# FAQ: National Qualification System Process

## Introduction

The National Qualification System (NQS)[1] is a process that strengthens the Resource Management component of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).[2] The purpose of the NQS Implementation Objectives is to provide specific benchmarks and example activities for organizations and jurisdictions to use when implementing NQS and when discussing NQS implementation with their partners and other jurisdictions.

The objectives help to bring organizational qualification procedures, certification programs and credentialing standards in alignment with the NIMS Guideline for the National Qualification System.[3]

Beginning in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, FEMA plans to leverage the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) Program to make the implementation of the National Qualification System a requirement for EMPG funding.

## NQS Implementation Objectives Common Questions

**WHEN WILL FEMA START REQUIRING NQS IMPLEMENTATION?**

- NQS is recommended in FY21 for EMPG.

- NQS will be required starting in FY22 for all EMPG-funded deployable personnel, as determined by each recipient organization and jurisdiction.

- Not all EMPG-funded personnel will be required to be NQS-certified.

    o FY22 EMPG guidance is being finalized for release in Calendar Year (CY) 2022.

- The NIMS Implementation Branch (NIB) will continue to engage with the Grants Preparedness Directorate (GPD) and the National Preparedness Assessments Division (NPAD) to capture stakeholder feedback and ensure program support and evaluation is focused on the process for implementing NQS, rather than NQS directly.

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[1] For more information on the NQS visit: https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/nims/components#nqs.

[2] For more information on NIMS visit: https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/nims.

[3] For more information on the NIMS Guideline for the NQS visit: https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/fema_nims_nqs_guideline_0.pdf.

**WHY DID FEMA DECIDE TO MAKE NQS A REQUIREMENT FOR THE EMPG PROGRAM BEGINNING IN FY22?**

▪ NQS helps bring organizational and jurisdictional qualification procedures, certification programs and credentialing standards in alignment with the 2017 NIMS Guideline for the National Qualification System.

▪ NQS also supports the National Preparedness Goal[4] by creating a network of qualified personnel for potential nationwide deployments and disasters by enabling organizations and jurisdictions across the country to work together during all incidents, regardless of size or type.

▪ Implementing NIMS across the nation is fundamental to building a culture of preparedness.

**DOES MY ORGANIZATION OR JURISDICTION HAVE TO USE NQS?**

▪ Implementing NQS does not mean that an Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) must use NQS Job Task Position Qualifications (JTPQs) and Position Task Books (PTBs) for non-deployable personnel, as determined by each organization.

▪ NQS does not replace existing personnel qualification and certification systems. AHJs that already utilize a personnel qualification and certification system are not required to switch to using NQS tools and guidance. As long as the system aligns with the NQS Implementation Objectives, the AHJ meets the requirements for EMPG.

▪ See below for a short list of examples of systems that align with NQS.

**CAN AN ORGANIZATION OR JURISDICTION USE OTHER SYSTEMS THAT ALIGN WITH NQS?**

▪ Yes. Using a system that is aligned with NQS meets EMPG requirements. Examples include the All-Hazards Incident Management Teams Association Interstate Incident Management Qualifications System Guide (AHIMTA IIMTQS) and the National Wildfire Coordinating Group Incident Qualifications and Certification System (NWCG IQCS).

**HOW WILL FEMA SUPPORT NQS IMPLEMENTATION?**

▪ The National Integration Center (NIC) continues to support NQS implementation with workshops and technical assistance. Contact the NIMS Inbox[5] with any questions or concerns, and the Help Desk team will provide support. Support can include emails, phone calls or even "formal" workshops where the NIB and Regional staff will provide information about NQS.

**WILL FUNDING BE AVAILABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF NQS TECHNOLOGY?**

▪ No direct funding is available, but OneResponder, as part of the National Resource Hub (NRH), is available at no cost to all jurisdictions to manage their personnel qualifications and inventorying.

▪ For more information on the NRH and OneResponder visit: About - National Resource Hub - Preparedness Toolkit.[6]

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[4] For more information on the National Preparedness Goal visit: https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/goal.

[5] The NIMS inbox is fema-nims@fema.dhs.gov.

[6] For more information on the NRH and OneResponder visit: https://preptoolkit.fema.gov/web/national-resource-hub.

**DOES IMPLEMENTATION OF NQS APPLY TO SUB-RECIPIENTS (LOCAL AGENCIES)?**

▪ No. Reporting will be conducted at the State (i.e., recipient) level.

**HAS FEMA CONSIDERED INTEGRATING NQS AND OTHER SYSTEMS?**

▪ Yes. FEMA is currently working to develop the NRH as a "system of systems." The NRH brings together various resource management systems to "talk" and share data and resource management roles. This will create a "system of systems," using the data and functions of the technologies to create a holistic resource management approach.

**WILL A NATIONAL REGISTRY OF QUALIFICATIONS REPLACE THE NEED TO GO TO EACH INDIVIDUAL AHJ OR STATE, TRIBAL OR TERRITORIAL REPRESENTATIVE?**

▪ The NRH will support a national resource catalog where each organization or jurisdiction can manage its own resources. There will be no official "registry," as each organization and jurisdiction's data belongs solely to that organization or jurisdiction.

**WILL NQS IMPLEMENTATION REPORTING BECOME PART OF THE ANNUAL STAKEHOLDER PREPAREDNESS REVIEW (SPR)? IF SO, IN WHAT YEAR WILL THIS CHANGE TAKE EFFECT?**

▪ Yes. Reporting on NQS implementation will be part of the SPR in CY 2022.

**IN FY22, HOW WILL FEMA MEASURE EMPG RECIPIENTS ON THEIR IMPLEMENTATION OF NQS?**

▪ NQS implementation by EMPG recipients will be measured in FY22 based on their use of the indicators found on the National Qualification System Implementation Objectives Fact Sheet.[7]

**WHAT IS THE EXPECTATION FOR A TIMELINE TO MEET ALL FOUR IMPLEMENTATION OBJECTIVES AND THE REQUIREMENTS FOR EMPG FUNDING?**

▪ EMPG recipients should achieve or work toward achieving each of the objectives listed in the National Qualification System Implementation Objectives Fact Sheet[8] to be considered NQS-compliant. An AHJ that is working towards these objectives can meet the objectives or have a plan or process in place to meet the NQS objectives. Examples include the following:

   o Tracking qualifications using a system, Excel spreadsheet or Access database.

   o Issuing PTBs to personnel that the AHJ determines must be NQS-qualified.

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[7] For more information on the National Qualification System Implementation Objectives Fact Sheet visit: https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_nims-nqs-implementation-objectives_fact-sheet.pdf#%3A%7E%3Atext%3DThe%20NQS%20Implementation%20Objectives%20reflect%20the%20concepts%20and%2CFiscal%20Year%202022%2C%20FEMA%20intends%20to%20make%20the.

[8] For more information on the National Qualification System Implementation Objectives Fact Sheet visit: https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_nims-nqs-implementation-objectives_fact-sheet.pdf#%3A%7E%3Atext%3DThe%20NQS%20Implementation%20Objectives%20reflect%20the%20concepts%20and%2CFiscal%20Year%202022%2C%20FEMA%20intends%20to%20make%20the.

**WHAT WILL THIS SYSTEM BE USED FOR? WILL THIS BE A DATABASE OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL, AND IF SO, WHO WILL USE IT?**

- NQS is a process intended for AHJs to use in managing their qualifications and resources.

  o Each organization owns its resources and processes and determines which deployable personnel will be NQS-certified.

  o FEMA provides technical assistance for setting up this process but does not qualify/certify/credential personnel.

  o Grant recipients will not be responsible for ensuring that deployable personnel from agencies they do not have jurisdiction over meet NQS requirements.

**FOR THE PURPOSES OF EMPG QUALIFICATION, WHAT DOES "IMPLEMENTATION" REQUIRE?**

- This depends on where an AHJ is within the qualification process. An AHJ can set up the process or NQS can supplement progress already achieved towards implementation.

- NQS Implementation Objectives discuss the planning and process—AHJs do not have to use the guidance and tools FEMA provides if they already utilize a process or system.

**FOR THE PURPOSES OF EMPG QUALIFICATION, WHAT DOES "WORKING TOWARDS" REQUIRE?**

- As long as a recipient is making progress towards implementing NQS using the phased approach as outlined in the NQS Implementation Objectives, they have satisfied the EMPG requirements.

**DOES "DEPLOYABLE" REFER TO "IN-STATE/TERRITORY/TRIBAL" DEPLOYMENT OR "OUT-OF-STATE/TERRITORY/TRIBAL" DEPLOYMENT?**

- Both. NQS is intended to apply for in-state/tribal/territorial response, as well as state-to-state mutual aid. The state or jurisdiction chooses their most frequently deployed positions to be NQS qualified. NQS Job Titles and PTBs do not cover all deployable emergency management positions, just the most frequently deployed.

- Deployable can also refer to intra-jurisdictional personnel. For example, if an AHJ has a designated emergency operations center (EOC) team, they "deploy" those personnel when the EOC is activated. Deployment does not necessarily mean a movement from one place to another. Virtual EOCs are a good example of this: Personnel are deploying to their roles in the EOC, although they may not be in the physical location of the EOC.

**ARE AHJS REQUIRED TO FOLLOW THE NQS TASK BOOKS? IF NOT, WHAT OVERSIGHT WILL FEMA PROVIDE FOR THE QUALIFICATION PROCESS?**

- No. FEMA strongly encourages, but does not require, jurisdictions to use all NQS tools and resources. If choosing another qualification process, a jurisdiction should incorporate the minimum qualifications defined in the associated job title position qualification sheet for the deployable position.

**ARE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE COMPACT (EMAC) DEPLOYMENTS AND FEMA DEPLOYMENTS REQUIRED TO FOLLOW NQS?**

- EMAC signatory states are not required to follow NQS unless receiving EMPG funding. For states that do not receive EMPG funding, all NIMS and NQS activities are voluntary.

- NQS products are incorporated into the National Emergency Management Association's (NEMA's) Mission Ready Packages (MRPs) used by the Emergency Operations System, which is required by the FY22 NIMS Cooperative Agreement in support of EMAC.

## WHAT RECOURSE DO ORGANIZATIONS AND JURISDICTIONS HAVE TO SUPPLEMENT LIMITED RESOURCES IN SITUATIONS WHERE NOT ENOUGH PERSONNEL HAVE THE APPROPRIATE CREDENTIALS?

- Mutual aid under EMAC is negotiated as a contract between State Governors, who determine acceptable criteria for sending/receiving mutual aid support under EMAC. The States under EMAC determine the minimum acceptable support criteria.

## IF A JURISDICTION DOES NOT USE FEMA RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TOOLS (E.G., ONERESPONDER), WILL FEMA REQUIRE FORMAL APPROVAL OF THE JURISDICTION'S ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM?

- No. FEMA is in the process of building out an Application Programing Interface (API) for third-party systems to connect to OneResponder if they so choose.

## DOES EMPG FUNDING APPLY TO ALL LEVELS OF EMPG RECIPIENTS, INCLUDING COUNTY LEVEL SUB-RECIPIENTS?

- Yes. For purposes of the Implementation Objectives, Phase 0 "work toward" means that the 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico shall begin implementation efforts in FY22 by developing an Implementation Plan that will identify a jurisdiction's timeline for implementing NQS by FY25.

- All other jurisdictions are encouraged to begin working toward identifying frequently deployed positions and NQS implementation but will not be required until FY23.

- In FY23, during Phase 1, all jurisdictions must begin development of their implementation plans. By FY24, Phase 2, all jurisdictions will have completed an Implementation Plan and begun implementing NQS.

- By FY25, Phase 3, all jurisdictions shall have issued PTBs to incident workforce personnel, EMPG applies to all levels of recipients, and implementation will be conducted in phases based upon jurisdiction type.

## DOES THE "INCIDENT WORKFORCE" INCLUDE ALL PERSONNEL INVOLVED IN MANAGEMENT, SUPPORT AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DUTIES, INCLUDING ALL EOC STAFF AND FIRST RESPONDERS?

- Yes. The AHJ identifies the most frequently deployed incident workforce positions.

## ARE ALL POSITIONS CATEGORIZED AS "INCIDENT WORKFORCE" REQUIRED TO BE IN COMPLIANCE WITH NIMS TRAINING PROGRAM STANDARDS?

- Yes.

## DOES THE QUALIFICATION REVIEW BOARD (QRB) APPLY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, AND DOES IT INCLUDE ALL "INCIDENT WORKFORCE" POSITIONS?

- If the AHJ is applying for the EMPG Grant, the QRB will be applicable to all levels involved. The AHJ determines the need for a QRB and for what positions.