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## Ethos, Core Values, and Guiding Principles

### Ethos

**The distinguishing character, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution.**

Orange County Emergency Services' (OCES) goal is to help and support our citizens, visitors, co-workers, and emergency responders, especially when they are most in need. OCES personnel must be good stewards of county resources, and ensure that our customers—both internal and external—are treated fairly and respectfully. Achieving this goal will occur through formal processes, such as personnel policies and training programs, as well as through fair and respectful treatment of each other and those that we come in contact with.

Our personnel across each of the OCES mission areas: 9-1-1, Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services, and Fire Marshal/Life Safety, must exhibit unwavering commitment and support of this ethos.

### Core Values

**The accepted principles and standards of a person, group, or institution. The following core values will guide our behavior and provide the basis for how our personnel operate and interrelate with others. OCES personnel must be committed to the core values of integrity, respect, fairness, and compassion.**

#### Integrity

As individuals and as a collective agency, OCES personnel must recognize that **integrity is our most valuable attribute**. We are obliged as public servants to comply with a range of ethics-based principles and high standards of conduct. OCES is an inherently collaborative organization; we work daily with a very diverse group of emergency responders, citizens, visitors, and community employees. Our personnel must work diligently to establish productive relationships with these groups by **earning** their trust and always behaving honestly, credibly, dependably, and professionally. Trust is not a right that is given, it must be earned.

## **Respect**

OCES employees must be committed to treating those whom they serve and those with whom they work with fairness, dignity, and compassion. We do this because morally, it is the right thing to do. We also do this because it develops and maintains sustainable working relationships with our stakeholders. OCES personnel must be committed to understanding the unique sensitivities of diverse groups and members of our community, and respond appropriately by treating everyone without bias or preference. OCES, especially those in a leadership role, will support and encourage their fellow co-workers to grow through opportunity and empowerment while working as “one” cohesive team.

## **Fairness**

The Core Value of fairness extends to the mission of all programs and services provided by OCES. Our personnel must communicate clear and consistent information to our stakeholders, listen actively, and consider the viewpoints of our citizens, visitors, emergency responders, and co-workers. Regardless of the outcome of any discussion or decision, all those with whom OCES has contact must feel that our personnel listened to their input, and treated them respectfully and fairly.

## **Compassion**

In dealing with our communities and emergency responders who may be affected by a significant emergency or disaster, empathy and compassion are essential qualities that must be embodied in our preparedness, response and recovery efforts. OCES personnel must ensure that we focus on the needs of the members of our community, especially those who may have special requirements and those who have become most disadvantaged by the incident. Our primary responsibility is to support our citizens, visitors, co-workers and emergency responders in caring for those affected by any emergency or disaster, and to provide this support with patience, understanding and respect.

# **Guiding Principles**

**The common framework for how OCES will deliver services and support for our stakeholders. These principles are grounded in our Core Values, and further help define how we should view ourselves as an organization, as well as how we would like our stakeholders to view OCES.**

These principles should be used to guide our actions, as they are particularly important when we face unusual situations where there is little or no clear guidance in policy or procedure. For OCES personnel, knowing and applying the following Guiding Principles will ensure that we constantly and consistently act in accordance with our Core Values.

## **Stewardship**

OCES personnel are public servants, entrusted with public resources to perform our critical mission areas. We have ethical, moral and legal obligations to protect these resources and ensure they are used effectively and efficiently for their intended purpose. OCES employees are also entrusted with the responsibility to be good stewards of the County's natural and cultural resources. We must take this responsibility very seriously when executing each of our mission areas.

## **Engagement**

OCES personnel should actively and regularly engage the whole community of Orange County, which includes organizations that may not traditionally have been seen as emergency response stakeholders, such as our citizens, visitors, and co-workers. Informed stakeholders make better choices for their organizations, themselves, and their communities. The process of engagement will enable OCES to develop and/or participate in teams that are needed to accomplish our core missions.

Timely, accurate and open information sharing, along with mutual fairness and respect will provide the foundation for effective engagement. OCES must clearly and openly communicate the essential elements of our situational awareness to our leadership, to the public, and to our emergency services partners in order to form a common operating picture. We do not only want to be on the same sheet of music, we also want to be on the same note.

Effective engagement means that OCES personnel respect and value the capabilities and professionalism that our stakeholders provide. OCES employees must seek new opportunities and innovative ways to include our emergency service partners in critical decision-making processes, in addition to collaborating with them during the execution of our daily missions. We must also actively engage with our community. A simple "how are you today?" or "can I help you?" or "how are we doing?" will go a long way.

## **Teamwork**

As an emergency services organization, our success is dependent on interdisciplinary, intergovernmental, and interagency coordination and cooperation. Understanding that major disasters and emergencies may be too complex for any single agency to handle, OCES must be prepared to lead and embrace teamwork among our County stakeholders, as well as those stakeholders outside of our County lines. OCES personnel must work hard to maintain and strengthen our relationship with these stakeholders by approaching our work with a "one team" mindset, and pursuing every opportunity to support and foster collaborative relationships.

## **Empowerment**

The nature of OCES' responsibilities means that all of our personnel must constantly lean forward and always be prepared to take informed and decisive action. Our personnel will be empowered to take actions in order to achieve the desired outcomes that are in line with our Core Values and Guiding Principles. Empowerment starts at the top and is shared throughout the organization. The OCES leadership must be able to trust the personnel in our organization, authorize them to make decisions, and meet the needs of an incident or event without having to constantly request approval from their superiors. This Guiding Principle reflects the understanding that each individual in the OCES organization plays a critical role in the execution of our mission.

Empowerment is achieved when those closest to the need are ready and able to act and make informed, prompt decisions based on appropriate authorities, policies, training and experience. Empowered decision-making during day-to-day operations, emergencies, and disasters requires asking the following questions:

- Is the decision lawful?
- Does the course of action have the best interest of the customer in mind?
- Would I make the same decision if the media or commissioner were right beside me?
- Am I willing to be accountable for this decision?

***If the answer to any of these questions is no, then it is most likely the wrong decision.***

## **Result Oriented**

Getting results means identifying what must be achieved, receiving direction as required, and accurately completing the task/assignment on time. We cannot drop the ball. If we say that we will do something or be somewhere, then we must do it without delay. The focus of this principle is that our personnel closest to our customers (both internal and external), will deliver the OCES mission most efficiently and effectively. Getting results means to innovate when there are roadblocks, and to succeed where there are opportunities.

## **Accountability**

OCES personnel must embrace our responsibilities for meeting the needs of our stakeholders, while being fully accountable to our citizens, response partners, and to each other. We will strive to meet the extraordinary needs and demands of our mission areas, even when they are encountered in difficult and often harsh conditions. OCES personnel must accept responsibility for accomplishing our missions without complaint, be transparent in our decision-making process, and expect to be held highly accountable for the actions we take and decisions we make.

## **Flexibility**

OCES must anticipate and be prepared to accommodate changes in organizational goals, courses of action, and operating environments. We must also be prepared to adjust quickly as our stakeholder needs change, and in fact thrive in this environment and devise innovative ways to meet new challenges as they arise.

As public servants, we must understand that in the event of an emergency or disaster, we may be deployed/dispatched/activated with little advance notice. We may also be asked to work irregular hours and perform duties other than those specified in our normal position descriptions. Being prepared to respond to the needs of our community stakeholders quickly and enthusiastically is at the heart of what it means to be a member of OCES.

## **Preparation**

Preparation is the key to achieving the desired results. Benjamin Franklin once stated “by failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail”. One of the most important preparation tasks in which OCES must continually engage is the act of planning. OCES must be committed to the planning process, while ensuring that our plans are plausible and grounded in reality. When developing plans, OCES will solicit and incorporate input from our stakeholders. We must document what we will do, and then do what we document. In doing so, we will build resiliency and sustainability into our organization.

OCES’ plans must account for the various elements of Orange County’s population, and focus on integrating the functional needs of all community members, not just the average community member. Our plans must also be flexible and readily adaptable to the situation at hand. Winston Churchill said “those who plan do better than those who do not plan, even though they rarely stick to that plan”. So, we will plan so that we will do better.