

Final Report of the Neighborhood Emergency Team Organization and Responsibilities Working Group

Executive Summary

The Neighborhood Emergency Team (NET) program remains an important part of the City of Portland's overall strategy for preparing citizens for disaster and supporting emergency response to such events. The health and stability of the NET program depends upon the continued leadership of NET volunteers and the ongoing support of the Portland Office of Emergency Management. As such, the implementation of these recommendations depends on a continuing commitment from NET team leaders and team members to perform tasks that promote stable governance and consistent communication. To ensure this, the working group recommends establishing a NET steering committee to provide overall management and direction to the NET program. This committee will have four standing committees – communication, training, external relations and resource management. These committees will consist of NET members representing teams in each of the neighborhood coalition areas. The NET program coordinator should be an ex officio member of the steering committee and communicate program needs and priorities to Portland OEM managers and other city officials.

Background

The NET Organization and Responsibilities Working Group was formed following an April 19, 2010 meeting of team leaders. The group was charged with reviewing arrangements for establishing and maintaining teams. Its task included exploring the variety of tasks in which NETs engage, how they organize and manage their activities, the form of support they require, and the relationships they form and maintain with one another and other groups outside the NET program. Members of the working group represented teams in each quadrant of the city and members of varying tenures and experience levels within the program. The group met eight times between May 25 and September 21, 2010. This document summarizes the findings and recommendations arising from their discussions.

Findings

1. Motivations and expectations of NET volunteers vary widely.
2. NET roles, responsibilities and expectations require clarification.
3. NET is one of many ways the community can prepare for disaster.

4. Many small neighborhood teams are preferable to a few big teams in most FMAs.
5. NET volunteers and teams play an important role in promoting preparedness.
6. Training availability, accessibility and duration inhibit NET participation and growth of teams.
7. NET volunteers need access to ongoing training to practice and build skills.
8. The 25-hour initial training requirement discourages participation.
9. Ongoing NET training should promote continued development.
10. Team leaders require guidance and support to perform their roles.
11. Training should build both individual and team capabilities.
12. NET volunteers vary in their interest in and support for ad hoc deployments and training.
13. NET governance is a responsibility that must be shared by the city and NET volunteers.
14. Promoting participation, representation and equitable distribution of labor between NET and the Office of Emergency Management requires a flexible governance structure.
15. NET volunteers require assurances and confirmation that they will not be liable in tort for claims arising from their participation in covered activities.
16. Some NET volunteers have expressed interests and abilities beyond the scope of service that may contribute to community preparedness and response.
17. The issuance of NET identification cards has proven inefficient and troublesome for volunteers and the NET coordinator alike.
18. Program records particularly related to volunteer training are limited and efforts to maintain contact databases have proven challenging and time-consuming for the NET coordinator.

Recommendations

1. Clear divisions of labor are required to ensure safe, efficient and accountable administration and operation of teams. Every team should have at least five trained members, one of whom serves as the team leader. Teams should select leaders in consultation with Portland OEM to ensure the individual selected receives appropriate training and development to perform the role successfully. Teams should also have at least one licensed amateur radio operator. In addition

to the five team members, teams may allow others who have not completed the full NET basic course to participate in training and activities. Individuals who have completed the NET orientation course and passed a police background check may join teams as additional members while waiting to participate in the NET basic course.

2. Revise Chapter 15—Emergency Code of the Portland City Code to recognize the NET program as a key part of the City’s emergency management program and clearly articulate its scope and purpose. This section should establish the mission of the NET program and provide limited indemnity for NET volunteers when performing activities consistent with the NET program’s scope of service. The NET mission should recognize the following functions:
 - a. Individual and team preparedness
 - b. Community preparedness
 - c. Community partnerships
 - d. Response to catastrophic emergencies
3. NET teams, like the Portland Office of Emergency Management, should establish and maintain partnerships with other community-based and voluntary organizations to promote disaster preparedness. Partnerships with other community-based and civic organizations promotes preparedness in many ways, some more obvious than others. Virtually any activity that promotes the formation of social networks and the sharing of skills can build a community’s capacity to meet challenges following a disaster. Groups engaged in activities that promote environmental awareness, sustainability, resource conservation, manual skills, youth development and physical fitness all contribute to resilience. Neighborhood watch groups, business districts and others with a specific focus on security and safety can be important allies in promoting individual and group preparedness. NET members often have established relationships to one or more of these groups, which means NETs are networks of networks as well as individuals. Establishing and maintaining these relationships should be an active, intentional and ongoing part of each team’s preparedness program.
4. Continue to organize and recognize teams established on a neighborhood basis and assign responsibility for supporting fire station communication to the team responsible for the area in which the station is located. The fire station communication mission should be transferred to the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) or Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) program. NET amateur radio capabilities should be deployed in support of the neighborhood response and recovery mission so information about damage and community impacts can be relayed efficiently to emergency services and city or county emergency managers as appropriate. Neighborhood-based teams should focus on providing immediate assistance to neighbors requiring medical aid, light

rescue, control of utilities, damage assessment, family reunification and other support.

5. The city should encourage and support NET volunteers and their teams to undertake community presentations and other outreach activities to other community-based organizations that allow them to practice their skills and promote disaster preparedness. Consistent with the recommendations of the NET Communications Working Group, Portland OEM should work with NET volunteers to develop and adapt standardized presentations for delivery to diverse audiences. These presentations should be designed for delivery with minimum support from Portland OEM staff. These presentations should include an overview of the NET program, Are You Ready?, Know Your Neighborhood and topical presentations on essentials such as assembling a disaster preparedness kit, making a plan, staying informed and reducing your risk.
6. The city should partner with a community college or other vocational education or training institution to deliver an articulated training curriculum that provide opportunities for graduated participation in NET activities. The limited availability of Portland Fire & Rescue personnel and facilities make it difficult to expand the capacity of NET training in response to demand and limit the locations at which it can be delivered. The delivery of skill-based training and continuing education is a specialty of the community college system. With the establishment of Campus CERT programs at several educational institutions in the metropolitan area, an opportunity now exists to develop an ongoing training relationship with these institutions to expand access, ensure quality and improve efficiency. Portland OEM should pursue discussions with these institutions and Citizen Corps partners as a priority.
7. A new 3 to 4-hour course covering basic preparedness skills should be developed to introduce citizens to the NET program and promote individual and household preparedness. Like many other communities, Portland has found many citizens would become more active and involved in preparedness activities if they could do so gradually or with a limited up-front commitment. Jurisdictions that have adopted an incremental or articulated approach to training their volunteers have found that recruitment and retention improves when volunteers can begin participating after completing an introductory course that reviews basic preparedness concepts and an introduction to community preparedness. This material is consistent with the content included in the Are You Ready? (CERT Module 1) and Know Your Neighborhood programs. Portland OEM should make arrangements for the delivery of this program on a frequent basis and allow citizens to affiliate and train with established teams without gaining full membership provided they pass a police background check. Teams should take the opportunity of affiliating trained citizens to encourage further training and development through the completion of the remainder of the basic NET course.
8. A comprehensive and phased approach to training should be developed to provide initial orientation, basic NET certification, advanced NET skills, specialized NET

- skills and team leadership training. Building on the delivery of an initial 3 to 4-hour course in discrete increments would facilitate ongoing training of NET volunteers by providing a clear development path. The preferred curriculum would consist of five phases with each phase composed of appropriate modules.
- a. Phase I – Introduction to Emergency Preparedness
 - b. Phase II – Basic NET Course
 - c. Phase III – Advanced NET Course
 - d. Phase IV – Specialized NET Skills
 - e. Phase V – Team Leader Training
9. Team leader training should emphasize the communication, leadership and training skills necessary to motivate adult learners. Leaders should take at a minimum the following independent study courses offered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Emergency Management Institute. All of these courses are available online.
- a. IS-240 Leadership and Influence
 - b. IS-241-Decision-making and Problem-solving
 - c. IS-242 Effective Communication
 - d. IS-244 Developing and Managing Volunteers
 - e. IS-288 Roles of Voluntary Agencies in Emergency Management
10. NET training should recognize the graduated acquisition of skills consistent with varying levels of responsibilities and commitment to ongoing development.
- a. Advanced NET
 - b. Specialized NET
 - i. Amateur radio operator
 - ii. Shelter operations
 - iii. Public information management
 - iv. Logistics
 - v. Emergency coordination center support

11. NET volunteers should train together in their teams and with neighboring teams at regular intervals using consistent training materials that incorporate clear training outcomes and performance criteria. The frequency and content of team training has a significant effect on volunteer interest and team retention. Team leaders often feel ill-equipped to lead training, especially when they have no more or less experience than other members. Teams have demonstrated the efficacy of working together, however, to share skills, build camaraderie and discuss scenarios that make training more interesting and rewarding for everyone. Teams with successful training programs have demonstrated their willingness to share their materials with others and work together with other volunteers to develop new training outlines and scenarios.
12. The City should avoid accepting missions for or encouraging the deployment of individuals, as opposed to teams, for ad hoc assignments in support of outside agencies or organizations. Most requests for NET volunteers to respond to incidents have involved agencies outside the City of Portland. These responses have often come at short notice and involved requests for skills outside the NET curriculum. In many instances, the timing of these requests has made it difficult to attract the critical mass of volunteers required to meet the mission assignment. Volunteers can benefit from exposure to real-life incidents, and have expressed a willingness to support emergency responders when needed but should be seen primarily as a team or group of individuals that trains, equips and responds together as a unit. NETs should maintain their neighborhood as the primary focus of their response activities.
13. The City should establish a NET steering committee with four standing subcommittees: communications, training, external relations and resource management for the purpose of advising and assisting the NET program coordinator and supporting NETs and NET program volunteers. Membership of the steering committee and the subcommittees should consist of NET volunteers representing teams in each of the neighborhood coalition areas. The NET program coordinator or another Portland OEM staff member designated by the director of emergency management should serve as an ex officio member of the steering group and all standing subcommittees. The steering committee will be responsible for determining the scope of each subcommittee and overseeing their workplans and tasks.
14. Representation on standing committees should encourage participation widely representative of the city's diversity and the diversity of interests and experience within the NET program. The diversity of Portland's population is among its greatest assets. The membership of standing subcommittees and the NET steering committee should both reflect and promote this strength. Representation based on neighborhood coalition groupings is viewed as the best way of encouraging this diversity of representation. Nevertheless, the steering committee should work with the NET program coordinator to encourage the broadest possible participation in decision-making consistent with the best interests of the entire community and program participants.

15. The City should provide for the indemnification and representation of NET volunteers in the event they become subject to claims for simple negligence arising from the performance of duties consistent with the program's scope of service. The City should amend Title 15 of the Portland City Code to recognize Neighborhood Emergency Teams as part of the City of Portland's emergency management program. This recognition should include explicit indemnity and guarantees of legal representation against claims arising from actions performed as emergency workers and city volunteers within the scope of program activities consistent with the Oregon Tort Claims Act. NET volunteers understand that the performance of duties arising from their acceptance of standards of care consistent with training beyond the NET program's scope of service subject them to protection under the Good Samaritan doctrine and review of their actions consistent with other legal standards.

16. Teams and team members interested in and capable of providing services in excess of or beyond those considered within the defined NET scope of service, i.e., light rescue, shelter operations, logistics or communication, should be affiliated and subject to the direction and control of the appropriate service delivery agent, e.g., Portland Fire & Rescue, Red Cross, ARES, etc. Many NET volunteers wear more than one hat as disaster volunteers. Some teams have expressed interest in developing and extending their capabilities to take advantage of opportunities to serve the community in capacities beyond the Net program's scope. The City recognizes and affirms the impulse to serve the community, and wishes to encourage voluntary service that makes the best use of the capabilities of interested and engaged citizens. However, the NET program's success depends upon maintaining a clearly defined role and mission. To that end, individuals and teams that wish to participate in activities beyond the NET program's scope of service, especially activities arising during phases other than initial response, will not be prevented from doing so. The City will encourage individuals and groups to affiliate with and participate under the supervision of an appropriate agency or authority.

17. The City should discontinue the practice of issuing individual photo identification cards to NET volunteers and replace them with a qualification-based credentialing system that provides documentation and recognition of individual roles and skills. NET volunteers do not require identification to perform their duties. The issuance of individual photo identification cards conveys no particular privileges to holders nor benefits to City officials concerned with the integrity and accountability of the program as a whole. Volunteers do, however, need a way of documenting their qualifications and indicating their association with the NET program. Team leaders and program managers need a way of distinguishing the individual qualifications and abilities of volunteers to perform specific duties. To this end, the Net program coordinator should work with the proposed steering committee to develop, design and implement a credentialing system that provides a means of documenting individual roles and qualifications consistent with the program's scope of service.

18. The City should join the state Department of Human Services SERV-OR program as soon as possible and use this system as a means of encouraging individuals to maintain their own contact information. The proposed system provides a robust and secure platform for managing volunteer information. Portland OEM will take responsibility for loading individual records, including training status. Volunteers will verify that the information entered is correct and bring any inconsistencies to the attention of Portland OEM staff. After confirming the accuracy of individual information, the system will send reminders at regular intervals for volunteers to update or confirm their information and change their individual passwords. Once implemented, this system will also provide a platform for sending alerts and updates to NET volunteers by email and text messages during exercises and emergencies.