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Emergency Management: Principles and Practice for Local Government

CHAPTER

The intergovernmental context

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This chapter provides an understanding of

- The management of disasters in a federalist system
- The importance of emergency management networks
- Frameworks for coordinating emergency management
- Approaches to financing local emergency management programs.

By its very nature, emergency management requires the integration of policies, programs, and operations among a variety of individuals and entities. On the one hand, the participation of diverse actors ensures access to significant knowledge, resources, and skills. On the other hand, this diversity may complicate or even hinder mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. Thus, to improve the quality of emergency management, it is essential to understand the overall context in which it operates.

This chapter examines the management of disasters under the federalist system of government. Given the extraordinary number of actors involved in emergency management, coordination and networking are essential. Equally important, however, is adequate funding from both internal and external sources. Because public officials and citizens are often apathetic about the need to proactively mitigate against disasters, emergency managers are faced with two sets of tasks: the routine responsibilities of running a department, and the broader job of mustering the necessary political support to effect change.

Managing disasters in a federalist system

To understand emergency management in the United States, it is necessary to understand the federalist system of government. The country's founders, concerned about the potential for abuse of power, opposed the idea of a unitary government in which all authority resided with a king or other central official. Instead, they created a political system in which authority is shared among local, state, and federal levels of government; among geographical jurisdictions; and among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The U.S. Constitution therefore reflected dual aims: (1) to separate the functions of government and (2) to allow for some degree of sovereignty at lower levels of government.

What does federalism have to do with emergency management? Federalism permeates every governmental function, and emergency management is no exception. In practical terms, emergency management activities involve a vast number of stakeholders—from the president to Congress, federal and state agencies, and local and state officials. Although federal agencies provide substantial resources for emergency management, local governments bear most of the responsibility for the success of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. States often act as intermediaries, helping to implement federal policies, training communities in best practices, and funneling federal grant monies.

The federalist nature of emergency management in this country is also reflected in the law: all lower levels of government are expected to comply with national legislation and its accompanying regulations. Thus, lower levels of government must follow directives that may conflict with their own needs and desires.

More than two decades ago, sociologist Thomas Drabek examined six major disasters over a two-year period and found that the responses to these events revealed four characteristics of the American emergency management system: localism, lack of standardization, unit diversity, and fragmentation.[1] *Localism* refers to the fact that municipalities have a substantial responsibility for emergency management. In contrast to many centralized governments, the U.S. federal government relies heavily on municipalities—the lowest level of government—as the main responders in any disaster. *Lack of standardization* refers to the variation in how emergency management is organized and undertaken. For instance, some communities have independent emergency management offices; other communities locate their emergency management functions within the office of the chief executive or within the fire or police department. Because no two communities or states have identical policies or organizational arrangements, emergency management agencies operate within distinct contexts. *Unit diversity* refers to the fact that entities of many different sizes and types commonly respond to disaster. Drabek notes, for example, that at least seventy-eight organizations became involved in the aftermath of the Lake Pomona (Kansas) tornado in 1978. Unit diversity is even more extensive today: more than two hundred agencies and organizations responded to the 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

The first three characteristics—localism, lack of standardization, and unit diversity—combine to yield the fourth: *fragmentation*. When federal, state, and local governments' approaches to emergency management diverge, the overall emergency management effort

Intergovernmental distance and integration

In a 1989 article, Llewellyn Toulmin, Charles Givans, and Deborah Steel asserted that governments and public agencies are confronted with the challenge of "intergovernmental distance."[1] This concept refers not to spatial detachment but to differing and conflicting organizational cultures (e.g., missions, budgetary priorities, bureaucratic procedures, and terminology).

Examples of intergovernmental distance in emergency management include the following:

- Emergency managers give special emphasis to emergency preparedness, whereas floodplain managers pay more attention to structural and nonstructural mitigation.
- Fire and police departments use different terminology for on-scene communication.
- Local emergency management departments view federal disaster programs as inapplicable to the jurisdictional context.
- The priorities of the state emergency management agency conflict with the goals of the state economic development department.
- The forms used for damage assessment vary dramatically among organizations that participate in this post-disaster function.
- Municipal and county finance departments are unaware of federal requirements for disaster assistance.

The theory of intergovernmental distance explains why multi-organizational responses are problematic in small disasters and especially difficult in larger events. The theory implies that local governments should make an effort, before disaster strikes, to minimize the horizontal and vertical strains that inhibit integrated policy making and discourage coordinated disaster management. Such efforts may include conflict resolution, role clarification, joint planning and training, mutual aid agreements, memorandums of understanding, and the establishment of interoperable communications systems.

[1] Llewellyn M. Toulmin, Charles J. Givans, and Deborah L. Steel, "The Impact of Intergovernmental Distance on Disaster Communications," *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 7, no 2 (1989): 116–132.

is subject to vertical strains. And when separate entities view emergency management from their own frames of reference—leading to conflicts across departments and between neighboring jurisdictions, for example—the result is horizontal fractures in the overall emergency management effort.

Thus, the decentralized nature of federalist government yields numerous emergency management organizations with differing policies, priorities, and programs. Decentralization has several practical effects. First, the proliferation of agencies that occurs under federalism creates uncertainty and disagreement about responsibility for essential emergency management functions, increasing the likelihood that a particular task or issue will fall through the cracks. Second, federal requirements inevitably conflict, at times, with state and local preferences—and may exceed state and local resources. However, when state or community leaders opt to ignore such requirements because they are either politically unpopular or excessively costly, those leaders risk losing vital funding for emergency management programs. It is through funding that the federal government encourages state and municipal governments to support national programs—and this means of control has only intensified since the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the creation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The federalist system is not without its advantages, however. Among the greatest strengths of federalism are flexibility, diversity, and redundancy. Because the Constitution limits the power and authority of the federal government, state and local governments may determine, to a certain extent, their own emergency management priorities. This is vitally important in a large and geographically diverse country such as the United States. Each state and community has its own hazards and vulnerabilities to deal with; no single approach will work in every situation. Diversity means that each level of government, including all its departments and agencies, brings specialized knowledge and skills to emergency management. Disasters could not be effectively addressed if only state governments existed, or if every municipal department was responsible for only firefighting or building code enforcement. Finally, certain disasters (e.g., catastrophic events), by their very nature, overwhelm local resources. Redundancy in the federalist system allows disaster-stricken communities to seek assistance from nearby jurisdictions or from state and federal agencies.

Emergency management networks

In the context of public administration, a network may be defined as a "policy making and administrative structure involving multiple nodes (agencies and organizations) with multiple linkages."[2] In the context of emergency management, such networks may include a variety of practitioners and organizations linked through formal or informal relations.

The goal of emergency management networks is to devise policy and to implement programs that will reduce vulnerability, limit the loss of life and property, protect the environment, and improve multi-organizational coordination in disasters. The degree to which the emergency management community collaborates *before* a disaster is a strong determinant not only of the success of mitigation and preparedness activities, but also of the effectiveness of management during the crisis and recovery periods.[3]

As noted earlier, a vast array of individuals and entities are involved in emergency management. The best way to harness the knowledge, skills, and resources of this eclectic group is to create, participate in, expand, and improve the effectiveness of emergency management networks. Successful collaboration depends on a clear understanding of each entity's roles and responsibilities in emergency management. Thus, emergency managers must familiarize themselves with the functions and capabilities of all departments, agencies, and organizations at various levels of government as well as of other entities in the private and nonprofit sectors. Emergency managers must also use networks to develop priorities, set goals and objectives, and agree on implementation strategies. Of course, this suggests the need for a great deal of collaboration across organizations. (Chapter 5 discusses collaborative emergency management in detail.)

In the wake of a disaster, networks form automatically. Numerous studies have shown that an impressive—and in some cases overwhelming—number of organizations will converge at the scene of an incident to perform vital disaster functions.[4] These organizations will attempt to communicate with one another, although some will interact more than others. Because of differences in expertise and level of authority, the boundaries of individual or overall responsibility may be unclear; nevertheless, the organizations generally attempt to coordinate their activities in a harmonious way. To make the best possible use of these spontaneously formed networks—referred to in the field as EMONs (emergent multi-organizational networks)—emergency managers not only must be aware of the number and diversity of agencies involved in disasters, but also should sharpen their administrative skills and their ability to improvise in cooperation with others. Most importantly, however, emergency managers must strengthen ties between organizations *before* disaster strikes. There is substantial evidence that preparedness networks enhance response: the structure of interorganizational relations augments the benefits of planning.[5]

Local emergency planning committees (LEPCs) are excellent examples of such preparedness networks. After the deadly chemical accident in 1984 in Bhopal, India, Congress passed the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act (EPCRA; also known as SARA Title III because it was part of the Superfund and Amendments Reauthorization Act). Under EPCRA, each state is responsible for establishing a state emergency response commission (SERC) to plan for hazardous materials emergencies. One of the responsibilities of a SERC is to help develop LEPCs.

Each LEPC must identify hazardous materials within the applicable geographic area and develop emergency operations plans to deal with toxic chemical releases. The planning process associated with SARA Title III requires a network that may include emergency managers, fire department officials, public safety officials, public health organizations, environmental agencies, community-based organizations, industry representatives, and school administrators. Psychologist Michael Lindell has noted that "LEPCs represent a rejection of the historical role of the isolated Civil Defense Director who sat in the basement of the courthouse and prepared emergency plans that were never read, much less implemented."[6] Lindell also observes that although not every jurisdiction has created or fully used LEPCs, the existence of an LEPC does improve disaster planning. LEPCs are most likely to be successful when they are funded adequately by the community, membership in the LEPC is sufficiently broad, the burden of planning can be shared, there is political support for the LEPC's goals, and the LEPC's leaders and participants cultivate a climate of teamwork.[7]

LEPCs are not the only examples of emergency management networks, however. Other networks focus on specific hazards (such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and terrorism), different phases of emergency management, distinct levels of government, specific sectors (such as public, private, and nonprofit), or particular functional areas (such as land use planning, public information, emergency medical care, and the preservation of historic structures). Larger and more extensive networks may combine a number of different elements. Emergency managers should determine what networks exist or need to be created in their communities and seek ways to integrate themselves into what can be called "webs of enablement." Networking is an essential tool for helping emergency managers fulfill their responsibilities.

Coordinating emergency management

Coordination can be defined as "the collaborative process through which multiple organizations interact to achieve common objectives."[8] Although coordination can be—and has been—defined in a number of other ways, there is less controversy about its value. The purpose of multi-organizational, intergovernmental, and intersector coordination is to eliminate "fragmentation, gaps in service delivery, and unnecessary (as opposed to strategic) duplication of service."[9] Coordination is most likely to be achieved when organizations have (1) pre-disaster ties (which generate familiarity with others' knowledge, skills, and abilities), (2) a means of sharing disaster information easily and quickly, and (3) a willingness to work together to meet emergency management needs.[10]

In practice, coordination often takes the form of vertical and/or horizontal integration. *Vertical integration* occurs within the bureaucratic structure of a single entity or between different levels of government. A local emergency management office that works closely with state and federal agencies to minimize hazard vulnerability or to provide expeditious relief to disaster victims is an example of vertical integration. *Horizontal integration* occurs among distinct entities (e.g., different departments within a local government, diverse community organizations, or nearby jurisdictions within a region). Examples of horizontal integration include a joint effort to suppress a fire that has spread across territorial boundaries, and the creation of standard operating procedures throughout a metropolitan area. In both cases, the goal is to take advantage of synergy and to avoid working at cross-purposes.

Coordination can be strengthened through a number of means, including joint planning, memorandums of understanding, and mutual aid agreements; the Emergency Management Assistance Compact; the Incident Command System; the Standard Emergency Management System; the National Response Plan; and the National Incident Management System.

Joint planning

When joint planning is undertaken at the local level, the emergency manager meets periodically with representatives from various local government departments, community organizations, and other levels of government to identify hazards and vulnerabilities, agree on which risks have the highest priority, and find ways to mitigate disasters. Joint planning efforts may also be used to strengthen response and recovery capabilities. Because local businesses and nonprofit organizations play a much larger role in emergency management today than they did in the past, it is essential to include such entities in joint planning sessions. (Chapters 5 and 10 discuss joint planning in greater detail.)

Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and mutual aid agreements are similar in that they are both designed to improve interagency, intersectoral, or interjurisdictional assistance and coordination. However, MOUs tend to be less formal than mutual aid agreements, which are often legally binding and must be approved by both the attorney and the governing body of the local jurisdictions involved. An official sanction is imperative because mutual aid may generate expenses and liabilities (specifically, the possibility of injury or death among responding parties).

The Urban Area Security Initiative

The goal of the Urban Area Security Initiative, a program of the Office of Grants and Training of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is to strengthen the ability of urban areas to prevent, deter, respond to, and recover from terrorism. The program encourages urban areas to employ regional approaches to preparedness and to adopt regional response structures where appropriate. The Office of Grants and Training is responsible for providing state and local jurisdictions with training, technical assistance, funds for equipment purchases, support for the planning and execution of exercises, and other support.

A number of intergovernmental issues arise once funds have reached state and local governments. As funds are distributed across the urban area, local governments and regional partners must work together to determine how and when the funds will be dispersed and which projects will be implemented.

The distribution of funds can take many forms. If a regional entity (such as a council of governments) covers all or most of the urban area, that entity can control the disbursement of funds according to project goals. For example, if the goal is to establish a secure wireless network across the region, the council of governments can distribute funds to each unit of local government as it implements its portion of the project. Alternatively, funds can be distributed to individual jurisdictions to use at their discretion, with the understanding that regional projects will be given priority; in this case, a local government unit may dedicate its funds to the construction of an intelligence analysis center, with the understanding that the local government will share information with the county, which maintains corrections records.

However funds are distributed, it is still necessary to decide which projects should take priority if the grant award is less than the requested amount. Setting priorities is especially important when local priorities do not mesh with either regional priorities or those put forth by DHS. For example, it may be very important to the security of a local government to purchase a backup generator for the continuity of operations in the event of an emergency. However, if the regional and national priority is to enhance interoperable communications, the generator may not be the ideal use of DHS funds. Ultimately, the projects that are given priority and implemented must strike a balance between meeting the needs of the local government and the needs of the region; they must also be realistic and attainable given the available funding.

Source: Rocky Vaz, manager, Intergovernmental Affairs, Dallas, Texas.

Mutual aid agreements are beneficial for a number of reasons. First, federal grants for emergency management endorse mutual aid agreements. Second, in the case of some preparedness grants, the federal government supplies equipment on the assumption that it will be shared among numerous municipalities and counties in a region. Third, and most important, mutual aid agreements improve the coordination of disaster response by resolving, during the calm of the planning period, challenging questions about joint assistance. Emergency managers should seriously consider participating in MOUs or mutual aid agreements.

The Emergency Management Assistance Compact

States can also work to improve coordination. In the wake of Hurricane Andrew, which occurred in 1992, Florida governor Lawton Chiles worked with the nineteen-state Southern Governors' Association to develop the Southern Regional Emergency Management Assistance Compact, an interstate disaster assistance program.[11] The goal was to provide member states with fast and flexible assistance, and to enable them to rely on each other, rather than on the federal government alone, for resources and support. In 1995, this regional compact was opened to all states that wanted to join. Congress endorsed the new organization, known as the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), in 1996, and today all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands are members. States are encouraged but not required to donate $1,000 annually to maintain the system.

EMAC is essentially a state-level mutual aid agreement. It uses standard forms for assistance requests, helps affected states acquire resources from other states that are willing to donate them, and ensures that legal questions about employee benefits and response expenses are resolved before a disaster strikes. In the near future, EMAC's members plan to standardize some of the aid packages that will be sent to states in need. Since its founding, the compact has already proven useful in disasters ranging from wildfires and ice storms to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. EMAC was also used extensively after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The Incident Command System

The Incident Command System (ICS) is widely recognized as a means of strengthening coordination, generally among first responders at the operational level. Conceived after a series of major fires in southern California in 1970, ICS is a widely used framework for emergency response; its purpose is to standardize operations across agencies while allowing sufficient flexibility to respond to unique circumstances.[12] The principal elements of ICS (known as "sections") are planning, operations, logistics, and finance and administration. ICS is implemented under the direction of the on-scene leadership. Because it improves communication within and across organizations, ICS also improves coordination, especially when the responding individuals and agencies focus on collaboration rather than on control. (ICS and other emergency management frameworks are discussed in detail in Chapters 7 and 9.)

The Standard Emergency Management System

Like ICS, the Standard Emergency Management System (SEMS) was first developed in California, after a major disaster: the 1991 East Bay Hills fire in Oakland. The response to this incident was inadequate, and state senator Dominique Petris introduced Senate Bill 1841, which called for the integration of emergency response operations among all agencies in California. Approved on January 1, 1993, the statute was designed to standardize emergency management training and operations, improve the flow of information, and strengthen coordination among responding agencies. Through SEMS, first responders and emergency management agencies in California were able to improve their responses to major disasters, including the Loma Prieta earthquake, the Northridge earthquake, and fires in the urban-wildfire interface.

Under SEMS, depending on the nature and scope of a disaster, five organizational levels may be activated: the field level, the local government level, the operational level, the regional level, and the state level. Because ICS is the organizing framework for disaster operations, mutual aid requests, resource management, damage assessment, and other important functions, SEMS mandates that all jurisdictions in California operate under ICS.

The National Response Plan

Federal plans offer yet another means of promoting coordination. The federal government has had a number of plans over the decades, but the most important was the Federal Response Plan (FRP), developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 1992. The FRP was designed to coordinate the activities of all twenty-six federal agencies that were involved in disaster response operations; it also addressed the role of the American Red Cross, which was classified as a partner organization. The FRP categorized the response activities of the federal government into twelve emergency support functions, which were divided among a number of signatory agencies that had either primary or support responsibilities. Primary agencies had principal authority for a function, and support agencies provided assistance if needed. Although the FRP was implemented with increasing effectiveness during the mid- to late 1990s, the attacks of September 11, 2001, led some government officials to feel that it did not sufficiently address the threat of terrorism. In response, DHS created the National Response Plan (NRP).[13]

Like the FRP, the NRP assigns responsibilities among primary federal support agencies and support agencies, but it addresses fifteen functions instead of twelve. Although DHS maintains that the NRP represents an all-hazards approach to disaster, most scholars and practitioners of emergency management believe that it is heavily slanted toward terrorism. Moreover, under the NRP, some of the departments and agencies that were included in the FRP (FEMA among them) appear to have a less important role in managing all types of disasters than they did under the FRP. The NRP is currently under review and is likely to be revised often.

The National Incident Management System

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) was also developed by DHS in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks. It is designed to standardize disaster response and to address a number of problems that surfaced in the attacks—specifically, communication failures, poor information management, insufficient interorganizational coordination, failure to provide accurate and consistent public information, and flawed incident management. Developed in accordance with Presidential Homeland Security Directives 5 and 8, NIMS includes six key components: command and management, preparedness, resource management, communications and information management, supporting technologies, and ongoing management and maintenance. NIMS mandates the use of ICS and is somewhat similar to SEMS in that its goal is to integrate the activities of various governmental entities so as to achieve a holistic and well-orchestrated response.

Like ICS and SEMS, NIMS provides a set of standardized structures, but it is much broader in its intentions and implications. First, NIMS seeks to improve post-disaster operations through predisaster planning and capacity building. Second, the common processes and procedures required under NIMS are designed to improve interoperability among all types of responders, including those in the private and nonprofit sectors. Third, NIMS operates at all levels of government.

Although NIMS has been formally adopted by DHS, it is controversial. Some observers have argued that NIMS is too focused on terrorism preparedness and response, and that this focus may undermine efforts to mitigate and recover from natural disasters. Others contend that NIMS's emphasis on standards may inhibit creativity and improvisation during response. Proponents of NIMS, in contrast, believe that it is flexible enough to deal with all types of disasters, regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity. They also view NIMS as a logical approach to integrating disparate elements of response into a coherent management system. One thing is certain, however: NIMS is a new approach to disasters that will require ongoing review and modification. In the meantime, members of the emergency management community will require further training in order to implement it.

Financing local emergency management programs

Mitigation measures, emergency preparedness initiatives, and disaster response and recovery operations are expensive: among many other activities, the local government must acquire property in hazardous areas, purchase warning and communications equipment, pay overtime to emergency personnel, remove debris in the wake of a disaster, and reconstruct government buildings in affected areas. But these "routine" expenses mask the larger picture of exponential increases in disaster losses. In light of these increases, the importance of external and internal funding cannot be overstated: financial resources are the lifeblood of any emergency management program. Successful emergency management thus requires a thorough knowledge of the federal funding process, as well as of state and local government procedures for allocating funds, acquiring resources, managing grants, and developing alternative funding streams. Finally, emergency managers must recognize the contentious nature of the budgeting process and ensure that knowledgeable staff members are in charge of financial operations.

External funding

External funding for emergency management in the United States comes from the federal government. Each year, Congress appropriates money to support emergency management.[14] These funds are used to mitigate disasters and improve preparedness capabilities nationwide; to finance the day-to-day operations of DHS and FEMA; and to help implement major federal initiatives (such as earthquake mitigation, terrorism prevention, and training for emergency managers and first responders).

Congressional allocations are also directed to the Presidential Disaster Relief Fund (which is distributed by FEMA) and to numerous federal agencies that have post-disaster missions and responsibilities. These include the Small Business Administration; the Army Corps of Engineers; and the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Agriculture. A specific amount of money is designated for post-disaster assistance each year; if disasters are unusually frequent or severe, the result may be a shortfall in relief allocations. When this occurs, Congress will debate the merit of supplemental assistance and provide such assistance as needed.

A sizable portion of annual federal allocations is distributed to assist states and local governments in meeting their emergency management responsibilities. Most of this money is not given directly to local governments; instead, it is funneled through state emergency management offices. The state retains a portion of the funding to address its own emergency management needs; the remainder is passed on to local governments in the form of grants. In a number of instances, the regulations governing the distribution of federal funding have led to contention. Under the formula that was initially used to distribute State Homeland Security Grants, for example, some rural states, such as Alaska and Wyoming, received more money per capita than heavily populated states, such as California.

Among the federal grants for which local governments may apply are Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grants, Community Development Block Grants, Emergency Management Performance Grants, Assistance to Firefighters Grants, Community Oriented Policing Grants, State Homeland Security Grants, Community Emergency Response Team Grants, Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Grants, and Urban Area Security Initiative Grants. In an effort to create a "one-stop shop" for state and local governments, many of these grant programs have been consolidated under the purview of FEMA. However, these and other federal grants are administered at the state level by a state administrative agency (usually the state office of emergency management). If there is a large number of jurisdictions in the state, this task can be extremely challenging. In such cases, regional councils of government, which have well-established relationships with their member governments, play a vital role in grant administration.

Each federal grant has unique limitations and eligibility requirements.

Emergency managers can increase local government funding substantially by applying for federal grants. In doing so, however, they should be aware that each federal grant has unique limitations and eligibility requirements. For instance, Emergency Management Performance Grants cannot be used to construct emergency operations centers. Some DHS grants are available only to urban areas with large populations and vulnerable infrastructure. Other grants require the jurisdiction to have a completed emergency operations plan that meets specified criteria, or to have mutual aid agreements with neighboring communities. Many federal grants also require local matching funds.

One of the most prevalent requirements today concerns multijurisdictional projects. In fact, some federal grant programs are based on an explicitly regional approach to emergency management. In 2005, by distributing grants specifically to councils of governments in some states, DHS attempted to limit expenses and increase overall capability: for example, instead of funding a hazardous materials team for each jurisdiction, the department funded one team for the entire region. This approach was based on the assumption that jurisdictions would share resources in time of need.

Although the regional approach is an economical means of meeting needs, it may complicate efforts to apply for and manage grants. Each jurisdiction will have its own preferences, and it may be difficult for localities to agree on funding and operational priorities. Ideally, a region would have the time to develop a complete strategy and coherent logistical plan before purchasing millions of dollars worth of emergency response equipment. Fortunately, some state administrative agencies have empowered councils of governments to partially withhold funding until studies can be completed to ensure the best use and allocation of resources.

Unique rules are applicable to other grants as well. As of November 1, 2004, local governments are required to have a FEMA-approved Hazard Mitigation Action Plan (HazMAP).[15] A community that lacks an approved HazMAP is ineligible for a number of federal assistance funds, including Hazard Mitigation Grants and Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grants. Moreover, lack of a state HazMAP plan may render the entire state ineligible for FEMA's Public Assistance Grants during recovery. (Such regulations have not always been enforced, however. After

Hurricane Katrina, for example, many Louisiana communities received post-disaster assistance even though they did not have approved HazMAPs.)

Different interpretations of grant rules may lead to conflict between different levels of government. For example, post-disaster relief funds are ordinarily distributed according to a 75:25 ratio of federal to local funding. However, when an area is affected by a disaster, its senators and representatives will pressure the federal government for as much money as possible. In some cases, the president has responded by giving more than a 75 percent share to affected communities—a choice that is often made more for political reasons than for practical ones. Such decisions have led other localities, which have received only the standard amount after disasters, to claim unfair treatment. State and local governments have also objected to delays in the distribution of federal funds. In their opinion, the federal government is too slow to release money for rebuilding after a disaster.

Grants are complex in other ways. The instructions given to elected officials and chief financial officers may be ambiguous or poorly written. Application guidelines for federal grants may change over time, with little or no notice. Grants may involve many departments and agencies, complicating decisions about priorities and the application process itself. Local emergency managers must understand the importance of following grant instructions, find ways to build consensus, and ensure that applications are filled out in a clear, logical, and concise way.

If an emergency manager succeeds in obtaining grant funding, that is when the work really begins. Funds may have to be shared among as many as ten functional groups, including first responders, public health departments, and public works departments. Disagreements among these parties will almost certainly arise as funds are distributed and spent. There will also be record-keeping requirements, reporting requirements (on an annual, semiannual, or quarterly basis), and other deliverables. Some grants may require a substantial amount of paperwork for two or more years.

The management of grant funds and the associated paperwork requires extreme care. A number of recipients of DHS funds have already been audited because of concern about possible funding abuse. As the result of one audit, a municipality was required to return $300,000 to the federal government because it had used DHS funding to pay its regular personnel costs. Maintaining sound business practices in grant administration is somewhat daunting. There are, however, useful steps that local governments can take to increase the likelihood of clean audits:

- Ensure that there is a dedicated point of contact who is knowledgeable about governmental accounting and purchasing practices
- Enlist the support and involvement of the local government's finance, auditing, or purchasing department
- Develop a standardized filing and inventory system
- Identify and tag all assets purchased with DHS funding
- Create a line of succession so that disruption is minimized in the event of staff turnover
- Meet with staff from the state administrative agency or the state accounting office to learn what these agencies look for in a typical audit; use this information to improve the community's grants-management process.

Internal funding

In addition to the funds provided by the federal government, state and local governments also finance emergency management with their own funds. State governments designate tax revenues to operate state emergency management departments. Allocations vary dramatically, depending on the hazards facing the state, the strength of the state's economy, the size of its population, and the values of its constituents. For instance, California has reserve funds for disasters that affect local jurisdictions, whereas Texas does not. There are also unique state-level funding streams. For example, after Hurricane Andrew hit Florida in 1992, legislators added a tax to homeowners' insurance. This money helps support all types of emergency management activities throughout the state.

Local governments are creative when it comes to obtaining funding for emergency management. One approach is to use bond programs or special tax assessments to pay for mitigation.

Berkeley, California, for example, has passed a number of bond issues to support such efforts as the seismic retrofitting of public and private infrastructure. In parts of Oklahoma and in other jurisdictions around the country, small tax increases have been used to fund projects to prevent repeated flooding. In these cases, the immediate financial impact on citizens was small, but the long-term benefits were substantial.

Emergency managers should be prepared for political reality: when risk reduction is perceived as interfering with economic growth, both businesses and elected officials may prefer a compromise approach.

In various parts of the country, local governments have benefited from Community Development Block Grants in their efforts to buy out property in low-lying areas. Risk reduction can also be financed through special assessment districts, impact fees, zoning revisions, and changes in development rights, all of which provide either incentives or disincentives to development. Tools such as impact fees and special assessments, however, must be used with caution because they may simply drive investors to seek out communities where such fees are lower or nonexistent. Emergency managers should be prepared for political reality: when risk reduction is perceived as interfering with economic growth, both businesses and elected officials may prefer a compromise approach.

Emergency management programs can also be financed through partnerships with outside agencies in the public, private, or nonprofit sectors. For example, in exchange for limited tax abatements, Collin County, Texas, obtained permission to use the fiber-optic networks owned by the Collin County Community College District. Among other purposes, the networks were used to develop redundant communications systems for homeland security. Nearby graduate programs also offer potential partnership opportunities: when students provide low-cost technical assistance to local governments, everyone—the local government, the university, and the students—benefits from the arrangement. Because colleges and universities may have substantial investments in research projects, educational institutions can also serve as funding sources for grants that require a match. For example, the University of Texas at Dallas and the North Central Texas Council of Governments filed a joint grant application for a federal technology grant. This particular grant required a "soft" match (a soft match may include previous investments, staff time, volunteer time, and other projects or resources that are related to and/or enhance the purpose of the grant). Because the university had previously undertaken an information technology research effort, the "local" share of the required matching funds already amounted to several hundred thousand dollars.

To support emergency management programs, many localities have worked out unique memorandums of understanding with private sector organizations. In one jurisdiction, a large and well-known department store agreed to be the main distribution point for vaccinations or medications in case of a bioterrorism attack. In a different region, a large and well-known fast-food chain agreed to promote and support community emergency response teams. In yet another case, two local stores that carry hardware and home supplies have formal agreements with a city to serve as drop-off points for donations; these stores have also expressed their willingness to donate plywood, plastic, and other items from their own inventories if needed. In such arrangements, the municipality benefits by acquiring private sector resources to address local emergency management needs, and the private sector benefits from the public relations opportunity.

Although nonprofit agencies struggle to find funding at times, these organizations may nevertheless be valuable assets for preparedness. The brochures and preparedness training available through the American Red Cross, for example, can help a community prepare for any contingency. Donations and volunteer time may offer an unexpected way to meet matching requirements for federal disaster funds. For example, after the communities of Fort Worth and Arlington, Texas, were struck by a tornado on March 28, 2000, more than five thousand volunteers assisted with recovery; by applying the hourly rates established by the United Way for volunteers ($11 per hour at the time) to the number of documented hours, the local government was able to demonstrate that the community had invested more than enough funds to meet the matching requirement. (A volunteer coordinator, supported by a fiscal analyst, pulled together the documentation.)

Important considerations

Whether at the federal, state, or local level, hearings regarding appropriations for emergency management can be contentious. Most policy makers prefer to avoid spending tax revenues on disasters that may not occur, and tend instead to award funds for law enforcement, education, and roads. Governmental frugality when it comes to emergency management is nowhere more evident, however, than at the local level. Local elected officials often overlook or ignore risk, and resist allocating money for emergency management programs and activities. They may believe that disasters will not occur, or they may assume that state and federal agencies will cover all expenses if disasters do occur. If an emergency management office is located within another department, such as police or fire, funding is even more difficult to obtain because the department's mission may not correspond exactly with that of the emergency manager.

The task of obtaining internal funding is often filled with strife and turmoil. Moreover, once funding has been obtained, gaining approval for budget increases is a constant challenge. Outdoor warning systems, backup generators, upgrades to the emergency operations center, and other important projects may not be given any serious consideration, much less make it to the local government's list of capital improvements. Appearing before a local governing board to propose an annual budget or request project funds can be intimidating. Emergency managers must provide clear, succinct, articulate, and well-conceived explanations of program needs and of how funds will be spent. While denials may be common, however, persistence will eventually lead to success.

Communities often miss out on funding opportunities because they fail to provide sufficient staffing and resources to pursue or manage grants.

One of the best ways to increase emergency management funding is to select the right person to manage grants and budgets. In most states, the governing body serves, by law, as the director of emergency services and therefore has the power to remove the emergency manager for failure to acquire money for, or properly plan for, the community's emergency management needs. Local officials must also recognize that the jurisdiction may be held liable for failing to meet minimum standards for mitigation and preparedness. They need to carefully evaluate the work of the emergency manager to ensure that whoever holds this key position is proactive and keeps officials abreast of grant programs and funding opportunities. Now more than ever, emergency managers require formal training and a higher level of education to perform their duties adequately.

Moreover, because the grant management landscape changes rapidly, it will often be impossible for one person to seek out, apply for, and manage grants. Today's grants are complex, the requirements for sharing funds with other departments and jurisdictions are numerous, and time frames are often tight. Therefore, a responsive and fast-acting grant management team is virtually essential.

Communities often miss out on funding opportunities because they fail to provide sufficient staffing and resources to pursue or manage grants. For example, to be eligible for DHS funding, Texas municipalities and counties had to complete a 180-page hazard and vulnerability assessment. Such an undertaking obviously requires a large staff, but because most emergency management programs have just a limited number of employees, only 95 jurisdictions completed the assessment during the first year. In the second year, several hundred more met the requirement. As of 2004, approximately 750 of more than 1,400 potentially eligible agencies had finished their assessments. Although 750 is far from the total number of jurisdictions, the ones that did complete the study make up about 95 percent of the state's population. Nevertheless, many jurisdictions missed out on two years of DHS funding simply because they could not complete the assessment on time. Moreover, several of the assessments included incomplete or inaccurate information because the staff members who were assigned the task of filling out the form lacked essential information.

In sum, a vibrant emergency management program is impossible without adequate funding, and obtaining that funding is the emergency manager's job. Local governments finance emergency management both through the normal budgeting process and through creative ventures with other entities in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Funding may also include federal grants for mitigation, preparedness, response, or recovery. Although acquiring and managing grants and other intergovernmental funding can be complex, emergency managers can successfully navigate such challenges if they use political acumen and always comply with local, state, and federal regulations.

Striving for change

As noted in the preceding section, one of the most persistent problems facing emergency management is insufficient resources. And one of the principal causes of insufficient resources is apathy toward emergency management on the part of both public officials and their constituents. But it is time to rethink attitudes toward disaster. Academic research, government investigations, and insurance reports all indicate that disaster losses in the United States average about $1 billion per week.[16] Studies also reveal that disasters are becoming more frequent and intense—a trend that is expected to continue and even accelerate.[17] The growing threat of disaster results, in part, from new and more complex hazards, but it also stems from increasing vulnerability. For example, urban development continues to pack people into dangerous areas, and building codes are not always enforced. Meanwhile, the responsibilities assigned to local emergency managers are increasing, but staff and material resources are not. Emergency managers are often hard put to meet even the minimum demands placed on them.

Emergency managers and related stakeholders—meteorologists, floodplain managers, land use planners, engineers, insurance companies, business-continuity planners, workplace safety specialists, and disaster relief agencies, among others—have an obvious incentive to strive for change. These and other professionals in the disaster field must take a more active role in the policy-making process: disaster-reduction champions are urgently needed. Emergency managers, for their part, should look for opportunities to remind elected officials of their responsibility to protect people, property, and the environment. They should strive to educate civic leaders about the benefits of mitigation and preparedness so that disaster management is included on the public agenda and in debates about community priorities. The emergency manager should also ensure that other local government departments and the general public are aware of the true costs of ignoring disasters. This push for change can be accomplished over lunch, at meetings of the local governing board, in newsletters, and through public speaking. The goal is to make the case—through hard evidence and skillful argument—for increased political support, new ordinances and regulations, and additional human and material resources for emergency management. The art of the profession is at least as important as the science of the field.

Emergency managers, for their part, should look for opportunities to remind elected officials of their responsibility to protect people, property, and the environment.

Of course, those striving for change must recognize that elected officials always face constraints and are likely to make trade-offs for the public good. Budgets are tight, and emergency management needs are often politically unpopular. The seemingly uncertain benefits of mitigation and preparedness are typically overshadowed by the more obvious needs for road repairs, new schools, and additional police officers. But emergency managers must not be discouraged by these barriers: persistence and dedication will pay off in the end. Linking emergency management to wider community goals—for example, by demonstrating how disaster mitigation can strengthen the local economy—is one means of increasing support. Another strategy is to take advantage of windows of opportunity: for example, to push for change after a disaster, when it is easy to get people's attention.

Emergency managers should maintain a stack of ready-made proposals that can be given, as circumstances direct, to the local governing body. These documents may include a buyout plan for apartments located in a floodplain, bids for the installation of a new warning system, a plan for a public education program, or a draft ordinance requiring the retrofitting of buildings. But time is of the essence: both elected officials and the public are more likely to approve such ideas right after disaster strikes, and the proposals are more likely to be accepted and implemented if they have been prepared in advance.

That said, emergency managers should not wait until after a disaster has occurred to press for change. And even as policies are adopted, the emergency manager should not assume that the battle is over. Public officials may, for example, state their support for ordinances but limit compliance to the letter of the law. Or they may sponsor the creation of written plans to appease their superiors or to obtain support from funding agencies, but they may fail to follow through by developing the capability to effectively implement the plans. New Orleans, for example, had an evacuation plan, but the city does not appear to have ensured that it was capable of implementing it. Encouragement, advice, assistance, and even cajoling may be necessary to persuade public officials and citizens to support emergency management projects and programs. And once the desired programs have been established and adequately staffed, the emergency manager must ensure that they are as effective and efficient as possible. The emergency management function is not a matter of checking off items on a list but of continuous monitoring and revision.

Summary

Local emergency management is directly influenced by the federalist structure of government in the United States. Emergency managers should take advantage of the value of networking with other individuals and groups, and must employ a number of strategies to facilitate multi-organizational collaboration. The level of external and internal funding has a direct impact on local emergency management programs. Because disasters are becoming more frequent and intense, emergency managers should strive to influence disaster policies. They must make a strong and consistent effort to influence decisions that will affect the strength of emergency management institutions.

Notes

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16 Dennis S. Mileti, *Disasters by Design: A Reassessment of Natural Hazards in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press, 1999), 66.

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