

**Minutes of NE-TF1 Stakeholder Group Meeting**  
**January 4, 2022**

**11:30 a.m.** Program Manager Thavenet opened the meeting.

**ATTENDEES:** Thavenet, Schneider, T.Reed, Engler, Cunningham, Kluthe, Majors, Ripley, Forney, Sabatka, TJ Reed, Spath, Kirchofer, S.Brown, Wirth, Buettner, Papik, Meyer, Gage

**SYSTEM/BRANCH UPDATE (Thavenet):**

**Extension on GM 2021.** The terms of members serving on US&R Advisory groups have been extended through the April 2023 due to Covid19. (Kirchofer, Mueller, Schneider, Kluthe, Thavenet, Majors)

**Covid19 Protocols:** New Covid19 protocols have had a significant effect on meetings, training & deployments. The new protocols cover vaccine & mask requirements, and guidance on social media posts. Make sure any photos taken/posted are of individuals who are following FEMA Covid19 protocols.

Meetings/Training stopped at the National level since March 2020. Branch staff is still working remotely through potentially the end of Feb, beginning of March. It could be longer with new variants probable.

There have been discussions and plans at the National level to get training and meeting started again, but this was also halted due to omicron. The only classes scheduled so far in 2022 are classes that State and local agencies sponsor as “FEMA equivalent” training. The Program Branch recently put out classroom safety guidelines that must be followed for any gatherings utilizing federal funds.

The City of Lincoln has different protocols for employees vs. the public. Cloth masks require two masks vs. N95. We are working through all the requirements.

**NE-TF1 UPDATES (Thavenet):**

**HSART:** There has been a change of leadership at the Air Guard. The new Colonel in charge of the HSART program hasn't pushed forward with the program; as a result, our members weren't able to meet requirements for flight times. NE-TF1 initiated a meeting to get back on track; one additional joint training occurred after that meeting, but we haven't heard anything since then. Flight crews don't know what happened either. The Air Guard spent \$30k on gear, but the colonel has not authorized additional joint training opportunities. NEMA is perplexed as well as they would like it to be part of their operating plan.

**ARE:** An administrative readiness evaluation was initially scheduled for NE-TF1 in 2021 but was canceled due to the program office falling behind on deployment reimbursements. They re-directed all staff to re-focus on processing deployment reimbursements to reduce the backlog. There have been discussions of re-scheduling in 2022, but not sure how that will happen under the current circumstances. When we hear that it is occurring, we may reach out to members of this group for support/assistance.

**Canine Update (Wirth):** In September, NE-TF1 notified the search dog foundation that we will have a couple of K9s retiring. We have been in discussions with a K9 handler in Iowa who is a Veterinarian about joining our task force. She has already attended some NE-TF1 K9 training, and they are familiar with our handlers. We want to fast-track them on and do additional succession planning.

Four K9's retired this year, three handlers going for recertification in April in TN (potentially). I am hoping to get two additional K9 from the Search Dog Foundation. We are still trying to plan for the next four

years, so we will still be looking for Live find K9's and handlers. If anyone knows someone interested in becoming a K9 handler, get them in touch with Damon. We would also like to get more LF&R or OFD handlers. The only out-of-pocket expenses for handlers with SDF dogs is essentially dog food and fuel to get to training.

**K9 New Business (Wirth):**

**CE:** Damon suggested NE-TF1 look into the possibility of NE-TF1 hosting a CE in 2023, if possible.

**3<sup>RD</sup> & South:** A big "Thank you" to Ashley Engler, Mark Majors, & Brian Wojtasek for working to provide new training props at 3<sup>rd</sup> and South. We now have state of the art agility course.

**SuperFit hosting:** The next event is planned for Tulsa. Brad would also like to look into hosting another one of these. It is an excellent advertisement to get the interest of potential K9 handlers.

**NE-TF1's February 18<sup>th</sup> training:** planned for a location in Iowa.

**Search Dog Foundation Open Training:** The SDF is trying to get NE-TF1 K9 teams to attend open training this next Oct/Sept. and participate in invitational training where NE-TF1 would host the training in California. This concept is still in its infancy. SDF will even cover travel expenses for non-FDS dogs to attend in October.

**Q:** Damon asked if all handlers/dogs should attend the SDF open training at once, or do we need to leave some back here in case of deployment? Brad didn't see an issue with all handlers going at once. If an event occurred, they could fly from their location and meet up with the task force, or there are also opportunities for resource sharing if needed.

**Q:** Is there any additional information out on cadaver part storage? Brad and Ashley reported there is no further information to provide at this time. The Program Branch is working on a PD/GM, but nothing has come out yet.

**Covid19 Vaccine Mandate (Thavenet/Engler):** Essentially, you must be vaccinated to even come into the building. The unvaccinated can't deploy, and we can't spend federal funds on anyone not vaccinated. They do not qualify for federal worker's comp even if they trip on the steps. We don't anticipate any exceptions will be approved.

**How this has impacted NE-TF1:** Eighteen unvaccinated members have left the team due to this mandate. The most significant impact was felt with RSP.

The current challenge we are facing is no training is being provided at a federal level. (TDS) is a temporary deployable status that allows a member who has met all requirements, except a FEMA training course due to it not being available. For rostering purposes, they can still deploy as long as they are matched with a seasoned individual that can mentor them.

Many STM, PTM/TIS, LSP, and MTM are also awaiting training. PTM training is scheduled to be held internally. If there is no national training, we may also need to increase proficiency training to familiarize newer members with position responsibilities.

We want to keep our member totals between 172 & 183 due to gear & equipment limitations.

**Deficiencies & Solicitation of New Members (Thavenet/Engler):**

**The financial impact of putting on a Structural Collapse course internally (Thavenet):** It is a significant impact however, money has been budgeted; it just depends on the size of the class, how big of an effect, and if budgeted amounts would cover that.

**A survey went out earlier this year to determine the needs of the task force (Engler):** Due to a lack of FEMA training opportunities, the task force hasn't incurred any significant expenses training most of the people who joined NE-TF1 in the last two years. If they are interested in another area, we are at a point that this would be a good time to transfer because the expense to the task force would be minimal. The same goes for bringing on people who have already received some of their required training through their local agency. That would put them higher on the list to get on the team. Nine current members have expressed interest in transferring to RSP.

**Process for bringing on new members (Engler):** Solicitations will occur in February, and in March, the group of stakeholders that are here today will review/approve members from those applications. Potential members must then receive final approval from their primary agency.

**Two significant shortages (Engler):** HazMat and RSP. We need to be thinking about succession planning. Part of that will be keeping in mind what size class can be safely held. STC course looking at from max of 15 people.

Alternate positions are considered for deployment by roster color order.

When it comes to open solicitation, we need to identify our needs and only solicit for those positions. We will need to determine exact numbers during that process dependent on the applications received and the cost of training that needs to be provided. It currently looks like we should solicit for HSP and RSP. Positions generally held by civilians or participating agency personnel (e.g. HRS/Comms) can be better filled outside the open solicitation process.

**OCONUS Deployments:** Stems from Puerto Rico deployment. NE-TF1 is covering Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. PEK= pre-positioned kits are in the process of being positioned in Puerto Rico and Hawaii. Once positioned, Task Forces that deploy to those areas will only need to pack their fly-away kits. Carriers are contracted at the National level; Task Forces have to come up with their own load plans.

**Q:** Could we encounter passport issues? (Thavenet) The team would likely go through a reception center or could just be verified by State Department. They are still working through that issue.

**MTM from UNMC (Thavenet):** Still working to finalize an agreement.

**Manager's Minute (Thavenet):** We have not been getting these out as often as we would like. Do you see value in these? What frequency is preferred? It was determined there is value in putting out the Manager's Minute and that quarterly would be adequate. It provides members with a pulse check of the program and keeps civilian members engaged. Ashley also noted that members are encouraged to submit pictures of any training they have participated in for use in the Manager's Minute.

**Ida AAR Comments (Thavenet):** Brad reported that he reviews all comments and summarizes them in the after-action. All comments are reviewed and put into an action tracker. At some point, we will address/identify the status or how issues were/are being addressed. He thought it would take too much

time to review them at this meeting today. Copies of all AAR's submitted to FEMA can be viewed on our member's only page of the task force website.

## **TRAINING (Engler)**

**Scheduled Away Training:** Only two individuals are currently scheduled to travel. They are attending LTM training. The training calendar is located on the member's only page of the website. Rescue training is the only training announcement that is sent to everyone. Ashley also noted that anyone could attend Technician level training to observe, but not everyone will be allowed to participate in the training out of safety concerns.

**Local Training:** Ashley reported she is shooting for quality over quantity when it comes to local training. An SCT course has been planned as part of a larger FSE for Spring of 2023, but it won't be as large as a traditional FSE. She would like to use Logistics more to set props during training to better use instructor time. We also want to focus on succession planning for instructors, getting them more training and experience to bring back to the team. We would like to include all disciplines in the next SCT training (MSP, LSP, SOF).

Let Ashley know what you want to see in training. She will assist with putting together logistics/safety plans etc. to help instructors facilitate training courses.

**Promotional Process:** Ashley & Mark Majors have been working to iron out this process. Their plan is to start with RTM, looking at three phases based on feedback from current Manager's, and TFL's. Promotions will not be based on agency rank. NE-TF1 has to have a defendable promotion process. We need to justify professional development and training opportunities some individuals will receive over others. Ashley will send out a draft of the process for feedback from this stakeholder group. The ultimate purpose is to provide a path to IST participation as Division Group Supervisor.

To hold a position on the IST, task books must be completed to ensure capable, qualified individuals hold positions supported with federal funding. NE-TF1 is proactive with developing our internal process as we expect that FEMA will implement something similar very soon.

**Leadership Academy planned:** L290 is a path from fellowship to leadership. We are working on getting certification for that. Also, we would like to teach position-specific documentation requirements for deployments.

**Div. Grp Sup Class:** is taking place here next week. It is a difficult class to get into, but if you are interested, get signed up. If you ever plan to participate on the IST or hold a TFL position, both require this course. It's also useful for PTM as they regularly communicate with the Div. Grp Sup. during deployments.

**Computer-Based Training:** CBTs are being reassigned to all members who have not completed them in the past three years. Due to Covid19, training opportunities have been scarce for over a year. This will help individuals keep their knowledge current. Not all positions have CBTs, but it will be required over the next year if there is one for the position. Members will have a sizeable amount of time to complete the training, but there will be a reasonable deadline. Completion will play into deployment priority. We recommend individuals make job-aids based on this training. Afterward, we will request member feedback by position to determine how often training needs to be completed. If you have alternate positions, you should meet the requirement for your primary position first, by the deadline, and then work

on the CBTs for your alternate positions at your leisure. You can't deploy in an alternate position if you haven't completed the CBT for that position, so it is recommended you do eventually complete CBTs for all of your task force positions.

NE-TF1 will be accepting more WRS. We are not sure how many yet. We are allowed 40 WRS due to the amount of gear we have. All current members are eligible to take the watermanship test.

#### **LOGISTICS (T.Reed):**

**SCBA** backpacks are at the end of their service life and need to be replaced. Scott came out with an S3 specific to US&R. We put it out for bid through the City. After bids were received, we were notified that NIOSH certifications hadn't been received on the S3 yet. These will need to be put out for bid again once Scott obtains the certifications. In the meantime, we are in a holding pattern.

**PAPARS** are also out of date. Todd has been trying to work with 3M but not getting responses.

**Comms Trailer:** We are exploring a Communications trailer purchase. It should be out for bid in the next couple of weeks. This will change how we convoy. We will need to eliminate one of the gator trailers if we purchase a comms trailer to stay in compliance with convoy standards. He can't guarantee we can get the gator in this new trailer and may need to eliminate one forklift. We may replace the two older gator trailers with one 20' aluminum trailer instead. We are considering all options. The task force does have some CARES\$ that we could utilize for these types of purchases.

**Passenger Van:** We will be looking at replacing US&R 2 with a passenger van as a people mover, which will reduce the number of vehicles we need to rent. We hope to keep US&R 2, possibly sell it to LF&R, and then borrow it back if we need it to transport people during a deployment.

**GSA Federal Property:** We had several pieces of equipment, trailers, flatbeds, a van that were owned by FEMA but provided to NE-TF1 over a decade ago. Todd was able to work through the process, and this equipment is finally off our books. We are just waiting for the feds to finish their process.

**OFD Separated Member Gear:** Todd asked if OFD personnel in attendance could facilitate gear retrieval from OFD members separating from the task force. Matt Meyer will work to coordinate with OFD task force members on this.

**LTM Move:** Todd is in the process of transferring back to a rig on LF&R. He is going to try to continue working to support NE-TF1 Logistics during his off time and will remain the primary contact for now. They will likely need some additional LTM/LSP support following this transition.

#### **US&R SPECIALIST (Cunningham)**

**AT&T FirstNet:** Nic reported we are encountering problems switching from the City cellular provider to AT&T. He is hopeful this can be completed soon. The switch is a result of AT&T being awarded the federal contract to develop FirstNet. FirstNet should provide better coverage in hurricane areas. Part of this contract obligates AT&T to respond to disaster areas within 24 hours to repair any damaged systems that can be used to support task force communications.

**Tech Items:** Nic encouraged everyone to familiarize themselves with tech-related to their positions, e.g. Microsoft Office, Zoom, Google Drive, Survey 123, how to access passwords, etc. These are the systems FEMA operates in. There have also been additional medical tech purchases, and we have new plotters for PTM. Nic will better attempt to communicate new software that we implement or tech purchases to keep members in the know.

**Telegram:** Brad stated we plan to continue to use Telegram because it is the platform of choice with the IST. We plan to roll out some additional directions to utilize the platform for communication so that members don't become desensitized to notifications.

**Round Table Discussion:** Brad encouraged stakeholders to reach out to others in their discipline to see if they have any needs or feedback and bring those back to this group to address.

### **ROUND TABLE / PENDING ITEMS / DISCUSSION:**

#### **Command & General Staff Input:**

**Ripley (TFL):** Logistics is in pretty good shape. Do need to continue to look at vehicle replacement and upgrades to large movers. FEMA is working on a capital improvement plan at the federal level that may earmark some funding for big rig replacement. Todd has done a great job organizing the warehouse and thanked him for his efforts.

**Forney (PTM):** What was the resolution to Survey123 password management? We are only allowed three tries at a password before it locks us out. We need to identify a process to manage this and document where passwords are located and who should access them. Brad reported he is working through this issue and has a couple of ideas. He will continue to work to codify the process, and once it is nailed down, he will push that information out.

**Sabatka (SOF):** He suggested we put additional effort into getting the word out about the positive changes and positive culture the task force has achieved within the past few years. Matt Meyer added he could facilitate getting some information out internally at OFD if needed.

#### **Operations Input:**

**Majors (RTM):** Mark reported a lot of work is coming up this year. They are trying to integrate Logistics into more training courses. We would also like to lean into logistics during structural collapse training in 2023. He is working with Ashley to design an improved training site at 3<sup>rd</sup> and South. Ashley added they would like Damon Wirth to be a part of that process.

**Kirchofer (HTM):** Dave stated he felt working to improve the morale of team members is always important. He would like to focus more on member morale to maintain positive interactions throughout the task force.

**TJ (STM):** He has been working with Ashley and Todd over the past several months to identify more hands-on training opportunities for STM's.

**Wirth (CSS):** Damon asked if he needs to go through Todd or someone else regarding equipment/purchases requested by K9 or handlers? Brad recommended they continue to go through Todd. Todd asked they send him specific info on what they want to purchase to speed up the process.

**Buettner (STS):** Engineers have some additional skillsets that could likely be utilized in non-collapse deployment environments. If engineers can be utilized as a part of any other training opportunity they would be happy to participate. Brad agrees 100% and intends to offer engineers the opportunity to participate in Planning and TIS training.

**Brown (MSP):** Steve conveyed safety concerns he has heard regarding overnight convoys, driving straight through the night. Brad stated that he recognizes those concerns and stated Program Managers have been trying to push back on this at a higher level. They have been regularly met with political pushback that has put pressure on the system from the top down. Brad stated he is looking to address this internally and provide some additional guidance. Kyle Sabatka stated that some members deployed to Ida were going on 52 waking hours when they arrived on site.

Steve also suggested instructions be provided for personal cell phone use, telegraph use, and instructions on how to upload photos during deployments. This might be accomplished through an instructional/release form provided at in-processing. Brad also agrees this should be researched further to determine the best approach.

As stakeholders, Steve stated he envisions this as the group that may be influencing members of today and tomorrow. It seems that something we continue to run up against is members who would rather provide backfill than become a member of the team. He suggested we may need to brainstorm some ways to communicate the many benefits of belonging to the team that might offset the benefits people see in providing backfill in order to gain more member buy-in.

Logistics Input:

**Spath (LTM):** Nate reported that Logistics has made huge improvements under Todd's guidance and as a result, he has observed more participation from LSP and members wanting to support logistics. Todd has also been much more receptive to task force feedback regarding needs, e.g. new uniforms, boat trailer, and vehicle modifications, etc., and has supported them in moving those ideas forward. He expressed his thanks to Todd for all his efforts.

Input from At Large Members:

**Papik (At Large):** Brady stated he sees the goal of his participation as a stakeholder being a liaison, as being the eyes and ears of our members. Facilitating communication between members and task force management in order to provide opportunities to build and grow from the bottom up.

**Gage (At Large):** Christian inquired if any additional consideration has been made to utilizing OFD CDL drivers? Brad responded the only hang-up is that OFD can't guarantee its members could report for drug testing within 4 hours of a request. Brad will continue to work on this issue. Now that we have a provider in Omaha working with OFD, their command staff may be more open to it.

Christian also suggests task force management reiterate there are promotional opportunities within the team that isn't tied to agency ranking. It could also be beneficial to communicate to members who the

Stakeholders are so that people know who to go to with questions or concerns. Brad agreed, and Ashley stated she would like to get a group photo of the stakeholders at the next meeting to include in the next Manager's Minute.

**Kluthe (IST):** Dave reported he likes seeing new and up-and-coming members here today participating, and being interested and involved in the management of the task force. On behalf of the TFL's he asked stakeholders and members to feel free to reach out.

**Thavenet (Program Manager):** Brad requested feedback on the frequency of Stakeholder meetings going forward. The consensus was to meet quarterly, more often if urgent issues arise. Mid-week was recommended and mornings are preferred.

**Next Stakeholder Meeting: March 2, 2022**

**Meeting Adjourned:** 4:15 p.m.