



2014-15 NATIONAL RURAL TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

VOLUME I: Rural Training Coordinators Needs Assessment

Rural Domestic Preparedness Consortium
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Executive Summary

Rural communities throughout the United States continue to face persistent and ever-changing threats and hazards. A full understanding of the rural threat and hazard picture is needed by training providers in order to develop and subsequently deliver needed training that aims to build rural community resiliency and response capabilities. To achieve this understanding, the Justice and Safety Center (JSC) at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), on behalf of the Rural Domestic Preparedness Consortium (RDPC), routinely conducts a National Rural Training Needs Assessment (NRTNA), which assesses the training experiences, needs, barriers, and preferences of rural first responders. With the last NRTNA occurring five years ago, and given the significance of rural and urban incidents occurring since this time (e.g. Newtown [CT] school shooting, Hurricane Sandy, Oso [WA] mudslide, Boston [MA] Marathon bombing, Deep Water Horizon explosion and spill, Tuscaloosa [AL] and Joplin [MO] tornadoes, high-profile train derailments, western U.S. wildfires, etc.), the need to conduct a new NRTNA was clearly established.

The first of two phases of the 2014-2015 NRTNA began in late summer 2014 with the eventual completion of *Phase I: Rural Training Coordinators Needs Assessment*¹ in early 2015. Subsequently, work began on *Phase II: National Rural County Needs Assessment* towards the end of Phase I. This report details the results of Phase II, which sought information from

approximately 22,500 rural response agencies across the United States. Phase II of the 2014-2015 NRTNA obtained information pertaining to rural first responder training needs, barriers, and influences. Figure ES-1 presents the most important and salient results from Phase II. It must be noted that the Core Capability-based rural training needs cut across all mission areas (prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery) and the respondents indicated a heavier need/emphasis on continual and short-term² training. Further, the results within rural training influences and barriers are consistent with previous national rural assessments in which cost factors were particularly important issues. Lastly, the results also indicate that rural emergency response agencies are successfully applying and diffusing the training they do receive thereby increasing the resiliency and response capabilities within the rural communities they serve.

Overall, Phase II of the NRTNA produced highly valuable information that can be utilized in training development delivery efforts to address rural training needs. This will better prepare rural communities through increased community resilience and response capabilities. Phase II officially completes the main effort of the 2014-2015 NRTNA, which achieves the most comprehensive understanding of rural homeland security training needs to date.

Figure ES-1: Top Rural Training Needs, Influences, and Barriers³

Core Capability-Based Training Needs	Topical Training Needs	Threat and Hazards Training Needs	Training Influences	Training Barriers
Operational Communications	Active Shooter	Hazardous Materials Release	Cost	Cost of Travel
Operational Coordination Planning	School Safety	Severe Weather	Topic of Training	Cost of Training
Threat and Hazard Identification	Interagency and Information Coordination and Communication	Flood	Training is Required	Location of Training
Public Information and Warning	Media Relations	School Violence	Location of the Training	Work Obligations
		Workplace Violence	Dates and Times of Training	Dates and Times of Training

¹ Simpkins, B. (2015). *2014-2015 National Rural Training Needs Assessment – Volume I: Rural Training Coordinators Needs Assessment*. Richmond, KY: Eastern Kentucky University, Justice and Safety Center.

² Short-term training needs are defined as those needs requiring training within the next six to twelve months.

³ Results are presented based on the total number of responses (highest to lowest) for each result area.

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Acronym List

AAR	After Action Report
CEU	Continuing Education Unit
CPG 201	Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 201
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
EKU	Eastern Kentucky University
EMI	Emergency Management Institute
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
IBM SPSS	International Business Machines Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
ICS	Incident Command System
JSC	Justice and Safety Center
LTPOC	Local Training Point of Contact
MYTEP	Multi-Year Training and Exercise Plan
NDPC	National Domestic Preparedness Consortium
NIMS	National Incident Management System
NPR	National Preparedness Report
NRTNA	National Rural Training Needs Assessment
NTED	National Training and Education Division
NTES	National Training and Education System
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
RDPC	Rural Domestic Preparedness Consortium
SAA	State Administrative Agency
TCL	Target Capabilities List
TDM	Tailored Design Method
TEPW	Training and Exercise Planning Workshop
THIRA	Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment
TPOC	Training Point of Contact
U.S.	United States of America

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Introduction

The Nation's rural first responders face many challenges in meeting homeland security requirements and often lack access to training that considers their unique needs. To meet the demand for consistent, quality training in rural areas, Congress and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) established the Rural Domestic Preparedness Consortium (RDPC) to develop and deliver all-hazards training that supports rural homeland security goals and needs. In authorizing the RDPC, Congress noted:

Training for rural first responders poses unique challenges when compared to their urban counterparts. This new consortium will provide rural first responders with awareness level training, develop emerging training, and provide technical assistance in support of rural homeland security requirements.

Since its establishment in 2004, the RDPC has trained over 60,000 first responders across all 50 U.S. states as well as multiple U.S. territories. Training has been provided through 50 DHS-certified courses, which include instructor-led, web-based, and train-the-trainer courses.

To ensure that training initiatives are appropriately aligned with the overarching goals of federal, state, and local homeland security strategies and cognizant of the evolving needs of rural areas of the Nation, the Justice and Safety Center (JSC) at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), on behalf of the RDPC, routinely conducts a National Rural Training Needs Assess-

ment (NRTNA) of rural responders in addition to other needs-based (e.g., Tribal Nations, maritime), event specific (e.g., National Level Exercise), and course evaluation research. The specific goal of the NRTNA is to assess the training experiences, needs, barriers, and delivery experiences and preferences of rural first responders. Since 2005, the research team at EKU has conducted national rural assessments on training needs on five previous occasions.

Since the completion of the most recent NRTNA in 2009, the Nation and its relative threats and hazards have continued to evolve for both urban and rural communities. In addition to increasing occurrence and severity of natural events, communities now face a myriad of threats and hazards that come from both natural and man-made sources. Current examples of the varied event types now facing communities include active shooter situations, communicable disease preparedness and response (e.g., Ebola), civil disobedience, violent extremism, and increased gang/cartel activity across the United States. The diverse and evolving threat and hazard picture within the United States illustrates an informational need for more current data to determine the training needs and gaps within rural jurisdictions across the Nation. To address this informational need, the research team initiated the 2014-2015 NRTNA. This report details the results of Phase II of the NRTNA, which focuses on important issues for emergency response agencies within designated rural counties across the United States.

² Conference Report (H. Rept. 108-774) accompanying the Fiscal Year (FY) 2005 DHS Appropriations Act, Pub. L. 108-334.

³ For more information on the Justice and Safety Center, please visit: <http://www.jsc.eku.edu/>

⁴ To access copies of previous national rural assessments and other research performed by EKU on behalf of RDPC, please visit: <https://www.ruraltraining.org/resources/tag/report/>

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Background

The RDPC NRTNA continues to be the only comprehensive, national assessment of rural first responder training needs in the United States. The 2014-2015 NRTNA is the fifth national rural assessment conducted by the research team at EKU. Since 2005, information has been collected from 4,890 rural emergency response agencies across the United States through the five national assessments. Due to the success of previous NRTNAs and other national needs-based and event-specific research, the research team at EKU was again tasked with the responsibility of administering a new NRTNA. Incorporating lessons learned and best practices from previous NRTNAs and other research, the current NRTNA represents a transition to a more in-depth and comprehensive process (see Methodology section for detailed information). The revised NRTNA process provides more assurance of reliability and validity of the assessment and the results, more incorporation of stakeholder input, and cost efficiencies (e.g., staff time, material costs).

Despite methodological changes, the NRTNA's fundamental basis has remained unchanged since the first assessment in 2005, which is the Core Capabilities⁵ as identified in the *National Preparedness Goal*⁶. Utilizing the Core Capabilities provides a common and comprehensive foundation to assess rural training needs as well as a mechanism that ensures that identified rural training needs can be easily translated to the overarching national targets and standards. Further, the common framework of the Core Capabilities enables comparative data analysis of between NRTNA results and other federal training assessment data as well as longitudinal analysis of rural training needs with previous NRTNA results. Additionally, although the NRTNA has continued to utilize survey research as the (non-experimental) research design, the survey itself has migrated from fully paper-based, to a hybrid incorporating an online version, to fully online. Lastly, the overall 2014-2015 NRTNA will be completed in two separate parts: Part I: Rural Training Coordinators Needs Assessment; Part II: National Rural County Needs Assessment. The entire NRTNA will result in a multivolume body of work that will cover both parts as well as a longitudinal analysis of rural training needs through comparison with previous NRTNAs. The culmination of the NRTNA will achieve the most comprehensive understanding of rural homeland security training needs to date.

Importance

The RDPC aims to build rural community resiliency and response capabilities through the provision of training of utmost importance to rural communities. In many cases, the RDPC represents the only opportunity for rural responders to obtain access to timely and effective training. Other training may overlook or fail to account for the unique conditions and challenges that exist in rural communities. This mission is important especially in light of recent trends and statistics that highlight the increasing

demands for capabilities in both urban and rural areas alike. While federal funding for equipment purchases and preparedness activities in general may be diminishing, rural communities continue to face a range of hazards and threats. It is essential that RDPC's mission is accomplished through a rigorous process that begins with the identification of rural needs through the NRTNA and culminates in the delivery of courses that are timely, accurate, and relevant, which will positively impact resiliency and response capabilities in rural communities.

Overall, the rigorous NRTNA process provides actionable and needed information for the RDPC and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Training and Education Division (NTED). Specifically, the RDPC will be provided with valuable information that can be immediately utilized to ensure the consortium is meeting the homeland security training needs of rural emergency responders. Further, NTED will be provided information from its constituents to inform future funding allocations as well as to better understand rural homeland security issues, which may not be apparent or reflected in aggregate, national-level data such as reported in the *National Preparedness Report (NPR)*⁷. Further, longitudinal data analysis across all NRTNAs, where possible, will aid in the identification of rural training needs that have been met, those that continue to persist, and future rural training trends. In summation, the NRTNA is currently the only source by which actionable information is obtained regarding rural first responder training needs.



⁵ The Target Capabilities List (TCL) was utilized in national assessments through 2009.

⁶ Federal Emergency Management Agency (2011). *National Preparedness Goal*. Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Management Agency.

⁷ For more information on the *National Preparedness Report*, please visit: <http://www.fema.gov/national-preparedness-report>

Methodology

Building upon lessons learned from previous EKU research efforts, the 2014-2015 NRTNA utilizes survey research as the (non-experimental) research design to obtain in-depth information from specific audiences. This report details findings from Part I of the NRTNA in which information from those with RDPC course delivery experience was collected. These individuals include the 55⁸ State Administrative Agency Training Points of Contact (SAA TPOC) and 371 rural local training points of contact (LTPOC) who hosted an instructor-led RDPC training between January 2012 and June 2014.

Although the need for a NRTNA was previously established, the transition to a more in-depth and comprehensive methodological process began in August 2014 after the 2014 NPR was publically released. Once released, the 2014 NPR methodology and results were analyzed as part of the initial planning and coordination process along with a review of previous NRTNAs and other national assessment research performed by EKU to garner lessons learned and best practices. From this review, a draft survey and methodology were developed in August 2014. The draft survey included two versions; one each for the SAA TPOCs and the rural LTPOCs.

During the draft survey and methodology process, a stakeholder group was formed to provide strategic guidance for the NRTNA. The stakeholder group included SAA representatives, local training points of contact familiar with RDPC training, and RDPC Advisory Board members who represent prominent national and international first responder associations and organizations. Meetings with the stakeholder group were conducted in early September 2014, which included an in-depth review of the draft survey and methodology. Stakeholder group feedback was utilized to revise and finalize the survey and methodology, which were subsequently submitted to and approved by the NTED.

Once the survey and methodology were finalized, the research team at EKU developed and submitted an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application for Phase I of the NRTNA to the EKU Division of Sponsored Programs for review in accordance with federal and EKU regulations. IRB approval was granted in mid-September 2014. During the IRB process, the contact lists for the 55 SAA TPOCs and the 371 rural LTPOCs were developed as well as an online version of the finalized survey. Contact information for the SAA TPOCs was gathered and verified through publically available federal⁹ and state-specific websites¹⁰. Contact information for the rural LTPOCs was previously collected by RDPC as part of the training delivery process. RDPC training delivery records between January 2012 and June 2014 were reviewed to identify those individuals who have hosted an instructor-led RDPC training course and to access necessary contact information. As for the survey, EKU's Qualtrics¹¹ service account

was utilized to develop and host the online survey, which is an online survey software platform that enables fully online data collection thereby eliminating the need for printed survey dissemination and manual data entry¹².

To disseminate the survey, the research team at EKU utilized the Don Dillman¹³ Tailored Design Method (TDM) to contact individuals to request their participation in the study. The TDM provides guidance on how to obtain high quantity and quality responses to surveys, which includes when to contact potential participants (five total contacts over a defined timeframe) and language to include in the separate contacts. EKU began utilizing the TDM in 2012 and experienced a significant increase in survey response rates; therefore, it was determined to be applicable for use for the NRTNA. Additionally, individual contacts were developed for each group (SAA TPOCs and rural LTPOCs) whereby language in the separate contacts was adjusted to fit the specific group. Postal mail and e-mail were utilized to contact survey participants. Specifically, the SAA TPOCs were contacted via e-mail with the exception of one SAA TPOC for which a valid e-mail address was not available. Instead, this SAA TPOC was contacted via postal mail. All contacts sent to the rural LTPOCs were distributed via postal mail. Lastly, each participant was assigned a unique one to three digit access code as an identifier to track his/her completion of the survey, which was provided within the full invitation contact and each subsequent reminder contact. Participants were required to enter the access code in order to complete the online survey.

The data collection phase for the survey lasted 10 weeks (see Figure 1). Dissemination of the various contacts to survey participants began the week of September 22, 2014 in which postal letters and e-mails were distributed. This pre-notice communication was sent to all participants to introduce them to the project and provide advanced notice of the upcoming survey. The following week (week of September 29, 2014), the full invitation to participate in the NRTNA along with the online survey link was distributed to all participants. Approximately two weeks later (week of October 13, 2014), the first reminder contact was sent to those

Figure 1: Data Collection Phase Timeline

Date (week of)	Description
September 22, 2014	Pre-notice contact
September 29, 2014	Full invitation and online survey link contact
October 13, 2014	Reminder contact
October 27, 2014	Reminder contact
November 10, 2014	Final reminder contact
December 2, 2014	Completion of data collection phase

⁸ Washington, DC was not included in the assessment due to an absence of rural areas.

⁹ Contact information for SAA TPOCs was initially obtain via the NTED website at: <https://www.firstrespondertraining.gov/content.do?page=saa>

¹⁰ Individual websites of the designated SAAs for each state were accessed to verify the NTED website information.

¹¹ For more information on Qualtrics, please visit: <http://www.qualtrics.com/>

¹² Printed surveys are provided to individuals upon request.

¹³ Dillman, D., Smyth, J., & Christian, L. (2009). *Internet, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method* (3rd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

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participants who had not completed the survey. An additional reminder was sent approximately two weeks later (week of October 27, 2014). The final contact/reminder sent to the participants who had not completed the survey was sent the week of November 10, 2014. Data collection officially ended on December 2, 2014 after which both online surveys were deactivated. The collected data was then exported from the Qualtrics website for analysis via IBM SPSS® Statistics 21.0.

Response Statistics

A total of 426 individuals were invited to participate in Part I of the NRTNA, which included 55 SAA TPOCs and 371 rural LTPOCs. While all SAA TPOCs were able to be contacted, 22 rural LTPOCs were unable to be contacted due to reasons including insufficient postal address, change of employment, and/or retirement. Both survey groups had response rates well above 50%, which is a significant increase from previous national assessments which had response rates in the 20% to 30% range. As for geographical representation, the rural LTPOCs were geographically dispersed covering 40 states, however, the SAA TPOCs had noticeable representation gaps in the southwest, coastal southeast, and northeast regions. Figures 2 through 4 provide detailed response statistics and geographical representation of the responses.

Figure 2: Response Statistics

Group	Adjusted Population Size	Completed Surveys	Adjusted Response Rate
SAA TPOCs	55	30	54.5%
LTPOCs	349	191	54.7%
TOTAL	404	221	54.7%

Respondent Demographics

Demographic information collected via the surveys indicated rural training points of contact were sufficiently targeted, which was the emphasis of Phase I of the NRTNA. For example, of the 30 SAA TPOC respondents 28 (93.3%) indicated they served as the training point of contact for the SAA. The remaining two individuals (6.7%) were SAA directors. As for the rural LTPOCs, over half ($n=102$; 53.4%) specified that they are the assigned individual to oversee training for their agency¹⁴. In addition to their agency training role, the rural LTPOCs were asked additional demographical questions to understand jurisdictional representation. Overall, approximately half of the rural LTPOC respondents served populations of 50,000 or less ($n=96$; 50.3%) along with a large number indicating that a county was their agency's primary area of responsibility ($n=80$; 41.9%) followed by a municipal (city or town) area ($n=45$; 23.6%). Although just over half

($n=101$; 53.2%) of the rural LTPOC respondents indicated the number of agency employees thereby limiting data analysis, those that did respond illustrated a high percentage of agencies employing 50 or less individuals ($n=46$; 45.5%). Figures 5 through 9 provide detailed response statistics.

Figure 3: SAA TPOC Responding States and Territories

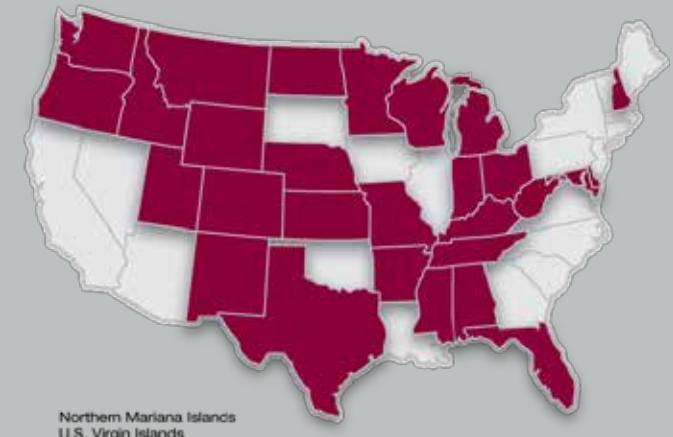
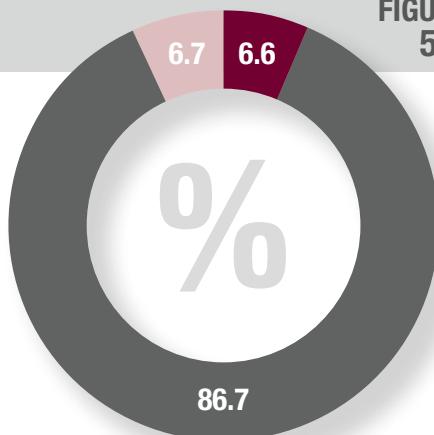


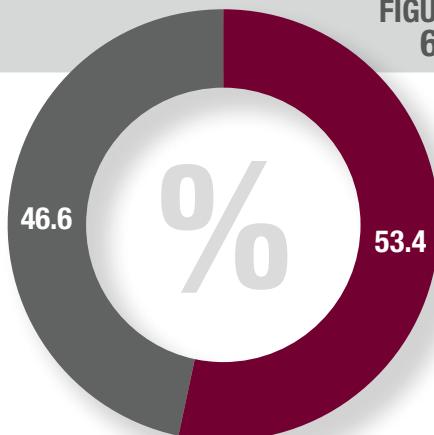
Figure 4: LTPOC Responses per State



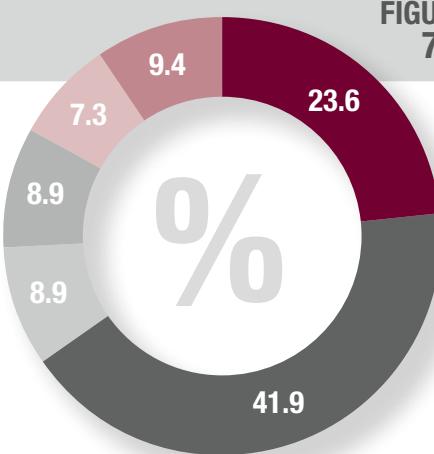
¹⁴ This specific question was conditional on the rural LTPOC respondent indicating that his/her agency did employ/assign a person to oversee training on a primary question. Overall, 140 (73.3%) respondents indicated that their agency did in fact employ/assign a person to oversee training.

FIGURE
5**SAA TPOC Respondent Title/Position (n=30)**

- Director
- Training point of contact
- Other

FIGURE
6**LTPOC Assigned to Oversee Agency Training (n=191)**

- Yes
- No

FIGURE
7**LTPOC Respondent Agency Primary Area of Responsibility (n=191)**

- Municipal (city or town)
- County
- Municipal and county
- Regional
- State
- Other

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Core Capability-Based Rural Training Needs

Rural training needs identification was achieved through the use of the Core Capabilities. As previously noted, utilization of the Core Capabilities provides a common and comprehensive foundation to assess rural training needs as well as a mechanism that ensures that identified rural training needs can be easily translated to the overarching national targets and standards. To identify rural training needs, each respondent selected and rank ordered the top ten (10) Core Capabilities in which training is most needed within their jurisdiction or within rural jurisdictions within their state¹⁵ to increase capabilities¹⁶.

As indicated in Figure 10, the Core Capability *Operational Communications* was the most selected capability in both groups. Approximately two-thirds of all respondents (n=147; 66.5%) identified training was needed within this Core Capability. In addition, the Core Capabilities of *Operational Coordination* (n=139; 62.3%) and *Planning* (n=130; 58.8%) were present in the top four identified needs for both groups. Figure 10 presents the remaining Core Capabilities for both groups. Although the rank order is not exactly the same, nine of the ten identified training needs were the same across both groups. The exceptions were *Community Resilience* for the LTPOCs and *Cybersecurity* for the SAA TPOCs.

In terms of rank ordering, *Operational Communications* and *Operational Coordination* were the most common Core Capabilities to be ranked as one of the top three needs by the respondents (see Figure 11). These two Core Capabilities were followed by *Community Resilience*, *Planning*, and *Threat and Hazard Identification*, all of which were ranked as a top three need by almost 20% of all respondents. Lastly, although it received the fourth most overall top three selections, the Core Capability *Planning* received the most #1 rankings of all Core Capabilities by a considerable margin.



In addition to selecting and rank ordering the top ten Core Capabilities in which training is needed, the respondents also indicated the timeframe in which needs should be addressed for each of the identified top ten Core Capabilities. Respondents were provided the opportunity to select one or more of the following timeframes:

- Immediate – within next six months
- Short-Term – next six to twelve months
- Long-Term – within next one to three years
- Continual Basis – annual training, skills maintenance, training of new staff

As displayed in Figure 12, respondents indicated a heavier need/emphasis on continual training timeframes followed by short-term training timeframes. Both immediate and long-term training timeframes were fairly equal, but significantly behind the other two timeframes.

FIGURE 8

Population Served by LTPOC Respondent Agency (n=191)

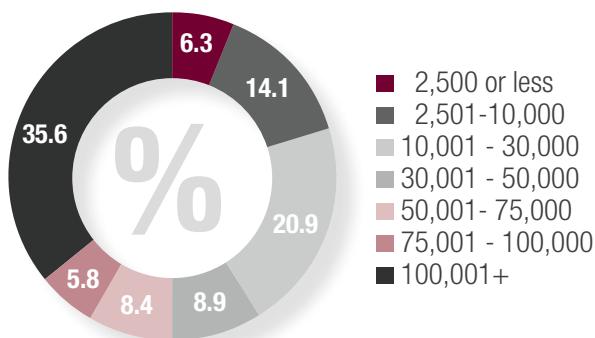
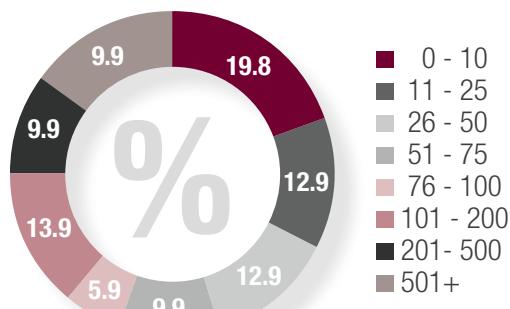


FIGURE 9

LTPOC Respondent Agency Size (n=101)



¹⁵ Per survey instructions, SAA TPOCs were asked to answer questions as they related to rural jurisdictions within their state, while the rural LTPOCs were asked to answer questions as they relate to their individual jurisdiction.

¹⁶ For the purposes of this question, **capability** is defined as possessing the critical elements necessary to prevent, protect against, mitigate the effects of, respond to, and recover from all threats and hazards. Critical elements may include equipment, personnel, training, knowledge, and expertise necessary to capably manage a threat or hazard.

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Figure 10: Core Capability-Based Rural Training Needs

LTPOC			SAA TPOC		
Core Capability	# of Responses	% of Respondents	Core Capability	# of Responses	% of Respondents
Operational Communications	125	65.4%	Operational Communications	22	73.3%
Operational Coordination	119	62.3%	Mass Care Services	21	73.3%
Planning	111	58.1%	Operational Coordination	20	66.6%
Threat and Hazard Identification	109	57.1%	Planning	19	63.3%
Public Information and Warning	102	53.4%	Public Information and Warning	19	63.3%
Situational Assessment	102	53.4%	Cybersecurity	15	50.0%
Community Resilience	87	45.5%	Intelligence and Information Sharing	14	46.7%
Mass Care Services	86	45.0%	Situation Assessment	14	46.7%
Intelligence and Information Sharing	75	39.3%	Threat and Hazard Identification	14	46.7%
Mass Search and Rescue Operations	72	37.7%	Mass Search and Rescue Operations	13	43.3%

Figure 11: Rank Ordering of Core Capability-Based Rural Training Needs

Core Capability	Ranking Responses (LTPOC / SAA TPOC)				% of All Respondents
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Total	
Operational Communications	18 / 5	19 / 3	14 / 2	61	27.6%
Operational Coordination	13 / 5	20 / 6	11 / 2	57	25.8%
Community Resilience	16 / 2	11 / 3	10 / 1	43	19.5%
Planning	26 / 4	9 / 0	0 / 2	41	18.5%
Threats and Hazard Identification	17 / 1	10 / 1	9 / 0	38	17.2%
Public Information and Warning	8 / 0	8 / 2	15 / 2	35	15.8%
Situational Assessment	7 / 1	12 / 0	9 / 2	31	14.0%
Cybersecurity	11 / 1	4 / 3	9 / 1	29	13.1%
Mass Care Services	5 / 3	7 / 0	5 / 2	22	10.0%
Intelligence and Information Sharing	2 / 1	8 / 0	7 / 1	19	8.6%
Mass Search and Rescue Operations	5 / 1	2 / 3	5 / 2	18	8.1%

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Figure 12: Training Timeframes for Core Capability-Based Rural Training Needs

Core Capability	Timeframe Responses (LTPOC / SAA TPOC)			
	Immediate	Short-Term	Long-Term	Continual
Operational Communications	33 / 6	35 / 10	23 / 6	48 / 12
Operational Coordination	33 / 6	25 / 8	27 / 4	54 / 9
Planning	28 / 2	19 / 7	17 / 7	55 / 12
Threats and Hazard Identification	20 / 3	32 / 9	24 / 4	42 / 7
Public Information and Warning	24 / 2	32 / 10	20 / 3	39 / 12
Situational Assessment	26 / 2	30 / 5	17 / 5	46 / 8
Mass Care Services	11 / 4	30 / 11	21 / 7	31 / 9
Intelligence and Information Sharing	12 / 5	23 / 8	19 / 4	28 / 9
Mass Search and Rescue Operations	9 / 2	23 / 5	23 / 5	21 / 6
Cybersecurity	17 / 2	21 / 10	14 / 3	19 / 5
Total Response per Timeframe	230 / 36	287 / 89	227 / 50	421 / 93

Topical, Threat, and Hazard Rural Training Needs

In addition to identifying rural training needs via the Core Capabilities, the survey respondents were also provided an opportunity to indicate rural training needs related to specific topics, threats, and hazards. This line of questioning is valuable because rural training needs may not be easily encapsulated within a single Core Capability. Therefore, providing opportunity for narrative descriptions of rural training needs allows for the collection of data that cannot be determined via preexisting classifications such as the Core Capabilities. To analyze these questions, all answers/narrative comments were coded with like items placed into categories that represent the intent of provided comments.

Two specific open-ended questions allowed the respondents to provide narrative comments on rural training needs. The first question asked respondents to indicate any topical training needs (versus needs related to equipment acquisition, increase in personnel, funding obtainment, etc.) they believe need to be addressed. As Figure 13 displays, *active shooter* and *school safety* were the top two identified topical rural training needs by a significant margin. Interestingly, both topics received the same amount of total responses when both groups are combined. Other common topical rural training needs across both groups included *communications*, *dealing with the media*, and *mass care*.

The second question asked respondents to identify the top threats and hazards to their jurisdiction or rural jurisdictions within their state in which they believe relative training is needed. Since rural communities face a variety of threats and hazards, the respondents were directed to the *Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 201: Threat and Hazard Identification and*

*Risk Assessment Guide (CPG 201)*¹⁷, which defines three types of threats and hazards:

- **Natural hazards**, which result from acts of nature, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, animal disease outbreak, pandemics, or epidemics.
- **Technological hazards**, which result from accidents or the failures of systems and structures, such as hazardous materials spills or dam failures.
- **Human-caused incidents**, which result from the intentional actions of an adversary, such as a threatened or actual chemical attack, biological attack, or cyber incident.

In addition to the definitions above, the respondents were also directed to a replicated table of example threats and hazards from the CPG 201 to help identify possible rural threats and hazards¹⁸. Figure 14 displays the top ten threats and hazards identified by both groups. *Hazardous materials release* and *severe weather* (e.g., winter storms, wind storms, ice storms) were the top two rural threats and hazards in which training is needed with approximately 30% of all respondents indicating these two threats/hazards (*hazardous materials release* – 29.7%; *severe weather* – 29.4%). These two threats/hazards were followed closely by *flooding*, which was a top three rural training need identified by both groups. Overall, eight of the top ten identified training needs were the same across both groups.

¹⁷ Federal Emergency Management Agency (2013). *Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 201: Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Management Agency.

¹⁸ The source of the replicated table is Table 2: Example Threats and Hazards located on page 6 of the CPG 201.

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Figure 13: Topical Rural Training Needs

LTPOCs			SAA TPOCs		
Topic	# of Responses	% of Respondents	Topic	# of Responses	% of Respondents
Active Shooter Communications	31	16.2%	School Safety (to include active shooter)	9	30.0%
School Safety (to include active shooter)	28	14.7%	Active Shooter	6	20.0%
Interagency and information coordination and communication	13	6.8%	Crisis and emergency communications	3	10.0%
Media relations	10	5.2	Search and rescue	3	10.0%
Basic emergency and disaster planning and response	9	4.7%	Public Information	3	10.0%
Volunteer and donation management	9	4.7%	Dealing with the Media	2	6.7%
Communicable disease (Ebola, Flu, PPE)	8	4.2%	Mass care	2	6.7%
NIMS and ICS	8	4.2%			
Hazardous materials incidents	7	3.7%			
Mass care and sheltering	6	3.1%			

Figure 14: Threat and Hazard Rural Training Needs

LTPOCs			SAA TPOCs		
Topic	# of Responses	% of Respondents	Topic	# of Responses	% of Respondents
Hazardous Material Release	57	29.8%	Severe weather	14	46.7%
Severe Weather	51	26.7%	Flood	11	36.7%
Flood	38	19.9%	Hazardous materials release	9	30.0%
Train derailment	38	19.9%	Earthquake	8	26.7%
School violence	34	17.8%	School Violence	8	26.7%
Workplace Violence	28	14.7%	Workplace Violence	8	26.7%
Tornado	21	11.0%	Tornado	8	26.7%
Active Shooter	20	10.5%	Animal disease outbreak	7	23.3%
Power failure	20	10.5%	Power failure	7	23.3%
Wildfire	20	10.5%	Wildfire	7	23.3%

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State and Local Training Needs Assessments

Aside from training needs identification completed at the national level (e.g., NRTNA, NPR), respondents were asked whether their agency/jurisdiction conducts a training needs assessment. As indicated in Figure 15, training needs assessments are significantly more prevalent at the state level than at the rural level. Specifically, all but two ($n=28$; 93.3%) of the SAA TPOCs indicated that their state conducts training needs assessment. Conversely, slightly less than half ($n=86$; 45.0%) of the rural LTPOCs indicated that their jurisdiction conducts a training needs assessment. This could be due to needs assessment being conducted at the county level as opposed to the local level. As for methodology, both indicated a mixture of both formal processes (e.g., Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment [THIRA] process, State Preparedness Report, Training and Exercise Planning Workshops [TEPW], Multi-Year Training and Exercise Planning [MYTEP] Workshops) as well as informal processes (e.g., AAR reviews, in-house assessments, surveys, and outreach to other agencies).

Training Information Obtainment

In addition to training needs identification, the respondents were asked to detail how they obtain training information. It is important for training providers to understand how rural response agencies determine what

training programs are available to address their specific needs. This information can help inform necessary adjustments to marketing and outreach efforts to ensure information is readily available to those who need it. Figure 16 presents respondent data on how training information is obtained. The most common method to obtain training information by both groups were *state agencies* and *directly from training providers*. Over three-quarters of all respondents indicated the use of these two sources (*state agencies* – $n=175$; 79.2%; *directly from training providers* – $n=169$; 76.5%). These sources were followed closely by *DHS/FEMA, conferences or expositions*, and *local agencies*, all of which were utilized by over two-thirds of the respondents. Individually, the rural LTPOCs also indicated a heavy use of *word of mouth/social networking* ($n=105$; 55.0%) while the SAA TPOCs indicated additional use of *agency head and/or training coordinator* ($n=22$; 73.3%) and *other federal agencies* ($n=18$; 60.0%) as sources. The SAA TPOCs were also asked what sources agencies within rural jurisdictions within their state used to obtain training information. Overall, the SAA TPOCs indicated similar results as the rural LTPOCs with some variability. For example, similar to the rural LTPOCs the SAA TPOCs indicated a perceived high use of *state agencies, conferences or expositions, directly from training providers, local agencies, and word of mouth/social networking* as sources, but less indicated use of *DHS/FEMA* which was heavily used by the rural LTPOCs.

Figure 15: Implementation of Training Needs Assessments and Methodology

Answers	LTPOCs ¹⁹		SAA TPOCs	
	# of Responses	% of Responses	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	86	45.0%	28	93.3%
No	104	54.5%	2	6.7%
Methodology	<p>Solicit information from agencies within jurisdiction through surveys, interviews, meetings, etc. ($n=21$)</p> <p>Annual meeting/Review with other agencies (e.g., TEPW) ($n=16$)</p> <p>In-house assessments ($n=10$)</p> <p>Use THIRA or other method to determine threats and vulnerabilities to address through training ($n=8$)</p> <p>Review internal capability in relation to current trends, topics, recent events, and published AARs ($n=8$)</p> <p>Training needs are based on annual certification and Continuing Education Units (CEU) requirements ($n=6$)</p> <p>Training needs are based on state requirements ($n=4$)</p>			
	<p>MYTEP Workshops ($n=14$)</p> <p>Jurisdictional outreach (direct but informal contact with agencies and first responders) ($n=6$)</p> <p>Statewide needs assessment surveys ($n=5$)</p> <p>State Preparedness Report ($n=4$)</p> <p>THIRA ($n=3$)</p> <p>AAR reviews ($n=2$)</p> <p>Improvement planning workshops and conferences ($n=2$)</p> <p>Exercise reviews ($n=2$)</p>			

¹⁹Note: One rural LTPOC respondent did not answer this question resulting in 190 responses. Percentages are based on the total rural LTPOC population of 191 respondents.

Figure 16: Sources of Training Information

Source	LTPOCs		SAA TPOCs			
			SAA		Rural Jurisdictions	
	# of Responses	% of Responses	# of Responses	% of Responses	# of Responses	% of Responses
Agency head and/or training coordinator	98	51.3%	22	73.3%	16	53.3%
Conferences or expositions	123	64.4%	25	83.3%	21	70.0%
DHS/FEMA	126	66.0%	27	90.0%	16	53.3%
Directly from training providers	141	73.8%	28	93.3%	20	66.7%
General Internet searching	69	63.1%	14	46.7%	17	56.7%
Local agencies	133	69.6%	14	46.7%	19	63.3%
Local colleges or universities	62	32.5%	9	30.0%	10	33.3%
Other federal agencies	52	27.2%	18	60.0%	11	36.7%
Professional/trade associations	81	42.4%	13	43.3%	11	36.8%
State agencies	158	82.7%	17	56.7%	24	80.0%
Word of mouth/social networking	105	55.0%	15	50.0%	19	63.3%

Training Influences, Barriers, and Preferences

Once training needs are identified, it is important to understand what influences rural first responders and/or their agency to select a specific training course/program and what barriers may exist that may preclude them from attending a training course/program. Two specific questions were asked of the respondents to obtain this information. First, respondents were asked to indicate what factors influence the decision of their agency or rural agencies within their state to select a training course/program. As indicated in Figure 17, both groups ordered the seven factors the same with the exception of one factor. For example, the rural LTPOCs placed an emphasis on *cost* and *topic of interest* as indicated by close to 80% of the rural LTPOCs respondents. SAA TPOCs perceived that rural agencies within their state placed the greatest emphasis on the fact that *training is required* (n=23; 76.7%) followed by *topic of interest* (n=22; 73.3%). Interestingly, the factors of *cost* and *topic of interest* received the same amount of total responses when both groups are combined (n=169 or 76.5% of all respondents). The remaining factors in order were *training is required*, *location of the training*, *dates and times of training*, *availability of certification or credit*, and *reputation of the training provider or facility*.

As for training barriers, the respondents were asked to indicate what barriers prevent rural first responders and other community stakeholders within their jurisdiction or within their state from attending training. As displayed in Figure 18, both groups identified similar barriers. Specifi-

cally, both groups identified the three barriers of *cost of travel*, *location of training*, and *work obligations* as part of their top four training barriers. The remaining top barriers were *cost of training* by the rural LTPOCs and *lack of backfill in jurisdiction* by the SAA TPOCs. When both groups are combined, *cost of travel* was the most frequently mentioned barrier by a significant margin, which was indicated by 77% (n=170) of all respondents. This barrier was followed by *cost of training* (n=141; 63.8% of all respondents), *location of training* (n=141; 63.8%), and *work obligations* (n=138; 62.4%). In addition to the overall training barrier question above, the respondents were also presented a specific question regarding whether minimum course attendee requirements are a barrier to hosting training within their jurisdiction or within rural areas within their state (see Figure 19). Although a majority (n=18; 60.0%) of SAA TPOCs perceived minimum course attendee requirements as a barrier, only approximately 30% of the rural LTPOCs (n=55; 28.8%) perceived the requirement as a barrier. Despite the difference in the perceived barrier, those who confirmed that minimum course attendee requirements were a barrier provided similar comments on their reasoning, which centered on lowering the minimum requirement below 20 attendees.

In the previous discussions, the element of *date and time of the training course* was the fifth most mentioned decision factor and barrier. Coincidentally, the survey included a specific question that asked respondents whether instructor-led training courses offered on evening and weekend schedules would provide greater access to their jurisdiction or to rural jurisdictions within their state. As displayed in Figure 20, 80% (n=24) of

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the SAA TPOCs indicated that greater access would be provided, while approximately half ($n=97$; 50.8%) of the rural LTPOCs perceived greater access. Despite the difference in perceived provision of access, those who confirmed greater access in both groups provided similar comments on their reasoning. The most common reasons/comments were:

- The heavy presence of volunteers in rural agencies who have other fulltime employment, which limits ability to train during business hours throughout the week ($n=69$);
- Job responsibilities during business hours presents attendance issues ($n=12$); and
- The nature of shift work in response agencies presents scheduling and attendance issues ($n=9$).

The effect of the reliance on volunteers in rural areas seems to be evident in training length preferences as indicated by the respondents. Specifically, the respondents were asked to identify what length of training does agencies in their jurisdiction or within rural areas of their state most prefer. As indicated in Figure 21, the most preferred length by approximately half of both groups was one day (eight hours) followed by a length of more than four hours, but less than eight hours. Overall, 72% ($n=159$) of all respondents indicated a preference for a training course length in the four to eight hour range.

Figure 17: Training Selection Decision Factors

Factor	LTPOCs		SAA TPOCs	
	# of Responses	% of Responses	# of Responses	% of Responses
Availability of certification or credit	75	39.3%	11	36.7%
Cost	149	78.0%	20	66.7%
Dates and times of training	93	48.7%	18	60.0%
Location of the training	112	58.6%	20	66.7%
Reputation of the training provider or facility	70	36.7%	13	43.3%
Topic of interest	147	77.0%	22	73.3%
Training is required	114	59.7%	23	76.7%

Figure 18: Training Barriers

Barrier	LTPOCs		SAA TPOCs	
	# of Responses	% of Responses	# of Responses	% of Responses
Cost of backfill in jurisdiction	70	36.7%	17	56.7%
Cost of training	130	68.1%	11	36.7%
Cost of travel	148	77.5%	22	73.3%
Dates and times of the course	75	39.3%	14	46.7%
Lack of access to technology and/or other equipment	12	6.3%	6	20.0%
Lack of backfill in jurisdiction	59	30.9%	19	63.3%
Lack of professional incentive	37	19.4%	4	13.3%
Location of training	122	63.9%	19	63.3%

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Figure 18: Training Barriers (continued from previous page)

Personal and/or family obligations	61	31.9%	7	23.3%
Relevance of training content	40	20.9%	8	26.7%
Reluctance to travel	50	26.2%	12	40.0%
Required to use leave time	48	25.1%	14	46.7%
Training format	9	4.7%	4	13.3%
Work obligations	115	60.2%	23	76.7%

Figure 19: Minimum Course Attendee Requirements as a Training Barrier

Answer	LTPOCs ²⁰		SAA TPOCs	
	# of Responses	% of Responses	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	55	28.8%	18	60.0%
No	135	70.7%	12	40.0%
Narrative Comments	15-20 is a more appropriate requirement (n=4) 10 is a more appropriate requirement (n=5) Notable Comment: Most of the rural areas are not able to meet the required minimum for training courses, thus resulting in a cycle of needing training, but not being able to provide it to the area that needs it most.		Requirements above 20 is not realistic in rural areas due to travel distance to central locations and heavy presence of volunteers (n=8) 10-15 is a more appropriate requirement (n=3)	

Figure 20: Greater Access to Training via Night and Weekend Training

Answer	LTPOCs ²¹		SAA TPOCs	
	# of Responses	% of Responses	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	97	50.8%	24	80.0%
No	93	48.7%	6	20.0%
Narrative Comments	Heavy presence of volunteers in rural agencies who have other fulltime employment which limits the ability to train during business hours throughout the week (n=51) Job responsibilities during business hours presents attendance issues (n=8) The nature of shift work in response agencies presents scheduling and attendance issues (n=8) Training provided on weekends would provide the most benefit (n=7) Training provided on weekday nights would be more preferable (n=5)		Heavy presence of volunteers in rural agencies who have other fulltime employment which limits the ability to train during business hours throughout the week (n=18) Job responsibilities during business hours presents attendance issues (n=4) The nature of shift work in response agencies presents scheduling and attendance issues (n=1)	

²⁰Note: One rural LTPOC respondent did not answer this question resulting in 190 responses. Percentages are based on the total rural LTPOC population of 191 respondents.

²¹Note: One rural LTPOC respondent did not answer this question resulting in 190 responses. Percentages are based on the total rural LTPOC population of 191 respondents.

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Figure 21: Preferred Training Course Length

Factor	LTPOCs		SAA TPOCs	
	# of Responses	% of Responses	# of Responses	% of Responses
Less than four hours	34	17.8%	3	10.0%
More than four hours, but less than eight hours	41	21.5%	5	16.7%
One Day (eight hours)	96	50.3%	17	56.7%
More than one day	10	5.2%	4	13.3%
Other	10	5.2%	1	3.3%
Dependent on training topic	7			
Length of training is not a factor	3			
Do not know			1	

Training Delivery, Application, and Diffusion

The last section of the survey allowed respondents to provide narrative comments/descriptions related to rural training delivery, application, and diffusion. Beginning with training delivery, respondents were asked for suggestions on how to improve training delivery to their jurisdiction or to rural jurisdictions within their state by the FEMA federal training partners (e.g., RDPC, National Domestic Preparedness Consortium [NDPC], Emergency Management Institute [EMI], etc.). The survey respondents were an appropriate group to provide such suggestions as the rural LTPOCs had recently hosted an instructor-led RDPC training within their jurisdiction and the SAA TPOCs coordinate federal homeland security training within their respective state/territory. Despite the overall low number of comments provided (which could be an indication of effective and efficient training delivery operations by federal training partners), there were some identifiable themes within the submitted comments. As displayed in Figure 22, both groups referenced the need for training delivery flexibility (evening and weekend training; reduced minimum course attendee requirements) and more outreach to enable more insight as to what training courses and programs are available.

As for training application, the respondents were asked to list any incidents in which agencies in their jurisdiction or within their state applied training from a federal training partner to an actual incident. These *success stories* are important as they show how received training is transferred to rural responders' daily job settings and utilized in all mission areas. Similar to the training delivery question, the training application question received a low number of comments. This should not, however, be construed as a lack of training application. Further, there were no responses from the SAA TPOCs beside four individuals who stated that they are unaware of any incidents because this type of information is not collected by the SAA. As for responses by the rural LTPOCs, the list

below provides a breakdown of the provided comments:

- Hazardous materials incident (n=8)
- Planned event (n=6)
- Rail car incident (n=6)
- Flooding (n=3)
- Tornado (n=3)
- Active shooter (n=2)
- Bomb threat (n=2)
- Mass fatality incident (n=2)
- School-based incident (n=2)
- Tropical storm/hurricane (n=2)
- Wildland fire (n=2)
- Animal disease incident (n=1)
- Ice storm (n=1)
- Maritime incident (n=1)
- Missing child (n=1)
- Winter storm (n=1)

Within the responses, the respondents only listed event types without providing specific details of the incident. While detailed information was not captured by the survey, the RDPC has previously recorded detailed accounts of the application of RDPC training to actual events.²²

In addition to training application, the survey also incorporated questions related to training diffusion. Training diffusion²³ is important within rural response agencies because an agency may only be able to send one individual to a training course instead of multiple individuals afforded by larger agencies. Once the training course is completed, the single individual then has the responsibility to diffuse the information to others

²² Rural Domestic Preparedness Consortium (2014). *Training to Action*. Richmond, KY: Eastern Kentucky University, Justice and Safety Center.

²³ Knowledge transfer that allows for the concept of *train one, train many*.

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within his/her agency or even multiple agencies within the community. One way diffusion can occur is through the development or updating of agency policies, procedures, and/or plans. Therefore, the survey included a specific question that asked respondents whether they have noticed or witnessed agencies within their jurisdiction or within rural areas of their

state developing and/or updating policies, procedures, or plans because of training received through federal training partners. Rather than providing descriptive accounts, the respondents primarily listed the types of policies, procedures, and/or plans that have been developed or updated as a result of the training, which are presented in Figure 23.

Figure 22: Training Delivery Improvement Suggestions

LTPOCs		SAA TPOCs	
Topic	# of Responses	Topic	# of Responses
Deliver courses on evening and weekends	7	Better coordination, communication, and information sharing between SAA and training provider	6
Better advertisement of available training programs and courses (to include site visits and possible smartphone application)	5	More training delivery flexibility for volunteer agencies (e.g., evenings and weekends, lower minimum course attendee requirements)	5
Provide more training deliveries despite known challenges (e.g., lack of funding to deliver course, deliver course regardless if it has recently been delivered in the region)	5	More outreach to SAA and local agencies to allow for knowledge of what is available	3
Eliminate or reduce the need to cancel deliveries due to low enrollment	4	Consolidated online registration system	2
Create an online central training course catalogue (which does not include shelved courses)	3		
Develop and deliver more advanced classes	3		

Figure 23: Policies, Procedures, and Plans Developed/Updated due to Received Training

LTPOCs		SAA TPOCs	
Topic	# of Responses	Topic	# of Responses
Emergency operations plan	10	Local jurisdictions are always updating plans and have received information that the training has been useful in that regard	3
Mass fatality plan	7	Unaware because this type of information is not collected by the SAA	3
School-based incident plan	7	Standard operating procedures	2
General preparedness and response protocols	6	Emergency operations center plan	1
Public health plan	5	Emergency operations plan	1
Public Information Officer plan	4	Media Protocols	1
Active shooter policies	3		
Hazardous materials plan	2		
Planned event plan	2		
Rail car incident response procedures	2		

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Discussion

The results of Phase I of the NRTNA produced valuable information from state and local officials with direct insight into rural training needs. Efforts by the research team at EKU to identify and develop an appropriate population for Phase I was achieved, which is exemplified by the fact that over two-thirds of the respondents indicated they oversaw training for their state and/or agency. Although the respondents provided a strong response rate compared to previous national assessments, there were noticeable geographical gaps in the responses, particularly in southwest, coastal southeast, and northeast regions for the SAA TPOCs. Further, ten states were not represented by rural LTPOC responses and four states were not represented by either group. Despite this limitation, the survey results provided valuable information for federal and state training organizations, especially in terms of rural training needs identification.

The top identified Core Capability-based rural training needs were *Operational Communications*, *Operational Coordination*, and *Planning*. Although *Operational Communications* and *Operational Coordination* received the most responses as a rural training need, *Planning* received the most #1 rankings by a considerable margin. Therefore, this illustrates that while *Planning* may not be perceived as a rural training need by everyone, those who do perceive it as a rural training need view it as possibly the most important need. This may be due to the increased emphasis on en-

gaging the Whole Community²⁴, which plays a major role in rural planning efforts as well as in all mission areas. As for *Operational Communications*, the continued need for interoperable voice and data communications across the United States may have resulted in the identification of this training need. Further, rural areas face resource constraints that create difficulties and shortcomings for response agencies in terms of staffing, equipment, and other resources, which can have a direct impact on operational communications abilities. Additionally, rural agencies face geography issues related to communications in which obtaining simple *operable communications* is sometimes difficult due to vast and, often times, sparsely populated areas that may be extremely challenging (e.g., mountains, marshlands, wilderness). Common conditions, constraints, and other aspects of emergency response in rural communities can also affect *Operational Coordination* capabilities due to possible large incident areas, mutual aid needed from surrounding communities, and a heavy reliance on volunteers. Heavy reliance on volunteers in rural communities as well as high employee turnover rates in rural agencies may also provide insight into why a heavier need/emphasis on continual training timeframes was indicated by both groups.

Other Core Capability-based rural training needs of note include results for *Community Resilience* and *Threat and Hazard Identification*. Although *Community Resilience* was not a top ten rural training need identified by the SAA TPOCs, it received the third most top three rankings in terms of importance across both groups. *Community Resilience* was the point of departure for the groups as the SAA TPOCs identified *Cybersecurity* as a top ten rural training need over *Community Resilience*. This may be explained by a federal-level focus on cybersecurity issues lately that have filtered to the state level. Based on the results, rural communities do not perceive cybersecurity as a top training need. As for *Threat and Hazard Identification*, this Core Capability was highly ranked by the rural LTPOCs (#4 training need), but ranked lower by the SAA TPOCs (#9 training need). This result may be due to state agencies being more familiar with the THIRA process due to the State Preparedness Report process and requirements.

Overall, the identified Core Capability-based rural training needs represent a significant departure from federal data as only *Mass Care Services* was identified as a top training need by both NRTNA respondent groups and the 2014 NPR. Furthermore, none of the top ten Core Capability-based rural training needs identified by this study are listed as a top ten training need within the 2015 NPR. This is not a surprising result as rural homeland security issues may not be apparent or reflected in aggregate national-level data such as reported in the NPR. This illustrates the important and significant value of the NRTNA as a mechanism to determine alignment (or misalignment) of the needs of rural communities with national priorities.

As for topical, threat, and hazard rural training needs, five specific areas were constantly identified by both groups as the highest need. There



²⁴Federal Emergency Management Agency (2011). *A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, Themes, and Pathways for Action* (FDOC 104-008-1). Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Management Agency.

areas were *active shooter, floods, hazardous materials, school safety, and severe weather*. Training needs related to floods, hazardous materials, and severe weather are understandable due to the repeated threat and actual occurrence of these events in rural areas. Active shooter and school safety training needs, however, may be based on recent events that illustrate a needed increase in mission area capabilities to address these events. This may also be compounded by the fact that RDPC's school safety courses continue to receive an increasing number of requests that cannot be fulfilled due to federal funding provisions that are based on rural training needs identified through the previous NRTNA conducted in 2009. Further, crisis and other communications areas and mass care were mentioned by respondents, which were both identified Core Capability-based training needs. Lastly, there was a low emphasis on training related to communicable diseases despite the 2014 Ebola outbreak.

When addressing known rural training needs, both groups indicated utilization of similar sources for obtaining training course/program information and specific training selection decision factors. An interesting result was the *reputation of the training provider or facility* was the least important training selection decision factor. Instead, *cost* and *topic of training* were the most important. The aspect of cost, both in terms of the training course and travel to the course, was also the top rural training barrier identified by both groups. This is consistent with previous national rural assessments that identified cost as a significant rural training barrier. In addition to cost, both group identified similar rural training barriers. Conversely, the two groups were divergent whether instructor-led training courses offered on evening and weekend schedules would provide greater training access. Despite the difference in perceived provision of access, those who confirmed greater access overwhelmingly indicated that evening and weekend training would assist the heavy presence of volunteers in rural agencies in obtaining needed training. The volunteer effect was also noted in training length preference in which almost three-quarters of all respondents indicated a preference for a training course length in the four to eight hour range. The volunteer effect, however, did not seem apparent in whether minimum course attendee requirements were a barrier to hosting training. In fact, over three-quarters of all respondents indicated that minimum course attendee requirements were not a barrier. Overall, the results illustrate that both groups referenced the need for training delivery flexibility (evening and weekend training; reduced minimum course attendee requirements) and more outreach to enable more insight as to what training courses and programs are available.

Overall, the Phase I results revealed a variety of rural training needs across the United States. Despite the variety, both groups identified similar rural training needs whether through analysis by the Core Capabilities or by perceived threats and hazards. In addition to rural training needs, both groups identified similar rural training barriers, training course/program information obtainment sources, and training selection decision factors. These similar cross group results illustrates that SAAs, who over-

see federal homeland security training for their respective state/territory, have appropriate insight into and knowledge of training needs and other training aspects within rural communities in their state/territory. The similar results across both groups also illustrate the validity and reliability of the survey and methodology.

Despite the successes of Phase I, there were noticeable limitations, such as low representation from certain geographical areas and states/territories and low numbers of submitted comments to open-ended questions. Further, additional questions would help to better understand divergent results. For example, those who felt that evening and weekend training would not provide greater training access were not given an opportunity to explain why (only those who answered in confirmation). Narrative comments from those who did not confirm potential greater access may have helped to further understand the results. Lastly, the low number of comments submitted to the three open-ended questions related to training delivery, application, and diffusion can also be perceived as a limitation. These three questions were placed at the end of the survey in which the low responses could be due to survey participation falloff.

Conclusion

Phase I of the NRTNA provided an opportunity to state and local officials with direct insight into training to voice their opinions on training needs within rural communities across the United States. Their voices and the data they provided are important to guide the direction of federal funding to support course development and delivery. While the identified rural training needs cut across all mission areas (prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery), both the rural LTPOCs and the SAA TPOCs identified similar rural training needs with similar ordering of importance. This illustrates understanding of rural training needs at the both the state and local level and provides actionable data to guide activities to fulfill rural training needs. Training that is developed and subsequently delivered without this understanding and representation from training audiences will not be effective, timely, or relevant. Through efforts such as the NRTNA, a more thorough understanding of rural homeland security needs can be achieved.

It must be noted that Phase I purposefully targeted a select group of individuals for the first part of the larger NRTNA. While not a very large group of respondents, the feedback they provided via the survey is extremely valuable. To obtain a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of rural training needs, the research team at EKU will be administering Phase II: National Rural County Needs Assessment in 2015. Part II will survey approximately 22,500 rural response agencies across 1,697 counties that are considered non-metropolitan according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (counties with an Urban Influence Code of 5 through 12²⁵). The entire NRTNA effort will result in a multivolume body of work that will achieve the most comprehensive understanding of rural homeland security training needs to date.

²⁵ For more information on Urban Influence Codes, please visit: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/urban-influence-codes/documentation.aspx>

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