



AMBER Alert Best Practices

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- 2 N D E D I T I O N -

AMBER Alert Best Practices

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Valued Partners and AMBER Alert Contributors

The AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention acknowledge key partners from the media; the broadcast industry; the wireless industry; state, local, regional, and tribal AMBER Alert Coordinators; state missing children clearinghouses; the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children; FirstPic, Inc.; and other private and public sector partners that have championed the work of AMBER Alerts through their many strategic and operational efforts.

Sincere respect and gratitude are extended for the contributions of survivors and their families. Through the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program's annual Family and Survivor Roundtable meetings, participants bring invaluable insights to the work of law enforcement and child protection professionals to continuously improve both investigative response and work with families during incidents of endangered missing and abducted children.

Collectively, these partnerships, as well as leaders at various levels of government and in the private sector, have played and continue to play a critical role in improving the AMBER Alert program and comprehensive child recovery strategies across the nation.



The AMBER Alert National Symposium events bring together AMBER Alert partners including AMBER Alert Coordinators and other child protection officials, and offer an important opportunity to learn and collaborate together across state and regional boundaries.

Acknowledgments

The significant enhancement and strengthening of AMBER Alert Programs across the United States and internationally since the development of this document in 2012 provides demonstrable evidence of the power and critical importance of AMBER Alerts as a key tool in the larger scope of a comprehensive child recovery process. In the years since the 2003 passage of the PROTECT Act (the Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today Act), and the resulting creation of the National AMBER Alert initiative, states across the country have worked tirelessly to build and strengthen their AMBER Alert programs. Their AMBER Alert plans, involving multiple partners in the private and public sectors as well as the general public, have shown significant leadership, unwavering commitment, and relentless dedication by many to advance the shared mission of safely recovering endangered missing and abducted children.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention acknowledges the work of the professional staff and associates from the National Criminal Justice Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College, which delivers the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program; and also recognizes the expertise and diligence of the state and regional AMBER Alert Coordinators who contributed their time and talents to the updating of this cornerstone publication.



The PROTECT Act

*Visit the Best Practices Resource Collection
To Download the Act*

On April 30, 2003, President George W. Bush signed into law the Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today (PROTECT) Act. The Act served to:

- Comprehensively strengthen law enforcement's ability to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish violent crimes committed against children;
- Reinforce the need for every state to have a plan to notify the public and law enforcement of child abductions and to coordinate search efforts for missing children;
- Provide funding and resources to encourage states to implement strategies that would streamline the approach to safely recovering missing and abducted children; and
- Create a level of national leadership by designating the Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) to serve in the position of National AMBER Alert Coordinator to assist states in the development of those plans, and to provide guidance on the issuance and dissemination of AMBER Alerts.

I

Introduction

The first AMBER (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) Alert program was created following the 1996 abduction and murder of nine-year-old Amber Hagerman in Arlington, Texas. In response to this tragedy, representatives from local law enforcement and media joined forces to develop and implement a groundbreaking series of protocols to be followed in the event of a child abduction.

The goal of an AMBER Alert is to instantly galvanize the community to assist in the search for and safe recovery of an abducted child. AMBER Alerts are activated in the most serious child abduction cases. The alerts are broadcast through radio, TV, road signs, cell phones, and other data-enabled devices. The AMBER Alert system is being used in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, areas within Indian Country, and internationally across 27 countries. Learn more about AMBER Alerts by visiting <https://amberadvocate.org> and www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow/amber.

Significant progress has been made in the more than 20 years since the inception of AMBER Alert. Yet, as with any major multiagency initiative, all program partners and stakeholders must remain vigilant and work collaboratively to improve their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of every agency and organization involved in the program. Partners must be open-minded when communicating with each other and always strive to meet the ultimate goal – keeping our children safe.

Purpose

The purpose of the *AMBER Alert Best Practices Guide* is rooted in raising awareness, increasing confidence in understanding, and promoting access to resources. Specifically, it is designed to:

- Raise awareness of roles, actions, and outcomes central to the coordination of an AMBER Alert program;
- Support the ability to create a meaningful and effective environment to facilitate recovery of missing children through the use of AMBER Alerts; and
- Promote good stewardship of the AMBER Alert program and plan for which AMBER Alert Coordinators are responsible.

This report provides a “what works” approach based on the input of those carrying out the day-to-day work of leading, administering, and executing AMBER Alerts as part of larger missing persons and child protection programs at the state and regional levels. Valuable input has also been gathered through the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program’s National AMBER Alert Coordinator and Missing Persons Clearinghouse symposium events. This publication and its online resource collection offer field personnel additional information about effective and promising practices. It is designed for interpretation at the state and regional levels in a manner that allows programs to consider their resource limitations and diverse demographic and geographic needs.

Understanding the Nature of the Problem: What the Research Tells Us

Those coming into a role within an AMBER Alert system without direct experience in missing child investigations will benefit greatly from having a clear picture of the nature and scope of the problem of endangered missing and abducted children. Studies conducted to date provide a better understanding and definition of:

- Who missing children are,
- What happens to them when they are taken; and
- The actions required to find them.

Findings underscore the necessity of swift, targeted, and strategic response by law enforcement and community partners through AMBER Alerts and their larger comprehensive child recovery systems. Of central relevance and importance in law enforcement’s work to safely recover endangered missing and abducted children

are the Washington State Study report *Case Management for Missing Children Homicide Investigation*, and the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMAART).

Case Management for Missing Children Homicide Investigations

(Washington State Office of the Attorney General, 2018)

This 1993–1996 study, with a 2006 update, was funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and conducted by the Washington State Attorney General’s Office. The study area covered 44 states and included both large and small law enforcement agencies in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Researchers examined 833 cases (27.4 percent unsolved) involving more than 800 child abduction murders occurring between 1968 and 2002 (74 percent female and 26 percent male).

The study findings support the need for a rapid, comprehensive community response to missing children cases.

Key findings:

- ***Time is the enemy***
 - » In nearly 60 percent of the missing children homicide cases studied, more than two hours passed between the time someone realized the child was missing and the time police were notified.
 - » In 76 percent of the cases studied, the child was dead within three hours of the abduction – and in 88.5 percent of the cases the child was dead within 24 hours.
- ***The killer is statistically just as likely to be a friend or acquaintance as to be a stranger***
 - » Victims and killers were strangers in 44 percent of cases studied.
 - » Victims and killers were friends or acquaintances in 42 percent of cases studied.

DIG DEEPER INTO THE WASHINGTON STATE
STUDY AND NISMAART FINDINGS



AMBER ALERT BEST PRACTICES RESOURCE COLLECTION
Research, Rulings and Findings

» Fourteen percent of the cases studied involved parents or intimates killing the child.

● **Killer profile: Prior crimes against children and sexual assault**

» Nearly two-thirds of killers had prior arrests for violent crimes, with slightly more than half of those prior crimes committed against children.

» The use of pornography by killers as a trigger to murder is a significant finding, and the primary motive for the child abduction in cases studied was sexual assault.

● **Victim age**

» In 74 percent of the missing children homicide cases studied, the victim was female, average age 11 years.

● **The killer is likely to be someone identified early on in the investigation**

» There is a probability of the killer's name surfacing during the first week or initial stages of the investigation.

Key recommendations:

● **Families and communities must ensure children are supervised – even if they are in their own front yard or neighborhood. Children are not immune from abduction because they are close to home.** Approximately one-third of the abductions studied occurred within one-half block of the victim's home. More than half of the study's abductions took place within three city blocks of the victim's home.

● **Children should be taught not to ever approach a car.** Whether the occupant is a stranger or not, children should not approach the car – no matter what the occupant tells them or asks them.

● **Families and communities should be aware of unusual behavior in their neighborhoods.** Many child abductions are witnessed by people who do not realize that a crime is being committed.

● **When a child is missing, CALL POLICE IMMEDIATELY.** An immediate response to a missing or abducted child may mean the difference between life and death.

National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children

(OJJDP, 2018)

The Missing Children's Assistance Act of 1984 established the involvement of practitioners, policymakers, and researchers who now contribute critically important data that define the severity of abductions, as well as the characteristics of children who are abducted, missing from their caretakers, or sexually exploited. In addition, the Act requires the OJJDP Administrator to "periodically conduct national incidence studies to determine for a given year the actual number of children reported missing each year, the number of children who are victims of abduction by strangers, the number of children who are victims of parental kidnappings, and the number of children who are recovered each year."

Today, NISMART research presents a significant body of findings across publications and bulletins resulting from its three major studies NISMART-1 (1984), NISMART-2 (1999), and NISMART-3 (2011), conducted as a component of ongoing data collection by the U.S. Department of Justice and its contracted partners. NISMART establishes five categories of episodes that can cause children to become missing. NISMART-2 and NISMART-3 used these standard definitions to develop unified estimates of missing children, including those who were and were not reported to an agency for help in locating them, as well as to support accurate classification within the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC).

- Abduction by a family member
- Abduction by a nonfamily perpetrator (including "stereotypical" kidnappings)
- Children who run away or are "thrown away" (i.e., abandoned, told to leave home, or prevented from returning home by a parent or other household member)
- Children missing because they are lost, stranded, or injured
- Children missing for benign reasons (i.e., misunderstandings)

NISMART's data present a dramatic example of the high numbers of children who go missing each year, estimated at 1.3 million. Although many of these children

return home safely, this number underscores the magnitude of the problem and mandates the swift and effective involvement of law enforcement.

Development of the AMBER Alert Network

Creating and maintaining an effective AMBER Alert network is essential for continued success in recovering endangered missing and abducted children. While an AMBER Alert plan is critical to safely recovering abducted children, it should be considered as one tool in a larger, comprehensive approach to recovering abducted children.

Identifying key stakeholders, or those individuals and entities who are invested in contributing to successful program outcomes and who will play a primary role in the dissemination of an alert, is central to an effective and robust AMBER Alert system. Program partners, or those who provide additional support and promotion of the program's purposes and processes, must also be proactively sought out, relationships built, and effective communications regularly fostered. The plan's success ultimately rests on the involvement of critical stakeholders and partners who actively participate in the monitoring, planning, and development of an effective and seamless abducted child alert system.

Part One of this guide will establish and define those outcome contributors and partners that bring the AMBER Alert program, as part of the larger missing child response system, to life.

AMBER Alert Criteria for Missing and Abducted Children

Every successful AMBER Alert plan contains clearly defined activation criteria. The following guidance, as developed by the [U.S. Department of Justice](#) with input from AMBER Alert stakeholders around the country, is designed to promote a uniform, interoperable network of plans across the country and to minimize potentially deadly delays because of confusion among jurisdictions with varying alert criteria.

Abduction verification | AMBER Alert plans require law enforcement to confirm an abduction before issuing an alert. This is essential when determining the

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES IN AMBER ALERT ACTIVATION CRITERIA



AMBER Alert Coordinators must understand that state and regional AMBER Alert plans' issuing criteria vary, often due to legislative mandates and/or program design, so diligence in reviewing and understanding neighboring states' issuing criteria is a critical step in preparing to work effectively with other states in the event a multi-state activation request is made in a case.

level of risk to the child. Clearly, stranger abductions are the most dangerous to children and thus are primary to the mission of an AMBER Alert. However, family abductions, especially where domestic violence is a factor, should also be responded to with equal vigilance, as they can be just as dangerous to the safety of the child or children involved. In some family abduction cases, the issuance of an AMBER Alert or Endangered Missing Advisory (EMA) may be the best recourse to assist in the safe recovery of the child. Allowing activations in the absence of significant information that an abduction has occurred can lead to overuse and ineffective outcomes for the system, ultimately degrading its power to find endangered missing and abducted children. Experienced AMBER Alert Coordinators emphasize that each case must be appraised on its own merits, and a judgment call must be made quickly based on the best information available.

Risk of serious bodily injury or death | Plans require a child to be at risk for serious bodily injury or death before an alert can be issued. This relates again to care in avoiding overuse of public alerting, reserving alerts for the most serious cases in which involvement of the public will prove of benefit to law enforcement's investigative work to locate and rescue the child.

Sufficient descriptive information | For an AMBER Alert to be effective in recovering a missing child, the law enforcement agency must have enough information to believe that an immediate broadcast to the public will enhance the efforts of law enforcement to locate the child and apprehend the suspect. This element requires sufficient descriptive information about the abducted child, the abduction, the suspect, and the suspect's vehicle. Many plans allow for the issuance

of an AMBER Alert without specific information on the abductor or a vehicle, but they may choose not to activate resources such as road sign messaging systems or to send cell phone messages unless vehicle information is known.

Age of child | While the majority of states have adopted the “age 17 or younger” standard, there are variances in age between AMBER Alert plans. As noted above, AMBER Alert Coordinators should review surrounding state plans to understand their alerting criteria and be prepared to effectively respond to requests for interstate issuance of alerts.

National Crime Information Center data entry | Data regarding the AMBER Alert should be entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) system immediately, which is defined as two hours following the first call/report of the missing child. Entry of the alert data into NCIC expands the search for an abducted child from a state, local, or regional level to a national level. This is a critical element of any effective AMBER Alert plan. Law enforcement personnel working with call intake and data management should carefully review the publication *Effective Use of the National Crime Information Center Database With Missing-Child Incidents* reference guide to ensure proper record creation, modification, and validation are occurring in these case types. More information on training and operational resources related to NCIC and telecommunications first response is covered in [Part Two of this guide](#).



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1

A Critically Missing Child – The Ecosystem of Response

Because an AMBER Alert program is a collaborative effort involving multiple agencies, the public, and the media, these stakeholders are outcome contributors – their actions within the AMBER Alert system and its processes are truly interdependent, and either strengthen or weaken the search to locate and safely recover the missing child. As the AMBER Alert initiative and regional and state AMBER Alert programs have evolved over the past two decades, experience and learning have shown us that like other complex and interconnected systems, AMBER Alerts have a life cycle and are affected by a multi-dimensional interaction of human decisions executed across multiple technologies.

Therefore, it is important to understand the AMBER Alert Coordinator’s role in the larger context of a missing child event. AMBER Alert is one of many tools in a **comprehensive child recovery strategy**. The success of an AMBER Alert activation ultimately rests on the proactive involvement of critical stakeholders alongside alert program design and execution. Training and resource access across each of these roles is integral to effective contributions to the missing child response.

Comprehensive Child Recovery Strategy

Building relationships, identifying resources, and establishing agreements, training, and continuous improvement – **ALL ARE CRITICAL** in being ready to respond to missing child incidents.



PROGRAM STRATEGY: Agreements and Policy

- Stakeholders/Outcome Contributors Identified
- Interagency Agreements MOUs*
- Technology Support and Infrastructure (Communications, Mapping, Data Sharing, etc.)
- Equipment Use and Deployment Policy, Agreements and Resource Inventories
- Child Abduction Response Team (CART) Request and Call-Out Policy
- Child Abduction Verification Criteria for Critically Missing Children
- Missing Child Alerting Policy and Agreements for Messaging Type, Technology/Platform Utilization, and Activation
- Broadcast and Social Media Plans
- Continuous Improvement: After-Action Debrief and Reporting, System Analysis
- Annual Review of Policies and Overall Plans (e.g., AMBER Alert, EMA**, etc.)

OPERATIONAL READINESS: Procedures and Field Resources

- Intake and Interview Protocols
 - » Telecommunications
 - » Patrol
 - » Investigations
- Staffing and Call Out
- Equipment Request and Deployment
- Initial and Ongoing Interagency Notifications
- Command Post Operations
- Canvass, Search, and Recovery
- Leads/Tips Intake and Management
- Public Alerting (e.g., AMBER Alert): Requesting, Approval/Denial, Activations, Updates, and Cancellations
- Public Information Management: Websites, Broadcast Media, and Social Media
- Debriefs and After-Action Participation

COMPETENCY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: Training, After-Action, and Process Work

- Training First Responders
 - » Telecommunications, Patrol
- Training Investigators
 - » Initial Response and Ongoing Case Management
- Multi-disciplinary/Full-Response System Training
 - » Mock Calls, Tabletop Exercises, and Field Exercises
- Equipment Tests
 - » Mobile Equipment, Computer Systems, and Infrastructure
- Public Alerting (AMBER Alert): Training Across All Areas of the Life Cycle
 - » Requesting, Approval/Denial, Activations, Updates, and Cancellations
- Public Education
 - » Awareness, Updates, Volunteer Training
- Leadership and Advisory Education
 - » Committee Updates, Process and Technology Demonstrations, Process Improvement Work

*MOU: Memorandums of Understanding

**EMA: Endangered Missing Advisory

Outcome Contributors

Each of these roles contribute to AMBER Alert's work to recover the missing child.

Ecosystem of Outcome Contributors in a Child Abduction Event



Source: AMBER Alert Best Practices – Research page: <https://www.amberadvocate.org/best-practices/#Research>.

- **911/Telecommunications – The 1st First Responder** | The information gathered, supplemented, and maintained by the telecommunicator forms the foundation of the incident information acted on by patrol officers and investigators arriving on the scene.
- **Patrol – First on scene: Secure, assess, classify, and mobilize** | Patrol officers identify circumstances that lead them to believe the child is critically missing; their proper incident evaluation and escalation of the response is vital.
- **Investigations – Expand response, build information** | Trained investigators build upon initial interviews, leverage specialized resources, and drive response and updates. Investigations support can involve local, state, and federal law enforcement resources.
- **AMBER Alert Coordinator – Engage and engineer** | The AMBER Alert Coordinator collaborates with on-scene law enforcement to drive a rapid, comprehensive alert engagement to empower the public with actionable knowledge in the effort to safely recover the child.
- **Public Information Officer – A conduit for understanding** | The Public Information Officer conveys accurate and timely information from the law enforcement agency to the public via the media and works to keep the child’s image and the story in the news.
- **Command Post – Coordinate and control** | The command post serves to unify multiple resources to manage expansive operations efficiently and effectively.
- **Media – Foundational ally in reaching the public** | The media distributes information through an array of systems and platforms.
- **Public – Eyes and ears** | Sparked by alerts and updates, the public engages with a desire to help locate and recover the missing child.
- **Family – A critical focal point** | Family involvement can be varied and complex but is always important.
- **AMBER Alert Program Leadership – Drive change, empower action** | Executive leadership is a powerful catalyst for vision, advocacy, and strategic support.
- **Legislative – Authority and funding** | State and federal lawmakers codify the AMBER Alert program framework, establish operational and training mandates, and authorize the allocation of resources.

2

The Life Cycle of an AMBER Alert

In child abduction cases, AMBER Alerts present a unique level of complexity, urgency, and investigative value. Understanding how AMBER Alert coordination functions across the life cycle of a case involving the issuance of an AMBER Alert will help to clarify actions, interdependencies, and outcomes, which are important in every key juncture of the process.

The 911 Call and Telecommunications First Response

Upon receiving the call about a missing child, the telecommunicator works through a defined intake protocol to gather information essential to determining the location and nature of the emergency, dispatching law enforcement officers, and entering and properly classifying the child in the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database. This establishes an information baseline and mobilizes law enforcement's field operations. The AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) offers a comprehensive training program for telecommunicators, [Telecommunications Best Practices for Missing and Abducted Children \(TELMAC\)](#), offered both online and in the classroom, which provides the background, best practices, and operational resources needed to meet the critical demands of the first responder role.

Law Enforcement Response

Upon arrival, a law enforcement first responder should triage the event using best practices, including on-scene checklists and operational tools. The overarching elements of their response should include interviewing pertinent parties, securing the scene, and mobilizing additional resources. Officers should be trained,

specifically as pertains to endangered missing and abducted child incidents, on these key areas of enforcement and investigative work:

- Securing the Scene, Establishing Perimeter
- Interviewing Witnesses
- Canvassing and Searching
- Managing Command Post Operations
- Using Volunteers
- Coordinating Public Information
- Organizing Recovery and Reunification

AATTAP offers both classroom and online training in these areas through the following courses:

- [Canvassing, Search and Recovery Strategies for Abducted Children \(classroom\)](#)
- [Child Abduction Response Team \(CART\) Training \(classroom and online\)](#)
- [Child Abduction Tabletop Exercises \(classroom\)](#)
- [Initial Response Strategies and Tactics When Responding to Missing Children Incidents \(classroom\)](#)
- [Investigative Strategies in Child Abduction Cases \(classroom and online\)](#)
- [Patrol First Response for Missing and Abducted Children \(online\)](#)

In addition to training, a variety of resources related to law enforcement's field response and investigative work in these cases can be found in the AMBER Advocate website's various resource collections:

- [AMBER Alert Best Practice Resources](#)
- [Child Protection and Community Safety Resources](#)
- [Child Abduction Response Team \(CART\) Resources](#)



RESOURCES FOR TELECOMMUNICATORS, PATROL OFFICERS, AND INVESTIGATORS

AMBER ALERT BEST PRACTICES RESOURCE COLLECTION

FOR TELECOMMUNICATORS:

- [APCO-ANS-1.101 NATIONAL BEST PRACTICES AND MODEL POLICY](#)
- [NCIC - QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE FOR MISSING CHILD INCIDENTS](#)

(continued on next page)

RESOURCES FOR TELECOMMUNICATORS, PATROL OFFICERS, AND INVESTIGATORS (continued from previous page)



- NO FEE TRAINING – CLASSROOM OR ONLINE 24/7
 - » TELECOMMUNICATIONS BEST PRACTICES FOR MISSING AND ABDUCTED CHILDREN (TELMAC)

FOR PATROL FIRST RESPONSE AND INVESTIGATIONS PERSONNEL:

- MODEL POLICY
- PATROL AND INVESTIGATIVE GUIDES
- OPERATIONAL CHECKLISTS
- INTERVIEW, CANVASS, AND SEARCH RESOURCES
- VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS
- PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER CONSIDERATIONS
- NO FEE TRAINING – CLASSROOM OR ONLINE 24/7
 - » PATROL FIRST RESPONSE FOR MISSING AND ABDUCTED CHILDREN (PATMAC)
 - » INVESTIGATIVE STRATEGIES IN CHILD ABDUCTION CASES (ISCAC)

Contacting the AMBER Alert Coordinator

Early action is essential because every minute matters when a child is missing. Law enforcement leadership should empower on-scene uniformed personnel to rapidly reach out to their AMBER Alert Program Coordinator, who will guide them in discussing, verifying, evaluating, and assessing the incident. The goal of this interaction is to decide if sufficient information exists such that issuing an AMBER Alert will prove beneficial to the case. The person having contact with the Coordinator should have direct knowledge of the ongoing event.

Approving or Denying an AMBER Alert

The decision to approve or deny the issuance of AMBER Alerts is most effectively executed by a primary person – the AMBER Alert Coordinator. A small group of alternate coordinators, trained and regularly involved in AMBER Alert operations, should be utilized to ensure continuity of approach. A recommended tactic involves

utilizing a second coordinator from the alternate group in initial contact with law enforcement agencies when an alert is requested. This promotes a full perspective on what is discussed and provides a real-world training experience. This builds valuable insight into the dynamics involved with the decision-making process.

The discussion with the requesting agency that leads to the decision of alert usage should be rich with details and the coordinator(s) should compare the specific facts with the DOJ-guided criteria. At the end of the discussion, the goal should be to have a collaborative mutual agreement on whether the alert should be utilized in the case. Divergence from a mutual agreement should be rare if the coordinator aligns the discussion with the criteria in a beneficial way. If the decision is made to not enact an AMBER Alert, the coordinator should provide alternative alerting options, such as an Endangered Missing Alert (EMA), along with offering the mobilization of other investigative resources.

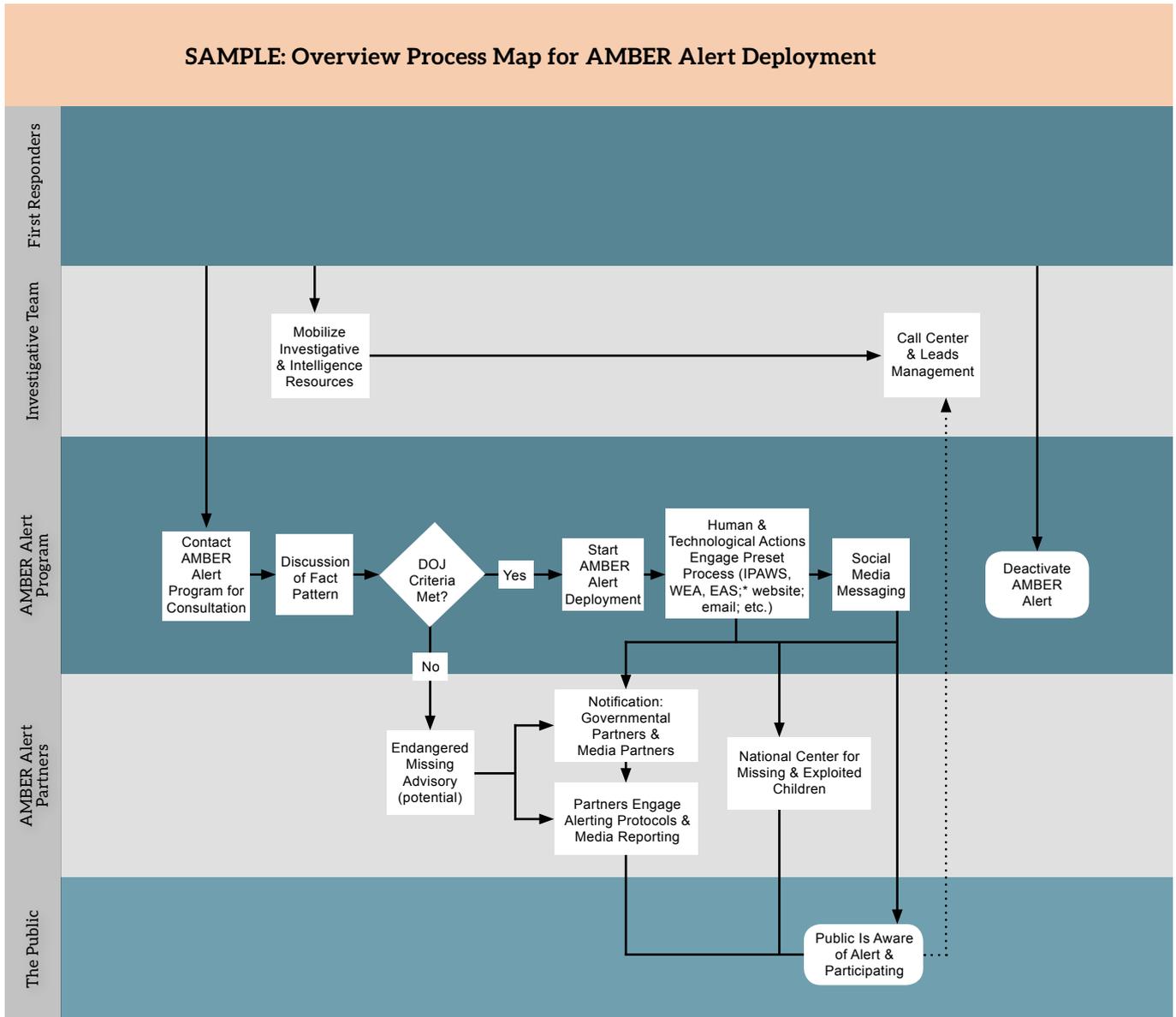
Alert Content

AMBER Alerts must be concise, easily understood, and quickly disseminated. They should avoid abbreviations and police jargon, and should use the fewest words possible without compromising clarity. While message construction will vary depending on the tools used, it is critical to include specific person and vehicle descriptors that will help the public to identify the child and/or suspect from the rest of the population.

In constructing the message, be aware of the potential for further victimization of the child through divulging information that is unnecessary, not actionable, or impertinent. This would include sharing with the public any type/manner of physical/sexual victimization of the child known to law enforcement as part of the investigation, the sexual preference of the abductor (other than confirmation of the abductor being a registered/known sex offender), and any disability information (child or suspect) that does not pertain directly to the endangerment factors or identification efforts in the case.

A Child Is Missing

System Action Across Patrol, Investigations, AMBER Alert, and the Public



*IPAWS: Integrated Public Alert and Warning System
 WEA: Wireless Emergency Alerts
 EAS: Emergency Alert System

Core Information Elements

The alert message is derived from the following information gathered through effective call intake by the telecommunicator, and through subsequent on-scene follow-up by officers and investigators.

- Specific information about the incident:
 - » Day
 - » Time
 - » Location
 - » Concise details about the nature of the incident (the AMBER Alert will use only that information which is appropriate for sharing with the public)
 - » Confirmation that an abduction has occurred and law enforcement believes the child is in imminent danger
- Child descriptive information:
 - » Name
 - » Age
 - » Gender
 - » Height and weight
 - » Hair and eye color
 - » Clothing last seen/known to be wearing
 - » Scars/marks/tattoos that would be readily identifiable by the public
 - » Any items the child may have in possession that are quickly recognizable, such as a bag/backpack
- Suspect descriptive information (if known):
 - » Name
 - » Age
 - » Gender
 - » Height and weight
 - » Hair color and eye color (if known)
 - » Clothing last seen/known to be wearing
 - » Scars/marks/tattoos that would be readily identifiable by the public
 - » Confirmation (if applicable) that the suspect is a known/registered sex offender

- Vehicle descriptive information (if known):
 - » Color, year, make, model, license plate/tag, including state of issuance
 - » Any highly recognizable issues with the body of the vehicle (e.g., damage, large areas of rust, bumper stickers, etc.)
- Known or suspected route/direction of travel and suspected destination (if known):
 - » Roads and highways believed to be used by the suspect, if known
 - » Other methods of transportation (such as taxi, bus, train, or airplane) that the suspect may use
 - » Town, community, or state where the suspect may be traveling

Leveraging All Media: Broadcast, Websites, Social Media

The content of the AMBER Alert will directly impact the effectiveness of the alert. It is critical that AMBER Alert Coordinators and public information officers pursue an agreement with local broadcast outlets that they will disseminate radio and TV alerts using the same message wording and sequencing as is released through the Emergency Alert System (EAS) and Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) broadcasts.

Additional details about the missing child that are available to the public but not included in the alert should be provided to the news media for televised broadcasts, websites, and social media platforms. The state AMBER Alert program will generally have a website or web page within its hosting agency on which active AMBER Alerts and other program information are provided to the public. However, the handling law enforcement agency can also be well served by using a recognized/consistent location for active public alerts on its website, and creating standardized AMBER Alert content formats for use when releasing and updating active alerts (AMBER, EMA, etc.) via social media posts.

Leads/Tips Reporting Information

When constructing alert messages for broadcast, web, and social media, be sure to include phone number(s) to be used by the public for providing tips (provide numeric, not just alphanumeric, if used). If the agency taking the calls can accept text messages, also provide that information. Website addresses should be included and hyperlinks to those sites incorporated if possible.



SAMPLE EMERGENCY ALERT MESSAGE

THE METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT IS SEARCHING FOR 10-YEAR-OLD JANE DOE. SHE WAS ABDUCTED AROUND 4 P.M. WHILE WALKING NEAR THE CORNER OF NEBRASKA AVENUE AND RENO ROAD IN NORTHWEST WASHINGTON COUNTY. JANE IS APPROXIMATELY 4 FEET TALL, WEIGHS ABOUT 60 POUNDS, HAS SHORT BROWN HAIR AND BROWN EYES, AND IS CAUCASIAN. SHE WAS WEARING A BLUE T-SHIRT, BLUE JEANS, AND A RED HAT, AND WAS LAST SEEN CARRYING A PINK AND WHITE STRIPED BACKPACK. THE SUSPECT IS A WHITE MALE IN HIS 20S, APPROXIMATELY 5 FEET 10 INCHES TALL, 200 POUNDS, AND HAS SHORT BLACK HAIR. HE WAS DRIVING A BRIGHT RED OLDER MODEL FORD EXPLORER WITH OREGON LICENSE PLATES. THE SUSPECT WAS LAST SEEN HEADING NORTH ON CONNECTICUT AVENUE TOWARD I-495. IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION REGARDING THIS ABDUCTION, CALL THE METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT IMMEDIATELY AT XXX-XXX-XXXX, OR DIAL 911.

AMBER Alert situations are fluid and can change minute-to-minute. Therefore, during an alert, AMBER Alert Coordinators, law enforcement officials, and their respective public information officers should be accessible to their media partners, providing mechanisms for reporters to verify information gathered during normal newsroom operations. AMBER Alert program and the handling law enforcement agency websites can provide a mechanism for media partners to monitor for updates, and may assist the public information officers in their ongoing work to regularly update the media.



THE CAE CODE

The Child Abduction Emergency (CAE) is an EAS Event Code used solely for AMBER Alerts. EAS, IPAWS, and WEA all rely on this code to flag AMBER Alerts.

Alert Activation

With AMBER Alert programs in every state, successful plans have leveraged differing approaches in utilizing resources and technologies to achieve the goal of rescuing an abducted child. AMBER Alert Coordinators must have a functional, working knowledge of messaging tools and pathways of distribution.

The Activation Process – Tools and Applications

AMBER Alert activations include multiple steps that may be completed separately through human intervention or may be streamlined through automated software purchased from a vendor or customized for an agency. Regardless of the processes used, the goal is always to rapidly notify the public of an abducted child using the outputs discussed below.

Outputs – Message Composition and Distribution Paths

AMBER Alerts involve notifying the media, the public, and others through a variety of output methods. Whether the activation process is completed manually or with software, it should allow the AMBER Alert plan to deploy several message formats to accommodate the unique needs of each output type.

Software systems may provide for a single entry point to accomplish several of these steps in one action, while others utilize multiple contact points to distribute or activate different notification tools.

Awareness of the benefits and limitations of each output tool will ensure AMBER Alerts are clear and accurate when they are disseminated to the public.

DISTRIBUTION RESOURCES



Resource downloads and links to more detailed information on EAS, WEA, websites, social media, and more can be found in the AMBER ALERT BEST PRACTICES RESOURCE COLLECTION

EAS: The Emergency Alert System

The Emergency Alert System (EAS) interrupts television and radio broadcasts with emergency tones, followed by a brief audio recording and text crawl to relay important information to the public. EAS provides only for a brief audio segment and scrolling text, so these messages should present the most critical descriptive and actionable information first.

EAS may be activated through software, the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS), the National Weather Service (NWS), or a broadcast entity, so it is important to communicate with software vendors, emergency management, and State Emergency Communications Committees to establish/confirm deployment processes.

WEA: Wireless Emergency Alerts

Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) are governmental messages broadcast free of charge to all cell phones from cellular towers in a selected geographic area. WEA messages are activated via IPAWS. The messages require strictly limited text, as they are regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), so it is important to present unique identifiers first and, if possible, direct the public to additional resources. Vehicle information is often the primary piece of information distributed through WEA, but it may be incident specific. WEA messages are an “opt-out” system and trigger emergency tones on cell phones, so AMBER Alert Coordinators should carefully consider the time of day and area for which alerts are being activated.

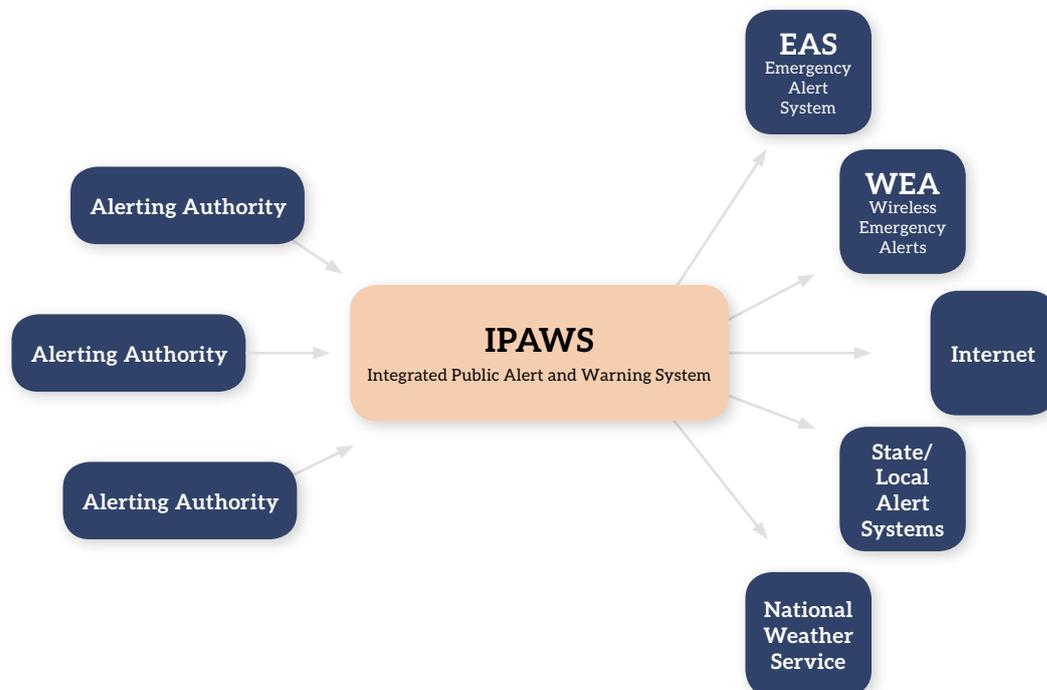
DOT: Department of Transportation

State or local Departments of Transportation (DOT) will play an integral role in the AMBER Alert process by posting information to signs along roadways. They usually have a number of Variable Message Signs (VMS) that can be activated remotely and will display text regarding a child abduction incident. Consider limiting use of VMS to cases where there is known vehicle information, since motorists are the primary audience. Like WEA, using DOT signs to relay specific, actionable information may vary based on the details of the investigation, and standards may change as the technology evolves.

Supporting Output Methods: The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS)

The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) is a cloud-based technology hub hosted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Using standard alerting language, called the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP), authorized alerting authorities can use a variety of software programs to access and send information to IPAWS, which in turn distributes the information in a pathway to emergency messaging technologies. These technologies include the Emergency Alert System (EAS), Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) cell phone messages, the National Weather Service (NWS), and other state and local systems. IPAWS provides a standard path between alerting authorities and the tools used to alert the public, enabling seamless integration and flexibility as technology evolves. More information about IPAWS and other alerting technologies can be found in the [AMBER Alert Best Practices Resource Collection](#).

The Integrated Public Alert and Warning System



Source: AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

Social Media

Social media includes an ever-changing group of platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Rapidly changing technology allows for direct, widespread access to the public and as a result AMBER Alerts often spread in a viral fashion. Capitalizing on current optimization practices can help direct accurate information to the public. By following the social media discussion around an AMBER Alert, it is possible to obtain almost instantaneous feedback and adjust public communication if needed. AMBER Alerts are posted to national social media accounts and specialized tools via the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's (NCMEC) AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution process.

The speed of social media makes it both a flexible and challenging tool to utilize. Consider engaging social media specialists at your agency or at partner agencies to help craft and regularly evaluate procedures. Procedures and templates will provide consistent messaging, which will build public trust over time in the information being shared with them. Consider integrating the following tips:

- **Hashtags, tags, and share drives draw the conversation.** #AMBERAlert is often used by the public across platforms, and hashtagging geographic locations, like a city and state name, can draw in local users. Tagging media agencies and personalities or re-sharing articles will help spread the word and maintain public interest;
- **Include additional content.** Provide a link to the full alert information;
- **Keep the public engaged.** Post updates and cancellation notices to the public; remember they are invested in the outcome of the alert. Updates keep the story at the top of newsfeeds, even as the case ages;
- **Set the boundaries in advance.** Understand how administrators will interact with the public when it comes to responding or not responding to comments. State laws may prohibit deleting comments or banning users, so know the rules in advance. Monitor comments and social media for leads, if possible;
- **AMBER Alerts are posted to @AMBERAlert on Twitter, and to Facebook.com/AMBERAlert.** Facebook also pushes the alerts to users near the child's missing location as part of AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution;
- **Be prepared for viral alerts.** Users may continue to share old alerts. Update or delete original posts to minimize this, and post messages to the public if an alert continues to circulate heavily. If your posts include a link to the alert,

ask your information technology department to provide a custom 404 page that indicates an alert is canceled when someone uses the broken link; and

- **Keep posting regularly, even when there aren't active alerts.** Sharing program news, articles, non-AMBER cases, and other items of interest will keep the public invested in your program and keep profiles from appearing antiquated if there are long gaps between alerts.

Agency Websites

During an active AMBER Alert, it is critical to have a central location for the media and public to obtain current information and photographs of the victim, suspect, and vehicle if available. The website information should be easy to post and optimized for public consumption including printing, links for WEA messages, and mobile viewing. Proactive communication with technology teams will keep your website operating in alignment with current standards and promote your ability to provide dynamic and secure content.

Lottery

State lottery agencies have become another valuable asset for displaying AMBER Alert information to the public. The alert content may be printed on a purchased lottery ticket or displayed as text and/or images on digital signs and automated lottery machines. The processes for and types of information shared between state AMBER Alert programs and their lottery partners vary based upon agreements and technologies utilized by the state/region.

Partner Email and Text Notifications

Email distribution lists, apps, and opt-in text message systems are an effective way to reach the public and various AMBER Alert stakeholders. These systems may be available through alerting software, emergency management systems, standalone tools, or from other partner agencies. Email notifications may be used to mobilize important resources during an AMBER Alert. Group emails that can reach multiple people across operational teams should be leveraged, along with a regular process of updating and confirming them to ensure they remain current.

AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) is tasked by the U.S. Department of Justice with providing AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution (AASD), and can also facilitate the deployment of WEA for AMBER Alerts if needed. The AASD consists of a network of partners, including national corporations, federal agencies, and others who need AMBER Alerts provided to them in a single, geographically targeted format. AASD and additional critical case resources for an AMBER Alert are facilitated through the NCMEC 24/7 Call Center.



HOW TO ACCESS NCMEC'S SECONDARY DISTRIBUTION RESOURCES

Contact NCMEC for information on how to include them in your email notification listing, as that will trigger NCMEC's secondary distribution resources for your AMBER Alert.

1-800-THE-LOST (843-5678)

Ongoing Alert Management

Alert Updates

As the AMBER Alert evolves and new information comes into the investigating agency through tips and leads, it may be necessary to update investigators, the public, media, and other stakeholders. This is especially critical when the information changes or new identifying information becomes available. As an example, if the alert was initially issued with only a vehicle description and license plate information has subsequently been obtained through investigation, this should be immediately disseminated through all appropriate channels, as it can make tools such as WEA or DOT signs significantly more effective.

Options and Considerations for Distributing Updates

Care should be taken in determining which notification systems should be updated. Often, an EAS message is broadcast over television and radio only one time for

REDUCING CONFUSION AND FRUSTRATION WITH CANCELLATIONS



- Best practice suggests that media outlets should place information about alert cancellation at the TOP of their online news stories or related content to reduce the frequency of redistribution of resolved alerts.
- While the public may sometimes ask that cancellation details be sent to WEA, it is important to remember that every WEA broadcast will set off emergency alert tones on potentially millions of phones. The purpose of WEA is to alert the public to the incident so they can seek additional information or take action. As the system evolves, this recommendation may change, but the system is currently designed to simply cease broadcasts when an alert is cancelled.

the initial activation, but significant updates may justify additional broadcasts. This concept can be applied to WEA as well. Whatever choices are made, it is important to understand the method and impact of updating each distribution resource in order to balance relaying important information to the public with care not to over-alert. For example, you may choose not to update the EAS or WEA message for a slight spelling change in a name, but may in fact choose to send an update when new vehicle or suspect information becomes available because it could enhance the investigation.

THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER



Detailed information on the role of the Public Information Officer can be found in the publication *Field Response for Endangered Missing and Abducted Children: Law Enforcement Investigative Response in Relation to the AMBER Alert Process*

Available from the
AMBER ALERT BEST PRACTICES RESOURCE COLLECTION

Media Engagement: Beyond the First Release – Press Conferences, Active Media Stance/Presence

The primary investigating agency should provide the media access to a designated Public Information Officer throughout the incident. If the agency does not have this resource, another agency with established media relationships and processes may be involved to assist. Consistent and regularly updated public information throughout an incident not only improves the chances of swift and safe recovery, but can also foster good will from the public for current and future cases, and build trust with media counterparts.

Alert Conclusion: Non-Emergency Channels/Paths

Informing the Media of the Cancellation

As soon as the child has been recovered, information about the conclusion of the AMBER Alert should be swiftly and accurately relayed to the media. Specific information about the condition of the child should be handled by the primary investigating agency during a follow-up press conference if needed, while the cancellation notice from the AMBER Alert plan should be more generic. The Alert cancellation should, at a minimum, indicate if the child has been recovered, and if the suspect is in custody or is still at large.

Updating Additional Distribution Resources

Ensure that all parties participating in the alert are notified of the cancellation. Websites and social media sites should be updated with cancellation posts, and emails should be sent to distribution lists and NCMEC. EAS, WEA, and DOT sign broadcasts should be canceled, **but should not be re-broadcast with the cancellation information to the public in order to avoid triggering alert tones and emergency notifications.**

If the Child Remains Missing

Unfortunately, not all AMBER Alert cases result in the recovery of the child. Maintaining the active status of the alert may not benefit, and may even hinder, the investigation. As the case continues, other investigative tools may add more value to the search for the child. Care should be taken in determining when to cancel an alert for an unrecovered child along with what the best course of action should

be in notifying the public. Some plans have a mandated expiration timeframe or alternate status for alerts where the child has not been found. This can provide a more consistent investigative process for children who remain missing. Some AMBER Alert plans require the decision of whether or not to cancel an alert to be made jointly between the AMBER Alert Coordinator and the primary investigating agency.

After-Action Reporting

An effective after-action review is an essential element of the continuous improvement process related to the issuance of an AMBER Alert. As soon as practical after the missing child incident is resolved, an in-depth review should be conducted to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the AMBER Alert process. All facets of the process should be dissected with a critical eye to determine what must be done to correct deficiencies or gaps in service delivery. Particular attention should be given to issues that resulted in delays in the issuance of the alert.

The review should be attended by individuals who were directly involved in the incident, as well as leadership constituents who have the ability to initiate immediate corrective measures. Detailed minutes should be kept with emphasis placed on who is tasked with correcting deficiencies as well as timelines in which the corrections will occur. Areas that might be included in the review are as follows:

- The Telecommunicator/Call-Taker role in the issuance of an AMBER Alert;
- Field discussions and processes initiated by on-scene first responders;
- Notifications with appropriate individuals involved in requesting activation, i.e., command personnel who may not be on scene;
- Activation/notification/communication with the AMBER Alert Coordinator;
- Timelines associated with the activation process;
- Utilization of appropriate technology and any problems that delayed the alert;
- Processes involved in processing tips/leads;
- Processes for updating alert information to be sure accurate and complete information is broadcast/disseminated;
- Processes around cancellation of the alert; and
- Training issues or gaps in human performance.

After-action reviews must be conducted with open, honest, and frank dialogue. This is absolutely essential to an accurate assessment of how things went, and creates the foundation for the system's ability to improve and grow stronger with every missing child incident handled.

In documenting findings and preparing a final report, be sure to create documentation that will align with open-records laws in your state, and make distribution of the report and any related resources to all roles in your system a priority. Your AMBER Alert system team should ideally have a chance to receive, review, and understand the findings before any formal presentation of the report is made. Diligence in developing, distributing, and discussing after-action findings creates a common denominator of information and perspective from which the AMBER Alert oversight committee can best review processes, make recommendations, and support the work and resources needed for continuous improvement.

AMBER Alert Program Committee Action

AMBER Alert programs are a collaborative effort among law enforcement, media, technical partners, advocacy groups, and citizens. The establishment of committees can allow a venue for these stakeholders to provide input to the program. Committee activity would be complementary to a robust after-action review process.

A committee involved with an AMBER Alert program should have a purpose statement that defines its role and scope. The statement can vary based on the intent of the guidance, with two general categories of feedback: oversight and technical guidance. The participants on committees should be carefully selected for their role and how they can influence the respective committee and/or program.

An oversight committee should contain executive-level members representing the AMBER Alert program, patrol, investigation, prosecution, media, and the public via an at-large member. This type of committee can provide input on historic program motion and strategic advice on future program direction. An annual or semiannual review of all alerts deployed and requested can provide insight to the trends within a given program and geographic area. The insights can be formative in understanding existing challenges and creating an architecture of training and improvement to overcome the challenges.

A technical guidance committee should contain engineers or practitioners from media and technical partners. For example, it could contain media engineers from radio, television, and web design alongside partners representing the cellular industry, digital billboards, government signage, and software vendors associated with the alert apparatus. This type of committee can provide information on the mechanical distribution pathways accessed by the alert, and accurate troubleshooting in the event of technical challenges. This group should also have insight to evolving technology that could be harnessed in the future.

AMBER Alert Program Evolution – Continuous Process Improvement and Modernization

When Minutes Matter

An AMBER Alert Coordinator or Program Manager should consistently question everything in their span of control. Can it be improved, modernized, or eliminated? They should measure and map everything that moves under their control internally or moves under the influence of their external training. ***Does each motion add sufficient value at the expense of time?*** During a child abduction event, minutes matter and a contemporary AMBER Alert program recognizes the need for continuous process improvement and modernization.

Continuous process improvement is about implementing change within the mechanics of an AMBER Alert activation. The AMBER Alert activation process can be defined as a series of human or technological actions that produce a timely, accurate, and expansive message to the public about an abducted child. All programs can benefit by employing a formalized strategy of continuously evaluating their internal and external processes in a way that increases speed, eliminates waste, reduces error, and cultivates efficiency.

PROCESS DEVELOPMENT AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT



AMBER ALERT BEST PRACTICES RESOURCE COLLECTION

[Links to sample process maps and continuous improvement resources](#)

Proven Methods for Identifying What Is Working For, and Against, Your AMBER Alert Process

The sectors of manufacturing, health care, public utilities, and business management have all formally recognized the need for continuous process improvement, and an entire career framework has emerged for professionals executing these duties. AMBER Alert programs can leverage those professionals or utilize their training and tools available to enact process change.

In an overview, the life cycle of process improvement begins with a granular understanding of the human and machine operations relating directly to the activation of an AMBER Alert within the coordinator's span of operations, from the point of abduction to the launch of the alert apparatus. With a well-mapped process and a pool of historical records gathered on previous AMBER Alert events, coordinators can benchmark the life cycle of previous alerts. It is likely that a review of the previous life cycles will provide clues about areas for improvement. A methodical data-driven development cycle can then be implemented that uses tools to define, measure, analyze, improve, and control the processes in the area for improvement. In most cases, programmatic improvements can occur with no cost, low cost, or even with a cost savings.

Modernization

Careful Analysis to Leverage the Right Technologies in a Rapidly Changing Landscape

Continuous process improvement focuses on developing consistent ongoing incremental change to existing mechanics, while modernization is dedicated to implementing new technologies or strategies related to alerting. Technology is evolving rapidly and in ways that can be difficult to predict. When evaluating the adoption of new technologies within an AMBER Alert system, consideration should be given to whether the new technology will be adaptable over time, interoperable with other existing processes as needed, and scale with the potential growth of the system.

Emerging technologies can reshape the methods of how an AMBER Alert activation shares information with the public. Methods considered new a few years ago are now considered standard emergency messaging pathways (e.g., IPAWS-WEA, website hosting, automated email distribution, reverse 911, etc.). As new platforms of media and message consumption are developed, conduits should be explored to establish a pass-through for emergency messaging. Some current examples of emerging pathways are mobile application integration, automobile infotainment systems, Next Gen TV (ATSC 3.0), and the ever-expanding social media platforms (e.g., beyond Facebook and Twitter).

Alerting Tactics

Making the Most of the Skilled Practitioners Available to You

State, major metropolitan, and local emergency managers are professional practitioners of alerting the public. They are typically good sources of information about emerging systems and understand the most effective combination of alerting tactics in their communities. Nationally, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, utilizes NCMEC to manage the AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution Program, which continuously incorporates new partners and their technologies. A synergistic approach between AMBER Alert programs and NCMEC can help identify different national and local initiatives for future incorporation into the alerting apparatus. In an interconnected world, it is important for the alert to flourish across multiple modern communication channels to meet shifting public expectations and increase alert effectiveness.

[LEARN MORE ON ALERTING TACTICS](#)



[AMBER ALERT BEST PRACTICES RESOURCE COLLECTION](#)

[Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology](#)

[Report on Alerting Tactics](#)





3

Strategic Outreach – Building Relationships, Proactive Coordination

Building and maintaining forward-thinking relationships, before the critically missing child case occurs. The success of an AMBER Alert does not begin with the call to the AMBER Alert Coordinator or even during the development of sound policies and procedures. Relationships and partnerships developed well in advance and maintained over time form the foundation of any successful endeavor, including AMBER Alert plans.

Other AMBER Alert Coordinators and Programs

An AMBER Alert Coordinator's partnerships with peers plays a significant role in shaping his or her view of the alert landscape. These partnerships can help build and maintain a deep understanding of the national AMBER Alert infrastructure, the AMBER Alert programs of their surrounding jurisdictions, and their own AMBER Alert program. Building these relationships requires a consistent effort of communication over time.

Partnerships should begin with neighboring AMBER Alert programs, which are important for operational and strategic reasons. Operationally, child abduction events can frequently travel across jurisdictions, and the continuity of the investigation and alert are vital. During a multi-program alert, it is essential to normalize the messages that are relayed to the media and public alongside the facilitation of law enforcement's investigative relationships. Strategically, building an understanding of neighboring programs can help in the continuous process improvement cycle. Programs can be benchmarked together, input/output mechanics can be evaluated, and peer support can be formed for assistance during and after events.

Partnerships with the national AMBER Alert infrastructure (e.g., DOJ, NCMEC, OJJDP, and AATTAP) allow for a conduit to national trends, services, training, and technical assistance. Relationships built within these entities and the subsequent participation with them in national initiatives can increase programmatic collaboration, improve technical skills, and assist in the development of effective policies and practices.

Government: Local and State Partners

Law Enforcement Agencies | Local law enforcement agencies, including their Public Information Officers and/or other authorized media representatives, are a most critical element of a successful AMBER Alert. If these agencies are unaware of the existence and processes involved in the AMBER Alert plan, it can significantly delay or prevent activation of their valuable resources. Continuous communication as to changes in the agency, and with the plan itself, can eliminate wasted time at the most critical juncture, the origination of the request and subsequent activation. Knowing and maintaining multiple points of contact at area agencies can greatly enhance the effectiveness of any AMBER Alert plan.

Child Abduction Response Teams (CART) | An AMBER Alert is part of a comprehensive strategy with the primary goal being the safe recovery of the abducted child. While the AMBER Alert is designed for rapid dissemination of actionable information to the public, another important aspect is a quick and prepared response by appropriate multi-disciplinary personnel. Many areas have developed and maintain CARTs that cover local, county, regional, and/or state areas. Any case involving an AMBER Alert has a significant chance of also warranting the involvement of a CART response. As these two valuable resources are linked in their impact, it is important to develop solid, consistent communication and working relationships with CART leadership in advance of any critical situation involving an endangered missing child.

State Attorneys General | In terms of AMBER Alert program coordination, State Attorneys General can serve as strong partners in working to support communication with private industry partners for needs and planning related to handling the demands of emergency alerting systems/programs. For law enforcement, Attorneys General Offices, upon receiving alerts via email and/or text notifications at the onset of the alert, can respond to assist law enforcement's investigative efforts as needed to proceed in a manner which best supports prosecutorial efforts in the case.

State Missing Persons Clearinghouse | Each state has a designated Missing Persons Clearinghouse that can provide important resources and services to any agency experiencing a missing child case. Clearinghouses serve as a repository of information about missing and unidentified persons in their respective states. They provide for the exchange and dissemination of information with the aim of helping law enforcement locate missing persons, and provide services such as toll-free help lines, websites, brochures, education, and public awareness as well as networking with other missing persons professional practitioners, organizations, and agencies.

Emergency Management | Child abduction cases and the response to them will almost always become large multi-disciplinary events that may also be multi-jurisdictional. Emergency Managers specialize in oversight related to the Incident Command System (ICS) as part of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). They can assist agencies in facilitating the response to disasters and other emergencies, and are able to assist in managing resources and coordinating partners involved in the emergency management response.

Fusion Centers | Created after 9/11, fusion centers are in every state and consist of multiple agencies located within the same physical location to promote information sharing and collaboration. They provide interdisciplinary expertise and situational awareness to inform decision making to assist local law enforcement in protecting against and responding to criminal and terrorist activity. Due to the potential broad reach of any AMBER Alert, fusion centers across the states of issuance may be utilized during activation and with subsequent investigative efforts. Each fusion center operates differently; it is important to learn how the fusion center(s) in your area operate and what value they may provide to your AMBER Alert program.

State Departments of Transportation (DOT) | One of the most visible and iconic symbols of an active AMBER Alert is the programmable highway sign displaying information about a suspect vehicle. Partnering with the state DOT to rapidly distribute information can significantly increase the reach of an AMBER Alert activation by alerting thousands of citizens already on the roadways where the suspect vehicle may be traveling, providing them with actionable information while driving. Knowing in advance the type and format of information needed to activate these resources is critical.

Lottery | Distribution of AMBER Alert information through state lottery officials has the capability to expand the reach of the message even further. Information displayed on point-of-sale kiosks as well as printed tickets can reach literally millions of people, increasing the number of people on the lookout for the abducted child. This greatly increases the chances of making a safe recovery. Each AMBER Alert program works independently with lottery providers in their states, so the AMBER Alert Coordinator should build and maintain these relationships, establishing agreements for receipt, content, and distribution of alerting information.

Schools | Local school districts typically have a variety of means for distributing information related to events impacting school operations, and these can be leveraged to help distribute AMBER Alert related information. Engaging these resources as well as tapping into school bus operations can expand the reach and scope of individuals actively seeking missing children, suspects, and vehicles. Many schools have sophisticated video surveillance systems that could provide relevant information about the abduction. Additionally, school districts have a multitude of personnel, such as school resource officers, counselors, principals, teachers, and classmates, who can be of benefit in obtaining information related to the abducted child. Law enforcement should be aware that schools/classmates of an abducted child may be a source of information spreading online, whether from official sources or not, and whether true or not.

Mass Transit | Engagement of local and regional mass transit systems allows dissemination of information about the AMBER Alert to transit operators and the thousands of people utilizing the system through programmable signs, radio communications, video surveillance, and billboard/poster placement or display. Specific information as to routes and modes of travel of suspects can direct the distribution of information to those resources and can result in additional actionable information.

OTHER PARTNERSHIP CONSIDERATIONS



Social Services organizations and State Attorneys General are excellent strategic partners in the comprehensive response to an endangered, missing, or abducted child, and can bring important resources to bear in the investigation.

Government: National Partners

U.S. Department of Justice | The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) coordinates the AMBER Alert program at the national level under the direction of the National AMBER Alert Coordinator, who is responsible for assisting state and local officials with developing and enhancing AMBER Alert plans, and promoting statewide and regional coordination among plans. The AMBER Alert Coordinator is tasked to:

- Facilitate AMBER Alert network development;
- Support development of state AMBER Alert plans and efforts;
- Help eliminate geographic gaps in AMBER Alert networks;
- Provide regional AMBER Alert network coordination; and
- Establish guidance on criteria for issuing an AMBER Alert.

AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program | Training, technical assistance, and resources are uniquely developed and delivered via onsite and online methods to support and strengthen the work and programs of AMBER Alert across the nation, and internationally in cooperation with the U.S. border countries. AATTAP provides a secure [AMBER Alert Partners Portal](#) for AMBER

Alert Coordinators, Missing Persons Clearinghouse Managers, and Child Abduction Response Team (CART) program leaders – supporting interstate collaboration toward a more robust nationwide network of prevention and response efforts for the problems of endangered missing and abducted children.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) | In addition to facilitating AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution resources and WEA as previously described, NCMEC has also been tasked by DOJ to maintain national data for AMBER Alerts. In cooperation with the AMBER Alert Coordinators, a report is published each year and can be found at missingkids.org/amber. Communication should be maintained with NCMEC before, during, and after alerts to make sure activations go smoothly and data are gathered accurately. NCMEC has a variety of resources for law enforcement, families, and the public regarding missing and exploited children. Assistance is available 24/7 and can be accessed by calling 1-800-THE-LOST (843-5678). Additional information is available at missingkids.org.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) | The FCC and FEMA provide regulatory and operational support at the national level. The FCC mandates the standards for use of all public communication tools and technology, which impacts emergency alerting with everything from traditional broadcast to WEA. FCC directives drive communication modernization while also monitoring for compliance and proper use of communication tools.

FEMA provides operational tools for alerting, including IPAWS, and provides a comprehensive library of information on alerting standards and technology. AMBER Alert Coordinators should leverage their relationship with FEMA when exploring software vendors, EAS, IPAWS, or any future national tools for alerting.



FEMA AND FCC RESOURCES

Links to current FEMA and FCC information can be found in the
AMBER ALERT BEST PRACTICES COLLECTION

Federal Law Enforcement Agencies

While AMBER Alert is a tool that is deployed through local agencies, it is critically important that existing relationships and partnerships exist with federal agencies as well. While some notifications at this level are automated through existing processes, such as the NCIC entry for the abducted child with the Child Abduction (CA) or the AMBER Alert (AA) flag, nothing can replace the immediacy of specific plan notification that brings local representatives of federal agencies into the incident as soon as possible.

As the AMBER Alert is being issued through our media partners and other means of distribution, the local agency will start to feel the impact of widespread awareness about the abduction through escalating response demands in the form of phone calls, tips, and needed follow-up. This increased demand can very easily overwhelm and/or move beyond the jurisdictional boundaries of the original agency.

Agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS) can provide immediate assistance in the form of additional personnel, clerical support, analytical support, and technological assistance for the investigation and continued response. Having relationships with those entities can streamline the process of involving the agency and its specialized resources during the critical, early phases of an activation and investigation.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Transportation Security Administration and Customs and Border Protection components may also become involved early in an activation, depending on the location and potential travel of the suspect and the abducted child. Additionally, depending on the location of the alert and specific information related to the travel of the suspect and the abducted child, existing relationships with bordering state law enforcement agencies can prove very beneficial. Having points of contact and engagement with those representatives can facilitate reciprocal activation of their AMBER Alert plan; however, this is a task that would most assuredly best be accomplished via a shared agreement or MOU *in advance* of a crisis situation. All federal stakeholders operating in your state should be included in your list of automatic notifications when issuing an AMBER Alert.

AMBER Alerts, at their foundation, are about partnerships which support a comprehensive child recovery strategy; those between law enforcement, the media, emergency management, and other local, state, and federal entities. These relationships should be leveraged and utilized at a local and operational level whenever possible; and when forged at the agency and individual levels, they are better positioned to enable swift and effective response by all parties involved to safely recover missing children.



FBI RESOURCES

The FBI's Violent Crimes Against Children (VCAC) program provides rapid and effective response to all incidents of crimes against children. As part of this program, the FBI can provide Child Abduction Rapid Deployment Teams (CARD) composed of experienced personnel with a proven track record in violent crimes against children investigations, especially cases where a child has been abducted by someone other than a family member.

Team members provide on-the-ground investigative, technical, command post, mapping, and other resource assistance to state and local law enforcement. The teams work closely with FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit representatives, National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime coordinators, and Child Exploitation Task Force (CETF) members.

Media

Building Trust: Creating Relationships, Joint Planning, Communicating Regularly

At its core, AMBER Alert programs are founded on strong partnerships with various media outlets, which are vital allies in the search for a missing child. While the technologies which drive the creation and distribution of AMBER Alert messages, and thus the nature of the operational coordination with media outlets, have changed since AMBER Alert's inception, care in creating and sustaining these partnerships is no less important now than in the early days of AMBER Alert programs.

Relationships between key personnel within the activating agency and its local media outlet(s) are critical to the swift and clear communications upon which successful deployment of an AMBER Alert depends. These relationships must be fostered and maintained through regular communication. With changing personnel assignments likely to occur on both sides, it is important to remain in contact with area media outlets and make key introductions and build relationships with new/incoming partners in a proactive manner. A strong sense of trust between the media and law enforcement that alerts are only issued when all previously established criteria have been met can make all the difference in ensuring strong and clear communication about the alert and the missing child case.

Local TV and radio stations are the primary distributors of EAS messages, and reach their audiences with original broadcast and subsequent follow-up reporting on the incident. In addition to this primary outreach, they typically have large audiences through their website and social media presence. This allows an increasingly broad and swift outreach to the community at large.

Print media, while not historically an obvious "broadcast" partner, has seen their audience and reach evolve over the years. Most print media outlets also have website and social media followings that can be leveraged to help distribute the message, as many people sign up for and receive "breaking news" alerts from these outlets.

Agreements to Support Operations

AMBER Alert Program Coordinators and local law enforcement agencies are encouraged to work proactively with their area broadcasters and other media outlets to conduct planning sessions and develop operating agreements to promote the most immediate and effective response possible during AMBER Alerts. To protect the integrity of the AMBER Alert system and prevent transmission of false or misleading information to the media, clear parameters must be established about when, how, and what information will be shared by law enforcement when AMBER Alerts are activated in a child abduction case. **The following represent just some of the elements of those parameters which may be established, agreed to, and assessed through after-action reviews following cases.**

- Law enforcement officials will provide complete, thorough information that is not legally prohibited and does not jeopardize the integrity of an investigation or the child's safe rescue.
- Law enforcement officials will recognize that broadcasters have a responsibility to the public to provide accurate information; therefore, law enforcement should confirm (and refute if necessary) speculative reports before they are picked up/shared by the media.
- Law enforcement officials will quickly terminate an AMBER Alert when the threat is no longer imminent or apparent, or when the child is rescued, even if the suspect is still at large. AMBER Alerts are for the child, not the suspect.
- Activation of an AMBER Alert will not prevent news organizations, including stations airing AMBER Alerts, from using this information for legitimate news purposes.
- Information gleaned by legitimate news operations but not provided in the AMBER Alert announcement can be disseminated to the public in news broadcasts and newspapers.
- Law enforcement will establish procedures for making information available, when possible, to the media and to other law enforcement agencies before requesting an alert.
- Law enforcement and the media will agree to provide the time and personnel resources necessary for periodic tests of the equipment, systems, and platforms used for alerting the media.
- The official, approved AMBER Alert cannot be altered without the permission of the issuing law enforcement agency.

State Emergency Communications Committees

State Emergency Communications Committees can be an extremely valuable resource in the event of a publicly noticeable glitch in the EAS message. If public complaints are received by the AMBER Alert Coordinator, and with a functional working knowledge of how EAS is handled in the jurisdiction, the coordinator is better able to provide valuable feedback both to the public and law enforcement alerting authorities on how to best address potential issues with future alerts. Because AMBER Alerts are just one of a small number of emergencies that are authorized for use of the EAS and WEA, it is critical for AMBER Alert Coordinators to build these relationships in advance so that in the event of an alert, technical or operational questions about the system can be addressed at the appropriate level.

State Broadcasters Associations

State broadcasters associations can be a valuable partner for the AMBER Alert Coordinator to develop and maintain for future alerts and issues or questions regarding broadcast media. The association is a high-level point of contact in reaching those media entities that may not be participating or may need guidance in how best to assist in the event of an alert activation. The broadcasters association president may sit on the State Emergency Communications Committee.

CAREFUL, COORDINATED RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC



**AMBER ALERT BEST PRACTICES
RESOURCE COLLECTION**

**RULES OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT
(American Bar Association, 2018)**

**PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER:
ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Regional and Local Non-Governmental Organizations and Private Sector Partners

Businesses Utilizing Electronic Message Signs/Boards and Other Distribution Networks

Private business owners often want to donate resources to share AMBER Alerts with the general public, their customers, or employees; this can be a great way to get information to a variety of populations. For instance, casinos or shopping areas often have internet-connected digital signs which customers look at regularly. Whatever the resource, it is important to determine the purpose and scope for the tool so it can be effectively used for AMBER Alerts. Businesses with reach in a small area or a single state, or small number of states, may find connecting directly with specific states' AMBER Alert plans to be the best solution. However, companies with a larger reach to several states or nationally may find it more effective to become an AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution Partner with NCMEC and obtain a single feed through this program. Creatively connecting with businesses can help the AMBER Alert Coordinator discover powerful new ways to spread AMBER Alert awareness.

License Plate Reader Vendors/Platforms

The use of license plate reader (LPR) data by law enforcement agencies has rapidly expanded over the past decade. LPR systems work by scanning and photographing license plates of parked or moving vehicles with instrumentation in fixed positions or mounted on vehicles. This information is cataloged into databases that can be queried by those with access. The instruments capturing and cataloging these data can be owned and operated by law enforcement agencies or commercial entities (e.g., towing or repossession companies, private parking vendors, etc.).

AMBER Alert Coordinators should generally understand the nationwide web of data that exists in a variety of LPR databases, and have partnerships with federal agencies that can provide insight and assistance across state lines (e.g., DEA, U.S. Marshals, DHS-ICE, etc.). Moreover, coordinators should have an in-depth understanding of LPRs operating within their area of program coverage. Specifically, they should know what entities (law enforcement and/or commercial)

are collecting data and where their instrumentation operates, and should develop a methodology for actively utilizing their repositories of data with license information related to a child abduction event. Fusion centers in your area of responsibility may be able to assist as well.

Victim Advocacy Centers and Child Protection Nonprofit Organizations

The goal of an AMBER Alert is always the safe recovery of the abducted child; to do so successfully involves the work and focus of many different agencies and disciplines. The goal of safeguarding the most vulnerable among us does not exist solely in the event of a child abduction, and because of this there are many entities within communities that are focused on that mission at all times. Local child advocacy centers, missing person organizations, and others exist outside of local government and are valuable resources at any time when dealing with child well-being and protection issues. These entities are well established with support networks of volunteers, donors, and other child advocates.

Work to identify and build relationships with key points of contact at local/area child advocacy centers and similar organizations that can work with your agency when a child goes missing or is abducted. They may provide victim and family support, and help to coordinate resources for the family early on and over the duration of the case. Establish agreements or MOUs which outline the purpose and scope of involvement and which support swift call-out and notification of child and family advocates and support services when needed.

AMBER Alert in Indian Country

Mission

The primary mission of the AMBER Alert in Indian Country initiative is to design, develop, and implement AMBER Alert programs in Indian Country; to foster relationships between tribes and their state and regional AMBER Alert plans and partners; and to provide tribal communities with training and resources for quickly recovering missing, abducted, or exploited children.



A CHILD IS MISSING: THE FAMILY'S PERSPECTIVE

OJJDP and AATTAP convene an annual roundtable event during which family members and survivors of missing and/or abducted children come together to share their experiences and to help law enforcement better understand how enduring the disappearance or abduction of a child or sibling affects them. In the face of the anxiety, fear, and often horror that comes with these incidents, law enforcement's approach to working with the family during initial response, public alerting, ongoing investigation, and court prosecution proceedings has profound and lifelong impacts on the family – and the victim if safely recovered. Invaluable insights and recommendations on what law enforcement did well – and what they could have done better – are gained from these roundtable events.

AMBER Alert Coordinators and other AMBER Alert partners can read past Family Roundtable Reports by logging into the AMBER Advocate Website Partners Portal and visiting the Partner Resources area:

<https://www.amberadvocate.org/partner-portal/>

Resources for families can be found at the AMBER Advocate Website Community Resources area:

<https://www.amberadvocate.org/training-resources/community-resources/#rfc>

And from NCMEC:

<http://www.missingkids.com/ourwork/support>

The 2018 Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act

A law born out of the tragic abduction and murder of 11-year-old Ashlynnne Mike of the Navajo Nation endeavors to bring increased law enforcement coordination, new and expanded resources, and renewed hope for solid protection of children living on tribal lands. The Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act was passed in April 2018, nearly two years after Ashlynnne was kidnapped and killed on May 2, 2016, near the town of Shiprock on the Navajo Nation Reservation. The Act expands the original PROTECT Act that started the National AMBER Alert program in 2003, and offers help for tribes by allowing for integration of tribal AMBER Alert systems into state AMBER alert systems, making Indian tribes eligible for AMBER Alert grants, permitting the use of grant funds to integrate state or regional AMBER Alert communication plans with an Indian tribe, and waiving the matching funds requirement for grants awarded to Indian tribes.

Outreach, Partnerships, Implementation, and Growth

AATTAP has developed a five-element process for implementing AMBER Alert in Indian Country under the new law. That process involves educating and informing, assessing needs, conducting meetings, developing tribal resolutions and partnership agreements with state AMBER Alert systems, and delivering training and technical assistance to ensure the support needed is provided every step of the way.





Pamela Foster, mother of Ashlynnne Mike, speaks at the inaugural AMBER Alert in Indian Country training held September 25-26, 2018, in Fort McDowell, Arizona. The 2018 Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act is named for her daughter, who was abducted and murdered on Navajo Nation land in May 2016.



Participants attend a presentation at an AMBER Alert in Indian Country symposium.





4

Maintaining Readiness, Safeguarding Success

The Critical Importance of Stakeholder Training and Public Education/Awareness

Strategy

The process for developing and implementing AMBER Alert operations is complex, and the myriad issues involved in a critically missing child investigation are even more so. **With the significant interdependence of these two systems of response, the importance of a comprehensive training plan that addresses not only each partner's roles, responsibilities, and functions – but also the mission-critical points at which law enforcement's investigative processes and their constituent public alerting processes intersect – cannot be overstated.**

While critically missing children often represent a low-frequency, high-urgency incident for law enforcement agencies, many have not pursued training in first response and investigative management of these case types. As such, they are often not fully prepared for the immediate surge of media attention, the impact on their community, the strain on agency resources, and other dynamics that occur as part of the search, investigation, and potential activation of a public notification tool such as an AMBER Alert or Endangered Missing Advisory (EMA).

Training plans and curricula should clearly establish the knowledge, skills, and abilities all AMBER Alert partners need to be effective in the child recovery process. In addition to knowledge training, functional or operational knowledge must

also represent a strong component of any training strategy, through the use of tabletop exercises and field scenarios – both by role/function and comprehensively from first call intake through recovery and reunification.

In addition to rigorous law enforcement training as noted earlier in [Part II - Law Enforcement Response](#), a formal training plan for AMBER Alert should be in operation continuously/dynamically, with no less than an annual cycle. An **AMBER Alert training working group**, built and stewarded by the AMBER Alert Coordinator, should collect and assess information on training needs, making curricular adjustments and developing new/additional training tools to address them. The larger AMBER Alert Advisory Committee should be briefed on training plan updates and outcomes in order to provide high-level program feedback.

Assessment of AMBER Alert activations will yield data and intelligence that can be thoroughly analyzed through the incident review process, which addresses the strengths and weaknesses of AMBER Alert plans. Training needs will emerge from this review. Additionally, **needs assessment surveys** can be administered by the working group to identify specific problems or topics for which new or additional training is warranted, and to gather input on the most effective methods through which to deliver the training.

Approach

Training must be built, tested, and deployed as proactively as possible. It should be ongoing, thorough, and detailed enough to meet the demands of an unfolding child abduction investigation and its intersections with public alerting processes. As part of their law enforcement operations training, first responders, supervisors, investigators, and command-level personnel must clearly understand how their work feeds the AMBER Alert process.

Training should employ a variety of methods to achieve the greatest reach, relevance, and impact for those who need it.

Classroom or onsite events, online live events such as virtual instructor-led sessions and webinars, and self-directed 24/7 online learning are highly effective when used synergistically to create optimal access to information and resources. With demanding schedules involving shift work, on-call status, and extended field assignments, flexibility in trainings offered is key to reaching all outcome contributors and other stakeholders effectively.

Community roundtable and similar education-awareness events can bring citizen stakeholders together with key law enforcement and other AMBER Alert program personnel to better understand needs and discover improved ways to work together to protect children and respond to missing child incidents.

Leverage professional organizations and associations such as chiefs, sheriffs, and broadcasters to provide key statewide and/or regional training audiences through conferences and annual events. Moreover, work with them where appropriate to codify and integrate an AMBER Alert curriculum at the state level to promote uniform training standards.

Awareness and operational publications and distributable tools are essential to leaving your training participants and stakeholders at large with tangible, shareable resources. AMBER Alert program flyers, pocket cards for law enforcement field personnel, operational checklists for telecommunicators and investigators – all are important materials for carrying information beyond your training events. Provide law enforcement agencies with sample policies they can use to incorporate AMBER Alert into their comprehensive child recovery strategies.

Social awareness and learning content can also be delivered through websites and apps, short videos, and infographics, and can drive awareness and sharing of important program updates and areas of emphasis to engage stakeholders and the public, and keep them engaged over time, by receiving new and interactive content.

Training Support for AMBER Alert Partners

AMBER Alert Coordinators, Missing Persons Clearinghouse Managers, and other outcome contributors can find training, technical assistance, and operational resources from a variety of partners.

**National Criminal Justice Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College
(NCJTC-FVTC) | www.ncjtc.org**

For more than 25 years, NCJTC has served as a national leader responsible for carrying out some of the nation's largest and most high-profile training programs funded through the U.S. Department of Justice. Current initiatives include AMBER Alert, Internet Crimes Against Children, Missing and Exploited Children, and Sex Offender Re-entry training and technical assistance programs. With more than 150 subject matter experts providing instruction in more than 80 training programs, NCJTC provides current and relevant information and strategies to help federal, state, and local criminal justice professionals in every state and U.S. territory. Flexible training solutions include onsite training, distance learning, webinars, self-paced courses, and customized training and technical assistance programs that agencies can host or attend.

As part of the NCJTC, the U.S. Department of Justice **AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program** provides technical assistance training and services to federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies as well as other key AMBER Alert stakeholders to increase collaboration, improve skills, and develop effective policies and practices to protect and safely recover endangered missing and abducted children. Detailed information on the mission, training opportunities, and resources provided by the AATTAP, as well as access to the secure AMBER Advocate Website Partners Portal, can be found at the AMBER Advocate Website, www.amberadvocate.org.

**National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) |
www.missingkids.org**

NCMEC is a nonprofit organization that works in cooperation with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and which serves as the nation's clearinghouse and comprehensive reporting center for all issues related to the prevention of and recovery from child victimization. NCMEC provides training, technical assistance, and resources to law enforcement personnel and others who investigate crimes against children, specifically cases of missing and exploited children. NCMEC hosts traditional [classroom training sessions](#) at its headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, offsite regional trainings across the country, and online courses through the [NCMEC University Online program](#). NCMEC provides a range

of resources and services to law enforcement and criminal justice agencies to help bring home missing children and combat child sexual exploitation, such as case analysis, forensic and biometric support, on-scene technical assistance, sex offender tracking, and more. Find complete information at <http://www.missingkids.org/ourwork/caseresources>.

U.S. Department of Justice AMBER Alert Website | www.amberalert.gov

An official repository of AMBER Alert information, the [amberalert.gov](http://www.amberalert.gov) website provides a brief history of the program, links to state contacts and AMBER Alert plans, press releases, publications, and guidelines.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention | www.ojjdp.gov

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), a component of the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, promotes effective policies and procedures to address the problems of abused, neglected, missing, and exploited children. OJJDP also administers programs related to crimes against children and provides leadership and funding in the areas of enforcement, intervention, and prevention.





Conclusion

Every minute counts. Preparation is the key. Every critically missing child deserves a swift and decisive response from law enforcement. All outcome contributors to an AMBER Alert must be trained and prepared for a child abduction in advance. A well-developed and comprehensive child recovery strategy will promote the best possible integration and alignment of enforcement and investigative actions with public alerting and child and family support. And in the final analysis, this will offer the best framework through which to achieve a successful outcome – rescuing victims, saving lives, and effectively prosecuting those who would seek to harm children.

This guide is a starting point for a continuum of learning, growth, preparation, and continuous improvement in your agency's or organization's work as a key partner in the fight to protect children from becoming endangered, missing, or abducted. Utilize the [AMBER Advocate Website's Best Practices Resource Collection](#) to review and download additional information and tools to support your mission. Call upon your [AMBER Alert Regional Liaison](#) for direct support in identifying and requesting training, technical assistance, or help in connecting with other AMBER Alert Coordinators and partners in your region. Take full advantage of the resources and operational support of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at www.missingkids.org, or 1-800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678).

You are never alone in your work to protect children. Together we can move our missions forward.

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