

## Mind the Gap: Planning for Our Real Communities

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**M**ind the Gap is a slogan well known to Londoners, reminding them to carefully consider the space between the train and the platform. It can serve us well in emergency management if we're willing to examine things differently.

Have you ever thought about having your family members review your Emergency Operations Plan? How about looking at your plan through the eyes of the very community members you serve? For ten minutes, "stop being you."

### Better Serving Our Communities

First, this article is not a criticism of your plan or the work you do, but more to provoke thought about how we can better serve our communities. Most of our plans are based on template documents that were produced as a one-size-fits-all solution or have been passed down from predecessors. To quote FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate, "We have been planning for *easy*, but we need to plan for *real*."

Do you know the demographics of your community? How many children are in your community? On the national average, children comprise 25 percent of a community. How many individuals have access and functional needs, or are transportation dependent? What about our senior or "experienced" individuals? By the time you get done, you will find that most of our plans address the needs of the few in our community and not the whole.

### Incorporating the Needs of Our Communities as a Whole

Hopefully, after reading this article, inclusion will be the new

buzzword. What do I mean? The FEMA Comprehensive Planning Guide (CPG) 101, Version 2, would be a great way to start incorporating the needs of our communities as a whole. Forget about special annexes or "adding it to the back of the plan." To quote Marcie Roth, FEMA's Director of the Office of Disability Integration and Coordination, "bake it in."

### Closing the Gap

How do we start closing the gap? Let's start with the Principles of Emergency Management. (See [www.iaem.com/EMPrinciples](http://www.iaem.com/EMPrinciples).)

#### ■ Principle #4 is *integrated*.

Emergency managers ensure unity of effort among all levels of government and all elements of a community.

#### ■ Principle #5 is *collaborative*.

Emergency managers create and sustain broad and sincere relationships among individuals and organizations to encourage trust, advocate a team atmosphere, build consensus, and facilitate communications.

We need to engage the stakeholders and work with trusted networks. Does it make sense for us to set up and maintain registries? Might it make more sense to engage programs that have daily contact and interact with our citizens who fall into the at-risk population categories?

FEMA's Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (ODIC) recently released "Guidance on Planning for Integration of Functional Needs Support Services in General Population Shelters" (Nov 2010).<sup>1</sup> ODIC continues to add resources to their Web page<sup>2</sup> and should be utilized as we move forward.

The National Commission on Children and Disasters, established by Congress in 2007, released reports in 2009 and 2010 identifying gaps in our nation's capabilities related to disaster planning, response and recovery for children.<sup>3</sup>

As we work to close gaps, there are several volunteer organizations that have a child-specific focus during disasters that can and will assist your community, not only during the response but also during the planning phase. FEMA has established a Children's Working Group to provide a focus that looks to address gaps. In June 2010, FEMA's Emergency Management Institute released the IS-366 Planning for the Needs of Children in Disaster course, which can be helpful as you look at your plans.

If you are interested in receiving e-mail updates from FEMA pertaining to children and disasters, you can do so at [www.fema.gov/help/getemail.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/help/getemail.shtm) (choose the "Children and Disasters" option) or [www.fema.gov/about/cwg.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/about/cwg.shtm).

### Conclusion

IAEM-USA has a Special Needs Caucus and a Children in Disasters Ad Hoc Committee. These groups of IAEM-USA members have the opportunity to share best practices and can help to develop workable solutions.

*Mind the Gap* is not just a slogan or the title of an article, but a concept to embrace. You may be an office of one, but *we* as a profession have always embraced collaboration. Together we can meet the challenges ahead.



<sup>1</sup> [http://www.fema.gov/pdf/about/odc/fnss\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/pdf/about/odc/fnss_guidance.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fema.gov/about/odc/>

<sup>3</sup> National Commission on Children in Disasters 2010 Report to the President and Congress: <http://www.childrenanddisaster.acf.hhs.gov>