



South Carolina Emergency Management  
Division

**Disaster Survivor Assistance Standard Operating  
Procedures**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In the aftermath of a disaster it is the responsibility of State and Local governments to respond to the needs of their citizens. If a disaster declaration includes authorization for the FEMA Individual Assistance (IA) program, it is critical that the Federal, State, and local teams ensure disaster survivors are able to register for disaster assistance and navigate the IA process.

## **II. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS**

When an area is declared for Individual Assistance, Disaster Survivor Assistance (DSA) teams are typically deployed to provide timely and flexible assistance to disaster survivors. They accomplish this through their five essential functions: Assess, Inform, Report (AIR); on-site registration intake; case status updates and inquiries; survivor needs assessment; and community outreach and partnerships.

## **III. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **A. Federal Responsibilities**

#### **1. DSA Branch Director**

- a. Reports to the FEMA Operations Section Chief and works in coordination with the State DSA Coordinator
- b. Coordinate with the State Disaster Recovery Coordinator (DRC) Coordinator and FEMA IA Branch Director to develop DSA reporting products for the disaster
- c. Assign DSA teams to impacted areas in accordance with the State prioritization
- d. Ensure DSA teams have been appropriately trained and briefed prior to deployment to the field
- e. Maintain situational awareness of any issues or concerns with DSA Team lead and communicate them to the State DSA Coordinator/elevate as appropriate
- f. Ensure timely and accurate reports (to include the DSA Situation Report) are provided to appropriate partners on a regular basis
- g. Develop a joint DSA strategic plan in coordination with the State DSA Coordinator

#### **2. DSA Group Supervisor**

- a. If the disaster is of sufficient size and scope, a DSA Group supervisor may be mobilized to support the DSA Branch Director
- b. Manage and coordinate DSA Task Force leads
- c. Coordinate with FEMA branch directors if geographic branches have been set up to ensure tactics align with the joint DSA strategic plan

#### **3. FEMA Operations Branch Director (if available)**

- a. Coordinate with the division supervisors and Joint Field Office (JFO) team to ensure appropriate flow of information
- b. Coordinate with the DSA Branch Director and/or Group Supervisor to develop DSA implementation tactics that align with the strategic plan

#### **4. FEMA Operations Division Supervisor (if available)**

- a. Assist in facilitating the introductory meeting between the DSA Team lead and the County emergency manager (or designee)

- b. Coordinate with the DSA Task Force Leader to plan and implement the DSA Mission
5. **DSA Task Force Leader**
- a. Manage DSA Crew leaders
    - 1. In geographic structure, the Task Force Leader supports the Operations Branch Director or Division Supervisor in implementing the DSA mission in the field
    - 2. In a functional structure, they report to the DSA Branch Director
  - b. Coordinate with the County emergency manager (or their designee) to identify the heaviest impacted areas and disproportionately impacted populations. The DSA Branch Director will evaluate data already submitted to the JFO prior to meeting with the local representative
  - c. Establish a working relationship with Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) personnel in the area as available
  - d. Set expectations, monitor performance, and provide corrective actions when trends develop
  - e. Conduct the DSA closeout meeting in accordance with the demobilization of teams guidance in section V
6. **DSA Crew Leader**
- a. Manage and supervise DSA specialists. Report to the DSA Task Force Leader
  - b. Conduct outreach to community and faith-based leaders and organizations
  - c. Elevate disaster-specific trends, concerns, or recommendations as identified and report to DSA Task Force Leader
7. **DSA Specialist**
- a. Reports to the DSA Crew Leader
  - b. Conduct DSA field operations in accordance with the plan developed by the DSA Task Force Leader and County representative
  - c. Register disaster survivors for assistance and make appropriate referrals to appropriate recovery resources
  - d. Provide case status updates to disaster survivors
8. **DSA Survivor Mobile Application Reports Analyst (SMARA)**
- a. If the event warrants, a SMARA may be deployed at the JFO, branch, task force, and/or crew level to consolidate reports
  - b. At the JFO and branch level, the SMARA is responsible for:
    - 1. Analyzing and consolidating reports into a final product
    - 2. Ensuring appropriate distribution of reports to State, local, and Federal partners
  - c. At the Task Force Level the SMARA is responsible for:
    - 1. Consolidating crew level reports and submitting them to the branch/JFO as appropriate
    - 2. Managing critical issues and ensure information has been referred to the appropriate program for action

- d. At the crew level, the SMARA is responsible for developing daily reports and submitting them to the task force, branch, or JFO level as appropriate

**9. DSA Bereavement Specialist**

- a. Reports to the DSA Branch Director
- b. The DSA Bereavement Specialist is responsible for assisting families eligible for bereavement assistance by:
  - 1. Making referrals to legal, physical, and mental/emotional health assistance partners, and;
  - 2. Collecting documentation to support an application for funeral assistance

**B. State Responsibilities**

**1. State DSA Coordinator**

- a. Brief the FEMA DSA Branch Director on the State DSA SOP and South Carolina-specific considerations
- b. Coordinate with the State IA Officer and FEMA DSA Branch Director to develop DSA reporting products for the disaster
- c. Coordinate with the State IA Officer and FEMA DSA Branch Director to determine the prioritization of DSA support to counties
- d. Provide damage assessment and community data to the FEMA DSA Branch Director to be communicated to the field
- e. Ensure daily activity reports and situational updates are provided to State and local partners where DSA is active
- f. Maintain visibility over DSA operations in the field and elevate issues as appropriate
- g. Assist County officials in determining when DSA teams should go to limited presence or demobilize from the area
- h. Coordinate with PIO/External Affairs for the distribution of DSA materials and information

**2. Regional Emergency Manager (REM)**

- a. Maintain situational awareness of DSA operations in the field and elevate issues and concerns as appropriate
- b. If geographic branches have not been established, coordinate with the County emergency manager, State DSA Coordinator, and DSA Task Force Lead to facilitate the DSA introduction meeting

**C. Local/County Responsibilities**

- 1. Participate in the DSA introduction meeting and provide information pertaining to concentrated areas of damage, cultural considerations, safety/security concerns, etc. (see Appendix 1: County Meeting Checklist)
- 2. Prioritize locations for DSA coverage (e.g., open shelters, homes evaluated in the damage assessment, isolated areas, areas of concentrated damage, vulnerable communities)
- 3. Identify essential elements of information the County wants to receive from the team

4. Make recommendations for DSA limited presence/demobilization as appropriate
5. Identify the ideal method of DSA presence for the community (e.g., remaining in a stationary location for survivors to seek them out or going door-to-door)
6. Make appropriate connections/notifications to local law enforcement

#### **IV. MOBILIZATION OF TEAMS**

- A.** Upon an Individual Assistance disaster declaration, DSA teams may be assigned to geographic areas, typically county-based. Team assignments will be made by the FEMA DSA Branch Director in coordination with the State DSA Coordinator
- B.** Once the team has been assigned and the Task Force Lead for that County has been identified, the State DSA Coordinator will connect the DSA Task Force Lead with the appropriate REM and/or FEMA Branch Director for that County to schedule the introduction meeting
- C.** The REM/FEMA Branch Director will facilitate the introduction of the Team Lead and the County emergency manager (or their designee) at a time and location convenient for the County
- D.** DSA Teams will initiate field operations upon the direction of the County/local official

#### **V. OPERATIONS**

##### **A. DSA Essential Functions**

1. Assess, inform, report (AIR) – collect targeted information and report it back to the EOC/JFO for decision-making purposes
2. On-site registration intake – assist survivors with registering for federal disaster assistance through FEMA
3. Case status inquiries and updates – review on-site survivor information to provide survivors with an update on the status of their case, identify other assistance they may be eligible for, and collect new information or documentation from survivors in support of their case
4. Survivor needs assessment – engage with survivors and local officials to identify immediate and unmet needs and resources available to address them through FEMA and/or community partners
5. Community outreach and partnerships – conduct outreach and facilitate the creation of partnerships between governmental, faith-based, community-based, private, non-profit, and disability partners

##### **B. Types of DSA Teams**

1. Traditional – A typical DSA Team is composed of at least seven DSA specialists and two crew leaders. As needed they can split up into smaller groups for outreach. Generally those teams contain FEMA staff, FEMA reservists, and FEMA Corps. These teams are trained and able to conduct all DSA mission areas
2. Surge Staffing – In certain events, FEMA may need to utilize surge staffing to support DSA operations

- a. Surge capacity force members come from non-FEMA sources, typically other Federal agencies
- b. Unlike traditional DSA teams, the capabilities of these forces can vary but they will be at minimum able to conduct registration intake operations

### **C. Field Operations**

1. Door-to-Door - This is the most traditional method of DSA Operations. Conducting door-to-door operations allows the DSA team to:
  - a. Reach populations that may not be able to visit a DRC, register online, etc.
  - b. Gather ground-truth information to support local, state, and federal data needs pertaining to rumors, trends, unmet needs, and impacts
  - c. Through the assess, inform, report (AIR) mission, DSA teams can provide targeted information at the request of the County Emergency Manager (or their designee) and/or the DSA Branch Director
2. Support Local Registration Efforts/Community Events – Although the DSA mission is traditionally mobile, the teams can be asked to support local registration efforts/community events where disaster survivors will already be congregating (e.g., town hall meetings or regularly scheduled community events)
3. Mobile Registration Intake Centers (MRICs) – In situations where it is not feasible for teams to go door to door or it is determined to be in the best interest of the impacted community, teams can be kept at a stationary location supported by a communications vehicle as a mobile registration intake center. If it is possible to establish a Disaster Recovery Center at that site, that is preferable
4. Local Law Enforcement Interface – DSA teams will need to interface with local law enforcement to verify team credentials and report incidents
5. Coordinate with PIO/External Affairs for the distribution of materials and information

### **D. South Carolina DSA Considerations**

1. Heir Property –Is a property that has been passed down informally such that the property owner may not have the deed or other documentation required by FEMA to establish ownership. These survivors have historically required additional assistance in navigating the FEMA IA process. In the event that DSA team members identify a survivor with heir property, it is expected that they will refer the case back to the JFO for additional case support and refer the survivor to the appropriate legal services entity
2. Previous Disaster Experience – in 2015, 2016, and 2018, many counties in South Carolina were declared for Individual Assistance. Many survivors were deemed ineligible for assistance in one or both events, so there may be a reluctance to go through the IA process in future events

### **E. Reporting**

FEMA has standardized DSA reporting products to use during a disaster. At the beginning of an event, the State IAO/DRC Coordinator, FEMA DSA Branch Director,

and IA Branch Director will review the reports and make any necessary changes (e.g., addition of data points to be collected, formatting changes, etc.)

1. **Daily DSA Summary Report** – daily compilation of DSA activities broken out by County to include critical and emerging issues, community contacts, and cumulative information from crew canvassing reports
2. **Spot Report** – brief narrative of critical issues that affect immediate health and welfare of disaster survivors that is or could become life threatening. Initial notification is made immediately by phone or email to the DSA Crew Leader
3. **County Progress Report** – overall summary of the activities to date in a county to be used by the County and State to determine when the mission has been completed. Note that this is not in FEMA’s standard reports and is created when the mission is nearing completion
4. **State Close-out Report** – overall summary of the DSA Mission to include the field activities, identified trends, community outreach and partnerships, and geographic coverage

#### **F. Coordination with other Recovery Partners**

1. Multiple groups at the JFO will develop resource and referral lists (e.g., voluntary agency liaison team/VOAD partners, unmet needs committees, disability integration, etc.) that can be distributed by DSA teams
2. Collect and share data as requested by Federal, State, and/or local partners. Voluntary agency data needs may also be supported if requested by a State partner

## **VI. DEMOBILIZATION OF TEAMS**

### **A. Limited Presence**

1. As the need for DSA operations in the field diminishes, teams may go on limited presence; as opposed to a full team being in the field, a limited number of DSA team members are left in the county to handle needs as they arise
2. Indicators for a transition to limited presence include:
  - a. All impacted areas within the area of responsibility have been visited
  - b. County/local strategic DSA priorities have been met
  - c. Data collection needs for the area have been met
  - d. County/local emergency manager requests limited presence
3. The determination to transition the DSA team to limited presence will be made collaboratively between the County/local representative, the State DSA Coordinator, and the FEMA DSA Group Supervisor

### **B. Demobilization**

1. When there is no longer a need for an ongoing DSA presence in the field, the DSA teams will demobilize
2. The determination to demobilize the DSA team will be made collaboratively between the County/local representative, the State DSA Coordinator, and the FEMA DSA Group Supervisor
3. Indicators for DSA demobilization include:
  - a. All impacted areas within the area of responsibility have been visited
  - b. County/local strategic DSA priorities have been met

- c. Data collection needs for the area have been met
  - d. DSA has been on limited presence for 10 days without the need for a field presence
  - e. County/ local emergency manager requests demobilization
4. After the DSA team has demobilized, there will still be resources available to help survivors including; [www.disasterassistance.gov](http://www.disasterassistance.gov), 1-800-621-FEMA(3362), and any DRCs that may still be open in the surrounding area

**C. Demobilization Concurrence Process**

- 1. When the FEMA DSA Group Supervisor believes that the DSA mission is nearing completion in a county, they will submit their recommendation, a copy of the DSA Mission Close-out Concurrence Form (**Appendix 2**) and a County Progress Report to the State DSA Coordinator
- 2. The State DSA Coordinator will review and, if in concurrence, provide that information to the County/local DSA POC for County Administrator concurrence
- 3. Upon written notification of County Administrator concurrence via email, the State will inform FEMA that they may move ahead with scheduling the closeout meeting with the County
- 4. FEMA and the State will provide close-out meeting details to their respective partners. The close-out meeting will include a review of the DSA final report with local, state, and federal stakeholders

**VII. IMPLEMENTATION IN DISASTERS WITH LIMITED FEDERAL STAFFING**

**A. Situation**

In active disaster years there may not be sufficient federal manpower and resources to stand up a full DRC and DSA mission in each impacted area in a timely manner.

**B. Allocation of Available Resources**

- 1. The prioritization of federal recovery resources will be determined by disaster impacts, as demonstrated by damage assessments, IA registrations to date, anticipated impacted population, and proximity to existing recovery resources
- 2. Based on the prioritization, the following assets will be assigned as available: fixed DRC sites, full DSA teams, mobile DRC sites (on a route), and surge staff DSA teams

**C. Locally Based Service Delivery Methods**

- 1. Local Disaster Assistance Centers –sites that can be established by local partners to provide information/registration intake for State/local assistance programs
- 2. Local Registration Intake Centers – sites, such as libraries or community centers, set up with computers and/or phone lines to provide a mechanism for survivors to register for Federal disaster assistance

## Appendix 1: DSA/County Meeting Checklist

Emergency Manager's Name:	Date of Report:
Organization/Title:	Phone:
County/Town/City/Parish/Borough:	Population:
Emergency Operations Center (EOC) location or Meeting Location:	
DSA Activities:	
DSA Representative:	
<p><b>Note:</b> Explain DSA Mission and vision, disaster relief process, provide disaster program information and materials, and respond to issues and concerns. Coordinate frequency and method of follow up communication.</p>	

### Local Community Impacted:

<p>Emergency Manager's Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) List: (e.g., priorities, heaviest impacted areas, shelter location, areas of impacted population)</p>	
Area(s) of Concern:	Road Closures:
Number of homes affected?	Number of businesses affected?
Any utilities out? (e.g., electric, water, gas)	How long have the utilities been out?
<p>Any damages to major infrastructure and wrap-around services? (e.g., Town Hall, Police Department, Fire Stations, Schools, Public Transportation)</p>	
<p>Any damages to Whole Community? (e.g., Faith Based Organizations, Chamber of Commerce, Community Centers)</p>	

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<b>Any disproportionately impacted populations that require attention?</b> (e.g., Low Literacy, Access and Functional Needs (AFN), Limited English Proficiency (LEP), Older Adults)	
<b>Who are the largest employers?</b>	<b>Recommended POC?</b>
<b>What is the most effective way to disseminate information in the area?</b>	
<b>Any special events where DSA could support?</b> (e.g., Town Hall Meetings, Festivals, Carnivals)	
<b>Any existing location of congregating populations?</b> (e.g., Point of Distribution Centers (POD), Faith-Based, Community Centers)	
<b>Locations of possible Registration Intake Centers?</b>	
<b>Comments:</b>	

**Displacement:**  
 Was the evacuation mandatory? How many people were evacuated?  
 Can you estimate what percentage of the evacuees are residing in:  
 Shelters: \_\_\_\_\_ Hotels: \_\_\_\_\_ With family or friends: \_\_\_\_\_

Are there any unofficial shelters open in the area?

Point of Contact	Phone #	Address	How many survivors sheltered?

Major Concerns:	
Health	
Safety/Security	
Utilities	
Roads/Bridges	
Sewage	
Water	
Communications	
Transportation	
Access and Functional Needs	
Limited English Proficiency Needs	
<p><b>Note:</b> We want to make sure our staff knows where to go when there are any warnings and advisories while in their designated location such as Thunderstorm, Tornado, Flood, Flash Flood, Winter Storm, etc.</p>	

**Close Out:**

- Make sure we have covered OSC, State, Local EM priorities, etc.
- Make sure last visit with designated official, EM report is provided to DSA Branch Director for information to include on DSA Close Out report.
- Report in an ongoing basis what we have learned in the meeting and make sure we are not missing anything that needs attention.
- Share and discuss the SMART visual to the Local EM to paint a clear picture of where our crews have been and what we've done--an overall summary of DSA field activities in their respective areas.
- Report back to JFO leadership on any outstanding matters in the impacted area that DSA cannot assist with, providing POCs for the Local EM to follow up with.
- Official Handshake

**Comments:**

## Appendix 2: DSA Mission Close-out Concurrence Form

### DSA Mission Close-out Concurrence Form

County: \_\_\_\_\_

Task	Responsible Party	Documentation Attached?	Date	Signature
Notify State (IAO, DSA Coordinator, or DSCO) that team leader has recommended close-out	FEMA DSA Branch Director			
Confirm state concurrence with recommendation	State IABD OR DSCO	<i>not required</i>		
Confirm county administrator concurrence	State IABD OR DSCO			
Schedule closeout meeting and provide details to DSA branch director	State IABD OR DSCO			
Provide closeout meeting details to appropriate State Partners	State IABD or DSCO			
Provide closeout meeting details to appropriate Federal Partners	FEMA DSA Branch Director			