
Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The General Assembly should direct the Department of Public Safety's Division of Emergency Management to provide guidance to local emergency management agencies to improve coordination with nonprofit volunteer organizations.

As described in Finding 1, local emergency management agencies would benefit from additional state guidance on how to effectively coordinate with nonprofit volunteer organizations. Effective coordination at the local level is important because all disasters begin and end within individual communities, with the State offering support to improve preparedness, facilitate response, and promote recovery. Local emergency management agencies struggle in working with one of the State's major nonprofit partners, North Carolina Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NC VOAD); this challenge in coordination is likely the result of local preparedness plans not outlining NC VOAD's roles and responsibilities.

Additionally, and as outlined in Finding 3, a permanent network of local nonprofit coordinating groups referred to as community organizations active in disasters (COADs) and long-term recovery groups (LTRGs) play an important role in disaster preparedness and recovery for local communities. In North Carolina, there are currently 15 LTRGs and three COADs.

The General Assembly should direct the North Carolina Department of Public Safety's Division of Emergency Management (NCEM) to provide annual guidance to local emergency management agencies that directs them to

- outline within local preparedness plans the roles and responsibilities of NC VOAD in communities during all disaster phases,
- obtain membership within COADs or LTRGs where applicable, and
- seek to develop COAD or LTRG partnerships with local private and public sector organizations, including nonprofits, if none exist.

NCEM should report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety, Joint Legislative Emergency Management Oversight Committee, and House Select Committee on Disaster Relief by December 1, 2021 on the implementation of this recommendation.

Recommendation 2. The General Assembly should require the Department of Public Safety's Division of Emergency Management to ensure that the distribution list for preparedness plans includes all nonprofit volunteer organizations mentioned in those plans and to establish criteria for more formal agreements.

As discussed in Finding 2, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety's Division of Emergency Management (NCEM) can improve how it engages with nonprofit volunteer organizations during the preparedness phase by ensuring that nonprofits know whether specific roles and responsibilities have been outlined for them in state preparedness plans. A simple way to achieve this objective would be to ensure that every nonprofit partner included in preparedness plans is included on NCEM's distribution list for

those plans. Another means of improving preparedness through better engagement would be through the use of formal memoranda of agreement between NCEM and nonprofit volunteer organizations, as other states have done.

In order to improve preparedness and ensure that nonprofit volunteer organizations know and agree to their outlined roles and responsibilities related to disasters, the General Assembly should require NCEM to include North Carolina Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NC VOAD) and other nonprofit volunteer organizations, as is necessary, in the distribution list for state preparedness plans such as the State's Emergency Operations Plan. In addition, NCEM should be required to obtain written verification that all entities received their designated copies of preparedness documents, which will ensure expectations have been communicated for disaster response and recovery.

The General Assembly should also require NCEM to establish policies and procedures for determining when and how the State should incorporate the use of more memoranda of understanding or agreement with nonprofit volunteer organizations.

NCEM should report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety, Joint Legislative Emergency Management Oversight Committee, and House Select Committee on Disaster Relief by December 1, 2021 on the implementation of this recommendation.

Recommendation 3. The General Assembly should require the Department of Public Safety's Division of Emergency Management to report on the effectiveness of Voluntary Agency Liaison activities.

As detailed in Finding 4, having a dedicated Voluntary Agency Liaison (VAL) at the state level is considered a best practice, and North Carolina meets conditions indicating the State would benefit from having one or more VALs. The North Carolina Department of Public Safety's Division of Emergency Management (NCEM) has assigned a portion of one position to fulfill these responsibilities and stated it has recently established one dedicated full-time VAL. However, the responsibilities outlined for this position do not resemble that of a dedicated position. Given the current job description of the VAL position, an oversight mechanism is necessary to ensure the position remains solely focused on performing VAL-oriented tasks.

NCEM has used supplemental federal funding that will expire in 2022 to support the newly established VAL position. Federal funds that North Carolina already receives can be used to fully support all VAL positions going forward.

To confirm the ongoing dedicated full-time status of the newly created VAL position, the General Assembly should direct NCEM to report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety, Joint Legislative Emergency Management Oversight Committee, and House Select Committee on Disaster Relief by December 1, 2021 on outputs and

outcomes associated with the essential job functions of the VAL position including

- updating contact information;
- developing a resource registry for nonprofit volunteer organizations;
- developing operational guidance for recruiting and developing community organizations active in disaster (COADs) and long-term recovery groups (LTRGs) where none currently exist;
- training existing COADs and LTRGs on operational capacity;
- taking part in recommended training modules; and
- any other strategies used for maintaining partnerships with nonprofit volunteer organizations at both the state and local level.

NCEM should report to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety, Joint Legislative Emergency Management Oversight Committee, and House Select Committee on Disaster Relief by December 1, 2021 on the implementation of this recommendation.

Appendices

Appendix A: Description of Disaster Events in North Carolina Since 2011

Appendix B: Matrix of Stakeholder Participation by Disaster Phase

Appendix C: Use of Emergency Performance Management Grant Funds

Agency Response

A draft of this report was submitted to the North Carolina Department of Public Safety to review and respond. Its response is provided following the appendices.

Program Evaluation Division Contact and Acknowledgments

For more information on this report, please contact the lead evaluator, Adora Thayer, at Adora.Thayer@ncleg.gov.

Staff members who made key contributions to this report include Allie Jaarsma, Brent Lucas, and Sidney Thomas. Kiernan McGorty is Acting Director of the Program Evaluation Division.