

VI. DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

The Standards in Section VI describe the requirements an I&R service must meet in order to best position itself to connect people to critical resources in times of disaster. Although most I&R services do not promote themselves as disaster service agencies, in the past decade I&Rs have been identified as natural community partners for the dissemination of information about community based disaster-related services. In the wake of September 11th and the institutionalization of 2-1-1, it has become prudent business practice for I&R services to be prepared for disaster response and equip staff to handle disaster related inquiries appropriately. The I&R service shall be prepared to assess and provide referrals for inquirers who are experiencing a crisis due to a disaster of natural or human origin, or who want to offer assistance and contact the I&R service for a means to do so. Preparation includes a plan for the I&R to continue to provide services if its building is damaged or destroyed; and the ability to effectively accumulate and disseminate accurate disaster-related information, provide information and referral assistance for individuals impacted by a disaster and provide community reports on inquirer needs and referrals.

Standard 21: Emergency Operations and Business Contingency Plan

The I&R service shall have a written emergency operations and business contingency plan that specifically addresses disasters common to the area, but one that also prepares for emergencies in general. The plan shall reference emergency preparedness and mitigation activities such as structural alternations and changes in business operations; and shall address the steps to be taken before, during and after an emergency to prevent or minimize interruptions in business operations and assure long-term recovery.

Criteria

1. The I&R service shall have written procedures that address specific types of emergencies including power outages, fires, medical emergencies, bomb threats, radiological threats, workplace violence and other incidents which may require different forms of response, e.g., duck, cover and hold during an earthquake or sheltering in place during a radiological emergency. Included shall be procedures for contacting the police/paramedics.
2. The I&R service shall have written procedures for emergency evacuation of the facility following a disaster that impacts the immediate area surrounding the facility and may have made continued occupancy unsafe. The evacuation procedure shall designate exits, specify an assembly area, include provisions for ensuring that everyone has left the building, provide for damage assessment, and include instructions for shutting off gas, electricity and water when necessary. Special arrangements for helping staff or visitors with a disability exit the building shall also be addressed.
3. The I&R service shall develop and document a designated leadership description which outlines the roles and responsibilities of managers and staff before, during and in the aftermath of an incident.
4. The I&R service shall have procedures for maintaining service delivery during and after an emergency.
5. The I&R service shall identify alternative sites or different modes for service delivery in the event of loss of facilities.
6. The I&R service shall have periodic drills that allow staff to practice emergency procedures outlined in the plan.

Standard 22: Formal Relationships with Government and Private Sector Emergency Operations and Relief Agencies

The I&R service shall participate in ongoing cooperative disaster response planning in the community and shall take all steps that are necessary to become recognized as an integral part of the community's emergency preparedness and response network.

Criteria

1. The I&R service shall understand the command and control structure within their jurisdiction and their own role and that of other organizations in the response, relief and recovery phases of a disaster.
2. The I&R service shall enter into formal agreements with appropriate government and private sector emergency operations and relief agencies such as VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Assisting in Disasters) and the Red Cross. The agreements shall outline the roles and responsibilities of all parties.
3. The I&R service shall actively participate in community meetings that address plans for disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, relief and recovery.

Standard 23: Pre - and Post-Disaster Database

The I&R service shall develop, maintain, and/or use an accurate, up-to-date computerized resource database that contains information about available community resources that provide services in times of disaster. Database records shall include detailed descriptions of the services organizations provide and the conditions under which services are available; and shall be indexed and accessed using the Disaster Services section of the AIRS/INFO LINE Taxonomy of Human Services.

Criteria

1. The I&R service shall include in their resource database information about permanent local, state and federal disaster-related resources, i.e., organizations with a formal role in emergency response, a clearly defined disaster mission and/or a history of providing services during a previous incident.
2. The I&R service shall add information about organizations that have no formal role in emergency response but emerge in the context of a particular disaster, specific relief and recovery services that come to life in response to the specific needs of the community, and information about specific services (and their locations) offered by agencies in the standing disaster database (such as Red Cross Service Centers).
3. The I&R service shall update the disaster resources annually, immediately prior to an anticipated disaster and throughout the response, relief and recovery periods.
4. The I&R service shall disseminate disaster-related information per pre-existing agreements with other organizations in the community.
5. The I&R service shall have an alternative means for allowing staff to access disaster resources in the event that computerized access is unavailable.

Standard 24: Disaster-Related I&R Service Delivery

The I&R service shall provide information and referral services to the community during (when appropriate) and following a disaster or other emergency. This service shall include assessing the needs of the inquirer, evaluating appropriate resources, indicating organizations capable of meeting those needs, helping inquirers for whom services are unavailable by locating alternative resources and actively participating in linking inquirers to needed services or volunteer opportunities.

Criteria

1. The I&R service shall ensure adequate staff to meet potential increases in inquirer needs.

2. The I&R service shall have in place mutual aid agreements with other I&R services which include provisions for relocation of staff and/or redirection of calls.
3. The I&R service shall have a protocol for staff who will be assigned to provide information and referral at local assistance centers (LACs) or other off-site locations.
4. I&R specialists shall have the skills to respond effectively to people in crisis, work cooperatively with other organizations, remain flexible in a rapidly changing environment, be willing to work under adverse conditions (e.g., long hours, uncomfortable surroundings), be aware of their own stress level and coping mechanisms, respond appropriately in face-to-face communications and work within the boundaries of their I&R role.
5. I&R specialists shall understand the government emergency response service delivery system, the types of services people typically need following a disaster, the organizations that generally provide them, the types of organizations that may be closed or otherwise unable to deliver services due to the emergency (e.g., government offices, the courts), atypical services people may need to access (e.g., open hardware stores, functioning ATM machines), and the structure and contents of the disaster database and/or other approved sources of disaster related information.
6. The I&R service shall have a written plan for providing disaster stress debriefing for all staff.

Standard 25: Disaster-Related Inquirer Data Collection/Reports

The I&R service shall track inquirer requests for service, referrals and when appropriate, demographic information about the inquirer; and shall be prepared to produce reports regarding requests for disaster-related services and referral activity.

Criteria

1. The I&R service shall collect and organize inquirer data that facilitates appropriate referrals and provides a basis for describing requests for disaster-related service and identifying gaps and overlaps in service.
2. The I&R service shall be prepared to produce regular reports to the community regarding referrals, access to services, service availability and unmet needs.
3. When appropriate, the I&R shall participate in shared client tracking efforts.
4. Following all emergencies that necessitate implementation of the provisions of the Disaster Preparedness standards, the I&R service shall produce an after action report which documents the special actions of the agency with a focus on what worked well and what needs to be improved through revisions of the agency's disaster plan and/or additional training for staff.

Standard 26: Disaster-Related Technology Requirements

The I&R service shall have technology in place that facilitates the ability of the organization to maintain service delivery during times of disaster or a localized emergency.

Criteria

1. The I&R service shall take whatever steps are necessary to establish a relationship with their telephone service provider that will ensure that the organization is given high priority for continued phone service in times of disaster.
2. The I&R service shall have the ability to reroute calls to another site (e.g., to cell phones, to people's homes, to another local agency or out of the region) if their business site is not accessible.
3. The I&R service shall have the ability to access the resource database (e.g., via the Internet, a stand-alone single user copy of the database on a laptop, a directory or other print version) if their business site is not accessible.

4. The I&R service shall conduct an assessment of its facility to identify equipment, connections and other resources that may be vulnerable under emergency conditions and take steps to mitigate the situation, e.g., move computers and telephones that are located on the floor to safer locations.
5. The I&R service shall have power supplies (UPSs) on all critical systems for short-term recovery in the case of a power failure.
6. It is recommended that the I&R service have an emergency generator or other power back-up that will allow them to continue operations on a longer term basis during a power failure. The I&R service will need to determine the length of time the back-up power supply will operate and inform staff regarding the components of the organization's operations (e.g., which computers, telephones, etc.) that it will power.
7. It is recommended that back-up systems for telephones be analog rather than digital so they do not require local electricity.
8. It is recommended that the I&R service have the ability to reprogram its phone lines and data network remotely.
9. It is recommended that the I&R service have redundant T1 lines from multiple central offices, where possible.
10. It is recommended that the I&R service have an alternative phone number in a different location for staff to access the agency in case of an emergency that makes the regular phone lines inaccessible.

Standard 27: Disaster Training and Exercise

The I&R service shall train staff on emergency operations and business expectations upon hiring and shall provide ongoing training at least annually thereafter. The I&R service shall actively participate in community disaster exercises to test the organization's emergency operations plan.

Criteria

1. The I&R service shall provide general training for staff that addresses the specific types of disasters common to the area; the organization's role and mission in times of disaster; the phases of disaster; federal, state and local response plans and resources; and other topics that will help prepare staff for an emergency and ensure that they understand their organization's commitments to the community.
2. The I&R service shall provide training on the organization's in-house disaster preparedness procedures and protocols.
3. The I&R service shall provide training for I&R staff that addresses the attitudes, skills and information they require to meet the needs of people in crisis during a disaster. The training shall help participants understand how disasters affect individuals and communities and shall address the specific requirements of people with special needs, e.g., individuals with disabilities, language barriers, cultural differences or other relevant characteristics. It shall also prepare I&R staff for the likelihood of providing service delivery under altered and frequently adverse conditions which may include working long hours, off-site or under the direction of another organization.
4. The I&R service shall provide training for resource specialists that addresses the types of resources that need to be included in the standing pre-disaster database and those that need to be added following the occurrence of an emergency; use of the Disaster Services section of the Taxonomy as a classification structure; and procedures for the collection, validation, maintenance and dissemination of disaster-related information.
5. The I&R service shall actively participate in a community disaster exercise annually and should schedule their own exercise if unable to participate in a broader community event.