



Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force

Purpose: To strengthen our nation’s disaster mitigation, response and recovery capabilities by modernizing federal assistance policies and practices, strengthening intergovernmental partnerships and developing local capacities.

Call to Action: The NACo Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force is chartered to partner with a new Administration and Congress, along with other intergovernmental partners, on practical and tangible reforms and improvements to federal disaster policies, programs and practices. [In recent years, NACo has partnered with The Pew Charitable Trust to host focus groups of county officials and intergovernmental partners to explore areas of priority focus, such as simplifying funding resources, removing barriers to multi-agency investments, augmenting local community capacity, leveraging data for better decision making and emphasizing multi-benefit projects.](#) Building upon these efforts, now is the time to prioritize and advance policies and practices that strengthen intergovernmental collaboration in pursuit of a more resilient nation.

Counties are on the frontlines of disaster mitigation, response and recovery, and the input of county elected and professional officials is critical as we improve federal policies and practices for better national and local outcomes.

Background: Disasters are increasingly affecting every community and sector across America, with intense hurricanes and tornadoes, powerful ice and snowstorms, heavier rainfall and flooding, extended droughts and more severe wildfires.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the frequency of billion-dollar disaster events has increased significantly in recent years. From 1980 to 2000, the average was approximately six events per year, while between 2016 and 2023, the average rose to over 18 events annually. The U.S. experienced 23 separate billion-dollar disaster events in 2023, with 2024 on pace to add substantially to these totals with Hurricanes Helene and Milton, among other costly events.

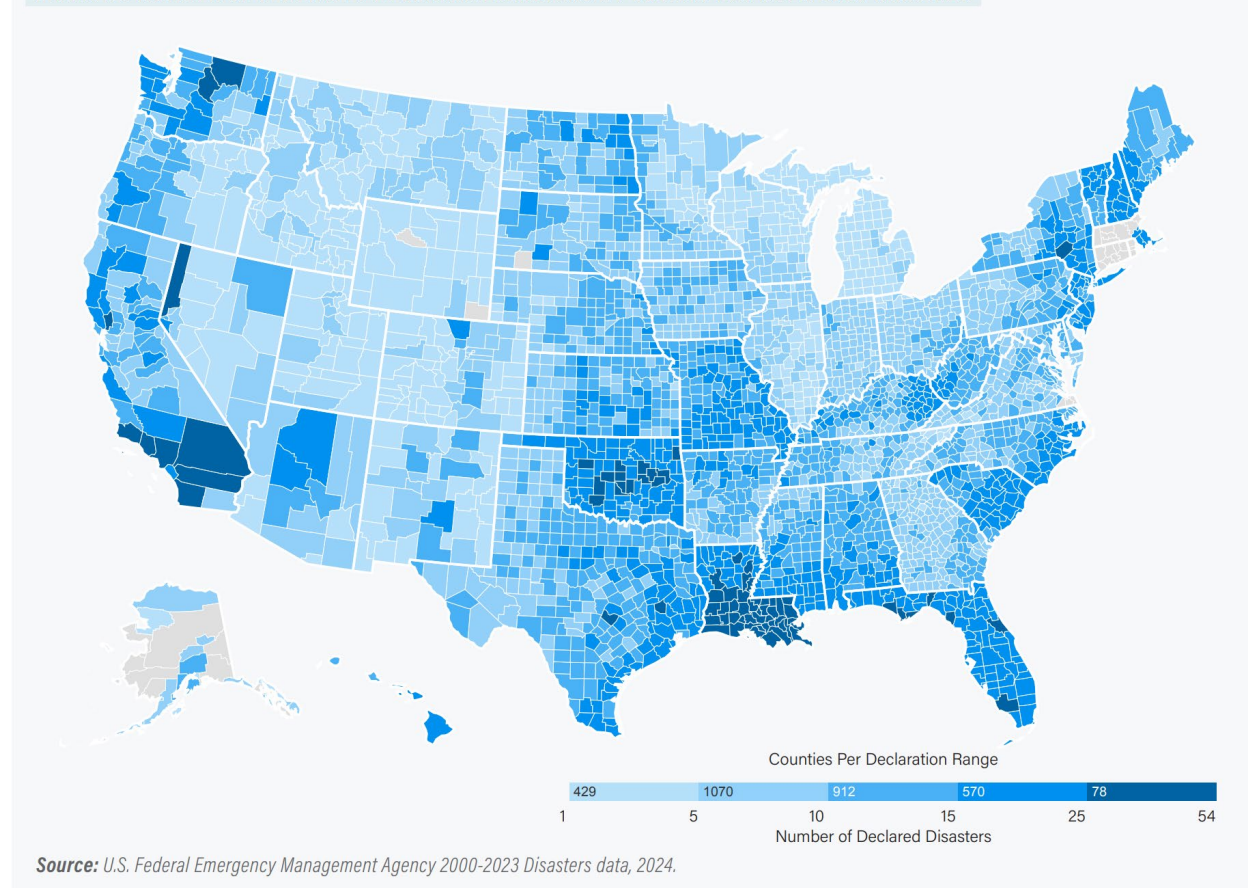
County governments, along with our federal, state, local and tribal partners, are already stretched thin for all types of resources—financial, political, social and workforce capital—that are essential for

effective mitigation, recovery and response needs amid these escalating and far-reaching disasters. Likewise, individual homeowners, local small business owners and the private and nonprofit sectors are also being forced to adapt, invest and respond to these evolving realities.

Federal aid and resources play a critical role in disaster mitigation, recovery and response, providing vital support to communities facing the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters. The scale of federal assistance is vast, encompassing financial aid for individuals and small businesses, emergency response teams, infrastructure repair and long-term recovery programs designed to help communities and individuals rebuild and become more resilient.

Federal agencies like FEMA, in coordination with other departments, provide essential resources such as emergency supplies, technical expertise and grants for both immediate relief and future mitigation efforts. This broad and coordinated federal response helps state, local and tribal governments, along with private and nonprofit sectors, to manage the aftermath of disasters and strengthen our preparedness for future events. Without flexible and timely federal resources, far too many communities would lack the financial resources necessary to mitigate, respond and rebuild, highlighting the indispensable role of federal aid and technical support in disaster resilience.

FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF FEDERALLY DECLARED DISASTERS BY COUNTY BETWEEN 2000 AND 2023



Disaster Impacts and Roles of County Governments

In 2023,

849 counties

experiences at least one
federally declared major disaster,

312 counties

had at least one
Emergency Declaration and

720 counties

had at least one
Disaster Declaration.

Nearly 900 counties, representing about one-third of all counties, face natural disasters annually, often more than once. This results in major economic losses, serious effects on communities and immense pressures on local resources.

County governments are on the frontlines of disaster mitigation, response and recovery. The input of county elected and professional officials is critical to improving our nation's intergovernmental policies and practices. *While state statutes and organizational structures vary, local emergency management responsibilities are typically vested in county governments.*

County governments are often responsible for developing and implementing local emergency plans, coordinating with state and federal agencies and ensuring that critical services such as law enforcement, emergency medical services, public works and public health are effectively deployed during and after disasters. Counties manage local resources and infrastructure, such as shelters, evacuation routes, debris removal, communication systems, water quality and stormwater. Collectively, counties own 44 percent of public road miles, 38 percent of the National Bridge Inventory, 960 hospitals, more than 2,500 jails, nearly 700 nursing homes and a third of airports.

Furthermore, county officials engage with local businesses, nonprofits and community organizations to create a comprehensive, collaborative response. By tailoring emergency management strategies to the specific needs of our local populations, county governments are uniquely positioned to ensure that our communities are more resilient and better prepared for future crises.

Counties are not merely stakeholders in this conversation but a part of the federal-state-local-tribal partnership of governments that together share the responsibility of protecting our nation and our residents from all types of disasters. Like the federal government, counties are entrusted by our residents and businesses to provide a variety of important services before, during and after a disaster strikes. As such, any federal policies impacting our ability to provide services should have direct county input in the creation, implementation and funding of these programs.

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General Themes of Exploration and Action

1. **Mitigation:** Provide recommendations for reforms and best practices for essential federal programs that improve disaster mitigation at the county level, including direct technical support, reduced administrative burdens and public accountability.
 - Assess how federal assistance can better support pre-disaster mitigation projects at the county level, including multi-benefit projects.
 - Explore lessons learned with mitigation programs like FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) and Public Assistance – Mitigation, HUD's CDBG-Mitigation Program and USDA Watershed Protection.
2. **Response:** Enhance the existing framework for federal, state, tribal and local partners to collaborate in a transparency and trusted manner in disaster response efforts.
 - Improve the coordination of federal and state disaster response resources with county-level emergency management efforts, including combatting mis-and-dis information.
 - Address barriers counties face in accessing federal resources in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and identify solutions to expedite funds, particularly under resourced counties.
3. **Recovery:** Expand access to the FEMA Public Assistance Dashboard, allowing county officials to track and address quality control and accountability issues with reimbursement claims.
 - Streamline recovery programs and increase transparency on reimbursements to reduce administrative burdens and speed up assistance to affected counties.
 - Enhance training and capacity building of county officials of FEMA rules and procedures.
 - Analyze the impact of delays in federal disaster recovery funding on local communities.
4. **Technical Assistance:** Strengthen the capacity and skills of county officials, including the fundamentals of federal policies and programs, trends with state and local practices and lessons learned and trends with insurance markets and other disaster-related issues.
 - Identify training and technical assistance opportunities for county officials.
 - Secure national-level partnerships to offer and sustain capacity building programs and resources for county officials, including covering the fundamentals of federal resources.

Scope of Work and Deliverables

The NACo Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Taskforce will:

- **Consult with county leaders:** Engage county elected officials and professional experts, including administrators, emergency managers, public safety leaders, public works and engineers and community planners, as well as federal, state, private sector and nonprofit representatives that specialize in disaster mitigation, response and recovery.
- **Dialogue with Presidential and Congressional Leadership and Transition Teams:** Collaborate with NACo’s executive leadership and policy committees with outreach to presidential transition teams and congressional leaders, among other key stakeholders.
- **Review existing intergovernmental disaster policies and resources:** Level set with a brief review of current policies and practices, focusing on both immediate response mechanisms and long-term mitigation and recovery programs. This includes a recap of the [NACo-Pew Disaster Roundtable findings and recommendations](#) from 2022-2024.

NACo and Pew Intergovernmental Roundtables on Disaster Resilience

Priority Challenges (2022)

- Disparities in local capacity & resources
- Rising cost of recurring disasters
- Fragmented federal support
- Disproportionate emphasis on disaster recovery, not on mitigation



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Elements of Capacity (2023)

- Funding for mitigation planning & implementation
- Staffing & dedicated offices
- Authority to enact policy & practice for mitigation
- Effective partnerships
- Ability to collect and interpret data
- Education & improved perception of risk

Intergovernmental Solutions (2024)

- Streamline access to disaster mitigation and relief funding
- Measure and address the economic risks associated with availability and affordability of property insurance
- Incorporate resilient practices in land use planning and development

- **Review existing federal disaster assistance policies, programs and practices:** Assess the current landscape of federal disaster programs, including the Stafford Act, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), HUD’s Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Watershed Protection

Program, U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and other relevant federal resources.

- **Identify specific gaps and areas of improvement:** Assess areas where federal policies, programs and practices should be enhanced and modernized to address the needs of counties and communities with disaster mitigation, response and recovery phases.
- **Evaluate funding mechanisms:** Examine how federal disaster funds are allocated and reimbursed, and assess opportunities for more streamlined, equitable and timely financial reimbursement. This includes ideas for enhanced training and technical assistance.
- **Explore effective intergovernmental collaboration:** Study and develop frameworks for enhancing collaboration between federal, state, tribal and local governments, ensuring counties are active partners in the policymaking and implementation phases for disaster mitigation, response and recovery efforts and overall national resiliency.
- **Develop Final Report:** Produce a final report that includes federal policy recommendations (for further review and consideration by NACo's policy committees), proven practices for improving intergovernmental partnerships and lessons learned from county officials.

The federal disaster system has supported countless communities, families, businesses and nonprofits in times of great need. Yet continuous improvement is essential for the future. NACo and county leaders are committed to proactively strengthening our nation's resiliency through improved federal policies, stronger intergovernmental partnerships and enhanced public-private collaboration.

Composition, Timeline & Membership

Taskforce Composition:

- **Co- Chairs:** County elected leadership with extensive experience in emergency management.
- **Members:** County elected and appointed officials with first-hand, practical experience, including elected executives and commissioners, administrators, assessors, emergency management directors, public works professionals and other county government experts.
- **Advisors:** Federal and state agency representatives, subject matter experts and stakeholders from key sectors (academia, nonprofits and private industry).
- **Working Groups:** Smaller subgroups focused on specific areas (e.g. mitigation, response, recovery and intergovernmental partnerships).

Timeline:

- **Phase 1:** Initial review and stakeholder consultations | Early November 2024 – March 2025
 - Initial kick off meeting over Zoom | November 2024
 - Post-Election Outreach Meetings with Presidential Transition Teams | January 2025
 - Pre-Legislative Conference Virtual Meeting and Focus Groups | January - February 2025
 - 2025 Legislative Conference meeting in-person | March 2025
- **Phase 2:** Development of draft recommendations and policy proposals | April – May 2025
 - Initial recommendations to Task Force members | Late April – Early May 2025
 - Taskforce Fly-In (Location TBD) | May 2025
- **Phase 3:** Finalization of report and submission to NACo leadership | June – July 2025
 - Submission of draft report to Task Force members | June 2025
 - 2025 Annual Conference in-person meeting and report release | July 2025

Co-Chairs and Members:

Co-Chairs:

- Commissioner Adrian Garcia, Harris Co., Texas*
- Parish President Cynthia Lee Sheng, Jefferson Parish, La.

Elected Officials:

- Commissioner Paul Anderes, Union Co., Ore.
- Supervisor Barry Anderson, Clay Co., Iowa
- Commissioner Dakkia Bradshaw, Telfair Co., Ga.
- Comptroller Ken Burke, Comptroller, Pinellas Co., Fla.
- Commissioner Ron Burrows, Rogers Co., Okla.
- Sheriff Paula Dance, Pitt Co., N.C.
- Judge Allen Dodson, Faulkner Co., Ark.
- Supervisor Lena Fowler, Coconino Co., Ariz. (Chair of Rural Action Caucus)
- Supervisor Heidi Hall, Nevada Co., Cali.
- Commissioner Wes McCart, Stevens Co., Wash. (President of Western Interstate Region)
- Councilmember Sharon Green Middleton, Baltimore City, Md. (Vice Chair of Large Urban Caucus)
- Councilmember Tamara Paltin, Maui Co., Hawaii
- County Executive Dave Somers, Snohomish Co., Wash.
- Commissioner Bill Truex, Charlotte Co., Fla.
- County Executive Mark Poloncarz, Erie Co., N.Y.
- Mayor Larry Waters, Sevier Co., Tenn.
- Commissioner Frank Williams, Brunswick Co., N.C. (Chair of Resilient Counties Advisory Board)

County Experts and State Association Officials:

- Pat Alesandrini, Assessor, Hillsborough Co., Fla.
- Nick Crossley, Director of Emergency Management & Homeland Security, Hamilton Co., Ohio
- Jeff DuVall, Director, Dept. of Emergency Management, Sonoma Co., Calif.
- Judd Freed, Director of Emergency Management, Ramsey Co., Minn.
- Jim Henderson, Executive Director, Kentucky Association of Counties
- Matt Machado, County Engineer, Santa Cruz Co., Calif.
- Monica Nino, County Administrator, Contra Costa Co., Calif.
- Eric Poole, Executive Director, Institute for County Govt., Florida Association of Counties
- Cody Powell, Emergency Management Coordinator, Wise Co., Texas

* Indicates Chair of Justice and Public Safety Policy Committee

** Members of the Executive Committee are Ex Officio members of the Task Force