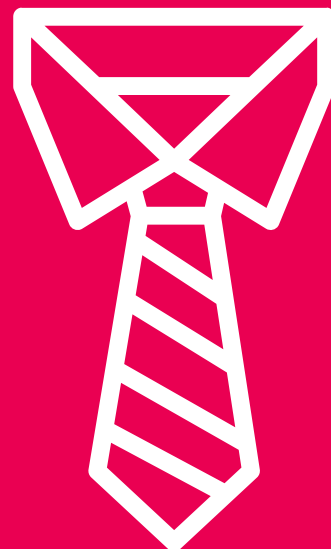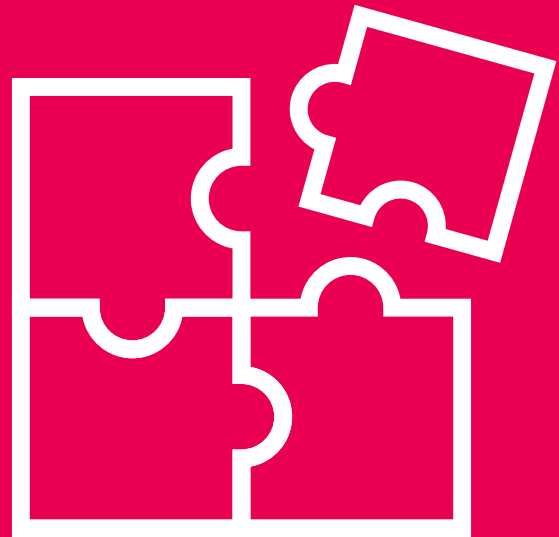# The All-Hazards Planning Guide to Effective Major Event Management

For stakeholders, all-hazards planning is increasingly integral to effective major event management. The reason is clear. Major events[i], whether international summits, political conventions, large-scale sporting events, or music festivals, pose outsized security risk, especially if they're viewed as political, social, or religious in orientation[ii].

And the fact is events of national and international focus are usually interpreted as inherently political. A consequence: stakeholders must consider those events as potential terror targets. Indeed, stakeholders have gotten the message. For instance, organizers of the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, the first Games held after the September 11 terror attacks, invested over $300 million on security[iii], $50 million *more than* Sydney 2000 organizers spent to secure the much larger Summer Games[iv].

Organizers of the **2002** Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, the first Games held after the September **11** terror attacks, invested over $**300**m on security, $**50**m more than Sydney **2000** organizers spent to secure the much larger Summer Games.

If anything, this sharp increase illustrates the fact that managing major events means courting dynamic, multi-directional risk. For the very factors that classify major events as major (see more below) explain why those events are such risk-vectors. For one, sustained media attention entices larger numbers of participants and spectators to an event. The health and safety of those publics must then be considered and ensured as part of a larger risk strategy.

Major events don't just attract media attention, either. They also require complex planning. That planning is parceled out between a diverse set of stakeholders, which increases operational risk[v]. Not to mention, the planning effort itself tends to involve more construction and operational phases, which makes it qualitatively distinct from smaller-event planning[vi]. The responsibility for executing those time-critical projects falls to larger numbers of staff and volunteers, all of varying levels of experience. Their occupational health and safety must also be carefully considered, which brings in a new risk factor[vii].

Of course, major events can bring prodigious benefits when run successfully. Again, the Olympics nets billions in revenue[viii]. Large-scale events of that type also generate so-called legacy benefits (e.g. modern structures and better infrastructure), which tend to be of longer duration. Marketing and positive media attention can also bolster a city's reputation and long-term attractiveness to tourists, while inculcating a sense of pride and fellowship among local residents[ix].

The opposite is true, as well. A major event gone awry (in the media glare) can torpedo multiple stakeholder reputations, erode any sense of fellow feeling among local residents, and send costs and liability through the roof.

So what, then, is needed to avert major-event disaster and enhance emergency response capabilities? Well, a number of factors go into effective major event management, beginning with a long planning period and extensive training (with response agencies). But even with years of planning and preparation, it's easy to get things wrong, even the essentials.

That's why we created this all-hazards planning guide for major events. The guide walks stakeholders through the finer points of large-scale event planning, including duty of care, interoperability, and emergency action planning with the goal of controlling major risk factors and keeping publics safe.

Major events: definitions and classifications

What's a major event, exactly? The fact is the definition varies. Different jurisdictions define major, or large-scale, events (and stakeholder responsibilities) differently. Even within the category of planned major events, there are subcategories. And that's not even factoring in unplanned disasters. Case in point: the U.S. Department of Homeland Security uses the standalone classification National Special Security Event (NSSE) for presidential conventions, large sporting events, international summits, elections, and presidential inaugurations. Meanwhile, emergency management regulators in the state of Pennsylvania single out events with 10,000 or more known or estimated participants/attendees: events of that size must have a special event medical services (EMS) plan.

Popular examples of major events:

- Festivals
- Concerts
- Fairs
- Sporting events

Navigating major-event duty of care

Managing major events means controlling risks that can emerge from virtually any aspect of the operation (see below). A daunting prospect, indeed. Made all the more so, because risk management isn't just a major-event management best practice. It's a binding legal obligation for event organizers. Specifically, organizers bear responsibility for ensuring the safety of everyone attending their event, whether the person in question is a ticket holder, paid employee, or unpaid volunteer. Each class is owed a duty of care.

Risk categories in major events

Risk issues category	Specific issues
Environment	Impacts, e.g. pollution, destruction of the environment, etc.
Financial	Sponsorship, ticketing and attendance, economic impacts/tourism, government support, ROI
Human resources	Paid staff, volunteers, training
Infrastructure	Existing infrastructure, new infrastructure, community resources
Interdependence	Hierarchy of power, partnerships
Legacy	New facilities, public availability
Media	Positive versus negative coverage
Operations	Logistics (travel, transportation, food, accommodations), facility management, safety, health and well-being, crowd control, security, administrative tasks (accreditation, communications)
Organizing	Bureaucracy, legal, organizational change, leadership
Participation	Public access, ticket availability
Political	Government changes, countries involved
Relationships	Meeting and balancing stakeholder needs and requirements
Threats	Epidemics, personal, terrorism, weather
Visibility	Ambush, marketing, brand, image, reputation, support for the event

Source: U.S. University of Ottawa

Duty of care standards vary by jurisdiction. But it's common for jurisdictions to demand that organizers ensure that people are not exposed to risks arising from the operation. To comply with this obligation, stakeholders have to take proactive steps to keep their publics safe, before, during, and after the event. Proactive steps include the following:

Performing proper due diligence when obtaining a location and venue, i.e. determining whether the (appropriately-permitted) venue meets public safety requirements

Conducting a thorough risk assessment, considering factors like the weather, wider environment, potential for fire, measures to keep children safe, etc.

Creating an emergency action plan (EAP) for the event

Informing attendees of potential threats at the event

Developing critical emergency procedures for the event, i.e. evacuation strategies, as well as providing for medical assistance, security, and law enforcement

Within the broader duty of care framework, organizers must also consider specific provisions for guaranteeing a safe operational environment for their crew, whether paid, volunteer, or third party. What should organizers do on this front? To simplify, event organizers are obligated to (1) identify work-related hazards, prior to (2) working with stakeholders (including crew) to eliminate or mitigate those threats.

Also, in the case of major events, large crowds stand out as clear injury risks to crew and attendees. And so, crowd management planning must also be a part of major-event management. Some baseline crowd management guidelines include:

Outline all potential dangers from mass gathering as part of a larger layout assessment of the venue

Hire additional staff

Contract trained security and crowd management personnel and/or police officers, or offer rigorous crowd management training to existing staff

Ensure appropriate signage is visible and legible

Appoint a worker to contact emergency responders if necessary[x]

Interoperability in major event management

Mitigating the public health and safety risk factors addressed above is simply beyond the capacity of any one major-event stakeholder. Sponsors and organizers will have to work closely with emergency response agencies (police, fire, ambulance etc.) as well as with public officials to ensure that mass gatherings remain secure and attendees stay healthy. Effective interagency cooperation alone can achieve the goals of preventing injury, suffering, or death from poor planning and preventable major incidents[xi].

Interagency cooperation doesn't just happen automatically, though. Stakeholders should understand basic principles first. From the emergency management literature, the key elements of effective interagency cooperation include collaboration, coordination, and communication:

Collaboration means organizations exchange information and share resources; different stakeholders actually alter their activities, bolstering the capacities of other stakeholders for the good of the overall mission[xii]. Without collaboration, individual stakeholders risk duplicating the efforts of their partners, misallocating resources, or even delaying crucial operations, like evacuations. Also, information might not get disseminated to the people that need it, or information systems containing useful data might not get used. As a result, stakeholders will make decisions without having access to the best information.

Coordination goes a step beyond (just) sharing information. When stakeholders coordinate their efforts, they actually permit out-of-agency stakeholders to weigh in on the end-to-end process, from the planning phase onward. Coordination helps foster truly collaborative, cross-agency teams, deeply invested in pursuing all available resources to achieve success.

In major-event incident response, coordination goes hand in hand with **communication**. Stakeholders need to be kept apprised and informed of what's going on throughout the incident. But the rapid exchange of information among stakeholders during an emergency is difficult, especially an emergency at a large-scale event. At that time, the number of organizations involved might swell.

Sharing data efficiently in that scenario is challenging, but it's critical none the same. More than procuring the right information management technology, stakeholders need to develop the right emergency response plans and procedures to address how they will work productively (and communicate efficiently) with other stakeholders.

Understanding interagency cooperation precepts is an important first step toward securing major events. But the precepts only work if they're deployed coherently in a previously-agreed-upon framework. That framework is interoperability, or the ability of multiple stakeholders to work well with each other.

In this era of emergency management solutions, the ability of multiple stakeholders to work seamlessly with other systems or products is an essential component of interoperability. More than ever, major-event stakeholders need to be able to talk to each other and share information in real time. Using interoperable technologies helps facilitate more efficient communication as well as lets stakeholders deploy the best resources more efficiently.

Of course, interoperability isn't only beneficial during an actual major-event emergency. Stakeholders who incorporate interoperability into major-event planning efforts can also better pool resources (and potentially save money).

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Popular frameworks for interagency cooperation during major events

For major-event stakeholders, interagency cooperation takes time and effort. Luckily, those stakeholders don't have to reinvent the interoperability wheel. Numerous frameworks already exist to facilitate cooperation between stakeholders. One example is NIMS (the National Incident Management System).

Put out by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, NIMS lays out a standardized approach for tackling all-hazard situations, offering a consistent nationwide approach for federal, state, tribal, and local governments, as well as private and non-for-profit organizations to use when working together to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from   of any cause, size, or complexity. NIMS is based on a few core concepts:

- A consistent method for identifying, acquiring, allocating, and tracking resources

- Standardized systems for classifying resources to improve the effectiveness of mutual aid assistance agreements

- Coordination to facilitate the integration of resources for mutual benefit

- Use of all available resources from all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector, where appropriate

- The integration of communications and information management elements into organizations, processes, technologies, and decision support

- The use of credentialing criteria that ensures consistent training, licensing, and certification standards

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Emergency action planning for major events

Interoperable structures like NIMS provide major-event stakeholders the easy-to-use frameworks they need in order to achieve better interagency outcomes. But NIMS is only a means to an end, not an end in and of itself. Effective interagency cooperation during a major-event emergency still requires targeting and formalizing inputs, such as the emergency action plan (EAP).

The EAP, which might be mandated in certain jurisdictions, is likewise integral to ensuring health and safety at a major event. That's because the dual goals of emergency action planning are to (1) identify all potential emergency hazards and (2) mitigate the risk (to life and property) posed by those hazards.

The plan itself should be highly site-specific, hashed out between the event organizer, relevant public officials, and emergency management agencies. To ensure timely notification, warning, and evacuation in the event of an emergency, the EAP should include the following elements as a baseline:

An organization chart laying out contacts to notify in the case of an emergency

Clear instructions and procedures on how to notify those individuals

A list of responsibilities for emergency tasks assigned to specific roles, i.e. who is responsible for identifying, evaluating, classifying, then officially declaring an emergency under pre-determined conditions[xiii]

Of course, baseline emergency action planning just won't cut it during a major-event emergency. Instead, stakeholders should develop, review, and (routinely) test best-practice EAPs. Emergency agencies in most jurisdictions put out best-practice plan templates. Here are the key takeaways from a review of the literature:

Analyze the vulnerability of your event site to natural, manmade, and event-generated emergencies

Comply with all public (local, state, and national) protocols for on-site emergency medical services

Coordinate emergency action planning with *all relevant* jurisdictions, agencies, and individuals

Create detailed site plans, including locations of all commercial services, first aid, assembly areas, vehicle access for emergency vehicles, etc.

Centralize activity in an emergency operations center and resource center

Disseminate primary and secondary communications systems

Include standalone EAP annexes for likely major risks, e.g. active shooter, bomb threat, civil disturbance, emergency weather, fire, hazardous materials, etc.
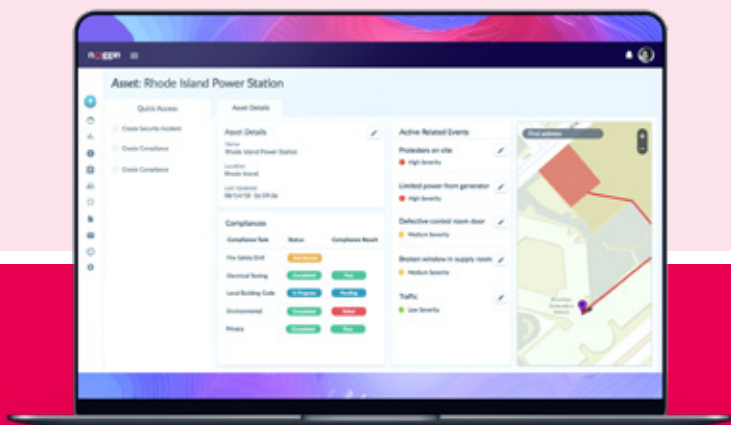
Conduct routine plan trainings in the run-up to the event; revise the plan where necessary[xiv]

From cash inflows to positive press to badly-need infrastructure projects, major events can bring many advantages to managing stakeholders and host sites. But the level of risk involved in putting on a major event is significant. So too are the penalties for getting major event management wrong.

For stakeholders, though, there's a solution. Effective all-hazards planning for major events helps mitigate topline risk and keep attendees safe. Also, strong planning protocols breed confidence among event workers and let busy stakeholders breathe a well-deserved sigh of relief.

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