
Section 4. Understand Your Local Community

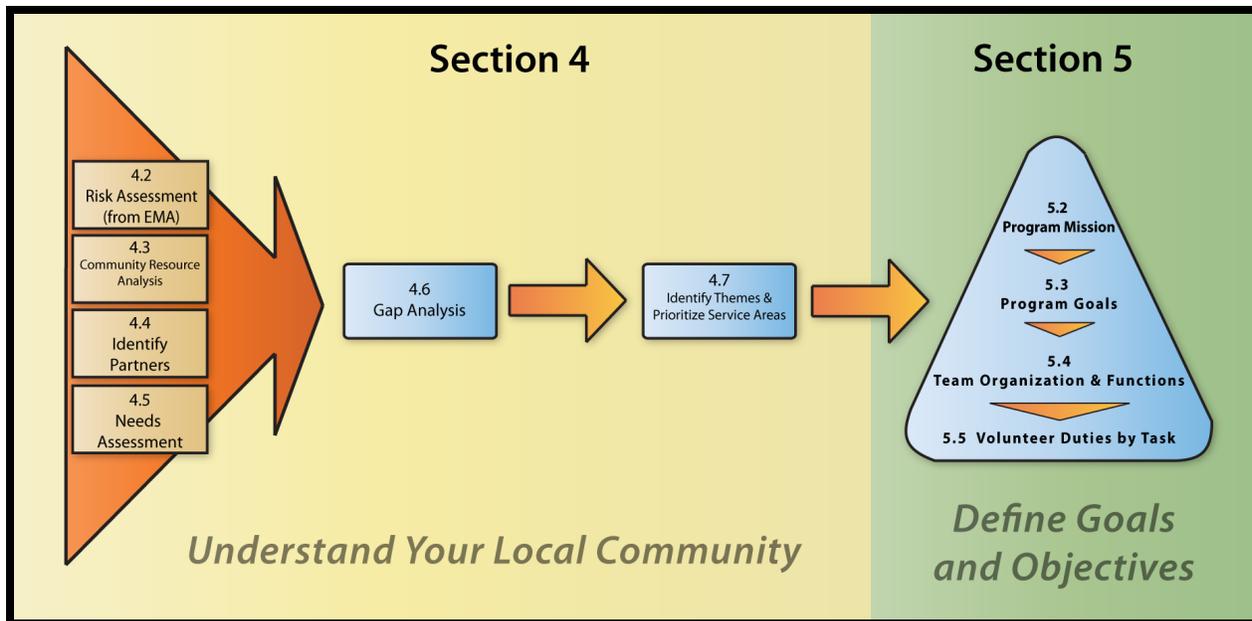
4.1.Overview

This section helps you determine the disaster technology and communication needs of your community and functions that a NET Guard Program can support. Understanding your community will help you:

- Catalog existing risks, needs, capabilities, partners, and gaps
- Justify resources
- Promote collaboration among local agencies, organizations, and businesses
- Support decision making+



Sections 4 and 5 focus on understanding your community and defining the goals for your NET Guard Program. The graphic below illustrates how the steps relate to each other. When performing the assessment and analysis described in Sections 4 and 5, be sure to keep the topics focused on potential ITC services. The program development in these sections will determine the defining features of the Program – the services that will be provided, the technical functions the volunteers will perform to support the services, how the volunteers will be organized to deliver the services.



4.2. Review your Community's Multi-Hazard Risk Assessment

Begin your community assessment with an understanding of the types of threats and hazards your community could face, and the ways these hazards can affect people, infrastructure, and businesses – particularly data and voice communication. The NET Guard collaborative planning team should include or coordinate with local emergency management officials who are subject matter experts and understand the kinds of hazards faced in the community. In addition to local experts and plans, FEMA has national hazard information available on the FEMA web site. State emergency management web sites provide information on hazards in the state and region and what to expect from hazard impact.

Next, think about the ways in which a trained NET Guard team can prepare for and respond to these impacts. Understanding the types of hazards that can potentially affect the area in which NET Guard Program operates makes it easier to determine the consequences and ITC gaps that may occur during and after a disaster.

4.3. Research Existing Community Resources, Emergency Operations Plans

Once you have reviewed your community's risk analysis and considered each hazard's potential impact on ITC and other information, communication or technology needs, begin identifying your community's resources, its existing emergency operations plans, and emergency response systems, both public and private, to determine how a NET Guard Program will be most effective in providing additional resources to fill gaps. Documenting the review of your community's

resources will be valuable when forming community partnerships, explained further in “4.4 Identify External Partners.” Areas to consider analyzing in your community review include:

- Emergency operations plans
- Emergency response and recovery support organizations
- Existing government and business continuity of operations plans
- Partnerships and organizations supporting collaborative planning and support for resilience, particularly the role of ITC including: Citizen Corps Councils, local chapters of InfraGard, organizations supporting response and recovery such as Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters, economic development partnerships, local chapters of the Association of Contingency Planners, and other similar private-sector groups and associations
- Amateur Radio clubs and their function within the emergency operations plans
- ITC support in place for organizations and their emergency response, for example, the IT support team for the local chapter of the American Red Cross, IT support for a local Medical Reserve Corps
- Community and neighborhood civic, faith based and service organizations and other communication and support networks necessary to resume daily activities for recovery

Reviewing emergency plans for your community organizations provides a good understanding of the function these groups perform in an emergency. It also shows the areas that already have or may need additional ITC support needs during a disaster or require a surge of support from the NET Guard Program. Be sure to consider recovery planning and organizations as well since many ITC functions may help the transition between response and recovery.

When building your NET Guard Program, it is important to build on the existing community strengths. Many communities have active Citizen Corps Councils, CERT Programs, Medical Reserve Corps Programs, COADS, American Red Cross chapters, Volunteer Centers, or other organizations. NET Guard Programs have found success working with these groups to aid with identifying community needs, volunteer recruitment and management, and long-term sustainability.

4.4. Identify External Partners

As you build the NET Guard Program, the circle of external partners will increase. Performing an initial assessment of your community’s resources provides you with a list of existing emergency management, response, and recovery organizations within your community. Working with these individuals to support their priorities and build on strengths helps prevent duplication or competing with existing capabilities. Publically and privately based NET Guard Programs must collaborate and work with local government emergency management to ensure support, integration with the Emergency Operation Plan and to avoid duplication of efforts.

Forming and maintaining partnerships is a continuous process. Periodically brainstorm with your collaborative planning team, asking the following questions:

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- If a disaster were to occur, which community groups would need the most assistance from ITC support and would benefit most from a NET Guard team?
 - Which local efforts are underway that NET Guard can help support?
 - What additional roles can NET Guard perform during a disaster, and are there groups that can help with these roles?
 - Are there any organizations that may require more-specialized kinds of ITC support, such as ones that assist people who speak languages other than English, persons with functional and access needs or disabilities, or people with less access to communication during a disaster?

Examples of the above may include working with shelters that would like to provide internet access, using online translation tools to translate forms and documents needed to begin disaster recovery, or working with a faith-based group to track community needs and resources electronically.

Always look out for potential partners with a shared mission or complementary function. Local businesses have resources to help support the NET Guard Program may also be facilitate recruiting volunteers from among their employees. Continually searching and engaging partners is important as it can take time for people to realize the different ways that a NET Guard Program can contribute to the community. People who understand both technology and how technology can support community emergency functions are particularly critical to helping identify potential community needs that can benefit from technology solutions.

A good approach to forming partnerships is finding ways that the NET Guard Program can augment an existing response or recovery organization. Many communities have traditionally focused primarily on ITC support to government response. Consider the ITC needs of service providers required to support broader public response and community recovery, including support to non-profits or direct support to the public, or interactive communication with the public.

4.5. Perform a Needs Assessment

After identifying key partners and potential service recipients, the collaborative planning team should conduct a needs assessment incorporating an understanding of the community, local hazards and their impacts, and emergency response and recovery plans. Following are some basic steps to conduct a needs assessment:

1. Identify individuals and organizations that will take part in the assessment based on their role in disasters or their knowledge of ITC needs
2. Determine a range of methods for identifying public and private sector service needs including a work session with representatives from multiple groups, interviews of key organization leaders, meetings with organizations by sector or role in disasters, and written or electronic surveys.

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3. Conduct the assessment and document the assessment findings.
 4. Prepare a report summarizing identified needs with recommendations.

4.5.1. Identify the Assessment Community

A good needs assessment involves and has commitment from all relevant individuals and organizations within the community, including:

- Emergency management
- Local government, especially representation from the IT department, the public information official
- Voluntary emergency response and recovery organizations
- Businesses and business associations
- Civic, Faith-based and other organizations providing human services support
- Neighborhood associations and others

A good strategy is to start the assessment process with the partners identified in “4.4 Identify External Partners” along with members of your collaborative planning team and local government officials. These stakeholders can use their circles of influence to expand the reach of the assessment. An inclusive and comprehensive needs assessment is more likely to result in the development of a NET Guard Program that focuses on key priorities and critical gaps to deliver services that are of strong value to the community.

4.5.2. Determine the Needs Assessment Process

Although all members of the planning team should participate in the discussions, it will facilitate the needs assessment process if one or two individuals take responsibility for designing, conducting and reporting on the results for the planning team. There are various approaches for conducting the needs assessment. They include:

- Researching existing data, including disaster after-action reports - The assessment can draw from after action reports and similar documents that captured information after an exercise, disaster, or during an independent plan or preparedness review. The lessons learned from past exercises and disasters can outline in detail the areas in most need of ITC support.
- Group discussions on topics related to NET Guard functions and the use of technology during disasters
- Interviews with subject matter experts from response and recovery as well as potential recipients of NET Guard services - For example, conduct interviews with the local emergency manager, government IT coordinator, and volunteer response and recovery groups within the community. This approach provides in-depth, qualitative information for the NET Guard Program

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- Surveys and questionnaires – For example, send surveys to local businesses, faith-based groups, neighborhood associations, or individuals in the community who can contribute or collaborate with the NET Guard Program. This approach provides a broader insight into the community

Surveys, interviews, and discussions should focus on identifying known ITC challenges a community has faced or may face during a disaster, and ways that a NET Guard Program can help address those needs. It is challenging to ask questions that are both open-ended yet specific enough to prompt individuals representing organizations with different mission areas to think about disasters. Addressing the community's needs for incidents such as power outages, cell phone interruption, high demand for data and voice services, or other interruptions requires understanding the public needs as well as input from individuals with knowledge of ITC. Spend time developing questions for interviews and surveys to both gain an understanding of the topics and terminology and engage in follow-up questions and discussion. Before conducting the assessment, it is a good idea to test the questions on a small group of individuals or by an evaluation from a subject matter expert.

Consider how best to record information to make it easiest to analyze and summarize for the collaborative team. After the surveys and interviews are complete, compile all of the data into an easily manageable format such as a list or database.

4.5.3. Prepare a Report with Recommendations

Since the NET Guard program development will refer to the needs assessment as an important base for designing the program, it is worth preparing a formal report for presenting to the planning team and the community. Even a simple needs assessment report should include elements such as:

- A brief overview
- List of participants in the needs assessment process
- A description of the assessment and analysis process
- 5-10 of the top concerns, findings, or observations
- An explanation of how the findings will shape the development of the NET Guard Program

The process does not need to be complex and the report does not need to be long to be effective. A one-page list that identifies the types of services such as voice, data support, computer networking, or mapping and the potential recipients is sufficient to outline the findings of the needs assessment process. Present and discuss the report's findings in a meeting with the NET Guard Program's collaborative planning team, partners, and representatives of all participants of the needs assessment process.

4.6. Perform a Gap Analysis

Once the NET Guard Collaborative planning team has reviewed the community's risk assessment, documented the community's resources, identified partners, and analyzed the community's ITC needs during and following a disaster, the next step is synthesizing the information into a gap analysis. A gap analysis simply reviews the information collected and identified areas in need of additional support.

Since a discussion of needs frequently focuses naturally on gaps, the people interviewed and surveyed as part of the needs assessment are likely to identify areas where there are gaps in existing emergency response and recovery support. Interviews and surveys can include questions to identify needs, gaps and priorities as part of the same process.

Examining gaps highlights the challenges that the community faces providing communication and information technology services to support preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a disaster. The gap review by the planning team should consider and decide:

- Of the listed gaps, which gaps can a NET Guard Program bridge with trained volunteers?
- Will the NET Guard Program be able to obtain the resources required to fill the particular gap?
- What other governmental and non-governmental partners will the NET Guard Program have to collaborate with to bridge the identified gap?
- What gaps are high priorities?
- What high priority gaps can NET Guard fill most easily for immediate benefit?

For example, the collaborative planning team may find that ITC support is available for shelter operations communications but does not include services to residents in the shelter for family reunification, access to disaster assistance programs and websites, or other recovery efforts. The gap analysis may reveal that trained ITC staff supporting Emergency Support Function #6, Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing, and Human Services, the local chapter of the American Red Cross or the Medical Reserve Corps is limited. This identifies support for communications for shelter residents as a gap that NET Guard volunteers could fill. In addition to providing trained staff, the NET Guard team would need to obtain laptops and network access in order to provide these services.

At the end of the gap analysis, the collaborative planning team should have a comprehensive understanding of the community's emergency ITC needs, the specific functions needed to bridge the gaps, and the service areas that are priorities for the NET Guard Program functions.

4.7. Identify Themes and Prioritize Service Areas

The collaborative planning team should now have a list of disaster ITC gaps within the community. The next step is to begin looking for similarities between these gaps and finding trends and themes. When reviewing the themes and potential service areas of the NET Guard

Program, the list should not be a “wish-list” of everything that the NET Guard Program can potentially accomplish. Instead, it should relate to the results of the needs assessment, risk analysis, and the capabilities that the collaborative planning team firmly believes the NET Guard Program can provide. Consultation with local government emergency management officials can help determine priorities.

The top themes identified become the NET Guard Program’s service areas. Service areas are broad areas of support that the NET Guard Program can provide. Consider the list of prioritized service areas a “living” document that continues to develop as the NET Guard Program grows. Initially, the collaborative planning team may only target a few top priorities. However, as the program grows, review the list periodically to identify additional areas that may augment the program’s initial scope.

4.8. Tools to Help Understand Your Local Community

List below are Tool Kit items relating to this section of the NET Guard Guide.

Title or Description	File Name	Public/Private
California CRA Bay Area NET Guard Working Group Needs Assessment Survey Presentation	Bay Area NET Guard - Overview of Needs Assessment Survey.ppt	Either
NET Guard Tool Kit: Beginning Questions for a NET Guard Needs Assessment.ppt	Beginning Questions for a NET Guard Needs Assessment.ppt	Either
Overview on engaging the whole community by CARRI	Engaging the Full Fabric to Build Resilience (CARRI).pptx	Either