A Question of Emergency Response Regionality

Perspectives from cross jurisdictional Covid-19 Responders throughout Washington State

Prepared for the Washington State After Action Review Task Force

Project Team:

Phyllis Shulman; M.A.	Interim Director	William D. Ruckelshaus Center
Jed Chalupa; M.A.	Lead Facilitator	William D. Ruckelshaus Center
Brandon Hardenbrook; M.P.A.	COO/Deputy Director	Pacific Northwest Economic Region
Eric Holdeman	Director, Center for Regional Disaster Resilience	Pacific Northwest Economic Region
Brian Murphy; M.B.A.	Principal	BERK Consulting Inc.
Katherine Goetz; M.P.P.	Associate	BERK Consulting Inc.

Disclaimer

March 2023

A Question of Emergency Response Regionality

Perspectives from cross jurisdictional Covid-19 Responders throughout Washington State

Contents

Introduction

The 2021-2022 Adopted State Operating Budget included funding for the Washington Military Department and the Department of Health to conduct a comprehensive After-Action Review (AAR) of the statewide pandemic response and recovery. The AAR is led by a multi-sector task force (Task Force). The Task Force will develop lessons learned and make recommendations on several aspects of the emergency response, including "whether establishing regional emergency management agencies would benefit Washington State emergency response to future pandemics," as called for in the legislative proviso.

Emergency management often works in the background, only coming to the forefront during a crisis. The role of emergency management was brought into spotlight during the Covid-19 pandemic response, which touched every community, drew on all local resources, and has persisted over the last three years. As the Task Force reviews the response effort, the role of emergency management is an important factor which creates an opportune time to consider different viewpoints on how to strengthen the state's emergency management function, including its organizational placement within the state government.

The William D. Ruckelshaus Center, which is providing facilitation for the AAR Task Force, is taking the lead on exploring the potential gaps filled, benefits, and challenges of establishing regionality within the structure of the Washington State's Emergency Management Division. The Center has prepared this report with the support of BERK Consulting and Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER). The AAR Task Force will review the findings and options presented in this report and incorporate them into its final recommendations.

This report is organized in the following way. First is a discussion of the process the Project Team undertook to collect the data presented. Then the background of emergency management that helped guide information throughout our engagement is provided, followed by a summary of the various perspectives provided through various methods. Then this report concludes with identified core principles that participants recommended to guide any decision around potential regionality throughout Washington State, as well as potential options should a regional approach be deemed necessary.

Project Process

The Ruckelshaus Center engaged multiple people who were involved in Covid-19 Pandemic response and/or who work within emergency management, as well as other sectors, throughout Washington State. The data presented in this report was collected in three primary ways:

1. Semi-structured interviews
2. Qualitative survey
3. Forum discussion

Semi-structured Interviews

From November 2022 to February 2023, the Project Team conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with people in different jurisdictions and levels of decision making. Each of these interviews were one hour long. In these interviews we asked two questions focused specifically on the idea of establishing state-run regional efforts within Washington State's emergency management. Those questions were:

1. How might strengthened regional information sharing, coordination/collaboration, or joint decision making be beneficial?
2. What concerns would you have about if regional emergency management functions were to be strengthened?

To recruit interviewees, our team identified a list of individuals who were, and continue to be directly involved in the Covid-19 pandemic response across the state. This included individuals from the Washington State Military's Emergency Management Division (EMD), Washington State Department of Health (DOH), city and county offices, universities, hospitality, and non-profits. After contacting our initial list of individuals, some of whom participated and some of whom did not, the Project Team engaged in snowball recruitment methods by asking our interviewees to recommend others who may be willing to engage with us and who were involved in pandemic response. *Appendix A* lists the individuals we have talked to so far.

Qualitative Survey

In November, the Project Team compiled a qualitative survey, consisting of three questions, focused specifically on regionality. The questions were:

1. In what ways could a regional field office of the Washington Emergency Management Division benefit your community?
2. What challenges might a regional emergency management field office create?
3. Beyond a regional field office, are there other regional structures that could support more effective disaster preparedness, information sharing, coordination, or decision-making?

The survey was sent to the over 300 individuals listed on the Washington State Emergency Management Division's "Statewide Emergency Contacts" list, via emailed *Google Forms* link. Some of these emails came back as undelivered. In total, 32 individuals responded to the survey. To keep responses anonymous, we did not collect contact information.

EMAG Forum

Following the survey, we completed a summary of the received input to be sent out to the Washington State Emergency Management Advisory Group (EMAG). On December 1, 2022, the Project Team attended the EMAG meeting and ran a 45-minute facilitated discussion addressing the reactions to the survey and provided the advisory group an opportunity to extend the conversation. The list of attendees for the meeting is provided as *Appendix B* and the facilitator guide used during this meeting is attached as *Appendix C*.

Defining Regionality

As the *Background* section of this report illustrates, regional approaches to emergency management can take on many forms based on the complex context in which emergency management exists across federal, state, and local jurisdictions. As such, we engaged participants without identifying a concrete definition of what a "regional approach" would or should entail. Instead, we focused our efforts on identifying gaps in Washington State's emergency management structure that more intentional regionality could potentially minimize, while allowing opportunities for the interviewees to build their own conceptions of a regional approach that might meet these needs. Although at times this did leave some participants wanting a clearer idea of what was meant by a regional approach, overall, it provided an opportunity for creativity and ensured the exploration of diverse potentials.

Background

Emergency Management Role and Structure

The function of emergency management exists at every level of government. Although the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is likely the most recognized governmental emergency and disaster agency, emergency management organizations exist in every state, in most counties, and some cities—depending on size. Even with state and federal entities, the command and control of disaster response always rests with the local government. When a disaster occurs, the first responsibility for responding resides with the local government in a city or county. An impacted jurisdiction is expected to exhaust all its internal resources before seeking assistance. The first level of help is to come from neighboring jurisdictions via a Mutual Aid Agreement. These agreements are usually between like organizations/disciplines (e.g., fire department to fire district). When those resources are also exhausted, along with commercial resources that can be brought to bear, only then is a local jurisdiction to request state assistance. In Washington State, this assistance would be via the Washington State Emergency Management Division (EMD) within the Military Department.

At the national level, the same model of states exhausting all resources before requesting federal assistance is expected. Many times, the last resource a Governor can call upon is the National Guard, at the state's expense. The National Guard can be activated by the Governor to help in the disaster response when either specialized equipment or more personnel is needed. When state resources are exhausted, the state can go to FEMA and request federal assistance. FEMA acts as a coordinating agency and funnels requests for assistance to the appropriate federal agency.

How and where to locate the function of emergency management can vary greatly. Large states with sophisticated emergency management organizations are located directly under the governor of the state. Examples of this are New York, Illinois, California, and most recently, Oregon. Oregon moved its emergency management functions from under the Military Department to the Governor's office in 2022. This shift is aligned with recent trends of states moving away from the Military Department model. Currently, Washington State's emergency management remains in the Military Department. Likewise, at the local level, emergency management resides in a variety of agencies. In smaller counties it has traditionally been placed in the Sheriff's Department. Other locations include placement in fire departments (e.g., the City of Bellevue) or public works (e.g., the City of Issaquah). Other configurations are also possible.

Emergency Management Funding

Funding the emergency management function is the responsibility of the parent jurisdiction and is usually considered to be part of the public safety mission. Jurisdictional size and economic capabilities create vast differences in the size of emergency management agencies. Small rural counties often have one person dedicated to the function or even have it as an "additional duty" for a staff member, while more urban spaces dedicate a muti-person team. Following 9/11, federal funding via the states, escalated dramatically for programs targeting terrorism preparedness. While a benefit for emergency management, this funding has also become a crutch for states who have not necessarily increased their own spending as a result. In recent years, a slow decrease in these federal funds has resulted in notable changes at the state and local level.

Additionally, disaster response is a "pull system" in that only resources requested by jurisdictions are sent to assist. The impacted jurisdiction must identify specific disaster assistance requirements. A city/county needs to articulate those to the state/federal government. In these contexts, the system is designed for command and control to remain at local levels while state and federal level involvement is dedicated to support. However, as the emergency management system has evolved over time, it has become much more complex. Grant management alone, without a disaster, can be a daunting task, especially for small jurisdictions with limited resources. Even with more federal funding being available for programs like Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC)—a grant administrated by FEMA—not every jurisdiction will have the internal capabilities to take advantage of these grants due to the complex nature of the applications process.

Phases of Emergency Management

There are four phases within emergency management: disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. Disaster response, while being the most publicly visible, is relatively limited with most emergency response efforts being spent on preparedness. Preparedness encompasses planning, training, and disaster exercises. In recent years, however, there has been an increase in disaster mitigation due to FEMA's BRIC funding.

Emergency Management in Washington State

Washington State's emergency management function is part of the Military Department. During state emergencies, EMD manages the State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) located on Camp Murray and coordinates the response. The EOC is designated as the central location for information gathering, disaster analysis, and response coordination. EMD also provides support to local jurisdictions with training and exercises and grant coordination.

Regional Emergency Management Efforts in Washington

Current structures of emergency management in Washington State include regional organizations that are both larger and smaller than the state. Larger entities include the Homeland Security regions. The nine Homeland Security Regions, shown in *Appendix D*, were established in the late 1990's by the Military Department. These large regional coordinators do not work for EMD or support functions like preparedness, response, or disaster recovery. Their work has been concentrated on grant administration, accounting for funds, and tracking the expenditure of funds by their region. In the last two years, regional coordinators have taken on a broader role for the administration of State Homeland Security Program Funds (SHSP). Regional coordinators review projects submitted by all the regions and rank them.

Another regional effort is the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) funding that comes from the federal government. Over the years, federal guidance has continuously evolved to include more jurisdictions. Initially funding went to the City of Seattle; however, as time has progressed the UASI funding is distributed to any city over 100,000 in population and their associated counties. This means the funding, administered by state EMD through grants, goes to King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties.

There is some regionality that occurs formally and informally below the state level. Organizations like fire departments and fire districts have mutual agreements. This same type of arrangement is also found between public works departments and water and sewer districts. Furthermore, many neighboring

communities and organizations may engage in informal peer-to-peer collaborations such as using personal relationships and networking to access resources not otherwise available.

Regional Emergency Management in Other States

To put Washington State's Emergency Management in context with other states, the following section will provide overviews of how some other states across the nation have implemented regional approaches to their emergency management structures. Many of the states presented here were mentioned as potential models for Washington State to explore as the inquiry into regionality continues. The states presented here included California, Colorado, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oregon, and Tennessee.

Some highlights from these examples include:

- A common role for regional or field staff is to provide assistance to local and county emergency management staff. This support includes designing or delivering regional training and exercises, providing technical planning assistance, and assisting with grant administration.
- Regional staff serve as a liaison to the state and provide local and county staff with a dedicated point of contact. The regional or field staff person gains familiarity with local needs and local staff has a direct link with the state.
- Some states use a model where the regional office takes a lead role in a response effort, by coordinating resources and information. Some states have brick-and-mortar regional offices.
- Regions do not necessarily align with Homeland Security regions.

Emergency Management in Other States

California Office of Emergency Services

The Governor's Office of Emergency Services, or Cal OES, serves as the state's leadership hub during all major emergencies and disasters. Its responsibilities include responding, directing, and coordinating state and federal resources and mutual aid assets across all regions in the state. Cal OES also supports local jurisdictions and communities through planning and preparedness activities, training, and facilitating the immediate response to an emergency through the longer-term recovery phase. Cal OES has been part of the Governor's Office since 2013.

Cal OES uses a model called the Standardized Emergency Management Systems (SEMS) as the fundamental structure for the response phase of emergency management. SEMS facilitates priority setting, interagency cooperation, and the efficient flow of resources and information.

Cal OES is organized into three administrative response regions: Inland, Coastal, and Southern. Each region is **responsible for coordinating information and resources** within the region and between the different levels of SEMS (e.g., between the state and a local government). The regions serve as the **conduit for local and regional perspective** and **provide a physical presence** for Cal OES functions at the local level in all phases of emergency management. The diagram below provides an overview of the structure of the state's SEMS, with the OES region just below the State.

Source: California Office of Emergency Services, https://www.caloes.ca.gov/office-of-the-director/operations/planning-preparedness-prevention/planning-preparedness/standardized-emergency-management-system/

Each region has emergency services coordinator positions. Emergency service coordinators are responsible for providing **guidance on emergency management**, providing **support and information sharing during and after disasters**, and serving as the primary conduit of contact with the Operational Areas and Special Districts throughout the State. Cal OES regions have a role in the following areas:

- **Preparedness:** Regions provide support and assistance to operational areas for a variety of challenges and threats.
- **Response:** Regions provide first line personnel to operational areas who are experiencing a disaster.
- **Recovery:** Regions support operational areas in organizing, conducting, and analyzing post-disaster damage assessments and coordinating removal of disaster debris and household hazardous waste.
- **Coordination.** Regions provide a resource for operational areas by helping to identify, recruit, and coordinate key stakeholders to assist in disaster planning, response and recovery.

When not responding to a disaster, each Cal OES region is also responsible for supporting a number of projects, including:

- Nuclear power emergency preparedness.
- Animal/agriculture emergency management.
- Communications and public information.
- Alert and warning.

Colorado Office of Emergency Management

The Colorado Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is part of the Department of Public Safety's Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. OEM has a Field Operations Section that provides technical assistance and operational support to local emergency managers, homeland security coordinators, and their respective staffs.

Field Services Managers help local governments to achieve their emergency management goals by providing **technical assistance with respect to strategic planning, emergency plan development, community preparedness, disaster recovery, hazard mitigation and training and exercise support**. Regional Field Managers are assigned to each of the nine regions in the state.

The principal responsibility of the Field Services Managers is to support local emergency managers with the development of comprehensive, sustainable emergency management programs. Emphasis is given to customer service and to providing local officials with information regarding best practices in the emergency management field. They can assist local governments in the following ways:

- **Response Assistance:** Aid in resource management to include ordering, providing situational awareness, and liaison functions.
- **Planning Assistance:** Analysis of local hazards, preparation of emergency operations plans, the formation of incident management groups, and development of hazard education campaigns.
- **Training Assistance:** Development of new training curricula, providing briefings to local elected officials, and support of local training activities.
- **Exercise Assistance:** Assistance with the design and implementation of local emergency training exercises and maintenance of an exercise reference library.
- **Grant Administration:** Assistance with administration of federal pass-through funds, Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) and the Search and Rescue Grant program and assistance to local governments in identifying other grant sources for planning and hazard mitigation activities.

OEM has noted that the establishment of planning regions and the move to out-station regional field managers has strengthened local-state partnerships and yielded several other benefits including:

- A greater familiarity, on the part of state staff, with people, places and hazards in local communities and a better appreciation of local challenges and issues.
- A stronger liaison role and a direct link between local and state officials before, during and after the occurrence of a disaster.
- Improved regional cooperation and inter-jurisdictional coordination on emergency management issues.
- Better information sharing, including the transfer of success stories and lessons learned from one jurisdiction to another.
- Improved efficiency by offering better customer service and serving as a single resource for information about resources and assistance available from other sources.

Mississippi Emergency Management Agency

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is an independent state agency. MEMA has districts throughout the state with an area coordinator assigned to each district as a liaison between the county emergency operations centers and MEMA.

Districts prepare regional hazard mitigation plans. The purpose of this plan is to:

- Merge the existing county hazard mitigation plans, as well as any municipal-level plans, into one regional plan.
- Complete update of existing plans to demonstrate progress and reflect current conditions.

- Increase public awareness and education about the plan and planning process.
- Maintain grant eligibility for participating jurisdictions.
- Maintain compliance with state and federal legislative requirements for local hazard mitigation plans.

One regional plan contains the following text: "This regional plan draws from each of the county and municipal plans and documents the region's sustained efforts to incorporate hazard mitigation principles and practices into routine government activities and functions. At its core, the Plan recommends specific actions to minimize hazard vulnerability and protect residents from losses to those hazards that pose the greatest risk."

North Carolina Emergency Management

North Carolina Emergency Management (NCEM) is a division of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (DPS). NCEM operates **three branch offices**, two warehouses and an Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The State EOC is co-located in Raleigh with the North Carolina Joint Force Headquarters building.

Each branch office is led by a branch manager and has planning and administrative staff. The manager is responsible for the five area coordinators who are the primary NCEM representative for the 6-8 counties in their area. The figure below shows the branches and the 15 areas for which coordinators are responsible.

Source: North Carolina Emergency Operations Plan, https://www.ncdps.gov/media/10946/open.

During emergencies, **the branch offices become Regional Coordination Centers** (RCCs) to provide **operational information sharing and resource coordination** between the state and counties. RCCs are available to **provide guidance and aid local governments seeking assistance**. Branch office personnel may respond to the county to facilitate ongoing information exchange. Each county is responsible for emergency management in its jurisdictional boundaries and will conduct emergency operations according to established plans and procedures.

The specific functions of the RCCs are to:

- Support incident management policies and priorities.
- Facilitate logistical support and resource tracking.
- Make decisions on information resource allocation using incident management priorities.
- Coordinate incident-related information.
- Coordinate and resolve interagency and intergovernmental issues regarding incident management policies, priorities, and strategies.

Oregon Department of Emergency Management

The Oregon Department of Emergency Management became a standalone state department reporting to the Governor in 2022. The agency previously served as a division of the Oregon Military Department since its founding in 1981.

In conjunction with this reorganization, Oregon Emergency Management (OEM) has increased its staffing level and received additional funding. These investments have allowed for a restructure of the agency to better support local and tribal jurisdictions through all phases of disasters, including readiness, response, mitigation, and recovery. OEM has six regional coordination teams to serve as **dedicated local points of contact, bridging gaps and strengthening relationships with emergency management professionals.** These coordinators are joined by a tribal liaison for Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes; and key roles to guide and implement inclusion, equity, and accessibility initiatives unique to each community.

Response and preparedness regional coordinators serve as key points of contact in their specific regions to support local and county emergency managers and their teams. Regional coordinators develop, train, and exercise plans, procedures, and programs to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters. Specific tasks for regional coordinators include:

- Representing OEM at local meetings and outreach events.
- Assisting in the development, conduct, and evaluation of regional exercises.
- Delivering regional emergency management training at the request of and in coordination with local and county emergency management staff.
- Providing technical planning assistance to develop and maintain local and county emergency operations plans.
- Serving as a liaison between local emergency operations centers and the state ECC during emergencies and disasters.
- Facilitating after-action reviews and evaluations following emergencies and disasters, at the request of and in coordination with local and county emergency management.
- Reviewing and tracking performance measures associated with OEM-administered grants.
- Providing regional project support.

Tennessee Emergency Management Agency

The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) is part of Department of the Military. During non-emergency periods, TEMA is under the administrative control of the Adjutant General in the Department of the Military. During emergencies, the TEMA Director reports directly to the Governor and coordinates with the Adjutant General.

TEMA's Field Services branch acts as liaison to local government entities across the State of Tennessee. Field Services personnel provide the **first line of support to local communities on all emergency management topics and TEMA programs**. They interact with their assigned communities and county emergency management directors daily from **three regional offices located offsite from TEMA's Central Office**. One purpose is for state staff to be closer to local emergency management staff, in order to build relationships and understand their needs.

Services include technical guidance, information on federal and state requirements for emergency management, updates on law and regulations, technical advice on grants, NIMS and other reports required for federal funding, information on other training, and **a rapid avenue to submit requests for state or other external mutual aid or assistance**. During a disaster, TEMA stands up Regional Coordination Centers (RCC). Local staff go to the RCCs for information sharing and resource requests. Having local staff go to the RCC avoids overloading the central office with requests.

Key Findings

In the following section, we discuss our findings during engagement with statewide participants. These findings include concerns, potential benefits, and perceived challenges that surfaced while discussing regionality as a means of addressing gaps and needs present in Washington State's current emergency response efforts.

One important finding that addressed the overall context of our conversations was participant's connection to the term "regionality." The term triggered a multitude of responses among those interviewees. Some individuals seemed indifferent to the term while others held strong disdain towards the word itself. This disdain appeared to stem from negative associations of the word to bureaucratic structures, which will be explored further down. This aversion to the word caused us to adapt alternatives during our EMAG facilitation. Taken out of context from the overall discussion, the alternative terms used could be misunderstood so there will not be provided.

Potential Benefits

While there were a few voices that were adamantly against regionality, many participants expressed that a strengthened regional approach across that state could benefit the state and their local jurisdictions depending on how it was implemented.

Localized Support

Some participants perceived regionality as a way to bring the state closer to local jurisdictions and increase state recognition of the uniqueness and specific needs of each community throughout Washington State and ensuring that one-size-fits-all models are not implemented. The ability for a state-run regional approach to accomplish this awareness, however, was articulated under the caveat that it could be achieved only if the state approach was focused on building trust and relationships with local jurisdiction during "blue-sky" times—a term used to address emergency management work that is not in active response.

Perspectives also surfaced in which emergency response managers did not see much value in a traditional brick- and- mortar building model. Instead, individuals expressed a desire to have regional state employees that were mobile. This seemed connected to ideas that regional state employees would

receive greater understanding of local communities by being present within them rather than having local jurisdictions interacting with them virtually or traveling to them.

Stronger Communication

Some participants described state communications during the COVID-19 pandemic as both fragmented and incomplete or inconsistent. A regional presence was seen by some as an important mechanism for ensuring that information from the state is clearly communicated to local jurisdictions, and that local needs and priorities are communicated upwards to the state.

Equity

There was a strong voice in the conversations, especially the survey, that indicated regionality being a benefit for resource equity goals. Individuals pointed to the fact that many communities along the I-5 Corridor and more urban spaces often receive greater consideration and distribution of resources. This was believed to relate to the I-5 Corridor and urban space's capacity to have multiple agencies advocating their voices rather than their actual need compared to their eastern or more rural counterparts. Views were presented claiming that regionality could in fact provide a more direct line for the voices of less resource rich communities to be heard. This included the idea that, in a regional network, communities could have a greater collective voice when applying for state resources, such as grants. To achieve this, the regional approach would need to be proactive in connecting local jurisdictions with one another, even across disciplines (e.g., public health, emergency management, and hospitality—who can provide staging space or quarantine rooms).

Efficiency in Spending

There were participants who saw regionality as a way to increase efficiency in spending. Currently, there is a sense that many communities have to compete with one another, including their immediate neighbors, if they are going to obtain enough resources to sustain their efforts. A prominent voice in this view were the smaller and more rural communities who expressed feelings that the cities and counties along the I-5 corridor and more urban spaces often have greater access to the resources that could benefit the smaller jurisdictions. By creating a regional network, the communities within could increase their collaboration efforts in applying and sharing resources such as FEMA BRIC funding. This may also amplify the possibilities to increase how often various jurisdictions collaborate in their training/exercise and preparedness measures.

Washington State Benefits

During our interviews, there were also comments made that indicated how the state may benefit from implementing increased regionality.

Decision Making

Interviews illustrated a need to reduce the distance between emergency response managers and policy and decision makers. Emergency managers advocate for the specific needs and concerns of local communities while also implementing the decision and policies that have been made. Having open lines of communication with local jurisdictions increases the feedback loop following decision-making. Increasing the relationship between state and local jurisdictions could also reduce resistance when new decisions and policies are made as local jurisdictions will likely have greater understanding of why decisions were made and ideally feel as though their input was considered.

Efficiency and Duplication

Connected to shortening the network between decision making and implementation is the idea that having a more direct connection to local communities could increase efficiency in resources by decreasing duplicative efforts. Interviewees commented that throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic local communities would set up efforts or access resources only to have the state duplicate them or send unneeded resources.

In connection, a stronger relationship between state and local jurisdictions could help ensure that the state can trust and turn to locals rather than reinventing the wheel. Many participants felt that during pandemic response, the state created its own structures rather than trusting, supporting, and increasing capacity for local emergency response management.

Stronger Integration with FEMA Disaster Response

Currently, the state is often not involved in local jurisdictions' interactions with FEMA's disaster response efforts. A trusted regional presence would ensure that the state would be aware of elements of disaster response that involve local jurisdictions and federal resources.

Concerns

As is the case with many complex questions, responses from participants represented a wide range of perspectives. At times these perspectives aligned with one another (e.g., the desire for the state to be in a supportive role), while other perspectives contradicted each other (e.g., statements that regionality "is not the answer" while others claimed, "regionality would benefit us greatly").

Bureaucracy

Among the greatest concerns individuals expressed around regionality was that it could create more bureaucracy. Some participants perceived the idea as adding another level of governmental structure between decision and policy makers and the local operations. This was viewed as potentially resulting in the slowdown of the overall emergency management system through inefficiencies and miscommunication, especially during response and recovery. To many participants, these concerns are supported by evidence surfaced during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Jurisdictions that experienced closer connection between decision/policy makers and those who operationalized them experienced less confusion, miscommunication, less duplication, and quicker adaptation as the pandemic persisted. On the other hand, those working for jurisdictions that felt distanced connection expressed that messages were often dropped prematurely, efforts were duplicated across disciplines and jurisdictions, and they regularly remained unaware of what decisions were being made and why.

Duplication of Effort

Duplication was a common concern for interviewees in two ways. First, some local emergency response managers stated they already have regional networks and relationships. This view recognized state-run regional approaches could interfere or duplicate relationships that already exist. Some even feared the state would control where and when networks are built and utilized. Second, some people pointed out that there are already regional structures, such as the nine Homeland Security Regions. Many comments were made that the current regional structures are ineffective and rarely used beyond grant funding. It was clear that these regional structures were not relied upon for other actions such as networking and training.

Reduced Funding and Staffing

Another prominent concern around regionality was the fear of reduced funding and resources, including staffing. People were concerned that a regional approach would strip local jurisdictions of already scarce funding and resources by shifting, rather than expanding, them. Many were adamant that they are against any form of structuring that would take way the resources they currently have. Instead, their biggest support surrounds efforts that would increase their capacity. This view was largely shared across all levels of emergency response management. It was also clear that there is skepticism by many that the state resources and support for expanding EMD are stable enough to ensure long-term stability for regional expansion.

Consistent Support

Along with the sustainability of funding, participants discussed how support from state level decision makers for EMD work has historically come in waves, shifting as new administrations take office and positions turnover. There was commentary indicating that a regional structure would only be effective if, at the higher state levels, support and dedication for EM work was more stable. This view further aligned with concerns about sustainability of networks. Turnover in emergency management results in the continuous need to re-establish necessary relationships and trust. If there were high turnover in the regional structure. then regionality could fail to meet its objectives.

Confusion and Reduced Local Authority

Connected, some participants expressed worry that added layers between local jurisdictions and state EMD could increase community confusion on where to turn for information regarding emergency management during response. The pandemic surfaced that people often felt lost on where they could turn for guidance and information, and the concern is that adding another state layer could amplify such experiences.

Furthermore, interviewees continuously articulated that only local jurisdictions can identify the needs and realities of the local community. However, they hold no authority beyond their relationships and expertise to ensure the community follows the emergency response plan. Increase formalized regionality was perceived by some as having the potential to destabilize this already unstable authority. Through this destabilization, another perspective surfaced recognizing that even if the intent behind state formalized regionality is to support local jurisdictions, there was concern that this opens the door for the state to increase its authority over local emergency response decisions. This concern was somewhat based on some experiences during the pandemic.

Prominent Tensions

Although the Project Team has outlined potential benefits and concerns it is important to draw attention to where views expressed were divergent from one another. Specifically, in the surveys, there were views that contradicted one another.

Understanding Local Communities

Although there were many individuals who expressed a belief that regional approaches could help the state be more in-tune with the specific and unique needs of the communities across Washington State, this was not a unanimous view. There were contradictory perspectives that focused on the idea that only individuals that live and work within a community daily will understand the holistic realities of that community. Overall, the amount of understanding gained by the state of local communities is likely to

vary based on the community and the relationships built between local jurisdictional staff and the potential regional staff.

Providing Resource Equity

Ideas of regionality increasing equity were also a point of tension between survey responses. While some, specifically those in rural and more eastern communities, believed that regionality could increase the consideration they are given by the state when making decisions—such as resource allocation—others expressed that would not be the case. They instead argued that there could be the same inequalities just on a smaller scale. Put differently, they indicated that the larger jurisdictions within each region would continue to receive disproportionate access to resources over their more rural or less populated counterparts.

Considerations and Options

The Project Team collaboratively considered the divergent perspectives represented, looked for commonality, and developed potential options that could benefit local entities and the state. Many of these options may result in a reexamination of the current structure of EMD within Washington State. Recognizing that the current structure was put into place purposefully, the Project Team acknowledge that the landscape of emergency management has shifted since those decisions. Combining such shifts with the lessons that were/are being learned following the Covid-19 Pandemic, the contemporary context is perfect for examining what structural changes are necessary to meet the emergency management needs of today.

Core Principles

Throughout the engagement efforts the Project Team identified some core principles, based upon participants' responses, that could guide any decisions associated with regionality within Washington State. These core principles have been identified through direct comments made throughout interviews, surveys, and forum discussions, as well as being extrapolated by our team based on other commentary provided by participants.

Local Control and Support

Likely the dominant core principle was the idea that regionality should only be a means of support for local communities and not strip them of "home rule." This suggests that regionality should not move decision-making away from local entities. This is further supported by models from across the nation. Support includes helping local communities apply for grants, coordinate training exercises, organize meetings, and facilitate networking opportunities. The support role would also include communicating the needs of local communities to the state and keeping local jurisdictions informed about the state inner workings. This support could especially impact communities whose emergency response efforts are an added responsibility to other positions rather than a full-time position.

Relationship and Trust Building

At every point in the engagement process, it was made clear that emergency response is dependent on strong relational ties and trust. This is often achieved through informal ways. If the state chooses to pursue regionality, it must be centered around a principle to actively and diligently build relationships and trust with local community members. This is especially important to do during "blue sky" times. By

the time an emergency within any region arises, the relationships and trust must already be built to be effective.

Beyond building relationships from the state to local EMD, it is important for regional staff and efforts to prioritize connecting locals across jurisdictions and disciplines. One important way to do this would be to approach relationship and trust building through a systems-thinking lens which seeks to critically examine which jurisdictions and disciplines are interdependent and/or could benefit from collaborative efforts. This includes strengthening and maintaining relationships between emergency response managers, public health, hospitality, and any other local community structures that could be beneficial to EMD efforts.

Flexibility

Flexibility is another key aspect of a regional approach that was regularly addressed. Emergencies and disasters rarely remain contained within communities. They usually extend across cities, counties, and state lines. interviewees advocated that they know their surrounding community partners and have the necessary relationships developed to adjust who they coordinate with depending on context. In association with this reality, participants articulated that any regional approach should be flexible and adaptable. Rigid universalized regional efforts could fail to meet the contextual realities of active emergencies.

Ideas of flexibility also appeared in statements that recognized communities do not necessarily share the same needs simply because they are geographical neighbors. Rather, a community may share more similarities, needs, and vulnerabilities with other communities across the state (for example two rural communities with urban neighbors). This leads to the recognition that a regional approach should recognize that within a region, communities are still unique, and a one-size-fits-all model will not work. Furthermore, a regional design may need to explore region layouts designed around other factors besides geography as well as being strategic for which communities a region is designed around (e.g., connecting cross state rural communities together or placing a rural community at the center of a regional effort).

Sustainable Funding and Support

Any move towards regionalization should ensure long-term sustainability. First and foremost, this should be built around efforts to expand emergency response management capacity across Washington State, not centralize it. That includes ensuring long-term increased funding, staffing, and other resources without shifting them from already existing jurisdictions. Moreover, sustainability also needs to be achieved in terms of support from elected officials and state decision-makers. Ultimately, built into a regional effort should be purposeful action to inoculate the emergency management system from shifts in political power.

Connected to this is the principle that any regional approach should hold at its center a commitment to adding value and capacity to local jurisdictions, and Washington State EMD as a whole, not limit or reduce it.

Resource Equity

A regional model should be dedicated to meeting the different needs of large and small, urban and rural, communities. This means implementing strategic efforts to ensure that smaller and rural

communities do not continue to feel overlooked but valued and supported. This would include being flexible based on all communities acute and situational needs.

Regional Role for the State

As reflected in the Guiding Principles above, the state could consider 1) expanding its role in regional emergency management; and 2) to do so in a way that is supportive of, and not threatening to, local control. This could be accomplished by focusing the state's regional role in two primary capacities:

- **Serving as a communications conduit**. This role could be active in all phases of emergency management and seek to:
  - ○ Provide consolidated and cohesive information from the state to local emergency managers.
  - ○ Share local concerns, needs, and questions with others at the state.
  - ○ Facilitate communication among local emergency managers at the regional level.
- **Serving as a convenor and providing technical assistance and resources.** This role would shift depending on the emergency management phase:
  - ○ **In prevention, mitigation, and planning**, the focus would be supporting grant writing and local planning, training, and exercises, perhaps organizing regional training or exercises.
  - ○ **In response and recovery**, the state's regional focus could include providing subject matter expertise, technical assistance, communications support, or other resources to support the local response.

Potential Models for Regionality in Washington State

Enhance and Expand Existing Regional Structures

Currently, regional structures throughout the state, such as the nine Homeland Security Regions are fairly limited in their scope to grant administration. This approach would call on and fund already existing entities to take a more proactive role and build capacity to support local jurisdictions further. This would mean working to build relationships with and across local communities, assisting in training exercises, and becoming a strong liaison between the state and local jurisdictions.

Community Liaison Team

This option is based around the idea of having a team of EMD employees, based out of Olympia that serves as a point of contact for local communities. These employees' jobs would be to get to know the local communities and develop a list, or menu, of services they can provide for local emergency managers. This provides local emergency response managers a point person to seek assistance from while also creating a proactive trust and relationship building entity on the state's behalf.

This model has the potential for various differing structures. First, there could be one liaison for rural communities and another for urban. EMD could also ensure that each of the state liaisons are specialized in different aspects of emergency response management and then "dispatch" the one who is most experienced in the need requested at the time. Or EMD could break the state into different geographic areas with one liaison for each.

Field Representatives

Another option is the implementation of field representatives. This is similar to the community liaison option; however, these individuals would not be stationed in Olympia but mobile throughout the state. They would be dedicated to traveling and engaging with various community emergency response teams and their community partners. This would also likely take on the latter of the liaison team structures in which the state would be divided into geographic areas, similar to states like Mississippi and Tennessee, and each representative would be assigned to and based in an area.

Adaptive Regionality

This model is enacted only in times of a statewide emergency such as the pandemic. Prior to an event occurring, the state could work within established regions to identify local entities who already have strong relationships and trust throughout their area and assist them in building their capacity to support their neighboring communities. Then only as needed by request or in response, the state could call on these entities to step into a state regional representative role and liaise between the state and affected community, and provide assistance where needed.

Moving EMD

There was significant support around the idea that the state EMD should be moved out from under the Washington State Military Department and established as its own department or be established in the Governor's Office. This would mirror other state models, such as Oregon whose EMD reports directly to the Governor since 2022.

The support for this move was tied to a couple of ideas. First, this would help to strengthen the bond between emergency management and the Department of Health (DOH), as it would put both on equal footing. While some emergency managers expressed a strong relationship with their local DOH, others expressed ideas that there is a lack of needed collaboration between the two. From the perspective of many of the health-based professionals who engaged with this project, the Covid-19 response would have been greatly improved if there was more crossover in the decisions being made by DOH and within emergency management efforts. Additionally, the move is supported by the belief that moving EMD would ensure that emergency response professionals have a stronger presence at the state level and can work even more effectively as part of the Governor's decision-making processes.

While there was support for this view, it was tied to the concern that this move could result in stretching already thin resources. If this move were to be made, it was suggested that it be done with the same core principle of funding discussed above. The need for dedicated and increased funding and capacity for EMD state-wide.

Conclusion

As this report has illustrated, perspectives surrounding a move for Washington State to increase regional state-run efforts vary across jurisdictions and communities. Through this report, the Ruckelshaus Center, in partnership with PNWER and BERK Consulting Inc., have described how engagement was completed between July 2022 and February 2023; provided background information about EMD—nationwide and at the state level—while also outlining how regionality is handled in other states; synthesized findings from engagement efforts; and provided core principles and possible avenues to be taken to strengthen regionality, should the state decide to make the shift.

The findings this report provides recognizes perceived benefits, by some, that increasing state-run regionality would provide, concerns others have about such a shift occurring, and foreseen challenges towards establishing regionality in a way that increases Washington State's capacity to respond to crises. While there were points of tension around if regionality would establish the necessary knowledge of local communities and provide equity for Washington State communities, there were many points of shared insight that also surfaced in terms of benefits, concerns, and challenges. Furthermore, through these views, the Ruckelshaus Center and its partners surfaced core principles that could guide any decision around regionality for emergency response management. These core principles were local control with state support, relationship and trust building being a primary focus, contextual flexibility, increased stability through high level support and expanded capacity, and commitments to ensuring resource equity across Washington State communities.

The Ruckelshaus Center will continue its cross jurisdictional engagement efforts to explore crisis decision-making and governing. These efforts will continue through June of 2023.

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Participants

Last Name	First Name	Title	Organization
Allen	Tristan	Risk and Resilience Manager	Washington State Department of Commerce
Anton	Anthony	President & CEO	Washington Hospitality Association
Biermann	Jason	Senior Policy Advisor	Snohomish County
Cameron	Ron	Under Sheriff and Emergency Manager	Clallam County
Castillo	Briseida	Community Based Worker	Youth and Family Link
Charvat	Steve	Director of Emergency Management	University of Washington
Chastain	Anne	Emergency Operations Center Coordinator	Clallam County
Cowan	Brendan	Director of Emergency Management	San Juan County
Davis	Deanna	Director of Emergency Management	Benton County
Davis	Sean	Director of emergency Management	Franklin County
Duffey	Sandi	Director of Emergency Management	Adams County
Elsenboss	Carina	Preparedness Director	King County
Ezelle	Robert	Director, Emergency Management Division	Washington Miliary Department
Jaffe	Darcy	Senior Vice President for Safety and Quality	Washington State Hospital Association
James	Hailey	Emergency Operations Manager	Washington State University
Johnson	Eric	Executive Director	Washington State Association of Counties
Lautenbach	Erika	Director of Health and Community Services	Whatcom County
Lien	Onora	Executive Director	Northwest Healthcare Response Network
Linares-Hengen	Travis	Operational Readiness Office Director	Department of Health
Mayer	Curry	Director of Emergency Management	City of Seattle
McCluskey	Brendan	Director of Emergency Management	King County

Last Name	First Name	Title	Organization
McDonagh	John	CEO	Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce
Melnick	Dr. Alan	Public Health Director/Health Officer	Clark County
Needham	Deborah	Director of Emergency Management	City of Renton
Paramore	Lt. Col. Price	Regional Medical Plans Officer	Washington National Guard
Rose	Andrew	Assistant Secretary-Response Operations, Executive Office of Resilience and Health Security	Washington State Department of Health
Salmon	Dara	Deputy Director of Emergency Management	Snohomish County
Vasquez-Stickley	Michelle	Secretary	League of United Latin American Citizen, Vancouver
Wallace	Charles	Safety and Disaster Coordinator	City of Edmonds
Wiesman	Dr. John	Former Secretary of Health	Washington State

Appendix B: EMAG Forum Attendees

Last Name	First Name	Title	Organization
Boggs	JoAnn	Deputy Director, Emergency Management	Pend Oreille County
Brooks	Eric	Deputy Director, Department of Emergency Management	Island County
Cameron	Ron	Undersheriff & Emergency Manager	Clallam County
Cowan	Brendan	Director, Emergency Management	San Juan County
de los Angeles	Steve	Vice Chair	Snoqualmie Tribal Council
Duffey	Sandi	Director, Emergency Management	Adams County
Ezelle	Robert	Director, Emergency Management Division	Washington Miliary Department
Ferguson	Jody	Director, Emergency Management	Pierce County
Figueroa	Lisa	Emergency Manager	City of Redmond
Fontana	Victoria	Executive Assistant	Washington State Emergency Management Division
Fox	Chandra	Deputy Director, Emergency Management	Spokane County
Goodall	Maurice	Director, Emergency Management	Okanogan County
Haarstad	Joel	Project Management, Operations & Health Care Management	Washington Emergency Management Division
Higashiyama	Darren	Chief Civil Deputy	Kittitas County
Johnson	Scott	Manager, Emergency Management Division	Clark Regional Emergency Services Agency
Kelly	Heather	Emergency Manager	City of Kirkland
LeSage	Anne	Emergency Management Coordinator	City of Bainbridge Island
May	Cherrie	Emergency Management Coordinator	Suquamish Tribe
Mayer	Curry	Director of Emergency Management	City of Seattle
McClain	Stacey	Operations Unit Manager	Washington State Emergency Management Division
McCluskey	Brendan	Director of Emergency Management	King County
McDougall	Scott	Director, Emergency Management	Pacific County
Miller	Antone	Director, Emergency Management	Yakima County
Newman	Troy	Preparedness Section Manager	Washington State Emergency Management Division
Sellars	Adenea	Director, Emergency Management	Stevens County
Tassoni	Peter	Manager, Emergency Management	Thurston County
Unfred	John	Assistant Police Chief	City of Lakewood
Wallace	Sharon	Deputy Director, Emergency Management Division	Washington Military Department
Wardell	Sierra	Financial Operations Sections Manager	Washington State Emergency Management Division
Wasserman	Adam	State 911 Unit Manager	Washington State Emergency Management Division

Last Name	First Name	Title	Organization
Zavala	Ryan	Emergency Management Coordinator	City of Shoreline
Zetzer	Kathryn	Preparedness Grants Section Supervisor	Washington State Emergency Management Division

Appendix C: EMAG Facilitator Guide

Hello everyone,

Today we are here representing the William D. Ruckelshaus Center, a collaborative effort between WSU and UW that serves as a third-party impartial entity to help address challenging issues across the state. In June 2022, State Legislators funded us, through the military department, to take a deep look into lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic as well as identify new policies that can be put into place to better address future crisis. One of the topic areas the legislators asked us to explore is whether establishing regional emergency management agencies would benefit Washington State emergency response to future pandemics. We are here today to engage you all in a collaborative discussion about the opportunities, barriers, and/or challenges that regional agencies would create and face, to provide recommendations based on your and other practitioner voices. In short, we want to hear your honest perspectives on the topic while actively putting your individual perspectives in conversation with one another.

Some of you have completed a brief survey which we used to gain some initial insight into this inquiry. For those of you who received the survey link but did not respond, we still encourage you to do so. If you would like to take the survey and did not receive the link, let us know. Initially, we received and synthesized 24 survey responses that you all received prior to today. This original synthesis that we have since added based on additional responses, will be used as an information base for us to start our conversation.

As we discuss today, we recognize the potential for differing points of view and needs. We ask that your responses:

1. Be brief since we have limited time
2. Be respectful- not everyone is going to agree with one another
3. Provide others with the opportunity to speak. If you would like to follow up with us via email or schedule additional time to talk, please email Jed at Jed.Chalupa@wsu.edu

A few people on this call have been part of individualized interviews with us and we ask that those people let others speak first.

Again, if you want to participate in an individualized interview for our overarching project, that goes wider than regional offices, please let us know and we can schedule an interview.

With all that out of the way, let us go ahead and get into the conversation.

Questions:

1. Is there benefit to establishing regional emergency management agencies to improve emergency response to future pandemics and other crises?
   a. If so, what are these benefits? Are there other ways to fulfill these needs?
   b. If not, why not?
2. For many that raised concerns about the implementation of regional agencies, the concerns were more about effective implementation rather than a lack of utility, what would be needed to effectively implement regional agencies in a productive way?
3. Are there ways that urban areas can better collaborate with their rural neighbors to increase resource and social equity decrease feelings of inequity?

Appendix D: Homeland Security Regions