

Illinois Emergency Operations Plan

ESF-15 External Affairs

Illinois Emergency Management Agency and
Office of Homeland Security

September 23, 2026



Illinois Emergency Management Agency
and Office of Homeland Security



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State of Illinois Managed Plan Emergency Support Function (ESF) #15 External Affairs

Title	ESF-15 External Affairs	
Managing Division/Branch	Division of Operations	Strategic Planning – Inter-Agency Strategic Planning Cell (ISPC)
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Branch Manager Review and Approval	Scott Gauvin, Manager of Strategic Operations and Preparedness	July 7, 2026
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State ESF - 15 Coordinator	Support Agencies & Organizations
Illinois Emergency Management Agency and Office of Homeland Security (IEMA-OHS)	American Red Cross (ARC) Illinois Department of Central Management Services (CMS) Illinois National Guard (ILNG) General Requirements for Other State Agencies, Boards, Commissions, Mobile Support Teams (MSTs), and Public Information Officers (PIOs) Activated through the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC)
Primary State Agencies & Organizations	
Illinois Emergency Management Agency and Office of Homeland Security (IEMA-OHS)	
Federal ESF - 15 Coordinator	
Department of Homeland Security (DHS)	



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Record of Changes

When changes are made to this document, the following procedures will be followed:

1. Changes will be issued by the Inter-Agency Strategic Planning Cell at IEMA-OHS and transmitted to agencies, personnel, and other designees specified by the IEMA-OHS Director or designee via electronic means.
2. When a change is made, an entry will be made in the following log:

CHANGE NUMBER	DATE ENTERED	PAGES OR SECTIONS CHANGED	ENTERED BY
1	March 2026	Bi-annual Review	Glenn Smith



1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

- 1.1.1. Establish processes and protocols for the timely and effective dissemination of information to the public, government officials, media, and key stakeholders.

1.2. Scope

- 1.2.1. This plan includes the components of:
 - 1.2.1.1. Public information and crisis communications,
 - 1.2.1.2. Legislative affairs,
 - 1.2.1.3. Intergovernmental affairs (federal and local coordination),
 - 1.2.1.4. Community relations, and
 - 1.2.1.5. Communications strategies.
- 1.2.2. For this plan, public information and crisis communications include, but are not limited to:
 - 1.2.2.1. Shelter locations,
 - 1.2.2.2. Road and waterway closures,
 - 1.2.2.3. Personal safety instructions,
 - 1.2.2.4. Evacuation instructions,
 - 1.2.2.5. Locations of disaster recovery centers,
 - 1.2.2.6. How to apply for federal assistance,
 - 1.2.2.7. Volunteer information, and
 - 1.2.2.8. Links to relevant information from other agencies or organizations (i.e., American Red Cross, National Weather Service, public health agencies, etc.)
- 1.2.3. This plan does not consider routine operational activities of the state or Public Information Officer (PIO) staff.



- 1.2.4. This plan does not supersede policy, enabling authority, or operational delegations of authority established by the Governor or IEMA-OHS Director.

1.3. Policy

- 1.3.1. Procedures for utilization, control, and use will incorporate and consider operational priorities that include, but are not limited to:
- 1.3.1.1. Protection of life,
 - 1.3.1.2. Public health and safety,
 - 1.3.1.3. Property protection,
 - 1.3.1.4. Environmental protection,
 - 1.3.1.5. Restoration of essential utilities,
 - 1.3.1.6. Restoration of essential program functions, and
 - 1.3.1.7. Coordination as appropriate
- 1.3.2. The IEMA-OHS PIO will act as the primary State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) PIO.
- 1.3.3. The SEOC will serve as the central source of information on state response and recovery activities and, as required, disseminate information to the Governor, General Assembly, Congress, the public, private sector, non-governmental, volunteer organizations, and the media through the SEOC PIO and IEMA-OHS Legislative Liaison, when appropriate. All communications with the public must be clear, timely, and accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
- 1.3.4. PIOs from other state agencies will coordinate and provide information on crisis communications, public information releases and notifications, legislative inquiries, social media analysis and information dissemination, and event-specific regulatory provisions to the SEOC PIO.
- 1.3.5. Release of external affairs information generated through the SEOC in response to an incident or pre-planned event will be authorized by the IEMA-OHS Director or designee. All communication with the public shall be timely, clear, and accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.



- 1.3.6. The SEOC PIO will acquire up-to-date contact lists of all media organizations serving Illinois citizens, other state agency PIOs, the Governor's press office contacts, local emergency management agency PIOs, PIOs from adjacent states, and PIOs for pertinent federal agencies, legislative and congressional offices through appropriate channels.

1.4. Situation

- 1.4.1. Events have occurred requiring timely, accurate information for impacted populations across the whole community.
- 1.4.2. Processes for effective collection, control, and dissemination of emergency public information are established to minimize confusion, misinformation, and rumors throughout short-, intermediate-, and long-term recovery.
- 1.4.3. State resources are required for the development, coordination, and dissemination of crisis communications and public information.
- 1.4.4. Rumors will propagate, requiring official verification and corrective actions.
- 1.4.5. Joint Information Center(s) will be established.
- 1.4.6. Individual agencies will coordinate with relevant stakeholders.
- 1.4.7. Multiple methods of disseminating crisis communications and public information will be required, including methods to reach those with access and functional needs. This may include, but is not limited to, translation to languages other than English, American Sign Language interpretation, closed captions, TTY services, and beyond.

2. Concept of Operations

2.1. General

- 2.1.1. Public information and crisis communications support is provided by resources of IEMA-OHS and other state agencies and external organizations.
- 2.1.2. IEMA-OHS will coordinate public information and crisis communications with state agencies and external organizations activated through the SEOC during response and recovery operations or an SEOC pre-planned event.
- 2.1.3. The SEOC PIO position will be appointed by the SEOC Manager in coordination with the IEMA Executive Team, in all activations to provide a cohesive and unified message to the public.



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- 2.1.4. Press releases, media advisories, and other press materials are distributed through or coordinated with the Governor's press office. All media should be released in a manner that is accessible to all people, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
- 2.1.5. Social media is monitored by PIO's assigned by the SEOC PIO during emergencies for situational awareness and rumor control.
- 2.1.6. Coordination and release of information to the public and the media will utilize a Joint Information System (JIS).
- 2.1.7. Public information includes processes, procedures, and systems for communicating information on an incident with respect to cause, size, and current situation, as well as matters of general interest.
 - 2.1.7.1. Various methods of disseminating crisis information and public information will be utilized to reach individuals with access and functional needs. All communication with the public shall be timely, clear, and accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
 - 2.1.7.2. Emergency instructions during an incident will be provided to the State Unified Area Command (SUAC) staff, which includes responders assigned to the UAC, using safety messages and Incident Action Plans (IAPs). Emergency instructions, which may impact a broader audience, including mission-critical workers from other state agencies, will be disseminated through the established channels within the CMS Office of Communication and Information (IOCI) or through the SEOC representatives.
- 2.1.8. Legislative Affairs addresses questions and concerns of constituents relayed by the congressional and legislative district offices of the United States Congress or the Illinois General Assembly members or their respective staff.
- 2.1.9. Intergovernmental Affairs is direct communication and outreach between elected officials at the federal, state, county, and local levels.
- 2.1.10. Community Relations is coordination and support to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in providing vital information to those affected by disaster through interaction with local officials, community groups, or individual community members.



2.1.11. Communication strategies include methods by which information will be conveyed to the whole community.

2.1.11.1. Delivery mechanisms and content messaging will be coordinated as appropriate to reach various population sectors, including those with access and functional needs, through:

2.1.11.1.1. Media advisories,

2.1.11.1.2. Press releases,

2.1.11.1.3. Prepared material (i.e., flyers, fact sheets, brochures, signage, etc.),

2.1.11.1.4. Public Service Announcements,

2.1.11.1.5. Briefing packages for media briefings,

2.1.11.1.6. Translated material,

2.1.11.1.7. Social media (Facebook, YouTube, X, etc.), and

2.1.11.1.8. Emergency Management Websites (i.e., www.Ready.Illinois.gov).

2.2. Notification, Alert, and Warning (NAW)

2.2.1. SEOC NAW of SEOC representatives will be handled in accordance with ESF-2, Appendix X-1 Notification, Alert, and Warning.

2.2.2. Primary and support agencies are responsible for internal and support partner NAW.

2.3. Activation

2.3.1. The IEMA-OHS Director, or designee, along with the Executive Team, will determine the SEOC activation level based on information provided by the SEOC Manager or Duty Officer to appropriately staff the SEOC for operations.

2.4. Communications

2.4.1. Communications throughout response and recovery will be conducted in accordance with standard operating procedures and managed using established procedures, processes, and policies outlined in IEOP ESF-2 Communications.



- 2.4.2. Communications will be conducted in a National Incident Management System (NIMS) compliant manner utilizing clear text and frequencies coordinated with the SEOC.

2.5. Resource Management

- 2.5.1. Resource management and logistics will be carried out in accordance with IEOP ESF-7 Resource Management and Logistics.

2.6. Organization

2.6.1. Direction and Control

- 2.6.1.1. State agencies and external organizations retain operational control of their resources.
- 2.6.1.2. The Governor, or designee, has the authority to exercise overall coordination of resources belonging to the state.
- 2.6.1.3. The SEOC PIO reports to the Governor's Office, IEMA-OHS Director, and SEOC Manager, as required.
- 2.6.1.4. The IEMA-OHS Legislative Representative will coordinate communications with members of the United States Congress, the Illinois General Assembly, and their staffs.

2.6.2. Coordinating Elements

- 2.6.2.1. The Joint Information Center (JIC) is a central location where public information personnel from activated agencies perform critical emergency information, crisis communication, and public affairs functions. The JIC is a part of the Joint Information System (JIS).
- 2.6.2.2. A JIC may be activated for a variety of reasons, depending on the event. These may include:
 - 2.6.2.2.1. Activation of the SEOC,
 - 2.6.2.2.2. The fulfillment of an Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) request to the state or by the state,
 - 2.6.2.2.3. Impact of the incident,



- 2.6.2.2.4. Pre-planned event,
 - 2.6.2.2.5. Potential level of media attention, or
 - 2.6.2.2.6. Duration of the incident, response, and recovery.
 - 2.6.2.3. Based on the scope and magnitude of an event, additional PIOs may be activated from:
 - 2.6.2.3.1. State agency PIOs, and
 - 2.6.2.3.2. Illinois National Guard (ILNG) Public Affairs Teams to help support PIO operations.
 - 2.6.2.4. If in-state PIO resources are depleted, additional PIO assistance can be requested from other states through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC).
 - 2.6.2.5. Coordination between private sector organizations and state damage assessment organizations will be maintained through the SEOC and the Business Emergency Operations Center (BEOC).

2.6.3. Federal Coordination

- 2.6.3.1. Under a Presidential Declaration, external affairs functions may be coordinated with federal counterparts in a JIC or Joint Field Office (JFO).
- 2.6.3.2. Inquiries received by the state PIO staff from the federal level will be coordinated by the FEMA External Affairs staff.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1. State ESF Coordinator

3.1.1. Illinois Emergency Management Agency & Office of Homeland Security (IEMA-OHS)

- 3.1.1.1. Coordinates the utilization of required ESF-15 support to execute missions presented by the SEOC Manager.
- 3.1.1.2. Coordinates, integrates, and manages overall State efforts for ESF-15 External Affairs.



- 3.1.1.3. Manages and updates resource availability for ESF-15 External Affairs.
- 3.1.1.4. Assists in planning during activations and updates to the overall ESF plan.

3.2. Primary State Agency/Organization

3.2.1. Illinois Emergency Management Agency & Office of Homeland Security (IEMA-OHS)

- 3.2.1.1. With the SEOC PIO, coordinate public information and messaging on response-related issues for the public, ensuring all public messaging is accessible regardless of mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
- 3.2.1.2. With the SEOC PIO, coordinate public information and messaging on response-related issues with internal and external response and recovery partners. Ensure all communications with the public are clear, timely, and accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
- 3.2.1.3. Coordinate incident communications using a communications strategy following an actual or potential terrorist threat or incident.
- 3.2.1.4. Serve as the primary agency for state external affairs.
- 3.2.1.5. Utilize the JIS.
- 3.2.1.6. Coordinate activation and management of a JIC at one or more locations.
- 3.2.1.7. Coordinate the development of public information in accessible formats, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
- 3.2.1.8. Coordinate posting of external affairs information on various media platforms in coordination with other state agencies, local officials, and key stakeholders. Ensure all public-facing information and media are accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.



- 3.2.1.9. Develop and disseminate crisis communications and public information utilizing a variety of methods in accessible formats to local, state, and federal response staff, public, media, volunteer, private sector, and non-governmental organizations. Ensure all communications and public information are accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
- 3.2.1.10. Coordinate media monitoring to ensure accurate and timely information is being disseminated.
- 3.2.1.11. Coordinate with the CMS's Illinois Office of Communication and Information (IOCI) to provide live and recorded video coverage of ongoing events. Ensure accessibility measures are utilized, which may include, but are not limited to, live interpretation, closed captioning, and transcription services.
- 3.2.1.12. Coordinate integration of federal external affairs support.
- 3.2.1.13. Develop staffing plans to address PIO and External Affairs needs for the entire response and recovery effort.
- 3.2.1.14. Develop and disseminate information for legislative and congressional members and their staff in coordination with the IEMA-OHS Legislative Representative.
- 3.2.1.15. Assist in the coordination of site visits for government officials and dignitaries.

3.3. Support State Agencies/Organizations

3.3.1. American Red Cross (ARC)

- 3.3.1.1. Works collaboratively with local, county, state, regional, and federal government agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and local community officials as a direct provider of disaster relief services, including emergency sheltering, feeding, disaster-related health and mental health needs, disaster assessment, family reunification, and public information. Ensure all public-facing media and communications are accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.



- 3.3.1.2. Under ESF-15 External Affairs, the American Red Cross coordinates disaster messaging with communicators and provides critical disaster relief and preparedness information to the public through proactive media outreach, its website (<http://www.redcross.org>), and social media platforms. Ensure all public-facing media and communications are accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
- 3.3.1.3. Provide public information and resource support as requested by the SEOC Manager or SEOC PIO Agency Representative.

3.3.2. Illinois Department of Central Management Services (CMS)

- 3.3.2.1. Assists with coordinating with the Governor's office to post news releases relating to the safety and security of the public. Ensures all public-facing media and communications are accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
- 3.3.2.2. IOCI can provide video via satellite or by posting to the IOCI webpage for download. Audio from any video is also provided separately for download via the IOCI webpage.
- 3.3.2.3. Assists with the distribution of news releases and video coverage of events approved by the SEOC or the Governor's office. Ensures all public-facing media and communications are accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
- 3.3.2.4. Assists with providing radio services for the development of public service announcements (PSAs). Ensures all public-facing media and communications are accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
- 3.3.2.5. Assist in the distribution of news releases through the Editorial Services unit of Illinois Information Services to news media. Ensure all public-facing media and communications are accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.



3.3.3. Illinois National Guard (ILNG)

- 3.3.3.1. Provide Public Affairs teams to conduct media acquisition in austere environments, facilitate civilian press activities, and augment the Joint Information Center with coordinated public messaging. Ensure all public-facing media and communications are accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.
- 3.3.3.2. Provide a Liaison Officer to integrate ILNG operations with state, local, and interagency partners by supporting information exchange, advising on ILNG capabilities and resources, and assisting the SEOC with situational awareness.

3.3.4. General Requirements for Other State Agencies, Boards, Commissions, Mobile Support Teams (MSTs), and Public Information Officers (PIOs) Activated through the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC)

- 3.3.4.1. Provide Public Information Officers from State Agencies, Boards, Commissions, and Mobile Support Teams that have been activated by the State Emergency Operations Center to work collaboratively with other PIO's and External Affairs Liaisons to develop and disseminate crisis communications and public information utilizing a variety of methods in accessible formats to local, state, and federal response staff, public, media, volunteer, private sector, and non-governmental organizations. Ensure all communications and public information are accessible, regardless of physical, mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, or financial needs, abilities, impairments, or medical conditions.

4. Authorities

1. Illinois Emergency Management Agency Act (30 ILCS 3305/), as amended
2. IEMA-OHS Operations Center SOPs, as amended.

5. References

1. Crisis Communications, Public Information and Public Education Plan (CCPIPE), as amended.
2. National Response Framework (NRF), as amended



3. National Incident Management System (NIMS), as amended
4. State Agency websites
5. Ready Illinois website: www.ready.illinois.gov
6. IEMA-OHS Crisis Communications, Public Education and Information Plan, as amended

6. Acronyms & Definitions

1. For all definitions and acronyms addressed in this plan, please refer to the IEOP Base Plan, Appendix X-7 Glossary of Terms.