plans for improvement. The Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 required states and Tribes to develop plans in preparation for a disaster and provide information about their plans to the Children's Bureau in their CFSP and APSR submissions, making disaster planning an integral part of those processes.

Disaster planning can also be integrated into prevention plans (e.g., by aligning the agency's disaster plan with those of community organizations) as well as agency CQI efforts (e.g., by including disaster readiness assessment into a broader CQI process). More information about how to integrate agency planning processes can be found in the Center's brief, "[Strategic Planning in Child Welfare: Integrating Efforts for Systems Improvement.](#)"

Plan to Collaborate Closely With Other Organizations on Disaster Planning

Disasters rarely will affect only the child welfare agency. Therefore, it is critical to develop a collaborative relationship with other public and private agencies to ensure an integrated approach to planning for disasters, including other state health and human service agencies, courts and attorneys, educational agencies at the state and local levels, emergency management agencies, hospitals, community-based providers, faith-based organizations, and others.

In particular, agencies should make sure to work closely with congregate care providers on issues such as:

- ▷ Emergency alternative sites (and possible licensing issues)
- ▷ Emergency contacts
- ▷ Transportation (including moving equipment and furniture and quickly accessing supplies)
- ▷ Staffing (e.g., during the COVID-19 pandemic, many group care providers faced significant staffing challenges as staff became sick and/or tested positive for COVID-19)
- ▷ Additional funding related to increased need following a disaster

Agencies should not try to “reinvent the wheel” but should look at what is already happening to facilitate disaster planning at other service agencies and grassroots organizations and in the community. What preexisting collaborations are out there already, maybe for other purposes? Can these be adapted for disaster planning purposes? Agency disaster planning teams should consider the roles these groups can play in disaster response and recovery phases, as they may be nimbler in addressing the needs of individuals and families at those times.

When collaborating with community-based providers and faith-based organizations, agencies should include smaller community organizations that may serve more targeted areas or populations, as they will have unique perspectives and outreach capabilities when a disaster affects those communities. Many of these grassroots agencies will likely represent communities of color and low-income communities, which are often disproportionately affected by disasters and often struggle with having their needs addressed during recovery efforts. Involving these entities in the planning stages will help to improve the likelihood that interventions will better mitigate the effects of a disaster in these communities and may have a positive effect on addressing their communities’ needs in the recovery phase.

Develop a Child Welfare Agency Disaster Plan

Because disasters regularly impact children, families, and agency services, child welfare agencies need to make preparing for disasters a priority. This should include consulting with key stakeholders to develop and implement a child welfare disaster plan that takes into account the plans that are already in place at other federal, state, and local organizations.

Though disaster planning may feel like a discrete process, it is often part of a cycle of federal strategic planning that includes the CFSP and APSR. Federal statute requires that states and Tribes develop plans in preparation for a disaster. (See the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 and Title IV-B, Subpart 2 of the Social Security Act at Section 422(b)(16)). Agencies can refer to the annual program



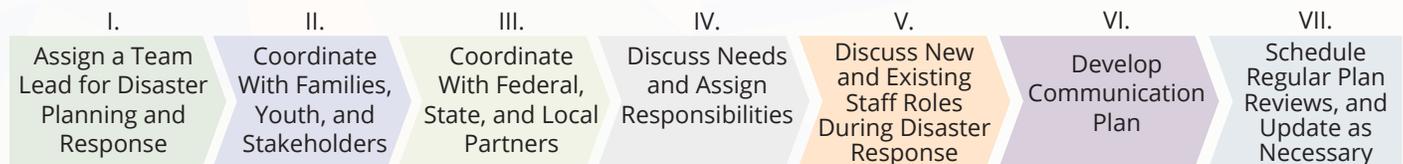
Thinking Outside the Box

- ▷ What are some ways to collaborate with families and youth in disaster planning? With Tribes?
- ▷ Are there community organizations in your area that you don’t regularly work with that can be helpful during a disaster?
- ▷ What are some ways your agency can plan for reducing racial/ethnic disparity and inequality in disaster response and recovery?

instructions for the APSR for the most current information on disaster planning (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/pi2013.pdf>) as well as visit the Children’s Bureau’s Disaster Preparedness and Response webpage, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/disaster-preparedness/>.

The steps shown in exhibit 2 can help agencies think through and refine a disaster plan. However, it is important to understand that disaster planning is not a one-time, linear process. Some of these steps may need to be repeated several times at various phases of the disaster planning process, as well as in the yearly review of the agency’s disaster plan.

Exhibit 2. Steps for Disaster Plan Development



I. Assign a Team Lead for Disaster Planning and Response

A point person should be assigned by agency leadership to oversee all work related to the child welfare disaster plan. Disaster planning should be identified as an official part of that person’s work performance responsibilities, and leaders should ensure that there is adequate time for the team lead to carry out these tasks. The agency should also consider formally naming the disaster lead in writing, which may provide the newly assigned individual the appropriate level of access to and cooperation of all key partners.

Responsibilities of the disaster planning team lead include (though are not limited to):

- ▷ Building an understanding of disaster planning as a foundation for the team
- ▷ Reviewing existing plans at other federal, state, and local organizations
- ▷ Ensuring the plan gets developed through a collaborative process
- ▷ Sharing information about the plan within the agency and in the community
- ▷ Coordinating with statewide emergency management processes
- ▷ Ensuring child welfare agency involvement in practices or drills
- ▷ Conducting periodic reviews of and updates to the plan based on new requirements, findings from tests and drills, and contributions from partners, youth, and families

As appropriate, the person responsible for the plan can convene a **core planning team** that can help delegate some of these tasks to specific people, convene workgroups or smaller, **collaborative planning teams** to assist with these tasks, and provide a forum for stakeholder and family participation. They should also make sure to coordinate with the team working on CFSP and APSR tasks to see where information gathering or other activities can be coordinated.

See appendix B for a teaming checklist that can assist agency leaders and disaster team leads with putting together inclusive and diverse core and collaborative disaster planning teams.

Florida: Continuity of Operations Plans

In Florida, legislation requires that all government agencies have a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) to provide for continuance of services and control in the event of a major disruption of normal operations. The Department of Children and Families (DCF), which oversees most public assistance and social services programs, including adult and child protective services, economic assistance, mental health, and domestic violence, has developed a COOP to ensure the continuation of essential functions and the orderly transfer of power to lower echelons when operations are disrupted. The plan identifies an emergency command team and its responsibilities and details mission essential functions. It includes alert and notification procedures for managers and staff and guidance on operations in alternate locations.

DCF has held “tabletop exercises” in which teams test the COOP by responding to emergency scenarios to evaluate what works and doesn’t work in the plan. The COOP is valuable, but DCF is also working on developing disaster plans specific to child welfare to address issues such as services for children with special medical needs during a disaster.

II. Collaborate With Families, Youth, and Stakeholders in Disaster Planning

In developing a disaster plan specific to child welfare, it is necessary to get input from key partners, including families and youth, agency staff at all levels (e.g., caseworkers, supervisors, regional managers, information technology management staff), federal partners, resource families, service providers, and the courts. For example, agency disaster planning teams could coordinate with the local family court to find out what the court’s disaster plan is and discuss how the plans could support each other.

In agencies where child welfare services, and particularly case management services, have been privatized, contracts should specify that contractors develop, implement, and update disaster plans in coordination with the agency and provide these plans to the child welfare agency. Agency staff then will understand the procedures to be followed during a disaster and can coordinate response across contractors and with the public child welfare disaster plan.

While consulting with key external partners and staff is important, ensuring that youth and families, including resource families, have a seat and a voice in the disaster planning process provides the planning team with a fuller perspective of how a disaster might affect youth and families in the communities they serve and increase the effectiveness of the disaster response. This will also create buy-in and trust for the disaster plan in the community, which can be helpful in addressing the needs of youth and families during and after the disaster.

Some key efforts to help ensure that youth and families can fully participate in the process include the following:

- ▷ **Include multiple parent, resource parent, and youth representatives on the disaster planning team.** This will ensure that one family or youth participant does not speak for all families and youth in the community and will allow them to support each other in the meetings and in meeting preparation. It also gives them an opportunity to discuss what is happening in the group with others outside of the meetings.
- ▷ **Establish roles and supports early in the process.** Some child welfare professionals at the table may not have experience working with family members, youth, or community members not affiliated with an organization as collaborative partners. The team leader can make it a safe

space for all participants by addressing this early in the process and asking the group to establish participant roles and identify what can help everyone feel supported. The team lead can also ensure that youth and family members have someone on the team who can serve as a guide and sounding board for them between meetings and ensure they feel prepared to participate in meetings.

- ▷ **Coordinate schedules.** While it is impossible to plan around everyone's work schedule, team leads should ask about the best times for youth and family team members and try to work around those times.
- ▷ **Ensure accessibility.** Some meeting locations are more welcoming for youth and families than others (e.g., many may not want to meet in the child welfare agency's conference room). Free parking and accessible public transportation are also important. Other aspects of accessibility (e.g., vision or hearing impairment, mobility impairment) should also be considered when planning the meeting location.
- ▷ **Compensate youth and families financially for their time at these meetings.** As with any process of youth and family engagement, agency disaster planning teams should remember that unlike many at the table, family and youth are often not paid to be there and may have to take time from work or school to participate. Jurisdictions can work with their local advisory boards or perhaps use other funds to compensate family and youth participants.
- ▷ **Offer childcare.** Helping families or young people with children access childcare while they take part in team meetings can make the difference in their ability to participate in disaster planning. Providing some level of onsite childcare is an important support.
- ▷ **Provide food and beverages.** If the team is meeting around mealtimes, try to provide some light food and refreshments that take into account cultural food norms, dietary restrictions, and food allergies of participants. Remember that youth or family members may be leaving the meeting to go to work or school and may not have time to eat.

In addition to including youth and family representatives on the collaborative planning team, disaster planning teams should seek out opportunities to engage with larger stakeholder groups of families, youth, and resource families. Most child welfare agencies have Youth, Family, or Foster Family Advisory Groups. Disaster planning teams might be able to work with these groups to explore ideas, share drafts of the plan for feedback, and develop connections for outreach that might be useful during the disaster response and recovery phases.

The plan itself should include specific information about how to communicate with and involve family and youth representatives in responding to a disaster while supporting them as they are faced with the personal challenges imposed by the disaster. Some key considerations when planning for family and youth needs during a disaster include:

- ▷ Ensuring access to technology and high-bandwidth internet for communication, work, and school
- ▷ Providing access to emergency transportation and housing as needed
- ▷ Putting together emergency kits that include supplies families and youth may need in the immediate aftermath of a disaster

- ▷ Identifying families who are energy dependent due to the need for at-home medical equipment and knowing how to contact these families for focused recovery of medical services
- ▷ Making sure that lists of emergency contacts are up to date and widely distributed
- ▷ Considering the effects of work disruption on income and housing
- ▷ Ensuring that families and youth have the necessary information to respond to a disaster with quick, on the spot, and informed decision-making and implementation



The Center for States publications "[Strategic Planning in Child Welfare: Strategies for Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement](#)" and "[Change and Implementation in Practice: Teaming](#)" have additional, detailed information on teaming and collaborating with partners, families, and youth.

III. Work With Federal, State, and Local Partners

Disaster planning teams should also consult with other public agencies such as mental health, education, and aid providers and other community members, such as the faith community, and should coordinate with disaster plans developed by other systems serving similar populations. Agencies should communicate with Tribes as appropriate to coordinate disaster planning and response.

Collaborate With Tribes on Disaster Planning

Regularly planning for disaster response and recovery is a crucial activity for Tribes. Tribes are sovereign entities and create their own individual disaster plans. As such, effective disaster preparedness planning, response, and recovery in Tribal communities includes consideration of the unique cultural and traditional needs of those communities. However, it is also important for Tribes and states to align their disaster plans so that it is clear to both where efficiencies can be realized and where and how states and Tribal organizations can support each other. See "Collaborating With Tribes and Partners" in appendix A for links to resources agencies can use to work together with Tribes on disaster planning.

Lummi Nation (Washington State): Proactive Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The leaders of the Lummi Nation, a sovereign Tribe in Washington State, began preparing for the COVID-19 pandemic when the virus first appeared in late 2019. Activities included enhancing medical emergency plans, reorganizing services, and gathering medical supplies, including test kits and personal protective equipment.

After their first case was confirmed in January 2020, the Tribe moved quickly to introduce mitigation and prevention measures such as social distancing, drive-through testing, telemedicine clinics, and a home delivery service for the elderly. In March 2020, the Tribe approved and financed the opening of a field hospital to treat COVID-19 patients. A community fitness center located next to the Tribe's health clinic has been repurposed for this function, with beds, protective gear, and other essential equipment in place. The 20-bed hospital treats less critical patients to free up intensive care units in nearby facilities and prioritizes Native Americans from any Tribe.

Coordinate With Emergency Management Agencies and Local Governments

State emergency management officials have overall responsibility for managing major and catastrophic disasters. Contacting and maintaining links with these officials will give child welfare managers the knowledge they need during disasters and help them advocate for including the needs of child welfare clients and staff in statewide plans. Many jurisdictions link to the emergency management team by having an agency leader serve on the team or by sending staff members to monitor meetings.

Child welfare disaster plans developed at the county or local level also need to be coordinated with local emergency management planners and first responders such as police and fire departments. Coordinating with emergency management on both levels allows the agency to:

- ▷ Stay updated on current emergency response plans, and to address questions such as: Who should be the child welfare agency's contact during a disaster to coordinate services? How can they be reached? Who should be contacted on specific issues (e.g., phone communication, reuniting families and children separated by the disaster, locating children at shelters)?
- ▷ Be informed of the roles assigned to child welfare staff responding to disasters (e.g., running shelters, processing food stamp applications, etc.)
- ▷ Provide information on the child welfare disaster plan so it can be aligned with or incorporated into the state and/or local emergency management plan
- ▷ Provide state emergency management or other agencies with agency contact information during a disaster
- ▷ Determine where emergency services are located during a disaster and whether child welfare can provide services in these locations
- ▷ Advocate for the needs of child welfare agency staff, resource parents, families, youth, and children (e.g., medically fragile children who need equipment or evacuation)
- ▷ Advocate for participation of child welfare agencies and families in emergency response drills
- ▷ Establish data-sharing agreements with agencies likely to be involved in running emergency shelters to help locate displaced children after a disaster

New Hampshire: Coordinating With Emergency Management Agencies

New Hampshire's Division for Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) leadership engages with broader emergency response planning efforts in the state. Child welfare agency staff participate as stakeholders in emergency preparedness functions operationalized by the state's Emergency Services Unit and Homeland Security and Emergency Management agency to support connections and resources at the local, regional, and state levels. Being a participant in this disaster response network has helped the agency be better prepared during disaster response.

The Director of the DCYF within the Department of Health and Human Services is a member of the state's disaster planning team and supports the agency programs identifying their continuity of operations needs so that mission-essential functions can continue in case of any disaster. The DCYF has found it valuable to participate in staged exercises such as emergency response drills, debriefings, and tabletop exercises to inform interagency relationships and identify lessons learned. These collaborative opportunities help child welfare agencies clarify their roles and those of others. New Hampshire has engaged in disaster response exercises using scenarios of ice storms, tornados, flu pandemics, nuclear reactor meltdowns, active shooters, and and cyber threats and is launching emergency shelters to consider readiness and the impact across systems and nearby states.

Establish Liaisons With Other Jurisdictions and Federal Partners to Coordinate Services and Share Information

During disasters children and families often move across state or county lines. Agencies can identify liaisons in neighboring states and counties who can share information from state or county automated databases and records and coordinate services for children and families who cross state or county lines.

Plans can identify liaisons by name or by a specific position. Agencies might consider identifying two or three contacts—for example, one for general information, one for foster care and adoption, and one for residential services. To identify liaisons, consider existing relationships from cross-state organizations such as the Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Placement of Children (ICPC) or foster care managers or adoption managers associations. Provide complete contact information (e.g., phone numbers, alternate phone numbers, fax numbers, email, addresses) for those liaisons and their alternates in the plan. This information can also be incorporated into existing border agreements.

A specific agency staff member also should be designated to initiate contact with federal agencies that oversee your agency during disasters and to maintain contact during the recovery process. This will allow for effective communication about federal requirements and possible waivers and information sharing on what is happening in the state and at the federal level related to the disaster. Agencies should also become familiar with available Children’s Bureau flexibilities for child welfare agencies (see the following information memoranda: [ACYF-CB-IM-05-06](#), [ACYF-CB-PI-17-06](#), [ACYF-CB-PI20-10](#), as well as the following Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response paper on ACF Program waivers and flexibilities: www.acf.hhs.gov/ohsepr/training-technical-assistance/acf-emergency-and-disaster-waivers-and-flexibilities).

Florida: ICPC Liaisons

Florida has developed an ICPC Disaster Preparation and Response Plan. It states that the ICPC Office is responsible for serving as the communications liaison between Florida and other states when either Florida’s dependent children relocate to another state or other state’s dependent children relocate to Florida. The primary point of contact in the ICPC Office will be the ICPC Administrator.

Collaborate With Other Relevant State Agencies, Programs, and Service Providers

Building on relationships with other state agencies or programs can help identify agency-specific roles to support families and children in times of a disaster. For example, the health department may already have plans for distribution of medication, which the child welfare agency should connect with in its planning. Child support enforcement can access recent employment data to help locate missing parents after a disaster. Other agencies oversee services such as Medicaid, food stamps, and mental health, all of which are critical to disaster recovery.

Providers of ongoing services for children and families are critical partners and should be involved in developing and updating the child welfare disaster plan. They should also help plan the delivery of essential services during and after disasters (e.g., expanding counseling and family support services after a flood destroys homes or setting up new programs for large populations affected by a tornado). Child welfare agencies should assess any special medical needs of children in out-of-

home care and communicate with hospitals and other medical providers to help meet these needs, if necessary. Including service providers in practice drills is beneficial and may prevent later role confusion.

Agencies should ensure that contract providers have effective and updated disaster plans in place. In addition, if case management services have been outsourced, agencies should review and coordinate providers' disaster plans.

Coordinate With Courts

Agencies should collaborate with courts to achieve better outcomes for children and families during a disaster and to coordinate disaster response efforts. Agencies and courts should share information on each system's disaster plans and on the status of processes during a disaster and work toward integrated information systems so agencies and courts can share appropriate case-level information. This level of coordination benefits both ongoing agency management and efforts to manage services to families in the wake of a disaster. Agency disaster teams should assign a person or position to act as a liaison with courts during and after a disaster to facilitate communication. Agencies may want to consider doing this both at the state level with the state agency and CIP leads, as well as at the level of the local agency and local courts, which the CIP lead can help facilitate.



Virtual Court and Mediation Hearings

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of child welfare court systems have begun holding some of their hearings virtually. In many cases, the move has been able to repurpose existing infrastructure such as computers and meeting software to meet this need, making this shift easier to implement. One benefit of holding hearings is greater parent and youth participation due to being able to participate in the hearing while at home.

The following steps can help support virtual mediation and hearings:

- ▷ Obtain the approval and buy-in of judicial staff and attorneys.
- ▷ Engage all stakeholders, including attorneys, youth, and families, to obtain agreement for virtual hearings.
- ▷ Develop a detailed process with the input of all stakeholders. The process should include:
 - ❑ A description of the technology and platform that will be used for the hearings
 - ❑ Identification of the person who will provide technical assistance if it is needed
 - ❑ Clear instructions for the hearing process
 - ❑ A notice of waiver of in-person hearing process
 - ❑ Guidelines for professional conduct during the hearing (i.e., expectations for behavior, appearance, etc.)
 - ❑ Guidelines for ensuring that due process is followed throughout
 - ❑ Clear parameters for measuring hearing or mediation outcomes

Going forward, many court systems are considering keeping in place a hybrid system that uses a combination of in-person and virtual formats depending on the needs of families and cases.

Identify Potential Volunteers and Their Tasks

Agency disaster planning teams should work on identifying organizations that might offer volunteer assistance during a disaster, such as faith organizations, civic groups, local or national volunteer organizations, and nonprofit agencies. The plan should consider the types of tasks volunteers might do and any training they would need to understand the agency and carry out those tasks. Agencies should also ensure that any necessary background checks are completed in advance based on the anticipated direct involvement a volunteer may have with children and families.

IV. Discuss Needs and Assign Responsibilities

To facilitate its disaster response, an agency's disaster plan needs to include:

- ▷ Who is authorized to activate the plan
- ▷ What essential functions must be performed
- ▷ A roster of the emergency management team
- ▷ A multidirectional communication plan

These details will need to be updated regularly as part of a regular plan when staff names and positions change due to staff turnover or agency reorganization. The plan can also specify other steps the agency will take prior to disasters, particularly around building infrastructure.

These steps can be drawn from plans for each of the specific infrastructure areas, and the smaller plans could feed into and support the broader agency disaster plan. For example, the agency might have a foster and adoptive program plan, an information systems development plan, a human resources plan, and/or a media communications plan. If disaster recovery or business continuity plans have been developed for these areas, they can be incorporated into and support the overall child welfare agency disaster plan. The disaster plan should also coordinate with work being done for the agency's annual CFSP and APSR.

Many of the areas addressed in a disaster plan are also important to ongoing program improvements. Key areas include:

- ▷ Coordinating with key partners, particularly families and youth, other public agencies, service providers, judges, and attorneys
- ▷ Strengthening internal and external communication systems
- ▷ Building or maintaining statewide automated information systems
- ▷ Establishing ongoing support services to help staff deal with the day-to-day trauma of child welfare work
- ▷ Providing critical information to staff, families, and providers and staying in touch with these partners

Texas: Department of Family and Protective Services Provider Contract Language

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) contracts require its service providers to maintain a written disaster and emergency response plan. A contractor's plan must address mandatory and emergency evacuations, disaster planning training for facility staff, location and tracking of children, protection or recovery of records, provision of regular and crisis-response services to children during and after a disaster, communication with DFPS, and postdisaster activities. The DFPS contracts state that all staff and subcontractors of the primary contractor must be aware of the disaster plan and its requirements and be prepared to fulfill their role in executing the plan. In an emergency, the agency website provides a key communication link for agency staff, providers, foster families, stakeholders, and the general public for sharing the status of disaster recovery efforts.

Plan for Financial Considerations During a Disaster

Agencies should plan for continuing payments to staff, youth, and families during a disaster. Using direct deposit to pay workers and those who receive checks directly from the child welfare agency (e.g., foster parents, adoptive parents with subsidies, independent living clients, youth with Education and Training Vouchers (ETVs), residential facilities, etc.) allows continued payments and electronic access to funds even if mail systems are down, local bank offices are closed, or recipients have relocated. However, agencies should be aware that in catastrophic disasters, bank systems may be down, so agencies should maintain the capability to revert to paper checks.

During a disaster, child welfare agencies may receive voluntary donations to assist children and families. Agencies will need convenient accounting procedures to assure their correct use, generate receipts, and report on expenditures. Since some of the donations may be material goods, agencies should plan ahead of time for storing and distributing these items to communities in need. It may be helpful to coordinate this work with community organizations, some of whom may be involved in planning.

Discuss Documentation Needs During a Disaster

Documentation can be critical during a disaster, not only for keeping track of and coordinating activities but also for reflecting on lessons learned and incorporating these insights into the disaster plan. Since most work in child welfare today is documented in electronic systems, agencies should plan for how staff will document their work if and when those systems go down for a time.

Agencies should plan to immediately document the work they do at the state and local levels related to the disaster (i.e., efforts to locate children) that may be eligible for federal reimbursement (appendix D contains a Disaster Documentation Tool that agency staff can use to keep track of the work they do in response to disaster). Even if there is no upfront disaster declaration, this could come later, and the early expenses may not be reimbursable if they are not effectively documented ahead of time. Depending on the source of the funding, documentation requirements will differ (e.g., CARES Act documentation is different than FEMA documentation requirements for COVID-19 relief). During major and catastrophic disasters, all payroll and timekeeping records should be saved, as a portion of overtime pay may be eligible for reimbursement.

The use of a disaster log can be a helpful tool for both staff and leadership to record events, decisions, and service provisions during the time of managing the disaster. This log can be a paper document or created electronically on phones, tablets, or laptops (see appendix D for an example

of what a disaster log might look like). The logs will help staff create a timeline of events for use in debriefing their disaster response and can be used to update the electronic systems once they are back up. Without such documentation it will be hard for staff to remember everything they did in response to needs and when they did so.

Plan for Technology Needs

Agencies have two distinct considerations when planning for technology needs related to disasters:

- ▷ Technology used and needed both before and during a disaster
- ▷ Technology needed only during the disaster

Ensuring that the technology used during nondisaster times is also available for use during a disaster should be part of the disaster plan. Agencies should consider how they might make adjustments to their technology to ensure its continued use during a disaster, for example, by using laptops or tablets rather than desktop computer configurations or using the internet or cloud computing as a way for staff to connect to key data systems rather than keeping information stored on local hard drives. In addition, agency teams should work to map out functional relationships, especially related to technology. For example, if more than one platform, software, or system is needed for an essential task (e.g., issuing payments to families), what are they and how do they relate to each other? If one system goes down, can the function still be carried out?

Montana: Virtual Coaching Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services' Child and Family Services Division (CFSD) adopted the SafeCare model of practice in 2014. Coaching contributes to implementation fidelity of the SafeCare Model.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, CFSD leadership consulted with the team that developed SafeCare and devised a way to continue coaching staff using virtual means. This included coaching around conducting virtual face-to-face visits and holding virtual meetings. This adaptation allowed CFSD staff to maintain fidelity as they implemented SafeCare.

Some specific technologies might be especially useful during a disaster. Technologies such as geographic information mapping (GIS) or GPS, which help identify affected areas more clearly and provide directions even when cell services are not available, are especially important for child welfare during a disaster. Battery backups, hotspots, and generators are also examples of technology needs during disasters. Agencies should ensure in advance that staff are trained on how to effectively use the technologies provided to them—an assessment of this capacity should be part of the disaster plan. Agencies should also plan for regularly maintaining equipment and replacing outdated equipment as needed.

Agencies should also carefully consider the technology needs of the youth and families served, including those at home and in foster homes and congregate care settings. How will agency staff communicate with families and youth, especially if they have limited data plans on their phones and limited or no access to Wi-Fi? For youth in particular, social media and direct messaging applications are effective ways for the agency to get information out in a timely way. Children, youth, and families may also need laptops to use to attend school or work or for other purposes. For example, during

the COVID-19 pandemic, many school systems shifted to distance learning and it took a significant effort to ensure students had laptops and Wi-Fi access and knew how to use these platforms (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams) for educational purposes. While it generally fell to school systems to provide these items and training, many state child welfare agencies had the additional task of ensuring that children and youth in foster care were provided the same tools and access as children and youth not in care.

Louisiana: Policies and Procedures for Remote Work

In 2011, Louisiana established a statewide, remote child protection hotline system called “Centralized Intake,” which allows hotline or intake staff statewide to telework from the individual staff member’s home. The call center routes assignments of calls to workers. All reports are then sent electronically to the local parish offices where the family normally resides. This system is currently operational.

When disasters occur, executive staff assess the impact and direct changes to the electronic routing of the intake based on where the family is located at the time a report of abuse and neglect is received and staff availability in the area. Typically, reports are directed to the local office address where the family normally resides. The intake system allows for adding staff during peak hours from anywhere in the state without staff leaving home and driving to an office.

This type of remote system is important to disaster response since intake is not centralized to one location that may be affected by a disaster. Technology requirements, specialized training, and policies were put in place for those working from home that provide guidance for remote practices and setting up a secure home working environment to maintain case confidentiality. Having the technology requirements, policies, and procedures already in place helps Louisiana’s preparedness for remote working during pandemics and other types of disasters that may require it.

Plan for Additional Trauma-Informed Care in Response to the Disaster

Experiencing disasters significantly impacts the health and well-being of both child welfare staff and the families, youth, and children with whom they work. For children, youth, and families, experiencing a disaster often leads to feelings of fear, dislocation, and distress as familiar environments are not able to be accessed and familiar routines are disrupted. Child welfare staff are also at significant risk for disaster-related trauma as they continue to work with children, youth, and families under difficult new conditions while facing potential personal stressors such as health crises, social isolation, childcare management, property loss, and psychological distress. Staff may also experience overwork and fatigue due to the challenges created by the crisis or disaster.

To address disaster-related trauma, agencies must carefully plan to make resources and supports available to both families and staff members. This may involve contacting mental health providers in the agency’s locale and working with them to ensure that they will be available to support agency personnel and families when disaster hits. Agencies can also think through what internal supports they may need to help their staff process the trauma of living through a disaster (e.g., counseling or offering space and time to discuss concerns and process emotions). Finally, agency leadership can facilitate staff self-care and discussion in the wake of a disaster by modeling openness about their own disaster-related emotions, concerns, and trauma.

For more information about trauma-informed care in response to a disaster, see the following resources:

- ▷ [Facing the Pandemic With Emotional Agility](#) (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute [NCWWI])
- ▷ [What Child Welfare Workers Need in a Pandemic](#) (NCWWI)
- ▷ [Coping After Disaster](#) (American Psychiatric Association)
- ▷ [Disaster Behavioral Health Resources](#) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

V. Discuss New and Existing Staff Roles During Disaster Response

It is especially important that the disaster plan discusses roles that staff members will assume in disaster response and recovery. Agency staff need clarity about their roles and tasks, particularly during disaster response when decisions are often made swiftly. Often, the roles and tasks that agency staff have in a disaster are not the ones they usually perform, so the plan should specify (and regularly update) both a staff member's name and title and their role in disaster management to avoid confusion. The new roles should be practiced in training and regular disaster drills. If local child welfare staff are represented by a union, new staff roles during a disaster may need to be reviewed by a union representative, and the union representative will need to be included on the disaster planning team. Disaster preparedness team leads and team members can find more information about training and practicing disaster response here: <https://preptoolkit.fema.gov/>.

Designate Managers and Other Essential Roles During Disasters

To facilitate speed of disaster response, disaster plans should identify staff roles and responsibilities:

- ▷ **Designate who is in charge during disasters**, and include two or three alternate staff members who can take charge if the designee is not able to assume the role.
- ▷ **Identify essential functions requiring continuous performance during a disaster**, and designate managers and alternate staff to oversee those functions. Those in charge during a disaster and those managing essential functions compose an emergency management team. To identify essential functions, consider what the agency absolutely must do to continue its work (i.e., mission-critical activities) and what can be suspended during a disaster. Also consider provisions for temporary delegation of authority to another agency if the senior leadership team is not available.
- ▷ **Define the roles and responsibilities of managers who have been given authority to make certain decisions for the agency**. Managers designated to oversee essential functions should receive notification of their assigned roles, a copy of the plan giving them authority, and some basic training on how to carry out their assignments during a disaster. These staff may not be top agency leadership but other managers who have been given the authority by agency leadership to oversee continuing operations of a specific program, such as foster care. All agency staff members should be notified who the managers will be during a crisis as part of basic training on the plan.
- ▷ **Describe how to put the plan in place and notify managers or alternates during disasters**. These steps are sometimes called activation procedures.
- ▷ **Specify how communication will happen among and between managers and staff**. It is useful to include phone trees and to update them regularly (see "Develop a Communication Plan").

In addition, managers need to make decisions specific to each circumstance about which staff members are needed to carry out essential functions, taking into account the safety of staff reporting to work, workload demands, and resources. To support continuing operation, the plan can also define the roles and responsibilities of frontline staff in each essential function area.

The person responsible for developing and updating the plan should regularly communicate disaster response expectations to agency and contracted staff. Assign responsibility to specific staff or positions for additional key roles during a disaster, such as:

- ▷ Handling the press and communicating a consistent message to media
- ▷ Communicating with and screening volunteers; assigning them to tasks and providing basic training
- ▷ Acting as liaisons with other jurisdictions (e.g., states, counties, or parishes)
- ▷ Communicating with federal partners
- ▷ Serving as a liaison to courts

Workload Planning

Agencies should consider how staff will be deployed during a disaster, especially given the extra demands that may fall on workers. Child welfare staff may be victims of the disaster themselves, with damaged or destroyed homes or missing or affected family members, which will limit their emotional and physical availability for child welfare tasks. Child welfare agency staff may be asked to perform the following additional tasks or functions during a disaster:

- ▷ Help with immediate response efforts, such as overseeing evacuations, and/or taking on tasks in the response and recovery process such as operating or working at shelters or providing child-care at assistance centers
- ▷ Take on roles outside their programs to provide a broad range of social services, such as food stamps or housing
- ▷ Assist families that are evacuating to stay together; having trained staff present could help families stay together, reducing the number of unaccompanied children to care for after the disaster
- ▷ Answer toll-free phone numbers used for communication during disasters (which may require additional training for staff)
- ▷ Attend or assist with court cases so that legal requirements (e.g., permanency timeframes) can be met, which will minimize the impact on children in care and the potential loss of title IV-E funding that would have a further negative impact on services

When thinking about staffing needs and roles during a disaster, planning teams can consider the following activities to identify the best staff members for particular roles and locate sources for additional personnel:

- ▷ Identify child welfare staff members with multiple skills who could assist with different jobs within child welfare and other social service agencies, as necessary.

- ▷ Determine roles that units within the child welfare agency, contractors, and staff from other agencies could undertake.
- ▷ Explore existing or potential processes for temporarily employing retired state employees. Some agencies have found this to be an excellent source of willing, skilled labor.
- ▷ Develop mutual aid agreements between counties and across state lines and specify how each agency will assist the other in times of crisis as appropriate—including sharing staff, facilities, and other resources. These agreements could be included in any existing border agreements.
- ▷ Consider using experienced resource parents to help with disaster recovery work.
- ▷ Develop a pool of trained volunteers who can help with multiple tasks during a disaster and participate periodically in practice drills.
- ▷ Check whether local court appointed special advocates may be willing to play additional roles during a disaster.

To help staff prepare to take on different roles in a disaster in the case of minor incidents like staff illness or displacement, plans should also specify a process for transferring cases temporarily to other staff members and include procedures for access to case records and contact lists.

Limon, Colorado: Additional Demands on Staff

After a tornado hit Limon, Colorado, social services staff members were surprised to find that the local disaster plan that had been written 10 years prior assigned Social Services the role of providing clothing, shelter, food, and registration of victims. The entire staff worked 14- to 16-hour days to set up and operate a food and clothing warehouse in the gymnasium of an elementary school. The agency had to continue to function—court hearings or processes went on, child welfare work went on, and people still needed benefits. This was a very difficult challenge for the staff. They were also surprised by how long the warehouse remained open for services. They operated the warehouse for approximately 1 year after the tornado so people could get clothing and household supplies as they moved back into new homes.

Role of Leadership

Child welfare disaster plans provide guidance on preparing for and coping with disasters and describe general emergency procedures, but they are not a substitute for sound judgment and capable leadership. Child welfare leaders play a critical role in effective disaster planning, response, and recovery through actions in four areas shown in exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3. Leadership Activities Important in Disaster Management

Prioritize the well-being of children, youth, families, and staff.	Adapt to changing circumstances and unique needs.
Coordinate with a wide range of partners, including public systems, community-based services, youth, and families.	Communicate authentically and visibly, listening and inspiring while prioritizing clarity.

Disaster plans can specify that if local administrators and supervisors determine that an emergency situation far exceeds what was anticipated in a plan, or if they are temporarily out of touch with state-level administrators, leaders have the authority to use their best judgment and they may need to improvise to meet the needs of the situation. Agencies can provide guidance on what actions can and cannot be taken independently by agency leaders during a disaster. For more information on effective leadership during disaster planning, response, and recovery, see the companion tip sheet to this guide, “Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems: Leading Your Agency Through a Disaster” at <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/disaster-preparedness/coping-with-disasters>.

New Hampshire: DCYF Incident Response Guide

In New Hampshire, the Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) developed an Incident Response Guide that focuses on DCYF’s unique responsibilities and empowers leadership and local decision-making. The guide provides a framework for supervisors and administrators to prepare for disaster, activate a response, ensure continuity of essential functions, and resume normal operations when the disaster is over. It creates a flexible and scalable model to assist in responding to events large and small. Depending on the size and scope of a disaster, the guide may be activated by a member of the DCYF’s administration, supervisory structure, or a facility manager. Local staff, administration, and program personnel are provided direction and information on steps to ensure communication and activation of continuity plans. Program- and population-specific continuity plans are incorporated to identify:

- ▷ The role of the supervisor (who is usually charged with determining whether it is safe to for the unit to do its work and with activating phone trees to contact staff)
- ▷ The roles of staff

The guide directs resuming normal operations, assessing the short- and long-term implications, and tracking the lessons learned to support CQI of its contents. Appendices include resources for hazard mitigation, tools for staff support, disaster plans for program partners, state and district office phone trees, and space for local emergency management information. The plan clearly states that DCYF is dependent upon the work of other department units, so the DCYF plan needs to be coordinated with the broader Department of Health and Human Services.

VI. Develop a Communication Plan

Developing a comprehensive internal and external communication plan is a critical part of any agency disaster plan. The plan should include strategies for communicating with the following groups in case of disaster:

- ▷ Children, youth, and families
- ▷ Resource families (including foster parents, kinship caregivers, and adoptive parents)
- ▷ Child welfare agency staff
- ▷ Other service agencies
- ▷ State agency that oversees the child welfare agency
- ▷ Partner organizations in the community
- ▷ Other agency stakeholders



Questions to Consider for the Disaster Communication Plan

- ▷ What types of information need to be shared, and with whom?
- ▷ Who will ensure that clear recommended actions for communication recipients are included in all communications?
- ▷ What methods will the team use to communicate?
- ▷ What is the best communication method to use with specific groups (for example, using social media to communicate with youth)?
- ▷ Where will the contact information live? Who is responsible for updating it, and how often?
- ▷ What stakeholders need to be included in communication? Under what circumstances?
- ▷ How frequently will information be provided to the disaster team? To agency staff? To the external stakeholders?

Onsite Internal Communication

Disaster planning teams should examine buildings where staff members work to see if managers can quickly communicate to all staff in an emergency. Questions to ask include:

- ▷ Is there a system (such as **phone trees** or **intercoms**) that can be used to quickly communicate to all programs or units in a building?
- ▷ Are there **email lists** that can be used to communicate with all agency sites throughout the county or state? These communication methods should be used regularly so staff are accustomed to being contacted and receiving important information this way.
- ▷ How can agency staff communicate information if power and communication towers are down (e.g., **radio PSAs**, **local television stations**)?
- ▷ Do agency staff have **personal phone lists** of staff and families they can access if computer systems are down?

Communication Technology

Teams should consider the use of a variety of communication modes:

- ▷ **Mobile phones.** All critical managers, staff, and providers should have work-issued mobile phones, if possible.
- ▷ **Satellite phones.** Satellite phones have sometimes proven to be more reliable for communication during major disasters when mobile phone towers are down or if electricity is out.
- ▷ **Text messaging.** Text messaging using mobile phones or tablets sometimes allows text messages to get through when voice calls are frequently dropped.
- ▷ **Public safety alert system.** The public safety alert system technology enables users to push out important and urgent text messages to large groups and allows for targeting to specific communities or populations. Agencies may be able to collaborate with their jurisdiction's emergency management agency to piggyback on their system.

- ▷ **Radios and walkie talkies.** Radios and walkie talkies with powerful ranges are helpful for communication within buildings or shelters or between locations. Since walkie talkies usually have multiple channels, the plan should address what channels are to be used for what purposes. For example, the same device may monitor police and fire activity while also having a designated channel for child welfare agency communications. Plans should state which channel will be dedicated to agency communications.
- ▷ **Laptop computers and tablets.** Laptop computers and tablets are powerful tools for communication and should be accessible to staff during a disaster whenever possible. Mobile computing capability and wireless remote access allow computers to be used offsite or in the field during disasters. Explore getting laptops and tablets to as many staff and managers as possible.
- ▷ **GPS devices.** If street signs have been knocked down or landmarks obliterated during a major disaster, staff may have difficulty locating clients and one another, especially if mobile phone towers are down. A dedicated GPS device (rather than a mobile phone GPS app) may be useful for these emergency situations.
- ▷ **Landline telephones.** If the Wi-Fi and mobile phone towers are down, staff might need to attempt using landline telephones to communicate, with the understanding that many households no longer use a landline phone.

This is an area where the requirements of the disaster plan may dovetail with other agency needs, so it should be possible to decide on and purchase communication technology ahead of time. Disaster planning teams should make sure that staff practice using all necessary technology before a disaster so they will not have to use new technology for the first time under stressful circumstances.

Agencies might investigate using the Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS), a resource that supports national leadership; federal, state, local, Tribal and territorial governments; first responders; and other authorized national security and emergency preparedness users. It is intended to be used in an emergency or crisis situation when the landline network is congested and the probability of completing a normal call is reduced. For more information, visit www.cisa.gov/government-emergency-telecommunications-service-gets.

Louisiana: RAVE Services

Louisiana's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), which houses the state child welfare agency and other family service agencies, recognized the need for a better method of reaching families during emergencies. In 2018, DCFS was able to contract with an agency to acquire an emergency alert system (RAVE) that allows DCFS to contact large groups of staff, providers, vendors, foster caregivers, families, and other parties simultaneously. In the event of a disaster, DCFS develops and sends text messages, phone messages, or emails with information on how to contact the DCFS for assistance, report information, access available services, and obtain updates on the status of the emergency. The RAVE system can handle a large volume of contacts and disseminate information quickly.

Websites and Social Media

Plans should designate a staff member to post information for staff, families, providers, and youth on a designated website and to post regular updates. Websites can include current status of services and how to access them, disaster updates, alternate transportation routes/maps, information for staff, toll-free numbers, and other contact information. Some agencies use intranet sites to provide this detailed information.

Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and even LinkedIn can be used to communicate to families, resources families, youth, providers, and other stakeholders. Comments on posts can allow individuals to share their location and describe possible needs, while agencies can get important information on where or how some needs might be met. Many social media platforms have messaging features that enable direct communication with youth, families, staff, and others. It may also be possible to operationalize other social media applications such as WhatsApp or Discord to share information during a disaster. Planning teams should discuss their particular needs with a special emphasis on the input of youth and family team members and should take into account existing agency guidelines or restrictions on the use of some social media applications.

Toll-Free Numbers

It is critical for the agency to have toll-free numbers or reserve numbers that can be activated, when necessary, for staff, families, youth, and providers to contact the agency during and after a disaster. These lines should be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and accessible to people with disabilities (TTY). These lines can provide recorded messages with information for people calling in or can be used to make outgoing calls.

It is helpful to draft scripts specifying what information the agency wants from families, providers, and youth who call in (e.g., Are you safe? Where are you? How long do you plan to stay? Are there any problems we can help with?). Also consider what information the agency would want to provide (e.g., information about how to access services, information on the status of siblings, parents, or children). If the agency uses an answering service, these scripts should be shared with the service as part of the planning process. If the agency plans to have staff answer calls, staff members who will fill these roles need to know in advance so they can review the scripts.

Media Communication

A staff person should be designated to work with the press and communicate a consistent message about agency disaster response activities. To prepare, agencies can draft news releases that include agency activities as well as:

- ▷ Toll-free phone numbers for staff, youth, and families
- ▷ Website addresses
- ▷ Alternative locations for service delivery and staff

The agency's disaster tool kit should include a list of media outlets where releases will be sent, including print newspapers, television, cable television, radio, and key websites. Also consider how to reach families or youth with limited access to public media, low literacy skills, or low or no English language skills. Ask local media for input on developing an effective public communication plan. The media may be the only avenue of communicating with staff if internal communications systems are disabled. The media plan should address providing critical information for families, providers, youth, and staff and should include guidelines for preparing releases in Spanish or other languages commonly spoken in the area.

Communication With Officials

In addition to regularly communicating with media, it is important to identify the elected and appointed officials who need to be kept abreast of developments at the agency during disaster response and recovery. Keeping them informed will help smooth the path when advocating for funding before, during, and after the disaster. A staff member (perhaps the same person who is in charge of media kits and communications) should be identified who will be responsible for keeping elected and appointed officials and others in the county or state emergency management hierarchy informed.

VII. Schedule Regular Plan Reviews, and Update as Necessary

During drills and tests of the plan and during actual emergencies, many valuable lessons are learned about processes that work and those that do not work. The disaster plan should be updated and modified based on these lessons and on realistic reassessments of potential disasters or threats. Agency leaders and the disaster plan lead should ensure that the plan is reviewed and revised regularly (e.g., every 6 months and after every activation of the plan) to ensure that information is current, including contacts, addresses and locations, organizational structure, and communication processes. Ideally, review and modifications of the disaster plan would be done in conjunction with the development of the annual CFSP or APSR, which requires the plan update.

Prepare to Manage a Disaster

To support the key elements of the agency disaster plan discussed above, and to make ongoing program improvements, it is important to strengthen critical infrastructure areas. When prioritizing areas to address, consider the goals and strategies contained in existing child welfare plans, such as the PIP or the title IV-B plan.

Practice in Advance

Once the agency disaster plan is created and approved and the preliminary work it specifies has been completed, agencies should practice disaster response activities. The first step is conducting discussion-based exercises such as seminars, workshops, or tabletop exercises to ensure that staff understand what is in the disaster plan and help them prepare for their roles in managing a disaster. Training on the disaster plan should be included in new worker training and offered to all staff on a regular basis. The training should focus on how staff members can prepare, how to contact the designated manager, and what is expected of them during a disaster.

The next step in practicing disaster response is participating in disaster-related drills. Agencies should conduct or participate in drills at the office, county or regional, and statewide levels. It is important to practice response to emergency situations on all levels, including:

- ▷ Regular fire drills
- ▷ Regular emergency evacuation drills
- ▷ Specific drills of the child welfare disaster plan
- ▷ Statewide, regional, or local drills organized by state or county emergency management agencies

It is particularly valuable to coordinate with emergency management agencies so child welfare can join with community organizations such as the Red Cross, local health departments, faith-based organizations, and police and fire departments to simulate and test disaster recovery plans.

Prepare All Locations for Emergency Operation

Designated child welfare staff can prepare offices and service delivery sites for possible disasters



Thinking Outside the Box

- ▷ How can you build buy-in for the disaster plan at your agency?
- ▷ What might help motivate youth and families to work on personal disaster plans and put together disaster kits?
- ▷ How can agencies encourage private providers to provide trauma-responsive care for staff?

by holding regular drills, coordinating with emergency management and key providers, establishing communication systems, and strengthening information systems. Some agencies have found it useful to evaluate their power supply and install generators to provide backup power at key locations.

Staff should determine possible alternative service delivery and staff location sites during a disaster and consider sites designated for statewide emergency management efforts. Alternative locations for services should have computer servers and access to the agency computer programs, if possible.

Agencies should post information on exit routes, conduct drills, and maintain strong communication systems. Some agencies keep emergency supplies (such as flashlights) in multiple locations and urge workers to keep a personal emergency supply kit in their office. For example, sneakers are an item most people do not think about adding to their personal disaster kit, but after the attacks of 9/11, workers both in New York City and Washington, D.C., found themselves walking miles either home or to safety.

Agencies should also prepare their staff to work remotely in case of a disaster such as a fire or pandemic. This might require that all staff have laptops or tablets and access to broadband internet at home or other accessible locations. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many agencies invested in mobile devices such as laptops or tablets and hotspots for all staff. The disaster plan at these agencies may build on these resources and focus on the next stage of planning for remote work (e.g., scheduling, remote supervision). Allowing staff to regularly work remotely once or twice a week during nondisaster periods can create a built-in capacity for remote work at the agency. The disaster plan also needs to address updates to the agency policy for remote work, including questions of confidentiality during calls and secure recordkeeping.

New York: Practicing Disaster Response

New York's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has conducted building evacuation exercises every year for the past 4 years at its headquarters in New York City. Staff follow procedures specified in the evacuation plan to leave the building and gather at staging areas. ACS also participates in response drills for specific threats conducted by the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management (OEM). For example, ACS recently participated in a coastal flooding drill organized by the OEM.

Create and Store Disaster Supply Kits

Agencies should consider storing a "kit" of essential items in offices that managers can take if they are forced to leave the building during a disaster. If regular and secure alternate locations are available for services during major disasters, similar supply kits should be stored there as well in case agency offices are not accessible or managers arrive at the alternative location directly from home. The kits should be reviewed regularly to ensure that contact information is accurate.

Operational disaster kits for managers might include:

- ▷ Laptop computer with extra batteries
- ▷ USB flash drive (with important documents loaded before a disaster)
- ▷ Fully charged power pack

- ▷ Phone lists and address book with employee and management contact information
- ▷ Employee lists
- ▷ Mobile phones, satellite phones, radios/walkie-talkies, wireless handheld devices
- ▷ Radios and extra batteries
- ▷ Disaster plans
- ▷ Maps and driving directions to alternate facilities
- ▷ Portable GPS devices (if available)
- ▷ Flashlight or lanterns, with extra batteries
- ▷ First aid kit
- ▷ Pocket knife or multitool
- ▷ Car chargers for laptop and cell phone
- ▷ Personal hygiene items
- ▷ Agency vehicles with full gas tanks

Strengthen Information Systems

Ensuring that agency information systems are ready for disasters is a crucial task. Designated staff should consult regularly with the agency information management staff on existing disaster recovery plans for the agency's information system. If possible, a member of the agency's information management staff should be on the disaster planning team.

The following questions can help ensure information system readiness:

- ▷ Is the disaster recovery plan tested and updated?
- ▷ Is critical information regularly backed up?
- ▷ What are the thresholds for having equipment in place, back online, and connected to a central site after a disaster?
- ▷ Are there procedures in place for falling back on manual processes (paper forms) and for setting up in alternate locations?
- ▷ What information is stored and updated in the current system on staff, clients, and providers?

Consult with information systems management staff on the current requirements for Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) or other information systems.

Store Critical Information

The following information should be stored in a cloud-based system with statewide accessibility and printed in case the power is out:

- ▷ Disaster plan details including roles and responsibilities
- ▷ Case and client contact information and other critical information as needed (e.g., medical and court records)

- ▷ Disaster plan contact information for staff, families, providers, and youth
- ▷ Human resource data (employee information, payroll systems)

Many agencies have found that it is particularly critical to ensure that information on clients is entered into the agency's systems and is updated regularly. The easy availability of current contact information on internet-based systems greatly expedites efforts to locate children and families.

Provide Access to Electronic Systems

During disasters, when families, youth, and providers disperse, staff across the state and from other states will need information on these clients to make appropriate safety decisions and provide adequate services. Statewide cloud-based systems allow staff in any part of the state access to information, and they allow central office staff to access information about children and families throughout the state.

Protect Vital Records and Equipment

Use offsite backup for information systems with case and client records (such as CCWIS) and human resource data (e.g., employee information and payroll systems). Backing up information in a secure, remote location is a vital step to accessing it remotely if disaster strikes agency buildings or the local area. Coordinate with other key partners, such as courts or other service agencies, on taking steps to backup critical records.

To protect data, equipment, and servers from environmental factors, invest in secure server cabinets with the necessary air conditioning and waterproof protection. Take appropriate steps to protect computers during disasters, such as covering or bagging machines and installing surge protectors.

Texas: Protecting Automated Records

In Texas, state agency records created mainly in the state capital, Austin, are backed up at a secure facility in San Angelo, Texas. San Angelo is over 200 miles away from the capital in an inland location. This helps keep the records safe and accessible in case of a disaster.

Assess Paper Records

Though many child welfare agencies now use electronic forms and documentation, there may still exist critical paper records vulnerable to disasters. These might include official court documents and archived case records from before electronic systems.

Agencies should assess any paper records they maintain, asking questions such as:

- ▷ How critical are they?
- ▷ Can they be converted to electronic records by scanning or using automated electronic forms?
- ▷ What steps must be taken to protect them?

Agencies can help protect any remaining critical paper files from fire and water by keeping them in fire-safe metal filing cabinets.

Set Up Documentation Infrastructure

A disaster could render the agency's child welfare data and case management system unavailable for a time. With staff unable to access the system, an alternative documentation infrastructure should be implemented to capture service delivery. This infrastructure might include a disaster log, such as the one in appendix D, and might need to be supplemented with some paper forms for staff to use in the interim. For example, a paper placement agreement form might be needed in place of an electronic form that is typically used. The agency might also consider items it will need to document differently during the disaster, such as online meetings, personnel time entries, and memorandums of agreement for sharing communications with disaster-related partners. As part of the disaster plan, agencies should also identify data elements they want to collect during a disaster to support decision-making by leadership. This might include new staff roles and responsibilities, the number of families impacted, the number of families accounted for, any reported needs, available flexible funding, or other elements. They should also establish how to collect and report the information (e.g., who will collect it, where it will be reported).

Prepare Staff and Contractors

The safety of child welfare workers is a top priority, as they need to be able to keep themselves safe as well as ensure the well-being of the children and families they work with. The following steps will help ensure that staff are prepared for a disaster and that agencies will be able to maintain communication with them.



Personal Disaster Kits for Staff Could Contain:

- ▷ Flashlights, lanterns, glow sticks
- ▷ Sneakers
- ▷ Maps, driving directions, and walking directions for evacuation routes
- ▷ Car keys
- ▷ In vehicles: water, blankets
- ▷ Charged power pack
- ▷ First aid kit
- ▷ Nonperishable snacks such as protein bars and dried fruit

Create Personal Disaster Plans

Child welfare staff should be encouraged to develop simple personal disaster plans, including where they would go in a disaster and contact information at these locations. The government website <https://www.ready.gov/> maintains updated emergency preparedness checklists that should be used for this purpose.

This information should be updated regularly, at least annually, perhaps on the anniversary date of hire or at the time of performance appraisal. Human resources should collect and store the information in a place where it will be accessible during a disaster, preferably in statewide automated databases. This will allow the agency to assess the safety of the workforce and determine their ability to carry out their job assignments after a disaster.

Staff should be required to check in as soon as possible after a disaster. Some agencies specify that staff check in within a designated period of time, such as 24 hours, if feasible. Workers should be given a toll-free phone number for checking in, information about alternative work locations, and how the agency will communicate with them if internal communication systems are disabled. For example, staff should know which radio or television stations have agreed to make major announcements for the agency. If a disaster is expected in advance, staff should know to take their laptops, tablets, phones, and electronic files home with them when they leave the office.

Agencies may want to lead a “personal disaster kit” drive for their staff and their households to ensure that staff are prepared ahead of time and will be able to better assist families during a disaster. Find tips on personal disaster planning in [Your Family Disaster Supplies and Preparedness Calendar](#) (National Association of Professional Organizers).

Set Up Support Services for Staff

Everyone who lives through a disaster, including children, youth, families, and child welfare staff, is at risk for experiencing a trauma response. Child welfare staff are particularly at risk, as they are likely to experience primary and secondary disaster-related trauma simultaneously.

Programs such as employee assistance and mental health counseling should be put in place to address the ongoing needs of staff arising out of the secondary trauma of child welfare work, as well as the potential primary trauma related to direct experience of a disaster. If these services are regularly available to staff to help them handle the stress of working with abused and neglected children, they will be easier to access during a disaster. Providing these services may also help agencies retain their workforce, contributing to higher employee satisfaction and improved services.

Some strategies agencies can use to plan for trauma services in case of disaster include:

- ▷ Keeping a list of therapists trained in trauma treatment who would be willing to do pro bono work in case of an emergency
- ▷ Knowing the names and contact information for groups like the First Responder Support Network (California) or First Responder Trauma Counselors (Colorado) that are local to the agency, or nationwide groups such as the Institute for Responder Wellness

Establish Expectations and Support for Contracted Staff

In child welfare agencies that have outsourced or privatized case management or significant service delivery responsibilities, expectations around preparing for and responding to disasters should be included in contracts and passed on to the contractor’s staff. In addition, contracted staff should receive disaster training, and contractors should be encouraged to establish support services for their staff.

Missouri Alliance for Children and Families: Emergency Response

The Missouri Alliance for Children and Families, a provider for the state of Missouri, has developed detailed emergency response procedures to protect its staff and avoid injuries in the event of a disaster or general emergency. The Missouri Alliance for Children and Families also developed a policy for its foster parents to follow in preparation for a disaster and when responding to emergency situations.

Prepare Families, Youth, and Providers

Agencies should prepare families, youth, and providers so they will know what to do during a disaster and so the agency can locate them during and after a disaster.

Facilitate Disaster Planning for Families and Care Providers

Providing information on requirements for disaster plans should be part of a broader effort to

inform families and providers on emergency preparedness. This information should be provided in a culturally sensitive manner (e.g., in local languages and through appropriate channels). Consider including this information in training for foster care licensure. Helpful information includes:

- ▷ How to prepare and update a disaster plan (e.g., forms—where, how, and when to submit)
- ▷ The requirement to check in and how to contact the agency (e.g., toll-free phone numbers, websites, email addresses)
- ▷ A list of critical items to take when evacuating with children, including:
 - Identification for the child and any citizenship documentation
 - The child's medical information and equipment (e.g., prescriptions, recent medical reports, physician(s) name and contact information, immunization history), educational records, and court orders
 - Agency contact information
 - Attorney contact information
- ▷ Recommended content of disaster supply kits, including items for special needs (e.g., medications and equipment for medically fragile children)
- ▷ Information on what to do if disaster strikes
- ▷ Tips for helping children handle disasters

To help families, youth, and providers keep critical information with them, agencies can distribute wallet-sized laminated cards that are less likely to be forgotten if a sudden evacuation from homes is required. Cards can have:

- ▷ Child-specific information (name, social security number, medical information)
- ▷ Agency contact information (phone numbers, websites, and emails)

Some mobile phones also have virtual wallets where information can be stored, since a physical wallet-sized card may not be accessible during disasters. Some states have also prepared small notebooks or expandable files where families can keep all the critical items for each child. This can also be done electronically and stored on a flash drive. This is good practice on an ongoing basis and helps ensure families, providers, and youth can easily take critical information with them when they evacuate. Training and assistance can help families, youth, and facilities compile the items listed above.

In compiling emergency preparedness information, agencies can refer to updated emergency preparedness checklists and information available on government websites such as www.ready.gov.

To keep children and youth safe, agencies should require families and providers who care for children to develop a disaster plan and to update it on a regular basis. Youth in independent living and youth receiving ETVs should also be encouraged to develop and update personal disaster plans.

Larger facilities are more likely to have disaster plans in place, possibly due to accreditation or licensing requirements. Agencies need to make an extra effort to help individual families and youth,

who are less likely to have specific plans in place, to develop them (see appendix C: Resource Family Disaster Plan).

Families, youth receiving ETVs or who are in independent living, and providers should be asked to check in as soon as possible after a disaster. Just as with staff, some agencies specify a check in within a designated period of time (e.g., within 24 hours or as soon as is feasible).

Disaster plans should include:

- ▷ Where the family, provider, or youth would go in an evacuation (two locations—one nearby and one out of the area)
- ▷ Phone numbers and other contact information (e.g., email and social media and chat application handles used on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.)
- ▷ Contact information of someone who will know where they are (e.g., out-of-area relative, friend)
- ▷ What they will take with them, including medication and medical equipment
- ▷ Toll-free phone numbers they will call to check in and the agency's website address

In congregate care facilities, disaster plans (with toll-free phone numbers to call) should be posted in areas accessible to youth.

Just as for staff, the information in these plans should be stored in an accessible place, preferably in statewide automated databases. Agencies should inform key partners, such as courts, of the information they are collecting and storing to encourage coordination of efforts to locate children after a disaster.

U.S. Virgin Islands: Staff and Family Disaster Plans

After hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, child welfare staff members shared some of their experiences. One staff member shared how she had planned for her family and home, including protecting the house structure as best she could and storing enough food and water to last for several months. However, she did not plan on her neighbor's family moving in with her after the storm took off their roof. Her well-thought-out plans for supplies dwindled rapidly. She said next time she would not only have a personal plan but encourage others around her and within her community to develop personal and community disaster plans.

Facilitate Disaster Planning for Parents and Families Receiving In-Home Services

Agencies need to work first to prepare and ensure communication with children and youth in out-of-home care. However, families receiving in-home services should also be encouraged to develop and update family disaster plans, and the agency should provide them with emergency preparedness information and a phone number they can call to check on their children after a disaster or evacuation.

When possible, agencies should collect identifying information such as social security numbers or driver's license numbers from parents and families receiving in-home services to help locate them during and after a disaster. Locating parents is particularly important to ensure that they are safe

and to offer any assistance that the agency can manage. It is also critical for continued work on the permanency plan and when court processes require their presence. This information, along with other contact information, should be recorded in automated databases so it can be accessed when needed.

Louisiana: Preparing Families and Providers

In Louisiana, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) offers greater emergency preparedness support for all the foster homes and residential providers in hurricane-prone areas of the state. Foster parents and residential providers are routinely advised of the agency expectation to evacuate if ordered by local authorities, and staff instruct these foster caregivers on making personal evacuation plans. Annually, caregivers are provided with an emergency preparedness checklist to help plan for the needs of each child in their care should a disaster occur.

To help prepare families, DCFS assists foster parents in collecting photocopies of medical cards, case plans, placement agreements, court orders, and other critical documentation for children in their care. In addition, child welfare staff contact all foster families in hurricane-prone regions and the licensing division contacts all nonmedical group homes to update home and business telephone numbers, cell phone numbers, and telephone numbers for their primary and secondary evacuation locations. All providers are all required to check in after a disaster to update the agency on the status of the children in their care, their needs as a family and childcare agency, and location and living situation plans. Additionally, information is routinely communicated on how to access the state disaster website (<https://getagameplan.org>) for the most current information on any disaster and resources available for assistance.



Lessons Learned: Planning for Disaster

- ▷ To be truly effective, disaster planning must be a regular part of agency planning and CQI activities. Agencies should try to integrate disaster planning into their CFSP and APSR cycles on annual basis.
- ▷ Plans should be reviewed regularly and updated often, at least every 6 months.
- ▷ Disaster planning teams need to be as diverse as possible and include several family and youth representatives that represent all the communities served by an agency.
- ▷ Disaster planning teams should learn to think flexibly about roles and resources when considering disaster response. Staff may be asked to take on roles other than their usual ones, and resources may need to be reallocated or serve double duty in response to a disaster.

Planning for Disaster: At a Glance

The following checklist can help disaster planning teams work through the process of planning for disasters. For more information, see “Planning for Disaster” in the *Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems* Guide and the Center for States’ [Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems webpage](#).

Assess Agency Preparedness for Disaster

- Evaluate potential disasters.
- Brainstorm common disaster outcomes.
- Assess the agency’s existing disaster response plan.
- Assess technology capacity.
- Align disaster planning with other federal processes.
- Plan to collaborate with other organizations on disaster planning, response, and recovery.

Develop a Child Welfare Agency Disaster Plan

- Put together a team for disaster planning and response.
- Engage agency staff, community stakeholders, families, and youth in planning.
- Discuss needs to be addressed and assign subteams.
- Discuss new and existing staff roles during disaster response.
- Develop a communication plan.
- Coordinate with federal, state, and local partners.
- Schedule regular plan reviews and update as needed.

Prepare to Manage a Disaster

- Practice in advance:
 - Conduct regular drills.
 - Prepare emergency locations.
- Strengthen information systems:
 - Store critical information.
 - Provide access to information systems.
 - Protect vital records and equipment.
 - Assess paper records.
 - Set up documentation infrastructure.
- Prepare staff and contractors:
 - Create personal disaster plans.
 - Ensure office and staff preparedness.
 - Set up support services for staff.
 - Establish expectation for contracted staff.
- Prepare youth, families, and providers:
 - Facilitate disaster planning for resource families and providers.
 - Work with families and providers to prepare for disasters.
 - Facilitate disaster planning for parents and families receiving in-home services.

Responding to Disaster

If child welfare agencies develop disaster plans that address key elements and critical infrastructure areas, they will have a framework to guide their response during a disaster. If the plan is tested and updated regularly, it will help managers continue essential functions. This section describes the steps agencies need to take to implement disaster plans and highlights other considerations during disasters.

Launch Initial Response

When a disaster occurs, agency leaders should begin by clearly stating when the disaster plan (or a portion of it) is activated and by notifying the appropriate personnel. Once this is done, staff members take on the roles assigned to them or their positions under the direction of the designated managers in charge of disaster response. This includes those designated to manage essential functions and those assigned to other critical roles (media, volunteers, support for disaster response, liaisons to other states, federal partners, and courts).

When a disaster occurs, Administration for Children and Families' Watch Desk (hswatchofficer@acf.hhs.gov) will reach out to the designated point of contact for CB and provide an Advisory about the event, including what happened and where (with names of states, Tribes, and territories affected). The Watch Desk will also request that jurisdictions affected by disaster fill out a CB Disaster Information Collection Plan. Agencies can find more information by contacting their regional office.

Key managers will meet regularly as an emergency command team and maintain links to broader emergency management efforts. Managers will regularly let staff, union representatives (if applicable), and providers know who needs to report to work and how to maintain essential functions.

New York: Communicating With Managers and Contractors

New York's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) has found that the ability to communicate and coordinate with key players is critical during a disaster. On 9/11, ACS evacuated its headquarters near the World Trade Center and moved to an ACS building in another part of the city. In the weeks following 9/11, ACS leadership kept in constant contact with the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Deputy Commissioners met daily and also met regularly with the managers of contracted services to answer questions, discuss service delivery, and keep them informed about efforts to bring computer systems back online.

More recently the Deputy Commissioners all got 800-megahertz radios with a dedicated frequency—one channel they can use to communicate with one another at headquarters, another that goes to the alternate site for ACS headquarters, and another that goes directly to the Mayor's OEM. The OEM conducts routine roll calls with these radios to make sure they are working.

Communicate

Disaster managers and staff should immediately implement the elements of the disaster communications plan (see "Develop a Communication Plan" in the previous section):

- ▷ Use the internal communication system to broadcast messages about the disaster to staff in all locations.

- ▷ Communicate with all families, youth, and external stakeholders about activities and plans, including:
 - Families and youth
 - Statewide emergency management staff
 - Liaisons in other jurisdictions
 - Contractors
 - Service providers
 - Courts
 - Federal partners
 - Community organizations and potential volunteers
- ▷ Ensure that toll-free phone numbers are working or are available as soon as possible.
- ▷ Post and update critical information on websites and social media.
- ▷ Implement the media plan.
- ▷ Review communication technology:
 - Are phones, cell phones, satellite phones, or other technology working among key managers and partners?
 - Are computers available?
 - Is there a need for GPS locators?
 - Do staff need additional training on this technology?

Deploy Emergency Response Staff

Managers should contact and deploy staff as needed to meet the demands of the disaster and should draw on extra resources, including mutual-aid agreements with other counties or states. Specific steps related to workload management include:

- ▷ Assess the availability of child welfare staff, including those affected by the disaster and their locations. Agencies could maintain a spreadsheet or database to keep track of who has been located and their status.
- ▷ Based on the disaster plan, carry out work functions identified as essential. Some nonessential, routine activities can be discontinued or limited, saving staff time for more critical functions.



Thinking Outside the Box

- ▷ How will child welfare staff inform first responders if they learn of families or foster families in danger or cut off from supplies?
- ▷ How can your agency ensure that information about new or revised services from other agencies and programs are communicated to staff and families?
- ▷ How can your agency encourage families, community organizations, and partner agencies to collaborate effectively?
- ▷ What are some ways that your agency can help staff process primary and secondary trauma related to the disaster, both immediately and long term?

- ▷ Find out what special waivers might go into effect during a crisis (including Children’s Bureau flexibilities for title IV-E and title IV-B for disasters and emergencies) and communicate those to all parties who need the information. It is particularly important that this information gets to frontline staff who are dealing directly with children, youth, and families (e.g., ICPC waivers, Medicaid waivers, face-to-face contact waivers).
- ▷ Deploy staff to answer calls to the toll-free phone number.
- ▷ Rotate local and nonlocal staff members and volunteers (if available) through the most demanding disaster-related positions.
- ▷ Have managers log situations they address to produce and share short “how to” guides. This will help avoid a duplication of effort as other managers face the same situation and will allow the experience to inform future revision of the disaster plan.

Rhode Island: Building a Team for Rapid Pandemic Response

At the onset of the COVID-19 public health emergency, the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) established a COVID-19 Readiness Team composed of senior leadership as well as middle managers and key professional staff. Initially meeting at least three times per week, the COVID-19 Readiness Team focused on key issues related to ensuring the safety of staff and clients. Team tasks included developing and adjusting guidelines for home visiting; obtaining and supplying personal protective equipment for staff, providers, and foster parents; developing and implementing strategies to conduct safe child abuse and neglect investigations; and communicating to staff, providers, families, and other key stakeholders regularly. The Acting Director and Readiness Team members held monthly Zoom forums with smaller groups of staff throughout the agency to disseminate information and obtain feedback. Regular meetings were held with leadership from several unions representing DCYF staff to promote collaboration.

Respond to Initial Family and Youth Needs

During disasters, child welfare agencies should immediately contact families and begin to respond to their needs. The following steps can help agency staff work with children, youth, and families during disasters.

1. Establish contact with families, providers, and youth in the child welfare system at the time of the disaster when they call in or use emergency contact information to locate them. Coordinate with other systems that have child and family location information. Ensure that check-ins with youth are human-centered and focus on meeting their needs.
2. Maintain a database or spreadsheet to track clients who have called in and those who are in unknown circumstances.
3. Conduct an initial assessment of locations and needs of children, youth, families, and providers.
4. Evaluate the availability of flexible funding to meet the needs of children, youth, families, and providers during an emergency or disaster.
5. Provide information, support, and services for these families and coordinate services with other agencies.
6. Help children, youth, and families affected by the disaster access additional programs or services such as:
 - ▷ Immediate trauma services for children, youth, and families

- ▷ Assistance for medically fragile children and their caregivers
- ▷ More time for service visits due to accessibility or other challenges
- ▷ New benefit programs to respond to needs (e.g., rebuilding housing)
- ▷ Childcare for families seeking help
- ▷ Extra assistance for foster families to provide for all the children in their care

A good place start is the FEMA Individual Assistance program, which may be available if the President issues a major disaster declaration. It includes programs such as the Individuals and Households Program, which provides financial and direct services to eligible individuals and households affected by a disaster who have uninsured or under-insured necessary expenses and serious needs. Access more information at <https://www.fema.gov/assistance/individual/disaster-survivors>.

7. Identify children separated from their families and provide services to them.
8. Relocate services to alternate locations as required by the scale of the disaster. Locate services close to where families and children are—disaster assistance centers along with other service providers, if possible, and/or use mobile units, neighborhood centers, or coordinated outreach to provide access. Maintain contact with emergency management agencies to learn about other relocated services or to provide input about where service is needed.
9. Make services culturally sensitive by providing services and information about them in the language clients use and in a culturally appropriate way.
10. Compile and distribute lists regularly for staff and families of other disaster-relief services and programs available through statewide emergency management efforts and/or other agencies.
11. Work with other programs that have flexibilities to address family needs of which the agency has become aware. Administrators should gather information about the most prevalent needs of children and families so they can advocate with other agencies to meet those needs.

Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation (North Dakota): Preventive Action for Tribal Family Well-Being

Tribal leaders of the 17,000-person Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara (MHA) Nation in North Dakota responded with decisive action in the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 to ensure that families in their Tribal community had the information and resources they needed to survive the pandemic intact. By taking active preventive measures, the MHA Nation was able to see to the well-being of all their children, youth, and families.

In April 2020, in response to a spike in cases off the reservation, Tribal leaders convened the MHA COVID-19 task force, which quickly mobilized to provide emergency aid services for families in isolation and quarantine. Task force volunteers worked with the Tribal Council to increase public awareness through weekly service announcements, provide community monitoring of cases, establish an isolation center and an aid distribution center, and launch an aggressive effort for mass testing despite limited health care resources. In spring 2020, an emergency response team assembled care packages for Tribal elders aged 60 years and older with hand sanitizer, bleach, toilet paper, information, and food items. They also created a meal site operated by elders to prepare lunches for families to pick up for school-age children. The Tribal Council also instituted a curfew to stop the spread of the virus. Vaccine clinics for all Tribal enrolled members were operational beginning in February 2021.

Support Staff

Recognize and understand staff stress and needs. Child welfare staff may be victims of the disaster themselves if their homes or personal goods have been destroyed or damaged or if their families have been affected. Furthermore, staff may have difficulty handling both their ongoing child welfare work and the additional work of responding to the disaster.

Provide staff support and opportunities to process emotions. Group opportunities to debrief stressors and share stories of their experiences can support and validate staff and help them recover faster. Draw on any existing staff support resources, such as employee assistance programs and existing peer support groups, to provide counseling and other support. In some cases, it is appropriate to use resources from outside the area, as local mental health professionals may be just as affected as staff and not able to offer productive help.

Other specific steps to support staff are listed below:

- ▷ Allow staff scheduling flexibility. In alternative locations, staff members often must work in close quarters and the work is stressful and demanding. Allow staff to stagger their work times so they can address personal needs.
- ▷ Advocate for staff to have priority in emergency housing. Articulate the necessity of having some staff on hand at service centers and in affected communities to provide required services to children, youth, and families in need. Support staff by working to ensure their basic needs are met, including places to sleep near the worksite.
- ▷ Establish administrative centers separate from disaster services. These centers allow staff space to take breaks, meet with one another, and store their personal items and should be located near service centers for easy access. Consider locating counselors in these centers to help staff process their experiences.
- ▷ Address immediate staff needs. If services are disrupted in a community, staff may need child-care for their own children. If they have been affected directly, the agency might organize collections of needed goods or funds.

Louisiana's Approach to Dealing With Secondary Trauma

In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Louisiana Division of Children and Families (DCFS) recognized the personal toll they took on their staff and initially developed a program to help those staff address the personal impact of traumatic life events. The agency developed a training curriculum and workbook to help staff work through their personal losses, and agency trainers encouraged staff to share their unique stories and find strength in the support of others, helping them to heal. This work has continued with DCFS having every staff member annually participate in Personal Disaster Preparedness Training to learn how to plan for their own families. The goal is to minimize the trauma experienced by staff during any disaster by staff being prepared to meet their own needs and the needs of their families. Then staff are able to focus on meeting the needs of others in the state impacted during a disaster.

The Louisiana Child Welfare Training Academy (LCWTA) also provides ongoing trauma training to staff, foster parents, and providers. The LCWTA is a collaboration among child welfare, the state's legal system, university partners, and other stakeholders to ensure multidisciplinary staff preparedness for serving children and families involved with the child welfare system. This preparation includes helping staff understand the importance of self-care and recognizing how trauma affects the staff as well as the children and families they serve. The ongoing work involves expanding the support and education available to child welfare staff, foster caregivers, and stakeholders around disaster preparedness and dealing with the trauma of disaster.

Respond to Remote Work Needs

One of the consequences of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic is that many jurisdictions were forced to move quickly to remote work environments. While this created its own challenges and stress, many child welfare agencies have learned the value in providing a flexible structure that allows for some level of remote work.

As part of disaster response for certain disaster types and impacts, child welfare agencies should activate remote work plans. In addition, they should quickly address any policy or practice changes that are obstacles to remote work based on the situation at hand (e.g., confidentiality issues, record-keeping). Some natural disasters may isolate geographic areas due to road closures and could mean remote work for only some staff. If current state statutes or regulations are obstacles, managers should elevate these concerns to state-level leadership to be addressed as quickly possible. Funding for technology needs may drive decision-making on this issue, so agency leadership should be prepared to address funding concerns.

Montana: Virtual Visitation

As the COVID-19 pandemic required child welfare agencies to find ways to meet the needs of the children and families they support, Montana quickly shifted to using a variety of virtual methods for its work. Within a few days of the Governor's first stay at home order on March 26, 2020, the Department of Public Health and Human Service's Child and Family Services Division had communicated to child protection staff, foster families, and providers the agency's guidance on the importance of conducting virtual visits and how to do so effectively. Family Support Team (FST) meetings, held with families as close to start of an investigation as possible, moved to virtual meetings and continued throughout the pandemic. One positive consequence was that FST meetings were held in a timelier manner, which allowed for families to access services and supports more quickly and effectively.

Work With Community Organizations and Volunteers

Depending on the scope of the disaster, agencies can have a few or an overwhelmingly large number of volunteers offering assistance. The agency may want to assign a person or position the responsibility of communicating with, screening, and assigning volunteers to appropriate tasks as specified in the disaster plan. In major or catastrophic disasters, this person will need assistance, and the agency might benefit from a volunteer coordinator in each region or county.

The agency may need to orient or train volunteers, and managers have found it useful to develop brief manuals or one-page tip sheets giving instructions for tasks and agency expectations so rotating volunteers will be oriented appropriately and efficiently. The agency may also receive a large volume of donations, which will need to be housed, organized, and distributed. An agency staff member or volunteer may need to be assigned to these tasks as well. The FEMA Management Institute course, [IS-244.B Developing and Managing Volunteers](#), can help agencies prepare for and manage volunteers before, during, and after a disaster.

Coordinate Ongoing Disaster Response

During disasters, agencies can draw on relationships they have established with key partners to communicate as necessary about the situation.

This includes:

- ▷ **Statewide emergency management staff:** Make contact between agencies, discuss the location of emergency services, get information on the agency's role in response, and advocate for needs of child welfare clients, staff, and volunteers. These activities should be part of all phases of disaster management—planning, response, and recovery.
- ▷ **Liaisons in other jurisdictions:** Contact liaisons in other counties or states for assistance or to consult and share information on families leaving or coming into the area.
- ▷ **Contractors:** Make sure roles and responsibilities are functioning as needed between the agency and various contractors.
- ▷ **Service providers:** Consult about the status of current services and plans for services to be delivered after the disaster.
- ▷ **Courts:** Coordinate efforts with courts to locate children and workers. Communicate about any necessary delay in court proceedings and on emergency placements of children, as well as any changes in case or visitation plans so families are not penalized for not obtaining services (which may be temporarily unavailable) or attending court-ordered parent-child visits (which may be logistically impossible). Consult on a process to transfer jurisdiction across state lines when the child and foster family have relocated and the family has no plans to return. For others, institute ICPC requests as appropriate.
- ▷ **Federal partners:** Maintain contact with federal partners to share information and communicate about federal requirements and local needs.
- ▷ **Volunteers:** Draw on any trained or available volunteers. Communicate with organizations offering volunteers through designated volunteer coordinators (see "Identify Potential Volunteers and Their Tasks").



Thinking Outside the Box

- ▷ What might be some of the challenges families and communities face if the disaster response goes on for an extended time? How can your agency help address them?
- ▷ How might your agency plan differently for long-term disaster response as compared to short-term response?

Continue Work With Families and Youth on Disaster Response Activities

The disaster team lead or designated staff member should maintain connections with the family and youth team members involved in the planning process and include them to the greatest extent possible as partners in the disaster response. Agencies should follow the communication plan for families and youth that was developed in the agency disaster plan. If modifications need to be made in the moment, they should be done through consultation with the family and youth team members.

To effectively collaborate with family and youth members of the disaster response team, agencies should:

- ▷ Ensure that family and youth team members and community organizations serve as channels for two-way communication between the agency and other families and youth
- ▷ Be sure that suggestions or challenges identified by families and youth are viewed as important contributions and make every effort to incorporate these into the disaster response
- ▷ Provide resources for family and youth team members to allow them to effectively participate in disaster response efforts

Hawai'i: Authentic Youth Engagement in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Hawai'i Helping Our People Envision Success (HI H.O.P.E.S) is a statewide initiative with youth boards that are comprised of current and former foster youth between ages 14 and 26. EPIC 'Ohana, the lead agency for the HI H.O.P.E.S. work, partners nationally with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's and Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. HI H.O.P.E.S. youth boards serve as the youth advisory council for the Hawai'i Department of Human Services - Child Welfare Services (CWS) and work with the agency to facilitate education, advocacy, and collaboration with young people currently and formerly in foster care and community stakeholders.

In April 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, HI H.O.P.E.S sponsored a town hall to connect young people to resources that fit their needs and concerns, use technology to connect with young people effectively, show young people the power of self-advocacy, and provide transparent updates on the child welfare agency's pandemic response and services. The town hall emphasized meeting young people where they are and proactively collaborating with them to meet challenges faced by the community. As a result of the town hall:

- ▷ Emergency Enhancement Funds were provided to young people (ages 18–26) to assist with small bills, toiletries, food, technology support, transportation, and more
- ▷ Funds were diverted to allow the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Boards to host virtual graduation events for graduates in their counties
- ▷ Sixty-seven young people received tablets to mitigate the barriers to participate virtually in an annual statewide conference in July 2020, which brought together adults and young people
- ▷ HI H.O.P.E.S. partnered with community agencies to host COVID-19 toolkit drive-throughs, which offered young people special toolkits with self-care items, resource booklets, easy recipes, self-care tips, hand sanitizer, face masks, snacks, and more

HI H.O.P.E.S. is providing leadership and guidance to CWS in the implementation of the Supporting Foster Youth and Families through the Pandemic Act

Trauma-Informed Care for Youth and Families During a Disaster

Everyone who lives in a disaster zone—as well as others who may live outside of it but have family, property, or other connections to the disaster zone—has the potential to be traumatically affected

by the disaster. The disaster may also trigger memories of prior traumatic events among youth or families. The child welfare agency will need to be able to assess trauma-related needs quickly and to continuously respond to those needs on an ongoing basis. The planning phases should have identified go-to resources that will now need to be activated. At the same time, agencies should be prepared for unknown challenges to arise that were not thought of beforehand.

Agency staff should ensure that timely assistance is readily available first to those communities most vulnerable and most disproportionately affected by the disaster. In these communities, the disaster-related trauma often compounds the trauma individuals have lived with throughout much of their lives. Agencies should work with the community and faith-based organizations (who were on the disaster planning team and should now be part of the disaster response team) to reach into those communities to determine where and how aid might best be deployed. Find and connect agency staff with the formal and informal leaders in those communities to identify what they see as the main challenges and needs and to help develop and implement solutions.

Additionally, the way that child welfare workers speak with youth and families they are assisting should reflect trauma-informed approaches and techniques. These may include using a warm or neutral tone of voice, leading with collaboration rather than blame or accountability, and infusing empathy and understanding into the conversation.

Rhode Island: Voluntary Extension of Care Services for Youth During the Pandemic

In April 2020, at the request of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), Governor Gina Raimondo signed an executive order extending voluntary extension of care services to young adults involved with DCYF whose cases otherwise would have closed with no further services upon reaching age 21 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The order allowed these young adults to continue to receive vital housing assistance, case management, and other supportive services. This was continued through a series of three additional executive orders and then was supported through the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act that extended such services to October 1, 2021.

Confirm That Information Systems and Technology Needs Are Being Met

When disaster occurs, designated disaster response staff should review access to computers, tablets, and other mobile technologies for all staff members who need them to provide client information, process payrolls, or perform other essential functions. If staff will need to work remotely for a time, plans should be in place to ensure that they have the technology and internet access they need. Staff should also check offsite locations with backups of critical information systems to determine that they are operational and accessible if necessary (see “Discuss Documentation Needs During a Disaster” for additional information).

Document the Disaster Response

Documenting the agency’s response to the disaster is critical for a number of reasons. Documentation will be critical in creating a timeline of response events and decisions during the response period and will be used to document expenses relating to the disaster (which could possibly be covered by disaster relief funds). Documentation will also aid in creating context and timing for the key decisions made during the disaster. The use of a disaster log (like the sample log in appendix D) can aid in tracking the disaster response and should be used by all staff. Finally, documentation can be used to record lessons learned that can help in planning for future disasters.



Lessons Learned: Responding to Disaster

- ▷ Recognize that agency staff may have multifaceted needs related to the disaster and may have experienced primary and secondary trauma. Families, too, may have additional needs and may be experiencing trauma. In responding to a disaster, it's important to remember that the primary work of the agency is to meet the new needs of families and staff in addition to continuing those existing processes that are deemed essential.
- ▷ During disaster response, it is critical to continue to keep in touch with youth, families, and community organizations as they are essential partners for helping agencies better understand the needs of families and communities.
- ▷ Although the work of responding to a disaster necessarily happens quickly, the importance of accurately documenting the activities of all staff responding to the disaster cannot be overstated. This is a crucial part of the disaster response that should not be overlooked.

Responding to Disaster: At a Glance

The following checklist can help disaster recovery teams begin the process of responding to disasters. For more information, see “Responding to Disaster” in the *Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems* Guide and the Center for States’ [Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems webpage](#).

Launch Initial Response

- Communicate with families and stakeholders according to the communication plan:
 - Use internal communication system to broadcast messages.
 - Ensure that toll-free numbers are working.
 - Post critical information on websites; provide regular updates.
 - Implement the media plan.
 - Review communication technology.
 - Ensure all stakeholders are updated about plans and activities, including:
 - Statewide emergency management staff
 - Liaisons in other jurisdictions
 - Contractors
 - Service providers
 - Judges, attorneys, and other court staff
 - Federal partners
 - ACF’s Watch Desk, CB, and the regional office
 - Potential volunteers
- Deploy emergency response staff:
 - Assess the availability of child welfare staff.
 - Deploy staff to meet the demands of the disaster and draw on extra resources, as needed.
 - Carry out work functions identified as essential; waive others.
 - Find out what special waivers and flexibilities might go into effect during a crisis and communicate to all parties needing the information.
 - Deploy staff to answer the toll-free phone numbers.
 - Rotate local and nonlocal staff.
- Respond to initial family and youth needs:
 - Locate and establish contact with families, providers, and youth; maintain database to track.
 - Conduct an initial assessment of locations and needs of families, providers, and youth.

- Provide information, support, and services to families, providers, and youth; coordinate with other agencies.
- Provide additional programs/services for children, youth, and families affected by the disaster.
- Identify and serve children separated from parents.
- Relocate services to alternate locations as required.
- Locate services close to where families and children are.
- Support agency staff:
 - Offer staff support and opportunities to process their emotions.
 - Allow staff scheduling and remote work flexibility.
 - Advocate for staff to have priority in emergency housing.
 - Establish a separate administrative center for staff to meet and take breaks.
 - Address immediate staff needs (childcare, need for goods, funds).
- Manage volunteers.
- Log the actions managers and staff take in response to disaster using the system set up in the disaster plan.

Coordinate Ongoing Disaster Response

- Continue to work with families and youth:
 - Ensure services are culturally sensitive.
 - Inform families of other available disaster-related services and programs.
 - Provide trauma-informed services as needed.
- Assess information systems and technology needs, including:
 - Data backups
 - Computer systems
 - Mobile technology and hardware availability
 - Internet access for staff, families, and youth
- Continue documenting disaster response.

Recovering From Disaster

During a disaster, agencies focus on meeting immediate needs. After the disaster, agencies continue to respond to an even broader array of needs and to implement other elements of the plan. Especially after a catastrophic disaster, there will be a long period of recovering and rebuilding. Over months and even years, agencies have to deal with the aftermath that can be bigger and more daunting than dealing with the immediate impact.

Although the process of disaster planning, response, and recovery sounds linear and clear, it is not. For example, plans for disaster recovery need to be made during disaster planning and disaster response, as the agency ensures that the most immediate and life-threatening aspects of the disaster are being addressed. There may be a need to loop back and forth among planning, response, and recovery—and adjust existing plans as needed—as response continues and moves into recovery. As a result, a small team should be tasked with starting the recovery phase even while others are focused on addressing the immediate needs of the disaster response.

This section describes some short-term and long-term considerations for agencies after a disaster.

Manage Short-Term Recovery

There often is not a clear dividing line where disaster response ends and disaster recovery begins. However, when most of the immediate needs of the agency's youth, families, and staff are addressed, work can begin on the disaster recovery phase.

Continue Work Begun During the Disaster

At the initial phase of disaster recovery, agencies will continue to provide additional services and supports to affected families, coordinate with key partners, work on keeping in touch with staff, families, and providers, implement the communications plan, and use the automated information system. Specific considerations for agencies are listed below:

- ▶ Assess the need for new or modified services as a result of the disaster.
- ▶ Continue to develop and provide additional programs and services to respond to needs, especially those related to trauma caused by a disaster.
- ▶ Provide services to children, youth, and families arriving from other states. Make placement slots available to children coming from another site affected by a disaster.
- ▶ Coordinate services for children served by the agency who are out of the area or out of state.
- ▶ Continue to provide services to unaccompanied children and work to reunite them with families.
- ▶ Ensure service delivery is culturally sensitive and competent (e.g., audio messages, telephone



Thinking Outside the Box

- ▶ What are the distinct needs of disaster recovery planning as compared to disaster response planning? What activities does it require? What changes in mindset?
- ▶ What does short-term disaster recovery mean for a type of disaster regularly faced by your community? How can it be improved?
- ▶ What lessons learned during disaster response can be part of enhancing the ongoing functions of your agency?

hotlines, and fliers should use local languages; use bilingual staff when necessary; advocate for distributing food that is culturally familiar).

- ▷ Develop a list of frequently asked questions to help staff answering the toll-free numbers respond to common questions.
- ▷ Work with federal partners to explore which federal requirements are still in place and if there are any waivers or flexibilities that might reduce the demands on state staff focused on disaster recovery.
- ▷ Have a system for communicating with staff through meetings or emails so that everyone is getting information on the extent and impact of the disaster and the status of agency offices and services. Establishing a consistent source for internal communication will cut down on conflicting messages.
- ▷ Continue support services to help staff deal with the trauma and stress of child welfare work and disaster work. Also, allow staff to exercise control by giving them some choices (e.g., flexibility in redesign of offices, scheduling, and office attire).
- ▷ Recognize staff efforts through awards, citations, and/or press coverage.

During the latter half of disaster response, an impact assessment should be completed that documents the impact of the disaster on the children, youth, and families with whom the agency works and the communities where they live. This should be followed by prioritizing efforts (this should include input from all stakeholders), setting objectives for recovery, and planning recovery

Prowers County, Colorado: Supporting Staff After Disaster

Following the fire in Prowers County, Colorado, which destroyed the child welfare offices, managers noted that one of the worst aspects about the disaster was the loss of control. So, where they could, they gave staff opportunities to exercise some control. For example, they picked out five desk models and some colors and let people select the ones they wanted for their offices. They also let people flex their workday schedule to avoid overcrowding in limited space.

activities. The prioritization of efforts to address disaster impacts should continually be reassessed as the work of disaster response and recovery proceeds.

Partner With Federal, State, and Local Organizations to Rebuild

In the aftermath of a major disaster that destroys buildings and communities, agencies need to invest in rebuilding. This is particularly challenging as available resources must first be used to meet immediate needs. However, agencies must, in the aftermath of disasters, work collaboratively with partners to rebuild the structures needed for effective services in the long term, including physical facilities, equipment, and records for service providers. For example, agencies can work with FEMA Public Assistance for repairing or rebuilding child welfare office buildings (see <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20210318/what-fema-public-assistance-for-more-information>).

Agencies that have coordinated disaster planning with community partners and across all statewide stakeholders (as detailed in the disaster plan) will now reap the benefits of doing so, as many services—such as food stamps, Medicaid, mental health services, housing, and economic development—are critical to the ability of child welfare families to make a full recovery. In addition,

the ability of child welfare staff and providers in other systems to function is dependent on broader emergency response efforts providing for basic needs so they can live and work in the area, including housing, availability of food, transportation, and other basic services.

Plan for Long-Term Recovery

The work of long-term disaster recovery comprises many of the same activities as short-term recovery but also allows agencies the time and space to consider what they have learned from the disaster response, as well as think about what improvements they can make as they work to rebuild the child welfare system.

Capture Lessons Learned

After the disaster response period ends, disaster team leads should hold debriefing sessions with youth and families, managers, staff, stakeholders, and partnering agencies to explore what went well and what lessons were learned. For example, a fire will trigger efforts to contact everyone in the building. If managers could not do that efficiently, the agency might establish new phone lists and phone trees to place in accessible locations.

Based on these debriefing sessions, the team should update the disaster plan. This analysis can also support and help guide rebuilding efforts. Revisions should be communicated inside and outside of the agency.

Continue to Work With Families and Youth

After the agency has collaborated with families and youth on disaster planning and response, at the disaster recovery phase, the resulting relationships can help identify the lessons learned from the family and youth perspective—what worked, what didn't work, what perhaps never should have been attempted. The following questions can help elicit useful information:

- ▷ How well did the agency meet the tangible needs of youth and families?
- ▷ Did the youth and families feel that those helping meet their needs saw them as important and did they feel respected?
- ▷ What does “rebuilding” mean to the youth and families?
- ▷ In what direction would they like to see the agency move as it rebuilds?

These questions and others can work to strengthen the relationships that the agency has cultivated throughout the hard work of disaster planning and response. Continuing to take the contributions of families and youth seriously will go a long way to maintain the mutual respect that was established.

Build Relationships With Communities and Reduce Disparities

While some view disasters as great equalizers, more often they expose the raw reality of the disparities of income, class, race, sex, and gender identity. The recovery from a disaster offers child



Thinking Outside the Box

- ▷ Who are your agency's potential partners for long-term recovery (e.g., nonprofit organizations, businesses, faith organizations)? Have you considered organizations and groups that you have not worked with in the past?
- ▷ How can recovering from a disaster help your agency build a better system? What are the positive changes that might result?

welfare agencies and others a prime opportunity to take an in-depth look at these disparities by involving those communities that have been underserved, disproportionately affected by the disaster, and lacking a voice in discussions, planning, and implementation of the rebuilding phase.

The following are sample questions that can help agency disaster recovery teams collaborate with underserved communities as they rebuild:

- ▷ What community strengths helped your community plan for and make it through the disaster? How can these strengths be used to help your community rebuild?
- ▷ What hindered your community's preparation for and response to the disaster and how can these things be addressed in a way that is supportive of your community?
- ▷ Is affordable housing available? What can be done to make affordable housing more readily available in your community as part of disaster recovery plans?
- ▷ Was healthy and affordable food easily accessible before the disaster? If not, how can this be changed during rebuilding with healthy and affordable grocery stores?
- ▷ What employment opportunities can be brought to the community that are safe, meet the needs of the community, and provide living wage jobs for people who live in that community?

Collaborate With Tribes

Continuing to work with Tribal governments as equal partners, while recognizing and deferring to their status as sovereign nations, is crucial to successful recovery from a disaster. The relationships forged with Tribal governments while planning for and responding to a disaster can form a foundation for future disaster planning and response coordination. These relationships can also facilitate collaborative rebuilding of a culturally sensitive and responsive child welfare system that respects the unique status and culture of the Tribes.

Rebuild Better Systems

Throughout the disaster response, the designated staff member (per the disaster plan) should collect information on rebuilding resources: donations, available grants, and other offers to provide assistance. This person should communicate this information to all staff. This is more efficient than each staff member taking time to search for resources they need and helps coordinate and make the best use of available resources.

For any disaster—minor, major, or catastrophic—the assessment of lessons learned can help agencies identify systems that need to be strengthened. Disasters that destroy agency buildings and damage systems may provide opportunities to build better systems than those that were in place. These stronger systems will enhance the capacity to manage the agency on an ongoing basis and during a disaster. For example, an assessment of lessons learned and questions to consider could include certain critical areas:

- ▷ **Collaboration with youth and families.** How did the agency collaborate with youth and families during disaster planning, response, and recovery? What could have been done differently or better? Do the youth and families involved believe that they were treated as equal partners throughout the process?
- ▷ **Collaboration with partners.** How did the agency work with key partners, such as service providers or courts? What could have been done differently or more effectively? Strengthen the agency's commitment to ongoing collaborative work with these partners.

- ▷ **Contracted services.** Did outsourced agency responsibilities such as case management function effectively during the crisis? Reassess contract expectations to improve oversight and address deficiencies.
- ▷ **Service delivery.** Were necessary services provided effectively and efficiently despite the circumstances? Commit to ongoing work with providers to develop responsive services and enhance the service array.
- ▷ **Communication with families, providers, and youth.** Was the agency able to stay in touch with clients and providers? Institute new procedures for providing emergency preparedness information and encouraging clients to develop and update personal disaster plans, and strengthen ongoing communication and collaboration with families, providers, and youth.
- ▷ **Management of staff.** Was the agency able to communicate with staff to assess their needs and availability during and after the disaster? Did the agency help staff deal with stress? Strengthen the process for gathering and recording contact information for staff and contractors and build new systems to provide ongoing support. This will help retain a strong workforce, contributing to improved services.
- ▷ **Communication systems.** Was the agency able to contact all staff quickly? Did toll-free numbers and websites work? Was the media plan effective? Were managers, staff, and providers able to communicate with one another through phones or computers? Were adequate systems in place to gather needed information for managers and leaders and to disseminate information to field staff, providers, and families? Focus on rebuilding a strong communications infrastructure to improve management.
- ▷ **Information systems.** Does the agency have critical client, human resource, and contractor contact information stored in statewide automated databases? Could staff access this information during and after the disaster? Were vital records protected? Did backup systems work as



Lessons Learned: Responding to Disaster

- ▷ Effective recovery from a disaster requires distinguishing between the needs of short-term and long-term recovery.
- ▷ Agencies should capture lessons learned during a disaster and incorporate them into an updated plan.
- ▷ Valuable innovations can occur during a disaster. Agencies should assess whether changes to daily operations and procedures should be made based on operating efficiencies, increased flexibility, and new practices used during the disaster.
- ▷ The relationships the agency built by collaborating with youth, families, Tribes, and community organizations are invaluable for informing and executing the recovery. Agencies should continue consulting these resources for their input into rebuilding new and improved systems.

planned? Rebuild more effective information systems to make information easily accessible on a day-to-day basis.

Disaster Recovery: At a Glance

The following checklist can help disaster recovery teams begin the process of short-term and long-term recovery from disasters. For more information, see “Disaster Recovery” in the *Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems* Guide and the Center for States’ [Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems webpage](#).

Manage Short-Term Recovery

- Conduct an impact assessment that documents the impact of the disaster on the children, youth, and families with whom the agency works and the communities where they live.
- Assess need for new or modified services as a result of the disaster.
- Continue to provide additional services and supports to affected families.
- Provide services to children, youth, and families from other states who arrive in your state.
- Coordinate services for children from your jurisdiction who are located or living out of the area or out of state.
- Continue to provide services to unaccompanied children.
- Ensure service delivery is culturally sensitive and competent.
- For staff answering the toll-free numbers, develop a frequently asked questions document.
- Maintain contact with federal partners.
- Communicate with staff and contractors frequently so they know what is going on.
- Continue support services for staff and contractors to help them deal with the trauma and stress of child welfare work and disaster work.
- Recognize staff efforts.
- Invest in rebuilding; collaborate with partners and with broader emergency response efforts.

Plan for Long-Term Recovery

Capture Lessons Learned

- Hold debriefing sessions.
- Update the plan based on these debriefing sessions.
- Communicate revisions to the plan.

Rebuild Better Systems

- Assign someone to collect information on rebuilding resources.
- Identify systems that need to be strengthened.
- Build new systems that will improve disaster response and also strengthen critical infrastructure to improve performance and outcomes.

Continue to Work With Families and Youth

- Maintain regular communication with families and youth to ensure their needs are being met.
- Provide assistance to families and youth in accessing financial and other disaster recovery resources that may be available to them.
- Keep the families and youth who have been part of your disaster preparedness team involved as equal partners.
- Hold listening sessions with families and youth to gain their perspective on their needs as well as on the effectiveness of the disaster response.

Build Relationships With Communities and Tribes

- Build on new relationships within Tribes and communities that may have been created.
- Work with other agencies, communities, and Tribes to ensure recovery efforts are focused on meeting Tribal and community needs while respecting their cultures.
- Work to strengthen the economic and social conditions of Tribes and communities while not displacing those who live there.

Conclusion

Agencies that develop and implement disaster plans addressing key elements and critical infrastructure areas are more likely to be prepared for disasters and will have taken steps to strengthen the systems vital to improving day-to-day management. While it is difficult to commit time and resources to future needs, agencies can start with the most critical steps in their particular circumstances, many of which will yield benefits in both the short term and the long term.

While catastrophic disasters occur infrequently, minor incidents such as flooding of an office are more common, and having designated managers, alternates, phone trees, and technology infrastructure in place to notify staff and continue the work of the agency is invaluable. Keeping better automated records of client information will help during disasters and in ongoing management of cases. Strengthening internal communication systems with staff (email and phone trees, websites, social media, toll-free numbers) can help maintain communication during a disaster and build a more informed and cohesive workforce. These are just a few examples of how disaster planning is a worthwhile investment that can help agencies move toward stronger systems and improved outcomes for children, youth, and families.



Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems Resources

The following additional resources in the Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems collection can help agency leaders, managers, and disaster planning teams prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

- ▷ **“Leading Your Agency Through a Disaster” Tip Sheet** provides information on leadership skills and actions that can help agencies plan for, respond to, and recover from disasters.
- ▷ ***Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems Disaster Impact Planning Matrix*** recommends activities and responses based on disaster outcomes (e.g., need to work offsite, need to contact families) and provides a tool for disaster planning teams to plan for additional outcomes their agency may face.
- ▷ **“Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems Resource Roadmap”** serves as a brief “at-a-glance” introduction to the collection for time-crunched users and provide examples of how these publications can be used separately or together.

These resources, as well as this guide and links to additional resources, are available on the [Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems webpage](#).

Users may freely print and distribute this material crediting the Capacity Building Center for States. Suggested citation: Capacity Building Center for States. (2021). *Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems* Guide. Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This product was created by the Capacity Building Center for States under Contract No. HHSP2332015000711, funded by the Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The *Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems* Guide is a revision and augmentation of the 2007 publication, *Coping With Disasters and Strengthening Systems: A Framework for Child Welfare Agencies*, produced by the National Resource Center for Organizational Improvement. Some of the content in the current publication reflects the content of the previous publication that was informed by the knowledge and expertise of child welfare experts at that time. The remainder of the content reflects the current knowledge and expertise of experts from the Children’s Bureau, all Centers in the Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative, the Administration for Children and Families, and other experts in the child welfare field.

Appendix A: Additional Resources

The following additional resources, organized by topic, provide information and tools that can help child welfare agency disaster planning teams with their work.

Resources and Technology

[Inventory of Innovations: Innovations in Software and Technology](#)

Center for States (2018)

Explores ways to use recent developments in software and technology in child welfare to potentially save costs while allowing workers to provide better, more integrated services.

[Knowledge Management Research: Telework in Child Welfare](#)

Center for States (2020)

Supports child welfare agencies in transferring select operations online and out of a central worksite.

[Knowledge Management Research: Virtual Meetings in Child Welfare](#)

Center for States (2020)

Helps child welfare agencies better understand available technologies and best practices for holding virtual meetings.

[Virtual Visitation Resources](#)

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2020)

Provides information on the use of virtual visitations in child welfare and other fields.

Provides information, tools, and resources to support families in the case of natural disasters and help them to address the potential traumatic effects.

Policies and Practices

[Caring for Children in a Disaster](#)

Centers for Disease Control (2021)

Lists information, tools, and additional resources to keep children and families safe during disasters.

[Children and Disasters](#)

American Academy of Pediatrics (2021)

Provides information and tools to assist families in responding to natural and man-made disasters.

[COVID-19 Resources](#)

Children's Bureau (2021)

Presents current guidance and resources on addressing various parts of the child welfare system and practice impacted by pandemics.

[Disaster Planning for Child Welfare Agencies](#)

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2016)

Outlines the reasons child welfare agencies should develop disaster plans, provides an overview of plan development, points to resources for creating preparedness plans, and highlights state and local examples.

[Knowledge Management Research: Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Communication Planning](#) Center for States (2020)

Helps child welfare agencies respond to the need to alter practice and communication routines when “normal” child welfare services have been disrupted and better prepare agencies for future disruptions.

[Prepare, Respond, Recover](#)

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, Department of Health and Human Services (2018)

Contains information that assists the general public with planning for, responding to, and recovering from natural and man-made disasters.

[Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication \(CERC\) Manual](#)

Centers for Disease Control (2014–2019)

Describes the principles of crisis and emergency risk communication and how to address different challenges while communicating during a crisis or emergency and provides guidance for all stages of an emergency.

Workforce Needs

[ASPR Technical Resources, Assistance Center, and Information Exchange \(TRACIE\)](#)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (updated March 2021)

Provides resources to meet the information and technical needs of healthcare and related staff working in the areas of disaster preparedness and response.

[Becoming a Family-Focused System: Improving Culture Begins With Leaders](#)

Center for States (2019)

Presents strategies to initiate, promote, and sustain improved organizational culture through adaptive leadership and modeling collaboration.

[Virtual Workforce Supports Resource Collection](#)

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) (n.d.)

Offers resources for child welfare staff to help them work from a home environment safely and effectively.

[Virtually Supervising Child Welfare Professionals During a Pandemic](#)

NCWWI and QIC-WD (n.d.)

Offers strategies for virtual supervision to help support staff, encourage team cohesion, and ensure work continuity.

[What Child Welfare Workers Need in a Pandemic](#)

NCWWI (n.d.)

Presents an infographic that summarizes a Workforce Needs Assessment conducted with four public child welfare agencies during COVID-19 and provides three areas of need identified by the workforce.

Mental Health

[Disasters](#)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.)

[Disaster Technical Assistance Center \(DTAC\)](#)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (updated April 2019)

Helps states, territories, Tribes, and local providers plan for and respond to behavioral health needs after a disaster.

[NCWWI Resource Library: Trauma-Informed Practice](#)

NCWWI (n.d.)

Offers links to a variety of resources for developing trauma-informed practice at a child welfare agency.

[Trauma-Informed Practice](#)

Child Welfare Information Gateway (n.d.)

Offers resources and information on trauma experienced by children who have been abused, neglected, and separated from their families; secondary trauma experienced by child welfare workers; and mental health issues in child welfare during traumas and disasters.

Collaborating With Children, Youth, and Families

[Becoming a Family-Focused System: Strategies for Building a Culture for Service Collaboration](#)

Center for States (2019)

Presents strategies to establish, support, and reinforce culture and climate for collaborative development of a service array that is responsive to families and youth.

[Becoming a Family-Focused System: Strategies for Building a Culture to Partner With Families](#)

Center for States (2019)

Offers strategies to establish, support, and reinforce agency culture and climate supportive of family engagement.

[Emergency Planning With Children](#)

FEMA (updated February 2021)

Explores how organizations can provide services that assist youth and families with children to plan for disasters.

[How Families Can Prepare for Emergencies](#)

American Red Cross (2021)

Presents resources and suggestions to help youth and families prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

[Ready Kids](#)

Ready.gov (updated February 2021)

Offers tools and information for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery for children, youth, and families.

Collaborating With Tribes and Other Partners

[Building an Effective Tribal-State Child Welfare Partnership](#)

Center for Tribes (n.d.)

Presents information and resources to help Tribes and state child welfare agencies collaborate.

[Emergency Preparedness in Dependency Courts: Ten Questions That Courts Serving Abused and Neglected Children Must Address](#)

Children's Bureau with the American Bar Association, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the National Center for State Courts (n.d.)

Examines how lessons learned from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita could be applied to dependency courts and recommends strategies to ensure that the essential functions of dependency courts are sustained during a disaster.

[Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery \(for Tribes\)](#)

Centers for Disease Control (2018)

Offers resources for Tribal governments and their partners to serve Tribal communities more effectively and provides information to help community members plan for emergencies and apply for assistance when disaster strikes.

[Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning Guide for Tribal Governments](#)

FEMA (2019)

Provides a framework and guidance for Tribal leadership and stakeholders as they plan for recovery from disaster.

[Strategic Planning in Child Welfare: Strategies for Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement](#)

Center for States (2019)

Addresses the importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement in child welfare agency strategic planning and suggests actionable steps for achieving meaningful stakeholder engagement in strategic planning.

[Tapping Into Nontraditional Partners for Emergency Management](#)

Emergency Response and Crisis Management Technical Assistance Center, Department of Education (2007)

Discusses strategies for building relationships with community partners, expanding current networks of collaboration, and anticipating potential obstacles to partnership.

Disaster Management and Equity

[Embedding Equity Into Emergency Operations](#)

The Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative and The Public Health Alliance of Southern California (2020)

Offers practical strategies for integrating a robust equity response into a jurisdiction's emergency planning and disaster response.

[From Surviving to Thriving: Equity in Disaster Planning and Recovery](#)

Center for Progressive Reform (2018)

Details how investments in health, safety, and environmental protection on the front end can reduce the need for financial or other assistance after disaster strikes.

[In the Eye of the Storm: A People's Guide to Transforming Crisis & Advancing Equity in the Disaster Continuum Action Toolkit](#)

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (2018)

Discusses racial and economic disparities in responses to past disasters and offers strategies for how these can be addressed going forward.

[NCWWI Resource Library: Racial Equity Resources](#)

NCWWI (n.d.)

Supports child welfare staff and leaders as they confront implicit bias, implement system changes, and work to achieve racial equity within their organizations and across systems.

[Racial Equity Discussion Guide](#)

NCWWI (2019)

Presents key messages, reflection questions, and resources for engaging partners in courageous conversations and planning to challenge the institutional and structural racism that results in worse outcomes for families and children of color or Tribally affiliated children.

[State of Oregon Equity Framework in COVID-19 Response and Recovery](#)

Office of Governor Kate Brown, Oregon (2020)

Illustrates the core elements of protecting and engaging with communities; collecting data and promoting inclusive workplaces; and building economic resiliency in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Appendix B: Teaming Checklist

Teaming is the process of working together successfully as a group, including understanding how teams are formed and how they function. Effective teaming is vital to all stages of disaster management, as it:

- ▷ Promotes the leadership and engagement needed to support planning for, responding to, and recovering from disaster
- ▷ Ensures that the team has the necessary capacity and expertise for required tasks
- ▷ Establishes multidirectional communication channels so that everyone involved in the processes of disaster management is kept informed

The team consists of two halves: the core planning team, which coordinates the disaster planning process, and the collaborative team, which consists of subject matter experts and stakeholders and provides input into the disaster planning process and helps create the disaster plan.

This checklist can help agency and disaster planning team leads put together teams for disaster planning and response. More information can be found in the Center's publications, "[Change and Implementation in Practice: Teaming](#)" and "[Strategic Planning in Child Welfare: Strategies for Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement](#)."

1. Identify the Core Team's Members and Purpose

- Convene a meeting of all core team members who will lead and coordinate the disaster planning process.
- Articulate why the team is necessary right now in a short statement.
- Write the team mission statement (a short paragraph that describes the team's primary purpose, including team goals and objectives).

2. Identify Prospective Collaborative Team Members and Create the Team

- Discuss what roles and expertise are needed on the team to contribute to disaster planning, response, and recovery.
- Identify staff and internal partner team members (including individuals from all levels of the organization, as well as youth and families).
- Identify community members (these should include representatives from all communities served by the agency, as well as organizational and business representatives).
- Consider whether identified team members represent the history, culture, and lived expertise of community members; if not, identify community members who can fill these roles.
- Consider the diversity of the team and whether the team reflects the diversity of the families served by the agency.
- Create a teaming structure (see "[Change and Implementation in Practice: Teaming](#)," pp. 8–9 for more information).

3. Develop the Team Charter

The team charter is a formal document created by the team early on that provides the foundation for the team's work. The following are common elements of a team charter (more information can be found in the [DIA Toolkit Team Charter Tool](#) [free registration required]):

- Mission of the team related to disaster planning, response, and recovery
- Goals and objectives for the work of team
- Scope, boundaries, and timeframe for completing the work
- Expected deliverables
- Decision-making authority
- Decision-making policy
- The role of agency leadership relative to the team
- Brief description of communication strategies and frequency, both within the team and with external partners
- Roles and responsibilities

4. Develop a Team Communication Plan and External Communication Strategy

Ask and answer the following questions to ensure that your team communication plan and external communication strategy will be useful for all team members and partners.

- Does the plan ensure that information on disaster planning, response, and recovery flows both down (from leaders) and up (from team members and partners)?
- Is there a strategy to share information in a timely manner with all stakeholders and solicit feedback?
- Does the plan clarify the process for communicating information, the people or roles responsible for it, and the frequency of communication?
- Is there consideration of multiple communication strategies (e.g., email, in-person meetings, calls, messaging, social media)?
- Does the plan have communication strategies for all three phases of the disaster management process?

Appendix C: Resource Family Disaster Plan – Basic Template

This document is offered as a basic starting point for agencies developing a form for resource families to use as part of an overall strategy to improve emergency preparedness. Agencies should tailor their forms as appropriate to meet agency and family needs.

Resource Family Disaster Plan

Resource Family Name: _____

This document contains my plans if I am required to leave my home address due to a natural disaster or catastrophic event.

If I need to evacuate my home, I will relocate to:

FIRST CHOICE:

(name of friend or family if relocating to a residence, address, phone number, alternate phone number, other contact information – email, etc.)

SECOND CHOICE:

(address, phone number, alternate phone number, other contact information – email, etc.)

Other means of contacting me:

Mobile phone number: _____

Email address: _____

Contact information for person with whom I would be in touch in case of an emergency and who the agency could contact if necessary (e.g., family member or friend, living outside of the immediate area):

In case of evacuation, I understand that I should take the children in my care with me unless other arrangements have previously been made with the child welfare agency.

I understand that there are critical items I am urged to take with me when we evacuate.

These include:

- ▷ Agency contact information (e.g., agency emergency contact number)
- ▷ My children's medical information (e.g., prescriptions, recent medical reports, physician/s name and contact information, immunization history)

- ▷ Educational records
- ▷ Identifying information for the child including citizenship information
- ▷ Court order giving the agency custody of any children in my home at the time of the event

I understand that I am required to check in with the (Agency Name). I can use these toll-free numbers and/or websites: **(add phone numbers)**.

I understand that should any of the information included in this plan change, I am to update the form within 14 days of the change and provide the agency with the update.

Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Appendix D: Simple Disaster Activity Documentation Tool

This simple tool can be used to record daily activities and events such as meetings, service contacts, service provision, and key decisions during the disaster response. A list like this can be kept manually, in a spreadsheet, or in a Word document to facilitate ease of entry. It is important to keep the record current throughout the disaster response and recovery phases.

Tool Owner:

Activity Date/Time: _____

Persons Involved: _____

Activity Notes: _____

Estimated Expense: _____

Activity Date/Time: _____

Persons Involved: _____

Activity Notes: _____

Estimated Expense: _____

Activity Date/Time: _____

Persons Involved: _____

Activity Notes: _____

Estimated Expense: _____

Activity Date/Time: _____

Persons Involved: _____

Activity Notes: _____

Estimated Expense: _____

Activity Date/Time: _____

Persons Involved: _____

Activity Notes: _____

Estimated Expense: _____