PUBLIC INFORMATION ASSISTANCE TEAM PROGRAM

DEVELOPMENT PLAN
CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS (CONOPS) & IMPLEMENTATION

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EPA PUBLIC INFORMATION ASSISTANCE TEAM

I.   MISSION

To strengthen the agency's public affairs capabilities, provide national consistency, and develop a communications assistance program to assist the regions' public affairs in the earliest days of an incident by providing highly experienced personnel to establish a standardized communication module to support key agency communication objectives observed from years of response activities across the country.

II.   BACKGROUND

The Gold King Mine After-Action Review Team Recommendations for improving implementation of the incident command system at EPA outlines a number of actions for Headquarters and the regions to undertake.

Recommendation 6: Establish Public Information Assistance Team and Broaden Data Training for Public Information Officers (PIOs) and Public Affairs Staff – The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) Deputy Associate Administrator will identify three geographic teams of trained and experienced communications staff with specialized skills in conveying complex technical information to the public. The team will deploy within 24 hours of a release to set up initial communications infrastructure that is suitable to the size and complexity of the incident.

In order to ensure that EPA has the national capability to meet today's challenges, this document outlines the structure, staffing, and concept of operations of a nationwide Public Information Assistance Team to support the regions during the initial phases of an incident.

III.   CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS (CONOPS)

In the Incident Command System (ICS) structure, a Joint Information System (JIS) integrates incident information and public affairs into a cohesive organization designed to provide consistent, coordinated, and timely information during crisis or incident operations.

The EPA Public Information Assistance Teams (PIATs) will develop a communication module to support a JIS to provide a standardized mechanism to organize, integrate, and coordinate EPA information to ensure timely, accurate, accessible, and consistent information. The JIS communication module will establish plans, protocols, procedures, and structures that EPA will use to coordinate information internally and provide information externally and achieve EPA's communication objectives during a response. The communication module can also support EPA's responsibilities in a Joint Information Center (JIC) under a Unified Command if one is established.

The PIATs will be formed and deployed to support the Field PIO in establishing a communication framework to support the communication objectives generally required during a federal response to an incident. The PIAT is not directly involved in the communication activities and tactics of the response. The primary function of the team is to establish a standardized and consistent communication module to support the JIS operated by the Regional Public Affairs Director (PAD) or other designated Field PIO. The six member team will arrive on-scene within 24 hours of activation and demobilize upon completion of its mission in support of the Field PIO, typically within five to seven days.

Three geographic PIATs have been identified for assessment during the initial year of the program. They are:

Eastern: Regions 1, 2, 3, 4 with Region 1 PAD serving as PIAT lead for the first year
Central: Regions 5, 6, 7 with Region 6 PAD serving as PIAT lead for the first year
Western: Regions 8, 9, 10 with Region 9 PAD serving as PIAT team lead for the first year

Each PIAT team will be responsible for providing support to their geographic area upon activation. During the first year, each PIAT leader will identify five subject matter experts from the regions and Headquarters offices to fill the corresponding responsibilities for the team. Each of the three geographic teams will share information and resources as necessary to meet the overall program objectives. Over the course of the first year, each team will test, define, develop, and improve standard operating protocols and systems for the communications module outlined below. These protocols and systems will be shared with Incident Commanders and others in the Incident Management Team (IMT) and National Incident Management Assistance Team (N-IMAT) structures, as well as other Federal agencies as appropriate, to solicit feedback and provide awareness of the module. In addition, each PIAT will assist with the development and delivery of training curriculum and position requirements to transition to a long-term sustainable PIAT program within the agency.

PIAT activations will be authorized by a Field PIO, Regional PAD, or Regional Administrator, in coordination with the Regional Incident Coordinator, Incident Commander, or the Associate Administrator for OPA. There are no stated criteria for when to activate a PIAT, as the decision will be based on both response needs and the necessity to maintain a well-trained team. The Field PIO, in consultation with the PIAT leader, may activate only some of the PIAT positions to the field.

During the first year of the program, there will be two to four deployments of each team. In addition, the teams can also gain experience by working with Regional IMTs and backup region (BUR) IMTs. Exercise, experience, and practice will be the best test of protocols and systems to support the communication objectives of the agency. Practical experience will also help refine position requirements and design training programs for PIOs across the agency. Post-event feedback will be used to design and modify the long-term program.

The PIATs are not intended for sustained operations, but rather to stand up communication systems for the regionally-managed long-term response organization. The PIAT will be demobilized as soon as it has completed its mission. The demobilization will be coordinated with the Field PIO, Regional PAD, or Regional Administrator, in coordination with the Regional Incident Coordinator, Incident Commander or the Associate Administrator for OPA.

IV. Field PIO AND N-IMAT[1] PIO COORDINATION

The PIATs are designed to support the Field PIO for the first few days of the response by establishing systems and tools to stand up a standardized communication module. The N-IMAT, on the other hand, is directly involved in operational activities and tactics of the response and provides incident management leadership, support, and ICS coaching to the impacted region. When both the PIAT and the N-IMAT PIO are involved in a response, the Field PIO, as the lead PIO, is supported by the N-IMAT PIO to provided incident management leadership, support and/or ICS coaching, and by the PIAT as it establishes systems and tools to support the response.

The PIATs assisting the Field PIO will bring expertise and resources to initially stand up systems designed to support field communications operations for the response. Teams do not interfere with the Field PIO roles and responsibilities. Each PIAT member will be carefully educated on the limits of their responsibility and role before arriving at a response. The Field PIO retains authority for overseeing communication decisions and activities in support of the response, and will be responsible for developing and shaping EPA's communications related to the response. The PIAT is established to assist the Field PIO in deployment of systems to establish a standardized JIS for the response.

The PIAT will provide immediate assistance and support to the impacted region with a specific focus on the deployment of consistent communication systems, both for internal coordination and external dissemination, in support of standardized JIS objectives for the agency.

Like the N-IMAT, the PIAT is not intended to be used for sustained operations; rather, it is intended to establish systems to support the Field PIO within the first five to seven days of the response.

V. STRUCTURE

EPA Public Information Assistance Teams
Roles and Responsibilities - Overview

Each of the three PIAT leads has overall responsibility for implementing objectives to establish and integrate EPA's communication module within five to seven days following notification and deployment, developing straw communication staffing projections within two days for the Field PIO's use, and transitioning the module to the Field PIO prior to demobilizing. Each team

member has direct responsibility for the unit objectives identified by the PIAT leaders. The expectation is for the teams to deploy within 24 hours of incident notification.

POSTION A: LEADER	POSITION B: INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
POSITION C: MEDIA	POSITION D: ENGAGEMENT
POSITION E: RESEARCH	POSITON F: WEB/IT

VI.   EPA COMMUNICATION MODULE KEY OBJECTIVES

POSITION A: LEADER

- Takes direction from the Field PIO and coordinates all PIAT activities
- Establishes EPA JIS objectives
- Establishes EPA integration protocols in JIS
- Ensures that notifications are in place to alert program offices of information being managed in the JIS
- Establishes guidelines and procedures for integrating regional response with Headquarters
- Establishes protocols to communicate EPA's activities to protect human health and the environment
- Establishes processes to convey timely and accurate information to the public
- Establishes guideline to ensure that scientific information is presented in plain language
- Establishes procedures to quickly counter misinformation/rumors
- Establishes guidelines regarding how policy versus practical issues will be handled
- Provides training/coaching for official speakers for presentations and interviews, if needed
- Establishes systems to support a consistent approach to how data is handled and synchronized with communications and outreach strategies [2]
- Establishes homeowner data release procedures
- Establishes response-specific Confidential Business Information/Privacy Act guidelines in coordination with OGC, if anticipated
- Establishes module staffing projection for Field PIO within two days
- Ensures transition of module to Field PIO
- Ensures coordination with N-IMAT PIO, if activated

POSITION B: INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
- Establishes an agency-wide tracking system/database for incoming media inquiries and agency responses
- Establishes system for press and social media monitoring
- Establishes a tracking system/database for public inquiries/complaints—including photos and videos submitted to the agency—and agency responses
- Establishes a tracking system/database for inquiries from and agency responses to Congressional members and other elected officials
- Establishes procedures for the release of preliminary data to response partners and the public in the early hours and days of a response
- Establishes systems for Web analytics
- Establishes system for news clips collection and distribution
- Establishes an electronic tool for review and approval of communication products
- Establishes call-in lines for pubic inquiries (separate from one for vendors/contractors), if needed
- Establishes documentation and record management system of communication activities (concurrence, press releases, social media)
- Incorporates communication records into response project files
- Establishes a standardized system for the coordination of FOIA requests from the media
- Establishes a standardized system for the coordination of Litigation Holds and identifying custodians within the Field information office operations
- Recommends unit staffing projection, location (field vs virtual)
- Ensures unit transition

POSTION C: MEDIA
- Establishes process for timely and accurate responses
- Establishes process to prioritize incoming media requests to balance the challenges of national press and local press, and to involve EPA Headquarters and state agencies, as needed
- Establishes procedures for reviewing, approving , and issuing press releases, including creating agency media response letterhead
- Establishes press distribution system
- Establishes guidelines and procedures for engaging other local, state, tribal, and Federal stakeholders within the JIC
- Establishes system for distributing talking points for field personnel and contractors to respond to the press (and schedule for routine updates)
- Recommends unit staffing projection, location (field vs virtual)
- Ensures unit transition

POSTION D: ENGAGEMENT
- Establishes guidelines and procedures for interacting with the impacted public
- Establishes guidelines and procedures for integrating EPA into public meetings

- Establishes guidelines and procedures for integrating EPA into Congressional briefings
- Establishes guidelines and procedures for integrating EPA into press conferences
- Establishes guidelines and procedures for developing handouts, fliers, and presentation materials including access to emergency printing GPO Express cards and translation/interpretation services; and for coordinating translation/Limited English Proficiency (LEP) services
- Establishes process for timely and accurate responses to citizen complaints/inquiries, including photos or videos submitted to the agency
- Establishes a process to maintain/update critical contact list to keep key stakeholders informed
- Conduct high level evaluation of potential for environmental justice considerations in the response
- Identifies major obstacles or preferences for communication methods, particularly in regard to social media platforms and community engagement methods
- Recommends unit staffing projection, location (field vs virtual)
- Ensures unit transition

POSITION E: RESEARCH/FACT FINDING
- Establishes mechanism to conduct research and identifies Subject Matter Experts
- Establishes response library of key documents such as action memo, SitReps, QA/QC plan, sampling plans)
- Establishes procedures to create and update FAQs
- Establishes guidelines and procedures for developing materials for Congressional delegation briefings
- Research public meeting locations (cost, availability, AV capabilities, etc.)
- Identifies existing fliers, brochures, handouts, and presentations materials
- Recommends unit staffing projection, location (field vs virtual)
- Ensures unit transition

POSITION F: WEB/INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
- Establishes website compliant with EPA requirements and develops procedures for publication of documents on the website, including expected timeframes for content approval and posting
- Establishes social media program compliant with EPA requirements and develops procedures for publication
- Establishes a location for photos
- Establishes guidelines and procedures for the use of video/television equipment, and agency-assigned phones, chargers, and flash drives
- Set up a webinar account to allow for webinar presentations for the public, media, and elected officials
- Recommends unit staffing projection, location (field vs virtual)
- Ensures unit transition

VII. STAFFING AND TRAINING

Positions will be staffed with trained and experienced personnel from both Headquarters and regional offices. During the first year, PIAT members may be asked to staff specific positions due to technical expertise. Each PIAT lead will identify team members through a consultation and collaboration process with the home office of each team member. It is estimated that the time commitment of each team member will be less than 20 percent of their annual duties, including training, planning, coordination, and actual mobilizations. It is not required that the duties be incorporated into the PARS agreement, but it is encouraged.

During the first year, the PIAT will further identify job requirements, position descriptions, and critical job elements, and longer term training requirements to build skills within the agency's workforce in close coordination with OPA and the Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Positions will be consistent with ICS Key Leadership Position (KLP) descriptions and responsibilities found in the 2016 EPA Incident Management Handbook and in the ICS position specific Job Aides located on the EPA National Incident Management System (NIMS) Integration Team website at epaosc.org. Recommendations will also be made as to the expansion and contraction, virtual versus non-virtual nature of the PIAT positions. Training for each of the positions will be maintained by OPA. Documentation and certification of team personnel will be provided to OEM. Training focused on the functioning of the PIAT will be offered annually and fully integrated into the ICS Academy.

VIII. BUDGET

In order to create, integrate and maintain the PIAT program at EPA, a dedicated budget should be established. The first year budget will include up to $180,000 in designated travel funds and $15,000 in equipment costs for a total of $ 195,000. During the first year, a set-aside $60,000 travel budget for each of the three PIATs will be distributed to the appropriate office(s) with the responsibility for providing Travel Authorizations for the PIAT members deploying to an incident. Travel includes air, train, bus, GOV, and POV transportation. Equipment budget of $15,000 will be managed by OPA to assure program-wide consistency and prioritization of purchases. Copies of financial expense reports and budget updates will be provided each quarter to OPA and OEM to ensure overall accountability for the program. Future budget projections for the long term sustainability of the program will be developed by the PIATs in coordination with OPA, Regions, and OEM. Approved budgets will be established each fiscal year, with site accounts created in advance of events.

Type of Cost	Activity	Timeframe	Cost Estimate	Annual Total
Operational – travel	Eastern PIAT- deployment	Year 1	$60,000	
	Central PIAT - deployment	Year 1	$60,000	
	Western PIAT -	Year 1	$60,000	$180,000

	deployment			
Operational - equipment	OPA	Year 1	$15,000	$15,000
Training - logistics	1 day in person meeting	Fall 2016	$3000	$3,000
Training - travel	ICS Academy	Spring 2017	$1300 x 3 teams x 6 members	$23,400
	2-3 day in person meeting	Fall 2016	$1300 x 3 teams x 6 members	$23,400
	1 day co-training with IMAT/IMT/other ICS training	Fall 2016	$1300 x 3 teams x 6 members	$23,400
Total				**$268,200**

IX.   ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Note: this section will incorporate the Gold King Mine After Action Report (GKM AAR) implementation team's efforts to develop communications toolkit for emergency response which is currently under development.[3]

[1] GKM After Action Report: Recommendation 1: Establish a National Incident Management Assistance Team (IMAT) at EPA. The OEM Director and the Regional Superfund Division Directors will create a national IMAT comprised of EPA staff who are appropriately trained to assume leadership of functional positions within ICS. The national IMAT will be ready to deploy within 24 hours to support the local Incident Commander. The eleven-person IMAT includes a Public Information Officer (PIO) as part of the Command staff reporting to the Incident Commander.

[2] GKM After Action Report: Recommendation 7: Invest in data resources and clarify responsibilities. Data Management Team is currently working to develop a 'playbook' for data personnel to provide a consistent approach to how data is handled during an emergency response. Public affairs staff are working closely with the implementation team and Data Management Team to synchronize communications and outreach strategies with the deliverable for this recommendation.

[3] GKM After Action Report: Recommendation 9: Align public affairs resources and update communications procedures. The OPA Deputy Associate Administrator, OCIR Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, OEM Director, and the appropriate Regional Public Affairs Directors will develop/update and align Standard Operation Procedures (including social media), emergency preparedness resource lists, and communications templates and toolkits for PIOs.