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## PRACTICE NOTE

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### **Planning for Individuals with Disabilities and Other Access and Functional Needs: The State of Florida Division of Emergency Management's Hurricane Access Tabletop Exercise**

#### **PRACTICE**

The State of Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) conducted the Hurricane Access Tabletop Exercise (TTX) to provide emergency management officials and functional needs support services (FNSS) organizations with an opportunity to enhance collaboration on emergency preparedness and response activities.

#### **DESCRIPTION**

##### **Background**

In early 2010, FDEM personnel recognized that local emergency management agencies may be unaware of resources available through FNSS organizations. Similarly, FNSS organizations may be unfamiliar with emergency management agencies and opportunities to collaborate. While some FNSS organizations had participated in exercises with emergency management agencies, none of these exercises focused on preparedness and response operations for populations with disabilities and other access and functional needs. As a result, FDEM personnel developed the Hurricane Access TTX to emphasize collaboration between emergency managers and FNSS organizations. FDEM personnel collaborated with National, State, and local partners to design the TTX.

##### **TTX Conduct**

On September 27 and 29, 2011, FDEM sponsored the Hurricane Access TTX in Regions 1 and 2. TTX participants included 289 individuals from the 23 county emergency management departments and more than 130 organizations. These organizations included several Centers for Independent Living, local health departments, the American Red Cross, United Way chapters, and senior centers. Participants responded to a category 2 hurricane scenario that included 25 injects. The TTX evaluated the readiness and response capabilities of FNSS organizations within the regions. The TTX did not include sheltering operations.

FDEM organizes the State into seven regions. Coordinators serving in each region provide a first line of support to the community on emergency management issues. Regions 1 and 2 comprise 23 counties in northwestern Florida.

Exercise controllers conducted the TTX using an online program. This allowed participants in multiple county emergency operations centers (EOCs) to participate across a large geographic area. The online program also reduced the cost of the TTX because participants did not have to travel to a central location. Each EOC had one individual responsible for monitoring a computer and delivering injects administered through the online program. Participants at each EOC worked with one another but not with participants at other EOCs. Individuals from local partner agencies volunteered to evaluate the exercise.

## Outcomes

As a result of the TTX, emergency management personnel learned about resources available to them through the FNSS community. Exercise injects contained links to Web sites with searchable databases of FNSS resources. For example, some links directed participants to 2-1-1 sites where they could search for resources for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. Further, one inject presented an individual with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) who required a nebulizer. The TTX directed emergency managers who were unfamiliar with COPD to authoritative online resources where they could learn about the disease and what a nebulizer is.

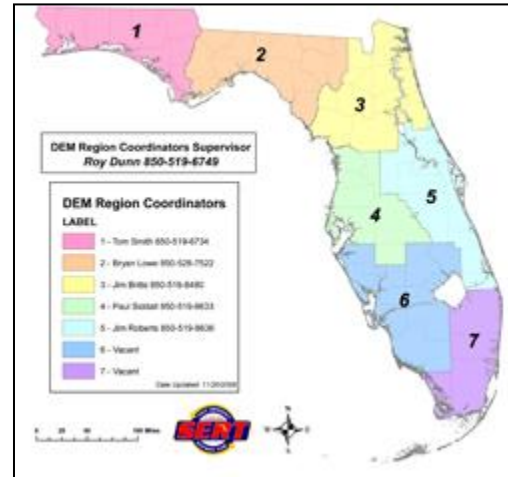
The TTX enabled FNSS organizations to become familiar with the emergency management process and how an EOC operates. For example, the TTX encouraged emergency managers to explain their plans, processes, and procedures to participants from FNSS organizations. The TTX also led to discussions about how emergency managers would notify FNSS organizations with information for situational awareness and what role organizations could play in assisting emergency managers with developing incident action plans. Emergency management personnel and FNSS organizations developed relationships during the TTX that will impact future planning processes.

The TTX prompted participants to develop solutions to issues they had previously identified but were unable to address in the past. For example, emergency managers and FNSS organizations were aware that a situation could arise in which hospitals were forced to release patients prematurely due to a lack of staffing. The TTX brought these two groups together to find solutions to this challenge.

Finally, the Be Ready Alliance Coordinating for Emergencies (BRACE) had made prior attempts to include individuals with disabilities in the emergency preparedness process. During the TTX, a representative from an organization that serves individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing approached BRACE personnel and offered to engage the organization's clients in community preparedness activities. As a result, BRACE personnel collaborated with the organization to develop Community Emergency Response Team classes that include sign language interpreters.

## Future Plans

FDEM plans to conduct the Hurricane Access TTX in the other five Florida regions. The TTX will be modified to better match the varying population densities and corresponding challenges in urban and rural counties. In addition, one exercise participant suggested that future TTXs focus on response to entire communities impacted by incidents rather than responding to individuals or a single family.



**A map of the seven FDEM regions.  
(Source: FDEM)**

BRACE serves as the Citizens Corps coordinator for Escambia County, which includes overseeing the county's Community Emergency Response Team program.

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