REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND HOMELAND SECURITY

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT NEEDS EVALUATION STUDY

TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2026, the General Assembly directed the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, in coordination with VDEM and statewide partners, to assess Virginia's emergency management needs, evaluate the sustainability of its current funding model, and review alternative approaches used across the country. This directive comes at a time of significant transition: federal funding is becoming less predictable; disasters are increasing in frequency and complexity; and states and local governments are being asked to assume greater responsibility for preparedness, response, and recovery.

Drawing on 5 years of Local Capability Assessment for Readiness (LCAR) data, statewide risk assessments, after action reports, Regional Readiness Summit findings, federal policy analyses, and comparisons with peer states, the study identifies significant opportunities to strengthen capabilities across state, regional, and local levels. These gaps fall across **3 interdependent themes**:

1. **State-level capability needs.**
   The study identified several opportunities to strengthen Virginia's emergency management capabilities, including managing incidents that fall below federal declaration thresholds, improving coordination across the emergency management enterprise, modernizing information sharing, strengthening public communication systems, and establishing statewide training, qualification, and resource management standards. Capability levels vary significantly across agencies and localities, complicating unified operations during major or multi-jurisdictional events.

2. **Local emergency management capacity.**
   Local programs - especially small and rural jurisdictions - face persistent staffing shortages, uneven access to technology, and limited capability to maintain plans, conduct exercises, and sustain specialized operations. Only 19% of local programs meet all 3 LCAR staffing profile indicators (which will be discussed in depth later in this report), representing just 28% of the Virginia's population. Federal pass-through funds have not kept pace with local needs, leaving many programs unable to invest in building capacity.

3. **Integration of nongovernmental and nontraditional partners.**
   Private sector partners, institutions of higher education, community services boards, and nongovernmental organizations hold capabilities essential to preparedness, response, and recovery. Yet integration is ad hoc rather than systematic, and partnerships are not consistently reflected in emergency operations plans, notification systems, or real-time coordination structures. Support for populations with access and functional needs remains uneven across mission areas and is often constrained by limited funding and capacity.

The study also finds that **Virginia's emergency management enterprise is not sustainably funded**. The field of emergency management has evolved from a single hazard discipline in the 1950's,

focusing primarily on civil defense issues related to a nuclear attack, to a comprehensive multi-hazard program with a host of evolving programmatic requirements that state and local government must comply with.[1] Over the last decade, federal grants have made up nearly 92% of VDEM's total budget, including a substantial share of core operating costs. This level of federal dependence creates significant financial risk as federal funding levels decline, awards are delayed, and federal requirements and conditions continue to evolve. Local governments face similar challenges, relying heavily on federal pass-through funding to support essential emergency management capabilities. At the same time, the FEMA Review Council's Final Report signals a shift toward greater state and local responsibility for disaster costs and administrative functions, further increasing the need for a more sustainable state and local funding model.

In support of unified readiness, there is an immediate need for state funding for 94 current positions to sustain emergency management staffing and capabilities, reducing dependence on short-term and increasingly uncertain grant funding while ensuring long-term operational readiness. This need includes 49 positions identified in VDEM's budget package request, consisting of 38 Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG)-funded positions and 11 Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI)-funded positions, an additional 11 Virginia State Police/Virginia Fusion Center positions facing grant and scope-related concerns, and 34 positions currently supported through disaster management cost recovery (20 positions) and State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) funding (14 positions). Together, these 94 positions represent the minimum staffing necessary to maintain existing services and capabilities, not future growth.

Transitioning these positions to stable state funding directly aligns with the recommendations of the SPSHS Strategic Plan and this study, both of which emphasize reducing reliance on declining federal grant programs and establishing a sustainable state funding source. It also supports priorities identified during the Unified Readiness Summit (prioritized by the 1,000 public safety leaders in attendance), where staffing emergency management with state dollars and moving positions off short-term grant funding emerged as two of the top priorities. Recent FEMA guidance further underscores the urgency of this action, including potential restrictions on using EMPG funds for salaries, increased cost-sharing burdens on states, and ongoing uncertainty surrounding federal grant programs. Funding these 94 positions with state resources will strengthen Virginia's readiness posture, provide workforce stability, reduce operational risk, and ensure the Commonwealth can continue delivering critical preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation services regardless of fluctuations in federal funding.

Strategic Recommendations

The study provides a set of strategic recommendations aligned to the 3 themes and the funding analysis that would most effectively strengthen Virginia's emergency management enterprise. These

[1] Department of Emergency Services, *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster*, *House Document No. 21*, (Richmond, VA: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1994), 32. https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/1994/HD21-PDF.

recommendations represent the most critical actions Virginia can take to improve emergency management capability, resilience, and fiscal sustainability:

Build and sustain emergency management capabilities at the state level.
Implement the Unified Readiness Framework; develop a statewide capability inventory with documented activation pathways; modernize information sharing and technology systems; establish statewide staffing, planning, and training standards; and clarify resource-deployment criteria for non-declared incidents.

Strengthen local capacity.
Fund minimum local staffing requirements, incentivize plan maintenance, expand access to training and exercises, formalize local-to-local mutual aid, support local mitigation projects, and sustain recovery and hazard mitigation expertise at state and local levels.

Better integrate nongovernmental and nontraditional partners.

Create a dedicated private sector integration program; formalize partnerships with critical infrastructure, nongovernmental organizations, and institutions of higher education; enhance information sharing and notification systems; and invest in preparedness initiatives that support populations with access and functional needs.

Modernize Virginia's emergency management funding model.
Establish stable, recurring state support that reduces reliance on federal grants and equitably supports local, regional, and statewide emergency management capabilities, including incidents below federal assistance thresholds. The model should also improve coordination and tracking of public investments and the significant resources contributed by volunteer organizations and private sector partners.

Many of the findings in this study echo conclusions identified more than 3 decades ago in the Commonwealth's 1994 *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster* report. While Virginia's emergency management capabilities have expanded substantially since that time, driven by improved planning, stronger partnerships, and advancements in technology, several long-standing gaps and vulnerabilities persist. The continuity of these challenges across multiple generations of emergency management professionals underscores the need for sustained investment and structural modernization to ensure Virginia is prepared for increasingly complex and consequential disasters.

This study provides a path forward: a readiness model that is resilient, modernized, and sustainably funded—positioning Virginia to protect its communities, infrastructure, economy, and quality of life in an era of accelerating risk.

Virginia has built substantial capability through years of state, local, and intergovernmental partnership. Yet Virginia now faces a critical inflection point. Virginia's emergency management enterprise must adapt to a more complex risk landscape, growing operational demands, and an evolving federal role. Sustained state investment, stronger local capacity, and purposeful integration

of nongovernmental partners are essential to ensuring that Virginia is equipped to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from future disasters.

This study provides a path forward: a readiness model that is resilient, modernized, and sustainably funded—positioning Virginia to protect its communities, infrastructure, economy, and quality of life in an era of accelerating risk.

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INTRODUCTION

Virginia has built substantial emergency management capability through strong partnerships between VDEM, the Virginia Emergency Support Team (VEST), local governments, tribal nations, institutions of higher education, regional coordination groups, as well as with private sector, nongovernmental organizations, and federal agencies. The present challenge is to sustain and modernize that capability as responsibilities, hazards, technology, and funding conditions change.

As noted in the 1994 report *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster,* the state and political subdivisions have successfully compensated for many of the emergency management enterprise shortfalls due to the nature, scope, or location of previous disasters.[2] It cautioned, however, that those same weaknesses would become far more apparent during a major or catastrophic event, particularly one occurring in a densely populated and heavily developed area of the Commonwealth. Over 30 years since the report was published, the emergency management landscape has changed dramatically but many of the risks remain.

Virginia's emergency management enterprise faces escalating challenges driven by the increasing frequency of disasters and high-profile events; heightened costs for response, recovery, and mitigation; and a transition beginning in 2025 from a historically dependable federal funding model to one with increasing requirements, conditions, and legal concerns. The historic 76-day Department of Homeland Security (DHS) shutdown in fall 2025 and spring 2026 further limited Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) support to states. During the shutdown, most activities not directly related to life-saving operations, including certain public assistance functions, long-term recovery, training, policy development, and deployments, were paused. In addition to these recent reductions in state support, the President's Federal Emergency Management Agency Review Council's Final Report, published May 7, 2026, recommended various policy, legislative, and regulatory changes involving shifting disaster management to a model in which state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments play the primary response and recovery role. As part of these recommendations, FEMA is reassessing its role in supporting states and realigning the criteria for federal disaster assistance to account for SLTT capacity, with an emerging theme that states should independently manage routine or less costly events.[3] These actions and recommendations signal a clear shift: as federal disaster aid becomes more restrictive and conditional, Virginia must assume greater responsibility and expand its own emergency management investments.

In light of these developments, the Virginia General Assembly directed the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security to evaluate Virginia's emergency management capabilities and identify

[2] Department of Emergency Services, *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster*, House Document No. 21 (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1994), https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/1994/HD21-PDF.
[3] The President's Council to Assess the Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Final Report, May 7, 2026, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2026-05/26_0507_fema%20review%20council_final%20report.pdf.*

strategies to strengthen state and local readiness (SB98/HB169, Chapter 570). This study responds to a growing concern that Virginia's current emergency management model, which is built around consistent federal partnership and funding, is increasingly vulnerable. Over the past decade, many federal emergency management funding sources have remained level or declined while the costs of maintaining basic capabilities have continued to rise. That longstanding funding pressure, combined with the federal realignment now underway, creates additional risk for state and local emergency management programs. The purpose of this study is to provide the General Assembly with a clear and evidence-based understanding of Virginia's current emergency management capabilities, the challenges and gaps that affect statewide readiness, and strategic recommendations to address them.

This study draws from 6 lines of evidence:

- **Financial analysis.** VDEM budget and grant management data from federal fiscal year (FFY) 2017 through FFY 2026 and federal grant award data.
- **State and local risk assessments.** Virginia's Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA), Stakeholder Preparedness Review (SPR), and 5 years of Local Capability Assessment for Readiness (LCAR) survey responses covering all Virginia localities.
- **After action reports (AARs) and summit findings.** Post-event AARs from the last 5 years and the 2026 Governor's Regional Readiness Summits meta-analysis.
- **Federal policy review.** The President's Council to Assess FEMA Final Report, National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) 2026 Biennial Report, and other research reports examining national emergency management funding trends and practices.
- **State comparisons and national benchmarking.** Structured comparison of emergency management funding, governance, and program structures across peer states.
- **Stakeholder engagement.** Interviews and structured input from VDEM and the study Advisory Group, which included representatives from VDEM, the Virginia Department of Planning and Budget (DPB), the Virginia Emergency Management Association (VEMA), the Virginia Municipal League (VML), and the Virginia Association of Counties (VaCo).

It is important to note that Virginia's emergency management enterprise extends well beyond VDEM. Numerous other state agencies and all local governments, together with private sector partners, nongovernmental organizations, institutions of higher education, and volunteer networks all contribute to Virginia's ability to prepare, respond, and recover. Assessing the entire state and local emergency management enterprise and its affiliated budgets requires a much broader study. Findings and recommendations that follow should be read as a comprehensive review of available data on VDEM's current capabilities and alternative future strategies. Because all disasters start and end locally, additional efforts to understand fiscal constraints and operational barriers to emergency management capabilities at the local level should be undertaken.

CHAPTER 1: EVALUATE THE EXISTING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT NEEDS

The analysis begins with the roles and responsibilities of the entities that make up Virginia's emergency management enterprise, from the Governor to local governments, private sector partners, and nongovernmental organizations. It then examines capability gaps across 3 themes:

1. State-level requirements and needs, including funding for incident response, standardizing regional coordination, strengthening information sharing and public communication, and setting statewide training and qualification standards;
2. Local requirements and needs, including staffing shortages, capacity, sustainment of specialized response capabilities, and modernization of public safety and communications technology; and
3. The integration of nongovernmental and nontraditional partners into preparedness, response, and recovery, including private sector engagement and support for populations with access and functional needs.

Each theme concludes with recommendations on how to further enhance Virginia's emergency management enterprise. Additional information for each theme, including a detailed crosswalk of gaps and affiliated recommendations, is available in section **1.4 Recommendations**.

The Emergency Management Enterprise

Virginia's emergency management enterprise begins with the statutory authorities and requirements established by the General Assembly. Title 44, Chapter 3.2 of the Code of Virginia, the Emergency Services and Disaster Law, establishes Virginia's emergency management framework, including the authorities and responsibilities of the Governor, state agencies, and local governments. The Governor serves as the Director of Emergency Management, while the law also provides for coordination with federal agencies, private sector organizations, and other public and private partners in carrying out emergency management functions.

Governor
• Holds broad emergency management responsibilities under Title 44, Chapter 3.2 of the Code of Virginia. • Promulgate and activate the Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Operations Plan. • Declare a state of emergency, suspend state laws or regulations to facilitate emergency operations, order evacuations or curfews, direct state and local agencies, and deploy the Virginia National Guard. • May commandeer private property or facilities for public protection, provided compensation is given, and can seize public utilities during emergencies.
VDEM
• Virginia's lead coordinating agency during disasters and emergencies; supporting emergency preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation activities. • Provides statewide emergency planning, coordination, and technical assistance. • Assesses statewide risks and capabilities. • Supports local emergency management programs and administers funding. • Has immediate response authority and capability for Hazardous Materials and Search and Rescue incidents, and coordinates state resources when needed. • Activates the Virginia Emergency Operations Center and coordinates the VEST. • Approve the installation, operation, and maintenance of flood observing gauges and associated equipment used to support flood and dam-safety warning capabilities.
Other State Agencies
• As outlined in Executive Orders 41 (2019) and 19 (2026) required to maintain emergency preparedness programs and provide coordinated support to emergency response efforts. • When the VEST is activated, must render appropriate assistance to prepare for, respond to, and recover from the disaster, including implementing mitigation operations and restoring affected areas to address both immediate threats and long-term recovery needs.
Local Governments
• Oversee and implement, disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery programs within their jurisdictions. • Must maintain an emergency management organization, designate emergency management leadership, maintain an emergency operations plan, participate in mutual aid, and assess and report on preparedness capabilities.
Private Sector
• Support continuity planning, protection and restoration of critical services and infrastructure, supply-chain operations, and coordination with government during emergencies.
Nongovernmental Organizations
• Support activities such as sheltering, feeding, volunteer and donations management, disaster case management, and long-term recovery.

Table 1. Emergency management roles and responsibilities of Virginia entities

Virginia's emergency management model is locally executed, regionally coordinated, state managed, and federally supported. The overall performance of the enterprise depends on the level of preparedness of each component and of the elements that make up those components.[4] Grounded in the basis that every disaster begins and ends locally, Virginia's emergency management model recognizes that local governments are the primary implementers of emergency management and have the greatest understanding of their jurisdiction's needs and capabilities. It must be emphasized that the role of the federal government is clearly one of support. Local and state governments hold the responsibility to coordinate response and recovery operations, and only request federal assistance when their resources are depleted or if the situation overwhelms their capabilities.[5] The legislature's continued investment in emergency management is an investment in intergovernmental capacity, with state support directly impacting every locality's capacity to perform critical emergency management functions.[6] State support also enables every locality to adopt organizational models that reflect local risk profiles, geography, resources, and operational complexity.

Capability Assessment and Gap Analysis

The following section provides a strategic, system level assessment of Virginia's emergency management capabilities and gaps. Using state risk assessments, AARs, fiscal and organizational studies, Local Capability Assessment for Readiness (LCAR) data, and national benchmarks, the following analysis identifies 3 overarching themes where Virginia's emergency management enterprise is most vulnerable and puts forward actionable recommendations to build a robust and sustainable statewide readiness posture. What follows is an aggregation of the most critical emergency management needs in Virginia. For a comprehensive list of gaps and targeted recommendations drawn from multiple assessments, see **Chapter 1: Recommendations.**

1.1 Sustain and Enhance Emergency Management Capabilities at the State Level

To build and sustain a nationally leading emergency management enterprise, Virginia must strengthen core capabilities at the state level. This section highlights persistent challenges in managing incidents that fail to meet formal emergency thresholds, coordinating complex and cross-jurisdictional events, and strengthening regionalization efforts. The discussion also addresses critical gaps in mutual aid, information sharing, public communication, and resource management frameworks. Finally, the theme explores the need for standardized training, qualifications, and succession planning to ensure a consistent and effective statewide emergency management enterprise.

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[4] Department of Emergency Services, *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster, House Document No. 21,* (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1994), 6. https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/1994/HD21-PDF.
[5] Ibid.
[6] National Association of Counties and The Pew Charitable Trusts, *Defining and Building Capacity for Disaster Mitigation: Findings from the Intergovernmental Roundtable on Disaster Resilience*, (Washington, DC, 2023).

Implement and Resource the Commonwealth of Virginia Unified Readiness Framework, with VDEM Serving as the Lead Coordinating Agency

The Governor's Unified Readiness Framework provides a mechanism for the emergency management enterprise to evolve. As Virginia's disaster landscape grows more complex, one opportunity for advancement is funding for events or incidents that require state resources but do not meet the threshold for a state declaration of emergency. Closing this gap would provide VDEM and state partners with a clear pathway to support responses to highly localized events, such as flooding, severe winter storms, and other incidents, or infrastructure disruptions that fall below federal and state criteria but still require a coordinated response from state entities.

In conjunction, Regional Readiness Summit data point to opportunities to strengthen how Virginia manages increasingly complex incidents. Overlapping hazards, technological threats, aging infrastructure, cascading consequences, and long-duration recovery operations increasingly require coordination across agencies, disciplines, jurisdictions, and sectors. AAR and Regional Readiness Summit findings indicate that information sharing, establishing unified command, and response-to-recovery planning would benefit from further refinement for large cross-jurisdictional events.

Since 2001, there has been a shift in the responsibilities and expectations of emergency management from primarily a natural hazards focus (hurricanes and flooding) to an all-hazards focus (including cybersecurity and terrorism). Therefore, the state's response role has expanded as disaster demand grows, and federal support becomes less predictable. This necessitates the evolution of emergency management under the Unified Readiness Framework, elevating the whole-of-government approach to all-hazards disaster response. This shift will be especially important for capabilities that require specialization, are needed at scale, and entail complex authorities. Meeting that demand will require leveraging cross-sector operational knowledge to support governance, funding alignment, personnel continuity, and shared understanding. With VDEM serving as the lead coordinating agency under the Unified Readiness Framework, the broader emergency management enterprise will strengthen its organizational alignment, enhance coordination across partners, and build collective capacity to address the evolving challenges of the coming decade.

Build and Maintain a Statewide Inventory of Capabilities with Documented Activation and Resource-Request Pathways

At the regional level, Virginia has significantly strengthened its emergency management capability through VDEM's regional offices and regional coordination centers. Regional staff serve as a critical link with local governments, providing operational coordination, planning support, technical expertise, resource coordination, situational awareness, and direct assistance before, during, and after emergencies. This regional structure enhances consistency across jurisdictions, strengthens local capabilities, and supports a more unified statewide response. The next opportunity is to strengthen how localities understand, access, and engage with Virginia's regional emergency management capabilities. Localities report uncertainty about what support they can request, how to

access regionally based teams, and how responsibilities shift as incidents escalate between regions. These challenges are compounded by uneven participation in regional exercises and planning efforts, which often depend on local capacity and available funding.

Regional Readiness Summit data, LCAR data, and Virginia strategic reports identified an opportunity to build a statewide inventory of state capabilities, organized by all potential preparedness, response, and recovery requirements. The VEST, with more than 300 members across state agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and private sector partners, provides an established body within which to build the inventory. Executive Order 19 (2026) provides a governance basis for developing and maintaining this inventory, aligning agency plans, sharing capability data, and tracking corrective actions through a continuous readiness cycle.

To become operational, a complete, current statewide capability inventory needs to specify the responsible agency, points and methods of contact, activation trigger, request pathway, and typical timelines for the resource to be on-site. The inventory must also integrate with current resource request platforms. This documentation should identify the statutory basis for each state agency's disaster-related authorities, the declaration category or trigger that activates them, the resources available under each category, and the reimbursement mechanisms that apply.

The Governor's Regional Readiness Summit series convened more than 750 leaders across all 7 VDEM regions and identified that state agencies already maintain significant capabilities deployable for local disaster response. Many local agency leaders have not been made aware of what resources each state agency can provide, how to request them, or what timelines to expect once a request is made. Critical infrastructure operators reported a similar gap.

This approach is particularly important for specialized capabilities that are costly or impractical for every locality to maintain independently, such as swift water rescue, hazardous materials response, cybersecurity response, aviation, and debris management. To ensure timely access to these specialized capabilities, Virginia should ensure emergency managers know what is available, where it is located, how to access it, how quickly it can deploy, and how it will be sustained and funded—strengthening statewide mutual aid, coordination, and readiness.

Building State-Level Capability to Share Information with State and Local Partners and with the Public

Virginia has made significant investments in public information sharing and warning, but the capabilities across Virginia are not yet consistently unified or accessible. Regional Readiness Summit participants highlighted that there is no statewide mechanism to reach residents when cellular service is disrupted, and persistent gaps remain in effectively communicating with rural communities and older adults.

Multiple THIRA and SPR sources, AARs, and Regional Readiness Summit data also pointed to an opportunity to build a comprehensive, shared, secure collaboration platform for information-sharing across Virginia jurisdictions and agencies. Many information systems currently operate in isolation, resulting in siloed data, inconsistent data management practices, and multiple, redundant data-entry requirements for state and local partners. Existing technology tools would also benefit from greater cross-agency staffing, training, and institutional knowledge to support their effective use.

LCAR data from 2022 through 2026 indicate that many jurisdictions are in the process of upgrading alert and warning platforms, but public enrollment in alert systems remains low across Virginia.

Localities consistently request state-provided templates for multi-lingual and accessible emergency notifications.

Small jurisdictions (less than 50,000 population) in particular struggle to reach all populations effectively. Many areas lack full-time public information officers to manage high-volume information demands during incidents, and many rural areas have gaps in cellphone coverage for receiving emergency messages.

These gaps are closely linked to funding and governance disparities across Virginia. Federal grants have supported the acquisition of platforms and tools, but they have not always funded the long-term staffing, training, and maintenance needed to integrate those systems into routine operations. Additionally, aging systems and platforms across agencies require significant upgrades, yet modernization needs have outpaced available funding and are further inhibited by funding constraints.

Addressing these gaps is an opportunity to strengthen how Virginia reaches every community in a crisis. Public information and warning capabilities are critical to supporting community readiness and trust. Research also suggests residents who do not receive timely, accurate, and accessible information are less likely to follow protective actions, more vulnerable to misinformation, and slower to recover from incidents.[7] Rural communities, seniors, and individuals living near hazardous materials facilities, in particular, may face unique challenges, including limited access to broadband, language barriers, or mobility constraints that make it harder to receive and act on warnings.[8]

The General Assembly should invest in the shared technology and information infrastructure that supports coordinated operations across state and local partners. This should include developing and maintaining a shared collaboration platform focused on providing a statewide common operating picture, modernizing enterprise information systems (including geospatial and decision support tools), and strengthening data governance and cybersecurity. In parallel, Virginia should implement a comprehensive technology lifecycle management approach with sustainable funding and improve interoperable, resilient communications infrastructure.

[7]Jeanette Sutton et al., "Measuring the Effectiveness of Disaster Warning Messages: A Forum," *Natural Hazards Review* 26, no. 1 (2026): https://doi.org/10.1061/NHREFO.NHENG-2372.
[8] Mobile Beacon, "Rural Communities & Reliable Access," *Mobile Beacon* (July 2026): https://www.mobilebeacon.org/blog/rural-communities-reliable-access/.

Further Build and Incentivize a Statewide Emergency Management System through the Unified Readiness Framework

VDEM should clearly define what emergency resources the state will provide annually to localities and should publish minimum recommendations for emergency management capabilities to support a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Beyond the identification of resources, the system should also provide recommendations on minimum staffing levels as a means to provide clearer benchmarks for local emergency management programs and to help local leaders identify gaps and plan for sustainable growth. Establishing this framework will also provide localities with clear capability expectations, ultimately improving unified readiness and resilience.

In 2021, VDEM identified the ability to respond to one statewide incident and three local incidents simultaneously as a baseline strategic planning factor. A baseline-driven system also ensures more equitable service delivery, especially for incidents or events that do not qualify for state or federal emergency declarations or support. Budget officials should collaborate with relevant agencies to identify which types of response and recovery expenditures the state will cover and determine what support will be offered to local governments. Establishing clear, pre-defined criteria for deploying state resources and expenditures before disasters occur significantly improves fiscal planning and community outcomes. By setting these parameters in advance, Virginia can more accurately anticipate budget needs, minimize uncertainty for affected communities, and avoid disrupting funding for other priorities. Clearly defining who is eligible for state assistance and the level of support provided can help reduce disparities between jurisdictions, particularly those with fewer resources or less capacity to advocate for aid.[9]

Additionally, Virginia has an established Incident Management Qualification System for personnel serving in incident management team positions, providing a standardized approach to training, experience, qualification, and credentialing. However, no comparable statewide system exists for the broader emergency management workforce. Training and professional development expectations for emergency managers vary across different sectors of the emergency management enterprise, contributing to uneven levels of preparedness and limiting a common understanding of the competencies needed to perform successfully in emergency management roles.

While work is underway to establish a position qualification system for the VEST, Virginia should also leverage the Unified Readiness Framework to establish a statewide Emergency Management Training and Qualification System that defines FEMA-aligned minimum training, experience, and professional development expectations for state and local emergency managers while recognizing different levels of responsibility and experience. Virginia should provide accessible regional training, exercises, mentorship, and additional professional development opportunities while using state investments to incentivize adoption of the system. Future state investments in emergency management could also

[9] Colin Ford, et al., "How States Can Build Disaster-Ready Budgets," *The Pew Charitable Trusts Issue Briefs* (May 1, 2025), https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2025/04/how-states-can-build-disaster-ready-budgets.

incorporate the system as an eligibility criterion, creating a sustainable pathway towards greater consistency and compliance without imposing an immediate unfunded mandate on local governments.

1.2 Build Local Capacity to Handle Emergencies

A basic premise of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) is that all disasters start and end locally.[10] Building local emergency management capacity reduces the strain on state emergency management systems while also building locally staffed, integrated response teams. This principle applies to every locality. The required functions of emergency management, including planning, warning, coordination, mass care, continuity, recovery, and cost documentation, must be performed even where populations are small, dispersed, or seasonal.

This theme explores the persistent challenges facing Virginia's local emergency management enterprise, including supporting public safety organizations, focusing on gaps in capability measurement, staffing, workforce resilience, specialized expertise, and technology modernization.

Chapter 2: Virginia's Emergency Management Funding, provides more details on the financial aspects related to building local capacity, examining federal pass-through funding and program-specific state special funds that currently support local emergency management

Measuring Local Capability Gaps

In alignment with Virginia Code §44-146.19(F), VDEM facilitates the annual emergency management assessment through a standardized Local Capabilities Assessment for Readiness (LCAR) survey. LCAR data collection centers on local emergency management program capabilities to protect life, property, and the environment through a self-assessment of staffing, frameworks, and functional capacities.

Analysis of the LCAR data highlights how emergency management programs across Virginia vary widely in staffing and capabilities. While code and funding mandates shape the emergency management program for all jurisdictions, localities retain flexibility in how these requirements are prioritized and fulfilled.

[10] Federal Emergency Management Agency, *NIMS Training Program* (Emergency Management Institute, 2011), 3. https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/assets/nims_training_program.pdf.

LCAR Survey Focus Areas		
Staffing	**Framework**	**Functional Capacities**
Localities need **individuals** and/or teams with the **knowledge, skills**, and **abilities** to perform EM specific tasks and program management activities. Measures include: • *Status* • *Primary Discipline* • *Sufficient*	Localities are expected to develop and maintain **policies, plans, and procedures** to provide **guidance, structure, and tools** to be leveraged by the **trained individuals** coordinating local EM programs. Measures include: • *Plans* • *Policies* • *Procedures*	Blends availability of **trained staff with resources** (including time) to develop, maintain, and train on **locality frameworks** across mission areas. Measures include: • *Confidence ratings* • *Requests for assistance* • *Specialized assets or tools*

Sustainable Staffing Capabilities

Virginia's local emergency management capacity varies significantly across the state, with jurisdiction size, fiscal resources, geography, and access to specialized personnel shaping the ability of localities to sustain preparedness programs. In 1994, 14% of localities had full-time emergency management coordinators; over 30 years later, only 46% of local emergency managers are full-time.[11]

> *"Staff capabilities and effectiveness in performing their duties during a disaster is directly related to the level of training provided to them prior to the event."*
>
> *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster, House Document No. 21 (1994)*

As indicated in the Governor's Regional Readiness Summits data and Virginia strategic and policy studies, larger jurisdictions with diversified revenue and higher grant allocations can maintain full-time emergency management staff, invest in planning and exercises, and participate in regional initiatives. Smaller and rural localities face greater difficulty sustaining dedicated personnel because of limited fiscal capacity, dispersed geography, and competition for specialized professionals. Staffing shortages and increasing workloads across emergency management, law enforcement, fire/EMS, and 9-1-1 centers have left many offices reliant on part-time emergency management coordinators or staff who carry multiple responsibilities. Figure 1 reflects the staffing constraints from 2026 LCAR data with less than 1 in 5 localities reporting a sufficiently staffed emergency management program.

[11] Department of Emergency Services, *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster*, *House Document No. 21*, (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1994), 13. https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/1994/HD21-PDF.

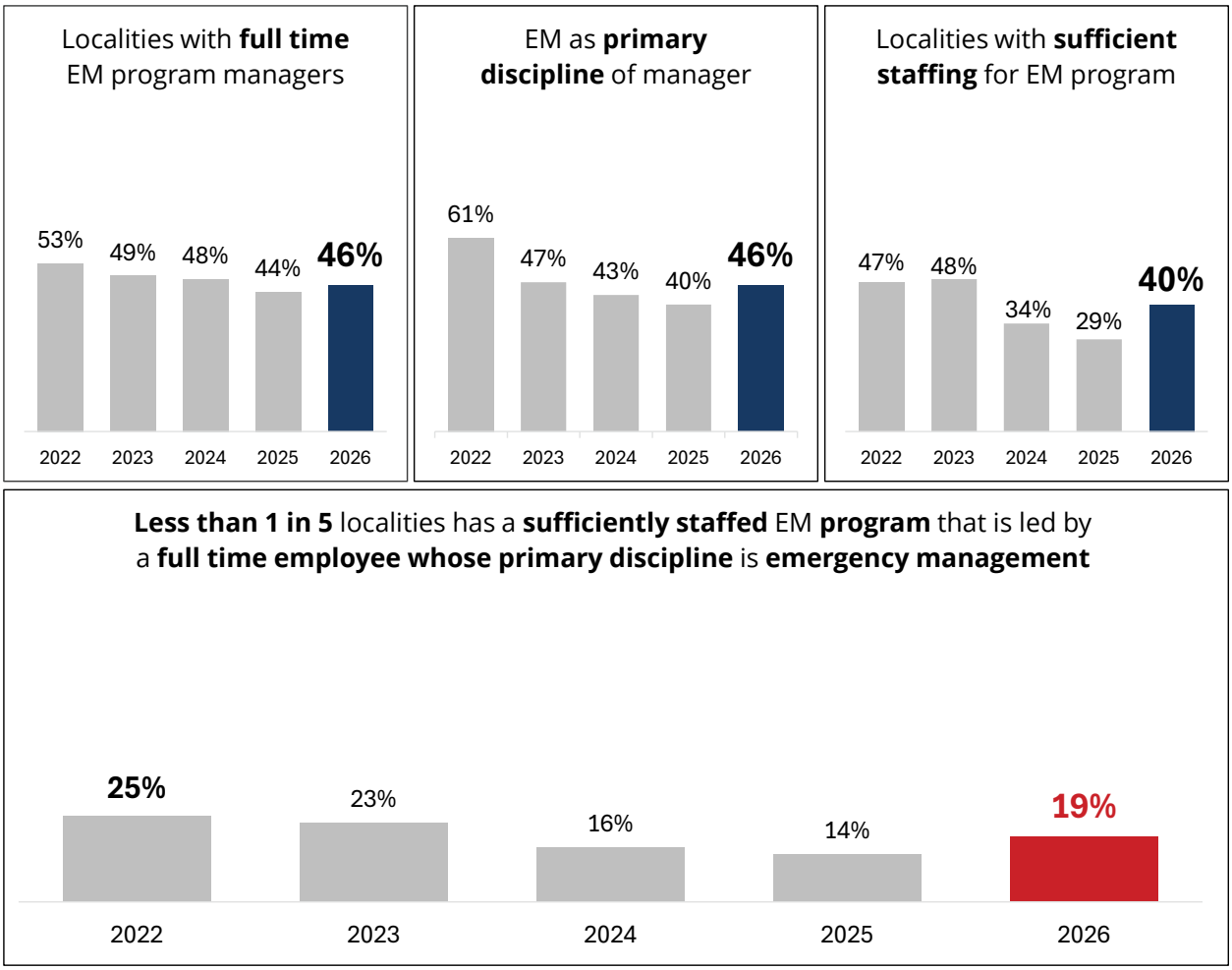


Figure 1. Statewide overview of local emergency management program staffing

Source: 2026 LCAR

These staffing constraints limit the ability of localities to develop robust preparedness programs enabling them to successfully and efficiently mitigate, respond to, and recover from increasingly complex incidents, emergencies, and disasters.

The LCAR tool also currently measures the extent to which local emergency management programs have the capabilities and resources to prepare, respond, and recover from emergencies that exceed normal public safety operations and may trigger requests for external assistance.

The results indicate a patchwork of readiness across Virginia. Smaller jurisdictions rely heavily upon external support and volunteers, often without dedicated logistics or resource management personnel, and depend upon informal relationships rather than formal agreements to secure support. Regional Readiness Summit participants noted that Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for external support largely don't include neighboring states, as a state declaration of emergency is often required to enable interstate mutual aid — a requirement that can delay access to the geographically closest specialized assets and increase

operational risk during incidents that escalate quickly but do not immediately meet declaration thresholds.

Heavy reliance on volunteers further strains local emergency management capabilities. Jurisdictions experience persistent challenges recruiting and retaining volunteers for extended responses, particularly as younger residents face competing demands and as long-duration incidents require sustained commitment. These pressures compound over time: staff across emergency management and public safety experience high levels of stress, particularly during multi-year recovery efforts and repeated incidents, and workforce burnout reduces resiliency and surge capacity. Burnout-driven turnover carries a direct capability cost — it erodes the institutional knowledge that under-resourced localities can least afford to lose, and localities using pass-through funds to cover basic positions have limited resources to invest in wellness initiatives even as staff oversee multiple responsibilities without adequate support or relief.

Virginia should extend and resource the existing statutory requirements with explicit local capacity requirements, including a full-time emergency management coordinator and other minimum staffing standards supporting the development of frameworks and functional capabilities. This requirement should be paired with sustained and meaningful state funding to help localities meet the standard and prevent additional unfunded mandates on local governments.

The appropriate standard is not that every locality must maintain the same number of personnel or use the same organizational model. Rather, every locality should be able to demonstrate that it has identified leadership and sufficient capacity to maintain plans, conduct mitigation and preparedness activities, coordinate response and mass care, issue public information and warnings, support continuity, manage recovery, and document disaster-related costs. Shared services, regional agreements, and mutual aid may supplement these capabilities, but they do not replace a locality's own emergency management responsibilities.

Prioritize Plan Maintenance

LCAR is the primary tool by which VDEM identifies the policies, plans, and procedures in place to provide guidance, structure, and tools to be leveraged by the local emergency management programs. These administrative frameworks underscore how a jurisdiction intends to coordinate response efforts, maintain continuity, conduct recovery efforts, and meet documentation requirements for funding reimbursement.

The Code of Virginia §44-146.19 requires every local political subdivision to prepare, maintain, and officially adopt a current Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). Each subdivision must also update and re-adopt their EOP every 5 years. Data utilized in the SPR and VDEM Annual Reports highlights that the number of jurisdictions with expired EOPs has increased in recent years from only 5% in 2023 to 17% in 2026.[12] Figure 2 highlights 2026 LCAR figures on the percentage of localities that have final

[12] Anticipated publication dates for both the 2026 SPR and VDEM Annual Report are Winter 2027.

versions of the selected plans currently in effect, as well as those in current draft, those scheduled for development or revision in the next 12 months, and those not scheduled within the next 12 months. In most cases, localities cited lack of staffing, technical support, and time to complete comprehensive research and collaboration required to develop or revise these plans.

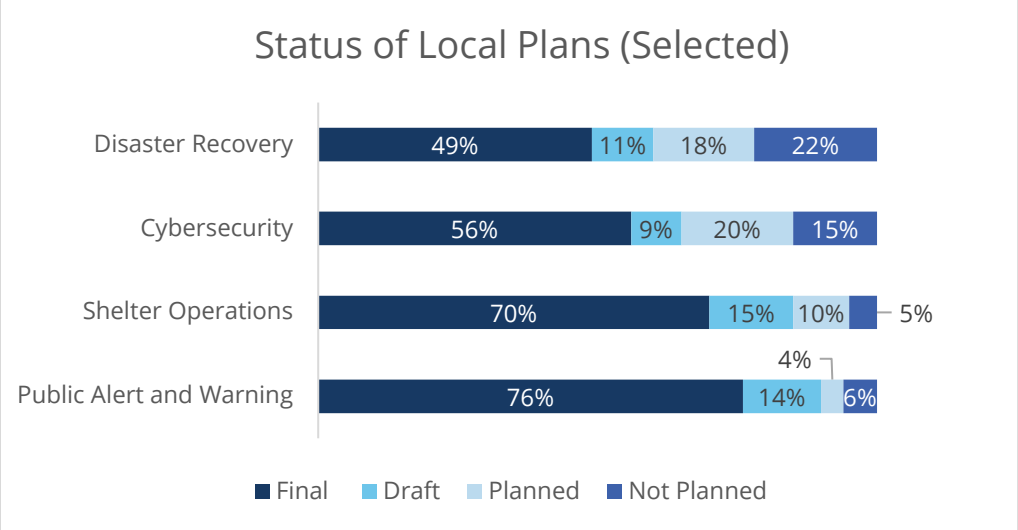


Figure 2. Status of select local emergency management plans

Capability gaps are closely tied to capacity constraints, and time further compounds those disparities. Over time, jurisdictions with more resources can assess risks, refine plans, and utilize statewide initiatives to enhance capabilities. Jurisdictions with limited staff and resources focus on day-to-day compliance and grant administration, struggling to absorb the fixed costs associated with training, exercises, and plan maintenance. Because staff must prioritize grant administration and day-to-day compliance, they have limited time to develop robust, foundational plans let alone invest in specialized planning. This means that a locality's plans can be incomplete and grow outdated not from neglect, but from a lack of capacity to keep them current.

Meeting this standard should not depend on whether a locality has sufficient staff or discretionary funding to maintain it independently. Virginia should incentivize local framework development and maintenance by incorporating appropriate requirements into state preparedness funding while providing targeted financial and technical assistance to less-resourced localities with demonstrated needs. State support could fund technical assistance for planning development, training, exercises, and other activities necessary to develop, maintain, and validate local frameworks. If Virginia is investing preparedness dollars locally, Virginia can reasonably expect certain readiness outcomes, but it also has a responsibility to help less-resourced jurisdictions achieve them.

Strengthen Local-to-Local Mutual Aid and Incentivize Mitigation to Sustain Specialized Capabilities

LCAR and SPR findings, staffing assessments, and Regional Readiness Summit data indicate that specialized emergency management capabilities remain limited and unevenly distributed across

Virginia. Many jurisdictions lack sufficient in-house expertise in areas such as cybersecurity, recovery, continuity, debris management, crisis communications, and support for residents with access and functional needs. Figure 3 reflects the percentage of local emergency management programs with access to specialized assets based on 2026 LCAR data.

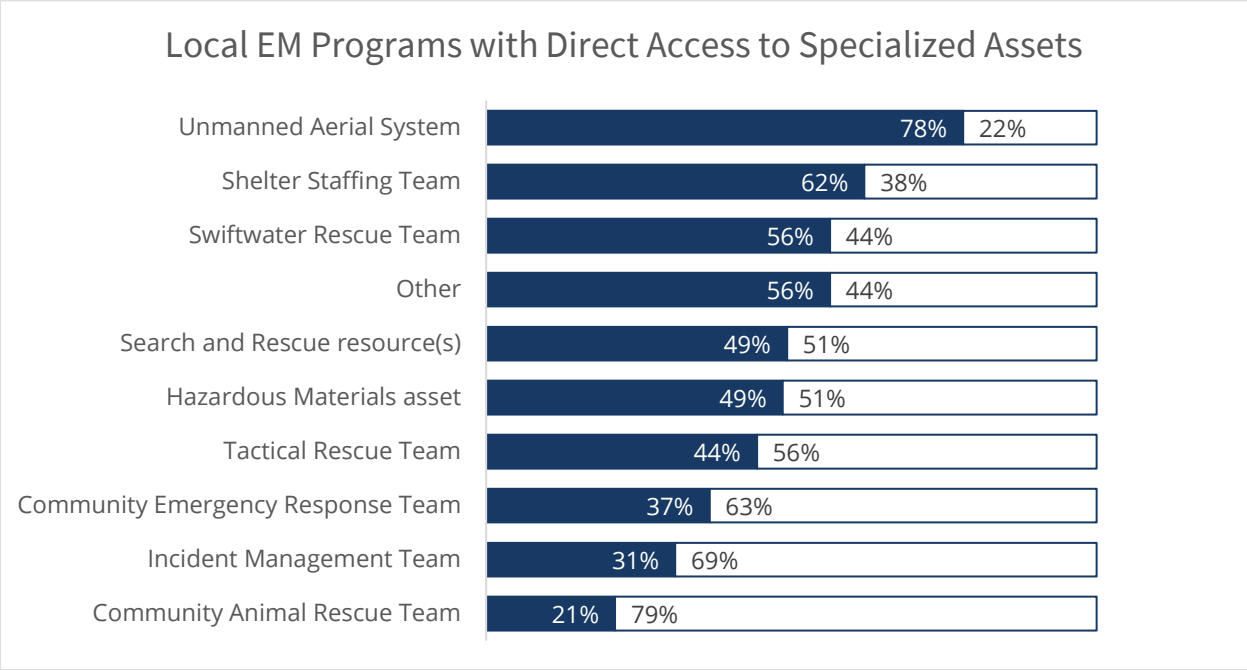


Figure 3. Local emergency management programs with direct access to specialized assets, 2026 LCAR

Specialized operational capabilities such as hazardous materials response and complex fire response are often dependent on regional teams or a limited number of subject-matter experts. Travel time, staffing limitations, and competing demands can create significant capability gaps, particularly in rural areas and during rapidly escalating or widespread incidents.

These limitations reflect the reality that specialized capabilities require sustained investments in personnel, training, equipment, and exercises that may be impractical for every locality to maintain independently. Virginia should strengthen local-to-local and regional mutual aid as the preferred initial augmentation mechanism when an incident exceeds a jurisdiction's available capability. Virginia can support this approach by helping to formalize mutual aid agreements within and across regions, providing model agreements and coordination tools, and ensuring activation, credentialing, cost recovery, and reimbursement processes are understood and exercised before an incident occurs.

At the same time, Virginia should invest in reducing demand for response capabilities by expanding financial and technical support for local mitigation. Limited staffing, funding constraints, and the administrative complexity of federal mitigation programs can prevent jurisdictions, particularly less-resourced communities, from advancing projects that could meaningfully reduce future disaster impacts to life and property. State technical assistance, planning support, and targeted funding can

help localities identify, develop, and implement mitigation projects while improving their ability to compete for available federal resources.

1.3 Build a More Purposeful and Consistent Program to Integrate Nongovernmental Resources and Nontraditional Partners Into Emergency Management

Nongovernmental partners and private sector partners have capabilities that complement and extend what the government can deliver on its own. The value to the emergency management enterprise of pre-event partnerships across all sectors is both operational and financial: they expedite response, clarify authority and reimbursement, expand access to equipment and expertise, and help sustain critical economic and daily activities during disruption.[13] The private sector often operates with more flexible funding, staffing, and procurement systems than local or state government emergency management agencies, and it can scale workforce, redeploy employees, and provide equipment and services on timelines that support fast-moving incidents. Dominion Energy, for example, operates a fleet of drones and robotic inspection systems with Federal Aviation Administration beyond-visual-line-of-sight waivers that support rapid damage assessment, search and rescue, and situational awareness during response operations, and onsite environmental and safety teams that could integrate into joint operations for spills and hazardous events. Nontraditional, nongovernmental partners, including institutions of higher education (IHE), community services boards, and the hospitality sector, hold capabilities that can be advantageous during large or long-duration incidents. For example, some IHEs maintain bus fleets that can support evacuation and hotels can potentially provide overflow sheltering during periods when public shelter capacity is exceeded. NGOs reach populations that are often difficult to reach through government channels alone, particularly individuals facing language barriers, disabilities, isolation, or limited familiarity with government services. Finally, community members and volunteers act as force multipliers during surge periods and can accomplish tasks at speeds and scales that supplement formal response.

[13] National Association of Counties and The Pew Charitable Trusts, *Findings from the 2024 Intergovernmental Roundtable on Disaster Resilience*, (Washington, D.C.: 2024).

Formalize the Role of Nontraditional Partners

Building on the statewide capability and planning frameworks described in Themes 1 and 2, Virginia should strengthen community-based preparedness and resilience. Emerging threats, including cyber incidents, misinformation, and infrastructure disruptions, are increasing the complexity of risk Virginia faces and require more robust, community-based resilience strategies. However, Virginia's whole-of-community preparedness and resilience posture is uneven and underdeveloped. Preparedness capabilities and public outreach vary significantly across jurisdictions, and community partnerships and engagement with the private sector are often ad hoc rather than integrated into emergency plans and operating procedures.

Florida's Business Emergency Operations Center fully integrates private sector partners (e.g., retail, logistics, utilities, health care, finance) into EOC operations, providing structured information sharing, resource coordination, and situational awareness with businesses.

Virginia is planning to implement a Business Emergency Operations Center in early 2027.

The Governor's Regional Readiness Summit series identified that several categories of potential public safety partners, including higher education institutions, critical infrastructure owners and operators, and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster organizations, are not consistently included in pre-incident planning, training, or early operational coordination, despite maintaining facilities, personnel, and services that could support response and recovery. Critical infrastructure operators specifically noted that incident response plans often do not include communication with them, neither to warn them about potential impacts nor to ask about available resources.

According to Virginia AARs, policy and strategic reports, and Regional Readiness Summit data, many local programs lack the resources to build and sustain these partnerships. Even though larger jurisdictions have more resources available to invest in community education, volunteer programs, and partnerships with nongovernmental and private sector partners, planned, trained, and exercised integration is less common. For example, critical infrastructure and nongovernmental partners do not consistently receive statewide incident notification or terrorism-related intelligence, limiting their ability to integrate into real-time response coordination structures.

As a result, community preparedness and inclusion in response and recovery varies widely, limiting resilience and increasing vulnerability. Virginia has built a strong foundation for engaging these partners and should continue working to integrate nontraditional partners whose capabilities are not yet consistently reflected in state and local emergency operations plans.

IHEs, critical infrastructure, community services boards, hospitality sector partners, and others hold capabilities including facilities, transportation, behavioral health infrastructure, research expertise, and student volunteer bases that can support response and recovery at scale. Jurisdictions that have treated these partners as "honorary county departments," a practice identified in the Regional

Readiness Summit series, describe faster problem-solving and smoother coordination during real events. Virginia should support the identification of nontraditional partners in each region, encourage documentation of their potential contributions in emergency operations plans, execute pre-event MOAs and MOUs where appropriate, and include these partners in exercises and training so that integration is practiced before it is needed.

Virginia should deepen its investment in the nongovernmental organizations that carry much of the burden for conducting mass care, recovery, and community outreach. Virginia Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster member organizations, faith-based organizations, the American Red Cross, Medical Reserve Corps units, and community-based organizations serving specific populations each bring capabilities that state and local governments rely on during major incidents. Alongside continued support for established programs, Virginia should pilot approaches that reflect how people today prefer to contribute their time and skills. Pilot models could include platforms that match volunteer skills to specific incident needs, structures that let volunteers commit for defined tasks rather than open-ended service, and partnerships with private sector employers to support volunteer release time during incidents. Similarly, outreach and educational resources that can be easily customized could be leveraged by local emergency management coordinators to deploy in their own communities.

Engage Private Sector Resources

Virginia has built a strong foundation for engaging private sector partners and should continue integrating the private sector into preparedness efforts and invest in a dedicated program with personnel focused on pre-disaster private sector outreach and integration. This program should produce and maintain a living map of major private sector partners in Virginia and the resources they can provide before, during, and after a disaster, including activation pathways, expected response timelines, cost or reimbursement arrangements, and contractual terms. Details regarding available support should be recorded in formal MOAs/MOUs and incorporated into risk assessments, plans, training, and exercises.

Virginia has seen that public-private partnerships within emergency management help governments overcome limited funding, staffing, and outdated tools by leveraging the private sector's agility, resources, and specialized capabilities. Private sector partners can rapidly scale their workforce, pre-deploy staff, and provide critical equipment and services without lengthy approval processes; government partners do not always share the same administrative flexibilities. They can also be a source of volunteers and donated goods.

By establishing pre-event agreements (e.g., MOAs or MOUs) between public and private sector partners, such as critical infrastructure owners or response vendors, emergency management stakeholders may form a trusted framework for information sharing and resource support that is tailored to community needs and complements public response and recovery efforts.

In addition, cooperative purchasing agreements at multi-state or national levels can help balance disparities in resources between jurisdictions, standardize vetting and pricing, and build trust in

participating companies, provided that legal, technological, and policy requirements are carefully addressed in collaboration with the private sector.[14]

Best practices of note from California include 2 complementary structures that embed private sector engagement directly into emergency management operations: (1) the Governor's Office of Emergency Services Office of Private Sector & NGO Coordination, a dedicated government office that maximizes the inclusion of private sector partners in all phases of emergency management[15] and (2) the Business & Utility Operations Center, which formalizes the direct involvement of private sector organizations within the state operations center or regional emergency operations centers.[16]

Prioritize Integration of Access and Functional Needs

THIRA and SPR data, Virginia policy and strategic reports and studies, Regional Readiness Summit data, and LCAR data highlight that Virginia's integration of access and functional needs considerations into emergency management remains inconsistent and incomplete across mission areas. Access and functional needs capabilities are not systematically embedded in preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation, leading to variable levels of support for individuals with disabilities, chronic health conditions, language barriers, and other functional needs. These gaps are particularly concerning given Virginia's aging population and the increasing frequency of incidents that disrupt essential services.

Localities with limited resources may struggle to develop specialized plans, training, and partnerships focused on access and functional needs populations, and they may rely on general sheltering and communication strategies that do not fully address specific needs. While 85% of local EOPs currently address access and functional needs considerations, only 76% of local Public Alert and Warning Plans do so. In addition, only 51% of local Public Alert and Warning Plans address foreign language needs.

LCAR data from 2022-2026 indicate that localities consistently report needing technical assistance on more specialized planning, such as continuity, family assistance operations, debris management, recovery, and cybersecurity, suggesting that access and functional needs considerations often compete with other pressing priorities. Without dedicated funding and clear expectations, access and functional needs integration remains uneven and dependent on local initiative.

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[14] National Emergency Management Association, *Building Trust, Enhancing Resilience Recommendations for Public-Private Alignment*, (2025). https://nemaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Building-Trust-Enhancing-Resilience-White-Paper-Draft-9.18.25.pdf.

[15] "*Private Sector & NGO Coordination",* California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, accessed August 15, 2026, https://www.caloes.ca.gov/office-of-the-director/policy-administration/private-ngo-coordination/?utm.

[16] "*Business & Utility Operations Center*", California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, accessed August 15, 2026, https://www.caloes.ca.gov/office-of-the-director/policy-administration/private-ngo-coordination/business-utility-operations-center/?utm.

These gaps affect both operational outcomes and equity. When access and functional needs considerations are not embedded across all emergency management mission areas, individuals with disabilities or other functional needs may face barriers to receiving warnings, accessing shelters, or obtaining recovery assistance. Incidents can exacerbate existing health conditions, disrupt access to medications or medical equipment, and increase isolation for individuals who rely on community support.

Ensuring inclusive planning is essential to enhancing community safety for all Virginians, including those with access and functional needs. Building on its existing sheltering and communications guidance, VDEM should develop and distribute additional access and functional needs planning guidance for evacuation, family assistance, and coordination with health departments, community services boards, disability services organizations, and aging services. Virginia should require that access and functional needs scenarios be incorporated into state-led and regional exercises. Finally, drawing on California's Listos model, VDEM should pilot a recurring microgrant or regional subgrant program, compensating community-based organizations for measurable deliverables, such as in-language preparedness workshops, emergency alert enrollment drives, and development of accessible materials.

A barrier underlying these gaps is that most access and functional needs-related activities rely on dedicated, sustained non-disaster funding, which remains limited and inconsistent. It is challenging for both state and local government to absorb the ongoing costs associated with accessible and equitable preparedness – particularly for services that required certified providers. For example, translation services average $0.11 per word per language, making even routine updates to public-facing documents or alerts cost-prohibitive. Without sustained, dedicated funding streams, state agencies and localities struggle to maintain accessible materials, build multilingual outreach programs, and provide optimized access and functional needs planning. This means that access and functional needs integration too often becomes an unfunded mandate, resulting in uneven implementation and widening gaps in equitable preparedness across Virginia.

1.4 Recommendations

The table below lists each identified gap, the source documents that substantiate it, the theme it aligns to, and the recommendation the study identified to address it. Gaps are organized by theme: Theme 1 (state level capabilities); Theme 2 (local capacity); Theme 3 (nongovernmental and nontraditional partner integration); and Funding (sustainability of current funding sources). Some gaps span multiple themes and are marked accordingly.

Table 2. Consolidated capability gaps and recommendations

Theme(s)	Gaps	Associated Recommendation	POETE Element(s)
State Level Capabilities	Increasing incident complexity stresses coordination, regional support, and sustained operations; capability maturity and readiness to cope with this complexity vary widely across regions and localities.	Ensure statewide governance and operational doctrine establish consistent operational practices (Planning P, operational tempo, common planning processes) and performance measures across all emergency management functions.	Planning
State Level Capabilities	Information sharing, role clarity, and standardized processes remain challenging in complex incidents.		Planning, Organizing, Equipping
State Level Capabilities	Unified command and leadership roles are often unclear when incidents cross jurisdictions or involve state and federal partners.	Strengthen leadership development, credentialing, and succession planning programs for EM and public safety leaders.	Training, Exercising
State Level Capabilities	Virginia lacks a comprehensive shared, secure collaboration platform or common operating picture.	Strengthen statewide information sharing and multi-agency coordination by utilizing common operating platforms, standardized templates, and consistent information sharing processes across all levels of government.	Planning, Equipping, Training

Theme(s)	Gaps	Associated Recommendation	POETE Element(s)
State Level Capabilities	There is no comprehensive, statewide joint information-sharing system and processes for sharing information between jurisdictions and agencies are not well-defined.	Develop a comprehensive, shared, and secure collaboration platform that incorporates critical infrastructure partners.	Planning, Equipping, Training
State Level Capabilities	No standardized, statewide emergency management qualification and training system with FEMA-aligned minimum requirements.	Develop and maintain statewide emergency management training standards and performance measures that support baseline long-term readiness across Virginia.	Planning, Training
State Level Capabilities	Training standards differ between staff and volunteers; limited regional training academies.		Planning, Training
State Level Capabilities	Agencies primarily conduct training in-house, with relatively few regional tabletop or full-scale exercises.		Training, Exercising
State Level Capabilities and Local Capacity	Aging technology and communications infrastructure; modernization needs exceed funding availability.	Develop and implement a comprehensive capital and technology lifecycle management approach (acquisition, modernization, replacement, interoperability).	Planning, Equipping
State Level Capabilities and Local Capacity	Technology capabilities and access vary across agencies, and much of the equipment in use is aging or insufficient.	Develop sustainable lifecycle funding for technology, communications	Planning, Equipping

Theme(s)	Gaps	Associated Recommendation	POETE Element(s)
		infrastructure, fleet, and capital equipment.	
State Level Capabilities and Local Capacity	Persistent gaps remain in reaching rural communities, older adults, and populations near hazardous materials operations, and jurisdictions face ongoing challenges maintaining communication during outages and effectively managing misinformation.	Coordinate public information, warning, mass care, sheltering, housing, and recovery support with a focus on reaching rural, senior, access and functional needs, and hazardous materials adjacent communities.	Planning, Organizing, Training
Local Capacity	Staffing shortages and increasing workloads across emergency management, law enforcement, fire/EMS, human services, and 911 centers have left many offices depleted even under baseline conditions. Virginia does not have minimum staffing standards for emergency management, communications, environmental, or health partners.	Develop staffing requirements and provide sustainable funding mechanism for core emergency management and public safety positions.	Organizing
Local Capacity	Heavy reliance on volunteers and small departments strain capabilities, as jurisdictions have trouble recruiting and retaining volunteers for extended responses.		Organizing
Local Capacity	Agreements with neighboring states are largely absent, and a state declaration of emergency	Approach this challenge in coordination with Emergency Management Assistance Compact	Organizing

Theme(s)	Gaps	Associated Recommendation	POETE Element(s)
	is needed to enable interstate mutual aid.	administrators, as this issue is facing many jurisdictions and neighboring states as declaration thresholds and qualifiers change over time.	
Local Capacity; Nongovernmental and Nontraditional Partner Integration	Limited specialized expertise in cybersecurity, recovery, individual assistance, debris management, support for residents with access and functional needs.	Expand regional specialty teams and support mutual-aid frameworks for specialized response and recovery capabilities and services (e.g., cybersecurity, hazardous materials, bomb squads, structural assessment, and complex incident support).	Planning, Organizing, Equipping, Training, Exercising
Local Capacity	Many jurisdictions cannot independently manage large hazardous materials or complex fire incidents and must rely on regional teams and specialized subject-matter experts. Travel time and limited asset availability further contribute to critical gaps in early response.		Planning, Organizing, Equipping, Training, Exercising
Local Capacity	Preparedness capabilities and public outreach vary significantly across jurisdictions.	Support community preparedness through outreach and public education services.	Planning, Training
Local Capacity	Radio, CAD, and dispatch platforms differ among agencies and jurisdictions, and interoperability remains a persistent challenge.	Improve interoperable communications and resilient communications infrastructure (including statewide mutual-aid channels and 911/cellular redundancy).	Planning, Equipping
Local Capacity	911 and cellular networks are not designed to accommodate		Planning, Equipping

Theme(s)	Gaps	Associated Recommendation	POETE Element(s)
	significant surge demand and have limited redundancy.		
Nongovernmental and Nontraditional Partner Integration	Critical infrastructure partners are not well integrated into information sharing and coordination structures.	Strengthen cybersecurity, data governance, and enterprise asset management.	Planning, Organizing, Equipping
Nongovernmental and Nontraditional Partner Integration	Emerging threats (cyber, misinformation, infrastructure disruptions) require stronger community resilience. Meanwhile, preparedness capabilities and public outreach efforts vary significantly across local jurisdictions, and community partnerships with vulnerable populations require further development.	Support efforts with localities to build partnerships with nonprofits, volunteer organizations, private sector, and community-based organizations.	Planning, Organizing
Nongovernmental and Nontraditional Partner Integration	Community partnerships and engagement with vulnerable populations need development before disasters.	Support local integration of vulnerable populations into mass care, evacuation, and family assistance center planning.	Planning
Nongovernmental and Nontraditional Partner Integration	Access and functional needs capabilities remain inconsistent across mission areas.	Integrate access and functional needs considerations into public information, sheltering, and recovery plans and training.	Planning, Training
		Strengthen partnerships with organizations serving access and functional needs populations, older adults, people with	Planning, Organizing, Training

Theme(s)	Gaps	Associated Recommendation	POETE Element(s)
		disabilities, culturally diverse communities, and other underserved populations to improve preparedness, response, and recovery outcomes.	
Funding	There is heavy dependence on federal preparedness and mitigation grants, with limited recurring state funding available to support core capabilities.	Establish sustainable state funding to support baseline emergency management capabilities independent of disaster declarations.	Planning, Organizing, Equipment; Training; Exercises
Funding	Many jurisdictions rely on short-term grants to support essential emergency management functions and have limited capacity to sustain long-term recovery and mitigation operations.	Develop processes to equitably distribute federal, state, and regional grant funds based on population and demonstrated vulnerability.	Planning
Funding	Virginia does not have a mechanism to provide funding for events or incidents that may necessitate state resources but do not require a state declaration of emergency.	Establish a funding mechanism for state resources to support incidents or events that do not require a state declaration of emergency.	Planning, Organizing

CHAPTER 2: VIRGINIA'S EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FUNDING MODEL

This chapter examines the evolution and sustainability of Virginia's emergency management funding model over the past 2 decades. Virginia's current model reflects multiple generations of federal investment in state and local preparedness. The Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG), which predates September 11, 2001, has long supported the foundational capacity of state and local emergency management programs through a federal-state cost-sharing model. Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Congress significantly expanded federal investment in homeland security and first-responder preparedness, beginning with the state and local preparedness grant authorities established under the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 and further developed through the Homeland Security Act of 2002 and subsequent federal legislation and appropriations.

The post-9/11 period resulted in a substantial influx of federal preparedness funding through a range of programs supporting planning, training, exercises, interoperable communications, specialized response teams, equipment, technology, and other state and local capabilities. Following Hurricane Katrina, federal reforms further strengthened FEMA's preparedness mission and reinforced an all-hazards approach to emergency management.

Virginia, like many states, strategically leveraged these federal resources to build and sustain capabilities. VDEM-administered federal preparedness grant funding reached approximately **$69.3 million in FFY 2007**, including EMPG, State Homeland Security Program (SHSP), Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI), Port Security, and other grant programs that have since been reduced, consolidated, or discontinued. Since that period, federal preparedness funding available to Virginia saw a steep decline between 2010-2012 as reported in the October *2013 JLARC Review of Disaster Preparedness Planning in Virginia* and has remained relatively level while the costs of personnel, technology, equipment, training, and other core emergency management functions have continued to increase.[17] Virginia faced similar challenges according to the *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Disaster* House Document No. 21 (1994), which states that "the scope of the funding problem has reached a critical juncture on the state level, as federal funds, which have remained relatively flat for several years in most program areas are projected to be reduced by the federal government" following the demise of the Soviet Union and nuclear attack threat.[18]

Over time, capabilities initially developed or expanded through federal preparedness grants became embedded in Virginia's baseline emergency management system. Federal grants now support

[17] Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, *Disaster Preparedness Planning in Virginia*, *JLARC Report No. 445* (Richmond: JLARC, 2013). https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt445.pdf.
[18] Department of Emergency Services, *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster*, *House Document No. 21*, (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1994), 44. https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/1994/HD21-PDF.

portions of recurring state and local functions that require ongoing staffing, maintenance, replacement, and modernization. The 9/11 Commission warned that states and localities should not rely solely on federal homeland security grants to maintain their disaster response infrastructure, but such assistance should supplement state and local resources based on the risks and vulnerabilities that merit additional support. While federal preparedness grants remain an essential component of Virginia's emergency management system, they were not intended to serve as the sole long-term funding mechanism for sustaining core governmental capabilities. This creates an increasingly significant challenge as Virginia seeks to maintain capabilities built during periods of substantially greater federal investment.

The October 2013 JLARC report also cautioned that "going forward, states and localities may need to rely more on their own funding to sustain the preparedness capabilities developed through the post-9/11 infusion of federal homeland security grant funds." Unless additional support is made available, the Commonwealth's ability to keep pace with growing emergency management demands will decline and the enterprise's ability to deal with a catastrophic event will remain seriously inadequate.[19]

2.1 Sustainability of Funding

Consistent with other states, Virginia utilizes multiple federal, state, and local funding sources to support disaster and emergency management capabilities. While many state agencies are responsible for components of the emergency management enterprise, VDEM serves as the primary state agency responsible for coordination and delivery of state level emergency management capabilities and services.

VDEM's Budget = Pass-through Funding + VDEM Operating Budget

For purposes of this analysis, VDEM's budget is generally viewed in 2 components: funding administered and passed through to local governments and other eligible recipients, and funding retained by VDEM to support agency operations and the direct delivery of emergency management services statewide. Importantly, funding retained by VDEM does not solely support internal administrative functions. It also funds capabilities and services provided directly to local governments and other stakeholders, including VDEM's regional operations, training and exercise programs, planning and technical assistance, operational coordination, and other statewide preparedness and response capabilities.

[19] Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, *Disaster Preparedness Planning in Virginia*, *JLARC Report No. 445* (Richmond: JLARC, 2013). https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt445.pdf.

This analysis examines VDEM funding over a 10-year period to identify trends, changes, and significant outliers. It also considers federal policy developments and other indicators that may affect the future availability and structure of federal emergency management funding. These findings, together with the capability assessment presented in Chapter 1, inform the study's overall assessment of the sustainability of Virginia's approach to funding disaster and emergency management capabilities.

For purposes of this study, sustainability is evaluated based on Virginia's ability to maintain essential emergency management capabilities and services over time without significant disruption or an over-reliance on funding sources that may be reduced, delayed, or otherwise unavailable.

VDEM Budget and Spending Overview

Table 3 provides the average percentage of funding provided by federal, state general, and state special funding sources over the past 10 years.[20] Examining VDEM's total budget—pass-through and core operating—reveals nearly 92% of the budget has come from federal sources over the last 10 years.

	Federal	State General	State Special
Pass-through	98%	1%	1%
VDEM Operating Budget	77%	18%	5%
Total Budget	92%	6%	2%

Table 3. The average percentage of VDEM's funding provided by various sources over the last 10 years (SFY2017 – 2026).

Figure 4 visualizes the individual year funding source percentages that contribute to these averages. With the exception of SFY 2019, the percentage of federal and state funding has remained relatively consistent.[21] Federal funding has historically been and remains an essential source for VDEM to carry out its responsibilities, even as the mix of specific federal funding sources have fluctuated considerably over time.

[20] Note the State of Virginia's Fiscal Year (SFY) does not directly align with the federal fiscal year (FFY).
[21] The large amount of state funding spend in SFY 2019 was due to Hurricane Florence State Managed Shelters.

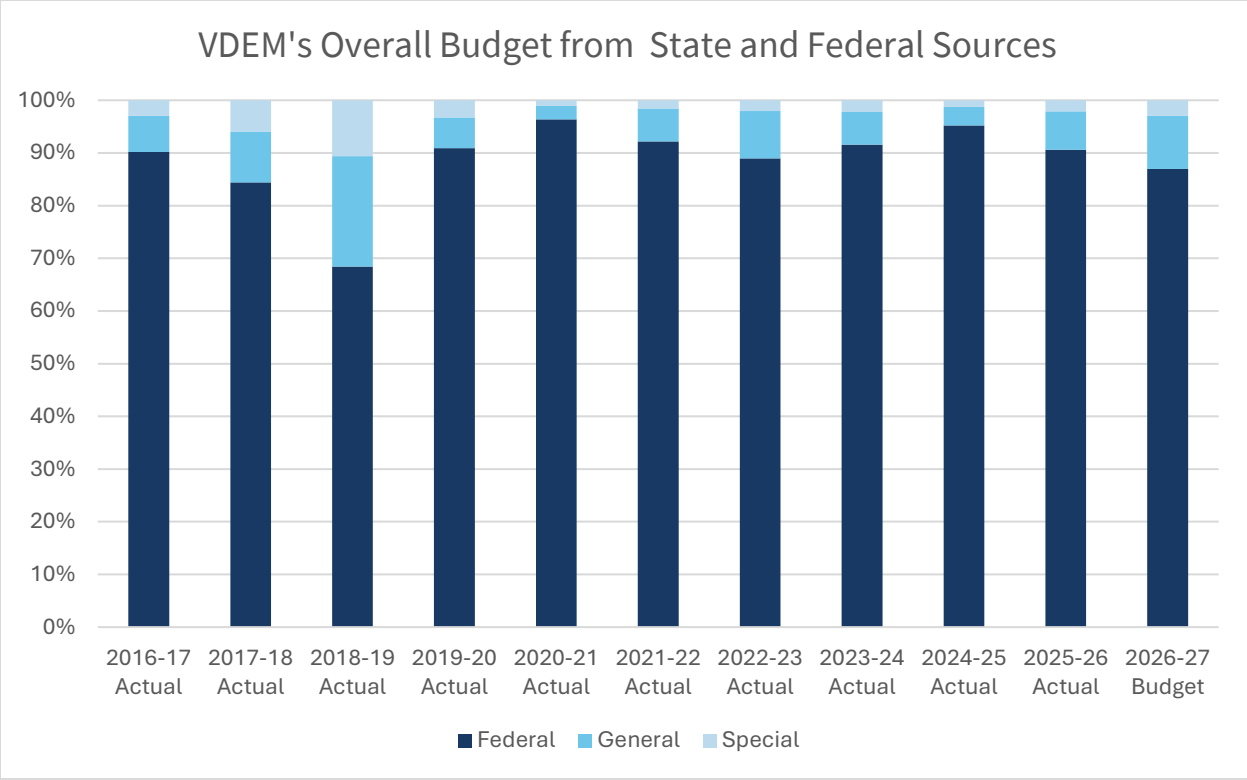


Figure 4. The yearly percentages of VDEM's overall budget provided by federal and state sources from SFY 2017 – 2026.

Source: VDEM Revised funding source data

VDEM Funding Passed Through to Local Governments and Partners

One of VDEM's core functions is the administration of state and federal grant programs to support local governments, other state agencies, and certain nongovernmental organizations in preparedness, prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation. Between 2017-2026, VDEM passed on an average of 71.7% of its overall funding through to subrecipients. Although pass-through funding may offset some of the local emergency management program costs, it does not provide the level of support required to attain and sustain the level of preparedness necessary to successfully respond to either a major or catastrophic disaster.[22] **Additionally, many rural localities across Virginia receive only about $7,500 annually from these federal grants, limiting their ability to build and maintain essential emergency management capabilities**

Pass-through funding comes from an array of federal grants and disaster funding allocations and supports a variety of local emergency management functions and capabilities. Table 4 describes the pass-through funding sources and summarizes the local emergency management capabilities and

[22] Department of Emergency Services, *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster*, *House Document No. 21*, (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1994), 13. https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/1994/HD21-PDF.

functions supported by those funds. One of the largest sources of federal funding passed through to local governments is FEMA's Public Assistance (PA) program. PA is only available following a federal disaster declaration and is a reimbursement program that helps eligible state and local governments recover costs associated with emergency response, debris removal, and the repair or restoration of public infrastructure. Unlike preparedness grants, PA funding is not intended to establish or sustain baseline emergency management capabilities; rather, it generally reimburses eligible disaster-related costs and supports restoration of damaged facilities following a federally declared disaster.

Funding Source	Examples	Local Capabilities and Functions Supported	Funding Type
Federal preparedness grants	EMPG, Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP), including SHSP, UASI, and other preparedness grants	Planning, equipment, technology, training, exercises, preparedness systems, special operation teams, communications technologies and systems.	Annual congressional allocation to each state
Federal disaster funding	Public Assistance (PA)	Emergency protective measures, debris removal, and other disaster recovery contracts	Federal Disaster Relief Fund, Disaster Dependent
Federal hazard mitigation funding	Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM), Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC), Flood Mitigation Assistance, and related programs	Hazard mitigation planning, risk assessments, and mitigation projects for risk reduction and community investment	Federal Disaster Relief Fund/federal appropriations
General fund	Recurring state appropriations	Backup generators/power for shelters	State Appropriations
Special Funds	Radiological, Fire Programs, Commonwealth Transportation and other dedicated sources	Program-specific personnel, planning, training, operations, technical expertise and related agency support for specialized emergency response capabilities	State Appropriations

Table 4. Pass-through funding sources to support local emergency management capabilities and functions

All localities within Virginia receive an EMPG funding allocation from VDEM which has been the funding model since 2012. EMPG funds contribute to local jurisdiction's expenses for personnel, contracts, supplies, and travel/training.[23] Despite the diversity of projects and localities that receive EMPG funding, it is often a small share of any given locality's total emergency management budget. Furthermore, the distribution of EMPG funding varies depending on whether localities receive population adjusted allocations (see Figure 5). Localities with a population less than or equal to 50,000 receive the baseline allocation of $7,500, while localities with a population greater than 50,000 receive $7,500 plus an additional amount based on population. Prior to EMPG, the most fiscally challenged localities received federal funding through a program called Emergency Management Assistance (EMA) which provided funding going back before the transition of civil defense to emergency management and their amounts were grandfathered into the EMPG allocation calculation, which was last updated in 2012. The lack of additional federal investment in EMPG over the past decade has prevented adjustments to the allocation formula, with VDEM consistently allocating $2.6 million to local governments. VDEM has been unable to increase the amount of pass-through funding beyond the 138 outlined below (see Table 5). For the FFY 2026 cycle, VDEM has advised localities that their EMPG allocations will be reduced by 10% due to the overall reduction of federal funding in FFY 2025-2026 for VDEM.

FFY 2025 EMPG Allocations		
Funding Source	**# of localities**	**Federal Funding**
Base Jurisdiction (less than 50,000)	74	$555,000
Above Based Jurisdiction (greater than 50,000)	5	$82,238
Population + EMA Amount	59	$2,038,868
Total	138	$2,676,106

Table 5. EMPG allocations for FFY 2025

In 1994, a report from the Virginia Department of Emergency Services (renamed the Virginia Department of Emergency Management in 2000) noted that although state funding helped reduce some of the financial burden on local emergency management programs, it was still not enough. Communities lacked the level of support needed to build and maintain the preparedness required to effectively manage major or catastrophic disasters.[24] This fact remains true today, limited funding results in increased reliance on the state to provide technical assistance in developing local plans, training, and exercise.

[23] EMPG funding requires a 50% nonfederal match, which means that if a locality receives $10,000 in EMPG funding, it must also provide at least $10,000 from its own funds for the approved projects.
[24] Department of Emergency Services, *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster*, *House Document No. 21*, (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1994), 13. https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/1994/HD21-PDF.

EMPG funding alone is insufficient to adequately support a local emergency management program, especially for smaller jurisdictions, many of which do not even have a full-time emergency manager.[25] An assessment of FFY 2023-2024 EMPG spending shows that baseline localities direct nearly all EMPG funding to contracts (70%) and personnel (28%), with essentially no spending on travel or training. Localities receiving larger, population-adjusted allocations show a meaningfully different pattern: contract share drops to 55% and travel and training rises to 17% of total EMPG spend.[26] This difference suggests that at the baseline funding level, localities cannot absorb the fixed costs associated with training or professionally developing staff. **Only once allocations rise above the baseline do localities begin to invest EMPG dollars in workforce capability building. The 74 localities below the baseline are unable to invest in their workforce capability, and when compounded with high turnover, means that the local emergency management workforce is continually underdeveloped.**

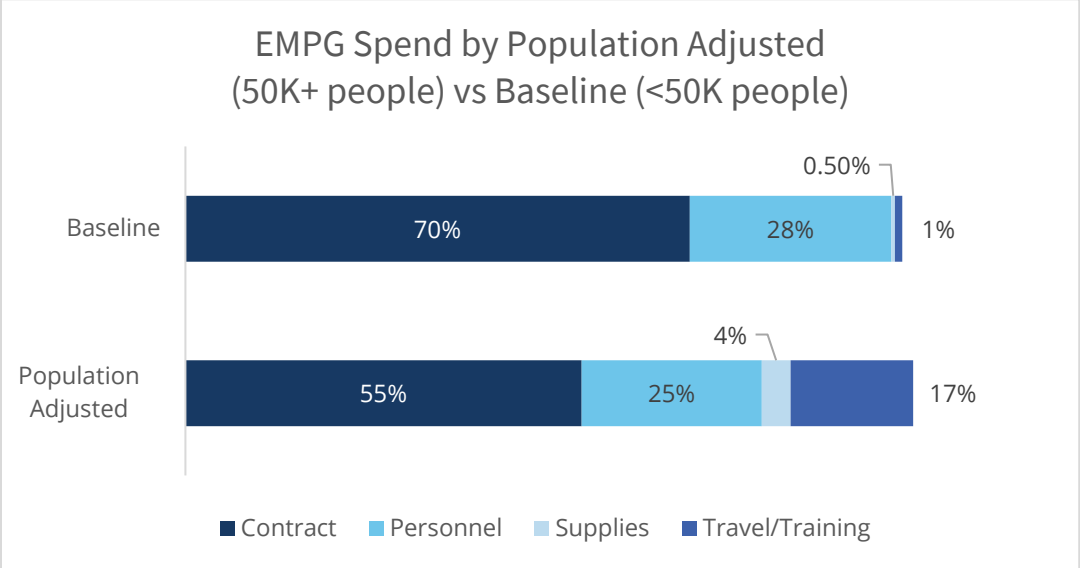


Figure 5 Local EMPG allocations by category

Source: Virginia Department of Emergency Management, 2017 - 2025 Actual, 26 Budget - Project, Virginia Department of Emergency Management Budget.

[25] Virginia Department of Emergency Management, LCAR 2026 Report.
[26] Virginia Department of Emergency Management, LEMPG Expense Report, LEMPG Spend 2021-2024.

As shown in Figure 6, additional analysis shows that the relatively constrained level of EMPG funding with inflation equates to a 26.5% reduction ($738,206) federal spending power at the local level from FFY 2014-2025.

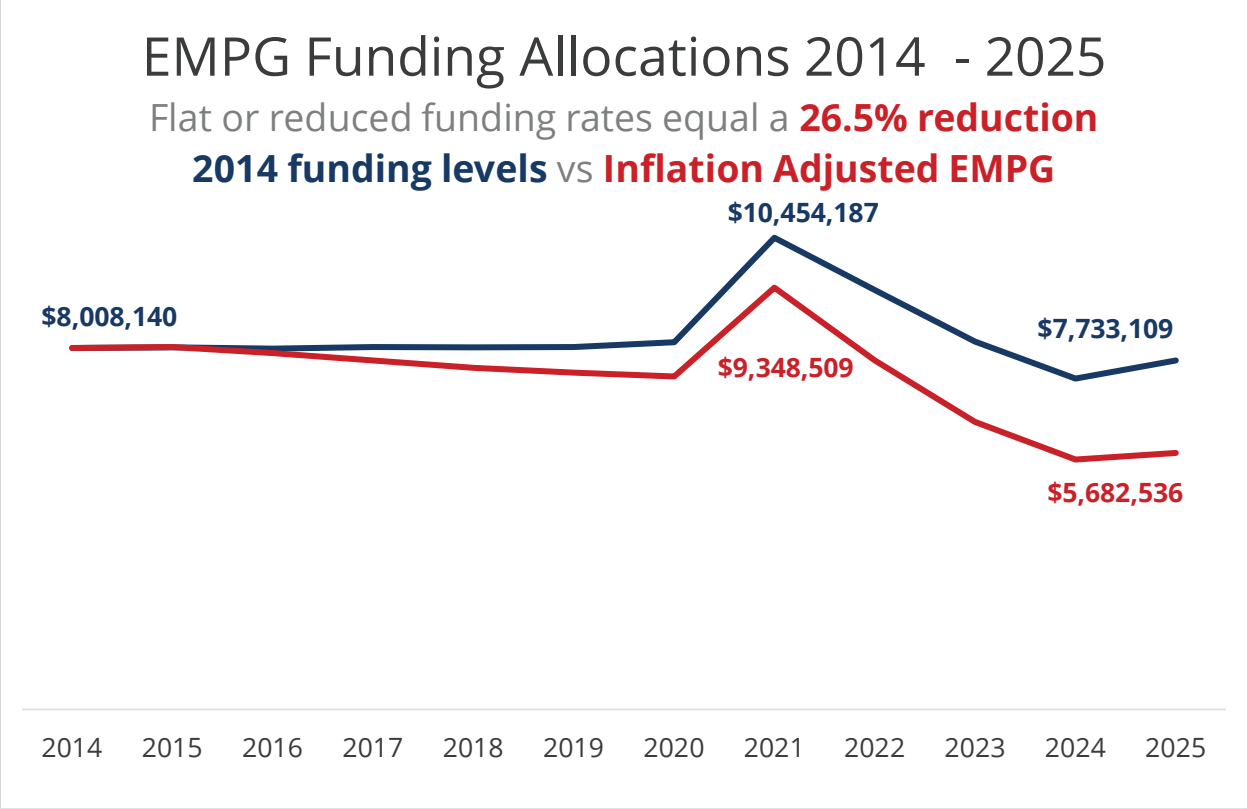


Figure 6 EMPG Funding Allocations 2014-2025

Virginia also receives annual allocations through the Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP), which is comprised of the State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) and Urban Area Security Initiatives (UASI). Federal statutes require that 80% of all funds shall be passed through to local governments. In Virginia, SHSP funding supports a broad range of state and local homeland security and preparedness capabilities, including: the Virginia Fusion Center; specialized response teams such as swift water rescue, hazardous materials, urban search and rescue, incident management, and communications cache teams; election security; and the statewide exercise program.[27]

[27] Virginia Department of Emergency Management, State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) Process Improvement Executive Summary.

FFY 2025 SHSP Local Allocations		
	# localities	Federal Funding
Special Operations Teams	52	$5,096,469
Virginia State Police	-	$877,085
Election Security	TBD	$263,126
VDEM Statewide Exercise Program	-	$780,000
Total		$7,016,680

Table 6. SHSP allocations from FFY 2025

Eligibility for UASI funding is determined by FEMA on an annual basis based primarily on terrorism risk. UASI funds currently support investments and projects exclusively located in 3 primary urban areas within Virginia:[28]

1. Northern Virginia (as part of the National Capital Region (NCR)): Projects include communications, alerting, and information sharing infrastructure, regional coordination platforms, and intelligence analysis.[29,30] Northern Virginia has consistently received funding as part of the NCR UASI since the program's inception, but that funding decreased by 60% in FFY 2025. Note: The District of Columbia (DC) manages this grant program.
2. Hampton Roads: Projects include regional planning and exercises, cybersecurity investments, interoperable communications strategic planning, and grants management.[31] Hampton Roads received UASI funding from FFY 2007- FFY 2014, when it was cut from the list of eligible recipients. The region was reinstated in FFY 2017. Note: Where VDEM manages this grant program, the Hampton Roads Planning District, through the Hampton Roads All Hazards Advisory Committee (AHAC) handles implementation and development of the program.
3. Richmond metropolitan area: Recent projects include tactical rescue equipment and personnel protective equipment.[32] The Richmond metropolitan area received UASI funding from FFY 2008 – FFY 2011, when it was cut from the list of eligible recipients. The metropolitan area was reinstated in FY25. Note: Where VDEM manages this grant

[28] As of FY 2026, both SHSP and UASI have local pass-through requirements of 80 percent and minimum spend requirements of 30 percent toward National Priority Areas and 35% toward law enforcement terrorism prevention activities. Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Fiscal Year 2026 Homeland Security Grant Program: Notice of Funding Opportunity*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2026).
[29] Virginia Department of Emergency Management, *CGMS Project Extraction*, August 10, 2026.
[30] Homeland Security Executive Committee, *Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Program Transition Recommendations*, (2025).
[31] Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, *FY 2026 HRPDC Work Program*, (Chesapeake, VA: HRPDC, 2025).
[32] Richmond Urban Area Working Group, *FY 2025 Urban Area Security Initiative Project Proposal Form Application*, (Richmond, VA: Richmond Urban Area Working Group, 2025).

program, the Richmond Urban Area Working Group handles implementation and development of the program.

The funding history across these 3 regions illustrates the inherent uncertainty associated with UASI funding. [33] Eligibility and award levels are reassessed annually based on federal risk assessments and funding priorities, resulting in significant year-to-year variation. As demonstrated by Hampton Roads and Richmond, regions may lose eligibility altogether and later be reinstated, while historically consistent recipients (NCR) may experience substantial reductions in annual funding.

This variability creates challenges for long-term planning and sustainment of capabilities initially developed through UASI investments. Personnel, specialized equipment, communications systems, training, exercises, and other regional capabilities require continued investment even when federal funding is reduced or unavailable. As a result, reliance on UASI to support ongoing capabilities can create funding gaps and place additional pressure on state and local resources to maintain investments that have become integral to regional and statewide preparedness.

VDEM Core Operating Budget

VDEM relies on a combination of state, federal, and special funds to support its operating budget and fund core functions, positions, technology, and equipment. Table 7 identifies the primary funding sources for VDEM's core operational expenses and summarizes the core functions supported by each source.

Funding Source	Examples	Core Functions Supported Across VDEM	State Statutory Requirement Supported
Federal preparedness grants	EMPG, HSGP (including SHSP and UASI), and other preparedness grants (e.g., Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grant (HMEP) and Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program (RCPGP))[34]	Planning, training, exercises, staffing, grants management, technology, statewide coordination, local support, preparedness systems	§ 44-146.18(B) - specifically sections 3, 4, 6 and 9. § 44-146.17 - specifically section 2; and §23.1-804 section D; § 2.2-222.1

[33] Virginia Department of Emergency Management, *Preparedness Grant Data – EM Grants Raw Data Export*, (Richmond, VA: VDEM, 2026).
[34] Awarded to VDEM in FFY 2025 and FFY 2026.

Funding Source	Examples	Core Functions Supported Across VDEM	State Statutory Requirement Supported
Federal disaster funding	Public Assistance (PA), disaster-specific federal awards	Disaster staffing, financial management, grants administration, planning, coordination, recovery operations, systems, contracts, agency-wide support and training	§§ 44-146.16, 44-146.18, 44-146.18:1, 44-146.18:4, 44-146.19, 44-146.20
Federal hazard mitigation funding	Hazard_Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) / Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC), Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) and related programs	Mitigation projects, hazard mitigation planning, reducing risk, technical assistance, staffing, grants management, data analysis, broader planning functions (plan updates)	§ 44-146.18(B) - specifically sections 3,5,7,8,14 and 15. (C) - specifically sections 4, 5, and 7; § 44-146.18(B)
General fund	Recurring state appropriations	Statutory responsibilities, core workforce, operating costs, state match, gaps not eligible for federal reimbursement, continuity of state functions	All Title 44
Special Funds	Radiological, Fire Programs, Commonwealth Transportation and other dedicated sources	Program-specific personnel, planning, training, operations, technical expertise and related agency support	§ 44-146.18, 19, and 33

Table 7. Funding sources and VDEM core functions

Source: Virginia Department of Emergency Management, VDEM Revised Funding Source Data.

For the 10-year period between SFY 2017 – SFY 2026, VDEM's operating expenditures were 76.8% federally funded, 18% from general funds, and 5.2% special fund. Over this time period, federal funding supported approximately half of the agency's personnel costs and more than 80% of contractual services, which include things like disaster technology (WebEOC and ArcGIS). Both software systems are critical to statewide preparedness because they provide the essential platforms for real-time situational awareness, resource tracking, and information sharing, forming the foundation for local requests and support during emergencies.

Figure 7 shows the percentage of VDEM's core operating budget supported by federal and state sources over the previous 10 years (SFY 2017 – SFY 2026). While there is considerable variability in funding percentages over time, the spike in federal funding in SFY 2021 was due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

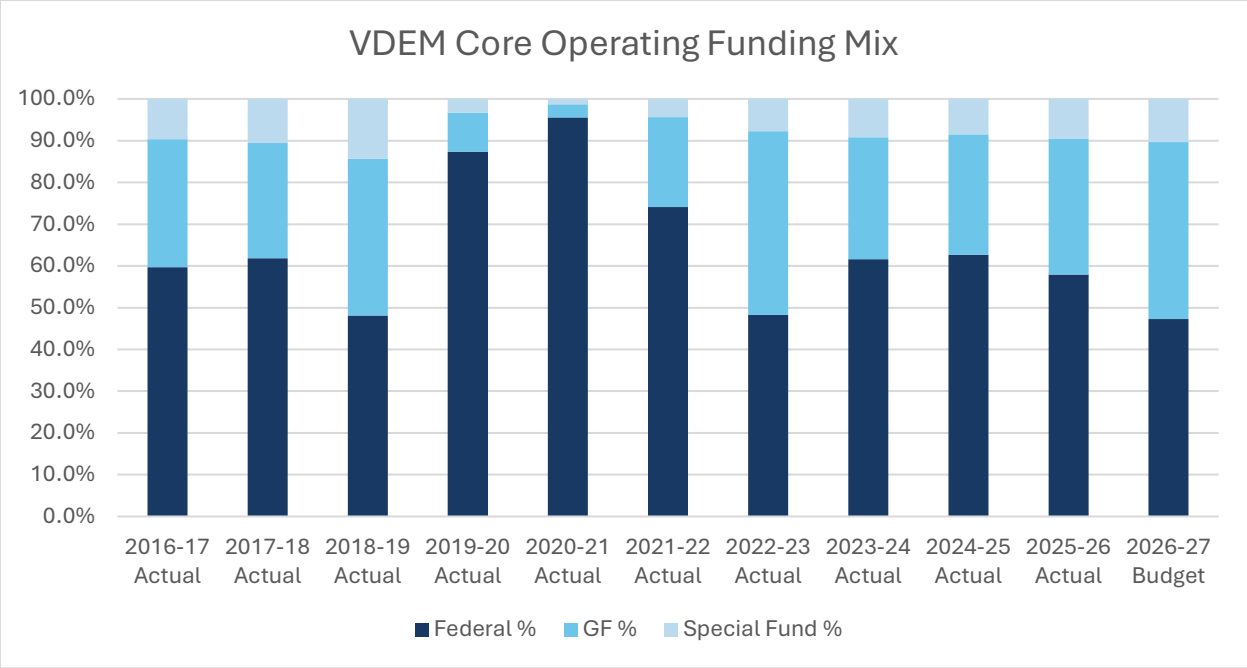


Figure 7. The yearly percentages of VDEM's core operating budget provided by federal and state sources from SFY2017 – 2026.

Source: VDEM Revised funding source data

2.2 Federal Funding Sustainability

Recent actions and documents produced by the federal government indicate that there is significant risk to relying on federal funding to sustain existing core capabilities at the state and local level. On August 7, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14332 – Improving Oversight of Federal Grantmaking, which establishes implementation and termination clauses and calls for revisions to the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200). The Office of Management and Budget proposed changes to the 2 CFR 200 expanding termination and suspension authority of the federal government. The Notice of Funding Opportunities for 2026 preparedness and hazard mitigation grants included new language that allows FEMA to terminate grant awards in instances when a state has failed to meet *established* "program goals" or "agency priorities." The new language would permit FEMA to terminate awards based on *new* or *changed* priorities and goals *after* an award is made. Termination is also permitted where "FEMA changes or re-evaluates the goals or priorities" of a grant program or if the program goals or agency priorities are "updated" after an award has been made. This is a significant risk to the sustainability of federal funding to state and local entities.

Over the past 5 years, the preparedness grant programs have become less reliable and more unstable and mired with changing priorities, required spending percentages, fluctuations in funding amounts, 12-month delays, funding holds, political influence, litigation, and requirements that Virginia may not be able to legally comply with. FEMA is holding the FFY 2025 funding, which is 65% of the total award for compliance with national priorities and law enforcement requirements. For the HSGP, there is a 20% hold pending compliance with new election security requirements, for which election security

only accounts for 3% of the total award. There was a 10% decrease in FFY 2025 across all preparedness grants, with amounts continuing to fluctuate for FFY 2026. The combination of federal government shutdowns and FEMA employee attrition has caused a significant delay in processing Virginia grant applications and project modifications. *As of August 2026, FEMA has yet to take action on more than 100 outstanding grant requests from Virginia.*

Since 2003, VDEM has partnered with Planning District Commissions to coordinate regional hazard mitigation plans, which must be updated every 5 years. The delay in approval of grant funds associated with planning applications has prevented timely plan updates, with 10 of the 22 plans expiring due to delays in federal funding, which is impacting the eligibility of 36 counties, 23 cities, and 58 incorporated towns to apply for hazard mitigation grant funding. In addition, as the state continues to pursue Enhanced State status for the State Hazard Mitigation Plan, the expiration of local plans counts against Virginia's ability to receive the designation which means that Virginia would miss out on an additional 5% of funding through the HMGP.

Hazard mitigation is an important component to the overall emergency management enterprise; buying down risk has proven to save lives and protect property and infrastructure. A recent study of actual flood losses avoided through FEMA grants showed that the acquisition and demolition of 10 homes in the City of Franklin after Hurricane Floyd generated a $4.49 return on investment after a 2006 Nor'easter, which exceeded expected savings by 98%. More information on the success of Virginia's hazard mitigation program can be found here - Mitigation Actions Since Hurricane Isabel.

Recent actions and documents on federal disaster aid suggest that FEMA's approach to disaster assistance is becoming more restrictive and indicate the agency may already be following some of the tenets captured in the FEMA Review Council Final Report. FEMA has issued policy guidance for state and local governments to be responsible for the cost and coordination of standing up disaster recovery centers under an Individual Assistance (IA) declaration. In 2026, 4 states were denied federal disaster assistance for snowstorms due to a determination that the response should be viewed as routine state operations. For the February 2025 Winter Storm and Flooding, Virginia applied for the HMGP and was denied which is estimated to be $5.7 million in funding that was not available to local governments to reduce long-term risk.

Changes to federal declaration thresholds, incident types supported, or cost-share requirements will increase the fiscal responsibility borne by the state and local governments for future incidents. Since the COVID-19 pandemic (beginning in March 2020), Virginia has declared a state of emergency for at least 21 incidents. Of these 21 incidents, 7 incidents resulted in federal emergency or major disaster declarations and 14 incidents involved state declarations without a request for federal assistance.[35] Of the 7 incidents that received a federal declaration since COVID-19, analysis using the proposed changes identifies that 4 of them would have resulted in less federal assistance from FEMA estimated

[35] This calculation treats Hurricane Helene as one (1) incident, although this incident resulted in both a federal emergency declaration (2024 Virginia Post-tropical Cyclone Helene (EM-3621-VA)) and major disaster declaration (2024 Virginia Tropical Storm Helene (DR-4831-VA)).

at a cost differential between $13.8 million and $129.6 million.[36] Should these 7 disasters have occurred in this new federal approval environment as suggested by the FEMA Review Council Report, Virginia would not have received $115.8M in federal assistance[37]. For more detail on how the incidents were reviewed and how this was calculated, please see Appendix B: Disaster Funding Trends.

Anticipated Changes Following the FEMA Review Council Final Report

On January 24, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order 14180 establishing the FEMA Review Council to evaluate FEMA's operations, staffing levels, and role in emergency management with the goal of reforming the agency. On May 7, 2026, *The President's Council to Assess the Federal Emergency Management Agency* published its *Final Report.*[38] The Council made several strategic recommendations regarding the role of FEMA, with considerable implications for state and local jurisdictions including disaster funding and how state and local preparedness capability is developed and sustained.

The report and associated recommendations envision a fundamental rebalancing of disaster management in the United States. The report states that the following doctrine was used to guide the Council's recommendations: "Disaster response should be locally executed, state or tribally managed, and federally supported." The report proposes a significant shift in federal emergency management resource allocation, with greater emphasis on building state, tribal, and territorial capacity and reserving federal assistance for disasters that exceed those capabilities. Although the report and current FEMA guidance articulate the policy prerogatives underpinning the transfer of responsibility from the federal government to the states, there has not been a prudent and meaningful timeframe allotted for states to offset the significant recission of federal roles and responsibilities across the emergency management enterprise.

Proposed reforms affect federal grant programs, federal disaster assistance (PA, IA, and HMGP), mitigation programs, flood insurance, and preparedness requirements. Federal grant programs would increasingly prioritize mission-ready teams, nationally recognized capabilities, and critical infrastructure rather than specialized equipment. Programs such as EMPG could be retained and could potentially receive a one-time increase to support the transition of responsibilities to states. VDEM's current SHSP funding strategy for local special operations teams directly aligns with the mission ready teams concept as recommended in the FEMA Review Council Report.

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[36] The $13.8M estimate assumes that the 2022 Virginia flooding and mudslides (DR-4674-VA) and the 2021 Virginia flooding, landslides, and mudslides (DR-4628-VA) never received disaster declarations because a low number of localities were affected and/or the disaster cost was low, and any funding obligated for PA or the HMGP was not received. The $129.6M estimate assumes that 2022 Virginia severe winter storm and snowstorm (DR-4644-VA) never received a disaster declaration, based on recent precedents in which major snowstorms were denied disaster aid, and $115.8M was never obligated for PA or HMGP, in addition to the $13.8M estimate for DR-4674-VA and DR-4628-VA.

[37] Federal Emergency Management Agency, *The President's Council to Assess the Federal Emergency Management Agency Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: FEMA, 2026). https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2026-05/26_0507_fema%20review%20council_final%20report.pdf.

[38] Ibid.

For 2 disaster programs, the FEMA Review Council recommended altering the federal cost share depending on the state's performance criteria within the applicable program. Table 8 presents an overview of these recommendations.

Stafford Act Program	Federal Cost Share	Non-Federal Cost Share	Proposed Program Name - FEMA Review Council	Proposed Federal Cost Share
Public Assistance	75%	25%	RAPID	50% up to 75% based on performance metrics
Hazard Mitigation Grant Program	75%	25%	Refined Risk Reduction	50% up to 75% based on performance metrics

Table 8 Recommended Federal Cost Share Changes

This shift represents a decrease in the federal share from its current share of 75% and under catastrophic circumstances up to 100%. Following the recommendations, federal disaster assistance could become more targeted, with updated declaration thresholds and common criteria for determining when an event exceeds state and local capacity. The Council also recommends establishing annual minimum state expenditure requirements, scaled by state size, that a state must meet before it is eligible to request a federal declaration.

At the disaster program level, the FEMA Review Council recommended consolidating IA into a single direct payment for survivors whose homes are uninhabitable and moving PA to a parametric, direct-funding model, which would place greater responsibility on states to administer the assistance. The Council also recommended refocusing FEMA's disaster housing role on emergency and temporary housing for those with serious damage, shifting evacuation and temporary sheltering responsibilities to SLTT governments, and leaving responsibilities for permanent housing to private insurers, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Small Business Administration.

The recommendations also place greater emphasis on state and local preparedness capacity, including planning, training, exercises, resource identification, risk assessment, and demonstrated capability. The proposed model would establish new expectations for state and local preparedness and administrative capacity. States, tribes, and territories would be expected to maintain statewide resident preparedness campaigns, ensure federally funded permanent projects, maintain detailed and cost-mapped resource inventories for mutual aid and interstate deployment, and develop the ability to collect and report preliminary damage assessments within 30 days of a disaster. They would also be expected to continually assess and address risks through the THIRA/SPR process and demonstrate progress toward national preparedness capabilities.

These recommendations point toward a federal emergency management system in which states assume more responsibility across all phases of emergency management while federal resources become more targeted, performance-oriented, and focused on truly catastrophic events.

2.3 Funding Trends and Implications

Sustainability Assessment

This report examined several factors and trends that can impact the sustainability of Virginia's disaster funding model. Table 8 presents a summary of these factors.

Factor	Trend	Implication/Finding
Disaster frequency and severity	⬆	Virginia's risk profile indicates that disasters will continue to happen and require greater capability and capacity for response and recovery, and result in increased costs to state and local governments.
Emergency management needs	**Unmet needs**	Emergency management needs are increasing while Virginia is confronting new and long-standing capability gaps.
Sufficiency of existing funding	⬇	The capabilities built in Virginia for more than 2 decades are becoming more difficult to sustain due to increased cost of personnel, benefits, technology, contracts, equipment, training, and other operating requirements under constrained federal funding.
Federal disaster funding	⬇	States may be required to take on more of the cost share for disaster related expenses.
Dependency on federal funding	**High**	There is a heavy reliance on federal funding for both VDEM's core operating budget and pass-through funding.
Federal pass-through funding	⬇	Federal pass-through funding to localities is decreasing, but localities rely on those funds to finance core operating costs and capabilities, including training, travel, contracted services, and personnel.
State Responsibility	⬆	States should anticipate being required to take on a larger role in emergency management and disaster response based on recent FEMA reform actions.

Table 9. Disaster-related trends and findings influencing the sustainability of the current funding model.

Taken together, these factors identify significant financial and capability risks for Virginia and demonstrate that Virginia's emergency management enterprise is not sustainably funded for the present and the future.

Virginia's emergency management capabilities have grown steadily over the past 2 decades, but they rest on a funding structure that was never designed to be permanent. Although federal preparedness funding was not intended to replace sustained state and local investment, states have relied on these federal programs to build and maintain preparedness capabilities for more than 2 decades. VDEM has similarly identified the risks associated with its heavy reliance on federal funding in agency planning documents for nearly a decade.

Federal dollars have enabled Virginia and its localities to build capabilities that would not otherwise exist, but those capabilities have matured into recurring responsibilities without a corresponding, sustainable state funding strategy. There was not an intentional decision at one point in time to fund three-quarters of VDEM's operations by federal grants, rather the funding model developed incrementally over more than 2 decades. As federal resources became available, capabilities expanded, requirements evolved, and those capabilities became a part of the normal expectation of the emergency management enterprise in Virginia.

As a result, federal preparedness, mitigation, and disaster recovery grants now support the majority of operating costs for both VDEM and for the pass-through funding provided to support local emergency management programs. VDEM has generally been expected to manage within the available resources and continue maximizing federal funding rather than request General Fund support for costs that could be federally eligible.

Today, federal funding is at considerable risk of delay, reduction, and elimination. With the current approach to emergency funding, if federal funding is reduced, restructured, or delayed, Virginia's ability to maintain readiness and support disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation will be directly and negatively affected. National county experience shows why local capacity and fiscal preparation matter: disaster reimbursement systems require local governments to front costs, carry outstanding claims, delay projects, and divert resources from other services. State investment in local emergency management capacity can reduce these pressures.[39] If implemented, the FEMA Review Council Final Report recommendations could also increase both the financial and operational responsibilities of Virginia and its local governments. Virginia will likely need greater independent capacity to sustain emergency management staffing and preparedness programs, maintain trained and deployable capabilities, administer disaster assistance, implement recovery programs, and absorb other responsibilities previously supported by the federal government.

[39] National Association of Counties, *The Big Shift: An Analysis of the Local Cost of Federal Cuts*, (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Counties 2025).

This trend and signal of decreasing federal funding and support occurs at a time when disasters are increasing in frequency and severity, and when limited budgets have already resulted in significant gaps in preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery capabilities. For much of the last decade, many of the federal, state, and local funding sources have remained relatively constant and constrained while the cost of personnel, benefits, technology, contracts, equipment, training, and other operating requirements have continued to increase. VDEM now has less spending power to sustain current capabilities, and not enough to meet new needs.

The impact of level funding is particularly significant for federal preparedness grants and other special-purpose funding streams that support ongoing emergency management capabilities. When appropriations remain relatively flat while personnel, contractual services, equipment, technology, training, and other operating costs increase, the practical result is a reduction in purchasing power and program capacity. For illustration, based on the Consumer Price Index, approximately $20 million in operating costs in 2016 would require nearly $28 million today to maintain equivalent purchasing power. Without corresponding growth in funding, increasing costs must be absorbed within existing awards, leaving fewer resources available for direct program delivery. Over time, this can mean fewer training and exercise opportunities, delayed replacement of equipment and technology, reduced ability to sustain specialized teams and personnel, and less capacity to respond to emerging requirements. In this way, even level funding can represent a real reduction in emergency management capability. The outcomes are not hypothetical nor nebulous; real lives are at risk due to these reductions.

Virginia is not alone in this position; many states are experiencing similar funding and capability gaps, and all will be challenged by changes in federal funding and requirements. Localities are similarly constrained. They also rely heavily on federal funds to finance core operating costs and capabilities, including training, travel, contracted services, and personnel—operating expenses that would otherwise fall on limited local general funds. If localities are less capable, more burden will also fall on state resources.

2.4 Recommendations

Given these dynamics, Virginia needs to be postured to shoulder more of the cost and requirements of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery than federal funds have historically supported. To address the uncertainty and financial risk with federal grant funds, Virginia needs to create a more modern and sustainable funding model for emergency management in Virginia. Sustainability can be addressed by identifying the core emergency management capabilities that Virginia expects to exist regardless of changes in federal funding and determining the appropriate level of state support necessary to maintain that as a baseline. Then, federal funding, if available, could be used to enhance capability at the state and local level, as originally intended. The following sections further describe the actions Virginia can take to develop and progress a sustainable emergency management enterprise. Continuing to be prudent with existing federal funding, leveraging and empowering

partners, and focusing on those capabilities best managed and delivered at the state level will also pay dividends towards long-term capability and sustainability.

Address Current and Future Risks of Federal Preparedness and Response Funding

This study recommends that the Virginia legislature explore ways to begin adjusting Virginia's emergency management funding model progressively over multiple budget cycles to reduce Virginia's reliance on federal funds beginning with VDEM core operations around planning, training, exercises, and regional coordination. This would give assurance that the investments over the past 20 years remain and Virginia's emergency management enterprise does not revert to a pre-Hurricane Isabel state which resulted in resources not getting to where they needed to in a timely manner.[40]

Those challenges carried significant human and economic consequences. Hurricane Isabel caused approximately $1.6 billion in damage and resulted in at least 10 direct deaths in Virginia, with additional deaths attributed indirectly to the storm. The subsequent congressional review documented prolonged power outages, shortages of essential commodities such as food, water, and ice, and challenges associated with coordinating and distributing resources and recovery services to impacted communities. These impacts demonstrate the consequences that can occur when emergency management capacity, coordination, and resource-delivery systems are insufficient for the scale of an event.

Chapter 3 provides examples of alternative funding models that other states have used to address similar challenges. This shift is both a hedge against the federal government's volatility and a strategic realignment consistent with the FEMA Review Council's Final Report that state and local capacity should carry more of the disaster management load.

Establish and Sustain Minimum Emergency Management Capabilities

Complementary to the recommendation above, Virginia should establish a statewide, capability-based investment strategy that defines the minimum emergency management capabilities needed at the state, regional, and local levels. Regular capability assessments, after action findings, risk information, staffing analyses, and input from the Unified Readiness Summits should be used to identify and prioritize gaps in personnel, planning, emergency operations centers, communications, logistics, mutual aid, continuity, and disaster recovery. These findings should inform a multi-year investment plan with defined responsibilities and measurable preparedness targets.

Recurring state and local funding should sustain minimum capabilities, while federal grants should be maximized to supplement baseline funding, address emerging risks, and advance capability improvements. The strategy should account for differences in local risk and fiscal capacity, provide technical assistance where needed, and support regional or shared capabilities when they are more

[40] Committee on Government Reform, *Emerging from Isabel: A Review of FEMA's Preparation for and Response to Affected Areas in The Hampton Roads Region,* (Washington, D.C.: House of Representatives, 2003*).* CHRG-108hhrg91421.pdf*.*

effective than maintaining the same resources in every locality. Progress should be reassessed regularly to determine whether investments are closing identified gaps and improving readiness across Virginia.

Sustainment of Recovery and Mitigation Expertise

As the above recommendations focus on sustaining and enhancing preparedness and response needs, the study recommends that the Virginia legislature take a similar approach to provide sustainable funding to VDEM recovery and mitigation programs. VDEM's ability to plan for and support state and local recovery and mitigation efforts is 100% funded by federal grants. VDEM has been integral in providing technical assistance and an efficient and compliant reimbursement process recovery, while helping local governments identify, apply for, and manage hazard mitigation funding. If federal funding is reduced or no longer available, VDEM would lose critical capabilities currently supported with disaster-related federal funding, including recovery staff, regional recovery and mitigation personnel, and several administrative and financial positions necessary to manage disaster programs and reimbursements. VDEM is currently closing disasters within an average of 4-5 years with current capability, and without these positions it would return to a 7-year or greater timeframe which would put us out of compliance with FEMA current closeout timelines and run the risk of not being able to reimburse local and state agencies in a timely manner. FEMA does not reward states for closing out disasters early with supplemental funding. Based on the agency's current capabilities, -during recovery efforts for Tropical Storm Helene VDEM paid its first reimbursement to a local government 71 days after the federal disaster declaration, which the fastest in the nation for Helene and is a target for all future disasters. With the proposed changes to federal funding, VDEM will not have the means to support local governments and meet statutory requirements. Instead, VDEM would have to revert to a just-in-time staffing model to hire staff or be completely reliant on contractors that may or may not have an understanding of Virginia. This model has been proven to be less strategic, more expensive, more time consuming, and results in indirect reduction of budgets of critical state and local assistance programs due to untimely reimbursements. In addition to VDEM, the delay in federal funding for local hazard mitigation plan updates has resulted in eligibility challenges for local governments wanting to pursue federal grants. Recovery and mitigation programs are only effective if Virginia has the proper staff to support the disaster before it occurs.

Strengthen Statewide Disaster Financial Coordination

Through the Unified Readiness Framework, Virginia should strengthen and formalize existing cross-agency coordination of disaster-related funding and resources across the Executive Branch. Significant incidents routinely require capabilities and resources from emergency management, housing, social services, health care, workforce, transportation, public safety, and other state agencies, each operating under different funding authorities and programs.

The Unified Readiness effort is already improving Virginia's understanding of where capabilities, resources, and funding authorities exist across state government and providing a framework for agencies to coordinate before, during, and after significant incidents. However, improved

coordination alone does not resolve the underlying funding challenge. Most state agencies operate within tightly allocated budgets intended to support their core missions, while many federal funding sources are restricted to specific purposes and, in several areas, are declining or becoming less predictable.

Building on existing coordination, Virginia should develop a more comprehensive approach for identifying available disaster resources, anticipated funding gaps, potential duplication, and costs that cannot reasonably be absorbed within existing agency budgets. This should include a coordinated review of disaster-related funding needs and a comprehensive accounting of disaster costs across state government—not solely those administered through emergency management programs.

Integrating this financial coordination into the Unified Readiness Framework would provide a consistent mechanism for agencies to align available resources, identify unmet needs earlier, maximize eligible federal assistance, and inform future state budget decisions when existing resources are insufficient to support Virginia's preparedness, response, and recovery requirements.[41]

[41] Colin Foard, et al., *How States Can Build Disaster-Ready Budgets,* (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2025). https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2025/04/how-states-can-build-disaster-ready-budgets.

CHAPTER 3: ADDITIONAL FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER STATES

Pursuant to Virginia HB169/SB96 (2026), this chapter examines alternative disaster and emergency management funding models from across the United States. While these are not formal recommendations, they are documented approaches that Virginia may consider for a more sustainable emergency management funding structure. To develop this chapter, open-source materials including articles, budget documents, legislative reports, and policy analyses were reviewed to examine how other states measure, manage, and mitigate the fiscal effect of disasters.

According to the NEMA 2026 Biennial Report, 38 states maintain a state funded disaster assistance program, and 35 utilize a funding mechanism that includes the non-federal costs of FEMA Public Assistance.[42] Virginia provides this assistance through sum-sufficient allocations authorized by a governor's state of emergency declaration. Sum-sufficient is utilized for disaster response operations, the state PA program, and cost share of the FEMA PA program, HMGP, and other needs assistance funding.

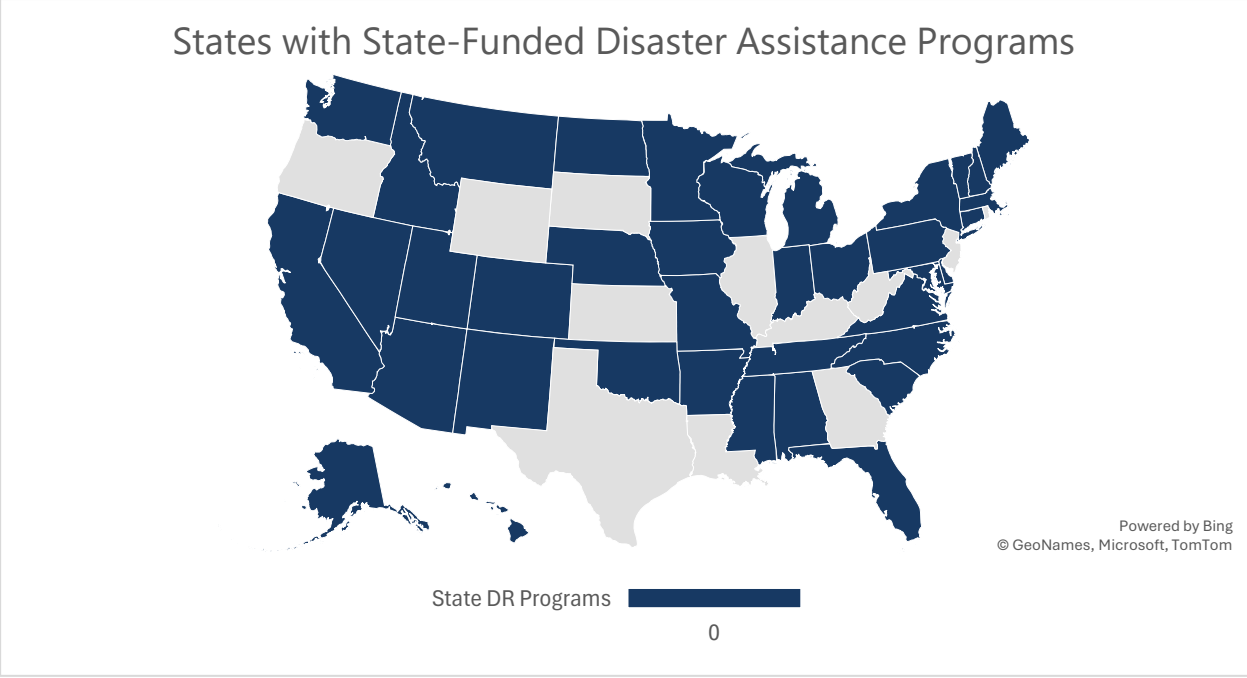


Figure 8. States with state-funded disaster assistance programs

Source: National Emergency Management Association 2026 Biennial Report

[42]National Emergency Management Association, *Biennial Key Insights: 2026,* (Washington, D.C.: NEMA, 2026). https://nemaweb.org/blog/document/keyinsights_2026-biennial-report/.

3.1 State Funding Models – Response and Recovery

Dedicated Disaster Reserves

Treating disasters as a recurring budget line rather than a one-time event allows states flexibility to support localities and plan for disaster related costs. These disaster funds provide an opportunity to proactively budget for disasters through annual general fund deposits, systematic deposits of surplus one-time revenue, or dedicated revenue streams. Tennessee created the Governor's Response and Recovery Fund in 2025 with an initial $100 million appropriation. The goal of the fund was to provide a flexible, state-controlled, grant-based mechanism supporting communities, businesses, landowners, and individuals when federal assistance is delayed, denied, or insufficient.[43] It is designed for events that fall below federal thresholds or where federal programs leave gaps, includes a waiver authority for exceptional circumstances and fiscally distressed jurisdictions, and relies on annual reporting for accountability.

Some additional examples of states with dedicated disaster funds include:

- North Dakota: Maintains a State Disaster Relief Fund through direct appropriations and oil and gas taxes. [44]
- Texas: Operates the Economic Stabilization Fund, a large rainy-day fund that covers budget gaps including disaster relief. [45]
- Arkansas: Maintains a $10.25 million Disaster Response and Recovery Fund in the Governor's Office that reimburses state and local response forces directly.[46]

The General Assembly directed a second study, *Assessing Non-Declared Response Needs* (HB1189), to assess the feasibility and fiscal impacts of developing a program that prioritizes prevention and mitigation efforts for imminent emergencies that may require a gubernatorial declaration of a state of preparedness. It also directed an assessment of how the Commonwealth can support significant incidents that do not warrant a state declaration of emergency, ensuring localities have access to needed resources during non-declared events.

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[43] "Governor's Response and Recovery Fund Awards Grants to Support Recovery Efforts", Department of the Tennessee Emergency Management Authority, accessed July 9, 2026, https://www.tn.gov/tema/news/2025/7/3/governor-s-response-and-recovery-fund-awards-grants-to-support-recovery-efforts.html.
[44] "North Dakota Government Funds", Office of the State Treasurer, North Dakota, accessed September 1, 2026, https://www.treasurer.nd.gov/north-dakota-government-funds.
[45] Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, "*Texas' Rainy Day Fund* Projected to Hit Cap for First Time", Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, accessed September 11, 2026, https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/fiscal-notes/archive/2023/mar/rainyday.php.
[46] National Emergency Management Association, *NEMA 2024 Biennial Report*, (National Emergency Management Association, 2024).

Individual and Household Assistance Support

Some states maintain state-level individual assistance mechanisms that operate independently of (or alongside) FEMA's IA Program. Washington's framework leverages disaster accounts and multiple state agencies to provide cash assistance, housing support, and social services. Short-term needs are met through Household Needs Grants, Extended Sheltering Assistance, and initial rental support; long-term recovery is supported through phased housing repair/replacement assistance, unmet-needs funding, and county/tribal Disaster Case Management grants. A related program, the Disaster Cash Assistance Program, provides flexible short-term cash to survivors once within a 12-month period when the governor has declared a disaster, while requiring applicants to also pursue other benefits (e.g., TANF, SNAP, unemployment) so state dollars cover only the immediate gap.[47]

Economic and Business Recovery Programs

Only 5 states (Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Wisconsin) maintain a disaster assistance program dedicated specifically to economic or business recovery, as opposed to individual or public assistance. Maryland delivers this through a combination of state programs: the State Disaster Recovery Fund, the Maryland Economic Development Assistance Authority and Fund, and the Video Lottery Terminal Fund, supplemented by the Departments of Commerce, Housing and Community Development, and Labor, and the Maryland Historical Trust.[48] This provides flexibility across business loans, unemployment benefits, and tax relief, though many components require emergency appropriations to activate at scale — a trade-off worth noting relative to a single dedicated mechanism.[49]

3.2 Preparedness and Mitigation Funding

Capacity-Building Grants

Beyond general-fund reserves, some states fund emergency management through statutorily protected fees tied directly to at-risk property or activity. Florida imposes an annual $2 surcharge on residential property policies and $4 on commercial policies, funding the Emergency Management, Preparedness, and Assistance (EMPA) Trust Fund.[50] Florida also uses EMPA as the non-federal match for its Local Emergency Management Performance Grant, guaranteeing every county at least $100,000 in combined FY 2026 EMPA/EMPG funding, allowing for rural counties to competitively staff at least

[47] Washington Emergency Management Division, *Washington State Disaster Individual Assistance Program Plan*, (Washington Emergency Management Division, 2023). https://mil.wa.gov/asset/69558b3e16bff/Washington_State_Disaster_Individual_Assistance_Program_Plan_FINAL.pdf.
[48] National Emergency Management Association, *NEMA 2024 Biennial Report*, (National Emergency Management Association, 2024).
[49] "Disaster Cash Assistance Program", Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, accessed September 11, 2026, https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/emergency-assistance-programs/disaster-cash-assistance-program.
[50] Fla. Stat. §252.371 (2025)

one full-time coordinator.[51] Florida's dedicated tourism-revenue trust funds similarly provide a consistent funding stream at both the state and local level.

North Carolina has used state funding to supplement federal preparedness resources through its Capacity Building Competitive Grant CBCG Program. Established by the North Carolina General Assembly in SFY 2022, the program provides nonrecurring state funding to county emergency management agencies to build capabilities, close locally identified gaps, and address preparedness needs that may not align with, or be adequately supported through, federal grant programs. Eligible investments have included mass care and human services, preparedness initiatives, incident management and coordination, emergency operations center improvements and technology, resiliency projects, equipment, and other priorities supported by local or regional risk assessments. The program was initially funded with a $3 million state appropriation in SFY 2022, followed by $5 million in SFY 2023 and approximately $1.9 million in SFY 2024. North Carolina has also directed resources from its State Emergency Response and Disaster Relief Fund to continue investments in local emergency management capacity. Unlike many federal preparedness grants, the program is funded by the state, does not require a local match, and allows North Carolina to direct resources toward state and locally identified capability gaps rather than relying exclusively on federal eligibility criteria and national priorities.[52]

The 1994 *State of Preparedness in Virginia for Catastrophic Disasters recommended the General Assembly* "Establish an Emergency Management Preparedness and Assistance Trust Fund, similar to that of the State of Florida, with a dedicated funding source, to be administered by the Virginia Department of Emergency Services (renamed the Virginia Department of Emergency Management in 2000) for the purpose of supporting state and local emergency management programs and initiatives. Florida's recent legislation is generating over $12 million in funding annually to support local and state emergency management programs and initiatives. In Virginia, the estimated need to provide an adequate ongoing program is approximately $8 million. Note that this does not include funding for hazardous materials programs or for capital outlay projects such as the EOC and communication enhancements. By example, this equates roughly to what is currently being generated to support the Fire Programs Fund, described under Section 38.2-401 of the Code of Virginia, using a percentile assessment levied against selected insurance policies."[53]

[51] See F.A.C. 27P-11 and 27P-19. https://flrules.org/gateway/Division.asp?DivID=1072. The calculation is based on assumptions regarding the FY 2026 EMPA and EMPG allocations, as noted in https://laws.flrules.org/2026/232 and https://simpler.grants.gov/opportunity/bc078c20-8fd4-4365-9338-440c6066ce70.

[52] "FY24 Capacity Building Competitive Grants (CBCG)", North Carolina Department of Public Safety, accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.ncdps.gov/our-organization/emergency-management/emergency-management-grants/fy24-capacity-building-competitive-grants-cbcg.

[53] Department of Emergency Services, *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster*, *House Document No. 21*, (Richmond, VA: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1994), 32. https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/1994/HD21-PDF.

Large-Scale Mitigation Investments

Targeting root causes of recurring disaster costs reduce both frequency and severity of future disaster expenditures. North Carolina's Flood Resiliency Blueprint is the largest statewide flood-mitigation investment in state history, pairing an online decision-support tool with coordinated planning to guide funding decisions and produce mitigation projects. North Carolina has also invested directly in response infrastructure, including an $87 million emergency training center providing International Fire Services Accreditation Congress-certified and specialized training to first responders, and uses hazardous materials facility fees to fund grants for local emergency management planning, training, and exercises.[54]

Florida also targets the underlying drivers of disaster losses through dedicated, state-funded mitigation investments. Supported by an annual $7 million allocation from the Florida Hurricane Catastrophe Trust Fund, the Hurricane Loss Mitigation Program advances property resilience through residential, commercial, and mobile home retrofits; expands public education and outreach on hurricane risks; and supports ongoing hurricane research to strengthen long-term mitigation strategies.[55]

Incentive-Based Programs

Incentives can drive engagement from local governments and nontraditional partners and encourage decisions that build long-term resilience financial incentives, information sharing, prioritization, assistance, and reputational recognition. Vermont's State Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund ties the level of state assistance a locality receives to the mitigation steps it has already taken — for example, an adopted local hazard mitigation plan can reduce a locality's required match for FEMA's PA program.[56]

3.3 State Capability Building Best Practices

The following best practices demonstrate innovative examples of enhancing state and local capabilities that could potentially be utilized in Virginia:

Private sector integration. Florida's Business EOC fully integrates private sector partners into EOC operations for structured information sharing, resource coordination, and situational awareness.[57]

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[54] "Flood Resiliency Blueprint," North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.deq.nc.gov/energy-climate/flood-resiliency-blueprint.
[55] "Hurricane Loss Mitigation Program," Florida Division of Emergency Management, accessed September 10, 2026,https://www.floridadisaster.org/dem/mitigation/hurricane-loss-mitigation-program/.
[56] Vermont Emergency Management, *Vermont Stronger: 2023 Vermont State Hazard Mitigation Plan*, (Vermont Emergency Management, 2023). https://vem.vermont.gov/sites/demhs/files/documents/2023%20SHMP_Adopted%20Draft%20Jan2024.pdf.
[57] "Business & Industry", Florida Division of Emergency Management, accessed September 4, 2026, https://www.floridadisaster.org/dem/business/.

Numerous states also have Business EOCs and VDEM is planning to launch a Virginia Business EOC in early 2027.

Standardized reimbursement processes. Texas's Emergency Medical Task Force operates under state mission assignments with published reimbursement parameters, allowable costs, and a standardized reimbursement packet, supported by ongoing training and a feedback survey for continuous improvement.[58]

Integrated real-time, data and dashboards. Texas uses ESRI-based platforms to compile real-time incident, shelter, road closure, transportation, utility outage, and infrastructure data into shared dashboards used by the State EOC and regional/local partners, alongside statewide resource- and mission-tracking tools (e.g., integrated with WebEOC) that support real-time decision-making and after action analysis.[59]

Institutionalizing capability after a major event. Following Hurricane Harvey, Texas established a statewide Disaster Recovery Task Force to provide specialized assistance to communities with federal disaster programs, financial issues, recovery, and resiliency planning. The Texas Legislature supported the new capability with approximately $10.4 million in state General Revenue and 28.2 positions for the 2020–21 biennium. The capability has since evolved into Texas Division of Emergency Management's Incident Support Task Force, which provides statewide expertise in community and infrastructure recovery, mass care, voluntary-agency coordination, functional-needs support, and disaster finance.[60]

Cybersecurity grant administration. Maryland's State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program supports local capability assessments, cybersecurity improvements, workforce development, and water/wastewater security, with the state centrally reviewing applications, executing awards, processing reimbursements, and monitoring compliance.[61]

Reaching underserved populations directly. The Listos California program funds community-based organizations, tribes, regional partners, and Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)-support organizations through separate statewide, regional, tribal, and CERT tracks — reaching people with

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[58] "Texas EMTF – Texas Emergency Medical Task Force," Texas Emergency Medical Task Force, accessed September 4, 2026, https://txemtf.org/.
[59] Alyssa Schaechinger, "A Tool to Track Texas Power Outages and Aid in Disaster Response," *EurekAlert!*, (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2026). https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/1118553.
[60] "Disaster Response & Recovery: State Medical Operations Center (SMOC)", Texas Health and Human Services, accessed September 1, 2026. https://www.dshs.texas.gov/center-health-emergency-preparedness-response/disaster-response-recovery.
[61] Yashodhara Rai, "Analysis of the SFY 2027 Maryland Executive Budget, 2026", (Maryland Department of Emergency Management, 2026). https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/pubs/budgetfiscal/2027fy-budget-docs-operating-D52-Maryland-Department-of-Emergency-Management.pdf.

low incomes, disabilities, language barriers, or advanced age through organizations that already have local trust and cultural competence.[62]

3.4 Implications for Virginia

The state examples reviewed in this chapter do not point to a single funding mechanism. Instead, they demonstrate several complementary approaches: recurring state support for core emergency management capabilities; equitable assistance to local programs; state-controlled resources for incidents below federal thresholds; targeted investments in mitigation and capability gaps; and stronger integration of public, private sector, and volunteer resources. They also demonstrate that federal grants are most effective when they supplement—rather than sustain—the basic emergency management system.

These findings reinforce conclusions Virginia has reached repeatedly. The General Assembly's 1994 catastrophic-disaster preparedness report recommended establishing a dedicated, ongoing funding source for state and local emergency management programs, modeled in part on Florida's approach.[63] The report estimated that approximately $8 million annually was needed at that time and identified Virginia's insurance-supported Fire Programs Fund as an example of a potential funding structure. A 2012 legislative agenda developed after reviewing priorities from VEMA, VML, VACo, and other organizations again called for a dedicated emergency management funding stream. VEMA continued examining dedicated funding strategies in preparation for the 2022 General Assembly session. The present funding recommendation is not a new concern; Virginia has periodically examined or proposed alternatives to its emergency management funding structure for more than three decades.

The issue returned through HB1992 and SB1246 in 2025 and HB169 and SB98 in 2026, which proposed a state-supported program to strengthen local emergency management capabilities and evaluate sustainable long-term funding. VEMA's 2025 presentation to the General Assembly also identified Florida's insurance-policy surcharge as an option for consideration. This history demonstrates that the need for more stable emergency management funding is not new; what has remained unresolved is the selection of a sustainable revenue structure and an equitable method for distributing support across the Commonwealth. Given the risk and funding environment, Virginia is primed to lead in this space.

The experience of other states supports a Virginia model that provides predictable state investment, directs a portion of that support to localities based on risk, capability needs, and fiscal capacity, and preserves statewide and regional capabilities. It should also address incidents that fall below federal assistance thresholds, target documented capability gaps, and improve accounting for the substantial

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[62] "Listos California Grant Program", California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, accessed on September 8, 2026. https://www.caloes.ca.gov/office-of-the-director/policy-administration/finance-administration/grants-management/community-resiliency-listos-grants/listos-california-grant-program/.

[63] Department of Emergency Services, *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster*, *House Document No. 21,* (Richmond, VA: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1994). https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/1994/HD21-PDF.

resources contributed by state agencies, volunteer organizations, and private sector partners. These principles provide the foundation for the recommendations presented in this report without presuming that one program or revenue source can meet every preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation need.

APPENDIX A: REFRENCED SOURCES

The analysis drew on 4 primary categories of source material: strategic, policy, and legislative documents; organizational, staffing, and capacity studies; AARs and hotwashes; and national and comparative research. The following provides a comprehensive overview of all sources reviewed across each category.

Strategic, policy, and legislative documents

- Governors Regional Readiness Summits regional data and Meta-Analysis (2026)
- Hampton Roads All Hazards Advisory Committee (AHAC) Legislative Package (2026)
- VDEM Strategic Plan (2024)
- Virginia LCAR Survey Reports (2022–2026)
- Virginia THIRA and SPR Reports (2022-2025)
- Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, *Disaster Preparedness Planning in Virginia*, JLARC Report No. 445, 2013
- *State of Preparedness in Virginia for a Catastrophic Disaster*, House Document No. 21, 1994

Organizational, staffing, and capacity studies

- Argonne Emergency Management Organizational Structures, Staffing, and Capacity Study (2025)
- VDEM Annual Reports (2020–2025)

After Action Reports

- 2015 Severe Weather Activation After Action Report
- VEST Activations for Tropical Storm Hermine (September 2016) and Hurricane Matthew (October 2016)
- February 24, 2016 Tornado Response and Recovery
- VDEM and Virginia Department of Military Affairs Operational Coordination During Winter Storm Jonas (January 2016)
- VDEM After Action Report for August 12, 2017 Charlottesville Civil Unrest and Terror Attack
- VDEM Response Operations for the January 20, 2020, Lobby Day Rally After Action Report (December 2020)
- Response Operations for Hurricane Dorian After Action Report (June 2020)
- COVID-19 Pandemic History and After Action Report, Volumes 1 and 2: 2020, 2021

- VDEM Colonial Pipeline Incident After Action Report
- VDEM February 2021 Winter Ice Storm After Action Report
- VDEM Hurricane Ian After Action Report (2022)
- January 3-4, 2022 Winter Weather Event and I-95 Incident
- 2023 VEST Exercise
- 2024 VEST Exercise
- Tropical Storm Helene After Action Report (2024)
- VDEM 2025 Winter Storms After Action Report
- 2026-01 Combined Winter Weather Quick Look Report

National and comparative research

- EMPG Funding Allocations and Relevance for U.S. Disaster Policy (2023)
- KPMG Innovation at Work: VDEM's Holistic Framework for Federal Grant Management and Resilience (2024)
- NEMA Building Fiscal Preparedness in Emergency Management (2025)
- NEMA Biennial Reports (2022–2026)

APPENDIX B: DISASTER FUNDING TRENDS

B.1 Introduction

As part of the research on a sustainable funding model for Virginia's emergency management enterprise, the study examined historical federal emergency and disaster declaration trends. The findings in this appendix include a review of the federal context for recent disaster funding trends, a detailed analysis of Virginia's disasters since the COVID-19 pandemic, and projections for future disaster assistance based on recent federal precedents. The goal of these findings is to inform recommendations that strengthen Virginia's long-term fiscal resilience, anticipate changes in federal funding, and better align resources with Virginia's emergency management needs.

B.2 Recent Federal Declaration Patterns

Recent actions and documents published by the federal government suggest that FEMA's approach to disaster assistance is becoming more restrictive. These actions and documents are consistent with the recommendations of the President's FEMA Review Council which suggested significant changes to federal emergency spending, focusing on shifting responsibilities to state and local governments.

The President's appointed FEMA Review Council suggested significant changes to federal emergency spending, focusing on shifting responsibilities to state and local governments. Notably, the Council's Final Report recommends increasing the eligibility requirements for states to qualify for federal assistance by increasing the statewide per-capita impact indicator from $1.94 to $2.99, while also requiring states to spend an unspecified minimum amount annually based on the state's size.[64] The recommendations from the FEMA Review Council include streamlining funding using a parametric funding model, rather than damage assessments, to determine awards for federal Public Assistance. The recommended parametric formula would be based on objective, independently verifiable metrics such as population impact, wind speed, flood depth, or earthquake magnitude.

Virginia currently spends approximately $20.2 million a year on its cost share.[65] These changes could significantly increase state costs by reducing the number of disasters

> Specifically, the Council estimates that at the corrected threshold, 29% of disasters declared between 2012 and 2025 would not have qualified, representing approximately $1.5 billion in federal funding.

[64] Federal Emergency Management Agency, *The President's Council to Assess the Federal Emergency Management Agency Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: FEMA, 2026). https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2026-05/26_0507_fema%20review%20council_final%20report.pdf.

[65] Virginia Department of Emergency Management, *Performance Budgeting System Reports, Department of Emergency Management 2024-26 Strategic Plan, (*Department of Planning and Budget, 2026). sp101 (PB Reports).

qualifying for federal assistance and decreasing the portion of damage costs which the federal government will reimburse.

As of publication, none of these recommendations have been enacted. The Final Report's recommendations are not self-executing; the most consequential changes, including the cost-share reduction and the shift to a parametric PA model, would require congressional action. The primary legislative vehicle, HR 4669 (the Fixing Emergency Management for Americans Act of 2025), passed the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure by a bipartisan 57–3 vote on September 3, 2025, but has not yet received a full House floor vote, and no companion bill has been introduced in the Senate. Virginia should continue to monitor this legislation, as its outcome will significantly shape the federal funding landscape this study addresses.

However, recent declaration decisions suggest that meeting established eligibility thresholds is no longer sufficient to guarantee federal assistance. In February 2026, 4 states (New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island) were denied federal disaster assistance for a major snowstorm despite validation from FEMA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that the damage met established criteria. The value of denied assistance across the 4 states was approximately $227 million. Comments by FEMA officials suggest that states may face greater difficulty obtaining federal assistance for snowstorms going forward, even when storms break historical records, emphasizing that states that regularly experience snow should plan and budget for snow removal as part of their normal operations, rather than seeking relying on federal assistance. If this trajectory holds, states may face a narrower window of eligibility for federal disaster assistance, even for events that would have qualified under prior practice. As a result, states will need to assume a larger share of disaster-related costs even when events meet historical federal eligibility criteria

B.3 Implications for Virginia

Since the COVID-19 pandemic (starting in March 2020), Virginia has declared a state of emergency for at least 21 incidents. Of these 21 incidents, 7 incidents[66] resulted in federal emergency or major disaster declarations, 1 incident resulted in a state declaration with a federal emergency declaration denial, and 13 incidents involved state declarations without a request for federal assistance. Table 9 provides an overview of Virginia events that received state emergency declarations and associated federal disaster declarations from 2020 through 2026.

Among the 7 incidents that received a federal declaration, 4 of them would have received less federal assistance from FEMA if they had occurred under a more restrictive federal funding environment.[67] In a best-case scenario, this would have resulted in approximately $13.8 million less funding

[66] This calculation treats Hurricane Helene as one (1) incident, although this incident resulted in both a federal emergency declaration (2024 Virginia Post-tropical Cyclone Helene (EM-3621-VA)) and major disaster declaration (2024 Virginia Tropical Storm Helene (DR-4831-VA)).

[67] Within this analysis, previous incidents that affected only one county incurred costs in the range of $20 million and involved clearing roads and removing snow were considered at risk for reduced federal assistance from FEMA. These criteria were developed from a combination of official recommendations from the President's Council report and inferences based on FEMA signaling and public statements.

obligated,[68] while the worst-case scenario would have resulted in up to $129.6 million less funding obligated.[69] This risk of decreased federal funds is significant and will result in financial challenges for Virginia, with the state having to redirect funds from other priorities to pay for future disaster response efforts.

Year	Event Name	Virginia Declaration	Federal Declaration
2020	2020-05-31 Civil Unrest	EO 64 (2020)	
2020	2020-08 Hurricane Isaias	EO 69 (2020)	
2020	2020-12-15 Winter Weather	EO 73 (2020)	
2021	2021-01-06 Civil Unrest	EO 75 (2021)	*Emergency Denial*
2021	2021-02-11 Winter Storms	EO 76 (2021)	DR-4602-VA
2021	2021-05-11 Shutdown of Colonial Pipeline	EO 78 (2021)	
2021	2021-08-30 Buchanan County Flooding	EO 81 (2021)	DR-4628-VA
2022	2022-01-02 Winter Weather	EO 83 (2022)	DR-4644-VA
2022	2022-01-14 Winter Weather	EO 85 (2022)	
2022	2022-01-20 Winter Weather	EO 12 (2022)	
2022	2022-01-28 Winter Weather	EO 15 (2022)	
2022	2022-07-13 Buchanan Flooding	EO 20 (2022)	DR-4674-VA
2022	2022-07-28 Flooding in SWVA	EO 21 (2022)	
2022	2022-09 Hurricane Ian	EO 22 (2022)	
2023	2023-09-22 Flooding Across Commonwealth	EO 27 (2023)	
2023	2023-11-06 Wildfires	EO 29 (2023)	
2024	2024-08-06 Tropical Storm Debby	EO 34 (2024)	
2024	2024-09-25 Hurricane Helene	EO 37 (2024)	EM-3621-VA DR-4831-VA
2025	2025-01-03 Severe Winter Weather	EO 44 (2025)	
2025	2025-02-10 Winter Weather Systems	EO 45 (2025)	DR-4863-VA
2026	2026-01-22 Severe Winter Weather	EO 11 (2026)	EM-3631-VA

Table 10. Overview of state-declared disasters and awarded FEMA declarations

Sources: Federal Emergency Management Agency, Disasters and Other Declarations. Virginia Department of Emergency Management, VDEM Incidents.

[68] The $13.8M estimate assumes 2022 Virginia Flooding and Mudslides (DR-4674-VA) and 2021 Virginia Flooding, Landslides, and Mudslides (DR-4628-VA) never received disaster declarations because they affected a low number of localities impacted or their associated costs were too low, and any funding obligated for PA or HMGP was not received.

[69] The $129.6M estimate assumes that 2022 Virginia Severe Winter Storm and Snowstorm (DR-4644-VA) never received a disaster declaration, based on recent precedents in which major snowstorms were denied disaster aid, and $115.8M was never obligated for PA or HMGP, in addition to the $13.8M estimate for DR-4674-VA and DR-4628-VA.

APPENDIX C: VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY – 2026 SESSION BILLS

VIRGINIA ACTS OF ASSEMBLY - 2026 SESSION
HB169/SB98

CHAPTER 569/CHAPTER 570

An Act to direct the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security to convene a work group to evaluate existing emergency management needs in the Commonwealth; report.

Approved April 13, 2026

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. *§ 1. That the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security (the Secretary) shall establish a work group composed of representatives from the Department of Emergency Management, the Department of Planning and Budget, the Virginia Emergency Management Association, the Virginia Association of Counties, the Virginia Municipal League, and such other stakeholders as the Secretary deems appropriate to evaluate existing emergency management needs, analyze sustainability of current funding for such needs, and review alternative funding models for such needs in other states. In conducting its evaluation, the work group may hire an outside consultant and shall analyze local capability assessment for readiness reports, recent after-action reports from declared emergency events, historical trends of federal homeland security and emergency management funding, any anticipated or announced changes to federal homeland security and emergency management funding, any gaps in current funding, how other states fund emergency management services, and best practices from other states. The Secretary shall report the work group's findings and recommendations to the Chairs of the House Committee on Appropriations, the House Committee on General Laws, the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations, and the Senate Committee on General Laws and Technology on or before October 1, 2026.*

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAR	After Action Report
AHAC	All Hazards Advisory Committee
BRIC	Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DPB	Department of Planning and Budget (Virginia)
EMPG	Emergency Management Performance Grant
EM	Emergency (as used in FEMA emergency numbering, e.g., EM-3621-VA)
EMA	Emergency Management Assistance
EMPA	Emergency Management, Preparedness, and Assistance
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
FFY	Federal Fiscal Year
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FMA	Flood Mitigation Assistance
HMEP	Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grant
HMGP	Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
HSGP	Homeland Security Grant Program
IA	Individual Assistance
LCAR	Local Capability Assessment for Readiness
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCR	National Capital Region
NEMA	National Emergency Management Association
NFIP	National Flood Insurance Program
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NIMS	National Incident Management System
PA	Public Assistance
PDM	Pre-Disaster Mitigation
RCPGP	Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program
SAA	State Administering Agency
SFA	State Fiscal Year
SHSP	State Homeland Security Program

SLTT	State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial
SPR	Stakeholder Preparedness Review
THIRA	Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment
UASI	Urban Area Security Initiative
VaCo	Virginia Association of Counties
VDEM	Virginia Department of Emergency Management
VEMA	Virginia Emergency Management Association
VEST	Virginia Emergency Support Team
VML	Virginia Municipal League