

Welcome Public Information Officer Awareness

After this course, you will be able to:

- Define emergency public information and the importance of being proactive
- Describe the role and functions of the Public Information Officer (PIO)
- Describe the types of written products used in public information activities
- Recall preparation techniques that contribute to a successful media interview
- Apply public information techniques to a 5% scenario

Lesson 1: Introduction to Public Information

Lesson Objectives

At the end of this Lesson, you will be able to:

- Define emergency public information
- State the importance of being proactive

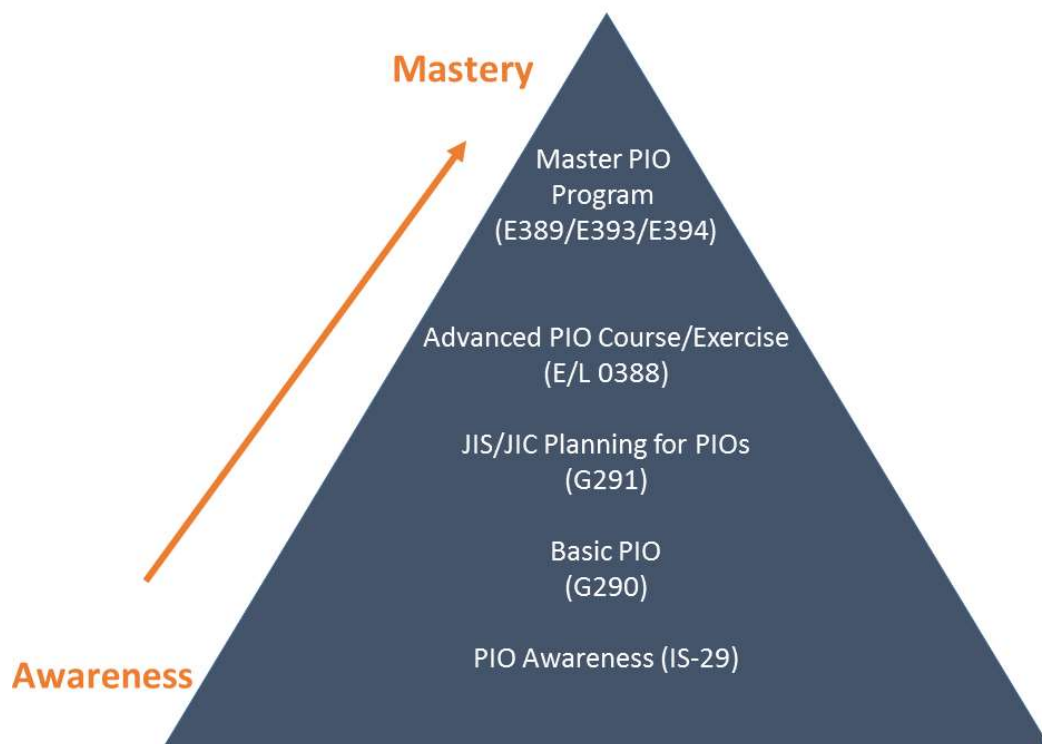
Course Goals

This course will:

- Introduce participants to the public information function and the role of the Public Information Officer (PIO) in the public safety/emergency management environment
- Prepare participants to continue developing their public information skills through training

PIOs in public safety and emergency management organizations are responsible for ensuring that the affected public receives accurate and timely information during an emergency. Armed with good information, people can make better decisions that contribute to the overall response goal of saving lives and protecting property.

The goal of this training is to provide participants with the skills and tools that those new to the position of PIO or with limited experience can use to effectively communicate with external and internal audiences on a daily basis, and to prepare participants for further public information training.



95/5 Theory

- 95% of a PIO's work is conducted in non-emergency times
- 5% of time and effort is directly related to incident response or recovery

95/5 intro

A theme that begins in this course and is carried throughout the Public Information Training Series is the "95/5" concept that takes its origin from two sources: management consultant D. Edward Deming and Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto.

95/5 explained

Deming said that 95% of an organization's performance is attributable to its systems and only 5% is due to the people. Pareto originally proposed the 80/20 formula, which has been applied to many aspects of both business and personal life (e.g., 20% of employees create 80% of an organization's success; 20% of your interpersonal activities create 80% of your sense of connection with others). Pareto suggested the 80/20 rule in 1906, a time before technology and other cultural changes contributed to speeding up both our work and personal lives. Many management experts today have recalculated Pareto's rule to 95/5 to reflect these societal changes.

Relating 95/5 to the roles of PIO

This 95/5 theory may be related to public information in many ways, but the greatest significance may be related to non-emergency and emergency situations. Most relevant to this training, 95% of a PIOs' work is in non-emergency times, with only 5% directly related to incident response or recovery. Another application might be that 95% of your organization's image may be affected — for good or for bad — by the 5% of time spent responding to an incident. So the activities a PIO chooses in non-emergency times (95%) has a significant impact on how successful he or she will be in the 5% spent in emergency response and recovery. Use the discussion questions below to engage the participants and to emphasize the importance of being proactive at all times in order to be effective during emergency situations (the 5% of the job).

Relating 95/5 to the roles of PIO

The discussion questions on the following slides emphasize the importance of being proactive at all times in order to be effective during emergency situations (the 5% of the job).

Terms Used in This Training

- Public Information
- Emergency Public Information
- External Affairs

For purposes of this training, we will define and make a distinction among the following terms:

Public Information: Information collected, assembled or maintained by an organization in connection with the transaction of official business and available for dissemination to the public.

Emergency Public Information: Information developed and disseminated in anticipation of, during, or after an emergency to provide specific life- and health-saving information.

External Affairs: Coordinates the release of accurate, coordinated, timely and accessible public information to affected audiences, including the government, media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. External Affairs works closely with state and local officials to ensure outreach to the whole community. Functions include, but are not limited to:

- Public affairs and the Joint Information Center
- Intergovernmental (local, state, tribal and territorial) affairs
- Congressional affairs
- Private sector outreach

Public Information Mission During an Incident

The public information mission during an incident is to get accurate, understandable information to the public in a timely manner so people can take action to save lives and minimize damage to property.

NIMS public information procedures and protocols support this mission.

Lesson Summary

You should now be able to:

- Define emergency public information
- State the importance of being proactive

Lesson 2: Public Information Roles and Responsibilities

This Lesson will take a look at the PIO's role and the qualities and skills that contribute to success.

Lesson Objectives

At the end of this Lesson, you will be able to:

- Define the role and functions of the Public Information Officer (PIO)
- Identify the qualities and skills that contribute to a PIO's effectiveness

Emergency Management Knowledge

The PIO must know:

- Basic emergency management concepts
- Incident Command System (ICS)
- National Incident Management System (NIMS)

The PIO should understand **basic emergency management** concepts, including the role of local, tribal, state and federal levels of government. Local government is always first to respond to a disaster. The state provides support as needed, and the governor requests assistance from the federal government if the event exceeds the local and state capacity to respond.

The PIO should be familiar with the local Emergency Operations Plan and his or her organization's role in an emergency.

The **Incident Command System (ICS)** originated in the 1970s during massive wildfire-fighting efforts in California. ICS is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazard approach to incident management. It provides a common framework within which people can work together effectively, even when they are drawn from multiple agencies that do not routinely work together. ICS has been called a "first-on-scene" structure, where the first responder on the scene has charge of the scene until the incident has been declared resolved, a superior-ranking responder arrives on scene and seizes command, or the Incident Commander appoints another individual Incident Commander.

The **National Incident Management System (NIMS)** provides a systematic, proactive approach to guide departments and agencies at all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector to work seamlessly to prevent, protect against, respond to, recover from,

and mitigate the effects of incidents, regardless of cause, size, location or complexity, in order to reduce the loss of life and property and harm to the environment.

ICS and NIMS Training Resources:

- Visit [FEMA's Independent Study](https://www.training.fema.gov/is) website at www.training.fema.gov/is. There you will find several free, web-based training courses about ICS and NIMS. □
- Visit [FEMA's Emergency Management Institute \(EMI\)](https://training.fema.gov) at training.fema.gov. EMI offers several classroom-based, on campus and field deliveries of ICS and NIMS courses for different audiences.

Joint Information System (JIS) Purpose

The Joint Information System (JIS) is the fourth NIMS Command and Coordination structure.

JIS integrates incident information and public affairs into a unified organization that provides consistent, coordinated, accurate, accessible, timely and complete information to the public and stakeholders during incident operations.

JIS operates across and supports the other NIMS Command and Coordination structures: ICS, EOC and MAC Group.

JIS activities include:

- Developing and delivering coordinated interagency messages
- Developing, recommending and executing public information plans and strategies
- Advise on public affairs issues that could affect the incident management effort
- Addressing and managing rumors and inaccurate information that could undermine public confidence

The JIS performs these activities in support of the Incident Commander or Unified Command, the EOC Director, and the MAC Group.

JIS Description and Components: PIO and JIC

The Public Information Officer (PIO) and Joint Information Center (JIC) are two supporting elements of the JIS.

The PIO is a key member of ICS and EOC organizations, though they might go by a different title in EOCs. PIO functions include:

- Advising the Incident Commander, Unified Command or EOC director on public information matters
- Gathering, verifying, coordinating, and disseminating accurate, accessible, and timely information
- Handling inquiries from the media, public and elected officials
- Providing emergency public information and warnings
- Conducting rumor monitoring and response

The JIC is a central location that houses JIS operations and where public information staff perform essential information and public affairs functions.

Normally, an incident should have a single JIC, but the JIS is flexible and can accommodate multiple JICs if necessary.

Informing the Public and Stakeholders

In some cases, lives will depend on getting information to the public quickly and those responsible take necessary steps to alert the public.

Getting information to the public and stakeholders during an incident requires an ongoing information cycle:

- **Gathering** complete information for the public and other stakeholders
- **Verifying** information to ensure accuracy
- **Coordinating** information with other public information personnel who are part of the JIS to ensure consistency
- **Disseminating** consistent, coordinated, accurate, accessible, timely and complete information to the public and stakeholders

Joint Information Center

What is the Incident Command System?

The Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized approach to incident management that:

- Is used for all kinds of incidents by all types of organizations and at all levels of government; ICS is applicable to small incidents as well as large and complex ones.
- Can be used not only for emergencies, but also for planned events.
- Enables a coordinated response among various jurisdictions and agencies.
- Establishes common processes for incident-level planning and resource management.
- Allows for the integration of resources (such as facilities, equipment, personnel) within a common organizational structure.

When is ICS Used?

The Incident Command System (ICS) can be used to manage any type of incident, including a planned event (e.g., the Olympics, the Governor's inauguration, state fairs, a local parade, etc.). The use of ICS is applicable to all types of incidents, regardless of their size or cause.

As a system, ICS is extremely useful. Not only does it provide an organizational structure for incident management, but it also guides the process for planning, building, and adapting that structure.

Using ICS for every incident or planned event provides the practice that will help to maintain and improve skills needed to effectively coordinate larger or more complex efforts.

Benefits of ICS

The Incident Command System (ICS) has positively impacted incident management efforts by:

- Clarifying chain of command and supervision responsibilities to improve accountability.
- Leveraging interoperable communications systems and plain language to improve communications.
- Providing an orderly, systematic planning process.
- Implementing a common, flexible, predesigned management structure.
- Fostering cooperation between diverse disciplines and agencies.

ICS: Built on Best Practices

The Incident Command System (ICS) has been tested for more than 40 years of emergency and nonemergency applications by all levels of government; and in nongovernmental and private-sector organizations.

ICS helps to ensure:

- The safety of responders, community members, and others.
- The achievement of incident objectives.
- The efficient use of resources.

ICS Functional Areas and Command Staff Roles

Every incident requires that certain functional areas be implemented. The problem must be identified and assessed, a plan to deal with it must be developed and implemented, and the necessary resources must be procured and paid for.

Regardless of the size of the incident, these functional areas are all required.

In case you ever need to assist with an incident, you should understand how the management structure is constructed using the Incident Command System (ICS). This will help you understand your role in the structure and how you may receive information and assignments.

This lesson focuses on the five major functional areas and the Command Staff roles. The General Staff roles will be discussed in the next lesson.

Incident Commander

Let's begin by taking a closer look at the Incident Commander. The Incident Commander is responsible for the overall management of the incident. Overall management includes Command Staff assignments required to support the incident command function. **The Incident Commander is the only position that is always staffed in ICS applications.** On small incidents and events, one person—the Incident Commander—may accomplish all management functions.

Qualities of an Effective PIO

- Analytical
- Strategic

- Proactive
- Knowledgeable
- Assertive
- Credible/trusted
- Flexible
- Able to perform under pressure
- Accessible!

The effective PIO builds successful internal and external relationships by demonstrating all of these qualities.

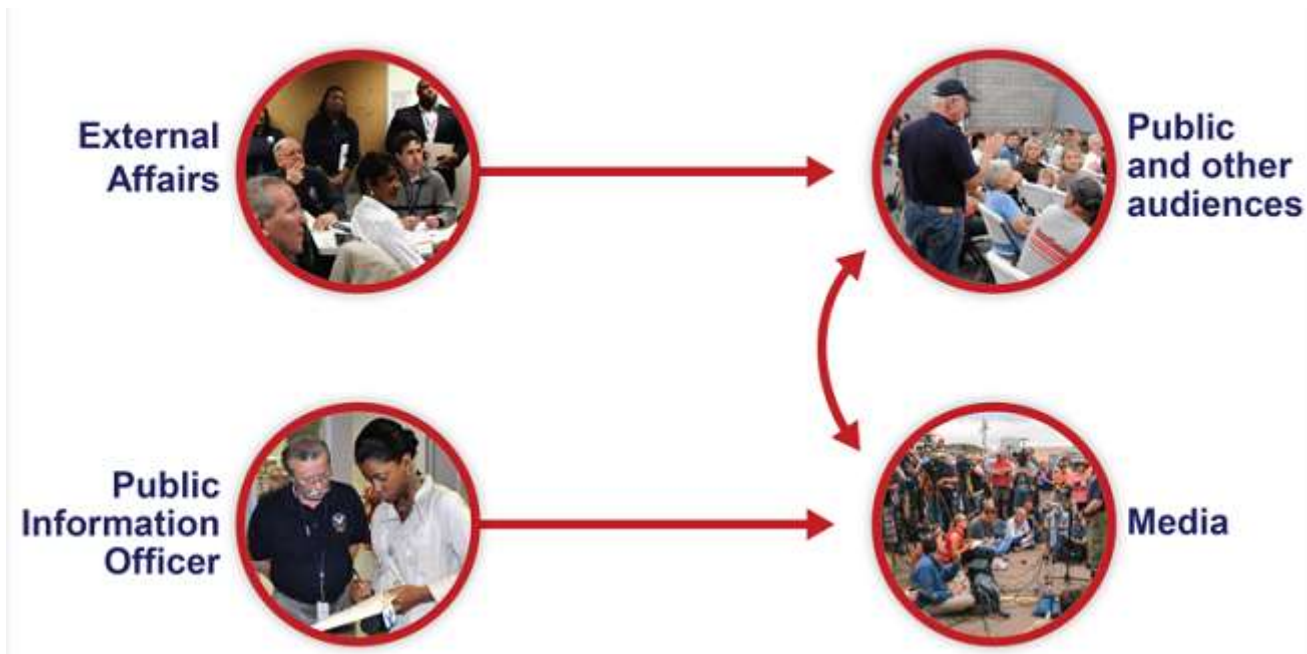
- The PIO needs to **analyze** what's going on and make **strategic** decisions in order to operate in a **proactive** manner. For example, imagine that a PIO for a local emergency management office reads in the paper and hears at town council meetings that the jurisdiction is in a budget crisis. He or she might develop strategies to build community understanding and support of the department by arranging media interviews, partnering with a school to promote emergency preparedness, or arranging tours of the Emergency Operations Center.
- **Knowledgeable:** Can speak with authority and credibility on all facets of the organization's operations. Knows where the organization fits in the bigger picture.
- **Assertive:** Can effectively navigate in dynamic situations to seek out important information and provide solid, thoughtful advice to leadership. Is able to redirect negative questions and turn them around.
- **Credible/trusted:** Has proven himself or herself to be knowledgeable and someone who will deliver what is promised. Returns calls and answers e-mails from the media. Also is trusted by those in the organization.
- **Flexible:** Can adjust plans and priorities as the situation requires.
- **Able to perform under pressure:** Can meet the demands of the situation without losing his or her cool and without sacrificing good decision making; has good public-speaking skills.
- **Accessible:** None of these other qualities will matter if you aren't accessible to the news media.

Other qualities you may have suggested

Possible answers:

- Be objective.
- Be an advocate — for the public, for your organization, and for the media. PIOs work with the media — not deal with the media.
- Be an educator. Media often covers many things and there are often new reporters, so you need to educate them. Building those relationships during steady-state is crucial to your success.

External Target Audiences



A key component of any communication is identification of the target audience.

Target audiences may be external or internal.

External target audiences include the general public and the news media that can be described as the conduit to the public.

Internal Target Audiences



The second target audience for PIOs is the internal audience, which includes:

- **Organizational leadership.** The PIO assesses every situation and advises leadership on public information implications. The PIO also looks for opportunities to advance the organization's goals and facilitates leadership's participation — for example, by setting up interviews with the news media and preparing talking points.
- **Communications advisor.** The PIO prepares others to speak to the public through the media, community organizations or during public events. The workforce.
- **The workforce** is a key player in any organization's public information efforts. The PIO trains, informs and educates the workforce so they can support and participate in public information activities — for example, "Shop with a Cop" to buy holiday gifts for needy children.

Tell internal audiences what you are telling the media, and also let them know what the media is saying.

Internal communication provides the workforce with information that they can relay directly to the public when asked by citizens. Uniformed personnel and first responders are the main point of public contact and need to know the information their organization is putting out.

Whole Community Awareness

The PIO must know the:

- [Demographics](#)
- [Governmental structure](#)
- [Key players \(people and organizations\)](#)
- [Relevant history](#)
- [Community "culture"](#)

The **whole community** approach ensures solutions that serve the entire community are implemented, while simultaneously making sure that the resources the different members of the community bring to the table are used efficiently. These members include those in all levels of government as well as those in non-governmental and private-sector organizations in fields such as transportation, health care, schools, public works, communications, agriculture, chemical/nuclear, and more.

Public Information Officer Skills

What follows are some baseline skills needed by a PIO. Continuous practice of all of these skills should be part of your regular 95% time plan.

Media Relations Skills

The successful PIO develops credibility and builds relationships with the media by consistently:

- Providing information and access to newsmakers
- Demonstrating an understanding of media needs and operations
- Respecting media deadlines
- Maintaining open dialogue

It is important to understand media. For example, if you were a firefighter, would you ever leave a fire before it has been put out? You wouldn't, right? Similarly, reporters don't leave a scene until they get the information they need.

PIOs should have a policy on working with the media. Consider holding quarterly meetings with media representatives. Allow them to ask questions and provide feedback. Some states meet every other month with media and government PIOs.

Writing for the public is different than writing reports. The writing style will be dependent upon the channel being used to deliver the message. Make sure to use the *Associated Press Stylebook*, available in print or online. Well written products assist the media in a number of ways. Some may choose to use the material as is. Well-written products will direct media to the most important information when deadlines are tight.

When speaking to the media, think in terms of sound bites. A sound bite is a short, catchy statement often quoted or replayed by the media.

It is important for the PIO to have tools and resources available for utilization during an incident. Although this is not a complete list, a Go Kit might include:

- Office supplies such as pens, paper, stapler, tape, etc
- Laptop computer, tablet, smartphone and portable printer with an alternate power source(s), including accessories (e.g., memory stick, CDs, mouse, etc.);
- Maps
- Television, radio, and/or broadcast recording equipment
- Cell phone with extra batteries
- Fax machine
- Agency or IMT letterhead
- Camera with extra batteries
- Battery powered radio
- Pre-scripted messages and template releases

Prior to an incident or planned event, establish agreements with businesses or agencies that can assist with the operations. Examples would be contracts with: translation services; printing companies (in order to publish brochures, fact sheets, or other emergency documents); and communication companies to install WiFi, cell, or hard-line telephones.

Lesson Summary

You should now be able to:

- Define the role and functions of the Public Information Officer (PIO)
- Identify the qualities and skills that contribute to a PIO's effectiveness

Lesson 3: Public Information Skills Overview

At the end of this Lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe the types of written products used in public information activities
- Recall preparation techniques that contribute to a successful media interview

What the Public Wants to Know

Immediately following a crisis, the public will want to know:

- What happened?
- What does it mean to me?
- What are you doing about it?

But what about non-emergency times — the 95% of your job?

What does the public want to know during the 95% timeline?

When determining public communication needs, think about “What does it mean to me?” The answer to this question is the key concern during both emergency and non-emergency situations.

This is why PIOs must always consider their target audience. For example, if you are stuck in traffic, you probably want to know what happened, how long you will be stuck, and alternate routes to take.

Using Key Messages to Plan

Starting with key messages helps you to:

- Target your audience

- Anticipate questions and concerns
- Develop supporting information
- Select the appropriate medium
- Ensure consistent communication

Your key message — the #1 thing you want your audience to know or do — helps you plan your efforts more effectively:

- Who do you need to reach with this message? Is your target audience people living in a certain community, tourists, young families, or new homeowners?
- What questions or concerns might they have about this subject? How can you address these concerns in your information campaign?
- What supporting information will help you convey your message? Supporting information may include facts (e.g., number of homes destroyed by fire), instructions (e.g., how to install hurricane straps), comparisons (e.g., the cost of a new ambulance over the expected lifetime of the vehicle).
- The complexity of the content is one consideration when selecting the medium. Other aspects are the impact of visuals (Will photos or diagrams help you convey the message?) and the expected “lifetime” of the message.
- An important benefit of articulating your key message is that it begins to ensure consistent communication. If everyone knows the key message and uses the supporting information, the public is less likely to get mixed messages from your organization and ones you are partnering with.

Supporting Information & Talking Points

Supporting information:

- Validates your key message
- Provides relevance for the target audience
- Addresses questions and concerns

Talking points:

- Make your message compelling and memorable
- Contribute to consistent communication

Supporting information is crucial to success. It gives your message validity and can answer the audience’s question: “What’s in it for me?”

Supporting information gives strength to your key message by providing facts and important information.

Talking points are just that — intended to be spoken — and so they need to present the information in a compelling, relevant manner. Talking points are for internal use only and unlike fact sheets, are not distributed to the public. They are used during media interviews and in product development to convey a key message.

Talking Points

- Short, easy to understand statements that reinforce your key message
- Brief, one- or two-sentence answers to basic questions that might be asked
- Memorable statements that make your audience visualize your main point
- Quotable
- Written for the ear, not for the eye
- Consider three bullets for each key message: past, present, future

Selecting the Right Product

The written product should suit the:

- Purpose of the communication
- Target audience's needs
- Complexity of the subject

There are five main purposes for communicating:

- To answer a question
- To inform or announce something
- To educate
- To clarify information
- To ask for an action

Your purpose, the needs and preferences of your target audience, and the complexity of the information all have impact on the type of written product you will use.

Public Information Written Products

- Statement
- Fact Sheet
- Media Advisory
- Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
- Newsletter Articles
- Brochures, Fliers, and Other Handouts

In this Lesson we will focus on talking points, news releases, and content for the Web, but there are other types of written products you may use from time to time:

- Statement: Used in lieu of a news release. Issued electronically or in print; less detailed than a news release. Good to use when you've received multiple media calls on the same topic.
- Fact sheet: Used when you need to provide more detail than possible in a news release.

- Media advisory: Used to invite the media to an event or news conference. Provides basic information (what, where, when, and why); provides directions.
- Public service announcements (PSAs): Used when you want to enlist the cooperation of the electronic media in promoting an important message.
- Newsletter articles: Used to communicate within the organization or may be a feature in a newsletter that reaches another audience.
- Brochures, fliers, and other handouts: Used to provide background information to supplement a news release, provide photos or graphics, etc. Remember not to overwhelm the reporter with too much or extraneous information. Sometimes “less is more.”

All of these products may be tweaked and repurposed for Social Media. We will cover Social Media later in the Lesson, but it is important to see all products and mediums as part of your whole public information strategy.

When To Use a News Release

Use when an activity or incident is newsworthy and a statement won't suffice

- Timeliness
- Proximity
- Conflict
- Impact
- Prominence
- Uniqueness
- Human interest

A news release is appropriate when there is a factual report of an activity or incident of news value.

An incident is newsworthy based on:

- Timeliness: Self-explanatory. News is NOW.
- Proximity: Events that happen near us have more significance and are more newsworthy to us.
- Conflict: Controversy or struggle between opposing sides makes news. (NOTE: The struggle doesn't have to be between people; it can be between people and the elements.)
- Impact: How will this affect me and to what degree?
- Prominence: Who is involved? The more “known” they are affects newsworthiness.
- Uniqueness: “Different” can be news.
- Human interest: Human interest stories can be of interest even if they don't exemplify some of these other characteristics of newsworthiness. Human interest stories appeal to emotion and enable the audience to identify with the subject.

News Release Content

News releases should:

- Provide accurate, factual information.
- Use clear, concise, easy-to-understand language.

- Use simple sentences.
- Contain short paragraphs.
- Be written in the third person.
- Attribute facts.
- Avoid all jargon and acronyms.

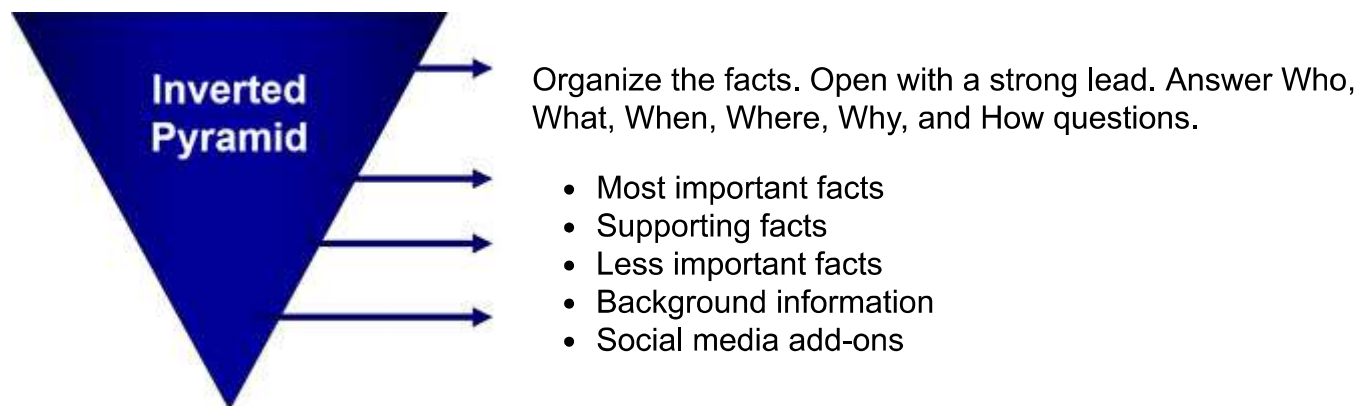
Acronyms can help us communicate internally, but can be real barriers to communicating with the public.

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News Releases



Avoid jargon and acronyms which can be real barriers to communicating with the public.

[Steps for writing a news release](#)

[Recommended format and style for a news release](#)

News Release Format and Style

Journalists use The Associated Press Stylebook

- Normally one page, single spaced
- On organization letterhead

- Following AP style
- Includes:
 - Contact information
 - Date (time optional)
 - News release number
 - “More” for continuation
 - “End” or “# # #” or -30-

[Select this link for an example of a news release.](#)

[Select this link for another example of a news release.](#)

Writing for the Web and Social Media

This discussion focuses on writing for the Web and Social Media. Social media is a specialized skill and additional training should be sought to enhance your knowledge, skills, and abilities with regard to social media. Social media platforms, analytics and audience usage frequently change. A PIO will need to stay on top of these changes. Either establish or follow a social media policy tailored to your organization. Social media use for PIOs is no longer optional. It is a major tool for a modern PIO.

For a more extensive look at how social media may be used in emergency management, you may want to take the FEMA independent study course [IS 42: Social Media in Emergency Management](#), available at <https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-42>.

Using the Web and social media tools has become an effective way to:

- Maximize timely dissemination of information.
- Reach diverse audiences.
- Facilitate information sharing and interactive communication.

When writing for the Web or social media, standard guidelines still apply:

- Content should be relevant to your target audience.
- The most important information should come first (inverted pyramid).
- Language should be clear, concise, and easily understood.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs. Consider the maximum number of characters allowed for different social media outlets.

What is Different?

There are some important differences to consider when writing for the Web or social media. Remember that people read differently online. You may use the same information that you use in a news release, for example, but you will want to repurpose it to fit the environment.

The visual displays some of the differences between writing for Web-based and social media and other communication tools.

TIPS:

- Use the words your audience uses to optimize search
- Chunk content
- Use visuals and multimedia

Social Media Do's

- Know your organization's clearance policy for social media
- Be strategic (think about your target audience and your goal)
- Think about how you will measure success (identify metrics)

When you write:

- Use conversational tone (use contractions and pronouns)
- Put intriguing information upfront
- Use fewer characters than allowed to make sharing easy
- Keep repurposing in mind (reuse Web content, but not verbatim)
- Use tagging (Facebook) and mentions (Twitter) to link with partners

For [internet terminology](http://www.netlingo.com), go to <http://www.netlingo.com>.

News Media's Role in Public Safety

The news media is the organization's link to the public before, during, and after an incident

AND

Social media can provide a direct link to your audience with two-way communication

Whether you use the word "partner" or not, the news media is undeniably our primary link to the public when it comes to sharing information. The better we understand the media and its needs, the stronger that link will become.

The traditional news media paint the image of the incident response in the eyes of the public. They create the perception of the agency and their response to the incident, and perception is reality to the public.

In the course of an incident's lifecycle, media attention usually follows this pattern:

- Initial: Reporters rush to the scene to capture and report the basic facts of the event. Stories typically do not require much investigative reporting.
- Continuing: The breaking news stage may or may not be past, as new challenges emerge. (For example, media turn to covering the repercussions of the event on the populace, which may include a shortage in food or housing after a hurricane or transportation problems after

a bridge collapse.) Investigative reporting can also keep a story in the news. If the focus turns to “who’s at fault”, the reporting will dig deeper and deeper and will keep the media’s and the public’s interest for a longer period of time.

- Diminishing: Story ideas come from reporters in the field or a PIO. Examples include profiles of a first responder or a disaster victim. Stories can also take an analytic approach, looking for deeper answers to why something happened.
- Recognition: Anniversary stories fall into this category and can offer opportunities to the PIO. For example, the anniversary of a severe winter storm may include the message to prepare a winter emergency kit for the home and the car.

News Media Types and Structure

- Print
- Television
- Radio
- Internet
- Social

“Social media is not a fad. It is a fundamental change in our environment. How we communicate, aggregate with others, and interact with our environment is changing dramatically with successive generations.”

ADM Thad Allen, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard, 2008

What ALL News Media Need

- Prompt answers to queries
- Access to the scene
- Access to policymakers, responders, and victims
- Fair treatment
- Respect for deadlines
- Updates and corrections to information in evolving incidents as fast as possible

Transparency in Government

- Freedom of Information (FOI) laws allow access to data held by national governments
- Sunshine laws, intended to create greater transparency in government, require government officials to hold certain meetings in public

Educate yourself on laws that prescribe access to documents and meetings. Research your own state’s transparency laws.

Freedom of information laws (FOI laws) allow access by the general public to data held by national governments. They establish a "right-to-know" legal process by which requests may be made for government-held information, to be received freely or at minimal cost, barring standard exceptions.

The Government in the Sunshine Act is a U.S. law passed in 1976 that affects the operations of the federal government, Congress, federal commissions, and other legally constituted federal bodies. It is one of a number of FOI laws intended to create greater transparency in government.

All states, the District of Columbia, and the federal government have laws requiring agency officials to hold certain meetings in public. These laws do not necessarily ensure that members of the public will be allowed to address the agency, but they do guarantee that the public and the media can attend the meetings. The ability to record a meeting, either through audio or visual recording has generally been viewed as implicit in sunshine laws if not explicitly written into the state law.

PIO actions to accommodate media access at the scene include: ☐

PIO actions to accommodate media access at the scene include: ☐

- Establish a media staging/briefing area that doesn't hinder operations, but affords the media reasonable, legitimate access. ☐
- When selecting a staging/briefing area, choose your background wisely. If you do not want something recorded by the media, cover it up or shield it with a vehicle. Use the staging area for all media releases, printed materials, live updates, and conferences — it will keep them there! ☐
- Reporters may record anything that they see or hear. They should not be told to stop recording. Always assume you are being recorded! ☐
- Coordinate access to persons in charge. ☐
- Occasionally it is necessary to restrict access to an area from the multitude of assembled media, but you still want to provide access under a more controlled system, such as a "media pool." A media pool is simply one representative from each of the four types of media (television, radio, print and Internet) who will be allowed access to a restricted area. These representatives are allowed access with the understanding that any video, audio or interviews they acquire will be shared with all of the rest of the media. Sometimes media representatives need to include more than one person from each media type (e.g., television might need a reporter and a camera operator, a newspaper might need a reporter and a photographer). This practice is legitimate and should be allowed. Members of the media must decide among themselves who will be in the media pool. Do not put yourself in the position of choosing for them.

Preparing for an Interview

The final topic in this Lesson is presentation skills — how you prepare for and perform during a media interview or public speaking engagement.

When a reporter requests or the PIO is setting up an interview, the first question is always: Who should speak for the organization?

Preparing for an Interview

- Identify the best spokesperson

- Develop your objectives
- Consider your audience
- Develop your message and materials
- Get clearance/approval
- Practice or prep the spokesperson

Improving Your Responses (1 of 2)

DO's: □

- Know what you want to say. It is the best way to control the interview and accomplish your objectives. Make sure you use your talking points. □
- Know your main point and stick to it. Too many messages will be confusing to the reporter and the public. □
- Be positive, yet realistic. Turn a negative question around and answer it in the positive. If asked, "Why didn't the police department use search dogs immediately?" Instead of saying, "We didn't use search dogs earlier because . . .," say: "We have used a full range of search strategies, including search dogs." □
- Show compassion and empathy. Personalize and humanize. □
- Know when to stop. Stop talking when you've made your point. Don't speculate and don't feel that you have to fill empty air space. □
- Whenever possible, summarize your key points at the end of the interview.

Improving Your Responses (2 of 2)

DON'Ts:

- Don't speculate. If you don't know the answer to something, say so. Don't offer your opinion.
- Don't answer hypothetical questions. Hypothetical questions often begin: "What if" Don't answer questions that require you to make assumptions.
- Don't respond to questions best answered by another agency. Also, don't talk about other organizations, unless to thank them for their efforts. □ Don't comment on what others have said,
- Don't comment particularly if you haven't heard or read it yourself. It may cause you to verify something that might not be true.
- Never lose your temper.
- Never lie. NEVER.
- And, most importantly, never say anything to a reporter you don't want to see in the news media.
- Never say anything "off the record." Some PIOs will argue that you can give "off the record" information to a reporter with whom you have a long-standing relationship of trust. One thing to consider: By giving this trusted reporter off-the-record information, you may be doing a disservice. If the information gets out from another source, other media outlets will run with it, while the reporter you trusted may hold back. Also be wary of reporters calling "off the record" information they are seeking from you as only "background" information that is ok for you to share.

"No Comment"

Never say “No comment.”

Answering “No comment” implies you are:

- Hiding something,
- Unprepared, or
- Uninformed.

Alternatives to “No Comment”

1. “The matter is under investigation and that information is not available at this time.”
2. “We will provide updates as more information becomes available.”
3. “Let me put you in contact with someone who is better able to answer that question.”
4. “Those details are covered by the Privacy Act and I cannot discuss them, but I can give you this general information . . .”

When you can’t answer a question, make sure the response you give is suited to the situation, is truthful, and is as forthcoming as possible.

- The first two options are suitable when you are dealing with an unfolding situation. Do not promise updates, however, unless you plan to provide them.
- If you cannot answer a question but someone else can, the third response is appropriate. Make sure you follow up and connect the reporter with the appropriate spokesperson or say that you are unable to do so.
- The fourth response is a good option when you are restricted from providing some information but you can offer general information that conveys your key message.
- Have several planned responses. “What I can share is....” Or “What we do know is...”

Transitional Phrases or "Bridging"

- In some interviews you may find that you are not provided with the right question to present your message. You can bring the focus back by building a bridge between the question and your message.
- Transitional phrases are tools that help you build such a bridge, and put the interview back on track to your talking points and main message.

Bridging statements

- “What is most important is ...”
- “What we should focus on is ...”
- “What the public should know is ...”
- “The point (or goal) is ...”
- “I don’t know, but what I can tell you is...”

Nonverbal Communication Tips

Any interview can be improved by paying attention to nonverbal communication:

- **Eye contact:** ALWAYS look at the reporter, not the camera. Avoid looking down. Avoid rolling your eyes or looking up to the sky.
- **Voice:** Speak clearly and modulate your voice by varying tone and volume. Slow down for emphasis when making important points. Pause to gather your thoughts rather than use fillers like “er,” “um,” or “you know.”
- **Expression:** Appear attentive. Show emotion as appropriate (sincerity). Assume that the camera is always on. Even if your words are not being taped, your facial expression will be conveying a message. Make sure it is the message you want to convey.
- **Body position:** Stand straight and align your body with the interviewer. In some instances the camera operator may -position you for the shot. Be aware of what’s being photographed in the background. Always be aware of scene safety for both you and the reporter.
- **Gestures:** Use natural, but not “big” gestures. Keep your hands away from your face Don’t cross your arms, raise your eyebrows, or shrug your shoulders. Avoid jerky movements.
- **Movement:** If standing, do not lock your knees, but don’t sway or bounce either. Don’t jingle jewelry or change in pockets. If sitting, don’t jiggle legs or spin or rock in the chair. Sit on your coat tail to keep your jacket from riding up.
- **Attire/Dress:** Consider your audience, market, and communication channel when dressing for an interview. In general, you don’t want your appearance to be “louder” than your message.
 - Wear your uniform or neat, conservative attire if non-uniformed.
 - Avoid bright whites, stripes, plaids, and complicated patterns.
 - Remove dark glasses/sunglasses.
 - Know your agency’s policy on showing your badge in public; some agencies discourage it to minimize fraudulent duplication.
 - Remove hat to avoid shadows on your face.
 - Remove distracting, overly shiny, or noisy jewelry (includes body piercings).
 - Consider covering tattoos and minimizing body piercing jewelry.
 - If something in your appearance significantly detracts from your message, get rid of it or fix it.
- Digital, High-definition (HD) and Web:
 - Digital and HD television is high quality and not only shows imperfections in clothing, but also has problems with certain colors (e.g., bright colors may cause problems with color balance and/or appear too vivid on some broadcasts). DOT ANSI (American National Standard for High Visibility) vests are not good for digital TV. Some badges and collar pins can also glare.
 - Conversely, Web broadcasts are low quality and brighter colors may make the image more appealing.

Dealing With Nervousness

Most of us experience at least some nervousness at the thought of being interviewed on-camera, but there are tips to help manage that nervousness:

- **Prepare.** The more prepared you are, the less nervous you will feel. Practice your delivery using talking points.

- Anticipate questions. Think like a reporter and anticipate the questions you might be asked. Reducing the “surprise” factor will reduce your nervousness.
- Do something to relax yourself. Take a few deep breaths, stretch, or walk around. Find out what technique works best to relax you.
- Use your nervousness as positive energy. Nervousness is not all bad! A bit of nervousness can energize your performance on-camera.
- Realize the reporter wants you to succeed. In most cases, the reporter is not out to get you and really doesn’t want you to stumble over words or misspeak. If the interview is being taped, don’t hesitate to say, “I’d like to try that again” if your answer to a question came out tongue-tied.
- Know it is okay to pause to gather thoughts. A pause will always seem longer to you than the audience, so don’t ramble or use fillers like “um” to take up dead air. Gather your thoughts and give your best answer.

Public Speaking

The verbal and nonverbal tips we’ve discussed for news media interviews are applicable to other public speaking engagements.

- Do your homework—know your role, the other players, and the environment
- Anticipate questions and issues
- Assess and “read” the audience
- Practice and demonstrate good verbal and nonverbal communication skills
- Practice active listening
- Use clear open-ended and closed questions appropriately

Lesson Summary

You should now be able to:

- Describe the types of written products used in public information activities.
- Recall preparation techniques that contribute to a successful media interview.

Lesson Objectives

At the end of this Lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe social marketing
- Relate the 8-Step Model to incident planning (planning P)

8-Step Communication Model

The visual displays a model for carrying out a strategic communications process based on the social marketing approach.

The eight steps are:

1. Assess Current Situation

- Acquire a thorough understanding of the problem, the audience and the action you want the audience to take. Assessing the situation reduces the assumptions and lays a solid foundation to continue the process.

2. Set Communication Goals

- Answer the question: what do you want to accomplish? Once you set your goals, develop specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART) objectives for implementing those goals.

3. Identify Intended Audiences

- Identify the segments of the population you want to target. This will drive the messages, channels and activities you choose for maximum impact.
- Once you identify your audience, go one step further and analyze the audience. When we segment down to a very specific audience, we learn what makes that particular group tick. And we can use that information to create messages and select channels that will align with the needs, beliefs, values, and priorities of our audiences.

4. Develop and Pretest Messages

- Make sure your messages are: easy for your audience to understand; are direct and concise; don't use jargon; and communicate the benefits to your audience.

5. Select Channels and Activities

- Research which communication channels are the most effective to reach your target audience. Remember to engage partners as force multipliers. Partnerships with key stakeholders are valuable elements in your ability to communicate with your audiences.

6. Develop an Action Plan

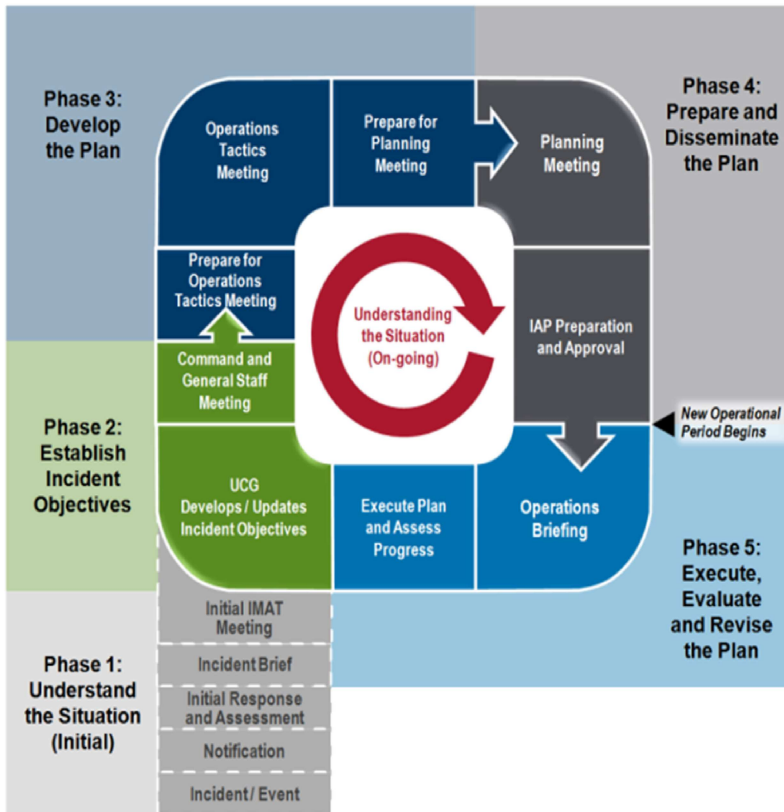
- How will you implement communications strategy? Do you have alternatives (backups) in place to implement all steps of the strategy? Did you identify potential risks and contingency plans?

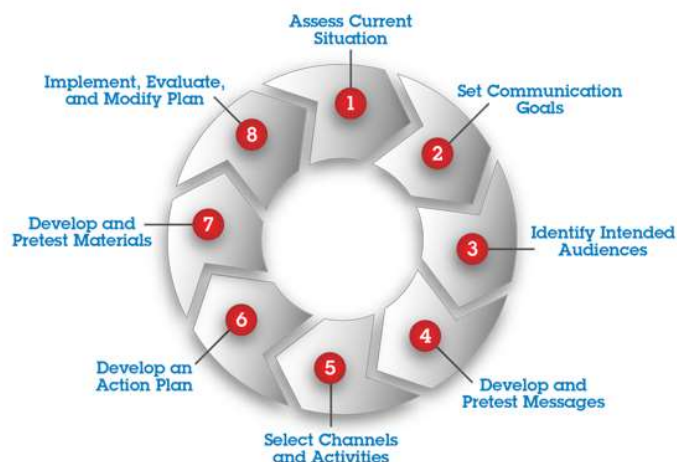
7. Develop and Pretest Materials

- Conduct concept and positioning testing to determine which materials are relevant to the audience; test the materials for memorability, impact, image, persuasiveness and other key attributes; conduct readability testing; consider adding peer or professional review to the materials testing process; conduct test marketing with a small sample of the target audience.

8. Implement, Evaluate and Modify Plan

- Review your action plan and modify as needed. Obtain any necessary or required approvals. Implement the approved plan.





Incident Planning and the 8-Step Model

During an emergency situation (the 5% aspect of the PIO's job), you will be operating under ICS. The Incident Planning Process — a crucial component of ICS — is described on the visual next to the 8-Step Model graphic.

You will notice that both incident planning and the 8-step model include processes for:

- Assessing the situation or developing situational awareness.
- Setting goals and objectives.
- Creating a plan.
- Implementing the plan.
- Evaluating and modifying the plan, as needed.

Fundamental Emergency Planning

There are two fundamental types of emergency planning:

- Deliberate planning, which is done under non-emergency conditions and includes general procedures for future threats. Examples include the National Response Framework (NRF) and state emergency operations plans.
- Incident planning, which is all planning associated with a particular incident that is impending or has occurred, such as the Incident Action Plan for a given event or the strategic communications plan that incorporates the Functional Plans for that event.

Lesson Summary

You should now be able to:

- Describe social marketing
- Relate the 8-Step Model to incident planning (planning P)

Lesson 6: Course Summary

Lesson Objectives

At the end of this Lesson, you will be able to:

- Recall course goals
- List additional training opportunities.

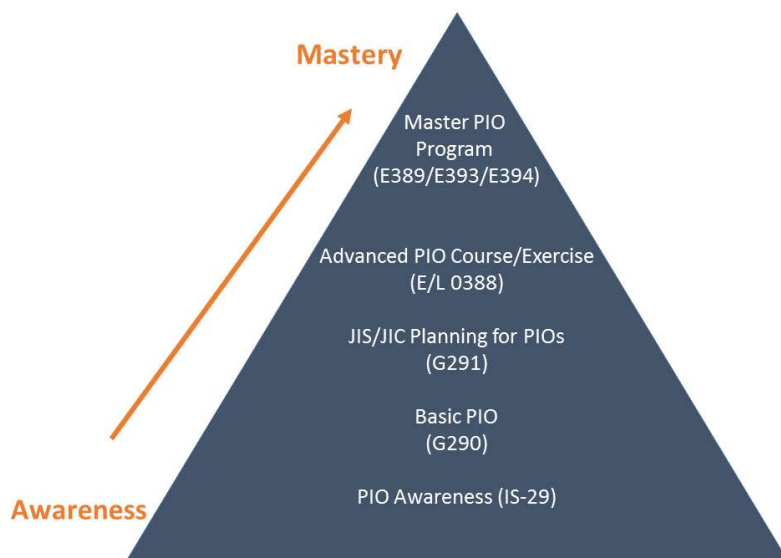
Did We Meet Our Course Goals?

Did we meet our goals to:

- Introduce participants to the public information function and the role of the Public Information Officer (PIO) in the public safety/emergency management environment?
- Prepare participants to continue developing their public information skills through training?

Continuing Your Development

What will you do to continue your professional development?



You can continue your professional development by progressing through the *Public Information Training Series* curriculum, including:

- G0290: Basic Public Information Officer
- G0291: JIS/JIC Planning for PIOs
- E0388: Advanced PIO
- E0389/393/394: Master Public Information Officer Program

For additional training opportunities, check out the [Emergency Management Institute Public Information Officer page](https://training.fema.gov/programs/pio/): <https://training.fema.gov/programs/pio/>

You can also expand your knowledge of public information and emergency management by completing [FEMA Independent Study \(IS\) courses](http://www.training.fema.gov/is) (www.training.fema.gov/is). IS courses are free. Here is a sample list of the courses available:

- IS-100.c: Introduction to Incident Command System (or ICS course for specific specialty: healthcare, public works, etc.)
- IS-702.a: NIMS Public Information Systems
- IS-909: Community Preparedness: Implementing Simple Activities for Everyone
- IS-0042 Social Media in Emergency Management
- IS-200.c ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents (or discipline specific course)
- IS-201 Forms Used for the Development of the Incident Action Plan (Waived if ICS-300 completed)
- IS-251 Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) for Alerting Authorities
- IS-700.b National Incident Management System (NIMS), an Introduction
- IS-800.c National Response Framework, An Introduction

Course Summary

Congratulations. You have now completed all of the lessons. You should now be able to:

- Define emergency public information and the importance of being proactive
- Describe the role and functions of the Public Information Officer (PIO)
- Describe the types of written products used in public information activities
- Recall preparation techniques that contribute to a successful media interview
- Apply public information techniques to a 5% scenario

For additional training opportunities, check out the [Emergency Management Institute Public Information Officer](https://training.fema.gov/programs/pio/) page: <https://training.fema.gov/programs/pio/>