



PROGRAM EVALUATION DIVISION

NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

December 2020

Report No. 2020-13

Better Coordination with Nonprofit Volunteer Organizations During Preparedness Can Improve Disaster Recovery

Highlights

IN BRIEF: The Department of Public Safety's Division of Emergency Management (NCEM) coordinates with local emergency management agencies and nonprofit volunteer organizations to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. A majority of stakeholders perceive NCEM's coordination with nonprofit volunteer organizations as sufficient. However, opportunities exist for improvement. Specifically, coordination could be strengthened by engaging nonprofit volunteer organizations through communication, training, and formal agreements; issuing guidance to local governments; and establishing at least one dedicated Voluntary Agency Liaison (VAL) position.

Background: Session Law 2019-250 directed the Program Evaluation Division to examine the Department of Public Safety's coordination with nonprofit organizations for disaster recovery planning. Such planning is often referred to as disaster preparedness and consists of activities that build, sustain, and improve operational capacity to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from disaster incidents by ensuring entities are as prepared as possible to respond to disasters.



An example of a disaster preparedness activity would be the development of a state emergency operations plan or recovery framework that outlines roles and responsibilities of both governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in managing disasters.

Disaster recovery refers to short-term and long-term activities that seek to return community systems to normal. Portions of the recovery phase sometimes overlap with the response phase, but recovery lasts much longer, often from several months to years.



An example of a disaster recovery activity would be rebuilding homes in a community that experienced a loss in its number of residential properties, as opposed to providing shelters, which would be a disaster response activity.

NCEM's coordination with nonprofit volunteer organizations can be improved with better engagement during disaster preparedness. Effective coordination requires stakeholders be aware of, agree to, and commit to roles and responsibilities for disaster activities. This evaluation found some nonprofit volunteer organizations did not know

whether they were included in state preparedness plans, had not received copies of planning documents, or did not agree to being included.

Recommendation:

The General Assembly should require NCEM to distribute preparedness plans to nonprofit volunteer organizations, verify that nonprofit volunteer organizations know and agree to their roles and responsibilities, and explore the use of memoranda of understanding.

Local governments need guidance from NCEM on how to coordinate with nonprofit volunteer organizations, COADs, and LTRGs for preparedness and recovery. Effective coordination at the local level is extremely important because all disasters begin and end within individual communities. The Program Evaluation Division found local emergency management agencies struggle in coordinating with a statewide nonprofit partner (i.e., NC VOAD) and also struggle to coordinate with two types of local nonprofit groups—community organizations active in disaster (COADs) and long-term recovery groups (LTRGs). Issues involving coordination at the local level hinder preparedness and recovery for communities.

Recommendation:

The General Assembly should direct NCEM to provide guidance to local emergency management agencies to improve coordination with nonprofit volunteer organizations.

North Carolina needs a dedicated Voluntary Agency Liaison.

A dedicated Voluntary Agency Liaison (VAL) serves as a central point of contact and coordination between government agencies and nonprofit volunteer organizations active in disasters. Having at least one VAL at the state level is considered a best practice.

NCEM has a position designated to fulfill these responsibilities that also performs other tasks that constitute a majority of the position's duties; only 20% of the position's activities consists of VAL-related tasks. Multiple stakeholders in federal and local government as well as nonprofit volunteer organizations find the effectiveness of this arrangement to be limited because of the position's split responsibilities.

The agency recently established a VAL position and is using supplemental federal grant funding to support it. However, the essential job functions of this new position do not resemble that of a dedicated position. Additionally, the funds used to support the position are designated for response to the ongoing coronavirus public health emergency and are set to expire in 2022. Federal funds can be used to fully support dedicated VAL positions beyond the expiration of the current funding source.

Recommendation:

The General Assembly should require NCEM to report on the effectiveness of VAL activities.