

**Ohio Emergency Operations Plan  
Emergency Support Function #6 – Mass Care**

**Tab D - Ohio Reunification Support Plan**

**FACILITATING AGENCY:** American Red Cross (ARC)

**SUPPORT AGENCIES:** Ohio Emergency Management Agency (Ohio EMA)  
Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP)  
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS)  
The Salvation Army (TSA)  
Ohio Department of Health (ODH)  
Ohio Department of Aging (ODAge)  
Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (Ohio MHAS)  
Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD)  
Ohio Department of Education (ODE)  
Ohio Amateur Radio (OAR)  
Ohio Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (Ohio VOAD)  
Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS)

**I. INTRODUCTION**

A. Purpose

1. Outline of state-level services that will be provided to support local family reunification efforts.

B. Scope

1. This plan describes State-level disaster reunification services in support of local response, where reunification services are defined as the process of assisting displaced disaster survivors to re-establish contact with family, friends, caregivers, pets, service animals and colleagues after a period of separation; and providing facilitated assistance to children who have become separated from their parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s).
2. This plan provides guidance for the management and/or support of multi-agency activities within a coordinated structure that supports reunification services in advance of, during, and after a disaster in an impacted area and/or jurisdiction.

3. Coordination under this plan will occur through the appropriate Emergency Support Function and the State Mass Care Lead.
4. A Governor's emergency declaration may trigger the State EOP's implementation, which is required to request a Presidential Declaration and Federal assistance.
5. The process discussed in this plan can be implemented by the State with, or without, a request for Federal assistance.
6. This document is intended to address the reunification of all persons, including people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs. This group includes the "whole community", including children, older adults, and persons from various religious, racial, and ethnically diverse backgrounds; and people with limited English proficiency.
7. This plan describes the actions that will be taken to meet family reunification requirements within Ohio, to effectively respond to the needs of populations that are impacted by emergencies and disasters.
8. This plan also describes the roles and responsibilities of organizations and agencies that are partner to this plan.
9. This plan is intended to be scalable to meet the requirements of varying levels of need and response.

## **II. ASSUMPTIONS**

- A. Prior to an incident that triggers the need for family reunification operations, State and local emergency management officials will have coordinated with appropriate agencies, voluntary organizations, and the private sector to understand and define respective reunification roles, responsibilities, capabilities, and capacity of their jurisdictions.
- B. In response to larger or catastrophic incidents, reunification needs may exceed the resources and capability of the State, and may require the request of resources from the Federal government and outside sources.
- C. Clearly identified roles and responsibilities for agencies and organizations that are responsible for the temporary care of children (educational, child care, medical, foster care, juvenile justice, and recreational facilities) will have been established prior to the need to activate this plan.
- D. Prior to the activation of this plan, appropriate agencies and responders will be aware of local and State laws related to reunification. In addition, individual privacy rights will be

respected and information will be safeguarded as required by applicable Federal and State laws.

- E. Protocols to share information among agencies/organizations providing reunification services will have been developed through MOUs.
- F. Family reunification operations will be dependent upon adequate communication and technology infrastructure.
- G. Public messaging systems will be developed to support reunification operations. These systems will be thorough, timely, accurate, accessible, and compliant with all legal requirements for individuals with disabilities, individuals with limited English proficiency, persons who do not speak English; and others with access and functional needs.
- H. Mass casualty incidents will require enhanced coordination among reunification operations, health care facilities, and fatality management services.
- I. Efforts will be made to ensure that databases, social media sites, and message boards that are created apart from State-level family reunification efforts are interoperable with State-level efforts.
- J. Support and crisis counseling for behavioral health, bereavement, grief, and other needs will be available for disaster survivors suffering long-term separation or loss of loved ones and for workers providing reunification services to survivors and their families.

### **III. SITUATION**

- A. Reunification operations partners will respond with available resources in accordance with the requirements of their internal policies, and in cooperation with emergency management officials from impacted jurisdictions. These agencies will respond as soon as reunification operations needs are identified.
- B. Under a Presidential declaration in response to a major emergency or disaster, and when conditions warrant, the State may request additional Federal support through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This support may include technical assistance, activation of Federal resources and contracts, and coordination of national tools and resources to meet incident demands in impacted areas. Reunification support may be provided under the Stafford Act, as Amended, April 2013, Sections 774 and 775.
- C. Major incidents that require reunification operations support will be either prior notice or no-notice events, and can be the result of a natural, human-caused, or a technological incident.

- D. Incidents that disrupt communications and cause populations to disperse, and incidents that occur during the work and/or school day may result in evacuations that will separate families.
- E. Calls from people outside the incident area, who are seeking information on the status of loved ones, may overwhelm local government, non-governmental organizations, and emergency dispatch centers.
- F. Social media applications that survivors utilize to post status updates or to obtain family contact information will be a reunification asset if they are accessible. When incident survivors do not have access to communications, cell phones, and other electronic equipment, especially in a catastrophic disaster, it may not be possible to use social media or these types of reunification tools.
- G. Emergency responders may be affected by the incident as well, and will seek information about their families, in some cases before reporting for duty.
- H. The effects of separation, particularly for children, and the lack of information about family members will likely cause some level of psychological distress among incident survivors.
- I. Incidents that result in the need for reunification operations may be located within one jurisdiction, may span multiple jurisdictions, or may encompass a very large (even national) geographic area, if many survivors evacuate outside of the incident area.
- J. Initial tracking data will likely be collected in silos by entities such as emergency medical services, law enforcement personnel, county and State emergency management, public health officials, hospitals and other healthcare facilities, the medical examiner's/coroner's office, animal control, non-profit disaster relief organizations, and private sector organizations such as Google.
- K. Lack of interoperability among reunification systems (e.g., missing persons, unaccompanied minors, fatality management, patient tracking, evacuation tracking, existing registries for people with disabilities, and lost/found household pets and service animals) may contribute to the complexity of tasks such as validating, reconciling, cross-referencing, and sharing data, and may affect the type and scope of reunification services required to support operations.
- L. In carrying out reunification operations, the State will determine the level of services that are needed, and will determine applicable reunification methods that are necessary to meet reunification needs.
- M. The State will also determine resources that are required to implement the chosen reunification methods, including assessing available resources from NGOs and the private sector.

- N. The State will identify resource gaps and shortfalls and will employ measures to respond to them.

#### **IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS**

##### **A. General Considerations**

The success of reunification operations will be dependent upon:

1. Survivor access to communications; including telephone, cellular phones, and/or internet to connect with email, social media, and reunification systems.
2. Seamless coordination and the ability to share information among agencies and organizations with reunification responsibilities for:
  - a. Evacuees
  - b. Children
  - c. Displaced adults
  - d. Missing persons
  - e. Emergency welfare and wellness inquiries
  - f. Medical patients (including those in healthcare facilities, and those who have been evacuated)
  - g. Fatalities
  - h. Household pets and service animals
3. Timely and consistent public messaging to survivors and the public outside the disaster area on available reunification mechanisms.
4. When the combined resources of NGOs and impacted jurisdictions are insufficient to meet the actual or projected demand for reunification, State ESF-6 operations will take action to secure necessary resources from the State and, if required, the Federal government and outside sources.
5. Locating missing children and reuniting unaccompanied minors with their parent/guardian will be a priority of reunification operations. The most effective method to reunite children will be to provide an efficient and coordinated family reunification program with a goal to deliver reunification services and support to all survivors and their families, friends, and colleagues. The agency that has the lead for reunification of children will coordinate its efforts and requests for resources with the

lead agency coordinating overall reunification operations or the Multi-Agency Reunification Task Force, if operational.

6. Accounting for all missing persons, whether alive, injured, or deceased, will require effective communication and coordination among multiple agencies and organizations, each of which may have responsibility for a different reunification operations component.
7. NGOs that traditionally provide family reunification services in a disaster response in accordance with the requirements of their charters will coordinate and work with emergency management officials.
8. NGOs, such as the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), may provide services at the request of the local/state government. Local government officials will provide guidance on the plan within their jurisdiction to these organizations.
9. Efforts will be made to incorporate all agencies and organizations providing reunification services into reunification operations, and to identify groups that may organize during a disaster to provide reunification services or tools and encourage them to participate in coordinated reunification operations.

#### B. Resource Considerations

1. Medium or high-intensity level incidents will trigger the deployment of increased levels of reunification staff and equipment resources. Examples of these resources may include:
  - a. The activation of this plan.
  - b. The activation of dedicated call centers and/or family assistance centers to support response to an large volume of calls to emergency dispatch centers from people who are unable to contact family and friends who have been impacted by an incident, and for incidents where the impacted population is dispersed across a wide geographic area.
  - c. Requests to the private sector and voluntary organizations for resources such as telephones and mobile telephone banks, cell phones and wireless access (i.e., Cells on Wheels), charging stations, and/or computers with internet access for survivor communications at shelters, service and community sites, and evacuation sites (e.g., embarkation/debarkation and reception processing centers) in response to wide-spread communication outages.
  - d. During evacuations, staff may be deployed and integrated into evacuation operations to ensure the accountability and safety of unaccompanied minors.

- e. Reunification support teams may be assembled to assess reunification needs and to support multi-agency coordination, information sharing and other reunification operations.
  - f. Requests for activation of the NCMEC's National Emergency Child Locator Center in response to significant numbers of missing children and/or unaccompanied minors.
  - g. The provision of behavioral health resources for survivors separated from family members and for reunification workers providing services and support to these individuals under stressful and emotional circumstances may be needed.
  - h. The activation of a Multi-Agency Reunification Task Force.
2. Ongoing assessments of incident intensity, reunification considerations (Section III D—Reunification Considerations), and shortfalls will be critical to ensure effective and efficient response operations to determine the methods of reunification services (Section III C—Reunification Descriptions) and capabilities (Section V—Reunification Support Organizations and Resources) that will be needed.
  3. All organizations participating in this plan will retain operational control of their assets and resources.
  4. The Multi-Agency Reunification Task Force may be used to coordinate reunification support operations.

### C. Local Agency Operational Tasks

1. Lead Reunification Agency
  - a. Coordination and facilitation of family reunification operations.
2. Local/State Emergency Management
  - a. Developing, maintaining, coordinating, and executing emergency preparedness plans that incorporate evacuation and reunification procedures and processes.
  - b. Complying with State laws and procedures that provide the necessary guidance and procedures for missing persons, including children.
3. Public Information
  - a. Developing preparedness and operational public messaging that encourages the development of Family Communication and work place continuity plans; developing familiarity with work, school, childcare, and juvenile justice

evacuation plans; and developing pre-scripted messages directing the public to available reunification services.

- b. Delivering accessible and effective public messages throughout reunification operations. Coordinating information about reunification and missing persons' procedures with media, social media, and ad hoc reunification system providers to ensure clear consistent messaging leading to efficient streamlined reunification services to the public.
  - c. Providing information to Mass Care operations about reunification and missing-persons issues that have been reported in the media.
4. Law Enforcement
- a. Taking and resolving missing persons' reports and assuming responsibility for unaccompanied minors, as provided for by law. Coordinating with Mass Care operations to facilitate reunification activities.
5. American Red Cross
- a. Operating the Safe and Well system.
  - b. Providing staff to assist with reunification operations and Emergency Welfare Inquiries and Safe and Well Information Field Teams (SWIFT).
6. Local Public Health Districts
- a. Providing welfare and wellness checks on clients participating in agency programs.
  - b. Encouraging clients to register their status in the reunification system of record.
  - c. Providing guidance to and coordinating with home health care organizations and local healthcare providers who may provide welfare checks on clients.
  - d. Coordinating with mass care agencies and operations to facilitate reunification activities.
7. Social Services/Aging Agencies
- a. Providing guidance to nursing home, assisted living, and other residential facilities on developing communication plans that provide information about the well-being of residents to families.

- b. Post-incident, providing welfare checks on clients participating in agency programs.
  - c. Encouraging clients to register their status in the reunification system of record.
  - d. Coordinating with Mass Care operations to facilitate reunification activities.
8. Local Functional Needs/Disability Organizations/Support Organizations and Advocates for At-Risk Populations
- a. Providing guidance and resources to support reunification services for people with access and functional needs, including people with disabilities and at-risk individuals.
  - b. Planning for and providing leadership and subject matter expertise on household pet and service animal reunification issues and legal issues related to property rights, other relevant animal laws, and disposition (via adoption, etc.) of unclaimed household pets and service animals.
9. Hospitals/Hospital Associations
- a. Coordinating with Mass Care operations to facilitate patient reunification activities.
  - b. Supporting patient evacuation tracking operations.
  - c. Providing information/assist patients to register their status in reunification system of record.
  - d. Assisting with resolution of Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 questions as they relate to reunification.
10. Child Welfare Agencies
- a. Supporting the development of emergency preparedness plans for childcare providers.
  - b. Supporting the safety and needs of children and their parents or legal guardians when separated due to disaster, including supporting unaccompanied minor shelters when significant numbers of children have become separated from parents/legal guardians.

- c. Planning and operational leadership for child reunification operations.
  - d. Integration and coordination with family reunification operations and agencies.
  - e. Provision of leadership and subject matter expertise on children's issues and legal issues related to the reunification of minors.
11. Education Departments
- a. Developing and maintaining school emergency preparedness plans and processes that address lockdown procedures (to protect from imminent threats such as gunmen), shelter-in-place (to protect from the threat of contamination or weather events), evacuation, relocation, and reuniting of students with their parents or legal guardians.
  - b. Assisting with resolution of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) questions as they relate to reunification.
12. Coroners/Medical Examiners
- c. Investigating fatalities that occur as a result of a disaster and provide assistance in the identification of deceased persons, including children.
  - d. Sharing information with Mass Care operations to facilitate reunification activities.
  - e. Integrating and coordinating with reunification operations.
13. Family Courts
- a. Supporting the resolution of legal issues involving unaccompanied minors as they relate to reunification.
14. Amateur Radio
- a. Providing emergency communications services to emergency management officials during disasters in support of reunification activities.
15. Chambers of Commerce
- a. Encouraging businesses to develop preparedness plans that include employee and family communication plans.

- b. Supporting public messaging during disasters by distributing information to local businesses on available reunification services.
- c. Identifying support that local businesses can provide (i.e. communications support, volunteers).

#### 16. Civic Organizations

- a. Assisting with preparedness activities in the community that encourage the development of Family Communication Plans and the development of and familiarity with work and school evacuation plans.
- b. Providing support for reunification through the management of donations, volunteers, equipment, and supplies.

#### 17. Logistics/Information Technology

- a. Providing equipment for call centers and communications equipment (telephones, cell phones, computers, and internet access) to support survivor reunification needs in shelters and other mass care facilities.
- b. Ensuring access to alternate communication for people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.

#### D. Mass Care/Emergency Assistance Working Groups

1. A number of Working Groups may be activated to assist with the coordination of state- and local-level family reunification operations. The Working Groups will be interdependent and will coordinate with each other to meet the needs of impacted individuals and families. These Working Groups could include:
  - a. Sheltering Support – Supporting mass care/emergency assistance sheltering operations in impacted jurisdictions.
  - b. Feeding Support – Supporting feeding operations in impacted jurisdictions.
  - c. People with Disabilities and Others with Access and Functional Needs – Identifying and supporting persons that may require assistance to maintain their health, safety and independence during congregate activities; including sheltering, feeding, distribution of emergency supplies, reunification, and mass evacuee support. Identifying resources (equipment, services, personnel) that may be required to address access and functional needs.

- d. Distribution of Emergency Supplies – Identifying and procuring critical emergency supplies and the means to distribute them; including life-sustaining, comfort, clean-up, and other essential supplies.
- e. Reunification Services Support – Providing systems and mechanisms to allow people who are separated to contact one another. Facilitating the reunification of children with parents or guardians, and of household pets with their owners.
- f. Household Pets and Service Animals Support – Identifying and coordinating whole community support to meet the needs of people with household pets and service animals; including addressing evacuation, rescue, congregate care activities (sheltering, feeding, and distribution of emergency supplies), and veterinary care.
- g. Mass Evacuation Support – Providing congregate care support to evacuees and their household pets and service/assistance animals; exchange of information, including the registering and tracking of evacuees.

#### E. Catastrophic Incident Planning

- 1. In response to a catastrophic event, response operations, including reunification operations, will be consistent with FEMA’s Catastrophic Housing Annex concept of operations, where the most support will be provided in the least impacted zones and will progress inward toward heavily impacted areas as accessibility allows. This strategy will be relayed to the public through the jurisdiction’s Public Affairs office.

#### F. Operational Phases

- 1. Operational response phases may be according to the operational phases as described in the July 2014 Response Federal Interagency Operational Plan. The phases of a notice event will include actions prior to the incident that increase readiness and available resources in preparation for the event.
- 2. Family reunification operations will be structured according to five Operational Phases:

##### Normal Operations Phase

- a. Impacted jurisdiction(s) will identify a lead reunification agency and will review existing reunification plans.
- b. Agreements, which will be essential to the success of Phase 2 operations, will be developed between agencies and organizations, detailing how and what information will be shared in relation to missing persons, children, fatalities, and patients.

- c. Public messaging will promote the development of Family Communication Plans in advance of a disaster.

Elevated Threat, Credible Threat Phase

- a. Once there is an elevated or credible threat, agencies with reunification responsibilities will review plans and will initiate contact with supporting organizations.
- b. Public messaging will encourage those within impacted areas to communicate their location and their condition to loved ones using traditional communications, social media, or disaster reunification technology. This phase will typically be handled through local emergency management, NGOs, and the media leading up to an incident and typically continues until an incident subsides or occurs.

Immediate Response, Deployment Phase

- a. Resources will be deployed to assist impacted population(s) with re-establishing communication with loved ones and with registering in reunification systems. This phase may be supported with State resources and capabilities. Additional resources during this phase may include the Safe-and-Well program, requests for and deployment of NCMEC resources, FEMA's National Emergency Family Registry and Locator System (NEFRLS), Reunification Support Teams, and others.

Sustained Response Phase: Resource Employment

- a. Reunification operations will continue and may require continued or additional State and Federal support. Efforts will be made to coordinate all relevant response agencies.

Short-term Recovery, Intermediate Recovery, Long Term Recovery Reunification Phase

- a. Individual unresolved cases are transitioned to local agencies when the situation becomes stable and communications are restored.

G. Further Resources and Procedural Documents

- 1. A number of procedural checklists and guidance documents that will be used to coordinate and facilitate state-level response to local family reunification operations will be accessed from the federal guidance (2015 Multi-Agency Reunification Plan Template). These checklists and guidance documents will be compiled into a physical and an electronic folder which will be maintained by the Ohio Emergency Management Agency.

## **V. COORDINATION AND ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **A. Coordination**

1. State-level operations will be coordinated and facilitated by this plan's Facilitating Agency, the American Red Cross.
2. State-level agency response operations will be coordinated and facilitated through the State EOC by the Ohio Emergency Management Agency.
3. Operational decisions on the employment of family reunification systems will be the responsibility of the jurisdiction or NGO(s) that own the system(s). If State and/or Federal family reunification assets are employed, they will be deployed through the State Emergency Operations Center (State EOC) in coordination and in cooperation with principal NGOs operating in the impacted area(s).
4. In incidents where survivors are evacuated to other jurisdictions, coordination with those jurisdictions and/or Host States will include the activation of communications equipment and systems at evacuation sites for survivor use. Additionally, evacuee information collected through evacuation tracking systems and other mechanisms will be utilized by emergency management professionals and responders to aid reunification operations.
5. Information that is shared between multiple reunification and evacuation tracking systems will be subject to applicable local, State, and Federal privacy laws and data sharing agreements in place among participating agencies, organizations, and jurisdictions.

### **B. Facilitating Agency**

1. American Red Cross (ARC)
  - a. Coordinate and report on multi-agency family reunification response operations.
  - b. Operate and administer the "Safe and Well" family reunification system.
  - c. Provide staff to assist with local reunification operations and Emergency Welfare Inquiries and Safe and Well Information Field Teams (SWIFT).

## C. Support Agencies

1. Ohio Emergency Management Agency (Ohio EMA)
  - a. Develop, maintain, coordinate, and activate emergency preparedness plans that address evacuation and reunification operations.
  - b. Provide guidance on state laws and procedures that provide guidance and procedures for missing persons, including children.
  - c. Develop familiarity with local work, school, childcare, and juvenile justice evacuation plans.
  - d. Through the State Joint Information Center (JIC), develop preparedness and operational public messaging that encourages the development of Family Communication and work place continuity plans, and develop pre-scripted messages directing the public to available reunification services.
  - e. Through the State JIC, deliver accessible and effective public messaging during reunification operations.
  - f. Coordinate and disseminate information on reunification and missing persons operations with media, social media, and ad hoc reunification system providers to ensure clear consistent messaging leading to efficient streamlined reunification services to the public.
  - f. Provide information to Mass Care operations about reunification and missing-persons issues that have been reported in the media.
2. Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP)
  - a. Assist local law enforcement agencies in taking and resolving missing persons' reports and assuming responsibility for unaccompanied minors.
  - b. Assist local mass care operations' family reunification operations.
3. Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS)
  - a. Provide guidance and technical assistance to county departments of job and family services and public children services agencies for reunification efforts for unaccompanied minors. Assistance to include safety assessments and safe placement.

- b. Coordinate subject matter expertise on children's issues and legal issues related to the reunification of minors.
  - c. Provide guidance to group homes, children's residential centers, crisis care facilities, and other residential facilities on developing communication plans that provide information about the well-being of residents to their families.
4. The Salvation Army (TSA)
- a. Assist and support local family reunification operations.
5. Ohio Department of Health (ODH)
- a. Query existing systems and programs for information that will support reunification efforts.
  - b. Provide guidance to ODH regulated health care entities, health care organizations and programs to promote client well checks and support the reunification process.
6. Ohio Department of Aging (ODAge)
- a. Provide guidance to nursing homes, assisted living, and other residential facilities on the development of communication plans that provide information about the well-being of residents to their families.
  - b. Post-incident, provide guidance to local response agencies on providing welfare checks.
  - c. Assist local response agencies in encouraging clients to register their status in the reunification system of record.
  - d. Assist with the coordination of aging-related operations associated with family reunification-centered mass care operations.
7. Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (Ohio MHAS)
- a. Provide guidance to adult care facilities, and other department licensed residential facilities on communication plans, and providing information as allowed by state rules and regulations about the well-being of residents to families or others identified by impacted residents during family reunification-centered mass care operations.
  - b. Assist local behavioral health response agencies in encouraging clients to register their status in the reunification system of record.

- c. Assist with the coordination of behavioral health-related services associated with family reunification-centered mass care operations.
- 8. Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD)
  - a. Providing guidance and resources to support reunification services for people with access and functional needs, including people with disabilities and at-risk individuals.
- 9. Ohio Department of Education (ODE)
  - a. Assist local school districts, colleges and universities and individual educational institutions in developing and maintaining school emergency preparedness plans and processes that address lockdown procedures (to protect from imminent threats such as gunmen), shelter-in-place (to protect from the threat of contamination or weather events), evacuation, relocation, and reuniting of students with their parents, legal guardians, and families.
  - b. Assist local response agencies with resolution of Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) questions as they relate to family reunification.
- 10. Ohio Amateur Radio (OAR)
  - a. Provide and/or support emergency communications services to emergency management officials during disasters in support of family reunification activities.
- 11. Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS)
  - a. Assist in identifying sources for equipment for call centers and communications equipment (telephones, cell phones, computers, and internet access) to support survivor reunification needs in shelters and other mass care facilities.
- 12. Ohio Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (Ohio VOAD)
 

Through member organizations, provide services and materials to support family reunification actions by:

  - a. Providing and/or coordinating spiritual and emotional care for families that are impacted by incidents that necessitate reunification actions.
  - b. Identifying and providing childcare services for families that are impacted by incidents that necessitate reunification actions.

- c. Assisting law enforcement agencies by providing childcare services for children who are impacted by incidents that necessitate reunification actions.
- d. Providing congregate care support for displaced animals; and coordinating with animal control agencies in identification and reunification efforts.