

Champion of COVID Response

FEMA Integration Teams (FIT),

Region 5

Department of Homeland Security Federal Emergency Management Agency



Summary:

FEMA Integration Teams (FITs) in Region 5 have been instrumental in advancing shared responsibilities and operationalizing preparedness by working alongside state and local partners to close capability gaps and enhance the partners' ability to manage disasters, including the uncharted territories of a global pandemic. Many states faced resource and staffing constraints that limited their capabilities to effectively and proactively plan and respond during COVID-19. Recognizing these capability shortfalls, FITs provided valuable technical assistance and better positioned states to respond. Throughout COVID-19 response, FIT members have served as critical points of contact between FEMA and the state, resulting in efficient delivery of information from issues ranging to Public Assistance eligibility to Individual Assistance Programs, crisis counseling, and the movement of essential resources into the state. The FITs provide a force multiplying capability implementing Agency priorities to our partners that has never existed before.

Description: Four Region 5 states (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin) have FEMA specialists co-located in their emergency management offices to help them build in-house capability and capacity. These specialists, known as FEMA Integration Teams (FIT), serve as force multipliers for the Agency. FITs can comprise of experts from mitigation, response, logistics, recovery, and preparedness. FITs work side by side with state, local, and tribal counterparts allowing FEMA to have more direct engagement with partners and to deliver training and technical assistance including advising partners on plans, policies, and programs. FITs work to close gaps with hazard mitigation planning, update emergency operations plans, develop logistics operations and distribution management plans, identify long term recovery strategies, and conduct training and exercises as well as building a culture of preparedness by providing outreach and education. FITs also help anticipate potential local operational and resource shortfalls, help states navigate federal assistance programs and processes, and support state readiness by connecting them to resources and assistance. So, when a disaster does strike, like COVID-19, federal, state and local partners are familiar with one another's capabilities, and begin working together efficiently right away. FITs often assume incident management and response roles in disasters such as FEMA Liaison Officers (LNOs), supporting state emergency operations and delivering immediate situational awareness, assistance, and reach back between FEMA and partners. During COVID-19 response, FITs proved invaluable by leveraging preexisting relationships with partners along with their understanding of the partners' operations, plans, and capabilities resulting in seamless integration into response operations quickly, competently and confidently. Examples of FIT work in support of COVID-19 include:

- Identifying and communicating planning/resource shortfalls, constraints, and averting challenges before becoming major issues
- Helping to reduce bottle necks with resource requests and enabling over 2,000 resource deliveries (testing kits, PPE, ventilators, etc.)
- Logistics and distribution planning
- Facilitating alternate care site (surge hospital capacity) buildouts and staffing
- Mission Assignment formulation/coordination
- Processing of Title 32 National Guard requests
- Providing federal assistance during two major operations occurring simultaneously – COVID response and two major dam failures, evacuating 10,000 residents in five counties, while supporting ongoing civil unrest operations. Because FITs are embedded with partners, they did not incur travel costs (including per diem), saving the Agency additional costs by not deploying Regional/incident management field staff. FIT have maintained an in-person presence with our partners even at personal health risk. FITs are helping partners adapt response plans to identify how future emergency management operations will unfold in a pandemic environment. FEMA Region 5 cannot imagine how we could have provided the level of federal support required under COVID without FITs and our state partners now view the FIT program as essential to their operations

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