## FEMA

**Resilience
National Preparedness Directorate
National Training and Education Division**

**Training Partners Program**

# TPP Times

## Innovation Equals Preparedness

In this latest edition of the TPP Times we present a unique layout with three articles that highlight the innovative practices of some of our partners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Center for Homeland Defense and Security at the Naval Postgraduate School, the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University, LSU's National Center for Biomedical Research & Training, New Mexico Tech's Energetic Materials Research & Testing Center and the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) Surge are all working to make sure we are prepared and can respond to both the training and operational needs of our emergency management partners. Their use of technology in a world of social distancing, lockdowns and general uncertainty is a vital part of their success.

And as always, we have new information on upcoming events, accessibility in "Section 508 Quarterly," NIMS alerts and course updates.

We welcome your input on the TPP Times, including comments, questions and information you want to share with other Training Partners. Email us at TPPTimes@fema.dhs.gov.

## In This Issue

## Constant Learning and Collaboration are Key

*NTED partners continue to learn as they offer all-remote course delivery during pandemic*

***From the Editors***

Early on in the COVID-19 crisis FEMA's National Training and Education Division (NTED) engaged with its many partners across the country to identify ways it could provide innovative solutions to help the nation's first responders receive mission critical emergency management training. The Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS), based in Monterey, California, is one key partner in providing advanced education for some of our executive-level stakeholders.

This partnership has opened up some new levels of collaboration, technology and coordination. As the COVID-19 pandemic cases increased in March, CHDS leveraged its experience with web conferencing tools, familiarity with remote learning practices and its coordinative and collaborative expertise to offer advanced learners the education and resources they need to prepare for and respond to not only this event, but future ones.

### Already Ready

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many practical, logistical and technological issues to the forefront. California was one of the first states hit by coronavirus cases and, fortunately, CHDS had already been conducting remote education programs for their master's courses. This experience in remote course delivery put CHDS in a great position to conduct their courses while following current social distancing guidelines.

As the pandemic spread to other parts of the country, CHDS students were contacting them to inquire about the immediate future for their courses. The students were concerned that response operations were "ramping up" and they would not be able to leave for any length of time to attend a course. CHDS was prepared. In one of the earliest instances of providing this

level of remote course delivery, CHDS went from repurposing a normal, in-residence course to remote in a weekend.

"We made a decision on a Thursday night and were delivering in full remote mode on Monday morning," Glen Woodbury, Director of CHDS, said. "Switching to a remote, Zoom-like environment [presented] a lot of difficulties in adjusting the lecture, but we were able to do it effectively and to the satisfaction of our learners."

There are always challenges in adjusting learning strategies and environments—not to mention during a global pandemic. With numerous and varied stay-at-home orders, social distancing guidelines and worries about family and friends, students and CHDS faculty had to maintain flexibility while responding to uncertain times. Additionally, providing educational content to emergency management practitioners who often have to be on the front line to help their communities is another hurdle that CHDS sought to overcome, mainly through the expanded use of technology.

Zoom was, and is, one of the go-to web conferencing platforms used by many educational institutions (also Webex, Microsoft Teams, Go-to-Meeting, Adobe Connect among others – CHDS, FEMA or NTED do not endorse any particular platform). Its intuitive controls, accessibility functionality and broad availability on desktop and mobile devices, made it a useful tool as course delivery modes were adapted to the times.

"We were able to use Zoom to conduct weekly alumni forums so panelists and participants could engage with each other about their specific recovery challenges from the current COVID-19 wave," Woodbury added.

> " *We were able to use Zoom to conduct weekly alumni forums so participants could engage with each other...* "

## COVID Challenges

As with most traditional to online learning conversions, there were challenges. CHDS has a robust IT support team, so including them in most of the early courses was necessary to help troubleshoot any issues. Class size is always a challenge. What's the right number of students to include so they get the most out of the training? Often it depends on the course material and purpose, but CHDS finds it's important to make courses as interactive as possible.

"We found that we could reach out to 200-300 people in a webinar versus 20-30 in a normal classroom environment," Woodbury said. "But we miss the value of the exchange and couldn't replicate the same type of remote environment for executive courses. The technology just doesn't support the type of interaction [we need] yet."

CHDS has been focused on a three-phase approach as it continues to offer—and expand—remote learning during and after the pandemic.

**Phase 1:** Turn current courses into online, remote, accessible courses that are simple to teach

**Phase 2:** Focus on the learner and what they need (materials, content and interactivity)

**Phase 3:** Leverage tools and technology, such as virtual reality, for use in skills-based learning courses

## Resources for Responders

Throughout the first two months of the pandemic, CHDS developed useful resources for stakeholders throughout the country.

One resource was a shared information, research and crowdsource webinar where first



Naval Postgraduate School University Circle

responders could participate and provide their colleagues with important information about how they are dealing with COVID-19. One successful outcome of this webinar was the sharing of recent thermal scanning research to detect high temperatures in individuals at sporting events. The director of security for the Boston Red Sox learned about the new research from the Richmond, CA fire chief. This nationwide information sharing could lead to finding solutions to testing crowds before baseball season (hopefully) opens this year.

This person-to-person sharing—online—is a key part of the response and future preparedness efforts of the emergency mangers and homeland security experts across the country. Another form of information sharing was accomplished through the school's Homeland Security Digital Library. They curated over 3,000 COVID-19-specific resources into a special collection that can be viewed by stakeholders and other interested parties (learn more about the collection at hsdl.org). CHDS has also created an easy-to-use section of its website that includes previously recorded webinars and other materials.

## We Can't Do It Alone

Partnerships between NTED and CHDS (and other organizations) are vital to ensuring our nation is prepared and resilient. Just as in real estate with "location, location, location" as the mantra, "partnerships, partnerships, partnerships" is a guiding principle for emergency managers and homeland security practitioners.

Some additional partnerships that CHDS has cultivated—and NTED supports wholeheartedly—are with the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA), International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) and the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA). Working jointly with NEMA and IAEM, CHDS conducted a webinar on strategies to maximize resilience for individuals, organizations and communities. This webinar saw 292 participants nationwide discuss good decision-making strategies, managing stress during a global pandemic, lessons learned from community resilience, among other topics.

Along with the NCJA, CHDS conducted a webinar on how best to maximize collaboration opportunities and leverage the emergency supplementary funding approved by Congress and signed by President Trump in March. With 153 participants, this first collaboration with NCJA was a true success in partnerships and sharing information during a stressful time— and may lead to future collaborations.

## What's Next?

The future of remote learning might already be here. With the advancement in technology and its ubiquitous use among all levels of government and in the private sector, there will be incentives for organizations to continue to investigate how it can help them before, during and after a disaster event. Now, as far as how training partners will adjust their offerings with the stark memory of a viral outbreak and terms like "social distancing" forever etched in our vocabulary?

"We'll probably see hybrids, where half the class is in the classroom and half is online," Woodbury said. "The evolution may be that the materials for online versus in-person won't be different, but the option to attend in person will be."

NTED and CHDS will continue to collaborate on vital homeland security and emergency management issues. To learn more about the programs and resources at the Center for Homeland Defense and Security, go to chds.us.
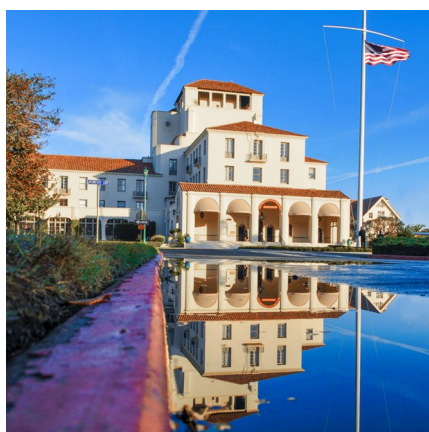
> "*We could hit the ground running on adapting our content from one subject to another.*"

# Technology to the Rescue

*Training Partners Employ Innovative Technology Solutions to Keep Training Going During COVID-19 Pandemic*

*From the Editors*

## Training During a Disaster

Emergency management training organizations know the importance of being flexible enough to adjust course content, training locations and other training support activities on the fly. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical nature of this skill in stark and unique ways. The pace of the virus' spread, the response efforts at the local, state and federal levels, as well as making (and implementing) policy on the run, were issues faced by many emergency management practitioners. But there were particularly unique impacts in the disaster management training world.

Some of the country's premier homeland security, disaster response and emergency management training institutions were faced with the dilemma of continuing to provide the best training possible, but with the added burden of social distancing, conducting training during a pandemic and making sure the training that was provided was relevant, timely and accurate. No mean feat.

## Hitting the Ground Running

The National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University, Louisiana State University's National Center for Biomedical Research & Training (NCBRT) and New Mexico Tech's Energetic Materials Research & Testing Center (EMRTC) are three academic organizations that provide training on a host of homeland security and emergency management topics. At the beginning of 2020, they were all preparing for, conducting and reviewing various courses for emergency management policymakers and practitioners. As the coronavirus cases began to spread, governments across the country and around the world started implementing social distancing rules and guidelines, shelter-in-place orders and shutting down non-essential businesses and activities.



Columbia University

"Even before COVID hit, we tried to design our courses so they wouldn't need to be constantly updated," said Sarah Proctor, Assistant Director of Research and Development of the NCBRT. "We could hit the ground running on adapting our content from one subject to another."

These academic training partners, working with FEMA's National Training and Education Division (NTED), had developed varied courses including responding to economic disasters for individuals and businesses, proper responses to the 2013 Ebola outbreak in West Africa and even incident response procedures for terrorist bombings. The courses are



Louisiana State University

vital to maintaining a level of proficiency for emergency managers and policymakers, so the NCDP, NCBRT and EMRTC used technology to keep the training going. From Zoom to Webex and Microsoft Teams to Adobe Connect, all of these organizations began to pivot their normal in-class instruction to remote, virtual learning—most in record time. So with mandated social distancing rules in place across the country—not to mention general concern among students and instructors about inadvertently spreading the virus to loved ones while traveling—how could these training institutions quickly address technology barriers, security concerns and balance learner needs to provide the best training solutions possible?

## Responding to the Responders' Needs

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many unique challenges to local, state and federal response efforts, ranging from personal protective equipment availability to monitoring and enforcement of social distancing guidelines. Responders, along with their families, had to make on-the-fly adjustments to how they did their jobs, took care of each other and faced the prospect of an invisible threat. As part of the NTED training grant, select training partners had developed much-needed courses to help responders and policymakers learn the latest best practices on responding to disasters. These normally instructor-led, in-class courses would last anywhere from four to 20+ hours each and consisted of standard student-instructor interactions, breakout sessions, group projects, assessments and surveys.

Normally, these courses can take months to plan, develop, test and secure approval. There are many layers of review for courses, not to mention promotion to interested parties, securing a physical site for training and any post-course activities (tests, certifications, surveys, etc.). In this case, there were days, maybe weeks, to adjust to the social distancing requirements, travel restrictions and general concern about spreading the virus. Remote learning using technology was the answer to many of these concerns.

"We used Zoom to conduct our Improving Business' Financial Literacy and Management to Support Post-Disaster

*(Continued from page 3)*

Economic Recovery course because it was very intuitive," said Tom Chandler, Director of the National Center Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University. "Learners without a webcam could still participate by calling in. There are also ample accessibility functions that made Zoom perfect for our needs."

Accessibility issues are a major part of providing learning content. All three organizations took advantage of the accessibility functions of their preferred platform. Zoom, for example, is compliant with both WCAG 2.1 AA Standards and Revised Section 508 Standards and offers American Sign Language integration, the ability interface with foreign language interpreters using a dedicated line and closed captioning and automatic transcription options. The other mentioned platforms, Webex, Microsoft Teams and Adobe Connect also offer similar accessibility features like screen readers, keyboard shortcuts and low vision support.

## The Future of Web Conferencing is Now

The use of online webinar-style platforms has seen tremendous growth since social distancing rules have been implemented across the country and around the world. According to businesswire.com, "the … COVID-19 global pandemic has significantly boosted the market growth of video conferencing software worldwide." And according to their "Video Conferencing Software Market Forecast from 2020 to 2025," Zoom has "recorded a surge in more active users so far this year as compared to that in 2019."

This is not to say that NTED or any of these institutions officially endorse Zoom or any other specific software, but it highlights the growth of these platforms and their importance to training institutions and our partners.

As with most video conferencing/meeting software platforms there is a free option with limited functions and more functionality as the packages and costs increase. The number of participants varies from 100 up to 1,000 depending on the platform.

The open nature of the platforms can lead to some concerns, however. For example, some training partners cited Zoom's security issues as a cause for not embracing the platform initially. Some of the security issues included:

- Substandard encryption
- Unauthorized attendance/ease of signing in if registration link was shared
- User information could be sold

James Zamora of New Mexico Tech's Energetic Materials Research & Testing Center said, "Our concerns about Zoom were the routing of the course content through servers in China. We understand that technology changes rapidly—and were happy that this particular issue was corrected—so we're ready to employ alternative platforms or methods should the need arise. We're constantly evaluating what is best for our participants."

Fortunately, the other security concerns have been addressed to the satisfaction of these organizations. Additional security

measures can be implemented by using password protected registration and possibly using "Zoom for the U.S. Government" which will provide FERPA/HIPAA compliance and 256-bit AES encryption.

## Quick Pivot to Online

Leveraging course content that already exists made the difficult prospect of getting new approvals not so daunting. After the 2013 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, LSU's NBRT prepared a bio-awareness course to provide an overview of identification practices, protective measures and other activities that responders could conduct if faced with the unimaginable: an Ebola outbreak here in the United States. With this course available, LSU was able to pivot from the Ebola content and easily build out a COVID-19 bio-awareness course. Because both events were health-related, the content lent itself to a quicker modification to a COVID-19 focus.

"So, within a month from submitting a short, basic course to FEMA for review, we were able to have a desk review completed for administration of the course," said Proctor. "That was a tremendous turnaround and, due to the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic, reduced approvals by months— while still providing our normal high-quality content."

## Creative Thinking Leads to Dynamic Training

New Mexico Tech's courses are structured differently in that they are more "dynamic" in content and delivery. With a focus on explosive-related terrorist event, the EMRTC are focusing on being as flexible as possible, using technology to its fullest and developing creative ways to teach.

Their Incident Response to Terrorist Bombings course



New Mexico Tech

consists of 27 hours of classroom time. Though Zoom, Webex and other platforms are all user friendly, conducting that many hours of instruction while sitting in front of a computer monitor and webcam is simply too much to ask. So, by breaking up the course into smaller modules—and even replacing some in-class training materials with off-line reading assignments—future courses could be conducted effectively during any social distancing periods.

"We're always looking for ways to use technology to its fullest," added Zamora. "Because of the highly technical nature of our course content we've been looking at ways to use augmented reality to show, for example, a 3D mockup of an IED that can be manipulated by the instructor and the learners can still get the benefit of close-in observation of an object. This may be a true gamechanger for our courses."

Columbia, LSU and New Mexico Tech found that Zoom made it the prefect platform as not just something that could

hold them over until things returned to "normal", but could be an effective tool due to the range of features and functionalities offered by the platform.

## Forever Learning

As with all emergency responses, there are always lessons to be learned and the COVID-19 pandemic was no different. Chandler, Proctor and Zamora all agreed that using web conferencing platforms like Zoom, Teams, Webex or any of the many other systems was an efficient and effective way to continue to provide the training services their learners need. Specifically, they mentioned some of the following lessons that could help any training institution take advantage of web conference platforms:

- Limit the number of course participants
- Keep the course length under 4 hours or break it up into multiple sessions
- Control access through strict registration
- Encourage participants to log in by video if possible, not dial in on their phone
- Promote the accessibility of the courses and platform to those with disabilities
- Always encourage attendees to mute their connections

"One of the more important aspects about using technology to teach is to mimic the in-class experience as much as possible," Chandler added. "Have introductions, group breakouts, video demonstrations, so learners feel engaged and more comfortable."

Moving forward each institution will be making any necessary tweaks to ensure course content is fresh and that learners are at the center of what they do.

Willie Johnson Jr., Retired Training Program Manager for NTED added, "Most of our training partners tailor their training based on information on the ground. States are doing many things differently, but with this technology, we're confident that our end users will get the best training they can, no matter the circumstances."

### Are. You. Ready?!

The 2020 Hurricane Season has already begun. Are you and your loved ones ready? Even if you don't live on the coast, you can still take precautions to safeguard your family and property from severe weather damage.

Here are some helpful things to keep in mind:

> " *How do we respond when many of our resources are on COVID?* "

## NRCC is Always Ready, Willing and Able

*Surge Increases Response Capacity During COVID Pandemic*



***From the Editors***

The ongoing Whole-of-America response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has been multifaceted, using a locally executed, state-managed and federally supported approach to protect the health and safety of the American people. Since March, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has led the federal response in combating the novel Coronavirus, while continuing to provide resources, training, guidance and leadership to local, state, tribal and territorial partners and stakeholders. But as the response to COVID-19 endures, what happens when another disaster inevitably occurs? As June 1st marked the start of the Atlantic hurricane season, FEMA's National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) has been hard at work answering that question.

### Preparing for Multiple Fronts

The COVID-19 pandemic presents FEMA's National Training and Education Division (NTED) an opportunity to support the NRCC so the Center can improve its response and organizational efforts. The NRCC is a multi-agency center that coordinates the overall federal support for major incidents and emergencies. NRCC also provides a clearinghouse of resources and policies for local and state governments in impacted regions. Its staff are trained and prepared to respond to a host of different emergencies across the United States and its territories, but because of the pandemic preparing for, responding to and recovering from simultaneous events must be top-of-mind.

With FEMA's primary focus on the COVID-19 outbreak, senior leadership began discussing the need to expand the NRCC's operational capabilities to be ready for hurricane season. The catalyst? Ironically, an earthquake in landlocked Salt Lake City.

Scott Kelberg, Acting Director of NTED said, "The wheels started turning on the surge concept right around the time of the earthquake outside of Salt Lake City in early March. The administrator and other senior leaders understood they had an active NRCC working the pandemic, but hurricane season is coming, so they began to ask: How do we respond when many of our resources are on COVID?"

Key questions arose as the Surge planning progressed: What facility can the NRCC Surge component use? What personnel are key to its success? Where will they come from? What if someone gets sick at the surge facility? The planning phases sought to answer these and many other questions.

### Phase 1: Facilities

The first and most obvious step to get the NRCC Surge going was to find a place for these coordination professionals to do their work. The current NRCC is located at FEMA HQ, but with this Surge and potentially hundreds of additional staff needed for this new effort it was important to find appropriate facilities that could operate separately from the main facility. This was an important point because of the possible COVID-19 spread. If someone got sick in the main NRCC facility, then FEMA's vital coordination and planning function—not to mention the entire FEMA HQ staff—could be put at risk.

Over the course of two weeks, facilities and operations specialists found the perfect site located at 7th & D Street SW in Washington DC. It was only a few blocks from FEMA HQ which made it perfect for additional coordination activities, staff convenience and rotations. The new facility was thoroughly cleaned, sanitized and disinfected. While the necessary infrastructure was installed (cables, lighting, security, etc.) the surge planning staff could simultaneously search for the best people for the job.

### Phase 2: Staffing

As the newly leased facility was being brought up to the appropriate standard, the surge planning group began searching through FEMA personnel records to find the right mix of technical skill, experience, leadership ability and interest. A survey was sent out to experienced FEMA personnel asking about their availability. Obviously, due to COVID-19, there were additional concerns on the part of the planning group and the individuals that were contacted. These included risk of exposure, other current responsibilities and whether they were, or soon would be, deployed or not.

"We sent out a couple of surveys and at this point there were multiple task forces being set up and people were being deployed to fight the outbreak," added Kelberg. "We weren't going to staff 400 positions [normal staffing level for NRCC], but we needed to start with vital positions such as NRCC Section Leads and with an initial focus on staff within Resilience."

Chad Gorman, Acting Assistant Administrator of the National Preparedness Directorate at FEMA, headed up the core team to identify the right people for the right positions, based on

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many factors including availability, desire, as well as previous experience in the NRCC and incident support. As the planning group began to place section heads, Aaron Levy, Acting Director of FEMA's Individual and Community Preparedness Division was designated as the liaison between the NRCC Surge Program management Office (PMO) and leadership and the NRCC Surge Sections Chiefs and other leadership. This was a vital position to keep the flow of information running smoothly as the planning group worked every day for those first few weeks.

"We were meeting seven days a week for the first couple of weeks, working well into the night," Kelberg added. "Meetings starting at 9 AM on Saturday or Sunday stated to become pretty regular."

As far as protections for COVID-19, in addition to the cleaning and disinfecting actions, the planners had to prepare for the possibility of an outbreak in the facility. Unfortunately, this happened in the main NRCC in mid-April with a staff member testing positive. Before this happened virtual "telecommuting" had been implemented but had to be expanded after the positive test. Additionally, temperature screenings were instituted so no one with a temperature over 100.4 degrees was allowed into the facility and enhanced, nightly deep cleanings began. These rapid response measures were also included in the surge planning efforts.

## Phase 3: Training

After the almost 100 personnel were identified for the surge operation, the focus turned to training to ensure they were all operating at a high proficiency level—and were ready to hit the ground running by June 1st. First guidance was sent to Surge staff to complete independent study courses available on the Emergency Management Institute's (EMI) website. These courses included:

- IS 100: Introduction to the Incident Command System

- IS 200: Basic Incident Command System for Initial Response

- IS 700: An Introduction to the National Incident Management System (NIMS)

- IS 800: National Response Framework, an Introduction

- IS 822: Fundamentals of Management Support Coordination of Federal Disaster Operations

Then technology was leveraged to offer NRCC-focused training for Surge staff. This style of training had been available for some time, but the pandemic made it even more necessary and critical. With "live" instructors available to guide students through the courses, web platforms like Adobe Connect were instrumental in providing general instruction and position-specific course content.

"We built a training program, converted multiple courses from classroom to virtual, identified and trained instructors." Kelberg said. "At this point in late March and early April, as

our regular state and local partner student programs were suspended due to COVD, we had some schedule flexibility with our instructors and developers."

Throughout the month of April, the surge staff completed courses that the EMI and ORR training teams had converted from traditional, in-class content to virtual delivery. As the foundational courses were completed, it was time to start on-the-job training and shadowing for staff, section leads and senior leaders. The section leads were vital parts of this effort as they created a program from scratch with both in-person and virtual training that prepared the surge staff for what it would be like once the NRCC Surge component was stood up.

## Phase 4: Exercises and Transition

By the end of April, the surge staff had completed its training requirements with, of course, the understanding that ongoing training will still be necessary. This additional training included on-the-job training where Surge staff got the opportunity to "side-seat" with the equivalent person and position within the NRCC who were supporting survivors dealing with the Pandemic. It was also quickly identified that exercises that would help hone their skills and build cohesion and a sense of teamwork and familiarity among the new staff members. With support from FEMA's Exercise Branch, and using technology like Microsoft Teams, a Hurricane Drill Week was held in the middle of May and culminated with a Hurricane Seminar to discuss lessons learned.

The end of May was targeted to include some additional functional exercises and a capstone event to put some "finishing touches" on the surge mission. The plan to transfer responsibility to the Office of Response and Recovery was also slated for around this time. The transition plan included trying to make the process more regimented to include two "tracks" that would (1) rotate people off the NRCC floor – many staff had been working up to 80+ days straight and (2) have NRCC Surge staff complete the exercises in order to produce capable, prepared staff ready to operate efficiently and effectively.

## Capacity Building = Capability

Over the course of three short months, NTED and the NRCC were able to plan, coordinate, train and certify a surge staff that is prepared to meet the disaster response commitment to the Nation–not an easy task by any stretch. Standing up the NRCC Surge process resulted in a response capacity increase of 28% with approximately 190 new operational staff who have been migrated into the newly formed IS Cadre. Hurricane season will not wait for the COVID-19 virus to subside (or vice versa), so the NRCC *team* must be prepared for whatever the country faces.

"Our section leads have been incredible," Kelberg noted. "They've been energetic, they've been communicating with their staffs—many of whom they've never worked with—and they've developed a team bond."

The importance of working together as a team cannot be understated. All levels of FEMA leadership, operational or administrative, have been supportive. They helped the process
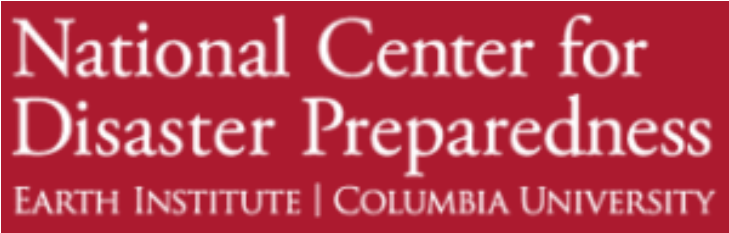
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with a strategic focus, along with a boots-on-the-ground, get it done perspective. At the surge staff level, teamwork was evident throughout the process.

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Being prepared for emergencies during coronavirus will help you and your community.

FEMA **Ready**

**NTED is proud to work with the following partners (highlighted in this edition of the TPP Times:**

New Mexico Tech
**Energetic Materials Research and Testing Center**

NPS
PRAESTANTIA PER SCIENTIAM
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National Center
Biomedical Research and Training
Est. 1998
LSU

National Center for Disaster Preparedness
EARTH INSTITUTE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

# NIMS Alerts
*From the Editors*

NIMS Alerts provide important information on new NIMS guidance, tools and other resources. Since the Winter 2020 issue of The TPP Times, FEMA's National Integration Center released the following:

- NIMS Alert 17-20: FEMA hosts additional webinars on COVID-19 Operational Guidance for Hurricane Season

- NIMS Alert 16-20: FEMA releases IS-700.b An Introduction to the National Incident Management System (Instructor-Led Training Materials)

- NIMS Alert 15-20: FEMA releases Business Emergency Operations Center Quick Start Guidance

- NIMS Alert 14-20: FEMA releases Planning Considerations: Disaster Housing

- NIMS Alert 13-20: FEMA releases Hurricane and Other Severe Weather Forecast Layers for Resilience Analysis and Planning Tool

- NIMS ALERT 12-20: Final Publication for the Revised NIMS Training Program

- NIMS ALERT 11-20: FEMA releases COVID-19 Operational Guidance for Hurricane Season

- NIMS ALERT 10-20: National Engagement for the Draft NIMS Implementation Objectives for Federal Departments and Agencies

- NIMS Alert 05-20: FEMA releases the Revised ICS 0300 and ICS 0400 Pretest and Final Exams. (Instructor Training Materials)

- NIMS Alert 02-20 PrepTalk released: "Left in the Dark: Power Outages in an Interconnected World"

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# NTED Course Updates: New, Revised, Recertified and Retired
*From the Editors*

## New

- AWR-385-W Mobile Device Security and Privacy, Criminal Justice Institute

- MGT-323-C Instructor Development Workshop, Customized, LSU—NCBRT

## Recertified

- MGT-447 Managing Food Emergencies: Strategies for a Community Response, LSU—NCBRT

## Revised or Retired

- None

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# Upcoming Events
*From the Editors*

The Small Business Administration is offering the following free webinars focused on economic recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Webinar Session #1: Responding to the Immediate Crisis / July 1, 11am-12:30pm ET

- Webinar Session #1: Responding to the Immediate Crisis / July 7, 3pm-4:30pm ET

- Webinar Session #1: Responding to the Immediate Crisis / July 9, 12pm-1:30pm ET

- Webinar Session #2: Staying Afloat Through a National Crisis / July 9, 3pm-4:30pm ET

- Webinar Session #2: Staying Afloat Through a National Crisis / July 13, 11am-12:30pm ET

- Webinar Session #2: Staying Afloat Through a National Crisis / July 16, 2pm-3:30pm ET

- Webinar Session #1: Responding to the Immediate Crisis / July 22, 11am-12:30pm ET

- Webinar Session #2: Staying Afloat Through a National Crisis / July 22, 3pm-4:30pm ET

To register, go to: https://sba.6connex.com/event/SBA8aVirtual/login.



*New York, NY, 4/14/20—As New Yorkers are hopeful that they have hit the peak of the coronavirus outbreak, signs are visible all over the city reminding residents to stay home to save lives and flatten the curve. K.C. Wilsey/FEMA.*

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## Want the latest? Get weekly news and updates

The Higher Education Program publishes a bi-weekly newsletter covering a wide variety of topics and updates from the Higher Education program. The current issue, as well as an archive of past issues, is available online at the FEMA Emergency Management Education Newsletter Archive.

# Best Practices and Considerations for Accessible Online Delivery

*From the Editors*

As we work to adjust to a new normal of virtual meetings and remote course deliveries, it's important that we not forget about accessibility. And while the delivery of courses via video conferencing platforms is a rapidly evolving concept, there are some basic considerations that can help ensure that all learners have an equivalent access to your courses.

Video conferencing has long been a useful tool for meetings and collaboration, but since the outbreak of COVID-19 has forced facilities and campuses to close across the country, web-based conferencing has become a go-to tool for learning. Zoom is almost ubiquitous, but there are a host of others—each with their own pros and cons—including Microsoft Teams, Adobe Connect, Google Meet, Skype, WebEx and others.

This article is certainly not intended to be an in-depth or thorough discussion of the pros and cons of each platform, nor an endorsement of a particular platform. Rather, we hope that this gets you thinking about accessibility, asking the right questions and exploring the features of the various tools—whether you have one in place or are comparing options—as you work to deliver your courses online.

Closed captioning is an especially important consideration. Some platforms, like Skype, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams, offer real-time automated captioning. As of now, Teams and Meet offer this in English only, while Skype supports 11 languages. Keep in mind, also, that crosstalk and unclear audio would likely impact the reliability of those captions, so if you're using automated captions, try to encourage your instructors or moderators to speak slowly and clearly, and one at a time, when possible. Other platforms, like Zoom and Adobe Connect offer built-in support for live captioning provided by a third party.

If you're recording your class, you may also be able to produce a transcript of the session. Zoom, Skype and Teams can generate transcripts automatically, whereas Adobe Connect can generate a transcript from the captions provided by a third party.

All of the platforms discussed above make claims about keyboard accessibility and compatibility with assistive technology, such as screen readers. It's encouraged to review the accessibility claims of whichever platform you choose and understand how its features relate to your course delivery.

Regardless of your platform there are steps that you can take to make your course as accessible as possible. If you're working to adjust an existing in-person course to be delivered remotely, the good news is that a lot of the accessibility work is already done in the form of your Section 508 compliant course materials. Providing students with these accessible materials in advance will allow learners to prepare for the course session and access the materials as needed during the delivery.

There are also some best practices for online sessions that will not only make the course delivery more accessible but help make the experience better and more productive for all users.

As mentioned above, having participants and instructors speak one at a time will go a long way to improving the quality of captions and transcripts, but will also make the course easier to follow by avoiding overlapping audio. Most platforms give the moderator control over who's mic is open at any given time, so keeping mics muted until needed is a good practice for everyone.

It is also helpful to get in the habit of having speakers introduce themselves each time they speak. Not only does this improve the clarity of captions and transcripts, but it helps everyone know exactly who is talking, which can often be difficult given the quality of built-in computer mics and speakers.

Note and Chat features can be used to keep track of key points of discussion or pose questions for consideration to the learners. Again, this is a practice that benefits all learners, not only those with disabilities.

Many of the platforms discussed have both desktop and mobile apps, with the desktop version often offering a more robust experience. When possible, encourage learners to attend the course on a computer rather than a mobile device. However, keep in mind that internet access itself is a barrier to entry—many rural and urban areas are without reliable high-speed internet connections. While this is not a Section 508 consideration, it should be something that you consider when planning your delivery. Providing a dial-in option, together with course materials sent in advance, can help you reach learners regardless of their internet availability.

We've only scratched the surface of accessibility considerations for online courses. We hope that this information, together with the approaches discussed throughout this issue, help you plan, assess and improve your remote delivery.

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