

National Emergency Technology Guard Pilot Program Summary Austin, TX

NET Guard Program Description

NET Guard is a program that develops teams of volunteers with verified relevant expertise to support IT and communications systems and services. NET Guard programs are tested as local assets and deployed through pre-disaster agreement with local Emergency Management for public and nonprofit entities providing essential services. Teams are established and maintained by governmental or private sector sponsors or both. Service examples include: mobile capability for shelters, volunteer reception center sites, evacuation staging areas, public internet access for recovery; local support for using new technologies for disaster preparedness, response, recovery including social media for public communication and situational awareness and crisis mapping; liaison with virtual volunteers for new technology tools and resources for response and recovery; temporary systems and communication back up for EOC or critical government functions. The NET Guard Team is designed as a local asset following the Citizen Corps partner program model and as a means to surge additional resources into impacted areas through mutual aid.

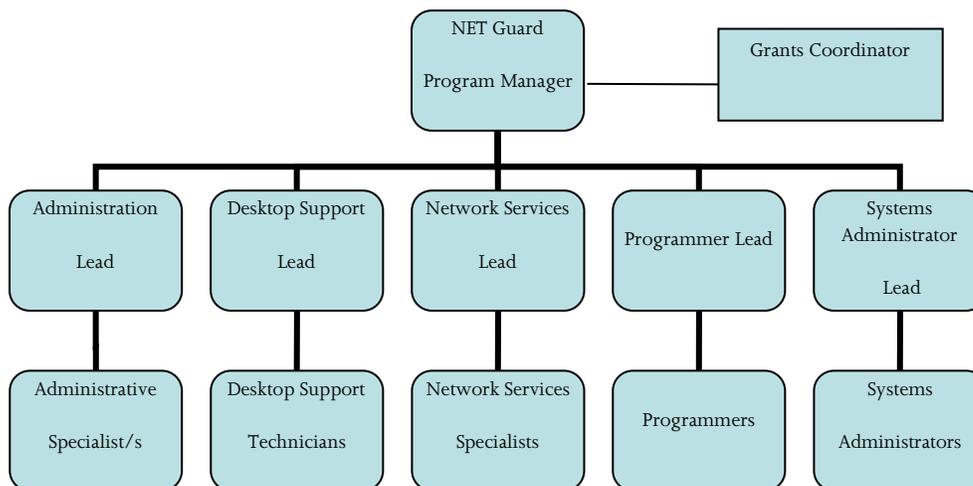
The City of Austin

The Austin Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) is located in a technology-driven socioeconomic region. There are major research and manufacturing companies from the technology sector, which allows the Austin UASI to have a large pool of potential volunteers NET Guard for a program.

Austin NET Guard: A Snapshot

Purpose: The mission of the City of Austin National Emergency Technology Guard (NET Guard) program is to train, equip, and prepare volunteers to set up technology that would support a backup Emergency Operations Center, a Volunteer Resource Center, or Shelter. Stemming from the City of Austin's Technology Response Team (TRT), the team now covers the entire Austin UASI.

Organization: The organizational structure of the NET Guard team is as follows:



Citizen Corps Affiliation: A briefing meeting was held with the State of Texas Citizen Corps Council prior to implementation. Texas CERT served as the main partner for recruiting volunteers, basic CERT training is required for NET Guard volunteers, and background checks for volunteers.

Operational Support: With reference to emergency operations, Austin NET Guard volunteers support Emergency Support Function #2 – Communications. The NET Guard team adheres to a designated activation protocol.

Roles and Responsibilities

Prior to the forming of the NET Guard program, there was the Technology Response Team (TRT) which was a technology management volunteer organization managed by Harris Newman. TRT was formed as a result of hurricanes Katrina and Rita when the technological resources of the City were overwhelmed and overburdened. These hurricanes and subsequent ones provided real time awareness of technological needs and capability gaps during an emergency and directly informed the NET Guard process in Austin.

The primary needs to be serviced by Austin NET Guard were identified as follows:

- Enable rapid deployment/implementation of teams and equipment to volunteer resource centers to enable shelter managers to process volunteers
- Enable rapid deployment/implementation of teams and equipment to shelters and critical facilities for use by shelter managers in registering evacuees and for use by the evacuees to seek assistance
- Enable rapid deployment/implementation of teams and equipment to critical facilities for use by incident command and the Joint Information Center
- Provide assistance with the set up of technology in order to free up City of Austin Communications and Technology Management personnel for other critical issues
- Provide technology assistance for regional partners in the Austin UASI area who also participate in guiding and sheltering coastal evacuees

The following roles were identified for the NET Guard team:

- Support IT services to city and partners
- Support voice and computer/network for city and partners
- Provide social media support during evacuation and other disaster scenarios
- Provide remote technical support like GIS or modified applications during a disaster

Training

Austin NET Guard volunteers were required to complete the following trainings:

- Basic CERT Training
- Initial Net Guard training to describe the program and its functionality
- Initial training on the satellite equipment
- Position-specific training (varying based on position)

Volunteers had the option of taking training on F4W satellite equipment, which covered an overview and setup. Each participant also configured and setup the system.

Program Implementation

Recruitment: The NET Guard program in Austin advertised the opportunity through an Austin NET Guard website that was linked from the Homeland Security and Emergency Management homepage, and via public access TV.

Selection: Upon resume submission, City of Austin Communications and Technology employees reviewed and appropriately placed volunteers on a team based on their experience. Recruitment was targeted to Austin CERTs, Central Texas Citizen Corps volunteers, and the InfraGuard (local Austin chapter).

Credentialing: Background checks were accomplished via the CERT background check process, which is required before any volunteer is granted CERT volunteer status. By using CERT membership as a prerequisite to being in the NET Guard program all NET Guard volunteers were checked. The CERT background check process is managed by the City of Austin's Human Resource department using a Federal Bureau of Investigations application. Volunteers must have their background checked once a year. Volunteers who lived outside Texas in the last 10 years must also have their fingerprints taken and this is performed by a third party.

Integration: The NET Guard program is currently being integrated into appropriate local emergency plans following a comprehensive briefing to all regional Emergency Management Coordinators. A mutual aid agreement has been signed with one of four neighboring jurisdictions.

Partnerships

Austin NET Guard benefitted from the following strategic partnerships:

- CERT - 12/8/2008
- The American Red Cross - 11/24/2008
- Travis County Amateur Radio Emergency Service – 1/23/2009
- Citizen Corps Council – 11/20/2008
- Austin UASI - 11/19/2008
- InfraGuard – 12/11/08
- Texas State Administrative Agency - 11/24/2008
- The City of Austin Communications and Technology Management (CTM) department

Activity to Date

Although the NET Guard team was activated for data entry into a flu shot database and for a cyber exercise held by the HSEM. These activities were scheduled during regular work hours and did not result in volunteers.

The NET Guard participated in two additional exercises designed for NET Guard. NET Guard training and skills testing; one on July 25, 2009, and on August 2010

Lessons Learned/ Recommendations

The following are recommendations for those localities considering starting a NET Guard program:

- Incorporate the NET Guard program into current emergency management/preparedness volunteer groups, such as CERT and Citizen Corps
- Incorporated NET Guard teams into local/regional EOPs according to their function

- Address challenges in the following areas: volunteer recruitment for events and drills, sustainable funding, and approvals from jurisdictional councils and committees

Contact Information

PROGRAM MANAGER: Harris Newman, CBCP, CISSP

GRANT ADMINISTRATOR: Aoife Longmore, Homeland Security and Emergency Management