



## **Voluntary Disaster Registry Planning Guidance**

### **Introduction**

The enclosed guidance aligns with the requirements listed in Government Code Section 8589.6., which reads:

*(a) The Office of Emergency Services shall develop model guidelines for local government agencies and community-based organizations planning to develop a disaster registry program. Adoption of the model guidelines shall be voluntary. Local governmental agencies or community-based organizations wishing to establish a disaster registry program may consult with the Office of Emergency Services for further guidance.*

*(b) The guidelines required by subdivision shall address, at minimum, all of the following issues:*

*(individual components of section (b) are listed beginning on Page 3 of this document)*

While the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) strongly discourages the use of voluntary disaster registries, we recognize that some jurisdictions may choose to explore, pursue, or implement registries. This guidance has been created to help local governmental agencies or community-based organizations understand what is included in Government Code Section 8589.6 and make informed decisions. Jurisdictions wishing to establish a disaster registry program are encouraged to consult with Cal OES for further technical assistance and options.

### **Background and Considerations**

Disasters, regardless of type, disproportionately affect individuals with access and functional needs – a term defined in Government Code section 8593.3, as individuals who have:

- Developmental, intellectual or physical disabilities;
- Chronic conditions or injuries;
- Limited English proficiency or who are non-English speaking;

Or, individuals who are:

- Older adults, children, or pregnant;
- Living in institutional settings; or
- Low-income, homeless, and/or transportation disadvantaged.

This disproportionate impact results in higher incidents of fatalities, suffering, and personal hardship among historically “vulnerable” populations before, during, and following emergencies compared to individuals who do not have access or functional needs. To close this gap, and strive for increased safety, security, and independence among all members of the community, some local jurisdictions use voluntary disaster registries.

The idea of a voluntary disaster registry is simple – create a list of individuals who need additional support during emergencies which government can use to help when crisis strikes. However, the successful development, protection, adoption, and implementation of disaster registries is incredibly complex. While Cal OES advises against the use of voluntary disaster registries, jurisdictions should decide what works for their own unique situations.

It is important to note that registries can give registrants a false sense of confidence that because they are on a list, they will receive additional resources or priority response services during emergencies. This false assumption is dangerous and can lead to an overall decrease in personal disaster preparedness. In addition, as opt-in programs, these registries provide emergency managers with an incomplete picture of access and functional needs in their community. Further, such lists are difficult to keep current and it can be challenging to protect the personal identifying information that these lists contain.

Below are the provisions of Government Code Section 8589.6, along with corresponding guidance from Cal OES that expands on each section as well as the above considerations.

Government Code Section 8589.6 (b)	Guidance
<p>(1) A purpose statement specifying that the intent of the registry is not to provide immediate assistance during a local, state, or national disaster, to those who are registered, but to encourage that those registered will receive a telephone call or visit from neighborhood disaster volunteers or other organizations specified in the final local plan as soon as possible after the disaster in order to check on their well-being and ask if they need assistance. This statement shall also specify that persons registered should be prepared to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours.</p>	<p><b>Ensure the purpose of voluntary disaster registries is clear.</b> Individuals who participate in registries often do so believing they will receive priority assistance or response resources during emergencies. Given the general premise of a registry, their assumption, while incorrect, makes sense. To address this misunderstanding, local governments should explicitly state that disasters often overwhelm emergency resources and registrants may not receive help or assistance for multiple hours or days– if at all. The purpose statement should be clear that the registry is not a means to dispatch physical resources during an emergency. Registries are tools to provide registrants with disaster-related information via telephonic notification or personal visits. The purpose statement should reiterate that registrants should continue their individual and family personal preparedness efforts.</p> <p><b>Keeping information current.</b> The purpose statement should underscore the criticality of updated information. Unless participants update their personal contact information every time they change a phone number, living address, email address, etc., local disaster registries will contain inaccurate information on who in the community needs assistance, where they are located, and how to reach them. The purpose statement should stress that the effectiveness of the registry depends entirely on the accuracy of its data.</p>

Government Code Section 8589.6 (b)	Guidance
<p>(2) A list of persons eligible for the registry. This list shall include, but not be limited to, disabled persons, including those with developmental disabilities, the elderly, those for whom English is not a first language, persons who are unskilled or deficient in the English language, long-term health care facilities, residential community care facilities, and residential care facilities for the elderly.</p>	<p><b>Understand the universe of eligible registrants.</b> When considering which individuals within a given community should enroll in voluntary disaster registries, local jurisdictions should cast a wide net to include all persons with access and functional needs. This is defined in Government Code section 8593.3, as individuals who <u>have</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmental, intellectual or physical disabilities;</li> <li>• Chronic conditions or injuries;</li> <li>• Limited English proficiency or who are non-English speaking;</li> </ul> <p>Or, individuals who <u>are</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older adults, children, or pregnant;</li> <li>• Living in institutional settings; or</li> <li>• Low-income, homeless, and/or transportation disadvantaged.</li> </ul>

Government Code Section 8589.6 (b)	Guidance
<p>(3) A statement specifying that the party responsible for responding to those registered will not be held liable for not responding.</p> <p>(5) A recommendation for those persons or organizations that would be appropriate to respond to persons on the disaster registry, and a plan for training the responsible party.</p>	<p><b>Registries are not a substitute for individual preparedness.</b> Depending on the scope and scale of a given disaster; the sheer number of individuals on a registry who may need assistance could exceed the capacity of responders. In other words, there may be more registrants to check on than there are responders to do the checking.</p> <p><b>Leverage partnerships and community groups.</b> Whether they do or do not use registries, local jurisdictions should coordinate with volunteers and community-based organizations (e.g. Independent Living Centers, homeowner groups, neighborhood watch groups, Community Emergency Response Teams, AmeriCorps members, etc.) to assist individuals with access and functional needs before, during, and after disasters.</p> <p>Designated responders should receive training from local jurisdictions on first aid, emergency management, and other courses as deemed appropriate by local leadership. These groups should also understand relevant liability issues, including that designees won't be held liable for not responding.</p>

Government Code Section 8589.6 (b)	Guidance
<p>(4) A plan for ensuring that hard data is available if computers shut down.</p> <p>(9) A recommendation that organizations currently providing services to persons who are eligible for the disaster registry program be encouraged to alter their information form to include a space on the form where the person has the option of registering for the program. By checking the box and giving approval to be registered for the program the person waives confidentiality rights. Despite this waiver of confidentiality rights, local government agencies and community-based organizations planning to develop a disaster registry are encouraged to do everything possible to maintain the confidentiality of their registries. Organizations that currently have lists of people who would be eligible to register for the program should be encouraged to share this information with persons establishing a disaster registry.</p>	<p><b>Securing and accessing personal data.</b> This can be difficult to achieve, and jurisdictions may choose to partner with local service providers to consolidate efforts. Revising intake forms for other services to include space for individuals to enroll in voluntary disaster registries could potentially increase the number of registrants. Service providers would need to inform consumers that by enrolling in the registry, they waive their confidentiality rights.</p> <p>The risks of exploitation or harm to individuals with disabilities, older adults, and others with access or functional needs from the breach of information in disaster registries cannot be understated. In addition to the challenge of safeguarding registries, accessing them during emergencies can be impeded in the event of loss of power or damage to telecommunication infrastructure.</p> <p>Maintaining a hard copy of registry data is an alternative, but has additional implications for information protection and secure storage. Registry data must be properly secured due to confidentiality considerations, including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which have legal ramifications when not followed.</p>

Government Code Section 8589.6 (b)	Guidance
<p>(6) A plan for community outreach to encourage those eligible to participate.</p> <p>(7) A plan for distribution of preparedness materials to those eligible to participate in the disaster registry.</p>	<p><b>Outreach considerations.</b> Time and experience repeatedly show that individuals with access and functional needs do not opt into voluntary disaster registries. Low registration rates occur for many reasons including that individuals who qualify for registries may not consider themselves to have an access or functional need; outreach often doesn't reach target populations; and individuals who are eligible to opt in lack assurance that doing so will make a difference during emergencies.</p> <p>Community outreach efforts should involve emergency managers working with individuals with access and functional needs as well as community-based organizations serving all populations. Existing disability and older adult service providers such as Independent Living Centers, Meals-on-Wheels programs, and others maintain trusted relationships with individuals throughout the whole community.</p> <p>Emergency managers should also coordinate with individuals and groups from the whole community to distribute preparedness materials to eligible registry participants. Local jurisdictions should develop protocols where responders provide community stakeholders with disaster-related information they can push out to their consumers. Doing so ensures multiple trusted parties send consistent emergency information far and wide throughout the whole community and to all potential registrants.</p>

(8) Recommendations and assistance for obtaining federal and state moneys to establish a disaster registry.

**Funding registries.** Jurisdictions seeking dollars to fund voluntary disaster registries and other emergency management efforts can search out grant and loan opportunities using a variety of online resources.

As part of the [Grant Information Act of 2018 \(AB 2252, Stats. 2018, Ch. 318\)](#), the California State Library built <https://grants.ca.gov/>, which provides a centralized location to find state grant opportunities. Users can see all current grant and loan opportunities that are offered on a competitive or first-come basis by California state departments and are able to search and filter their results.

Jurisdictions can explore federal funding opportunities through <https://www.grants.gov>. The Grants.gov program management office was established, in 2002, as a part of the President's Management Agenda. Managed by the Department of Health and Human Services, Grants.gov is an E-Government initiative operating under the governance of the Office of Management and Budget. Under the President's Management Agenda, the office was chartered to deliver a system that provides a centralized location for grant seekers to find and apply for federal funding opportunities. The Grants.gov system houses information on over 1,000 grant programs and vets grant applications for [federal grant-making agencies](#).

Jurisdictions can also explore specific funding opportunities listed through the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, Grants Management website: <https://www.caloes.ca.gov/Cal-OES-Divisions/Grants-Management>

<b>Government Code Section 8589.6 (b)</b>	<b>Guidance</b>
	<p>Cal OES Grants Management is responsible for the administration of approximately \$807 million in funds for homeland security, emergency management, public safety, and victim services programs, a majority of which are distributed to local and regional entities to enable the most effective prevention, detection, response and recovery efforts. Improving and enhancing local agency capabilities through grant funding is one of Cal OES's most important missions.</p>