

National Emergency Technology Guard Pilot Program Summary, City of Hamilton Indiana

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.

Hamilton County

Hamilton County is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. It has taken a proactive role in local emergency management and its outreach to private industry in its efforts to plan, prepare, respond to, and recover from significant events. Hamilton County has also created various public and private sector partnerships which have built strong relationships between the county government and local business.

Hamilton County NET Guard: A Snapshot

Purpose: The NET Guard program will play a significant role as it establishes a base of volunteer operations and resources to aid in the reestablishment of information technology and communication services in an emergency situation.

Organization: Initial Hamilton County establishment guidance was overseen by county leadership and a steering committee was first identified from the communications and IT public sectors by the Emergency Management Director. Additional volunteer communications support exists with two groups: Hamilton County Amateur Radio Emergency Service (HCARES) and Hamilton County Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (HCRACES). Both are described as licensed amateur radio operators. The NET Guard team is activated by local Emergency Management. However, in the case of both the IT teams and the Communications team, they are deployed by the Emergency Management Agency (EMA) but not necessarily always for the exclusive benefit of the EMA. The NET Guard Team has a Team Leader who will be under the direction of the Hamilton County Emergency Management Director. The Team Leader is assisted by two Support Unit Leads (Communications and Information Technology). The Communications and Technology Units both consist of two support units.

Operational Support: With reference to emergency operations, the Hamilton NET Guard Volunteer Communications Team supports the Emergency Support Function (ESF) 2 –

Communications. The IT Team supports ESF 2 and others by providing desktop and networking support for the Communications team and any additional on-site requirements for the supporting agency.

Roles and Responsibilities

To conduct a needs assessment, an initial steering committee was identified from the communications and Information Technology public sectors. The team was identified by the Emergency Management director of Hamilton County, and was made up of communications directors and IT directors from the surrounding areas as well as other experts.

Following multiple meetings with this steering committee to discuss the functions and services and needs the NET Guard team would support and fulfill, the designated missions and capabilities of the NET Guard team were decided to be:

- Provide a trained and credentialed deployable volunteer group that can be requested by EMA and provide to a requesting ESF communication or information technology services within Indiana Homeland District 5
- Technology Unit
 - Provide technology support as needed outside of full repair or reconstruction of public and private sector proprietary information management systems or other IT non-county critical systems
 - Windows based desktop and server support, networking, Microsoft based application support, and basic security requirements
- Communications Unit
 - Provide a self-contained ability to provide voice communications within a 10 mile radius operational area via cross band repeating over VHF/UHF
 - Provide short range and long range voice and digital communications via HF.
 - Provide digital communications as required by requesting jurisdiction
 - Provide internet based amateur radio services IRLP and Echolink abilities, which assumes internet availability is provided
 - Licensed Technician or General amateur radio operator by ARRL

Training

Hamilton County NET Guard volunteers are required to complete the following trainings on their own prior to become eligible for activation:

Both Teams:

NIMS – Incident Command System (ICS) Courses

- ICS - 100-700
- ICS - 200
- ICS - 800
- IS-7 Citizens Guide to Disaster Assistance
- IS – 288 Role of Voluntary Agencies in Emergency Management

Communications Team:

- Minimum Technician’s License – Amateur Radio Relay League (ARRL)
- Preferred General’s License – ARRL

- Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Course, Level 1 – ARRL, to be completed through self-study of provided materials

IT Team:

- Appropriate certification or reference exhibiting proficiency in the following areas of potential responsibility:
 - Microsoft Certification
 - Desktop Support
 - Server Support
 - Network Support
 - Wireless Communications
- Meet minimum level requirements for either Network Manager or IT Computer Specialist as defined by the FEMA Information Technology (IT) Cadre Disaster Workforce Credentialing Plan – August 2009

The following trainings are provided to team members before activation:

Both Teams:

- NET Program Orientation working session
- NET Guard Operation Plan and Deployment and Integration Guide working session

Communications Team:

- NET Guard digital radio requirements – exhibit proficiency or attend a NET Guard workshop on digital radio. Specific topics include:
 - Packet Radio hardware requirements
 - Radio Teletype (RTTY)
 - Phase Shift Keying, 31 Baud (PSK31)
 - WINLink 2000 – Global Radio Email System
 - WINMOR - WINlink Message Over Radio

Program Implementation

Recruitment: NET Guard has sent multiple outreach flyers to organizations which are believed to play a role in providing volunteers for a NET Guard team. Recruiting efforts focused on both a mailer campaign and contacts through associations. Both of these efforts were conducted with the identified partners. Many respondents to the flyer had a very strong IT background and provided a base of volunteers that were more cross-functional and could meet the mission requests with a smaller number of volunteers.

Selection: Many of the respondents and potential volunteers had a very strong IT background. An evidence based credentialing system was used to select positions and identify level of competence of each volunteer.

Credentialing: Credentialing is an evidence-based system which is used to define levels of proficiency for all Hamilton County Emergency Management Agency NET Guard Program Team members. This process for Hamilton County NET Guard uses identified position titles and monitor/evaluate whether individuals meet the work performance standards required to

execute the tasks associated within a position's proficiency level. Members are required to have a background check, and complete all required support team member training, with different job types requiring different trainings. Team members must also demonstrate leadership abilities and maintain an active role with the NET Guard program by attending meetings, trainings, exercises or actual deployments as required.

NIMS modeling: The National Incident Management System provides a unified approach to incident command, standard command and management structures and with an emphasis on preparedness, mutual aid and resource management. Hamilton County has adopted NIMS Incident Command System (ICS) as its organizational structure to be implemented to effectively and efficiently command and manage incidents. The NET Guard team operates under this system during deployment.

Integration: The primary agency that NET Guard supports, Hamilton County Health Department, has an MOU with NET Guard and has been integrated in their Emergency Operations Procedures. Indiana Department of Homeland Security is also aware of the Hamilton County NET Guard and the awareness led to NET Guard participation in National Level Exercise 2011 (NLE11)

Partnerships

Hamilton County Indiana NET Guard benefitted from the following strategic partnerships in terms of organizational guidance and sponsorship:

- Indiana State Citizen Corps Program Manager
- Indiana Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (INVOAD)
- Amateur Radio Relay League (ARRL)
- Hamilton County Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)
- Hamilton County Health Department
- Indiana Department of Homeland Security
- District Planning Council, Communications Section, Amateur Radio Working Group, District 5, Indiana Department of Homeland Security

Activity to Date

The NET Guard Program in Indiana was asked to participate in the newly formed Amateur Radio Working Group to leverage the assessments and capabilities identified within the NET Guard program. Also based on awareness within the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, the Hamilton County Indiana NET Guard Team provided support to the Indiana SimCell for the 2011 National Level Exercise (NLE11)

Recommendations

It was quickly determined that volunteer support would not be used within the primary first responder activities or the direct information technology support infrastructure. This directed the pilot activities to first identify gaps in any of the County's emergency support functions (ESF) continuity of operations capabilities should a significant event take place, then establish a working relationship and identify the specific missions and capabilities required to support the ESF with a volunteer team.

Any county wishing to establish a NET Guard team should first walk through an assessment template with the ESF that has been identified as a partner or has an identified gap from the County Emergency Management Plan update process.

A NET Guard team will require a dedicated effort from a program manager to continually recruit members, establish partnerships, provide ongoing challenging activities for training, and assess what other areas the team may provide a value. There is little doubt that gaps exist that the NET Guard team can provide assistance with. Finding volunteers that can free themselves from work obligations to provide skills that must be inherent to their regular activities. Availability and dedication are crucial to success of the program.

Contact Information

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