

Post Disaster Family Reunification Planning for the Town of Southington

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**Certification Statement**

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that the appropriate credit is giving where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in black ink, written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive, appearing to be a name like "J. H. Smith" or similar, though not fully legible.

### **Abstract**

The Town of Southington is one of 169 municipalities within the State of Connecticut. The State of Connecticut has no formal county government structure; therefore, Southington provides its own emergency management team. The emergency management team must provide the initial planning, response, and recovery actions for any scale event or disaster that would impact the town. The problem was that the Town of Southington had no procedure for reunifying family members displaced after a disaster or event. The purpose of this research study was to determine the benefit of a reunification plan for families separated during disasters or emergency events. Descriptive research methodology guided the following research questions: (a) What best practices or resources are available to develop a local reunification plan? (b) What would dictate the implementation of a family reunification plan? (c) What is the role/responsibility of the local emergency management team in a reunification plan? and (d) What challenges are associated with family reunification? A review of pertinent literature that included national standards, scholarly articles, guidelines, and recommendations was conducted related to family reunification. A survey was disseminated to public safety professionals to identify the practicality of including family reunification into emergency operation planning. Three interviews were also conducted with local emergency management professionals to determine the need for, including scope and role, of family reunification planning. The results concluded that, although a complex process, family reunification planning should be included in local emergency operations planning. It was further identified that the planning should be a collaborative effort of various agencies and community partners. It was recommended that the Town of Southington provide a family reunification strategy into emergency operations planning, including community partners and a focus on family preparedness planning.

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### **Post Disaster Family Reunification Planning for the Town of Southington**

Communities of all types and sizes have the potential to be impacted by varying levels of disasters, both natural and man-made. These disasters, regardless of their size, will challenge a community's resiliency. It is imperative to identify the potential risks, but also to determine how a community will respond, mitigate, and recover from a disaster event. Planning and coordination will provide a foundation for the overall success of a disaster and recovery effort. A fire department mission now encompasses an all-hazards approach. This approach must also utilize interagency cooperation, coordination, and planning to assist in the mitigation of hazards that face a community.

The Town of Southington operates a combination style fire department comprised of 32 career personnel and 67 volunteer members, all with varying levels of training, experience, and capability (Southington Fire Department, 2019). Through its mission statement, the fire department identifies four critical operational concerns: (a) fire suppression, (b) technical rescue, (c) hazardous material incidents, and (d) disaster mitigation response. The fire department, along with other agencies plays a critical role within the town's emergency management agency. The assistant fire chief and a battalion chief/shift commander are designated as deputy emergency management directors (DEMD) for the Town of Southington. The department is also the liaison agency for the community emergency response team (CERT).

The emergency management team has identified that traditional means of providing shelter and security either during or after an event may not be sufficient in some instances requiring a multi-agency or jurisdictional response. An unplanned or instantaneous event, such as hazardous materials release or active shooter event, could impact varying populations within the town's borders. The problem was the Town of Southington had no plan or procedure for

reunifying family members displaced after a disaster or event. The purpose of this research was to determine the benefit of a reunification plan for the Town of Southington to assist families separated during disasters or emergency. Descriptive methodology was used to guide the following research questions: (a) What best practices or resources are available to develop a local reunification plan? (b) What would dictate the implementation of a family reunification plan? (c) What is the role and/or responsibility of the local emergency management team in a reunification plan? and (d) What challenges are associated with family reunification?

### **Background and Significance**

The Town of Southington is one of 169 municipalities in the State of Connecticut. The State has no formal county government structure therefore counties are defined primarily for geographical or political reasons. However, for emergency planning purposes the counties also define the distinct regions for statewide emergency operations and response assistance (State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security [CTDEMHS], n.d.). The town provides and supports its own local emergency management agency (EMA) comprised of representatives of various agencies and handles smaller events strictly at the local level. On larger scale or multi-jurisdictional events, the EMA will activate and be supported through the state emergency management department.

The Town of Southington, centrally located in Connecticut, is designated in region three within Harford County. It occupies 37 square miles of varying terrain that is comprised of commercial, residential, and industrial properties along with land dedicated to open space and agricultural uses. The town is bisected by several major roadways and arteries vital to the New England corridor, primarily US I-84 and US I-691, responsible for over 140,000 vehicles daily. The town encompasses varying levels of critical infrastructure and recreational facilities that

could be impacted by natural or man-made disasters such as schools, hospitals, and an amusement park. Southington's vulnerabilities include "... (a) major snow fall, (b) ice storms, (c) blizzards, (d) hazardous material incidents/accidents, (e) aircraft accidents, (f) tornadoes, (g) hurricanes, (h) flooding... (i) major fires, (j) earthquakes, and (k) major highway accidents" (Town of Southington, 2018, p. 8).

The agencies (Appendix A) responsible for emergency management within the Town of Southington are: (a) public health, (b) police department, (c) fire department, (d) public works, and (e) IT systems. The public health director serves as the town emergency management director, with five deputy emergency management directors designated from the additional agencies. The town manager serves as the chief executive officer (Town of Southington, 2018). The police and fire departments are the primary emergency services providers, with the fire chief or his designee having ultimate command and control of a disaster scene. However, in the event of a localized disaster, all agencies would operate cohesively and likely in a unified command structure.

The Southington Fire Department operates a total of four stations with a combination staff of approximately 100 career and volunteer members made up of four different companies. The career staff operates out of two stations (one being shared with a volunteer company) working a four platoon 24/72 schedule, being supplemented by two additional volunteer companies at the remaining stations. Administrative staff, made up of both uniformed and non-uniformed personnel, work out of fire headquarters. Career chief officers (battalion chief and above) are trained up to the ICS-300 standard and Fire Officer three at a minimum.

The Southington Police Department is an accredited agency comprised of 77 sworn uniformed personnel and 19 civilians. The department is organized into seven major divisions



including (a) detectives, (b) patrol, (c) communications, and (d) administrative (Southington Police Department, 2017). The police department is also the primary public safety answering point (PSAP) for all 911 calls, emergency, and non-emergency calls for service.

The Town has designated shelter space in the public schools and other public facilities. However, most of those facilities are typically utilized for short duration weather events. The primary shelter, the senior center, is managed by the local CERT team and capable of handling 150 persons. The Town of Southington (2018) Emergency Operations Plan identifies several responsibilities of the municipality. Although highlighted in the recovery phase, providing temporary shelter and transportation for individuals are primary planning considerations; however, the need could occur in the emergency phase of a disaster as well. This would be especially true in the event of an active shooter hostile event response (AHSER). There currently is no provision, plan, or procedure for long-term sheltering or utilizing existing facilities as a collection point or reunification center for civilians. Although a complex task, reunification of families after a disaster or event should be considered a priority for the emergency management team.

In 2013 the Town of Southington retained the Center for Public Safety Management, part of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) (2013), to analyze the fire department's service delivery model. The overall report concluded with 31 recommendations. Recommendation number eight was to "undertake a community risk and vulnerability assessment" (International City/County Management Association [ICMA], 2013, p. 3). The emergency management team should utilize this recommendation to identify both vulnerable locations as well as suitable locations to utilize as civilian collection points or family reunification centers in case of a disaster event as part of the planning process.

As part of the Executive Fire Officer Program's Executive Analysis of Fire Service Operations in Emergency Management, this research adheres to the overall student course goal of "...to better prepare their communities for large-scale, multiagency, all-hazard incidents" (United States Fire Administration [USFA], 2016, p. vii). The research also focuses on the course enabling objectives found in units four, five, and six: (a) perform a vulnerability and capability assessment, (b) apply the planning process effectively, and (c) examine emergency response considerations and issues (USFA, 2016). This research also relates to the strategic objectives under goal one and the USFA's 2019-2023 strategic plan to "identify, prevent, prepare for and mitigate community risks" which would lead to both organizational and community resiliency (United States Fire Administration [USFA], 2019, p. 13). The goals of the USFA are mirrored in those of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) 2018-2022 strategic plan; that of to "build a culture of preparedness" which allows for a community to "achieve disaster resiliency" (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2018, p. 4).

### **Literature Review**

A literature review was conducted utilizing the resources and references available at the National Emergency Training Center Learning Resource Center. Additional sources used for the literature review consisted of USFA publications, trade journals, articles, and scholarly papers. Information regarding best practices, associated challenges, planning processes, and responsibilities were identified in the research. The overall concept of family reunification can be a daunting task and the research yielded generic templates and guidance that could be applied to various agencies and communities.

Recent political and social events, such as the migrant crisis at the US-Mexico border have placed family separation and reunification in the spotlight on the evening news. However,

these instances are not new or unique. The United States military and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) such as the American Red Cross and Save the Children have working experience in navigating the challenges and complexities of these processes. The military identifies that operations can be greatly impacted by displaced persons and that they will employ regulations and guidelines accordingly. Similarities can be drawn from military plans that provide for a standard of care, temporary locations until persons can return home, and to "relieve...human suffering" (Bennett, 2012, para. 7). Although different in context, a military operation towards controlling a population of displaced civilians could be used as a template for local disaster planning. Bennett (2012) identifies that properly caring for a population while not impacting overall operational objectives should be addressed in the planning and preparation phase of emergency management preparedness.

The *National Mass Care Strategy* identifies the responsibility of all levels of government and agencies to act collectively and corroboratively in a whole community approach "to provide life-sustaining services immediately following disaster events..." (National Mass Care Council [NMCC], 2012, p. 4). Any disaster can overwhelm a community, but when that disaster includes relocation, evacuation, loss of communications, and media coverage, the affects can be compounded especially when dealing with requests to assist in locating family members or survivors. A reunification plan, formulated from best practices or resources, will be based upon and contain "...well defined position and roles, responsibilities, and qualifications; and training programs" (*Multi-Agency Reunification Template*, 2015, p. 5).

The primary role and responsibility of and emergency management agency is planning. Planning for and the response to an event requires collaboration that will "...involve a range of personnel and organizations to coordinate efforts to save lives and stabilize an incident..."

(Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2017, p. 1). Any plan requires dutiful preparedness in order for it to be executed efficiently. Preparing for the response and recovery phases of a disaster will ultimately “improve the safety and effectiveness of a disaster response” (Helden & Stewart, 2008, p. 201). No organization is unique in the challenges it faces with preparing a fully comprehensive emergency operations plan. In fact, plans that are too stringent to established guidelines “...are not practical during a real-time emergency” (Helden & Stewart, 2008, p. 202). Plans should be developed with guidance that provides a basic framework of roles and responsibilities, but not rigid enough keep it from being flexible to react according to the disaster or event scenario. Overall, some sort of reunification planning process should be conducted by emergency managers, especially when planning for potential mass casualty incidents (Quigley, 2018).

As it relates directly to emergency services delivery, the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) (2014) identifies planning as a key component and responsibility of a chief fire officer. The chief of a fire department is considered critical to the “success of the local emergency operations plan” (International Fire Service Training Association [IFSTA], 2014, p. 249). The chief or their designees must work within a vertical jurisdiction, coordinating with other agencies and government leaders for overall plan development and execution (IFSTA, 2014). In order to be effective, the plan must include the respective agencies and their resources that would be available or necessary to mitigate the disaster (National Fire Protection Association [NFPA], 2014).

A local emergency management team should consider a family reunification plan essential to the overall emergency operations planning of a community. One primary reason is that, if necessary, the reunification plan can be implemented on a varying scale of localized

disasters. However, family reunification during or post-event could be considered a significant enough response action to warrant its own individual plan and planning assumptions. Integration and coordination within the planning process will allow the team to identify the necessary tasks and who is responsible for them (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2010). This process will assist in determining whether the reunification plan can be incorporated into the agency's all-hazard annexes or require a separate stand-alone document.

In 2018 the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) released *NFPA 3000 (PS) Standard for an Active Shooter/Hostile Event Response (ASHER) Program* (2018b). This provisional standard highlights the necessary planning, procedure, and practices in response to a hostile event. Within this standard is the recognized need for operation plans and recovery strategies to include victim notification and reunification (National Fire Protection Association [NFPA], 2018b). The standard underscores the importance of planning, as it relates to the recovery process in identifying the "rules and responsibilities of individuals implementing the recovery strategies" (NFPA, 2018a, p. 22). The benefit of a plan identifying the potential need for family reunification and a defined location is a logical transition to the possible need for a family assistance center; offering counseling and building community resiliency (NFPA, 2018b).

Having a plan and incorporating it into the emergency operations process is only the first step. Something as potentially complex as family reunification must incorporate training prior to any implementation. This burden falls upon the emergency management team and partners to exercise the plan as developed. As recommended by NFPA 3000 (2018b) "organizations...schedule for planning, training, and exercising recovery options" (p. 20). This step is a vital integration process that will provide opportunities to "...build awareness; educate and train personnel; to test procedures..." (Gustin, 2013, p. 297). Training is also a key

component in managing spontaneous volunteers. Volunteers, or those anxious to help after a disaster can often times become more of hindrance rather than helpful. A key strategy in a reunification plan is directed toward those providing support to victims. Providers “must be carefully selected and trained” (United States Department of Justice [USDOJ], 2017, p. 8).

Identifying and coordinating those volunteers, such as a community emergency response team (CERT) in the planning and training stages will increase overall command and control effectiveness (Fagel, 2011).

Training for potential real-world scenarios can often times be complex; however, the importance of such training, as a component of the emergency management team’s role, cannot be overlooked. The National Incident Management System (NIMS) recognizes training as a component that will “...enable personnel to understand their capabilities and limitations before an incident” (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2017, p. 53). NFPA 1500 recommends that “the fire department shall provide training...for all department members commensurate with the duties and functions that they are expected to perform” (National Fire Protection Association [NFPA], 2018a, p. 15).

The implementation of a family reunification plan implies a complex multi-site emergency operations response, and training for such an event should be equivalent in design. Exercises prepare the response organizations and participants for a real world or similar event, increasing the overall value of the training (Hermann & Henle, 2018). The most complex training is that of a full-scale exercise which would include all organizations and “...test many components of one or more capabilities within emergency response and recovery... to assess plans and procedures... and assess coordinated response under crisis conditions” (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], n.d.). Planning and training help define the roles and

responsibilities of all organization involved; however, those processes should be based on established or recommended best practices, policies, and procedures.

Best practices and recommendations are effective tools to use in developing a family reunification plan. The plan should address provisions for both a reunification center and notification process. Reunification takes place in both the response and recovery portions of a disaster. One of the recommendations noted as missing from a recent report on the Parkland, Florida shooting was that there was nothing “...related to reunification, notifying loved ones, or providing mental health services to the community...” (Averzoni, 2019, para. 5). Reunification locations should be located away from the incident and although included as part of the plan and response, should be a separate operation conducted off-site. Reunification needs are both incident specific and incident dependent. Regardless of the size or scope of the event, notification and coordination utilizing an accountability system is necessary to identify those that have been removed safely from the incident scene or transferred elsewhere such as to a medical facility. Reunification and notification procedures also need to account for and take the media into consideration (NFPA, 2018, p. 33).

Natural disasters oftentimes provide advance warning allowing emergency management personnel to be proactive issuing orders or directives to the community. Such orders are those to either evacuate a geographical area or provide sheltering at predetermined location or in-place (Stern, 2012). Most often in these types of events families remain together or are able to communicate their location and status effectively. In instantaneous events, this may not be feasible. However, family reunification locations and procedures can be predetermined similar to those of sheltering needs. Stern (2012) recommends a family reunification program as component of any incident action plan. Components should also include phone or internet

access for family members to search for individuals as well as enlisting the help of volunteer agencies. Families should have their own emergency plan that includes a reunification strategy as well. Family emergency plans should involve all members of the family and include “...phone numbers, emergency contacts, and multiple meeting places” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2018, para. 3).

Resiliency is vital to the functioning of a community. Crisis and disaster management require a high level of community resiliency which is borne out of collaboration between “government, business, and civil society” (Duckers, 2017, p. 182). The reunification process is one of the most challenging aspects of disaster response and recovery efforts. Hurricanes Rita and Katrina illustrated a failure in the management and planning process as it related to “addressing reunifying children with their parent or legal guardians” (Twachtman, 2014, p. 46). Chung and Blake (2014) identify both planning and technology as challenges in the family reunification process. Children make up one-quarter of the population of the United States, and disaster planning and exercises do not typically involve children or address their needs. Issues discovered post-Katrina revealed that 75% of the recommendations regarding reunification of children are still unmet (Save the Children, 2015). As children are most likely to be separated from their families as a result of their placement in daycare and educational facilities, plans must include collaboration with those facilities. In order to address that “local plans must be robust with specific protocols for children” (Chung & Blake, 2014, p. 337). Protocols can address factors and issues related to reunification of children such as; communications, guardianship, and custodial issues (“Post disaster reunification”, n.d.). Traditional families as a result of adoption, foster care, divorce, and other reasons are not necessarily prevalent in today’s society. In these cases, “a broad definition of family member should be considered” (United States Department of



Justice [USDOJ], 2017, p. 9). Managing the planning process requires that "...all personnel involved...must strive for cohesion, collaboration, and uniformity as ultimately...our society will be better served" (Nager, 2009, p. 205).

The aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita revealed that "inadequate resources existed to reunite children with their families" (Mace et al., 2010, p. 153). At that time national guidance and strategies for reunification did not exist. Several planning considerations including registration, identification, and reunifications services were recognized as something necessary to be provided by responders (Mace et al., 2010). However, more recent collaborative efforts have taken place in assisting with developing reunification plans. A Technical Resources, Assistance Center, and Information Exchange (TRACIE) release from the Department of Health and Human Services offers a topic collection on family reunification. Varying documents, guides, systems, and training references; along with links to organizations with dedicated research on family reunification is provided to assist in understanding the process and developing a plan ("Family reunification," 2019).

Templates taken from the National Mass Care Strategy and varying organizations such as; I Love You Guys Foundation (2018), Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council (2016), and the American Red Cross (2017) can assist local planning organizations. Templates should allow for a jurisdiction to tailor the plan to its overall needs without jeopardizing the planning process (FEMA, 2010). They can help with not only the methods and the legal concerns of reunification but an overall "understanding the complexities of implementing coordinated and collaborative reunification operations" (Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council [WRHSAC], 2016, para. 3).

The 2013 *Post Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach* offers assistance and guidance to both local governments and community partners ("News in brief," 2014). The report identifies the necessity of utilizing a whole community approach by involving and collaborating with non-governmental organizations. This collaborative effort will be reinforced in the emergency preparedness process by clarifying roles and authorities prior to a disaster occurring (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2013). The American Red Cross (ARC) identifies itself as often looked upon by emergency management officials as the primary agency for family reunification. However, the ARC recognizes that planning mechanisms should identify local capabilities to address reunification measures and that "reunification services are at their best when working in close collaboration with community partners" (American Red Cross [ARC], 2017, p. 19). Local capabilities planning will help with the potential unique aspects of reunification. Emergency management personnel should identify needs of those individuals that will not leave domesticated animals, or those with service animals. The loss or separation from a pet can have a profound impact on an individual in the wake of a disaster and should be recognized in the planning phases (Mace et al., 2010). In a larger scale incident, additional consideration should also be given to the sheltering or reunification of animals (ARC, 2017).

In the event of disaster, reunification planning should be concerned with "people of all ages and demographics" (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2013, p. 47). However, the reunification of children or minors with their appropriated guardians should be a priority for any emergency management team. Many challenges are associated with family reunification planning and procedures. Identification, legal considerations, and the media were the most prevalent.

Quigley (2017) identifies several methods, ranging from simple to complex, for tracking and identification such as; (a) barcode, (b) wristbands, (c) triage tags, (d) GPS/GIS systems, and (e) biometrics (p. 25). Chung and Blake (2014) also recommend the utilization of technology to expedite reunification but that any method or form of reunification included photographic identification. In a disaster under federal declaration the National Emergency Family Registry and Locator System, as well as, the National Child Locator Center for Unaccompanied Children are available. However, they are not available for state or localized disasters. Photographic based reunification tools could be more efficient and effective at the local level, especially for individuals who are unable to communicate (Chung et al., 2012).

Legal considerations are always visible in disaster response and recovery efforts. At the state and local level, authority for emergency preparedness, disaster response and recovery are found in the chapter 517 of the Connecticut General Statutes (State of Connecticut, 2018). Simply because a disaster exists, laws cannot be overlooked, ignored or broken (Quigley, 2017). Family reunification planning and strategies are not excluded. On a broader scope, emergency management officials will need to navigate, at a minimum, the application of the: (a) American with Disabilities Act, (b) Code of Federal Regulations, and (c) the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) (FEMA, 2013). Chung et al. (2012) identify the challenges of HIPPA as there is no provision in releasing or sharing confidential information between health care providers and emergency management officials in the event of a disaster to assist in reunification efforts.

Managing the media and public information were additional challenges to be identified in family reunification planning and implementation. Media outlets, especially social media, can be a valuable asset to the emergency management team, especially with regard to family

reunification processes. Individuals should be assigned to monitor social media platforms and release pertinent information (I Love You Guys Foundation, 2018). Information needs to be timely and of an official capacity. Utilizing the components of a family assistance center helps to facilitate that process (USDOJ, 2017). Communication is a vital component of a reunification plan; any deficiency may hinder that process. The American Red Cross (2017) recognizes the critical role that the digital age of communication and social media play in informing the public. Communication needs to be “...coordinated through media support, data entry, collaboration with outside agencies...and coordinating centers” (Nager, 2009, p. 203). Managing that process is best done through “...one specific agency/organization responsible...to internal/external stakeholders, the public, news media, and any others” (FEMA, 2010, p. 17).

The literature revealed that there was no one system or standard in place regarding family reunification strategies. There was noted advocacy for reunification planning processes, direction, and conclusive guidance on the characteristics of what should be include in the plans or systems. Many of the resources were directed toward the impact on children and the role of the medical community as “victims, including children separated from their families, will present to hospitals...” (Chung et al., 2012, p. 160). Educational systems, primarily grades K-12, were also identified as critical to community resiliency with a vulnerable population that should include preparedness plans and policies, one of which specific to family reunification procedures. There lies a responsibility for cross organizational communication of plans and procedures as “disaster planning is a shared responsibility” (Silverman et al., 2016, p. 953). Deference however was given to the emergency management community for having the necessary expertise to develop a reunification plan. That deference was based on the ability to identify and recognize local planning assumptions and capabilities.

### **Procedures**

Data was collected to determine the benefit of a family reunification plan for the Town of Southington. The collection of data was completed using descriptive research methodology. Two procedures were used to assist in the collection of the data. These procedures included one survey and three interviews. All procedures included questions that allowed participants to expand upon the selections presented and provide more detail to their answers.

The survey instrument (Appendix B) was the first procedure utilized. The 16-question survey was designed to determine demographic composition, organizational composition, authority, and responsibility while focusing on specific aspects of family reunification in emergency management operations. The purpose of this survey was to identify if family reunification played a role in emergency management planning for other emergency services organizations.

Participants accessed the survey using a link provided through Survey Monkey©. The survey was disseminated to fire and emergency services professionals, of varying rank and organizational responsibility, through the State of Connecticut list service. The list service is an electronic opt-in platform used to share and gather information that is managed by the Connecticut Fire Prevention and Control Commission (CFPC) through the office of the state fire administrator. Additionally, the survey was distributed via group email to the Connecticut Fire Chiefs Association, which includes career and volunteer chief officers (battalion chief and above) as well as the Connecticut Career Fire Chiefs Association. The email distribution groups were considered current at the time of submittal. The survey was also made available through submission to the International Association of Fire Chief's (IAFC) Knowledge Net. The total

sample size of the survey population was 6,250 which generated 178 responses, or just under three percent.

The remaining procedure involved three interviews conducted with emergency management and fire service professionals within the State of Connecticut at various levels of government. The first interview (Appendix C) was conducted with Jonathan Hartenbaum (personal communication, June 28, 2019) from the State of Connecticut Region Three planning office of the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, a division of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection. The second interview (Appendix D) was conducted with Shane Lockwood (personal communication, June 17, 2019). Mr. Lockwood is the director of the Plainville-Southington Health District and serves as the Emergency Management Director for the Town of Southington. The last interview (Appendix E) was conducted with Deputy Chief Kyran Dunn (personal communication, July 5, 2019) of the Fairfield Fire Department in Fairfield, Connecticut. Deputy Chief Dunn serves as the CERT coordinator for the Town of Fairfield Emergency Management Team. The three emergency management professionals were provided questions similar in scope to that of the survey instrument. Differing from the survey however, the interview questions allowed the individuals to expound upon family reunification planning based on their professional background, and if applicable, personal experience.

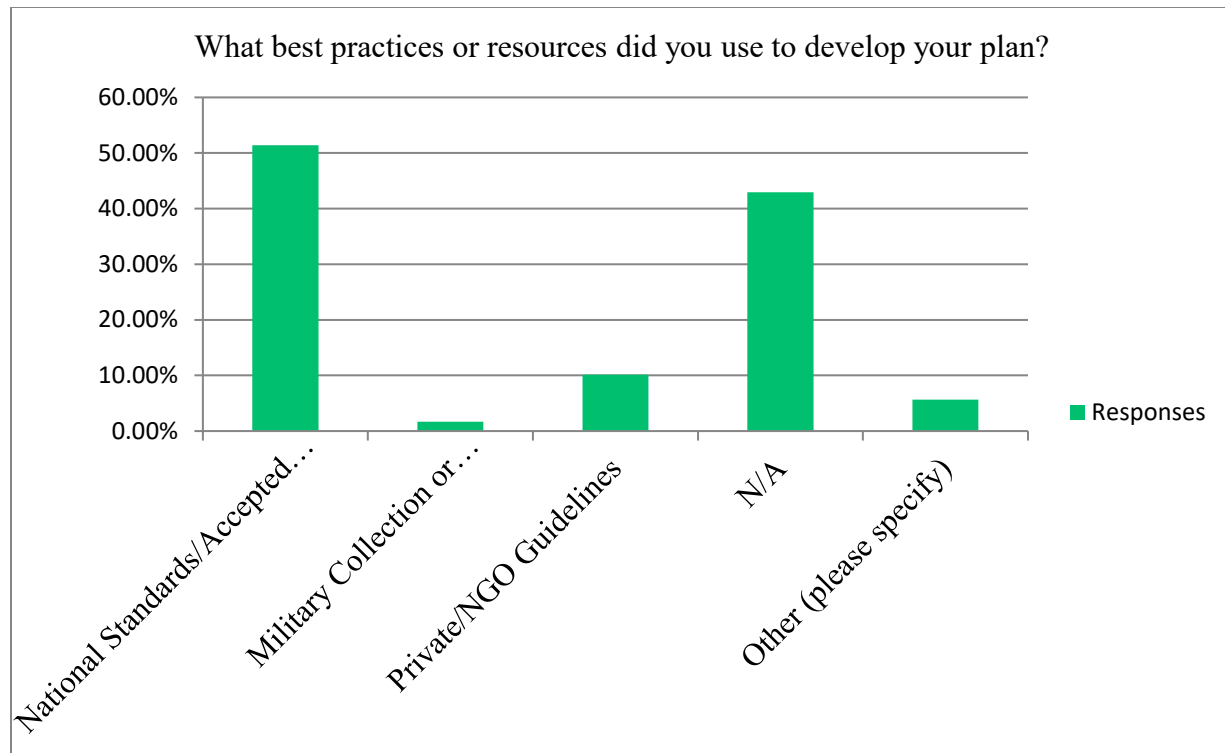
Various limitations were identified with the procedures, primarily with the survey instrument (Appendix B). The major limitation of the survey was the percentage of responses in relation to the sample size. Receiving just under a three percent response rate could result in or impart bias on the data collected. A second limitation was that the survey was not sent separately under different links to Connecticut participants and those outside of Connecticut.

Not offering the participants a way to identify their location or agency type reduces both reliability and validity in measuring the response. This, coupled with not distributing the survey directly to emergency managers via means of an association or organization could skew that data as participants were likely fire service professionals only. Lastly the options of selecting more than one answer on several of the questions fails to yield any priority measures as it relates to reunification planning. The interviews conducted with Hartenbaum (personal communication, June 28, 2019), Lockwood (personal communication, June 17, 2019), and Dunn (personal communication, July 5, 2019) (Appendices C, D, and E) presented with a similar limitation in that they did not expand past the State of Connecticut for additional data collection.

### **Results**

Descriptive methodology guided the data collection. Four research questions were developed too direct and aid in the data collection related to post disaster family reunification. The first research question asked: What best practices or resources are available to develop a local reunification plan?

The survey (Appendix B) identified that the utilization of national standards or accepted practices were the primary sources used, at just over 51% of respondents, for developing a family reunification plan. Following private or non-governmental organizations (NGO) guidelines accounted for 10% of participants' answers. The option of selecting more than one answer, as illustrated in Figure 1, identified that organizations may utilize a variety of accepted guidelines.

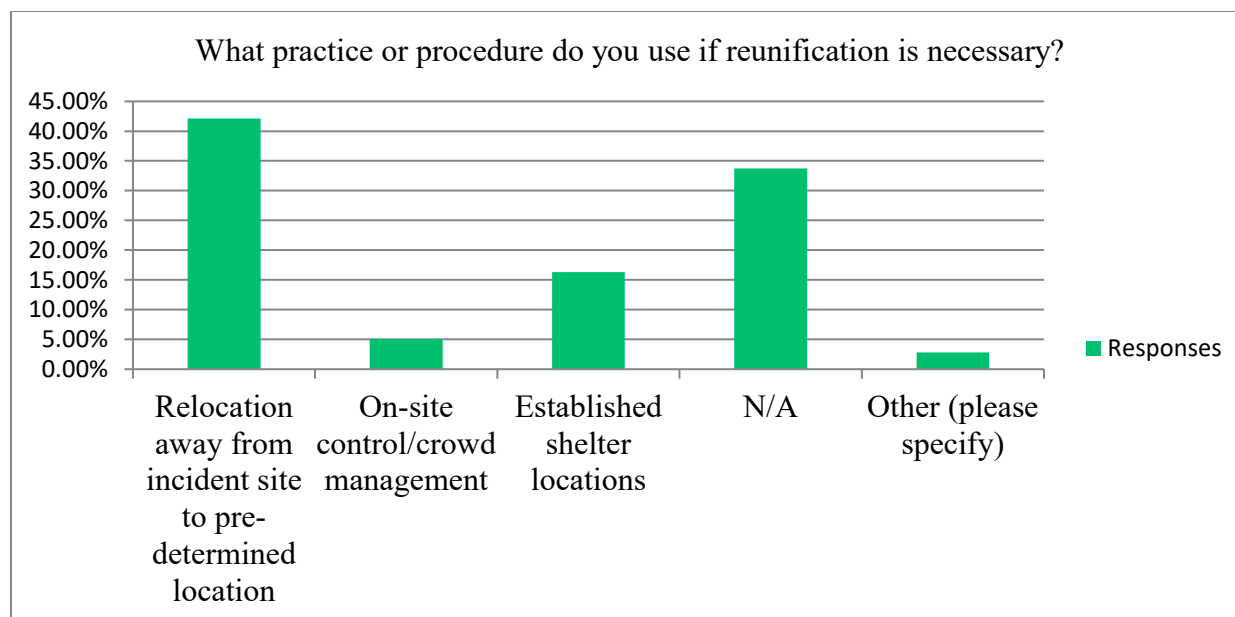


**Figure 1: Reunification plan best practices or resources used**

Approximately 43% of the respondents selected the option of not-applicable. This corresponds to question seven regarding the existence of a plan at the local level. Approximately 57% of the survey participants identified that at the time of the survey, no plan existed.

The survey also identified practices and procedures to be included if a plan were to be implemented. Approximately 43% of those surveyed indicated that relocation away from an incident site was the best practice to facilitate reunification (Figure 2). Responses written in also included that reunification sites would be incident dependent. Additionally, the use of photographic identification (56%) was seen as the most practical device to assist in uniting displaced family members.



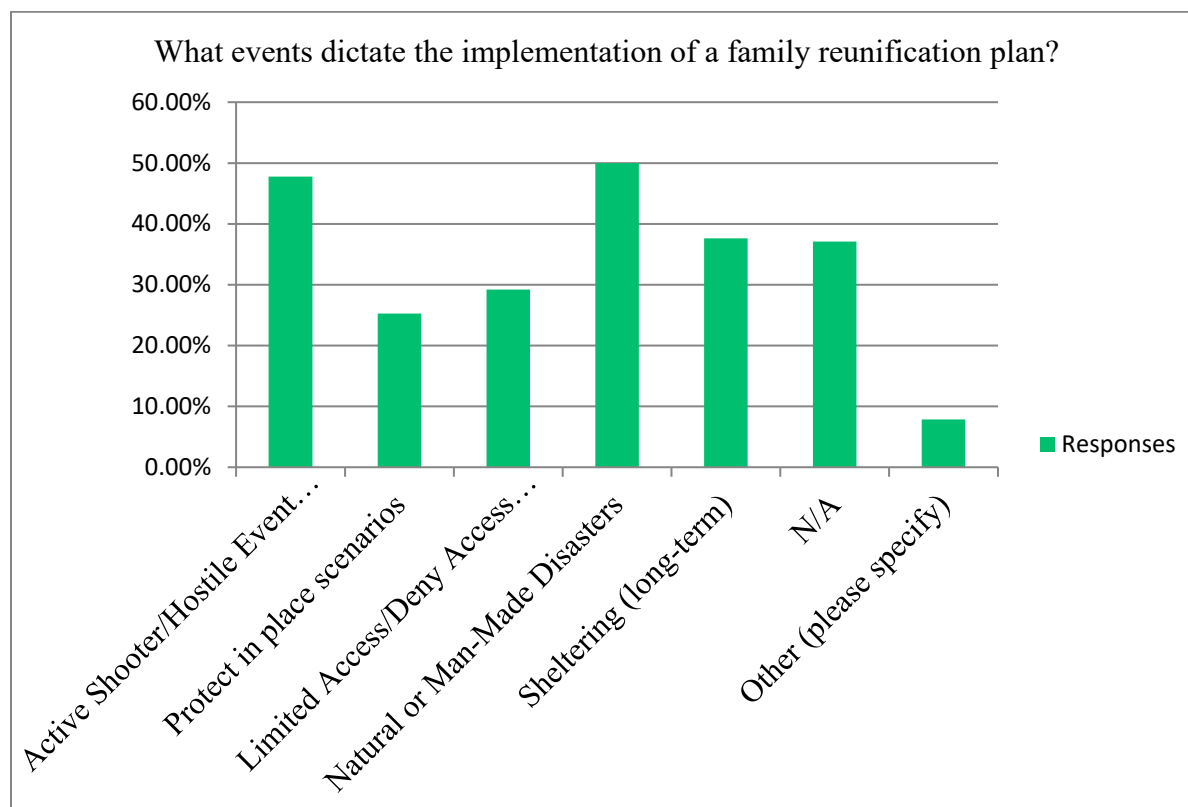


**Figure 2: Implemented reunification practice or procedure**

The interview conducted with Jonathan Hartenbaum (personal communication, June 28, 2019) (Appendix C) mirrored the survey responses in respect to utilizing the various templates available to develop the plan. He further expanded his answer by relaying that local plans should be developed with local resources and assets in mind. He included training and exercising the plan as a best practice (J. Hartenbaum, personal communication, June 28, 2019). The lack of an existing plan was noted in an ASHER exercise conducted by the Town of Southington according to the interview with Shane Lockwood (personal communication, June 17, 2019) (Appendix D). A plan, built off of templates such as that from the I Love You Guys foundation would assist the emergency response system in the event of tragic event. Additionally; using school personnel, school records, and technology systems were identified as procedures to be used for identification measures in a reunification plan (S. Lockwood, personal communication, June 17, 2019).

The second research question asked: What would dictate the implementation of a family reunification plan? Survey participants indicated that any range of disasters could necessitate a

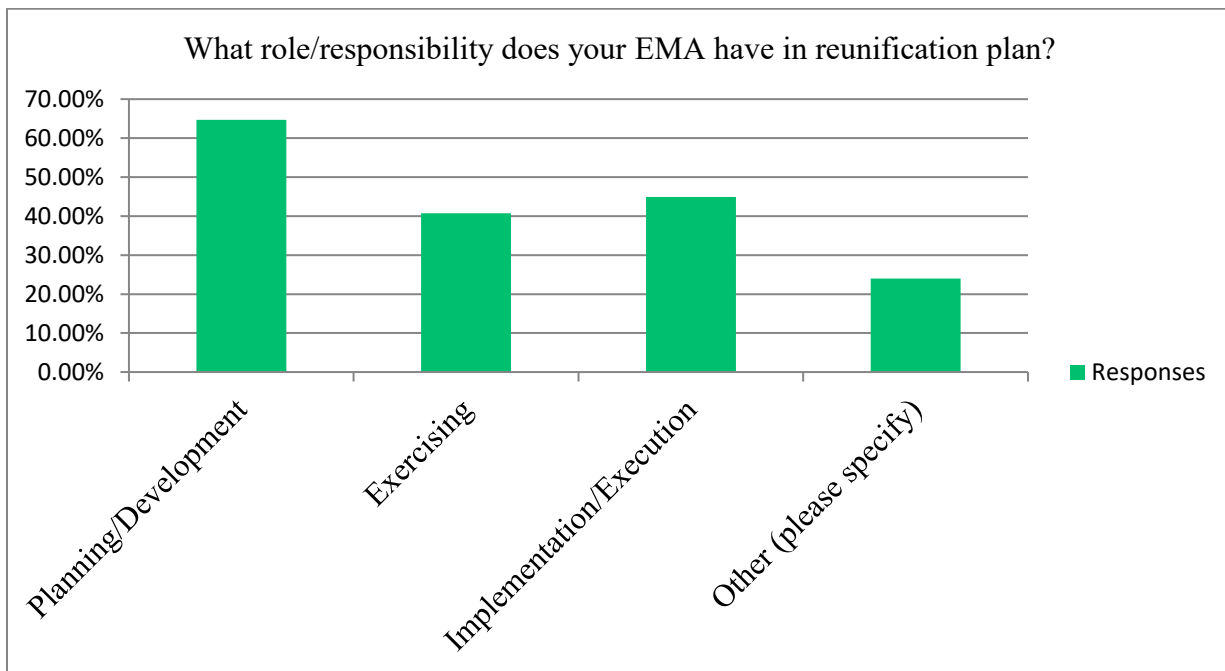
family reunification plan. However, natural disaster and active shooter/hostile events accounted for a near equal response amongst survey participants (Figure 3). One respondent wrote in identifying that any event requiring evacuation would trigger a plan to be put into action.



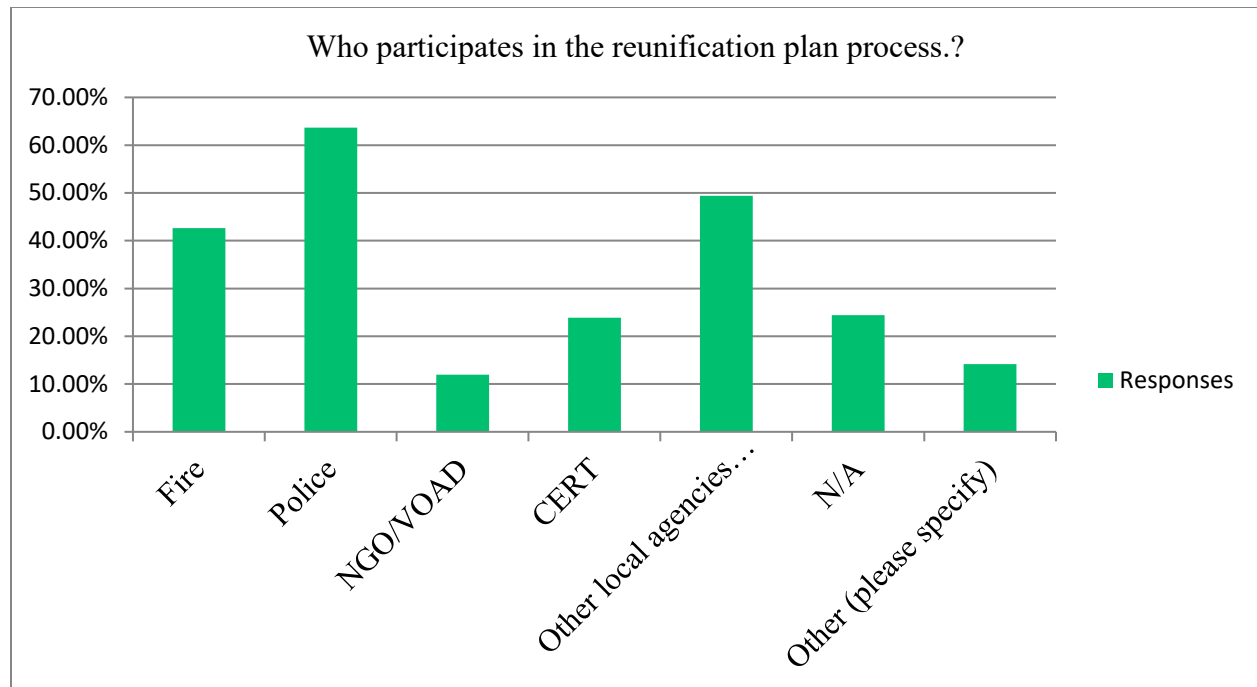
**Figure 3: Events that dictate implementation**

The activation of a family reunification plan would likely occur as a result of an active shooter event or any event “where children are separated from their parents” (K. Dunn, personal communication, July 5, 2019) (Appendix E). Hartenbaum (personal communication, June 28, 2019) (Appendix C) also identified that activation of plan is incident or event dependent. When referring to school-based incidents he mentioned that plans could be activate for other than ASHER events such as a chemical spill, fire, or building collapse. He further explains, with the inclusion of natural disasters, that “any event that constitutes a mass gathering should have a FRP” (J. Hartenbaum, personal communication, June 28, 2019).

The third research question asked: What is the role and/or responsibility of the local emergency management team in a reunification plan? Planning and development were selected as the main role, representing 65% of the responses (Figure 4). Nearly 64% identified a police agency as a main participant in the planning process (Figure 5). Second to a police agency was that of other community agencies such as boards of education and transportation agencies at approximately 50%. Fire service agencies accounted for approximately 43% of the respondent's selections. Exercise and implementation as it related to a role or function of emergency management was chosen approximately 45% and 42%, respectively, by participants.



**Figure 4: Role or responsibility of emergency management team**

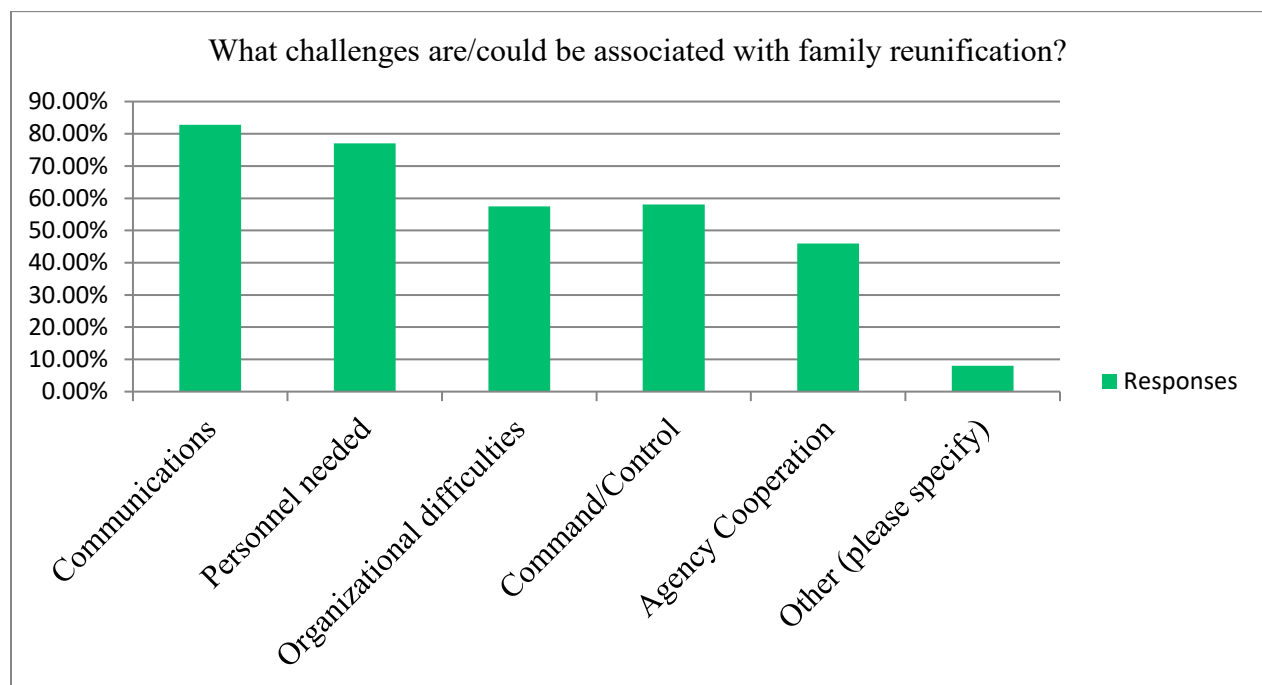


**Figure 5: Participants in reunification planning**

Hartenbaum (personal communication, June 28, 2019), Lockwood (personal communication, June 17, 2019), and Dunn (personal communication, July 5, 2019) (Appendices C, D and E) all provided a similar result to the survey response as it related to organizational participation. Partners in the process, from planning to implementation, should include all emergency and volunteer organizations. Both Dunn (personal communication, July 5, 2019) (Appendix E) and Lockwood (personal communication, June 17, 2017) (Appendix D) identified using CERT as planning team member and as a resource in the event of implementation.

Inclusive of this would be the town chief executive and potentially a facility or property owner of an impacted location. Training was identified as a key component and priority. Hartenbaum (personal communication, June 28, 2019) (Appendix C) identifies that a plan must be validated and to do so requires testing and exercising, otherwise it cannot be considered a fully operational plan.

The fourth research question asked: What challenges are associated with family reunification? Question 15 of the survey (Appendix B) asked if family reunification planning was practical for the respondents' jurisdiction. A majority of those polled, 80%, indicated in the affirmative. Question 16 asked for specific challenges to be identified. Communications (83%) and personnel resources (77%) were the most selected options (Figure 6). Written in responses also provided information on issues related to; (a) legal concerns (privacy/HIPPA), (b) managing social media, and (c) the manpower needed to manage reunification during an emergency.



**Figure 6: Challenges associated with family reunification**

Jonathan Hartenbaum (personal communication, June 28, 2019) (Appendix C) identifies cell phones and social media as a prevalent challenge as it relates to information management. An additional challenge noted was that of family notification related to death or injury of a family member. Kyran Dunn (personal communication, July 5, 2019) (Appendix E) identified that without practicing a plan the challenge would be found in overall efficiency and effectiveness. He also addresses family notification as a concern and utilizing area clergy for

assistance. Shane Lockwood (personal communication, June 17, 2019) (Appendix D) identified parents coming to the incident site instead of the reunification site as a challenge. He also referenced the staffing challenges associated in manning a reunification site, with the option of using staff from municipal offices assist.

The results of the data from the procedures were subjective but illustrated a commonality amongst both survey respondents and interviews. Results indicate a bias in that there was limited response, from the survey instrument, from those at the county government structure or higher. Additionally, most respondents identified they did not serve as emergency management directors or deputies. Survey participants overall indicated that family reunification planning would be an important component of an emergency operations plan. However, the data was restricted due to the overall broad response of what agencies are or should be involved in emergency planning and associated responsibilities or authorities. Family reunification will be determined by the nature and the location of the incident. Therefore; best practices, causes for implementation, roles and responsibilities, and associated challenges will be unique across all levels of government; local, county, state, and federal.

### **Discussion**

The literature yielded several resources that could be utilized in the development of a family reunification plan. Those resources identified that any post incident action plan should consider family reunification as a primary component (Stern, 2012, p. 60). Prior to any implementation, a plan must be developed to address the needs of the organization and community as it relates to identifying family reunification procedures. Nager (2009) identified that family reunification could be one of the most challenging endeavors faced by an emergency management team. Therefore, templates, such as those provided in the *National Mass Care*

*Strategy* or by non-governmental agencies like the American Red Cross, should be utilized. These will provide a jurisdiction the necessary guidance or road map in developing a reunification plan (*Multi-Agency Reunification Template*, 2015). The survey (Appendix B) data supported the use of accepted standards and practices from both government and non-governmental agencies. Best practices and procedures should involve a whole community approach. This will allow a jurisdiction to determine the requirements necessary for coordination and integration of a plan after a disaster has impacted the community ("Post disaster reunification," n.d.). This was identified in the interview with Jonathan Hartenbaum (personal communication, June 28, 2019) (Appendix C) with the State of Connecticut regional planning office who underscored that a plan developed using best practices will provide not only guidance and understanding, but also authority to execute it.

The research revealed that implementation of family reunification plan could be unique. The I Love You Guys Foundation (2018) recognizes that actions will be dictated by the event, location, and environment. Many resources from the literature review focused the importance of reunification on the impact of disasters on children. Therefore incorporating the needs of children into the planning processes is a vital component of any plan. This is influenced by the fact that 90% of children live in areas prone to natural disasters (Save the Children, 2015). A primary concern or consideration is due to the amount of time children spend away from home in a school type environment. Chung and Blake (2014) estimate that over 67 million children are already separated from their families during the course of a normal day (p. 334). The survey results corresponded with the literature review with primary reasons for implementation being either natural or man-made disasters, including a more specific focus on ASHER events. NFPA

3000 (2018) was developed as a direct result of these events and recommends that reunification should be part of a recovery strategy.

The literature review, survey, and interviews indicated that the primary role of the emergency management agency is planning and exercising those plans. Planning is an essential component of emergency preparedness and helps to build a more resilient community. In order to be effective, the organization must provide, through planning, for the protection and recovery of community at levels that are acceptable to the community at large (Fagel, 2011). Planning provides the means to define roles and responsibilities of individuals and organizations involved in executing and supporting a family reunification strategy. Training those personnel prior to an event is essential so they are cognizant of their overall abilities (FEMA, 2017). This component is integral to the response and recovery process. However, the survey (Appendix B) indicated only seven percent of the participants utilized full scales exercises as a component of their training. This illustrates a deficiency, which a jurisdiction must address, in the overall planning process. Outcomes will be dependent on how good organizations know and understand their roles, where they belong within the scope of the plan, and how well the plan is executed (FEMA, 2010). As Hartenbuam (personal communication, June 28, 2019) (Appendix C) established, in order to validate a plan, it must be exercised and tested operationally.

Challenges are inherent with many emergency management plans and operations. Similarities, regardless of the nature of the disaster or event, can be found such as: (a) communications, (b) personnel, (c) social media, (d) legal and (e) competing organizational goals or strategies. This is supported by the survey data as well as the literature review. The identification and reuniting of individuals and families within the reunification process is one specific challenge that was recognized. The need to protect the privacy and confidentiality of



potential victims while balancing the need for an effective reunification process must be managed (Chung et al., 2012). This process can be affected by specific laws such as HIPPA or even parent custodial agreements. Utilization of resources such as school documentation and emerging technology should be used as an avenue to help facilitate the reunification process. Any emergency scene will involve the media as many levels. The media will play a pivotal role in any emergency and can impact the successes or failures in the management of the emergency. Information management transcends traditional media as a result of social networks, thus expanding the audience and reach of information (Fagel, 2011). Managing that information is best done through official channels. This can be accomplished via a public information officer or joint information center through reception centers, call centers, or family assistance centers (USDOJ, 2017).

Overall, as identified through the literature review, interviews, and survey responses; a local jurisdiction should include a family reunification strategy into an emergency management operations plan. The process can be complex, exhaustive, and time consuming. That strategy needs to include: (a) promoting family preparedness, (b) collaborating with local agencies, (c) identifying roles and responsibilities, and (d) addressing the challenges associated with reunification methods. Chung and Blake (2014) state that the plans of a local jurisdiction will be the initial response and recovery template and the most used (p. 337). Disasters begin and end locally, therefore planning at the local level must occur to support the overall need of the community, from initial response through long-term recovery. Nager (2009) recommends that planning and preparedness must also occur at the smallest level, that of the individual family. Oftentimes decisions for implementing lifesaving actions are based on incident specific needs or situations. Implementing a family reunification plan is no different.

Emergency management teams need to understand the overall complexities and necessary collaborative measures to ensure operational success (Chung & Blake, 2014). Initial response actions set the stage for the overall effectiveness of the response and recovery effort. A comprehensive plan will help mitigate the challenges associated with family reunification. The local jurisdiction, organization, or emergency management team should consider it a planning priority towards making a community more resilient (*Multi-Agency Reunification Template*, 2015).

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the data. The first recommendation was that the Town of Southington should include family reunification planning as part of its emergency operations planning, as a standalone plan or annex. In order to facilitate this, a focus group representing various stakeholder groups including emergency management, the school board, community partners, and volunteer agencies, should be formed. The second recommendation was to identify; (a) roles, (b) responsibilities (c) resources, and (d) hazards specifically associated with family reunification strategies. The third recommendation was to promote overall family preparedness planning and communicate the importance of family reunification through town wide initiatives utilizing social and civic organizations.

The literature offered several options to design, content, and format of a family reunification plan. Although no one national standard exists, best practices and recommendations were available from the collaborative efforts of both governmental and nongovernmental agencies. A recommendation for future researchers would be to start at a local level by reviewing existing emergency operations plans to determine the potential scope and implication of a family reunification plan. Future researchers should also determine if plans

exist in neighboring jurisdictions to identify best practices and resources that may be available. Lastly, future researchers should concentrate on any legal considerations of family reunification by reviewing local, state, and federal regulations to include authorities allowed during emergency response and recovery efforts.

Incorporating a family reunification plan into existing emergency operations plans would require significant input and commitment from a variety of internal and external stakeholders. The community on a whole would be better prepared and therefore more resilient if an extensive family reunification plan were developed, communicated, and exercised appropriately. Existing measures for minor natural disasters are in place for identifying, tracking, locating, and sheltering individual predisposed to require assistance. A larger scale event involving another at risk group, such as an ASHER event involving a school will challenge every plan and contingency currently in place at the local level. The collective practice of identifying, planning, exercising, and evaluation should ensure response and recovery outcomes meet the goals and objectives of any aspect of an emergency operations plan.

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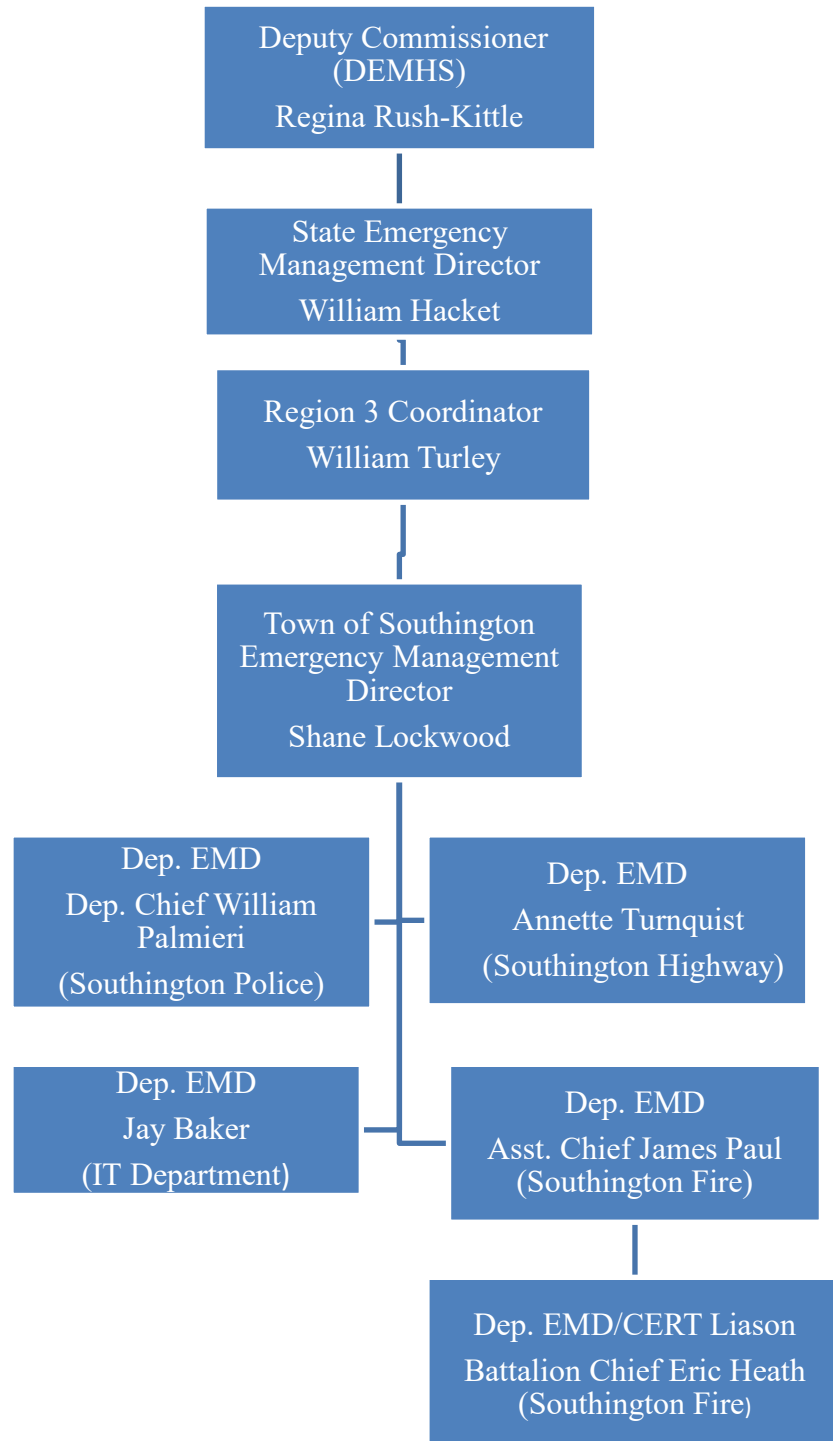
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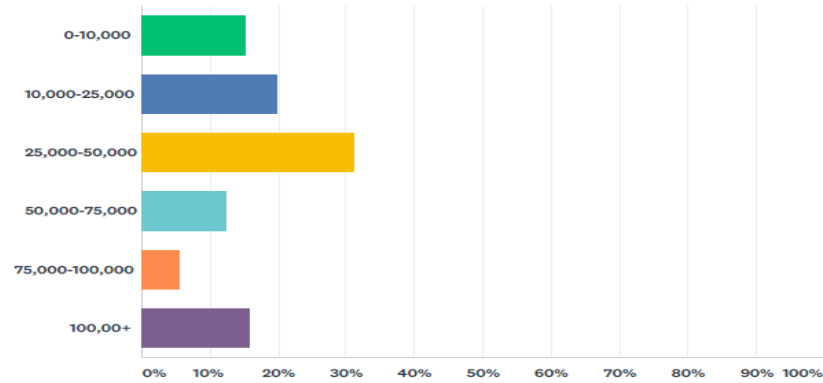
**Appendix A****Town of Southington Emergency Management Organizational Flow Chart**

## Appendix B

### Emergency Management/Fire Service Survey

#### Q1 What size population do you serve?

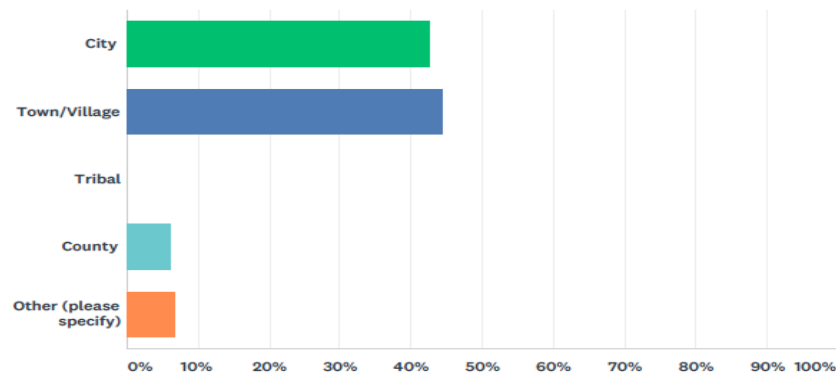
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-10,000	15.25%	27
10,000-25,000	19.77%	35
25,000-50,000	31.07%	55
50,000-75,000	12.43%	22
75,000-100,000	5.65%	10
100,00+	15.82%	28
TOTAL		177

#### Q2 What type of municipality do you serve?

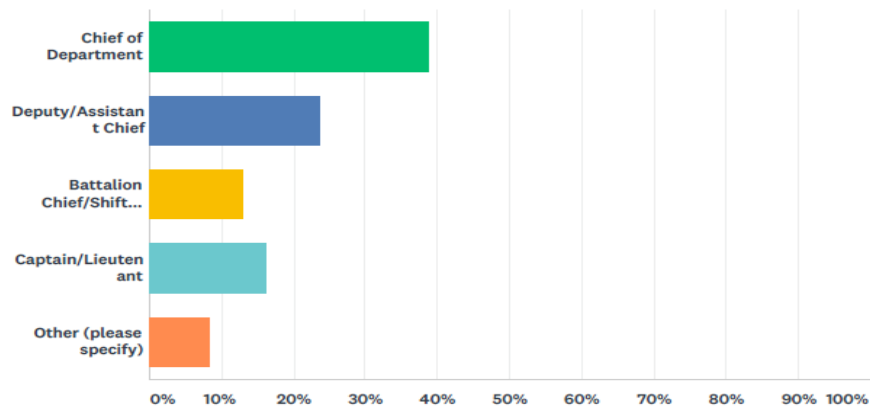
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
City	42.70%	76
Town/Village	44.38%	79
Tribal	0.00%	0
County	6.18%	11
Other (please specify)	6.74%	12
TOTAL		178

## Q3 What position do you hold?

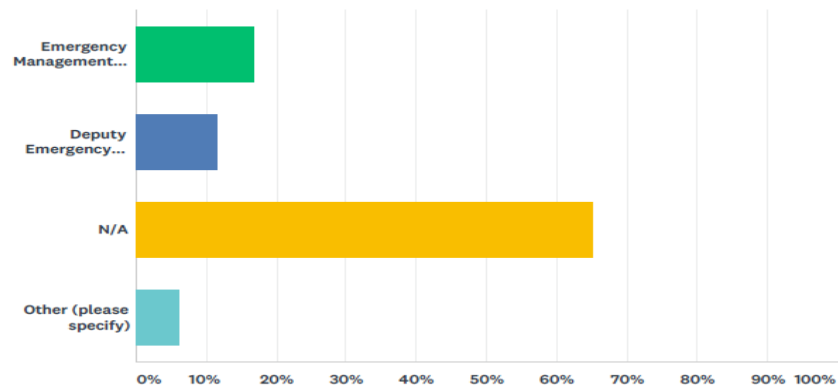
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Chief of Department	38.76%	69
Deputy/Assistant Chief	23.60%	42
Battalion Chief/Shift Commander	12.92%	23
Captain/Lieutenant	16.29%	29
Other (please specify)	8.43%	15
TOTAL		178

## Q4 Do you serve as your municipalities Emergency Management Director or Deputy EMD

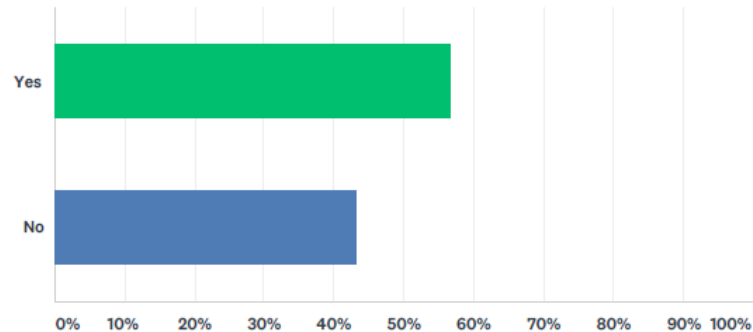
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Emergency Management Director	16.85%	30
Deputy Emergency Management Director	11.80%	21
N/A	65.17%	116
Other (please specify)	6.18%	11
TOTAL		178

### Q5 Is your local Emergency Management Agency a separate/standalone agency?

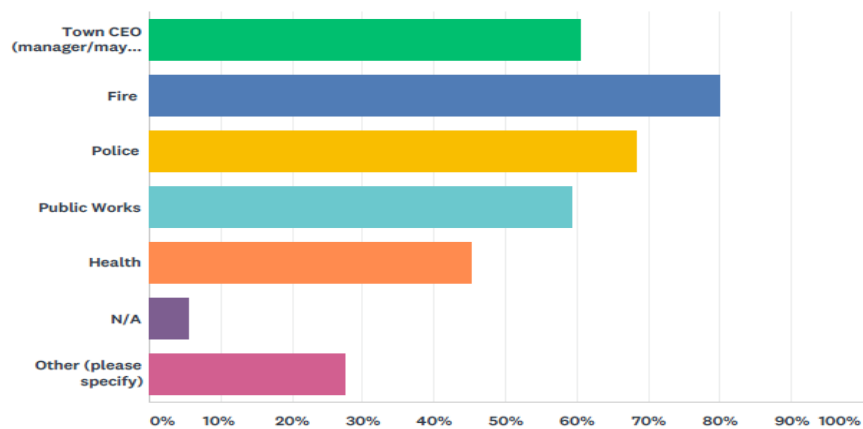
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	56.74%	101
No	43.26%	77
TOTAL		178

### Q6 What agencies make up your local Emergency Management Agency? Check all that apply.

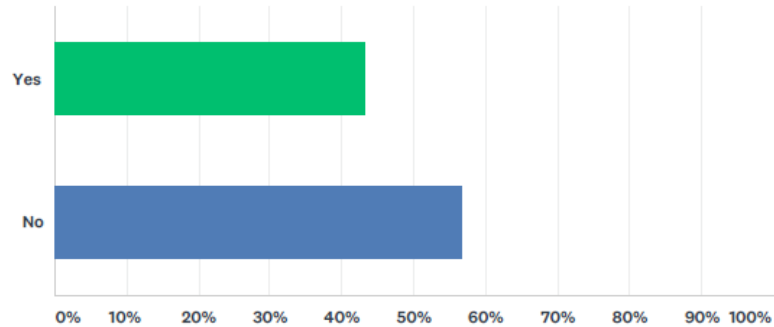
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Town CEO (manager/mayor, etc.)	60.45%	107
Fire	80.23%	142
Police	68.36%	121
Public Works	59.32%	105
Health	45.20%	80
N/A	5.65%	10
Other (please specify)	27.68%	49
Total Respondents: 177		

### Q7 Does your emergency management planning have a provision for family reunification after a disaster or event?

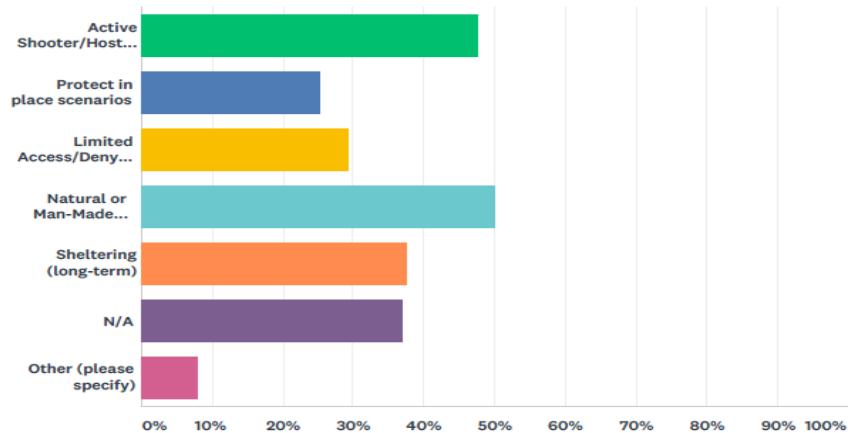
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	43.26%	77
No	56.74%	101
TOTAL		178

### Q8 What events dictate the implementation of a family reunification plan? Check all that apply.

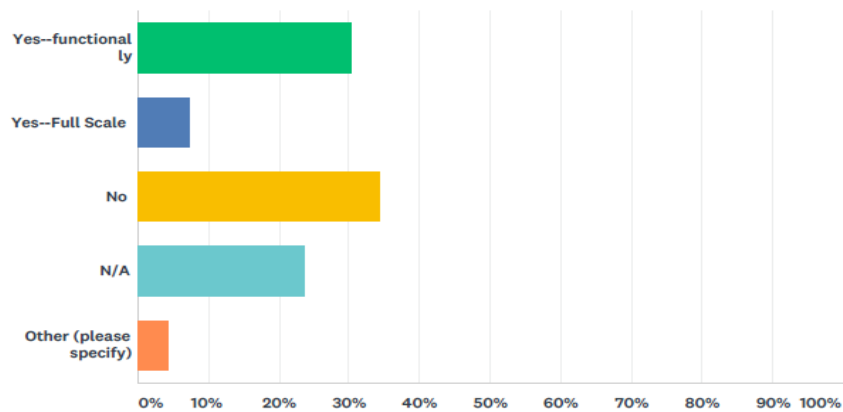
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Active Shooter/Hostile Event (ASHER)	47.75%	85
Protect in place scenarios	25.28%	45
Limited Access/Deny Access (wildfires/hazmat)	29.21%	52
Natural or Man-Made Disasters	50.00%	89
Sheltering (long-term)	37.64%	67
N/A	37.08%	66
Other (please specify)	7.87%	14
Total Respondents: 178		

### Q9 Do you exercise/practice your plan?

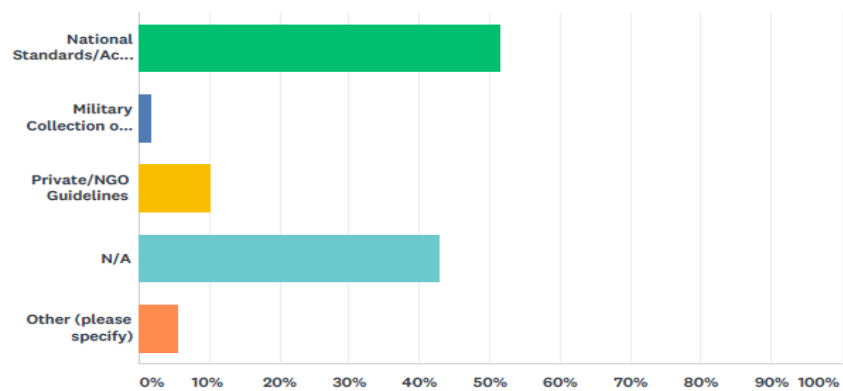
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes--functionally	30.34%	54
Yes--Full Scale	7.30%	13
No	34.27%	61
N/A	23.60%	42
Other (please specify)	4.49%	8
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>178</b>

### Q10 What best practices or resources did you use to develop your plan? Check all that apply.

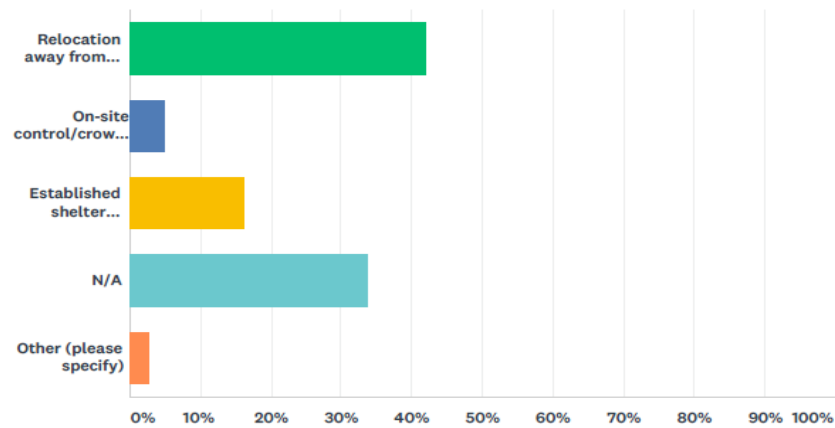
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
National Standards/Accepted Practices	51.41%	91
Military Collection or Detention Procedures	1.69%	3
Private/NGO Guidelines	10.17%	18
N/A	42.94%	76
Other (please specify)	5.65%	10
<b>Total Respondents: 177</b>		

### Q11 What practice or procedure do you use if reunification is necessary?

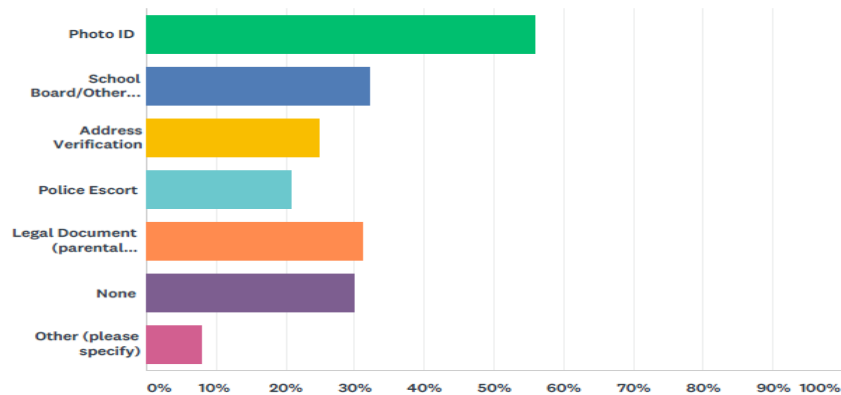
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Relocation away from incident site to pre-determined location	42.13%	75
On-site control/crowd management	5.06%	9
Established shelter locations	16.29%	29
N/A	33.71%	60
Other (please specify)	2.81%	5
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>178</b>

### Q12 What practice or procedure do you use for positive identification/release/reunification? Check all that apply

Answered: 177 Skipped: 1

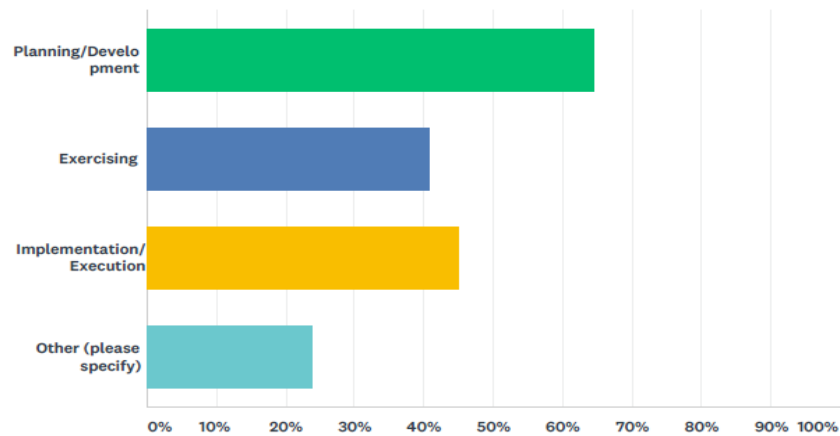


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Photo ID	55.93%	99
School Board/Other Facility Documentation	32.20%	57
Address Verification	24.86%	44
Police Escort	20.90%	37
Legal Document (parental custody considerations)	31.07%	55
None	29.94%	53
Other (please specify)	7.91%	14
<b>Total Respondents: 177</b>		



**Q13 What role/responsibility does your EMA have in reunification plan?  
Check all that apply.**

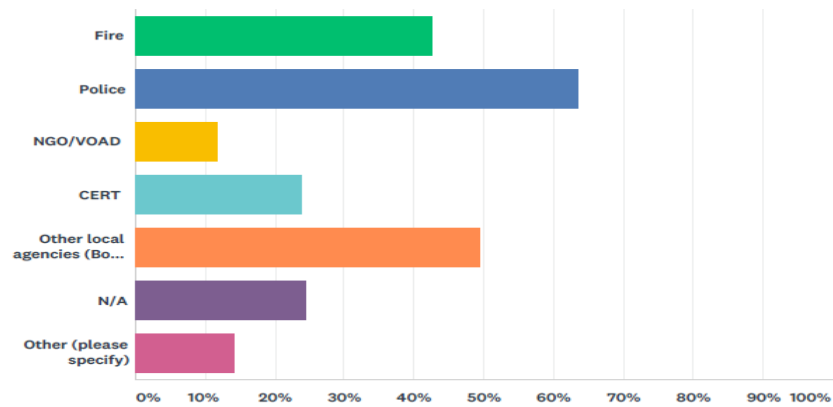
Answered: 167 Skipped: 11



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Planning/Development	64.67%	108
Exercising	40.72%	68
Implementation/Execution	44.91%	75
Other (please specify)	23.95%	40
Total Respondents: 167		

**Q14 Who participates in the reunification plan process? Check all that apply.**

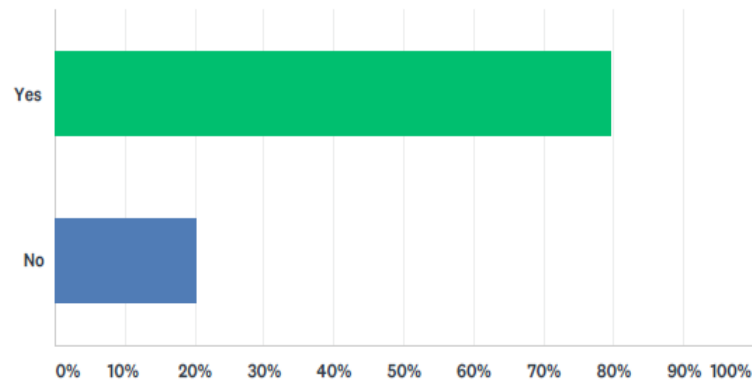
Answered: 176 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Fire	42.61%	75
Police	63.64%	112
NGO/VOAD	11.93%	21
CERT	23.86%	42
Other local agencies (Board of Ed, Bus Company)	49.43%	87
N/A	24.43%	43
Other (please specify)	14.20%	25
Total Respondents: 176		

### Q15 Is a family reunification plan practical for your jurisdiction's emergency operation planning?

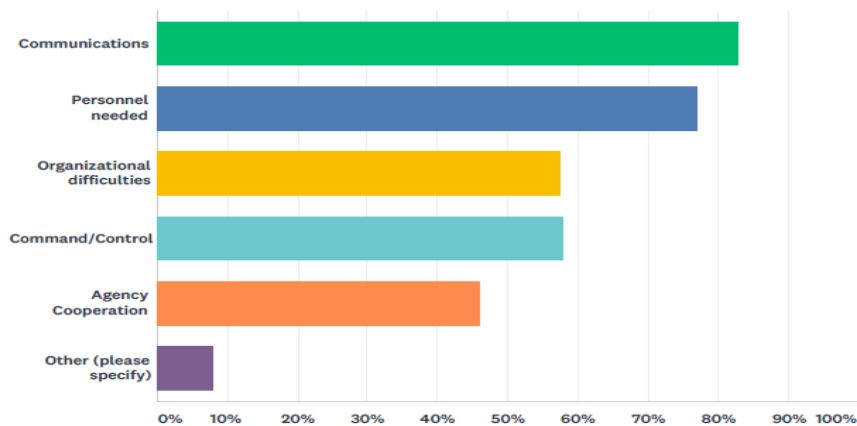
Answered: 168 Skipped: 10



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	79.76%	134
No	20.24%	34
TOTAL		168

### Q16 What challenges are/could be associated with family reunification (planning, exercise, or implementation)? Check all that apply.

Answered: 174 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Communications	82.76%	144
Personnel needed	77.01%	134
Organizational difficulties	57.47%	100
Command/Control	58.05%	101
Agency Cooperation	45.98%	80
Other (please specify)	8.05%	14
Total Respondents: 174		

**Appendix C****Executive Fire Officer Research Interview Questions/Responses with Jonathan Hartenbaum, Regional Planner, State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Management**

- 1) What is your name and title?
  - Jonathan Hartenbaum – Regional Planner
- 2) What type of municipality or agency do you represent?
  - State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security
- 3) Under what authority or statute do you operate/fall under (Emergency Management)?
  - Connecticut General Statutes, FEMA/DHS regulations
- 4) Do you serve as either your town's EMD or a Deputy EMD, or have you ever served as an EMD?
  - No
- 5) If applicable, is your Local Emergency Management Agency a separate standalone agency?
  - N/A
- 6) What agencies make up your local EMA?
  - N/A
- 7) Do you feel that Family Reunification should be a part of a local or regional emergency operations plan, and why?
  - Absolutely. A good family reunification plan will provide a guidance and understanding on how we re-unite children with their parents. A lot of time when

we discuss plans such as these, we are focused on school children, but this plan can really be used at any point where family members are separated or do not have reliable contact during or after an incident.

- Besides the general reunification of families, having a FRP will provide a guidance and authority for performing the task. Often times family reunification is being handled by the American Red Cross, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), or other groups of volunteers. The plan will provide them with a framework in which to operate, and should demonstrate how the FRP folds into the Local Emergency Operations Plan.

8) Does your emergency management planning have a provision for family reunification after a disaster or event?

- On the state level we work with the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, CT 2-1-1. There has been a lot of discussion on Family Reunification Plans, and there is no standard or requirements by the state. It has been a topic for discussion on creating a template for which cities and towns can use.

9) If a plan exists, or not, what events would/could dictate the implementation of a family reunification plan?

- Most of what we look at is the evacuation of a school where the normal transportation methods are impacted. While schools have been a large focus, any event which constitutes a mass gathering should have a FRP.
- With regards to schools, you don't just have to look at an Active Shooter as an event, but a chemical spill in a science lab, partial building collapse, fire, etc.

- The same reunification plan, but on a much larger scale can be used during natural disasters such as tornados where general communications may be impacted.
- Family reunification was a challenge for the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombings where the cellular towers were overloaded making it difficult for families to communicate their location and safety.

10) Have you exercised/practiced your plan? Or have you participated in another agency's plan implementation (exercise or real event)?

- I have not seen a FRP exercised. It is always just a discussion point in exercises, but it never goes beyond a reference.
- This is the type of plan which will need to be tailored to each incident, but there needs to be an understanding of the framework and where there are any gaps and challenges. This type of argument is the same when people discuss needing shelter training. Each town has a shelter identified and cots, the best way to conduct the training is for those who are going to support the shelter actually set up the shelter. Not all cots are easy to put together. And the guidance provided by the ARC is not going to be suitable to every building.
- In order to validate a plan, it must be tested which is why it must be exercised. It does not need to be a full scale, "let's race and put this together", but can a combination of Seminars, Workshops, and Drill which can allow people to discuss and actively participate in making the plan work for their locality.

11) What best practices or resources did you use to develop your plan?

- The idea is not to reinvent the wheel. There are numerous templates available such as the I Love You Guys foundation in Colorado. However, you cannot just put your town name into the template and say, “OK, we have a plan”.
- What works is developing your plan utilizing your town resources and assets, and solely looking at what you have available. This includes local first responders and any cadre of volunteers which may be available such as CERT. Most likely PD, FD, EMS, and OEM will be quite busy with the incident, so allowing those who will truly be running the reunification location to partake in the plan development will be crucial.

12) What practice or procedures do you use or should/would use if reunification is necessary?

- You should use what you planned and exercised. A plan that is created and not tested is not fully operational.
- It is also extremely important for personnel to be cross-trained (trained to be put in multiple positions, not everyone will be available). That information should be kept with the plan, so when opened and identifying who is fulfilling each role, you can see who is trained and qualified to fill that role.

13) What practice or procedure do you use for positive identification/release of individuals?

- This is really dependent on the event which caused the need to activate the FRP. If it is a school incident, this is actually easier because the school has the information about who is able to pick up the child. Events such as a concert could be extremely difficult and discussions such as that should be handled through a town attorney.

14) What role/responsibility does your local EMA have in a reunification plan?

- As the state, our responsibility would be to support the local EMA whether it is locating resources or personnel to assist.

15) Who participates in the reunification plan (from development to execution)?

- Anyone who is going to actively going to following the plan in the event of activation. There also needs to be complete buy-in from other first responders in the community who will need to provide resources and inspections for such facilities.
- PD, FD, EMS, OEM, facility owner/operator, town CEO (should be kept in the loop), Volunteer Organizations in the town.

16) Is a family reunification plan practical for your jurisdiction's emergency operation planning?

a. Yes, explain

- There is only a yes for this question. Plans can have annexes and should be comprehensive to cover any incident which may arise.

b. No, explain

17) What challenges do you believe or anticipate with family reunification for a post-disaster event?

- The biggest challenges right now are the implementation of cellphones and social media. Before you know it, people have communicated with their family member or posted on social media which make the interaction with facility staff more difficult.

- Part of a family reunification site is an area to break the news to parents of injuries and/or death which may have already been released based on the communications of cellular and social media.



## **Appendix D**

### **Executive Fire Officer Research Interview Questions/Responses with Shane Lockwood, Emergency Management Director, Town of Southington, Southington Connecticut**

1) What is your name and title?

- Shane Lockwood, Director of Health and Emergency Management Director

2) What type of municipality or agency do you represent?

- Health District and Municipality

3) Under what authority or statute do you operate/fall under (Emergency Management)?

- CT General Statutes, Town of Southington Town Charter

4) Do you serve as either your town's EMD or a Deputy EMD, or have you ever served as an EMD?

- Town EMD

5) If applicable, is your Local Emergency Management Agency a separate standalone agency?

- Yes

6) What agencies make up your local EMA?

- Health District, Fire, Police, Highway, Information Technology

7) Do you feel that Family Reunification should be a part of a local or regional emergency operations plan, and why?

- Definitely. The plan will allow families to reunite during tragic times. It will ease the burden on the school system and first responders by eliminating any confusion on what steps to follow during an emergency.

8) Does your emergency management planning have a provision for family reunification after a disaster or event?

- At the current time there is no provision in our Emergency Operations Plan.

9) If a plan exists, or not, what events would/could dictate the implementation of a family reunification plan?

10) Have you exercised/practiced your plan? Or have you participated in another agency's plan implementation (exercise or real event)?

- We have not exercised the reunification aspect of an active shooter drill. The lack of plan was highlighted as an area of concern during an active shooter drill during the previous school year.

11) What best practices or resources did you use to develop your plan?

- Iloveyouguys.org has a great template.

12) What practice or procedures do you use or should/would use if reunification is necessary?

- We will rely on the agencies involved in our emergency operations along with our Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). We will also look to have staff from municipal offices to volunteer at the reunification site.

13) What practice or procedure do you use for positive identification/release of individuals?

- Will have school personnel on site for identification along with software that will help with any questions regarding identity questions for parents and students.

14) What role/responsibility does your local EMA have in a reunification plan?

- We will oversee the development of the plan, any training of first responders and volunteers and activate the plan if necessary.

15) Who participates in the reunification plan (from development to execution)?

- The EMD and Deputy EMD's along personnel from the police and fire departments, the school system, CERT, CT DEMHS and the Town Manager.

16) Is a family reunification plan practical for your jurisdiction's emergency operation planning?

a) Yes, explain

- It is practical as it is an unfortunate reality that a municipality must plan for tragic events in our school buildings. We do not want parents/family members and the general public showing up at a building which may an active event or crime scene so we need to plan to move students to an off-site location for reunification.

b) No, explain

17) What challenges do you believe or anticipate with family reunification for a post-disaster event?

- Parents trying to enter the school property to immediately reunite with their children rather than going to our reunification site. We will also struggle at the beginning with staffing the site until a large number of volunteers arrive.

**Appendix E****Executive Fire Officer Research Interview Questions/Responses with Kyran Dunn, Deputy  
Fire Chief, Fairfield Fire Department, Fairfield Connecticut**

- 1) What is your name and title?
  - Kyran Dunn, Deputy Fire Chief/ Deputy Emergency Management Director
- 2) What type of municipality or agency do you represent?
  - Town of Fairfield, CT
- 3) Under what authority or statute do you operate/fall under (Emergency Management)?
  - Connecticut General Statutes Title 28
- 4) Do you serve as either your town's EMD or a Deputy EMD, or have you ever served as an EMD?
  - Deputy EMD
- 5) If applicable, is your Local Emergency Management Agency a separate standalone agency?
  - It's administered by the Fire Dept. The Fire Chief is the EMD.
- 6) What agencies make up your local EMA?
  - Virtually all agencies in the Town have a seat at the EOC and are included in the Emergency Management team. The First Selectman, Police, Fire, DPW, Health, Public Schools, Library, Social Services, Conservation, Engineering, etc.
- 7) Do you feel that Family Reunification should be a part of a local or regional emergency operations plan, and why?

- Yes. We have considered Family Reunification a function that Emergency Management would assist in if we had an incident where children are separated from their parents (for example, a hostile event in a school). Emergency Management might set up this function at another school or at one of the two Universities in town. For staffing we could use Public School staff, our vibrant CERT members and University personnel depending upon what is necessary.

8) Does your emergency management planning have a provision for family reunification after a disaster or event?

- Yes. The Police School Safety Officers have had drills and we have had drills with CERT regarding this function. CERT may or may not be used but they are trained in handling paperwork

9) If a plan exists, or not, what events would/could dictate the implementation of a family reunification plan?

10) Have you exercised/practiced your plan? Or have you participated in another agency's plan implementation (exercise or real event)?

- We have had some initial discussions on how we would implement but we are developing an actual plan at this time in conjunction with the Fairfield Police Department's School Safety Unit.

11) What best practices or resources did you use to develop your plan?

- I Love you Guys Foundation Standard Reunification Method and the Family Reunification Templated developed by the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council.

12) What practice or procedures do you use or should/would use if reunification is necessary?

- I would activate CERT if necessary to provide staffing.

13) What practice or procedure do you use for positive identification/release of individuals?

- We would work with Schools personnel if it involved their children. We would use their method of release.

14) What role/responsibility does your local EMA have in a reunification plan?

- We would oversee the Reunification process, secure the facility (either our Shelter (a High School) our backup shelter (the other High School) or one of the 2 universities in town. The site would be dependent upon the event and its location.

15) Who participates in the reunification plan (from development to execution)?

16) Is a family reunification plan practical for your jurisdiction's emergency operation planning?

a) Yes, explain

- Being developed

b) No, explain

17) What challenges do you believe or anticipate with family reunification for a post-disaster event?

- It wouldn't be smooth since we haven't codified and practiced this yet. We have run shelters so we can get facilities and staffing in place. We have spoken to area clergy and asked them how they could help, so they are on board. We need to have a drill to practice the concept.