National Veterans' NVTAC Technical Assistance Center

National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Community of Practice (CoP)

Emergency Planning and Disaster Response for HVRP

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Key Points

- **Introduction**
  - NVTAC staff shared that the session would cover HVRP best practices and encouraged grant recipients to consider practices that may improve service delivery. Before implementing a practice presented during the session, grant recipients should review their award statement of work and contact their Grant Officer's Technical Representative (GOTR) to determine whether the cost or activity is allowable or requires an amendment to their approved plan.
  - The webinar focused on preparing HVRP programs for emergencies, maintaining services during disruptions, and supporting recovery.
  - NVTAC emphasized protecting participants and staff while preserving veterans' connections to employers and training providers. Planning should reflect local hazards, conditions across the service delivery area, and each participant's needs.
- **Disaster Risks and Service Disruptions**
  - Attendees identified wildfires, flooding, tornadoes, pandemics, and mass shootings as emergencies experienced or anticipated in their communities. They described limited participant contact, loss of internet access, disrupted travel, and difficulty attending interviews or work as challenges to HVRP service delivery.
  - Veterans may face additional barriers related to unstable housing, disabilities, reliance on caregivers, and limited technology. Disasters can interrupt transportation, housing, employment, and training at the same time. The preparedness goals discussed were to protect participants and staff, maintain essential services, coordinate with emergency partners, and prepare for recovery.
- **Assessing Risk and Building Partnerships**
  - Grant recipients were encouraged to identify likely hazards and assess their potential effects on infrastructure, evacuation routes, transportation, and communication. Planning should also account for mobility limitations, medical equipment, accessibility needs, and service animals.
  - Partnerships established before a disaster help staff know whom to contact when services are disrupted. Recommended connections included:
    - Local and state emergency management agencies, public health departments, and police, fire, and ambulance services.
    - Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) contacts, Continuums of Care, nonprofit service providers, and veteran service organizations.

        - Local emergency planning committees, Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, and long-term recovery groups.
    - NVTAC encouraged participation in community disaster planning so HVRP programs are included in emergency notifications and resource coordination. Programs should become familiar with available shelters, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Recovery Centers, and local alert systems before an emergency occurs.
- **Facility and Participant Preparedness**
    - Facility preparedness includes reviewing emergency procedures and checking exits, fire extinguishers, and emergency lighting. Staff should know evacuation routes, shelter in place locations, accountability procedures, and how to receive local emergency alerts.
    - Programs can prepare participants by sharing shelter locations, hotlines, evacuation information, meeting locations, and emergency resources. Information binders or handouts can make these details available before an emergency, including in residential programs connected to HVRP.
- **Continuity of Operations and Emergency Action Plans**
    - A continuity of operations plan (COOP) should identify essential services, alternate work arrangements, and recordkeeping procedures. NVTAC recommended defining staff roles, reporting relationships, primary contacts, backup decision makers, and check in schedules. Participant contact information should be verified during routine meetings, including employment retention follow up.
    - Emergency action plans should provide clear instructions for specific hazards and disruptions, including:
        - Evacuation, sheltering in place, and responses to severe weather or other immediate threats.
        - Power outages, loss of cell service or internet, and office closures.
        - Emergency reporting procedures that identify who sends notifications, who receives them, and when updates are expected.
        - Backup communication methods, such as charged handheld radios for communication within a facility.
- **Recovery and Resuming Services**
    - Recovery begins with participant safety checks and connections to emergency housing, food, transportation, and other needed resources. Programs should document disaster impacts and services provided, reconnect veterans with employers and training providers, and resume HVRP services as conditions allow. NVTAC also identified the federal Recovery Resource Library as a resource for recovery information.
- **Disaster Preparedness Across HVRP Service Areas**
    - Rural, suburban, and urban communities can experience the same disaster differently. Programs serving more than one type of community may need multiple approaches to communication, referrals, and follow-up.

- **Rural Communities**
  - Long distances, limited cell or internet service, and road closures can isolate veterans from HVRP staff, employers, and training providers. A discussion scenario involved flooding that blocked a participant's route to a new job while limited cell service prevented contact with the employer or HVRP office. The scenario emphasized establishing a plan before the disruption occurs.
    - Agree on a realistic check in method and time, and document an alternate contact with the veteran's permission.
    - Use remote contact when possible, postpone unsafe travel, and coordinate with a partner already located in the veteran's community.
    - Help the veteran notify the employer, explain travel disruptions, and explore a temporary schedule change. Confirm the revised schedule and maintain contact to support a return to work.
- **Suburban Communities**
  - Veterans may live, work, and attend training in different counties, where emergency rules, resources, and transportation conditions vary. Employers may reopen before travel routes are restored.
    - Update contact arrangements and identify nearby services while continuing HVRP follow up.
    - Check access rules and resource availability in both counties before referring a veteran to a service location.
    - Help veterans contact training providers about missed sessions and arrange a reasonable plan to make them up.
    - Check the entire commute before advising a veteran to return to work.
- **Urban Communities**
  - Public transit disruptions, crowded shelters, and rapidly changing service locations can affect many participants at once. Programs should verify shelter availability and referral procedures before directing a veteran to a site.
    - Identify veterans who depend on disrupted transit routes and help them promptly contact employers and training providers.
    - Work with veterans and employers on temporary attendance arrangements to protect placements.
    - Use a shared staff log to track participants reached, employment at risk, urgent needs, and assigned follow up. This helps prevent duplicated outreach and missed participants.
- **Participant Specific Preparedness**
  - Emergency planning should address each veteran's circumstances. NVTAC highlighted the following considerations:
    - Communication needs: identify the best way to reach the veteran and a backup method if phone or internet service is disrupted.
    - Transportation barriers: consider how road closures and transit disruptions affect access to work, training, and services.

        - Mobility and accessibility: identify accessible transportation and emergency response options for veterans who need additional support.
        - Service animals: plan for shelter, transportation, and emergency resources that accommodate the participant and service animal.
        - Medical and medication access: anticipate interruptions to pharmacies, appointments, and VA services.
        - Limited technology: account for unreliable internet, lack of a smartphone, and difficulty keeping devices charged.
- **Documenting Performance Impacts and Communicating with the GOTR**
    - Grant recipients should document how a disaster affects participants, service delivery, transportation, and program sites. Records should capture office closures, difficulty reaching veterans, and interruptions to employment or training. NVTAC emphasized communicating with the GOTR early, including when a disaster is anticipated, and discussing potential effects on approved goals.
- **Practical Actions for the Next 30 Days**
    - Attendees were asked to identify one preparedness action their program could realistically complete within 30 days. Responses included checking whether a subrecipient has a COOP, creating an emergency preparedness plan, drafting a participant handout, and maintaining communication with employers.
    - Suggested next steps included:
        - Review the COOP and determine whether updates are needed, including coordination with subrecipients.
        - Update emergency contacts for staff and participants and verify partner information.
        - Identify and connect with emergency partners, including local emergency managers, VA contacts, and Continuums of Care.
        - Establish backup methods for communicating when phone, email, or internet access is unavailable.
        - Conduct a tabletop exercise using a realistic scenario to identify gaps in the current plan.
- **Resources**
    - Ready.gov
    - State And Local Government Emergency Management
    - Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC)
    - Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD)
    - Disasterassistance.gov
    - OSHA - Small Business Safety And Health Handbook
    - OSHA - Emergency Action Plan
    - Emergency Evacuation Floor Plans
    - Disasterassistance.gov
    - VA Grant Per Diem (GPD) Organizational Disaster Plans
    - Federal - Recovery Resource Library
    - HUD Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit

- Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Has an Office of Emergency Management
- Disaster Help

Conclusion

Effective emergency planning connects organizational procedures with the conditions veterans face in their communities. Grant recipients can strengthen preparedness by establishing emergency partnerships, keeping contact information current, and planning for accessible communication, transportation, and referrals. During disruptions, coordinated follow up with employers and training providers can help veterans maintain progress toward employment goals. Documenting service interruptions and communicating early with the GOTR supports timely discussion of program impacts. NVTAC encouraged each program to complete one practical preparedness action within 30 days and offered continued technical assistance.