



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF  
SOCIAL SERVICES

# Disaster Shelter Planning and Readiness

Jennifer Sharpe and Moira Qualls



1. What are your agency's roles and responsibilities if a disaster shelter opened in your locality?

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2. How does your agency interact and work with other agencies during a shelter operation?
3. What preparations (planning, training, exercise) have you taken with regards to your roles?





# **Strategies to strengthen shelter readiness**

Opening

Operating

Closing

**Available resources**

# Disaster Shelters

Safe      Accessible      Overnight

Food      Water      Restrooms

HVAC      Electricity      Sleeping areas

Basic health services      Security

Reasonable AFN accommodations





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**What is the mandate for local DSS involvement in sheltering during an emergency?**

Code of Virginia  
Title 44. Military and Emergency Laws  
Chapter 3.2. Emergency Services and Disaster Law



## § 44-146.19. Powers and duties of political subdivisions

**Virginia Code lacks a requirement for local DSS to lead or support emergency sheltering**

**A locality's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) may require it**

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# Local Emergency Operations Plan

Emergency sheltering is a key EOP component

Local EOPs should assign sheltering responsibilities



## Developing and Maintaining Emergency Operations Plans

Comprehensive Preparedness Guide (CPG) 101

May 2025, Version 3.1



FEMA



# Common Local Sheltering Assignees

American Red Cross

Local DSS

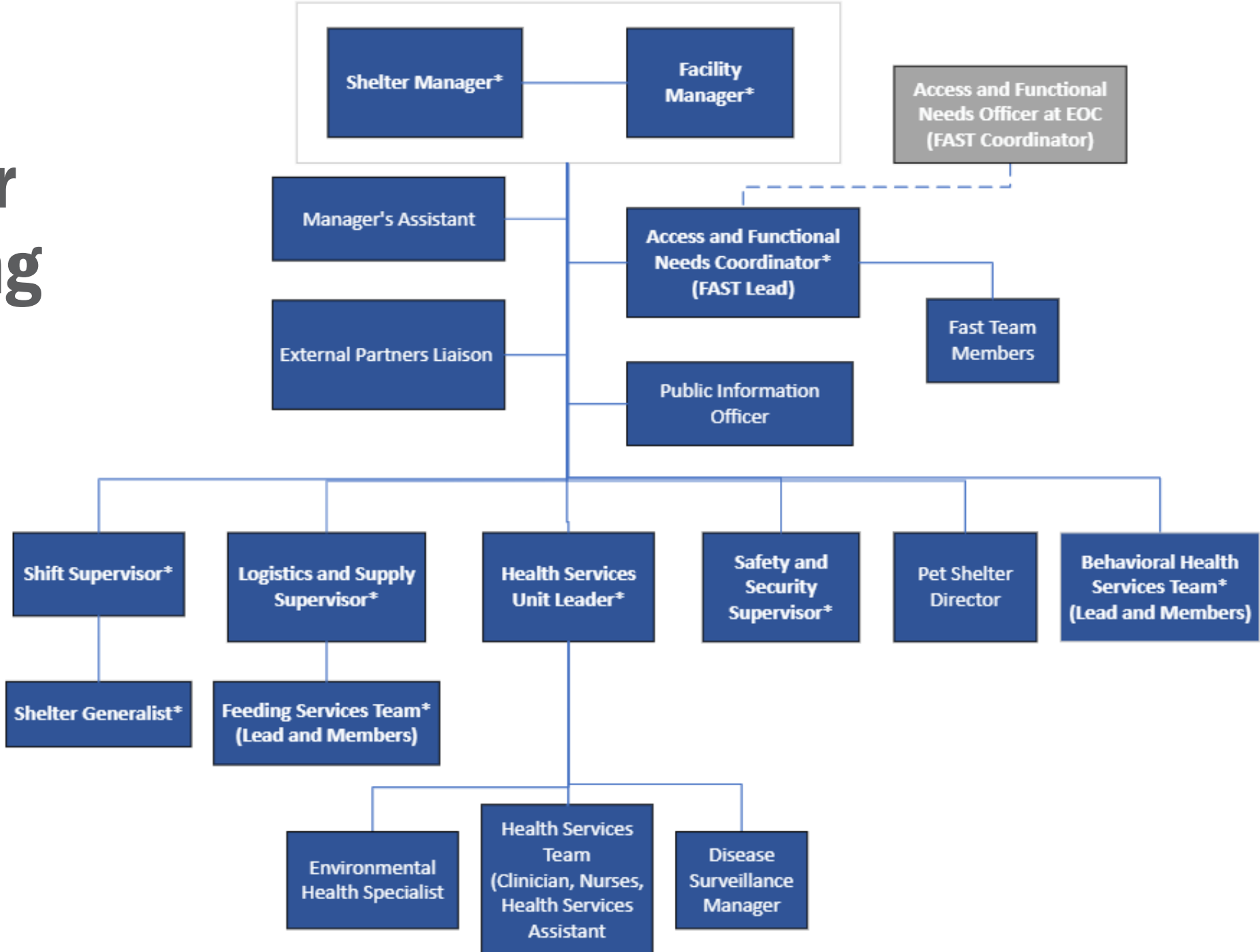
- Communicate with local EM
- Establish common understanding



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# Shelter Operations Interagency Coordination

# Shelter Staffing



# Shelter Facilities



ADA  
accessible



40-100 sf  
sleeping space  
per person  
(varies by  
location)



Programmatic  
space (food prep,  
dining, supply  
distribution, first  
aid/medical  
station,  
recreation, etc.)



Logistics  
staging area



Parking

# Shelter Supplies





# Shelter services



# Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Shelter Kits

Address a variety of AFN

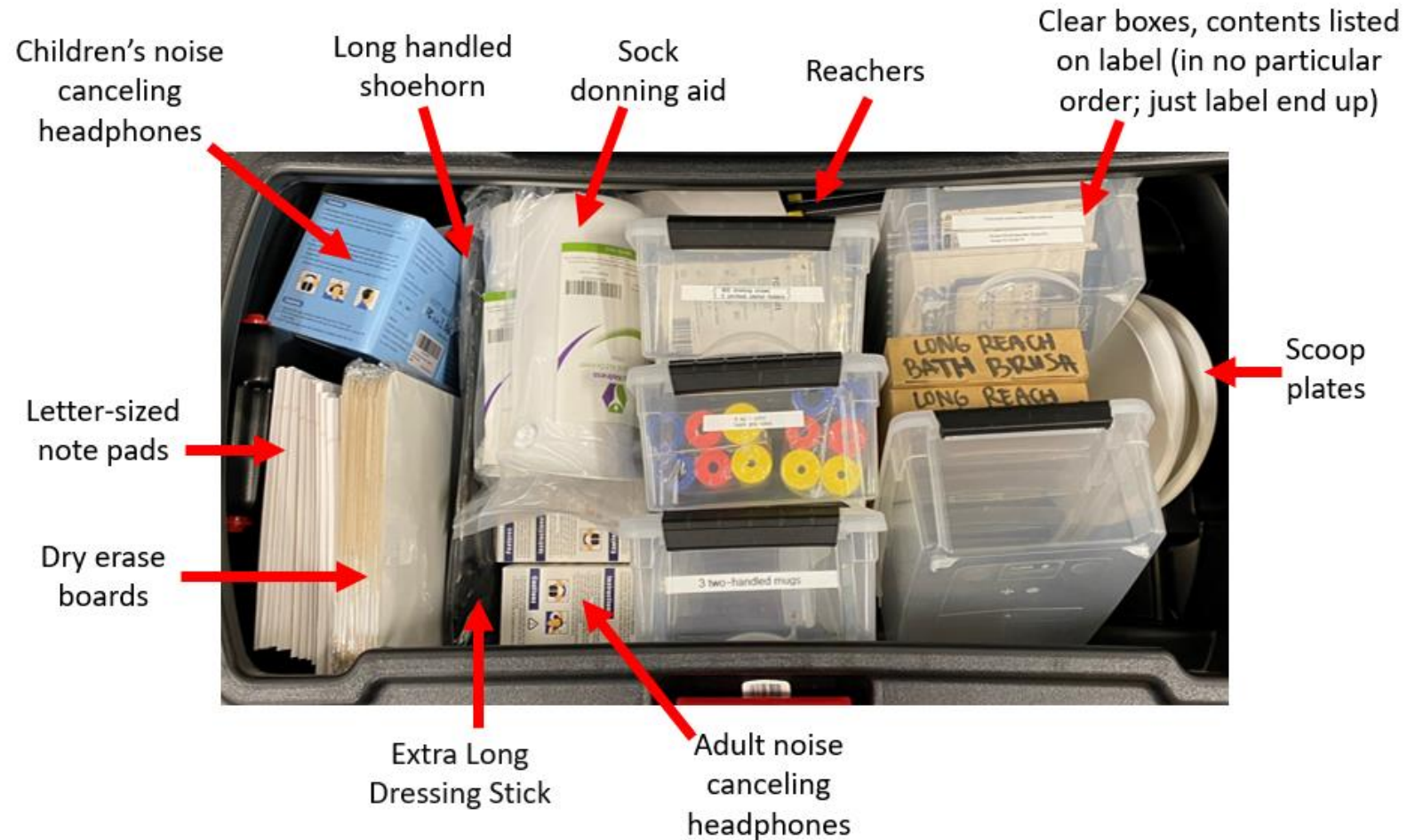
May not cover all needs

Created for State Managed Shelters

Useful in local shelters too

Deployable to localities opening or exercising shelter operations

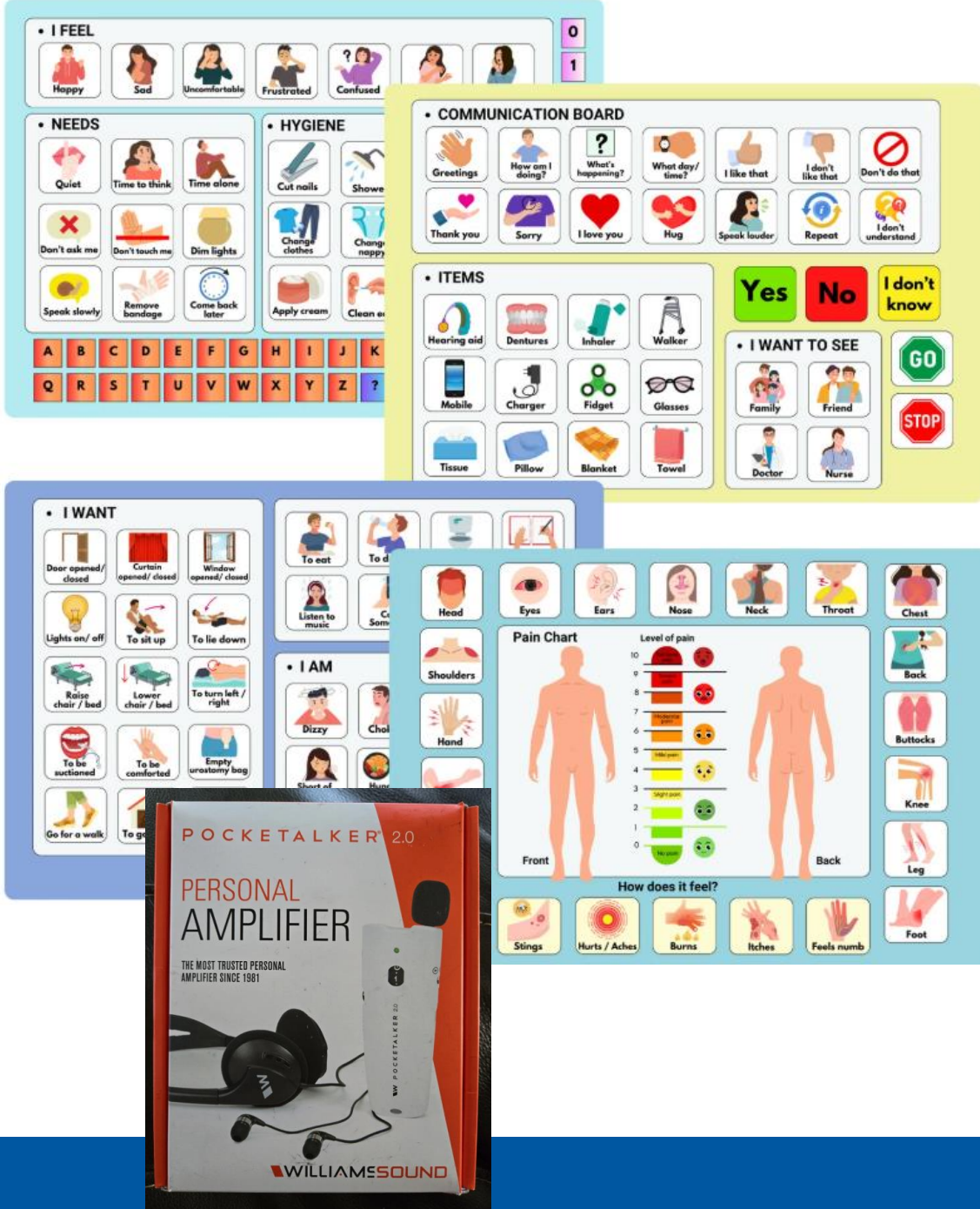
Two bins support a 100-person shelter



# What is in them?

## Communication Tools

- i-Pad with electronic communication boards, video translation apps/service
- American sign language guides
- Pictogram communication boards
- Notepads and pens, dry erase boards and pens
- Pocket-talkers
- Hearing aid batteries



# What is in them?

## Tools for Activities of Daily Living

- Dressing aids, Shoehorns, Sock donners
- Feeding aids: bendy straws, utensil straps and foam grips, two handled mugs, spill proof bowls with lips
- Long handled shower brushes
- Long reach grabbers
- Magnifying Lens





# What is in them?

## Sensory Supports

- Ear plugs
- Eye covers
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Fidget toys
- Weighted blankets



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## How can localities get the AFN Kits?

Local DSS exercise?

- Email [OEM@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:OEM@dss.virginia.gov) during the planning phase to request a kit

Local DSS opening a real shelter?

- Local EM submits a formal resource request in WebEOC

[Video training on kit contents](#) available in the COVLC (VDSS-OEM 1107)





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# Volunteer Emergency Workforce Model

# VDSS Emergency Workforce



Internal voluntary program for full-time state employees

Temporarily reassigned for disaster response

Regular pay during trainings and deployments

Trained, activated, and deployed for  
State Managed Shelters  
State Transfer Points  
Family Assistance Centers

Trained by OEM

Virtual and in-person trainings  
Practical exercises

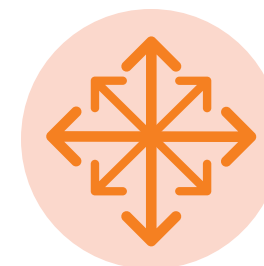
# Benefits of a volunteer Emergency Workforce



People who want to help provide better service



Those who opt in more likely to engage in training and prepare for an incident



Recruit staff beyond LDSS to other local government departments

# How to create your own voluntary Emergency Workforce

## Create a Policy

Determine eligibility

Non-essential? Full-time?

Establish work requirements

Activity level, applicable skills, etc.

Define processes

Activation, deployment, reimbursement, compensation, etc.

Create an application (MS Form or similar)



# What Trainings Should Prepare Your EW?

Use existing training programs during steady state/blue skies

Red Cross

FEMA (G108 Portsmouth)

VDSS (AFN and Trauma Informed Care)

EMACV YouTube video: Emergency Shelter Operations – Training for Excellence in Disaster Response



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# Shelter Planning



# Planning Process – Where and What?

Identify things you need to open a local shelter:

What facilities can you use?

Are those buildings ADA compliant?

Do they have a generator?

Is there a place for household pets?

What resources does your locality already have in place?

How are you planning to register people?





# Planning Process – Who?

**Building relationships with partners is most important**

Who do you call for help?

Who is the primary staffing source?

- County/City/Town Employees
- Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)
- Community Organization Active in Disaster (COAD)

Which non-profits can support the effort?

Are there faith-based organizations willing to help?

Who can do feeding in your locality?

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Who is going to oversee health/medical support? Is Telehealth Available?

# Planning Resources

- » VDSS Regional Mass Care Coordinators
- » Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) through your local Emergency Manager
- » FEMA Mass Care website
- » American Red Cross
- » Workgroups/Committees
  - All Hazards Advisory Committee (AHAC) - Shelter-Mass Care Workgroup
  - Emergency Management Alliance of Central VA (EMACV) - Mass Care & Human Services Committee
- » Other locality's plans/state plan for reference/template
- » <https://nationalmasscarestrategy.org/>

# VA Regional Mass Care Coordinators

- Emma De Jong
  - Northern, Central (partial), and Piedmont (partial)
  - VDEM Regions 2, 3, & 7
- Ron Clinedinst
  - Western and Piedmont (partial)
  - VDEM Regions 4 & 6
- Jennifer Sharpe
  - Eastern and Central (partial)
  - VDEM Regions 1 & 5



# Regional Mass Care Coordinator

Support local DSS with mass care planning

Train, mentor, and give real-time support during exercises & disaster response

Liaise between local and state agencies so that local priorities shape statewide mass care planning

Help localities identify & address gaps in resources, staffing, and planning

Build relationships between EM, DSS, ARC, and other mass care partners, non-profits, and faith-based groups





# Examples of Support

- Shelter Guidebook development
- Available tools:
  - Statewide Mutual Aid (SMA)
  - Intergovernmental Agreements (IGA)
  - State resources
  - Logistics Planning Tool
- Developing Workgroups
- Training
- Exercises

# Succession Planning - Documentation



**Processes ● Procedures ● Resource locations ● Contacts**

# G108 – Community Mass Care Management Training

Enable communities:

to plan for and manage mass care

Resulting in increased:

mass care flexibility at the local level

quality/quantity of local assistance  
for professional care organizations  
such as ARC

community self-sufficiency

Central Region:

Hopewell – December 8 & 9

Charlottesville – April 21 & 22

Eastern Region:

Portsmouth – January 28 & 29

More coming soon!



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**What can I clarify for you?**



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# Thank you

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