

## **Prior Learning Assessment - Portfolio Review Instructions Bachelor of Arts in Disaster Management**

Individuals majoring in the Disaster Management program at FIU can submit evidence of documented prior learning. Between 0-30 upper division academic credits will be awarded based on the extent of an individual's prior learning experience in the field of Disaster Management.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is the evaluation of an individual's learning that is gained outside a traditional academic environment that is evaluated for college credit. PLA is not awarded for experience; rather it is awarded for *college-level* learning, which entails demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and competencies obtained as a result of the learning. For Disaster Management, that learning can be demonstrated through military service, employment history, academy training, certifications, disaster experience, honors and awards, and volunteer service related to the field of disaster management (Figure 2).

The American Council on Education (ACE) and the Council on Post-secondary Accreditation (COPA) have acknowledged that "American society abounds in resources for learning at the post-secondary level. Associations, business, government, industry, and unions sponsor formal instruction. In addition, independent study and reading, work experiences, the mass media, and social interaction contribute to learning and competency."<sup>i</sup>

PLA is a rigorous process in which a student must demonstrate that he or she has college-level learning related to the Disaster Management program. PLA is evaluated on demonstrated learning through reflective writing and submission of supporting documentation, in addition to the experience itself.

## Qualifying for Academic Credit

To receive credit toward your Bachelor of Arts in Disaster Management at FIU, you must demonstrate that the learning you gained outside the classroom (Figure 2) has provided you with the knowledge and skills to complete advanced coursework or better prepare you for employment in the field of disaster management. This is similar to how a college course is designed to build knowledge and skills that prepare you for advanced learning and application.

Once you have demonstrated prior learning through the approved process outlined below, any credits awarded are posted on the university transcript and degree audit.

## Starting the Portfolio Assessment Process

- ❖ You **MUST** register for and earn a “P” grade (pass) in *FES 1950: Introduction to Portfolio Development for Prior Learning Assessment in Disaster Management* during your first or second semester of enrollment in Disaster Management to be eligible to submit a PLA Portfolio. This is a 0-credit Portfolio Development Workshop to assist you to the process and best practices of assembling and submitting your portfolio. This course will give you access to FIU Canvas to begin working with your coach to develop and submit the Portfolio.
  - The fee for FES 1950 is \$785. This one-time flat fee is not tied to the number of credits received. You will pay the same fee for 0 credits as for 30 credits. The fee supports the individuals who will work with you to develop your portfolio and the individuals who will evaluate it. This fee is NON-REFUNDABLE.
  - Financial aid and employer reimbursement programs typically do not cover Portfolio assessment fees.
- ❖ You have two semesters to develop and submit the Portfolio—the semester you enroll in the workshop plus one more semester. If the Portfolio is not submitted by the end of the semester following completion of the Portfolio Development Workshop, you forfeit the right to submit the Portfolio.
- ❖ Portfolios **MUST** be submitted at least one semester before the semester you expect to graduate, so plan accordingly. There are no exceptions.
- ❖ During the semester you register for the Portfolio Development Workshop, you **MUST** be simultaneously enrolled in at least one 3-credit class that is applicable to your degree in Disaster Management.
- ❖ There is **NO** guarantee that submitted PLA portfolios will earn any credits. The awarding of credits is based solely on the quality of the portfolio as measured by the rubric and official documentation. Therefore, it is possible that students who do not meet minimum rubric requirements; and/or do not offer supporting official documentation; or those who do not submit a portfolio will earn 0 college credits.
- ❖ There is **NO** guarantee that PLA credits are transferable to other institutions should you decide to transfer to another college or university.

- ❖ If you withdraw from Disaster Management courses or the program, refunds for tuition and fees, including the Portfolio Assessment fee, are bound by [FIU's policy governing official withdrawals](#).
- ❖ Portfolios are bound by [FIU's Academic Integrity Policies](#).

### Developing the Portfolio

- ❖ **For each of the seven sections of the portfolio (Figure 2), you must write a reflection explaining how your experience has provided you with knowledge and skills related to disaster management.**

NOTE: On the Proof of Documentation Rubric (Figure 3 below) some categories have a maximum number of points allowed per section. For example, no more than 13 credits are granted for Certifications. You may possess numerous certifications, must select the ones most relevant to the field of disaster management. You may need to include certifications (that place you beyond the 13-credit maximum for the category) if these certifications are referenced in your reflection as per FIU's Academic Integrity Policy. For example, if you reference in your chapter on Deployments that you utilized specialized training from a certification course on XYZ, yet certification course XYZ is not documented in the chapter on Certifications, the documentation needs to be added to the chapter on Deployments.

- ❖ For each chapter of the portfolio, you must provide documentation that supports your assertions. This will require you to include **OFFICIAL** documentation indicating your military experience (years and rank) and/or your employment status (years and rank) and/or copies of your academy training and certifications, and/or copies of awards and/or disaster deployment papers. All documentation must be official 3<sup>rd</sup> party documentation that is verifiable.
- ❖ Only documentation related to the field of Disaster Management may be submitted.
- ❖ You will be assigned a coach at the end of the Portfolio Development Workshop. Your individual coach will assist you with formatting and editing (grammar, punctuation, spelling, style, etc.), but s/he will not write your reflection for you. You may receive notations such as “This section needs to be written more concisely” or “This section is unclear—need to clarify”. You will not receive a rewritten document from the coach. You will be able to edit the reflections as many times as you need prior to submitting the Portfolio. The Reflection Writing Rubric (Figure 1 below) will be used to evaluate your writing on how your experiences relate to the core competencies in Disaster Management (Appendix A).
- ❖ In addition to the reflections for each chapter and the supporting documentation, you will need to **develop a Cover Page, Table of Contents, and introductory narrative.** If

relevant, an **Appendices and a Bibliography** will be required to support your documentation and citations.

- ❖ You **CANNOT** use certifications for Fire Officer or Police Trainings in your chapter on certifications for the portfolio **IF those trainings exist as part of your AS or AA degree and are posted on your transcript.**
- ❖ You cannot use FIU Fire Officer Training as part of the certification chapter of your portfolio IF you intend to earn credit for these trainings by taking the FIU exam demonstrating knowledge of subject matter.

### **Evaluation Expectations for Documentation and Reflective Writing**

- ❖ Portfolios will be submitted through FIU's Canvas Online learning management system.
- ❖ Portfolios may **only be submitted once** so you want to make sure your portfolio is fully developed (both in terms of written reflection as well as documentation) before submitting. This is a decision best made in consultation with your coach.
- ❖ **The documentation rubric indicates the amount of credit you will be awarded for a variety of experiences (military, work, deployment, etc.). However, it is the learning that has developed as a result of the experiences that FIU is assessing.** Therefore, you need to score well on the writing rubric for each of the seven chapters of the portfolio. If you do not receive a minimum passing score on the rubric for that chapter, no points will be awarded for that chapter. Therefore, it is critical that you work closely with your coach to think carefully and critically about the experience in terms of the FEMA Core Competencies and develop a well written reflection of how your experience ties to these Core Competencies and what you learned as a result that can be attributed to your studies in Disaster Management at FIU.

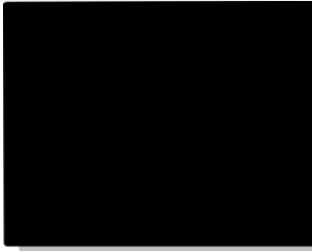
### **Evaluation, Scoring and Credits Awarded**

- ❖ The Portfolio will be anonymously and independently evaluated by:
  - Two experienced Disaster Management professionals (rubric in Figure 3).
  - Two FIU faculty/advisors/administrators (rubric in Figure 1).
- ❖ The scores of each evaluator will be averaged to determine the final number of credits to be awarded. If there is more than a 10-point difference on the writing rubric or a 5-point difference on the documentation rubric, the Program Director for Disaster Management will consult with the respective evaluators.
- ❖ Credits are only awarded as a whole number, not as a decimal. If you receive a decimal score on the documentation rubric, your score will be rounded **DOWN** to the closest whole number.

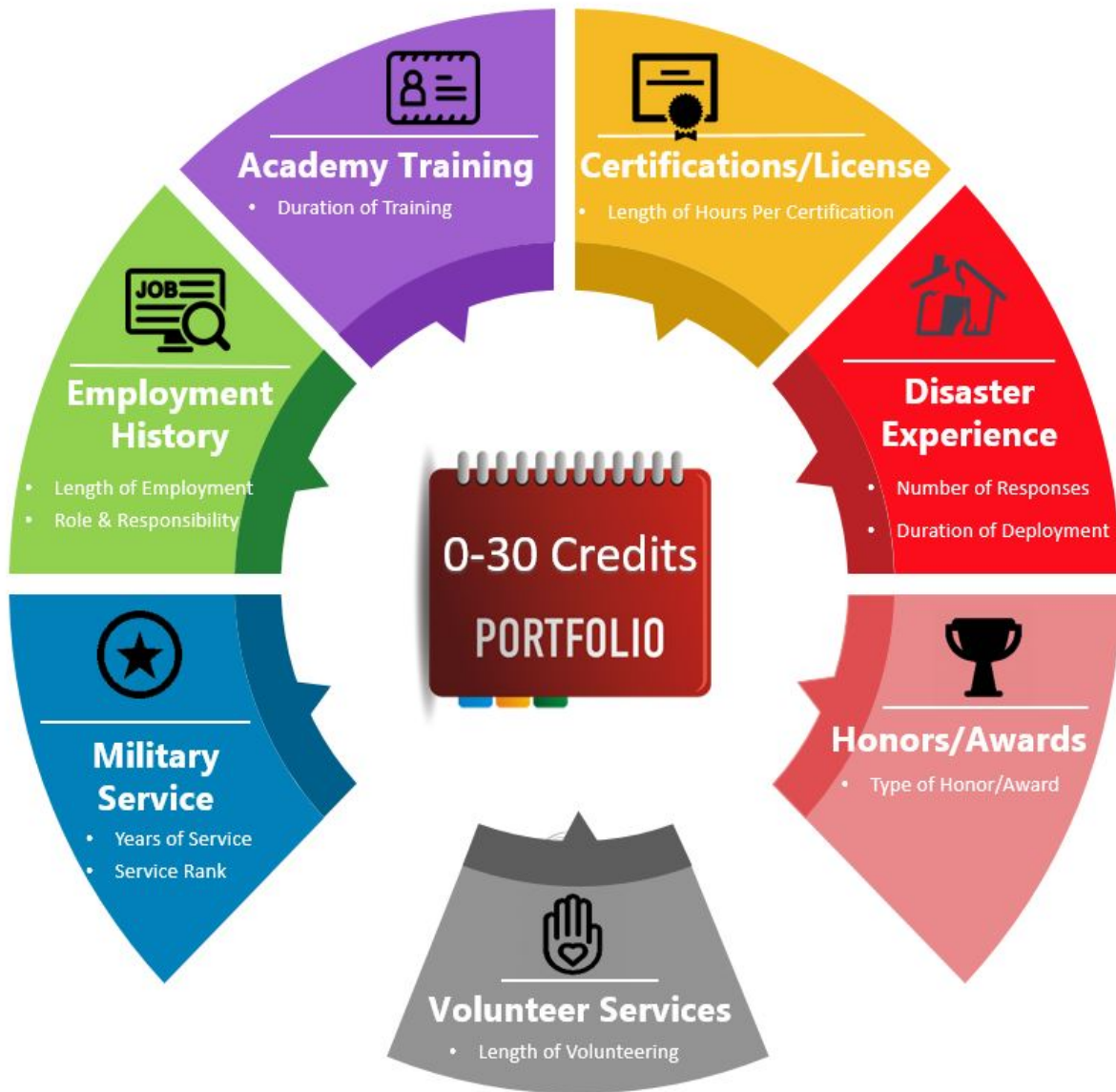
- ❖ You are entitled to one appeal to the determination of academic credits. You will receive a copy of the completed rubrics (Figures 1 and 3 below). If you feel there has been an error in the evaluation of your portfolio, you must write a formal letter to the Disaster Management Program Director indicating where you feel the error or omission has been made and direct the reader of your letter to the section of the portfolio where your documentation can be located. **You have 3 business days (from the posting of portfolio scores in Canvas) to submit your appeal letter.** The posting date of scores will be evident in the Canvas grade book and highlighted during the workshop.
- ❖ The Program Director of Disaster Management at FIU will review each portfolio, the independent recommendations of each reviewer, and will award the academic credits you will receive for the portfolio and submit the requests for the credits to be posted your Panther Degree Audit and included on your FIU transcript.
- ❖ Credits will appear on your transcript as upper division credits (in the amount awarded based on your prior learning as evaluated by the reviewers) for *FES 3951 Prior Learning Assessment for Disaster Management*. You will not need to register for this course and no additional fee is required.

**Figure 1:  
Portfolio Chapter Reflections Rubric**

<b>Chapter Reflections - Minimum Passing Total Score = 66</b>			
<b>Part 1: Reflection</b> <b>Min. Passing Score=48</b>	12	6	0
<p><b>Connection between prior learning and disaster management</b></p> <p><i>Identifies and draws insight from connections across relevant learning experiences and academic learning related to disaster management.</i></p>	Evaluates and/or draws conclusions by connecting examples and facts from past experiences with thorough analysis to learning in the field of disaster management.	Describes examples and facts from past experiences with general connections to learning in field of disaster management.	States examples and facts from past experiences with little or minimal connections to learning in field of disaster management.
<p><b>Ability to apply prior learning across numerous contexts</b></p> <p><i>Applies knowledge, skills, concepts, abilities, theories and/or methodologies across different learning experiences.</i></p>	Applies knowledge, skills, concepts, abilities, theories and/or methodologies across numerous situations/scenarios.	Applies knowledge, skills, concepts, abilities, theories and/or methodologies across some situations/scenarios.	Applies knowledge, skills, concepts, abilities, theories and/or methodologies across limited situations/scenarios.
<p><b>Reflective Observations and Self-Assessment</b></p> <p><i>Demonstrates a sense of self as a learner building upon prior experiences to respond to new and challenging contexts.</i></p>	<p>Critically evaluates strengths and challenges; connects current sense of self to past and/or future selves across multiple and/or diverse contexts.</p> <p>Consistently demonstrates ability to reflect on experiences</p>	<p>Describes strengths and challenges. Begins to describe self over time and/or in different contexts.</p> <p>Demonstrates ability to reflect on experiences and/or examine personal identity as a learner.</p>	<p>Describes strengths and challenges in a general learning context.</p> <p>Demonstrates limited or no ability to reflect on experiences and/or examine personal identity as a learner.</p>

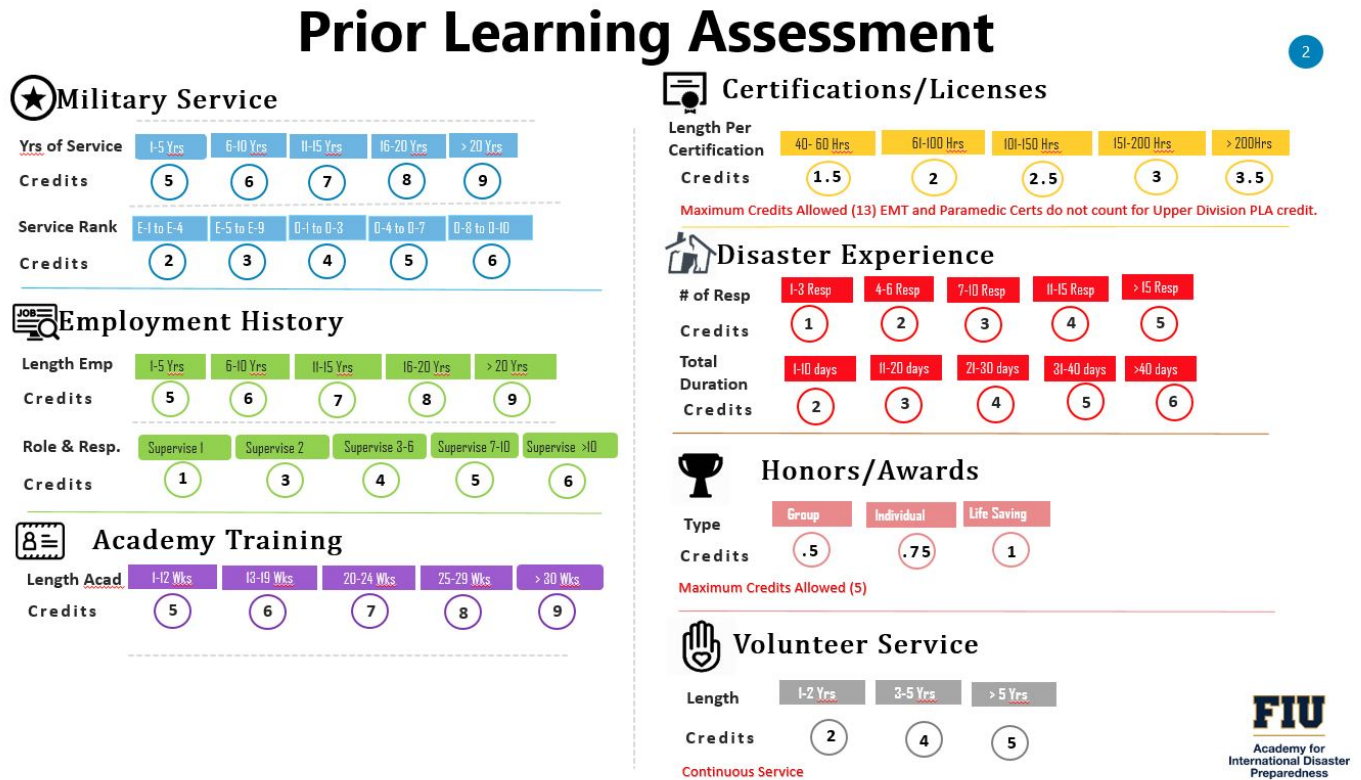
	and/or examine personal identity as a learner.		
<b>Elaboration</b>	All experiences are fully elaborated on with specific detail, reflection and depth.	Most experiences are fully elaborated on with specific detail, reflection and depth.	Few experiences are fully elaborated on with specific detail, reflection and depth.
<b>Part 2: Documentation Min Passing Score=10</b>	10		0
<b>Required Documentation</b> <i>Evidence is documented to substantiate the prior learning.</i>	Evidence is documented to substantiate the prior learning.		Evidence is not fully documented to substantiate the prior learning.
<b>Part 3: Writing Min Passing Score=8</b>	5	3	0
<b>Style/Language</b> <i>Employs various writing techniques and tone in development of narrative.</i>	Vocabulary is sophisticated and correct; sentences vary in structure and length and remain parallel in nature; tone is clear and purposeful for intended audience.	Vocabulary is used properly; sentences tend to be similar in structure and length; tone is generally clear and purposeful for intended audience.	Vocabulary is occasionally misused; sentences structure is not parallel; tone is somewhat clear and purposeful for intended audience.
<b>Grammar/Mechanics</b> <i>Utilization of appropriate grammar and sentence fluency.</i>	Writing is free of spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors; absent of fragments, comma splices, and run-on sentences.	Writing has a few spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors; or fragments, comma splices, and run-on sentences.	Writing numerous spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors; or fragments, comma splices, and run-on sentences that creates distractions.

**Figure 2:  
Portfolio Documentation Categories**





**Figure 3:  
Portfolio Documentation Rubric**



### Appendix A: FIU Disaster Management Core Competencies

*\*Adopted from FEMA’s Next Generation Core Competencies for Emergency Management Professionals*

During the 2017 FEMA Higher Education Symposium, professionals of the field of disaster management addressed the core competencies needed for the next generation of disaster managers. These are the competencies FIU has adopted in assessing the learning of students within the Bachelor of Arts in Disaster Management. The three main categories are:

- Disaster Management Competencies that Build the Individual
- Disaster Management Competencies that Build the Practitioner
- Disaster Management Competencies that Build the Relationships

## **Emergency Management Competencies that Build the Individual**

### *Operate within the Emergency Management Framework, Principles, and Body of Knowledge*

The emergency management professional utilizes a proactive, anticipatory, and innovative approach for guiding public policy and in the application of the emergency management framework and principles. Emergency management seeks to promote safer, more resilient, and thriving communities. All necessary actions are employed to mitigate against, prepare for, respond to, and recover from threatened or actual hazards. Emergency Management activities must be comprehensive, progressive, risk-driven, integrated, collaborative, coordinated, flexible, and professional (Blanchard, et al., 2007).

### *Possess Critical Thinking*

The emergency management professional employs critical thinking to identify and reduce disaster risk in the communities they serve. Critical thinking is a disciplined and multifaceted intellectual process, which involves problem-solving, strategic, adaptive, and innovative thinking. The practice of recognizing relevant evidence, understanding relationships in multi-layered data, and making clear the connections between potential causes and effects is fundamental to decision-making, adaptive actions, and thriving in uncertain environments.

### *Abide by Professional Ethics*

The emergency management professional both abides by and champions professional ethics. Professional ethics delineate expected and appropriate conduct, principles, and moral and ethical values that guide practice in the midst of both known and uncertain environments. Ethics must be approached as a totality of principles, not as individual guidelines; together, the sum of principles provides an important foundation for action.

### *Continual Learning*

The emergency management professional engages in continual learning as a central means of increasing their efficacy when operating in a dynamic risk environment. Continual learning is about building adaptive capacity through an iterative exchange of new information in relationship to prior understanding. The continual learning process allows ongoing improvement, which is critical to achieving system stability, resilience, and thriving opportunities in the midst of an uncertain and complex future. Continual learners develop and nurture a frame of mind that values and utilizes curiosity, reflection, experience, and the development of new understanding.

## **Emergency Management Competencies that Build the Practitioner**

### *Scientific Literacy*

The emergency management professional possesses an understanding and working knowledge of scientific processes, as well as a familiarity with the natural, social, fiscal, and applied sciences. Diverse scientific knowledge is essential as they inform the management and understanding of disaster risk and vulnerability on local, regional, national, and global levels. Scientific literacy is the capacity to objectively and systematically work through complex problems, using the scientific process to identify questions, interpret evidence-based findings to inform decision making, and effectively communicate the results to policy makers and the public. Through the use of the scientific process and principles in relationship to hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities, practitioners can deliver enhanced value to enable the communities they serve to thrive.

### *Geographic Literacy*

The emergency management professional possesses a foundational and comprehensive understanding of the geographic configurations of hazards, vulnerability, and risk. Geographic literacy comprises knowledge of the earth's physical and human systems, utilizing a spatial foundation where hazards, vulnerability, and risk can be conceptualized. The interconnections, interactions, and implications across complex physical, built, and social environments can be analyzed to track changing disaster risk profiles and inform decision making.

### *Sociocultural Literacy*

The emergency management professional recognizes the social determinants of risk, as both the risks for and the effects of disasters are socially produced. A sociocultural foundation provides the lens to examine and understand human behavior, and the individual and collective ways in which humans may affect their relationship to risk, adaptive capacity, and ability to thrive.

### *Technological Literacy*

The emergency management professional possesses a fundamental understanding of evolving technologies, their relevant application to practice, and timely adoption of these technologies. Technology refers to the mechanisms or devices developed from the application of scientific knowledge. Integrating emerging or evolving technology into emergency management practice requires an awareness of current innovations, the ability to evaluate their potential utility, the expertise to utilize technologies, and a grasp of the security measures necessary to protect the technology.

### *Systems Literacy*

The emergency management professional sees the whole picture, particularly interrelationships and patterns of change. Systems literacy helps the emergency management professional synchronize their understanding and practice with the ongoing shift away from a linear and

hierarchical human order to one that is characteristically dynamic, complex, and exponential. The focus of systems literacy is on interdependent relationships that produce reactions, changes, and adaptations over time. This scientific foundation provides the emergency management professional a deeper understanding of the present for developing future focused strategies that enable adaptation and the ability to thrive.

## **Emergency Management Competencies that Build Relationships**

### *Disaster Risk Management*

The emergency management professional communicates and facilitates disaster risk awareness, assessment, measurement, and reduction across a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Disaster risk management is the application of strategies and policies to prevent new disaster risk, reduce existing disaster risk, and manage the residual disaster risk, ultimately contributing to loss reduction, resilience building, and thriving communities. An understanding of how systems interact to create risk, along with recognition that risk is interdependent with social systems is fundamental to the function.

### *Community Engagement*

The emergency management professional is able to facilitate community ownership of risk. Community engagement involves an open dialogue and relationship development that fosters working constructively to reduce the shared disaster risk. The practices of clearly communicating information, giving voice to unheard community members, integrating divergent perspectives, promoting and supporting individuals, families, businesses, and organizations are vital for building the foundation of respect and support for a thriving community.

### *Governance and Civics*

The emergency management professional understands how to participate with civic and legal processes, from politics to policy. The way society manages collective processes is referred to as governance, which seeks to identify, evaluate, and operate within the context of relational dynamics including those within power structures. Collaborative processes further expand the achievement of public value by bringing people together across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, NGOs, business, and civil society.

### *Leadership*

The emergency management professional is comfortable leading within and across organizations. Effective emergency management leadership emphasizes team building, collaboration, collective leadership, and communication connectivity to a wide range of stakeholders, so that the complex risks can be addressed. Leadership is characterized by

informed decision-making, constructive administration and management techniques, fostering a shared vision, empowering others, establishing communication capabilities across varied networks, and creating an outcome-oriented environment for continual improvement.

---

<sup>i</sup> ACE/COPA Statement on Awarding Credit for Extra-institutional Learning.