



A Tailored Response:

An Emergency Preparedness Case Study in Natural Disasters

AN OVERVIEW

When creating or updating your emergency response procurement plans, some basic factors to consider include:

- Office size and structure
- Statutory authority
- Available resources
- Nature of the disasters/emergencies

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to emergency preparedness and response. An effective plan must be tailored to the specific conditions of the state and the emergency. In this case study, we will examine the emergency response procurement protocols of the states of Florida and Missouri. These states offer a contrast in function and structure but share several key characteristics. This is an example of two different, yet effective approaches to emergency preparedness and response procurement.



In **Florida**, the central procurement office is part of the Department of Management Services (DMS) and has a staff of 55 full-time employees. The Florida Division of Emergency Management (DEM) has a “Unified Logistics Plan” which requires the central procurement office to aid in emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. In response to an emergency event, acquisition and logistics are handled by a procurement team staged at the state’s Emergency Operation’s Center (EOC).



In **Missouri**, the procurement office is in the Department of Administration and employs a staff of 37. The procurement office’s role in emergency situations is to provide state agencies with available contracts, potential sources, and the authority to conduct emergency procurements. They identify the most critical players, the front-line responding agencies, and then give them the authority to respond, as necessary. However, as needed, the Missouri procurement office identifies sources of supply and handles emergency procurements for the state agencies.

A Closer Look at Design

In **Florida**, procurement's role includes locating, sourcing, and allocating resources such as supplies, office space and office equipment, fuel, contracting services, personnel, heavy equipment, generators, pumps, light towers, and base camps in support of state and local agencies. Under the "**Unified Logistics Plan**" a team is mandated to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) 96 hours before a hurricane is expected to make landfall, or the occurrence of any other event if known. There they begin to position base camps for first responders and logistical staging areas for emergency supplies.

The action happens at the state EOC. All officials and defined roles in the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) operate out of one secure location with backup generators and advanced telecommunications abilities. The 'floor' in Florida's EOC is a very large room with multiple 10' by 20' video screen walls that hosts approximately 250 people during emergencies.

The EOC utilizes a form of online eProcurement system, called WebEOC. In this database, county and state agencies on the ground can request missions for commodities or services they need post-storm. Typically, these missions include commodities such as ice, water, MREs, generators, cots, and tarps. WebEOC is a point of reference for everyone, allowing users to know where their missions are in the process. Led by CPO Rosalyn Ingram, and Emergency Coordinator Virgil Howard, the procurement team attempts to locate 3 quotes from current suppliers for said missions when possible and then provide the quotes to the Logistics Chief for DEM for final approval. During large storms like Hurricane

Michael in 2018, the procurement team responded to more than 3,000 missions. Hurricanes that make multiple landfalls in succession, like 2017's Irma and Maria can produce over 5,000 missions in the WebEOC system.

Missouri's central procurement office's role in emergency response differs from its counterpart in Florida. The Director of Purchasing, Karen Boeger, uses the delegation of purchasing authority to empower the responding state agencies to effectively intervene. The office assists state and local agencies by providing access to existing statewide contracts and agreements, and pertinent information concerning suppliers and sourcing. The approach can be described as identifying the most critical players and then giving them the authority to respond, as necessary. However, if requested by the state agency, the central procurement office in Missouri will handle the needed emergency procurement.

During an emergency, the Missouri Department of Public Safety utilizes a State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), that includes different state agency representatives. Director Boeger and staff operate from the procurement office in order to provide immediate support and resources to the SEOC. Procurement staff work with any incoming requests to identify suppliers and track orders. During emergency response and recovery, a majority of purchases are conducted at the local government level with assistance from the state.

When delegating authority to agency departments, the Director of Purchasing, the Commissioner of Administration, and the department director sign a delegated authority document. The three-signature document outlines the authority given to the agency



“When you look at the statute for emergency authority, it speaks to the commissioner waiving the procurement process. And so, I do feel like the intent of that, and what we’re trying to accomplish is, to let the agency accomplish whatever it is they need to accomplish in the best way they possibly can. If I can assist them with that, then I want to assist them with that. But sometimes in an emergency you have to stop the normal processes and you’ve got to let people do what they have to. Then figure out a long-term strategy for how you meet the needs going forward. For the immediate, must-get-to-the-emergency, whether it’s saving lives, saving property, saving any bad things from happening, you have to know when it’s time to just let them do it, and help assist that effort.”

—Karen Boeger, Missouri, Director of Purchasing

and identifies the basic rules that must be followed in conducting their procurements. In the signing of this delegation of authority document, agencies agree to comply with the provisions of the procurement manual, which includes instructions for emergency procurement. It is a detailed document that helps user agencies understand what is expected. A provision in this authority delegation document instructs that although an emergency procurement requires immediate action, emergency procurements must be made with as much competition as is practicable under the circumstances.

The Commissioner of Administration by statute has all authority for procurement. Whenever a major emergency occurs, frequently weather-related, the governor will typically declare a state of emergency. However, the Director of Procurement can approve an emergency purchase for commodities or services beyond a Governor-declared emergency if circumstances meet the statutory definition of an **emergency**.



Stitching a Plan Together

The nature of emergencies such as tornadoes differs greatly from ones like hurricanes, particularly when it pertains to predictability, forecasting, public warnings, and time to prepare. Differences in the types of emergencies dictate differences in preparedness, planning, response, and recovery. Other important factors to consider for areas affected:

- DEMOGRAPHICS
 - Age
 - Languages spoken
 - Disability
 - Families, children, pets
- ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS
 - Can the affected population move with ease or will they need assistance?
- POPULATION DENSITY
 - How many cots will be needed in shelters?

Geography and demographic factors can present unique challenges when responding to emergencies, such as downed trees and localized flooding, or evacuating a retirement community. It is also worth remembering that no two events are the same. What worked for one event, may not work for the next.

During the **Missouri** tornadoes of May 2019, weather forecasting ahead of time and the recent pattern of severe storms prompted the Governor to declare the emergency in advance of the eventual tornado. Attempts are made to get out in front of any of these emergencies when possible.



Depending on the emergency, the procurement official may be able to delegate authority proactively and start immediate prep work.

Despite the relative predictability and frequency of hurricanes in Florida, Emergency Coordinating Officer Virgil Howard emphasizes that you cannot anticipate the exact path of the storm. He uses the cone projections and probable trajectories to inform his judgement on where to begin staging response supplies. With such a wide range of variables to consider for any emergency event, it is most important that there is a plan in place to continue the vital functions of the procurement office in response to and recovery from disaster. Better preparation produces a more effective response.





“With a big emergency, it’s not just one thing, right? One of the things that I think you have to come to terms with sometimes in a purchasing office is trying to not be in the way. And I feel like in emergencies, sometimes when you’ve got to really, really react quickly, the people who are the experts in the area are the ones who are going to be able to get to the right people in the right amount of time. I want to try to give them the authority that they need to be able to react in the most expeditious way that we can.”

—Karen Boeger, Missouri, Director of Purchasing

Shared Measures for Success

1. Clarify responsibilities

Establishing roles and responsibilities, emphasizing the importance of communication.

Leaning on experts and having the right people in the right places.

One of the recommended best practices in NASPO’s *State and Local Government Procurement: A Practical Guide* states that every emergency plan should establish a system of clear roles and responsibilities, to allow for smoother operation and communication.¹ It is equally important to have the right people in those defined roles, so that they can successfully manage their responsibilities. Recognize your experts and refer to them when possible. Take proactive steps to facilitate effective communications.

As illustrated in their approach, **Missouri’s** Director Boeger believes in having an established emergency plan, complete with statutory guidelines that prescribe where purchasing authority rests, clear rules for the exercise of purchasing authority, and a means of documenting authorized actions. When a crisis arrives, the practical plan is to authorize and empower the experts at the various agencies to respond in the moment and allow central pro-

curement to focus on recovery in the aftermath. Missouri’s Division of Purchasing office maintains regular contact with agency and local buyers throughout the state and uses a Cooperative Procurement Program (CPP) that allows access to statewide contracts. They set up an online registry that allowed them to update contact information with local procurement officials to create a distribution list. An accurate and updated list of local contacts can save valuable time when responding to emergencies.

In times of crisis, **Florida** deploys an emergency procurement team, led by the designated Emergency Coordinator, in the EOC alongside the emergency command teams of other responding agencies. Crucial to the success of the team is the clear definition of roles and responsibilities with policies and procedures that clearly outline procurement rules. Due to the chaotic nature of the EOC during emergency operations, they have a checklist to follow to ensure that no steps are missed.

Operating in a fast-paced stressful environment, such as the EOC, you must know your staff well enough to know the people who can handle that type of stress. When choosing “seasoned” staff for Florida’s emergency procurement team, personality is just as important as skill.



Ensure that you have established a clear chain of command so that everyone understands where to report to. It is highly recommended that your Emergency Coordinator has the ability to report to leadership when necessary, especially in the height of the event. Also, know your subject matter experts and where to find them! I know where to go to get the answers to just about anything now and it has saved me over and over in reduction of time and movement of critical supplies and services.”

—Rosalyn Ingram, Florida, Chief Procurement Officer

As Chief Procurement Officer Ingram says, *“One of the hardest parts of emergency management is working with people because everyone is having an emergency. Everything is a five-alarm fire; everyone is panicking. No one is in a good mood when they call in an emergency.”*

Florida keeps the same team together for each emergency. Roles and rules have been developed in cooperation with the Department of Emergency Management, but team leaders will tweak roles for tighter efficiencies and elimination of friction points. Ingram insists, *“Experience is your best teacher and consistency in team members is vitally important as no one has time to train on the floor.”*

For Florida’s plan, delegating staff duties is essential and allows the director or coordinator to prioritize needs and keep an eye on the bigger picture. Team members are assigned certain commodities and services for which they handle requests and are responsible for all information concerning those subjects. This way, if questions arise about procurement of certain items during the response, or later during an audit, the director knows who to talk to, which can save valuable time.

2. Preparing and sharing resources

Getting tools ready and teams ready; making contracts available for cooperative use by agencies and localities, with lists of suppliers for extra or supplemental purchasing.

When natural disasters are expected to strike, procurement officials will ready emergency contracts that will be needed for state response. As listed in the recommended best practices in NASPO’s *State and Local Government Procurement: A Practical Guide*, state procurement offices should establish indefinite quantity/delivery contracts for commonly needed commodities, services, and even construction that may be used in the response and recovery phases.ⁱⁱ Having these contracts readily available for agency and local use can save valuable time and effort. Supplier information should be easily accessible to emergency response purchasers.

Emergency contracts should already be in place before the disaster hits. This way, procurement officials can identify the gaps in contracts for the most essential goods and services that will be needed in an emergency. Having contracts in place with approved suppliers for ice, water, food rations, temporary shelters, and transportation are essential in initial emergency response planning.



Missouri's Director Boeger combs through listings of state-wide contracts, selects the potentially relevant, and provides a list to the State Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Public Safety, and the Missouri State Highway Patrol, among others. These lists include suppliers' names and direct contact information for the related contracts. Missouri's CPP Quarterly newsletters provide timely information on the availability of statewide contracts, and in times of emergency CPP registrants receive the same available emergency supply contract lists that are provided to public health and safety organizations.

Prior to a known event, **Florida's** procurement office reaches out to suppliers with established state term contracts, as well as any other departmental contracts other Florida agencies may have in place. This allows

them to identify potential gaps or shortages in those commodities and services. Recently, the DEM created a broad contract with multiple suppliers to better fill those gaps. In the EOC, a small team of procurement staff are delegated to work on filling the gaps from existing state contracts, sourcing needed items that are not already covered.

Each state works to determine what statewide contracts and emergency contracts are most valuable, including quantities and usage rates, through past experiences. Ingram confirms: *"Experience is the best teacher! Looking back, in each event I realize that we could always be more prepared but you're not totally sure what to be prepared for until it happens. Because of the multiple events in Florida over the last 4 years, we have found gaps and filled them."*



"We're trying to anticipate what the state agencies are going to need... And if I know something's happening, but I've not gotten the request yet, I'll go ahead and try to have everything on the ready so that I can simply send it to them when it does finally happen. It just gives you some better time to react so that you're not scrambling in the middle of the night to try to deal with things."

—Karen Boeger, Missouri, Director of Purchasing



“(We had contracts) to push out the food and the water to the localities, and we set up shelters.... but for whatever reason, I don’t know what happened, the baby formula didn’t make it. Well, try to imagine what a nightmare that was. We stopped everything we were doing, and we got one of the trucking companies to go by 6 or 7 different Wal-Marts. And within about 12 hours, we had 4 trucks of formula.”

—Rosalyn Ingram, Florida, Chief Procurement Officer

Still, every emergency is different, and regardless of preparation there will likely be new or unique needs that arise. Both states’ CPOs have stories of unforeseen emergency purchases: hundreds of vehicle tires to replace ones ruined by flooding, hundreds of chainsaws to clear fallen trees, and truckloads of air conditioners and ice in response to a severe heat wave.

3. Staying on the same page

Supplier relations, developed in non-emergency times set clear expectations for quality, performance, and logistics.

Maintaining knowledge of specific types of commodities and known suppliers for each is an important factor in supplier relations. Supplier contacts and product specifications must be kept up-to-date year-round. NASPO’s *State and Local Government Procurement: A Practical Guide* recommends keeping searchable electronic and paper listings of suppliers of essential goods and services with current emergency contact information for use.ⁱⁱⁱ Cooperative relationships and clear expectations between the procurement office and suppliers can come from experiences working together in a response effort, but they should also be established prior to emergency events. Constant communication during an event fosters more comfort on both sides and the established expectations become more routine. NASPO’s *Emergency Preparedness Guide* states if a supplier feels valued, they are more likely to see you as a partner and teammate and embrace the very flexibility and mindset necessary during the emergency response and recovery phases.^{iv}

Florida’s emergency procurement team uses a simple dichotomy to differentiate operations, including supplier relations, during





“The vendor relationship has to be so close as to when a vendor changes a brand of their commodity, it affects us, and they need to be able to communicate that to us because if there is a performance difference, we need to know about it. We don’t need calls to the EOC saying a product isn’t working as intended.”

—Virgil Howard, Florida, Emergency Coordinating Officer

the year. “Blue skies” is the term for the period of time outside of hurricane season, when emergency situations are less frequent. Regular contact occurs between the team and suppliers, specifications for products and delivery are revised, and contact information is updated for supplier representatives. Accounts are updated in the MyFloridaMarketplace eProcurement system. “Grey skies” is the term given to the hurricane season, and specifically the time period just before, during, and after a storm. During this period, contact between the team and primary suppliers increases to ensure an efficient response. Interaction with suppliers during “blue skies” leads to better cooperation and a more effective response during “grey skies.”

For **Missouri**, several of the contracts that get most heavily relied upon in an emergency are NASPO Value Point MRO (maintenance, repair, and operations) contracts. Anticipation of events spurs communication between

the state and the suppliers they have existing contracts with. The state may reach out to let the suppliers know that they anticipate an emergency response operation, while suppliers may alert the procurement office that they are aware of a potential situation and are prepared to deliver.

4. Keeping track

Record keeping and accounting, centrally and by agencies to facilitate efficient auditing and assistance with FEMA reimbursement.

According to NASPO’s *State and Local Government Procurement: A Practical Guide*, the documentation of purchases made during an emergency is imperative.

It also states that “in addition to documentation being a standard best practice, the availability of that documentation will be required when seeking reimbursement from the federal government for emergency expenses.”



“When we know there’s something happening, we started reaching out to the main MRO contractors just to alert them that Missouri’s got an issue brewing at the moment. ‘It may be necessary for folks to be reaching out to you to get emergency product services. Please know that’s happening.’ And they’ve been very responsive to that. The good thing is, if I needed to, I could have any kind of information they provide, and get that out quickly.”

—Karen Boeger, Missouri, Director of Purchasing

Missouri created an emergency log that archives every emergency approval that the Division of Procurement has given to state agencies since its creation.

The collected information includes:

- Approval date
- Approving official
- Agency contact that requested the approval
- Brief description of the emergency

All related emails are filed by fiscal year for every emergency approval. There is both a physical record and a digital record filed in the procurement office.

While digital record keeping is important, paper may still be efficient in times of emergency. Record keeping should not be left up to the central procurement office alone.

State emergency management and all customer agencies must keep records of approval, receipts, and contract documents for emergency purchases as well. This is crucial for potential reimbursement, auditing, and reconciliation.

In **Florida**, the DEM's WebEOC system retains records of all missions, while the responding counties and customer agencies that submit requests keep them as well. All quotes from suppliers are recorded, and the



DEM Logistics Chief gives final approval for orders. Only then will the finance department issue a purchase order (PO). With each step documented in their database, DEM takes the lead on FEMA reimbursements while each agency in the state feeds information to them daily, to provide the most accurate accounting they can attain.



“We ask the state emergency management agency to maintain a list of the emergency purchases that are made, and then share that with us after-the-fact. And we’ll put that with our packet related to that specific emergency so that if we’re ever asked about it, we’ve got it. Should we need it for audit purposes or anything like that, then we’ve got it. They have to maintain it in their records as well. The better documentation you have, the easier it is when you’re trying to get the reimbursement.”

—Karen Boeger, Missouri, Director of Purchasing

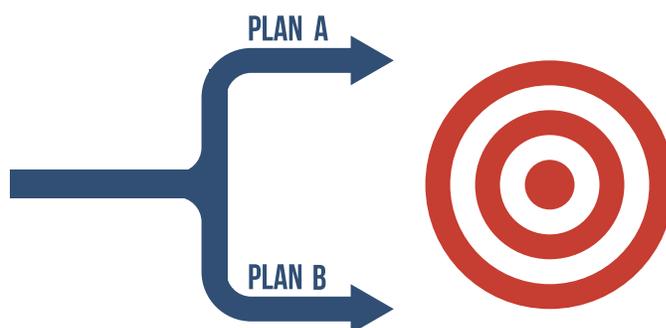


“After the storm has passed and the EOC goes back to what is termed “Normal Operations” the finance department starts reviewing the invoices. Typically, we assist them with the invoices on anything we got quotes on because we are considered the subject matter experts on that specific invoice. The PO’s and invoices are provided to us by DEM and we match them, confirming their accuracy. If there is a discrepancy, we advise finance accordingly and they reach out to the vendor immediately. Reviews and payments or disputes must be paid or disputed within 30 days or we must pay interest on the charges. After payment has been finalized DEM submits a Project Worksheet for FEMA reimbursement.”

—Virgil Howard, Florida, Emergency Coordinating Officer

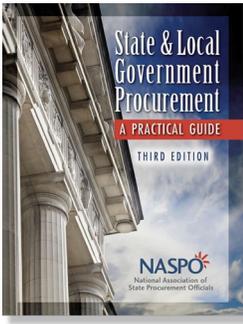
Two Paths to the Same Goal

Florida and **Missouri** are examples that support the idea that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to emergency preparedness. Each state’s plan is tailored to their individual needs and resources. One piece of advice that officials from both states offer is to keep learning. Use your emergency experiences to modify and adjust Emergency Response Plans, assigned roles and structures, and procurement procedures. Every emergency will be a little different, but it will also present an opportunity to improve.

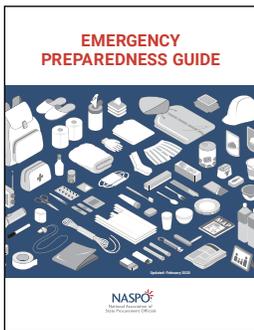


“This is an ever-evolving learning opportunity that you cannot ever get comfortable with because the challenges will be different each time. We always learn something new in every event.”

—Rosalyn Ingram, Florida, Chief Procurement Officer



For more reading about best practices for emergency preparedness, check out Chapter 18 of [***NASPO's State and Local Government Procurement: A Practical Guide.***](#)



For in-depth guidance with creating your own emergency preparedness plan, download [***NASPO's Emergency Preparedness Guide.***](#)

ⁱ National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO). (2019). *State and Local Government Procurement: A Practical Guide*, 3rd Edition. Lexington, KY: J. Ross Publishing.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO). (2020). *NASPO Emergency Preparedness Guide* [PDF]. Lexington, KY: NASPO.

^v National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO). (2019). *State and Local Government Procurement: A Practical Guide*, 3rd Edition. Lexington, KY: J. Ross Publishing