

CAMPUS PROTESTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS: THE ROLE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

**Findings From a Critical Issues Forum of Campus
Public Safety Leaders**

**Coordinated by the
NATIONAL CENTER FOR CAMPUS PUBLIC SAFETY**

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THE ROLE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On November 10, 2017, campus public safety executives from 23 institutions of higher education (IHEs), with support from the National Center for Campus Public Safety (NCCPS), gathered in Long Beach, California, for a one-day forum. The purpose of the forum was to define the role of the emergency management program during the planning process for events likely to result in protests and demonstrations. The forum aligns with the NCCPS's role as a nationwide resource for addressing critical issues in campus safety.

The forum convened as part of the 2017 International Association of Emergency Managers Universities & Colleges Caucus Symposium in Long Beach, California, which took place November 10-15, 2017.

Facilitated discussions during the forum identified the most pressing coordination challenges that emergency management programs face when planning for and managing campus protests and demonstrations. It addressed 10 topic areas that IHEs must address in order to develop robust solutions that help emergency managers work more efficiently and effectively:

- Command and control
- Planning
- Operational communications
- External factors
- Violence
- Safety
- Secondary concerns
- Policies
- Media/crisis communications
- Business continuity and recovery

The participants generated recommendations for promising practices to address those challenges. Their discussion did not evaluate specific efforts or policies at particular institutions, nor did it evaluate individual emergency management programs.

The forum attendees discussed a broad array of factors, tactics, and strategies. A series of core principles emerged:

- Campus emergency management departments need more effective tools, trainings, and exercises to prepare for protests and demonstrations.
- Campus emergency management departments should be proactive in determining the appropriate ways to incorporate protests and demonstrations into their everyday mitigation and planning activities.
- Campus emergency management departments need a higher level of understanding, buy-in, and support from campus leaders.

BACKGROUND

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution provides one of America's most valued freedoms: the right to assemble. College campuses have long been places at which people have exercised this right, making them incubators, launch pads, and proving grounds for many of the country's most significant social and political changes.

Many IHEs welcome the protests and demonstrations that are often a part of these movements, though the events often carry a variety of risks. Violence may erupt, facilities could be damaged or become inaccessible, and unfavorable media coverage could damage reputations, for example. Revenue could shrink if parents, sponsors, alumni, or other groups decide to distance themselves from the IHE after a controversial gathering.

In turn, campus protests and demonstrations frequently require careful coordination, planning, and response tactics from emergency managers. However, significant challenges arise for emergency management teams when different groups of people gather during protests and demonstrations.

The goal of the NCCPS forum was to discuss these challenges and uncover promising practices for addressing them so that local and campus emergency managers can coordinate more closely and efficiently.

Key questions included:

- How and why should emergency managers elevate their presence and authority in the planning process?
- What can emergency managers do to cope with unpredictable circumstances and external factors before, during, and after a protest?
- What can emergency managers do to secure and provide additional training, better tools, and improved planning abilities?

Established in 2013, the NCCPS is a clearinghouse for information, research, training, promising practices, and emerging issues in campus public safety. The NCCPS's mission is to provide useful resources and information to support safer campus communities. To this end, the NCCPS works to connect campus public safety officers, professional association members, advocates, community leaders, and others to improve and expand services to those who are charged with providing a safe environment for the nation's campus communities.

Amendment I, U.S. Constitution

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

DISCUSSION

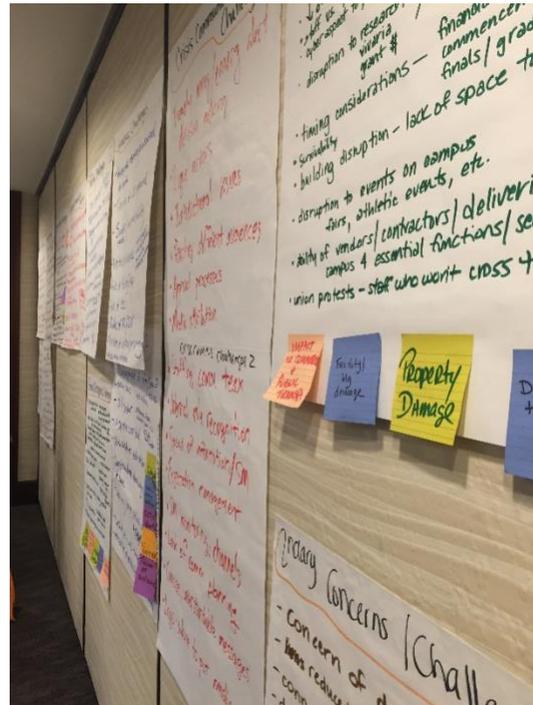
When large groups of people gather on campus and begin calling for change, emergency managers often have a lot to think about:

- Who is in charge if things get out of control? Is it the mayor? The local chief of police? Campus security?
- What is the role of the local police both on and off campus during the event?
- How can emergency managers communicate efficiently when it comes to planning for and responding to incidents during campus protests?
- How can emergency managers plan better for the media coverage, potential violence, business continuity, and other risks associated with campus protests and demonstrations?

Of course, those are just a few of the questions that forum participants said IHEs have when they are planning for, managing, or responding to campus protests and demonstrations. Their broader concerns fall into 10 categories:

- Command and control
- Effective planning
- Operational communications
- External factors
- Violence
- Safety
- Secondary concerns
- Policies
- Media/crisis communications
- Business continuity and recovery

Working through each of these key challenges, the forum participants evaluated potential solutions for helping campus emergency planners coordinate effectively and efficiently. This section summarizes their discussion surrounding the challenges within each category. It is important to note that although recovery is an area of concern, the forum's primary focus was on planning for protests and demonstrations.



Challenge category #1: Complex leadership demands

Campus protests and demonstrations often expose a variety of competing needs and priorities on and off campus.

Unclear chains of command. Often, there's confusion about which specific duties fall to campus police versus municipal, county, or other law enforcement authorities during campus protests, especially with regard to matters of crowd control, security, and traffic.

The confusion only adds to the chaos, risk, and expense of demonstrations that become violent or create other problems.

Exclusion. Forum participants said that emergency management departments are often left entirely out of IHE planning and communications loops, forcing emergency managers to spend precious time and resources on educating (or re-educating) various groups on and off campus about the National Incident Management System and the emergency management department's presence and role.

Underdeveloped protocols. Forum participants said IHEs often neglect to establish escalation criteria to help determine when it's time for local authorities to assist. Even when IHEs do take the time to establish those protocols, they often do not have enough people trained in their use. Many IHEs are also coping with the various consequences of having sworn or nonsworn officers respond inconsistently to campus protests.

Challenge category #2: Lack of planning resources

Forum participants said IHEs frequently aren't able to create adequate plans for campus protests. There were several reasons.

Some aren't sure how to do it. Many participants stated that IHEs often provide little or no incident command system (ICS) training to employees. IHEs that do provide ICS training typically only offer it to first responders. In addition, many IHEs overlook contingencies and fail to notice or address campus policies that create planning challenges.

Some don't know whom to involve. Forum participants said that a lack of communication among the right parties before a protest occurs often leads to poor engagement with the community, with IHE departments, with protestors, or with counter-protestors before, during, or after the event. This in turn can create confusion, hurt morale, and add expense. IHEs that are especially "siloe" may be especially vulnerable to these consequences. Not having defined roles for emergency operations centers (EOCs) — if the IHEs have them — during protests and demonstrations can add to the confusion.

Some don't have the resources. Participants reported that due to staff shortages and workloads, emergency management departments frequently do not have enough time to plan well for an event. They sometimes neglect to take advantage of external planning resources simply because they don't know they're available. Additionally, some said IHEs often aren't sure what "good planning" really looks like. Participants also wished for access to reusable planning templates.

Heard in the forum:
"Sometimes you have to involve people who just aren't used to protests. They don't think about what could go wrong, who should speak, what should be allowed. Getting people into the process and understanding it is a big challenge."

In addition to time shortages, funding shortages are a perennial issue. Forum participants reported that campus police departments often resist being solely responsible for the entire bill for planning and response to campus demonstrations. This may force difficult discussions about internal policies and the financial responsibilities of other departments or groups.

Challenge category #3: Communications struggles before, during, and after an event

Forum participants reported that IHEs encounter a variety of challenges relaying information before, during, and after campus protests take place.

Inadequate tools. Many communication problems revolve around the mechanics of transferring information. Forum participants said that outdated equipment, old technology, and incompatible systems or infrastructures often hinder emergency management communications. Additionally, training is an issue; not all IHEs have staff members who are adept at using social media and other technologies to message with various parties on and off campus.

Relationship-based data access. Many IHEs described themselves as “siloed,” meaning that campus departments or groups tend to retain information within their groups rather than share it. This kind of cultural behavior can put emergency managers and EOCs at a disadvantage. As a result, emergency managers may become aware of information solely because they’ve developed personal relationships with certain people in other departments or in local law enforcement. In turn, access to important information becomes dependent on personal vacation schedules, relationship status, or the employment status of specific individuals.

Further, forum participants noted that IHEs commonly become fixated on communications with fire and police, overlooking other important parties. Facilities managers, for example, might interact with protestors, but IHEs often fail to include them in the planning process and communications.

Heard in the forum:

“We can get the local police department to do raids, but we have to wait for the VP of student services to talk to the provost, communications team, and the president to ensure the ‘message is positive.’”

Too many decision-makers. Several forum participants said that all too often, many IHEs struggle to respond rapidly to campus protests simply because their own policies require multiple sign-offs on decisions and messages. These communications delays can damage an IHE’s reputation with protestors, student governments, parents, and the community, and they can inhibit the dissemination of accurate and up-to-date information, which could exacerbate injuries and damage.

Lack of MOUs with first responders. Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between IHEs and first responders often detail how and where teams should communicate during an event, who can participate in investigations of crimes that

happen during protests, and how groups will share information. However, participants said many IHEs don't have MOUs in place. Others struggle to delineate the duties of nonsworn officers versus sworn officers in their MOUs.

Challenge category #4: Unpredictable external factors

Forum participants noted that emergency management teams frequently must work with people and groups that do not report to them or that are not directly associated with the IHE. In turn, during campus protests and demonstrations, several situations can threaten an IHE's ability to manage or control an event, including:

- Outside organizers, official political groups, or hired protestors arriving at the event
- Groups with other issues overtaking the event
- Appearances or participation by politicians, celebrities, or other high-profile people
- Involvement from third-party security teams hired by protestors, speakers, or other parties
- Intense media coverage
- Misinformation quickly spreading via social media
- Clandestine event planning among groups, leaving emergency managers with little or no idea how many people will attend the protest or where they will go during the event

Challenge category #5: Threat of violence

This was understandably one of the biggest concerns forum participants had regarding the role of emergency management in campus protests and demonstrations. The issues fall into three categories.

Inadequate alert tools. IHEs often do not have tools in place to notify communities quickly that violence has occurred or is occurring. Forum participants reported that campus dispatchers and call centers regularly get overloaded during these events as well, further slowing the relay of information and response. Judgment about who should be on which notification lists varies considerably, as do opinions about whether and how different groups of people should be informed. Poor alert tools also create cumbersome after-action reporting.

Lack of adequate response policies. The nature of the violence during a protest will in many instances dictate how emergency management teams respond. As a result, IHEs often need multiple plans for various possible incidents. Forum participants said that these response plans and policies do not always exist, and that when violence does occur, emergency management departments are often pushed aside.

Short-term thinking. Forum participants perceived that violence often causes enrollment to decline, which in turn may dramatically affect an IHE's budget. Few IHEs think that far ahead and do not incorporate those possibilities into their planning.

Challenge category #6: Safety issues

One of the fundamental goals of emergency management is to ensure safety and prevent injury. As the forum members noted, however, campus protests and demonstrations can present significant safety threats. Emergency management teams face two challenges in this area.

Crowd management. Forum participants said crowd dynamics are often very unpredictable, making it hard for IHEs to anticipate when, for example, protestors will go around or over barricades, or where they will create barriers to emergency vehicles trying to access protest sites. Further, IHEs frequently find themselves short on personnel to staff events that last longer than expected.

Unanticipated consequences. IHEs can lose valuable staff time if faculty or staff members are injured in protests or demonstrations. IHEs that do not have mass casualty plans leave themselves especially vulnerable. Safety incidents can also require additional resources to manage rumors and media coverage, and this can drain funding.

Challenge category #7: Unanticipated secondary concerns

Forum participants stressed that campus protests and demonstrations can have a variety of indirect effects on IHEs. Though these concerns typically fall to IHE vice presidents and executives rather than emergency management teams, forum participants said that IHEs that do not anticipate or plan for two specific secondary concerns may be at a significant disadvantage.

Enrollment issues. IHEs that experience violent, controversial, or frequent protests and demonstrations may experience drops in enrollment, fewer sponsorships and donations, and/or more student transfers out of the school, all of which can have significant and long-term financial consequences.

Staffing issues. IHEs that experience violent, controversial, or frequent protests and demonstrations may have trouble attracting and retaining talent if workers negatively associate the IHEs with the issues that are the topic of the protests.

Challenge category #8: Contradictory policies

Policies don't just give IHEs a path for handling certain situations; they provide consistency and predictability in day-to-day activities. Policies are thus particularly important when IHEs are the sites of protests and demonstrations. However, several hurdles keep many IHEs from creating or optimizing policies that help emergency managers better cope with campus protests.

Conflicting goals. Academic missions and goals may sometimes conflict with emergency management's missions and goals. IHEs sometimes fail to consider these differences, thereby exacerbating the tension between teams, slowing down the planning process, and costing more money.

Differing school characteristics. Emergency management policies that work for private institutions don't always work for public institutions. Private IHEs, for example, can make different choices about closing campuses; likewise, public institutions sometimes have more funding sources available. Policies that address protests and emergency management must consider these differences.



Cultural battles. Forum participants reported that some staff and faculty groups may resist policy-making. Others may not fully appreciate the difference between policies and local laws and ordinances when it comes to enforcement. Additionally, participants said that “policy fatigue” at some IHEs may mean new emergency management policies carry little weight.

Execution problems. Forum participants reported frequent confusion about which parties should create and endorse emergency management policies, as well as who should keep them up-to-date so that policies address current issues and needs. They also reported concerns that IHEs often create emergency management policies after the fact, and those policies are sometimes so rigid that they don't apply in many other circumstances.

Challenge category #9: Weaknesses in media and crisis communications

Forum participants indicated that this is one of the most complex challenges associated with campus protests and demonstrations. The complexities revolve around three themes.

Slow response time. News and information travels rapidly, and that is especially true when campus protests occur. Forum participants reported that the public often expects IHEs to be ahead of the news at all times — especially on social media — and provide commentary, statements, or responses quickly on social media and in other channels. The participants also reported, however, that IHE senior leaders often want to pre-approve messages from the IHEs, which consumes time and can make the messages less effective.

Heard in the forum:
“We are dealing with a population that is so awash in information all their lives that they’re expecting us to be suppliers of information at that bandwidth.”

Lack of teamwork. Several participants reported that “rogue actors” who speak with a university voice but are actually not sanctioned by the university to speak to the media (e.g., faculty members, department heads, other employees) may surface. Other times, IHEs may want to issue a message or response but are discouraged from doing so by local authorities. In some cases, IHEs lack staff with crisis-communications skills.

Controlling where the media will be on campus and what reporters will see is also difficult for many IHEs.

Cumbersome decision-making. Forum members said IHE leaders sometimes have trouble deciding when to send emergency alerts. Additionally, they struggle at times to follow regulations and comply with community expectations at the same time. Writing the messages themselves can involve making tough decisions because people must agree on what the call to action should be, and they must ensure that the messages are in plain language.

Challenge category #10: Not enough focus on business continuity and recovery

Last but not least, participants noted that protests and demonstrations can interrupt or shut down campus operations. In turn, emergency management teams face a variety of challenges regarding business continuity and recovery.

No plans for instruction relocation. IHEs often have no plans in place regarding when, how, and where else they could hold classes if protestors overtake buildings or render them unusable for a time. Forum participants said that suspending teaching for a long period of time or an inability to issue grades could have severe, long-term financial consequences for IHEs that rely on financial aid disbursements, for example.

No plans for administrative relocation. Many IHEs have no plans in place regarding when, how, and where they can maintain regular accounting, payroll, legal services, admissions, housing and food services, or other functions if protestors overtake certain buildings or render them unusable for a time. Additionally, some do not have plans for managing vendors who are unable or unwilling to deliver critical supplies during or after a protest.

No plans for research relocation. IHEs often have no plans in place regarding when, how, and where they can relocate research activities, animals, specimens, essential equipment, and other critical research infrastructure in the event that buildings are overtaken or rendered unusable for a time.

No plans for community event relocation. IHEs often have no plans in place regarding when, how, and where they can relocate athletic events, conferences, camps, gatherings, concerts, or other events if buildings are overtaken or rendered unusable for a time. Sponsors and supporters may withhold funding for fear of being associated with the protest.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

The forum participants agreed that three things can significantly help IHEs address the challenges they face regarding protests and demonstrations:

1. Better planning, training, and exercises
2. More internal capacity
3. Cultural buy-in and support for emergency management

Heard in the forum:

“We just need to know what we have, what we need, and where to get it.”

Better Planning, Training, and Exercises

Emergency management requires an extraordinary level of coordination and an ability to translate technical information into useful and meaningful risk assessments, mitigation strategies, response tactics, continuity plans, and after-action reports.

More formalized planning processes. Forum participants said emergency managers must encourage their IHEs to establish and maintain incident management teams (IMTs) that have ICS training. IHEs should have crisis management teams that meet and coordinate regularly. They must find or create templates that make event planning more streamlined and more effective, and they must make efforts to establish MOUs with internal and external partners. Additionally, they must create incident flow charts and implementation instructions that are easy to understand and are disseminated to the right people. Emergency management teams should also participate in planning meetings before events to discuss and establish priorities.

Increased frequency of training. Forum participants said that conducting trainings and tabletop exercises frequently will give emergency managers and policy-makers a chance to improve their plans and incorporate new scenarios. This in turn increases the likelihood that an IHE and its community will be ready to respond appropriately to campus protests and demonstrations.

Appropriate equipment. Forum participants said emergency managers need adequate tools to support an event. This includes things such as radios, mobile command vehicles, and modern communications and alerting technology.

More Internal Capacity

Forum participants said emergency management teams should incorporate protests and demonstrations into their everyday mitigation and planning activities. Additionally, they must establish themselves as campus leaders in planning for protests and demonstrations.

Heard in the forum:

“That’s part of our job — help synthesize what our roles are and what we bring to the table.”

Synthesize expectations. Forum participants said emergency management teams have to be more assertive about defining the roles of those involved during a protest event, including responders and EOC members, and they must ensure that senior leaders are aware of those responsibilities. More education and outreach to the campus

community about the department's protest procedures and how to protest effectively are part of the effort.

Focus on engagement. Emergency managers are coordinators and translators. IHEs thus must be sure emergency managers have the authority to involve key stakeholders, including law enforcement and nontraditional partners, in planning and exercises. Furthermore, they must define how responders and emergency managers should interact with protest and counter-protest organizers. Prioritizing the safety of and respect for these organizers helps control perceptions about the IHE's stance and communications.

Demonstrate subject matter expertise. Forum participants said emergency management teams must get involved at the highest levels in order to establish themselves as leaders in planning for protests and demonstrations. This may include organizing planning meetings with stakeholders; creating or chairing IHE events committees; taking the lead in collaborating with city, county, or state emergency management teams; working independently to enhance relationships with external partners; facilitating discussions about procedures; and creating multiagency coordination groups.

Cultural Buy-In and Support for Emergency Management

Forum participants said emergency management departments must change the way their IHEs perceive the emergency management function and the value of the planning work they need to do.

More outreach to senior leaders. Emergency management teams must ensure that IHE leaders understand what emergency planning is, how it works, and what it requires.

Heard in the forum:
"It is amazing how much data we have collected about what it really costs us to be reactive instead of proactive."

Cause-and-effect analysis. Emergency management teams must teach IHE leaders about the financial and reputational costs of not planning for protests and demonstrations.

Policy-making leadership. Emergency management teams can help ensure that IHEs place more value on appropriate planning efforts by getting involved with groups responsible for developing IHE policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants defined a number of promising practices that emergency managers can implement to better coordinate protests and demonstrations.

Planning

- ✓ **Justify the plan.** Emergency managers should make a case to senior leaders for step-by-step planning for demonstrations and protests, so that everyone understands why it is needed.
- ✓ **Identify all the players.** In advance of planned and anticipated events, emergency managers should identify the key players to ensure all the relevant parties are involved. They should also establish memorandums of understanding or memorandums of agreement with parties as necessary.
- ✓ **Be explicit in the plan.** Emergency managers should use their planning efforts to determine:
 - Protest times and routes.
 - Suitable venues for certain types of speech.
 - Whether and how the IHE will provide security for VIPs.
 - Why protestors are protesting.
 - Where the neutral, separation boundaries are in order to minimize structural damage.
 - Where barricades will be.
 - Whether and where there will be a “safe zone” from which the media can observe rather than roam the crowd.
 - Whether any of the protestors are paid and how the IHE will engage with them.
 - How and where emergency vehicles can enter and exit the area.
 - How the fire department, local police, and emergency managers will triage the area if violence or damage occurs.
 - Which departments will pay for officer overtime and other costs, as well as how they will document those costs.
 - Under what circumstances (e.g., impeding fire access, fire lanes, physical violence) the IHE hands off leadership to local authorities.
- ✓ **Clearly define the responsibilities.** In their plans, emergency managers should clearly state everyone’s responsibilities before, during, and after the event to avoid confusion.
- ✓ **Keep the plan up-to-date.** Emergency managers should schedule for regular updates of their plans, of the frameworks, and of the people involved.

*“Preparedness is defined by DHS/FEMA as ‘a continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, exercising, evaluating, and taking corrective action in an effort to ensure effective coordination during incident response.’ This cycle is one element of a broader National Preparedness System to prevent, respond to, and recover from natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other disasters.”**



**<https://www.dhs.gov/topic/plan-and-prepare-disasters>*

- ✓ **Schedule time for after-action reporting.** After the event takes place, it is important to conduct a gap analysis to determine where the IHE performed well and where its deficiencies are.

Organization

- ✓ **Require a seat at the table.** Ensure that the emergency management program in general is in the right part of the IHE's organization chart. Whether the department is part of campus police versus environmental health and safety can make a big difference in what is prioritized and how plans are administered.
- ✓ **Double-check attendee lists.** Analyze who else needs to be at the table for specific events, including trainings or meetings, in order to strengthen collaborative relationships with internal and external stakeholders.
- ✓ **Meet regularly with stakeholders.** This emphasizes who is part of the "core group" for planning and response purposes, and it makes others aware of the technical expertise available to the rest of the team.

Communications

- ✓ **Disseminate the plan.** Share the plan as much as possible so that appropriate parties all across the IHE know the plan (and the planners) exist, making them more likely to consult with the plan and with emergency managers.
- ✓ **Invest in outreach.** Emergency managers must make a concerted, organized effort to reach out to the campus community about what to do if they're part of a protest/counter-protest or affected in any way.
- ✓ **Know what to say.** Emergency managers should work with the president's office, as well as the student affairs, marketing, and communications teams to build prescribed messages that they can have on hand in order to ensure rapid response as needed during a protest. Additionally, IHEs should develop protest education materials for the campus community and have processes in place to inform the community that an upcoming event may affect their regular routine.

Training, Tools, and Exercises

- ✓ **Establish specific training for protests.** Emergency managers should train senior leaders, campus partners (including communications staff, event management staff, and student affairs staff), EOC members, and responders (external and internal) in matters specifically related to protests and demonstrations. Part of that training should include helping people determine when to involve the emergency management department.
- ✓ **Develop and/or add a demonstration module to training programs.** This would include information about incident action planning, operation coordination, communications for operations and crises, continuity considerations, roles and responsibilities, and education and outreach.
- ✓ **Incorporate the training into the hiring process.** Onboarding and orientation is the best time to implement this, when a new employee's perceptions about the IHE's culture are forming. Emergency management teams that instill this thinking early on in an employee's tenure increase their chances of meaningful support later.