

# NEMA 2025 Annual Forum

## Public Information Officers (PIO) Subcommittee

### Full Subcommittee Report



This document highlights the key efforts and accomplishments of the PIO Subcommittee. For more information about these activities, please contact Celia Cusick at [ccusick@csg.org](mailto:ccusick@csg.org).

### Executive Summary:

Over the last six months, the PIO Subcommittee has been focused on navigating potential federal policy shifts and highlighting successful state approaches. In particular, we have discussed media campaigns, preparing for federal policy shifts, and strategies for educating the public on emergency management. We have transitioned to a new chair of the Subcommittee, Lauren Opett, Director of Strategic Communications and Senior Advisor, Virginia Department of Emergency Management. Our presentations covered topics such as public warning systems and approaches, and courses offered at the National Disaster and Emergency Management University.

### Overview of Key Subcommittee Efforts:

#### *Briefing on the BEACON System*

The Florida Division of Emergency Management provided a brief on the BEACON System. The BEACON System provides reliable public safety information and alerts across multiple channels, such as radio, mobile, streaming, and television. BEACON first captures content from official sources such as state emergency management, NOAA, Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS), and Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA). Then, using Artificial Intelligence, BEACON can translate messaging into languages such as Cuban-Spanish. Artificial Intelligence is also used to localize and target specific geographic areas. BEACON allows longer form messaging.

#### *Federal Policy Shift Implications Discussion*

The subcommittee discussed the shifting federal landscape. Issues arose such as handling uncertainty at the local level regarding grant funding. Strategies included being transparent about the available information and recommending cost-saving measures and contingency planning. Other discussions regarding state approaches to potential changes to the federal level were also shared, including standing up task forces dedicated to monitoring potential policy changes and exploring contingency planning that assesses all possible outcomes.

#### *Discussing Strategies for Outreach to Public Officials*

In the springtime, the PIO Subcommittee adopted a roundtable approach in their virtual meetings that allowed states to highlight best practices around a particular subject. In May, the round table focused on outreach that could be done to help educate officials and the public on the role of emergency management. Some of the key takeaways include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Start educating officials early and at all levels of government.
- Some states have focused on outreach to city-level officials on long-term recovery and response topics, including sharing what they can expect and who is responsible for what during these times.
- States recommended that agencies develop action-focused documents that can be used across administrations, especially during transitions.
- States shared that they have developed an Elected Officials Guide to circulate.

In connection with this discussion, states also highlighted their approach to uplifting positive stories about emergency management. Some of the strategies that rose out of that conversation included:

- Emphasizing empowering others to share their own story
- Highlighting disaster survivors' experiences

### ***Presentation about Wyoming's Mass Communication Initiative***

The PIO Subcommittee held a presentation on an initiative that Wyoming has been implementing to ensure that its mass messaging aligns with widely accepted terminology. Spencer Pollock (Preparedness Section Chief/SRCC Manager, Wyoming Office of Homeland Security) provided the brief. Some of the key lessons from the discussion are as follows:

- One of the challenges highlighted was a disconnect between what people refer to as a location or area and what that location or area is identified by mapping or zoning.
- Wyoming also faces a challenge with such a large number of tourists and visitors who would not be on traditional mass messaging platforms.
- Some strategies Wyoming has implemented include ensuring that its messaging synced up with colloquial names, roadways, or areas, or duplicating names alongside the mapping or zoning names.
- Wyoming has also included links in messages and created simplified, personalized (i.e., by county) URLs that can direct people to further information.
- Pre-scripting of messages has also been a best practice.
- To reach visitors, Wyoming has partnered with organizations such as the National Park Service and special event hosts to ask them how they plan to notify their attendees of emergencies, which has also helped them to prepare.

- To surge up call centers, Wyoming has also reached out to their non-emergency lines and public broadcasting stations to ask for support.

### ***Course updates at NDEMU Brief***

The Subcommittee also hosted Nicole Shutts (Training Specialist at the National Disaster and Emergency Management University [NDEMU], Federal Emergency Management Agency) to provide an overview and update of PIO courses offered at NDEMU. Among the information she shared, some highlights included:

- **01015 Basic PIO** is explicitly built with the Advanced PIO course in mind and aims to equip PIOs with some basic media skills and awareness.
  - This is 1 of 9 prerequisites for the advanced course and is regularly offered virtually.
- **0388 Advanced PIO** is an exercise-based course.
  - The Advanced PIO does have pre-work that goes out ahead of the course start date and is offered in person to get the most immersive experience.
- **Executive PIO** is the final component of the public information training series and is meant for career-level public information officers. The course aims to elevate professional skills by guiding strategic decision-making and trusted advisor roles
  - The Executive PIO is comprised of an application process, 3 5-day courses, and culminates in a written paper.

### ***Highlighting of Social Media Campaign Success Stories***

The Subcommittee shared social media campaigns that were in development or had been recently launched as part of our efforts to circulate best practices. Among those highlighted include the examples below:

- Tennessee shared its recent winter weather campaign, which included visuals on how to build an emergency kit for your car. To push out the messaging, reels were created (including a Wicked-themed one), and interviews with news stations were conducted leading up to the event.
- Virginia shared that during the Hurricane Helene response, they pushed out links via their socials to a landing page with information such as press releases, debris removal information, and donation information to be a one-stop-shop for relevant information.
- Ohio has launched a campaign called “know us before you need us” and has done lots of outreach at various events to help promote this message. In doing so, they highlighted county emergency managers to help strengthen their partnership with them as well.