PORTLAND NET PROGRAM

BACKGROUND BRIEF

In the wake of the 1985 Mexico City Earthquake, the Los Angeles County Fire Department created what would become the first Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) curriculum.[1] By 1994, the City of Portland became the third city in the United States to establish its own community response curriculum.[2] The Neighborhood Emergency Team (NET) training is based on the federal CERT curriculum managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), but is tailored to address potential disasters in the Portland metropolitan area.[3]

The NET program promotes emergency preparedness to neighbors, coordinates volunteers working alongside city staff, and raises awareness of risks associated with a potential Cascadia Subduction Zone Earthquake in the City of Portland. Portland increased financial support for the NET program in its 2018 annual budget. Like all CERT programs, the NET program is volunteer-led, but unlike most, the NET program is incorporated into the city structure and managed by the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management (PBEM).

PBEM has four full-time staff assigned to manage the NET program. Portland's NET program enjoys strong community support, with the number of active volunteers increasing from around 500 in 2012 to over 1,800 in 2018. In comparison, New York City had roughly 1,300 CERT volunteers active in January 2018.

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[1] City of Los Angeles, *What is CERT?*, https://www.cert-la.com/cert-programs-information/what-is-cert/ (August 13, 2019)

[2] Portland Bureau of Emergency Managements, *Portland's Neighborhood Emergency Team (NET) Guidelines*, https://www.portlandoregon.gov/pbem/article/475612, August 2016

[3] Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Community Emergency Response Team Basic Training Participant Manual*, https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1448917365279-3a7949605bd9e03633af2473a5741aa9/Section_0_PM_Combined.pdf, January 2011

Portland's NET team regularly trains as a part of the Regional Disaster Preparedness Organization (RDPO) along with programs from Multnomah County, Columbia County, Clark County, and Clackamas County. The RDPO seeks to promote universal training standards, injury coverage, and tools and equipment across all four counties' volunteer programs.

TRAINING

Before an individual may be deployed by PBEM or officially join a NET team, they must go through a series of steps. The five criteria for becoming a NET volunteer are to:

- Be at least 14 years old;
- Reside or work in Portland;
- Complete basic preparedness training online;
- Pass a criminal background check; and
- Graduate from the Basic NET Course.

Beyond these initial steps, there are annual criteria that must be satisfied for an individual to maintain active status. Volunteers must:

- Perform twelve hours of service;
- Attend two NET team meetings; and
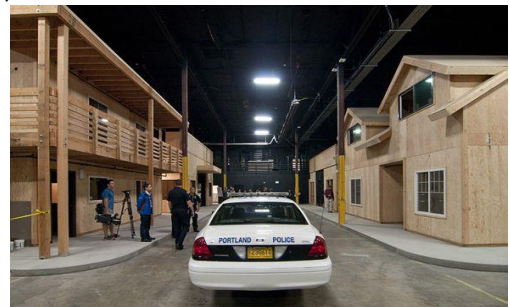- Participate in at least one city-wide training or exercise per calendar year.[4]

Figure 1: Scenario Village - Portland

Trainings take place in multiple venues, but one noteworthy location is Portland's Scenario Village, which is a one-city-block warehouse owned by Portland Police Bureau for scenario-specific training. The NET program is permitted to use the facility to run search and rescue exercises. Non-NET volunteers may also participate as victim volunteers or in other acting roles.

Currently the NET program is reserved for Portland residents, but PBEM is preparing to partner with Multnomah County and Metro for city-wide trainings and exercises beyond its current activities as members of the RDPO.[5]

Many of the people who train volunteers are volunteers themselves. PBEM offers training to volunteers who wish to serve as instructors in a future course or exercise. One upcoming training that NET volunteers are a part of is the "Stop-the-Bleed" training with Portland Public Schools, relating to school shootings. PBEM offered the training to Portland Public Schools and the demand was more than they could manage, so PBEM requested additional support from NET volunteers.[6]

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[4] In 2018, PBEM sponsored 39 free trainings, 4 trainings at a cost, and 8 city-wide exercises.

[5] Meeting with Stacy Cowan, State Lobbyist, Office of Government Relations; Jonna Papaefthimiou, Manager, Planning, Policy, and Community Programs, PBEM; and Jeremy Van Keuren, Manager, Community Resilience, July 16, 2019

[6] Ibid

Trainings have been offered in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Mandarin, and one course required four African languages to be translated live. Written materials are mostly limited to English and Spanish, but PBEM is working with a materials publisher in Austin, Texas to create more resources.

DEPLOYMENT

Portland's NET volunteers are deployed in multiple ways. Teams may be notified by PBEM to deploy to specific sites through email, SMS text, or phone call. In the event PBEM cannot communicate, teams retain the ability to self-deploy. In 2018, deployments included sending NET volunteers to Salem to aid in the cyanotoxin event, supporting the Portland Marathon in October and the Grand Floral Parade in June, and multiple deployments to assist during power outages. In 2019, the NET program deployed to aid during severe winter weather. However, the most common deployment for NET individuals and teams is for community outreach. Here, the NET teams inform the public about the program, share literature on how to volunteer for NET, and advise others on how to prepare for emergency situations.

NET OPERATIONS PLANS

NET teams are generally arranged amongst Portland's 95 neighborhoods and must create and follow their own operations plans.[7] As outlined by PBEM staff, these plans must define where staging areas are, how the team intends to communicate with each other given various emergency situations, how they will deploy within the neighborhood, and how they will communicate with nearby teams and PBEM. Teams are encouraged to consider how they will incorporate spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers into their emergency plans, as it is expected that in a true emergency many people will want to be helpful. All updated plans are posted online with all sensitive or confidential information redacted by PBEM staff.

VOLUNTEER DEMOGRAPHICS

PBEM categorizes its volunteers in three distinct categories: Active, Training, and Program Applicants. PBEM does not recognize any physical limitations as a restriction on volunteering; if someone wants to volunteer, PBEM seeks to find a place for them in the program. Some duties recently taken on by volunteers who are vision-impaired include: communications, the visual operation support team (VOST), documentation units, and community outreach.

Figure 2 shows the NET Volunteer Demographics as reported on their program dashboard on August 4, 2019.[8]

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[7] Portland Bureau of Emergency Management, *NET Operations Plans*, www.portlandoregon.gov/pbem/66371 (August 9, 2019)
[8] Portland Bureau of Emergency Management, *Portland NET Program Dashboard*, https://www.portlandoregon.gov/pbem/article/739038, August 4, 2019

Figure 2: NET Volunteer Demographics

VOLUNTEER DEMOGRAPHICS			
Age			
	Active	**Training**	**Applicant**
Average Age	53	48	46
Age Range (entire roster)	13	to	105
Gender Identification			
	Active	**Training**	**Applicant**
Women	51.2%	51.1%	54.3%
Men	43.2%	37.9%	34.2%
Trans*	0.4%	0.7%	0.5%
Decline Id'ing	4.7%	9.6%	10.4%
Ethnicity / Race ID			
	Active	**Training**	**Applicant**
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.0%	0.2%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.6%	0.4%	0.7%
Black or African American	1.5%	3.2%	1.6%
Hispanic or Latino	1.8%	2.5%	3.3%
Asian	2.3%	3.2%	2.3%
Two or more races	4.0%	6.4%	5.8%
White	82.1%	75.4%	76.9%
Decline ID'ing	7.3%	8.9%	9.2%

Source: Portland Bureau of Emergency Management – Program Dashboard

Figure 2 exhibits higher participation and retention rates through the training process by volunteers who identify as men and volunteers who identify as white. In a PBEM survey from 2014, common barriers for residents to become NET volunteers included economic status, race/cultural sensitivity of leaders, language and literacy, access, safety concerns, mistrust, awareness, lack of motivation, and lack of time.[9]

PBEM views volunteering as a gift of time and prescribes much of the disparity in retention throughout the training process to certain volunteers believing their time to be better spent elsewhere. With respect to gender minorities and communities of color, PBEM acknowledges that it is difficult for the Bureau to request the volunteer time when the city has done less, historically, to support those groups.[10]

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[9] Portland Bureau of Emergency Management, *NET Diversity Report*, https://www.portlandoregon.gov/pbem/article/500672, March 2014

[10] Meeting with Stacy Cowan, State Lobbyist, Office of Government Relations; Jonna Papaefthimiou, Manager, Planning, Policy, and Community Programs, PBEM; and Jeremy Van Keuren, Manager, Community Resilience, July 16, 2019
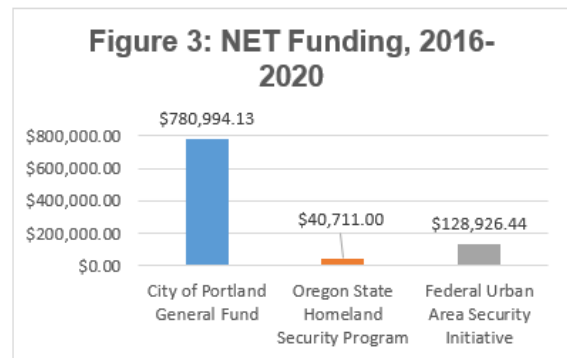
INDEMNIFICATION

Oregon law requires the Office of Emergency Management to provide workers' compensation coverage for emergency service volunteers if they are injured while performing emergency services[11] or during training for performing such duties.[12] The Portland City Code also entitles NET members to compensation for losses or harm in its indemnification policy.[13]

If a NET member or team chooses to deploy without approval from the city or offer assistance beyond the scope of their training, then they will not be covered by the indemnification policy.

There have been instances of teams self-deploying recently, even though the practice is meant to be a tool only used when certain conditions are met.[14] One NET volunteer responded to a traffic accident on a freeway by cordoning off the area until professionals arrived on scene. Another was returning from a sanctioned deployment at one site and passed by another site in need of aid. A third witnessed a drug overdose and administered CPR, which saved the person's life. In all three of these cases, the volunteers were covered under Good-Samaritan laws, but not by the NET indemnification policy, which applies only to official deployments.

FUNDING

Between fiscal year (FY) 2016/2017 and FY 2019/2020 a total of $950,631.57 has been allocated to the NET program from three primary sources: the City of Portland General Fund ($780,994.13), the Oregon State Homeland Security Program ($40,711), and the Federal Urban Security Initiative ($128,926.44). Funding in those four years increased from a total of $80,151.05 in FY 2016/2017 to $409,651.89 in FY 2019/2020.[15] Figure 3 shows the relative funding from each source since FY 2016/2017.

Figure 3: NET Funding, 2016-2020

Source: Legislative Policy and Research Office
Data: Portland Bureau of Emergency Management

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[11] ORS 401.368
[12] ORS 401.309
[13] Portland City Code Chapter 3.124
[14] Meeting with Stacy Cowan, State Lobbyist, Office of Government Relations; Jonna Papaefthimiou, Manager, Planning, Policy, and Community Programs, PBEM; and Jeremy Van Keuren, Manager, Community Resilience, July 16, 2019

[15] Email from Stacy Cowan, State Lobbyist, Office of Government Relations, City of Portland to Matt DeRosa, Analyst, Legislative Policy and Research Office (Wednesday August 7, 2019) (On file with Legislative Policy and Research Office)

STAFF CONTACT

Matt DeRosa
Legislative Policy and Research Office
503-986-1535
matthew.derosa@oregonlegislature.gov

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