



Homeland Security and Emergency Services

GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY PLAN

October 20, 2021

I. Review of the Division's Current Public Engagement

In 2010, the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services' ("Division") was created by bringing separate offices together as part of a single agency. The Division's mission is to provide leadership, coordination, and support to prevent, protect against, prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate disasters and other emergencies. The Division accomplishes this goal primarily through partnerships with local, state and federal government agencies as well as providing funding opportunities for local governments and nonprofit organizations. In furtherance of this mission, the Division also engages the public directly. This engagement includes the State's Citizen Preparedness Corps Training program, Fire Safety outreach at the State Fair and college campuses, as well as through social media to provide preparedness messages and help amplify warnings.

The Citizen Preparedness Corps (CPC) gives residents the tools and resources to prepare for any type of disaster, respond accordingly and recover as quickly as possible to pre-disaster conditions. CPC training began in February 2014 as a partnership between the Division and the Division of Military and Naval Affairs. The training courses are held online as well as at armories and other locations, such as the State Fair and local community centers and public gathering locations. Since inception, over 345,000 New Yorkers have been trained as part of the CPC's in person and on-line trainings. The training is led by the New York National Guard, working with experts from the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services' Office of Emergency Management and Office of Fire Prevention and Control. All training sessions are coordinated with local county emergency management personnel. The training course provides an introduction to responding to a natural or man-made disaster and educates participants on how to properly prepare for any disaster, including developing a family emergency plan and stocking up on emergency supplies. A key component of this training is distribution of free NYS Disaster Preparedness Kits to all participants (one per family) containing key items to assist individuals in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

The Division maintains a website (dhses.ny.gov) which lists a number of resources and communicates pertinent information to the public on agency initiatives and accomplishments through its social media channels. On the DHSES website, there are multiple pages with detailed information and resources available to the public and government partners. Examples include information on state and federal grant programs, opportunities for training exercises and classes offered to first responders at the State Preparedness Training Center and the Academy of Fire Science. The New York State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and State Hazard Mitigation

Plan is also maintained on DHSES' website. Moreover, the website contains information regarding the public meetings held by the Disaster Preparedness Commission and the Statewide Interoperable and Emergency Communications Board, including links to live streams for remote access to these meetings. The Office of Disaster Recovery Programs also provides information on FEMA's Individual and Public Assistance and Hazard Mitigation programs. Finally, the website contains extensive safety tips for a variety of emergencies, including how to spot and report suspicious activity.

II. Proposed Plan to Expand Transparency

Office of External Affairs

The Division is committed to increasing transparency and public engagement. Primary among the Division's efforts is the creation of a new Deputy Commissioner position to oversee the new Office of External Affairs. This Office will bring together the Public Information Office and the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. Moreover, the Deputy Commissioner of External Affairs will work with each individual office within the Division to review information and partnerships with an eye towards increasing publicly facing content, beginning with creating direct access to information most frequently requested by the public, the media, and our partners and stakeholders.

DHSES Website Redesign

The current version of the DHSES website has not been updated in several years. DHSES is currently working with the Office of Information Technology Services to update and redesign the DHSES website. In addition to updating the platform and presentation, DHSES executive staff were charged with reviewing the content on the website and proposing updates that will increase the amount of information accessible to the public.

The new Office of External Affairs will be responsible for continuing progress on the update process, as well as maintaining the website and updating information once the redesign is finished.

Freedom of Information Law Requests

DHSES Counsel's Office has worked with internal and external partners to streamline the FOIL process. Additionally, in August and September of 2021, DHSES executive staff were provided additional training on FOIL requirements, including the importance of providing timely and complete responses. This training resulted in a better understating of the FOIL process and a decrease in the number of pending FOIL requests.

Going forward, the Office of External Affairs will partner with Counsel's Office to review and expedite FOIL requests, as well as spotting emerging trends on the type of information requested. It is expected that this review will result in new data being posted to the website and/or Open Data NY to ensure quicker access to data. These efforts will result in the Division better meeting stakeholder needs and reduce staff workload.

Expand Use of Social Media

The Division lists a number of resources on its website and communicates pertinent information to the public on agency initiatives and accomplishments through its social media channels. The Division's social media channels, primarily through Facebook and Twitter, help communicate and disseminate much of this information, when applicable, to the general public and external partners. Social media is an important tool used by the Division to highlight agency initiatives, funding opportunities, emergency response activities in the field and share information from partner agencies and local governments to followers across the state

DHSES has previously sought to hire a manager of social media with the goal of increasing public engagement. DHSES will renew these prior requests once the Deputy Commissioner of External Affairs has started.

Project Sunlight

DHSES currently has staff members that are responsible for monitoring the use of Project Sunlight. Staff will be sent periodic reminders on the use and requirements for reporting in the Project Sunlight database including the available FAQ, and User Guide documents. In addition, the Division's Director of Internal Audit will be charged with monitoring compliance with Project Sunlight requirements.

Open Data NY

DHSES currently provides data to be included in Open Data NY. Within the last month, DHSES executive staff were charged with revisiting all internal databases and information sources for additional opportunities to provide new data. As part of this review, executive staff were asked to begin by looking at the most frequently requested data sets. As part of the ongoing DHSES website redesign, the website will be updated to reference and link to Open Data NY.

III. Measures of Success

The ultimate goal of these efforts will be to increase access to information about the Division and its activities. As such, metrics used to determine success will include

objective measures such as unique website visits, social media interactions and followers, video views and file downloads. Executive staff will also be charged with engaging stakeholders about their experiences in accessing information about the Division, including the quantity and quality of the information provided as well as areas for improvement. Finally, Division leadership will be surveyed about the number of inquiries received, including the type of information sought and whether that information could be proactively published. The Office of External Affairs will be charged with creating performance metrics to determine the success of the Division's transparency efforts and reporting the Division's progress to the Commissioner. A Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs will be hired and begin work by mid-November 2021.