

FINDINGS FROM 2022 INTERGOVERNMENTAL ROUNDTABLE ON

# DISASTER RESILIENCY

FEBRUARY 11, 2022 / WASHINGTON, D.C.

## Top Challenges in Intergovernmental Coordination and Collaboration

In February 2022, federal, state and county officials convened for a roundtable discussion to identify top challenges in intergovernmental coordination and collaboration in disaster resiliency. The following is a summary of key takeaways and priority challenges in achieving disaster resilient communities across the U.S.

## KEY TAKE-AWAYS

### Disasters Are Local.

Disasters directly affect people in their homes and their local communities. To support residents in response and recovery, there are distinct roles and responsibilities across levels of government that leverage strengths and resources. Counties lead at the local level, states coordinate wide-reaching responses and fund distribution, and the federal government provides financial aid and national response resources. The federal government provides aid to states and localities.

### Disasters Are Increasing In Frequency And Severity.

Twenty years ago, the U.S. experienced between five to eight 'billion-dollar disasters' per year. That number has been increasing, reaching 20 separate billion-dollar disasters, which totaled approximately \$145 billion in damages, in 2021. Intergovernmental partners recognize the growing imperative to address key challenges present in our current system of response and recovery.

Event hosted by the National Association of Counties with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts





# PRIORITY CHALLENGES

## **There Are Disparities In Local Capacity And Resources.**

Funding for key services, such as emergency management, at the local level is largely based on local tax revenue. Counties are not equally resourced, though they have the same responsibility in the event of a disaster. County officials estimate that even in the smallest counties, the county emergency management office requires up to five full-time positions to be able to adequately prepare and respond.

There is greater demand for services than ever before, including providing public information in more languages and formatted for mobile devices and providing more complex health and behavioral health services in emergency shelters.

## **Disasters Are Expensive And Difficult To Budget.**

Even the most well-resourced counties often do not have the funds needed to adequately respond to a disaster event.

***“My county, which is a mid-sized county of about 150,000 people, had to front approximately \$15 million for Hurricane Florence. It took time for us to begin seeing reimbursements. We were very thankful that we had planned for that.”***

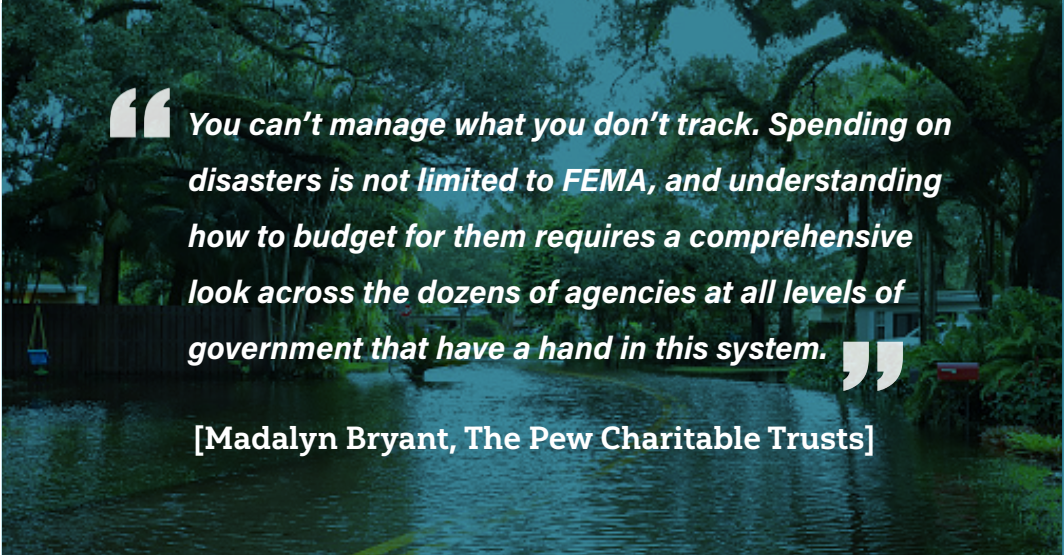
[Frank Williams, Commissioner, Brunswick County, N.C.]

Accurate budget forecasting requires accurate tracking of past expenses; however, most states and local governments do not comprehensively track disaster spending, largely due to the episodic and variable nature of disaster events and the reality that spending is spread across multiple agencies,

levels of government and the private sector. States may provide support to under-resourced counties, stepping in when disasters are more severe.

***“In Florida, we have 29 fiscally constrained counties that just do not have the same capability that a Miami-Dade or a Duval County or Orange County have...one thing that we do here in Florida is that we give out 12.5% match to all counties and municipalities on the 75% recovery funding that FEMA provides.”***

[Kevin Guthrie, Director, Florida Department of Emergency Management]



***“You can’t manage what you don’t track. Spending on disasters is not limited to FEMA, and understanding how to budget for them requires a comprehensive look across the dozens of agencies at all levels of government that have a hand in this system.”***

[Madalyn Bryant, The Pew Charitable Trusts]

State, federal and private grants can provide needed resources, but identifying, pursuing, funding a cost-share component and accomplishing the technical parameters of grants is challenging and time consuming.

## **Federal Support Is Complex And Often Slow.**

Federal disaster spending is spread across 17 major departments and agencies, including FEMA, USDA, HUD, DOD, HHS, DOT and the EPA, each with different award or reimbursement processes. While some resources can be aligned, there is a need for improved coordination at the federal level.

Long lead times and inconsistent processes between agencies lead to long gaps between response and recovery. State and county officials note that HUD's Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) grants are often awarded up to four years after a disaster event.

### **Federal Support Systems Are Not Designed For Equitable Distribution Of Resources.**

Government officials at all levels recognize that some communities are left behind after disasters.

***"We certainly can say our processes are blind and credible and we fund the best projects that we see, but are they the best projects? That's the question."***

[FEMA official]

DOD, FEMA and other federal agencies are working to build local capacity, drive equitable responses and support underserved communities in recovery and mitigation efforts through initiatives like DOD's REPI Program.

### **Emergency Management Is Too Focused On Recovery, Rather Than Preparedness.**

Government officials agree that emergency management has focused for too long on recovery rather than preparedness, such as hardening infrastructure to avoid loss of power and mitigating flooding so residents can stay in their homes. Officials estimate a 1:1 return on investment for recovery, whereas mitigation produces a 6:1 return. Participants noted several mitigation tactics that are not widely adopted, such as comprehensive insurance and adopting the latest hazard-resistant building codes. According to federal officials, only 38% of counties have adopted the 2018 code.

***"Disasters are going to come. More and more we depend on FEMA to build out state and local governments because they're underinsured or not insured."***

[Kevin Guthrie, Director, Florida Department of Emergency Management]

### **Building Community-Led Preparedness.**

Residents must invest in disaster preparedness and reduce over-reliance on government services at all levels. To accomplish this, community leaders should promote resiliency to their citizens by educating their communities about safety kits, insurance, disaster planning, and resiliency/sustainability tactics.

***"The biggest thing is just be prepared. We need to develop - in every county in the country - a culture of preparedness."***

[Frank Williams, Commissioner, Brunswick County, N.C.]

### **Actionable Science For Better Decision-Making.**

Government officials agree there is uncertainty in predictions related to sea level rise and other planetary stressors, though the science is advancing and uncertainty is reducing. The federal science enterprise, inclusive of NOAA, NASA, USGS, the Department of Energy and others, is working to both advance research and to translate this research into user-informed resources to better enable risk-informed decision-making at local levels.

***"Science for science's sake is indeed necessary but insufficient to improve adaptation outcomes on the ground. There is a critical need to collaboratively identify, understand, and communicate priorities of how science and services need to advance."***

[Mark Osler, Senior Advisor for Coastal Inundation and Resilience, NOAA]



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