Ohio County Emergency Management Capacity Assessment

Executive Summary

The National Response Framework (NRF) highlights the importance of capacity building at the local level. Local governments including, county, municipality, and unincorporated areas, serve as the front line and overall management and execution of response, and recovery following human, technological, or natural cause emergencies or disasters[1]. This is unlike states or the federal government who assist local governments with resource support, technical expertise, and funding if the scale of the disaster warrants. Unfortunately, overtime emergency management culture places a whole-of-federal government response on the forefront of emergencies, and preparedness, response, and recovery funding, whether it meets the scale for federal disaster assistance or not[2].

The NRF counters this theory by identifying the importance of local governmental engagement in the complex network of governmental, non-governmental, non-profit, private sector, individuals and families, or the whole community partners in pre-disaster preparedness endeavors[3]. An effective response and recovery to catastrophe does not organically happen, but rather by a strategic coordinated approach by local emergency management (EM) staff. Yet, across Ohio and in many states, county emergency management programs lack staffing and adequate funding to build the necessary capacity at the county level. This includes developing and maintaining plans, policies, and procedures, implementing national doctrines and best practices, real-world response and recovery management, or maintaining physical structures, equipment, resources, or implementing technological advances. Under Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 5502, *Department of Public Safety*, and primarily outside of Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati, emergency management practices do not exist at the municipal or township level, putting further strain on the county emergency management staff who represent these jurisdictions, to build capacity even beyond county government where it is needed.

With the heightened scrutiny of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and anticipation of a cultural and funding shift to states and local governments, the Emergency Management Association of Ohio, hereinafter referred to as “EMAO”, surveyed its membership of county emergency management programs to measure capacity and the dire need for state funding. The following sections of this document will highlight local capacity, perceived vulnerability, and the need for state funding assistance for local capacity building.

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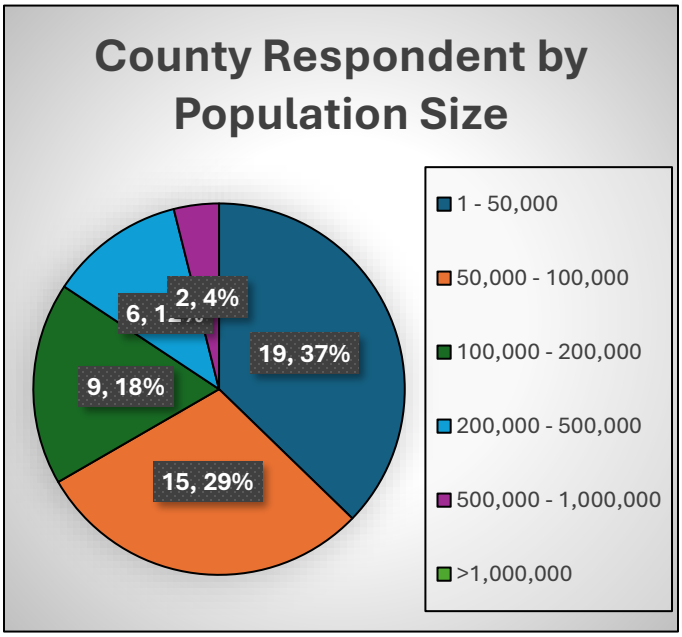
[1] Federal Emergency Management Agency. (October 2019). *National Response Framework.* Department of Homeland Security. Page 16.
[2] Department of Homeland Security. (December 2025). *The President’s Council to Assess the Federal Emergency Management Agency*. Page 8.
[3] Federal Emergency Management Agency. (2011). *A Whole Community Approach to EM Principles*. Department of Homeland Security. Page 1.

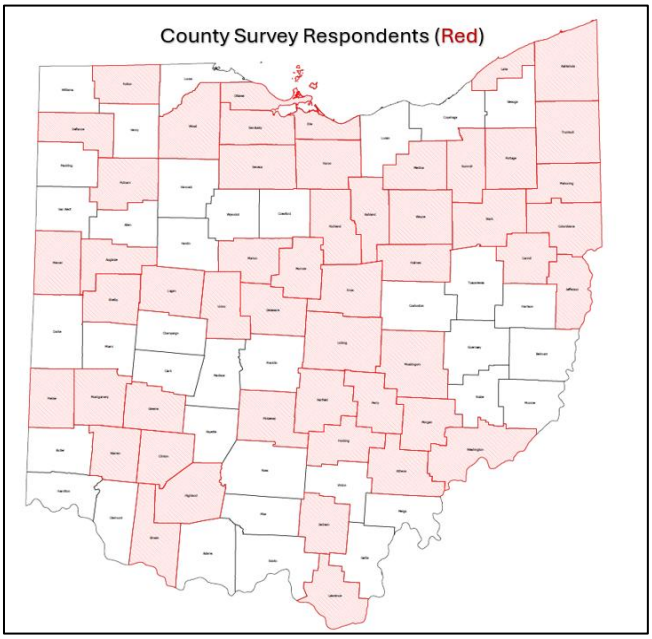
Methodology

Currently, two consensus standards exist as it pertains to emergency management: the American National Standards Institute's (ANSI) Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) Emergency Management Standard 5-2022 and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1660, *Standard for Emergency, Continuity, and Crisis Management: Preparedness, Response, and Recovery*. These two standards were cross-referenced and supplemented by national doctrines from the National Preparedness Goal, national planning frameworks, and supporting federal guidance to identify essential local preparedness and program capacity initiatives in developing comprehensive emergency management programs. Once derived, the criteria were entered into a survey utilizing Microsoft Forms®.

The survey was reviewed and approved by both the EMAO Legislative Committee and the Executive Committee and distributed to EMAO County Emergency Management Directors. Of the current 72 Counties represented in the association, 51 counties completed the survey within the 3-week period when it was open. This represents **71%** of counties on the association and **57%** of the 88 Counties total in Ohio. While not all 88 counties responded to the survey, most results were foreseeable and coherent within the 71% of respondents and present in all geographic sectors of the state. The data was then derived into this document to be shared with the EMAO Executive Committee for engagement with state stakeholders and legislatures.

County Demographics





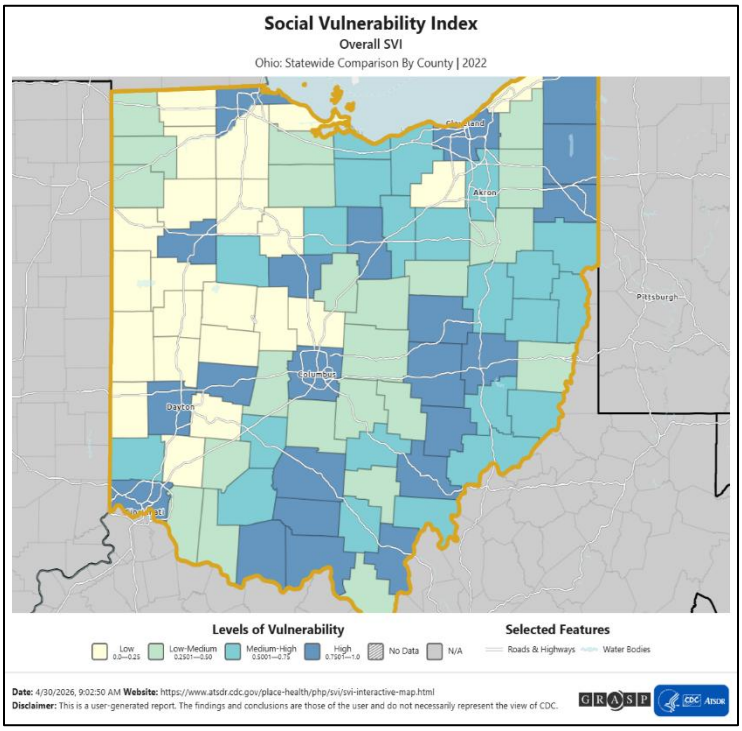
Staffing Report

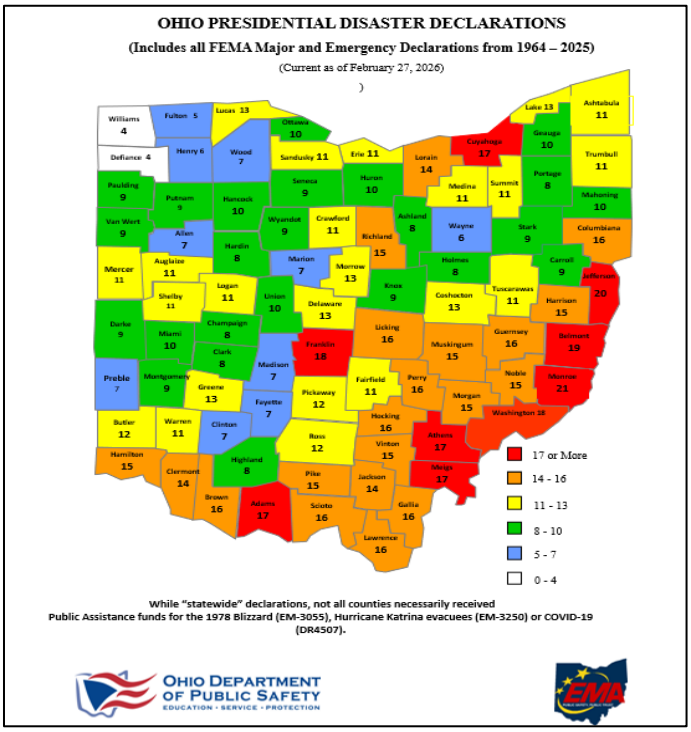
Emergency Management programs across Ohio vary widely in staffing, predominately influenced by population size. While population and population density is a disaster severity measurement tool, it does not explicitly depict overall risk. Risk can be coupled with social vulnerability

like socioeconomic status, unemployment, housing costs, age 65 and older, 18 and younger, households with disability, and ethnic minority status coupled with hazard probability and historical occurrence to name a few.

Of the **51** counties that responded, they reported a total of 104 full-time employees and 29 part-time employees and estimated population per the 2020 census of 4,872,000 people or 41% of Ohio's total population. That equivalents to 1 full-time employee per 47,000 residents. Per FEMA, they employ over 20,000 people, a 1 to 17,000 ratio of total U.S. population, and Ohio Emergency Management Agency (OEMA) an estimated 1 to 119,000 persons per total Ohio population.

County Population Size	1 – 50,000	50,000 – 100,000	100,000 – 200,000	200,000 – 500,000	500,000 – 1,000,000	> 1 Mil.
Total County Respondents	19	15	9	6	2	N/A
Full-time Avg.	1.5	1.9	2.5	2.6	4	N/A
Part-time Avg.	.26	.4	.3	1.2	.125	N/A



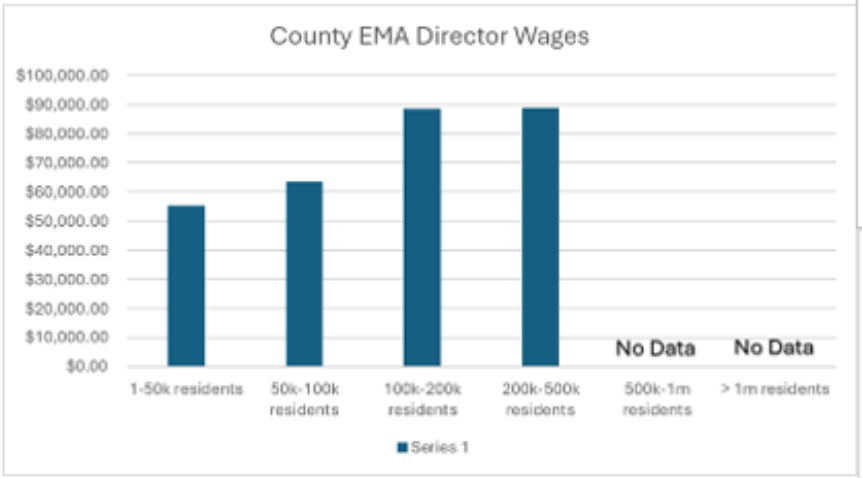


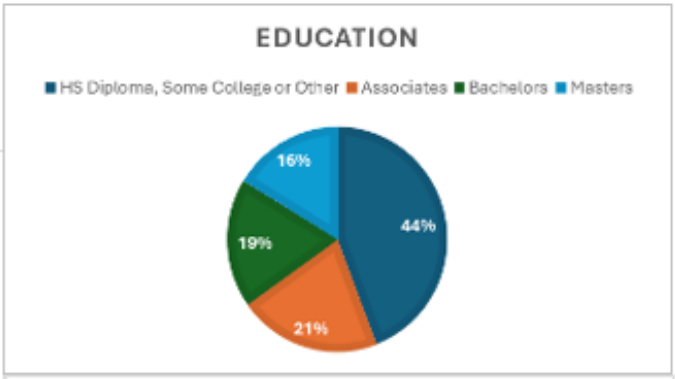
Staff Wages

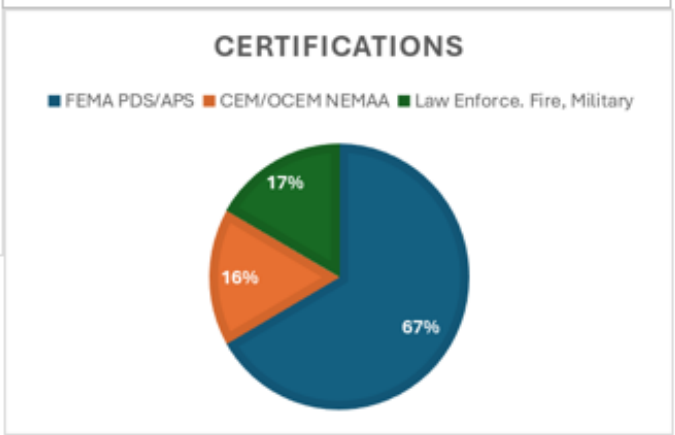
While collecting EMA Director wages was not conducted in the 2026 survey, a similar survey of staff wages was collected in 2024 by EMAO. Utilizing that data, of the 51 respondents, 41 provided

salary data with the average salary for the EMA Director of $68,667.07 and median value of $66,103.00. Three (3) respondents are noted to be part-time Director positions with a median value salary of $23,914.80 annually with an average population size around 31,000. With those 3 respondents removed from the data, average salary was $71,374.37 annually and a median value of $67,799.00. According to Cubit, the average salary for a full-time worker in Ohio is $77,106.00 and median salary is $59,646.00[4].

As emergency management expands into healthcare, utilities, non-profits, K-12 schools and higher education, consulting, healthcare, or outside traditional local, state, and federal governmental roles, competitive salaries to retain public service emergency managers remain difficult. Per the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics[5], private utility companies, oil and gas, community food, housing, and emergency or other relief services, colleges and universities, and healthcare on average pay **39.3%** higher, with a median pay of $106,820 or **26.1%** higher. Utility companies are rated as the highest with **88.1%** higher pay than that of public service emergency management.







[4] Income By Zip Code. (2026). *Ohio ZIP codes income and demographic data.* Cubit.
[5] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024, April 3). *Occupational employment and wage statistics: Emergency management directors (11-9161), May 2023.* U.S. Department of Labor

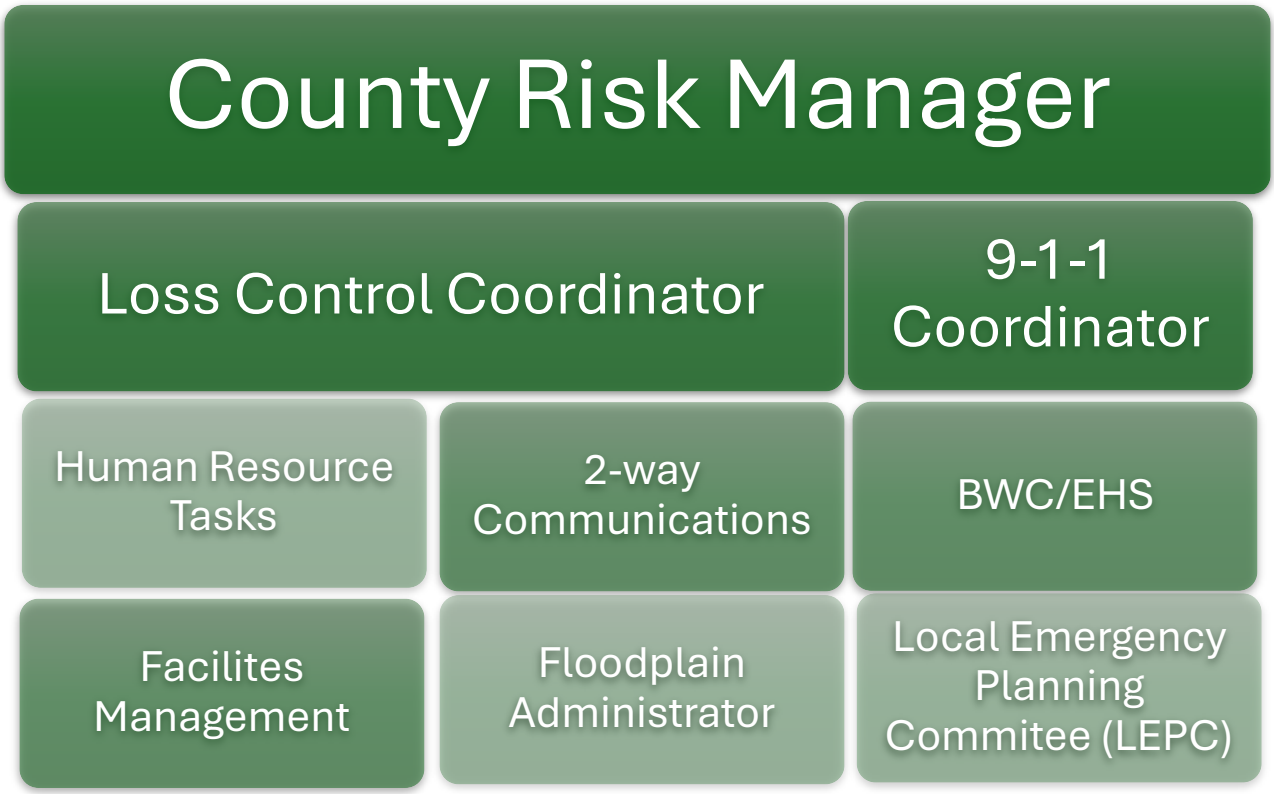
Staffing Responsibilities

65% Report

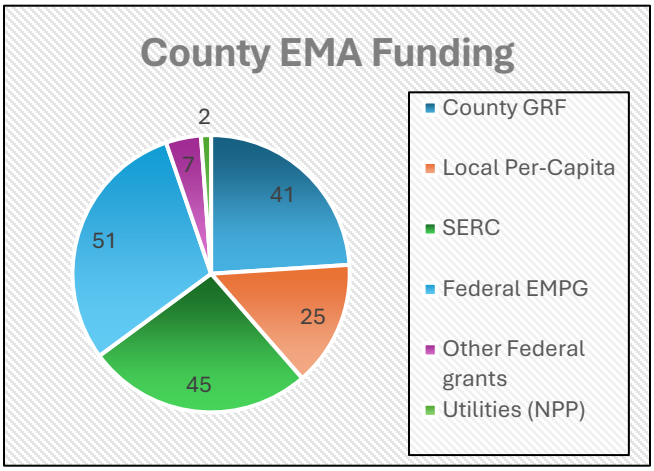
Sole Focus is EMA

Per the local organizational EM structure established in ORC 5502.26, *Countywide emergency management agency,* .5502.27, *Regional authority for emergency management,* or 5502.271, *Program for emergency management,* and supplemented by Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) 4501:3-3-01, *Local organizations*, local political subdivisions (counties) must employ a director of the EMA who is governed by the terms of the contract between the county and political subdivisions. Of the 51 respondents. 94% noted having a full-time Emergency Management Director, while only 65% reported duties to be **solely** focused on emergency management. According to the staffing report shared above it is common for full-time or part-time staff to be shared with other county departments or have a portion of their time designated for non-emergency management core tasks.

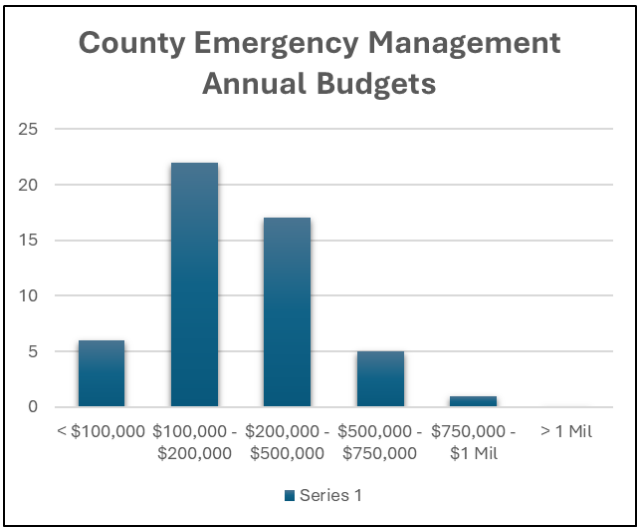
Non-EMA Job Duties Reported



Local Emergency Management Funding



Funding for county emergency management programs primarily comes from 3 sources, the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG), the respective county general fund, and the State Emergency Response Commission Grant for local emergency planning committee (LEPC) duties. Additionally, 50% of respondents noted the leveraging of local municipal or township per-capita fees. EMPG, a federal funding staple for most counties, has continued to decline over the past decade. The federal grant is a 50/50 match showing local commitment to emergency management capacity building. In 2025, all counties who anticipated EMPG were left unnerved as funding was halted for essential preparedness grants. As this funding returns in 2026, it shows the need for resiliency to federal political change as currently no funding is received from the State of Ohio strictly to emergency management. It is important to note that Ohio EMA passthrough 68% of EMPG received to County EMA programs.



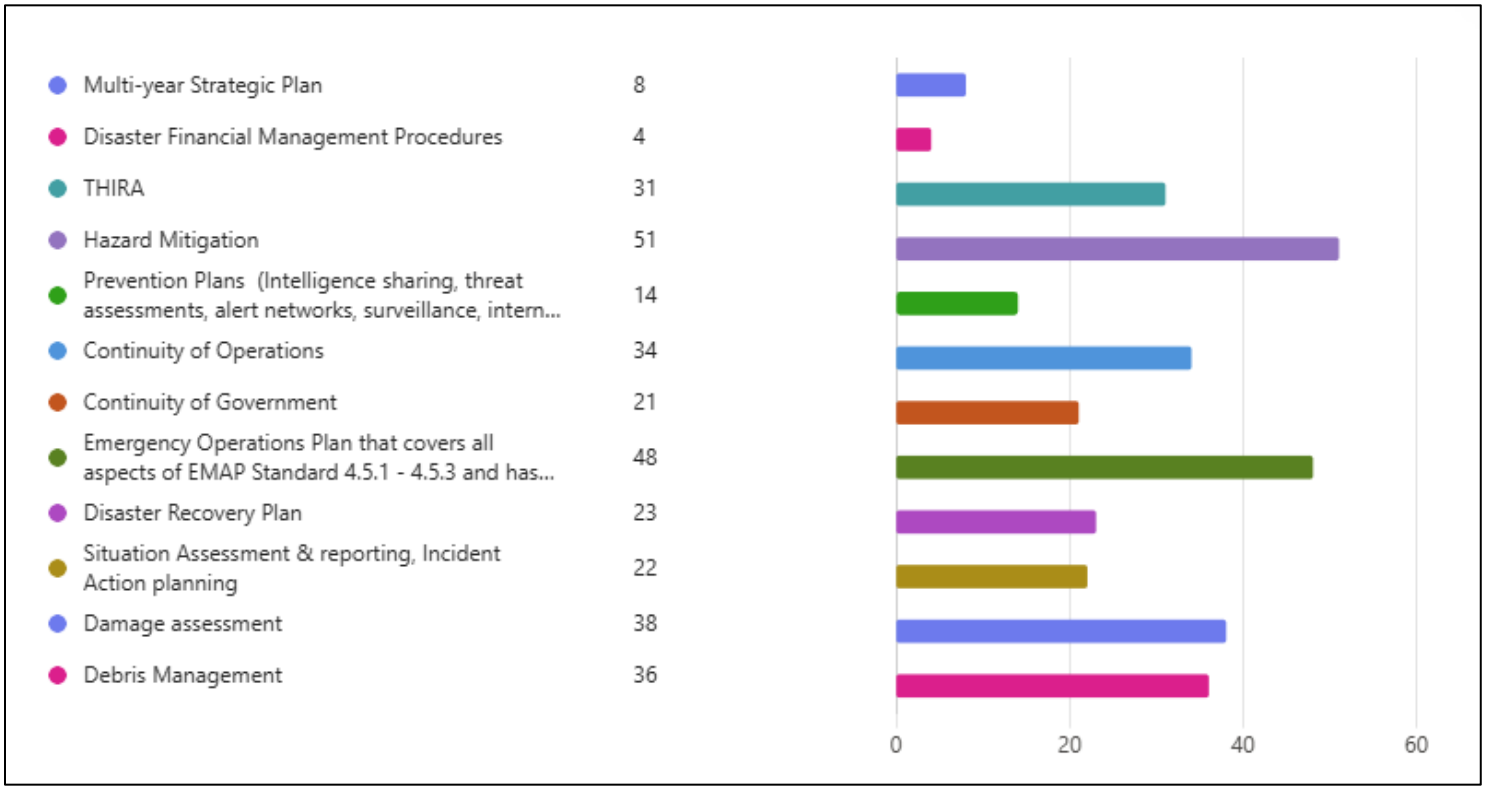
Of the 51 respondents, 76% noted a budget ranging from $100,000.00 to $500,000.00 annually. With most county budgets in the 10s of millions, this places a majority of county EMAs with a budget consuming less than 1% of general revenue fund (GRF) with offsets of federal grants. For FY25, the state passthrough 6.3 million dollars in EMPG funding to counties with a 50/50 match via GRF, or a 12-million-dollar investment between federal and local government. Of the 76% of counties reporting an annual budget of $100,000.00 to $500,000.00, the average EMPG received amount was $63,362.44 with a 50/50 match totaling $126,724.88. While county EMA budgets are less than 1% of total county GRF, GRF coupled with per-capita and the small amount of SERC funding total 200%, 300%, or even 400% of EMA county budgets to fund programs.

Local Emergency Management Capacity

The following data utilized the applicable standards as it pertains to emergency management coupled with federal doctrines and guidance on program development. This measurement is a baseline to gauge current emergency preparedness capacity at the county level. Further, this data can be used to outline where funding and staffing support could significantly increase capacity and heighten preparedness across all 88 counties in Ohio.

Emergency Planning

EMAP EMS 5-2022, NFPA 1660, and National Preparedness System planning guidance outline the following key areas of emergency planning. Planning is the foundational duty of emergency management, and each document represents a specific group of ***whole community*** partners that assist in its development and can bare resources to meet the specific need. Of the 51 respondents the following total counties have applicable plans developed.



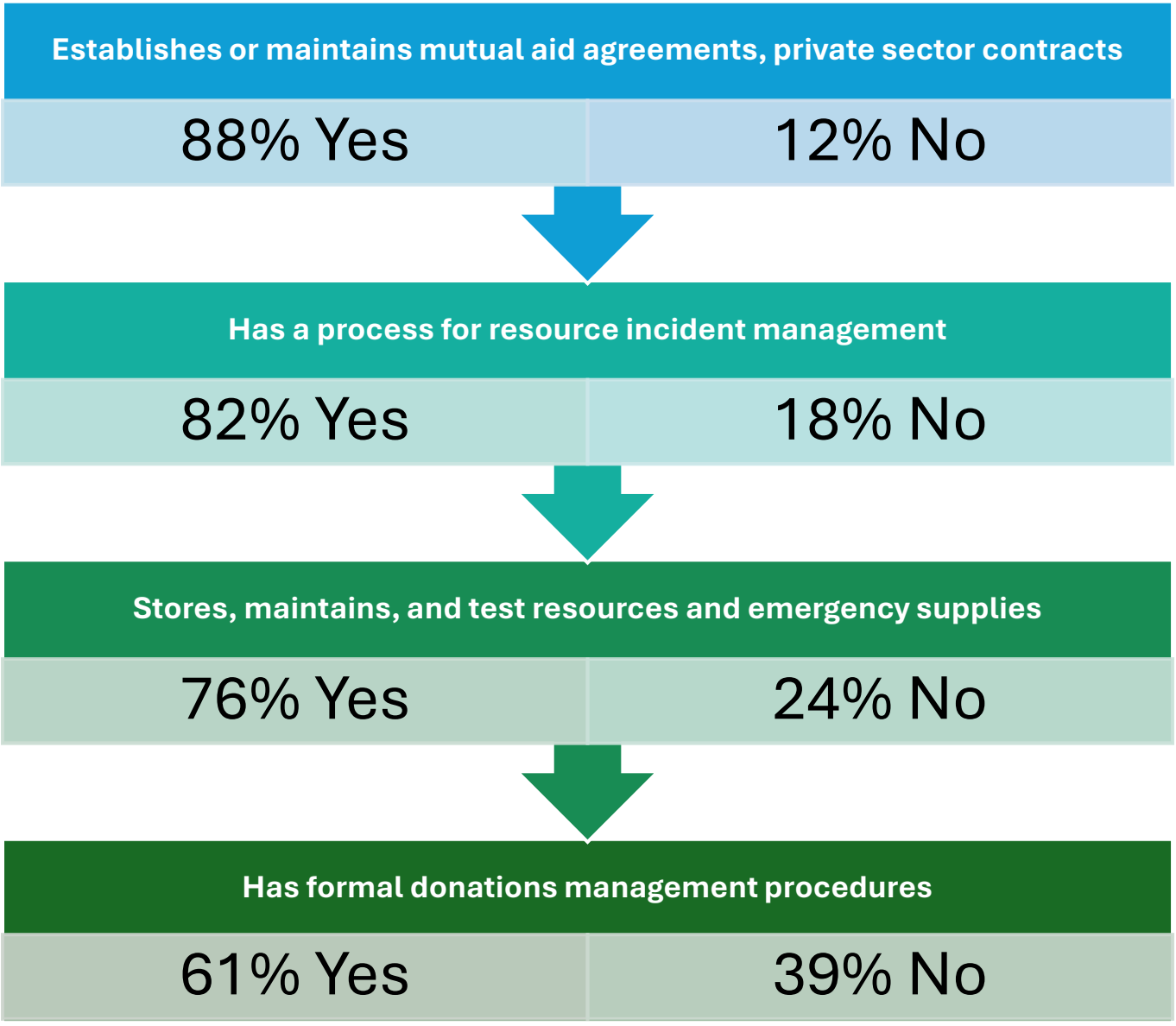
100%
Of counties recognize
NIMS
As the standard for incident management

98%
Of counties recognize the
National Preparedness System
As the standard for building all-hazards capabilities

Note: *Hazard Mitigation Planning is federally mandated by the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. Emergency Operations Plans are mandated in ORC 5502. NIMS is mandated to receive EMPG funding.*

Resource Management

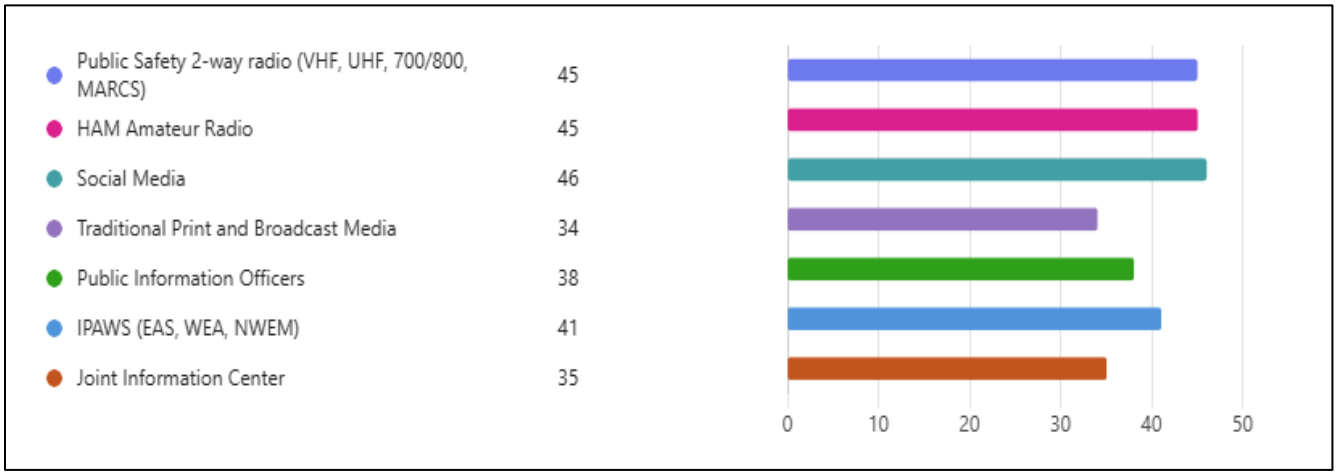
The National Incident Management System (NIMS)[6] defines resource management as identifying and typing resources, mutual aid agreements, training and credentialing personnel, acquiring and storing resources and the method during response of identifying, ordering, mobilizing, tracking, and demobilizing deployed assets no longer needed or idle. Resource Management is a cornerstone of preparedness actions and incident management. Of the 51 respondents the following identified key resource management metrics:



[6] Federal Emergency Management Agency. (2017). *National Incident Management System*. Department of Homeland Security. Page 6.

Communications

NIMS defines four standard communication types as **strategic,** both vertical and horizontal communication and decision making in an organization, **tactical**, traditional public safety 2-way radio, **support,** communications with support agencies, dispatch, hospitals, amateur radio support etc., and **public** communications such as alerts, warnings, press conferences, and use of a critical tool, the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS). The following were measured if a County EMA is maintaining communications, notifications, and alert and warning systems. Out of 51 respondents, the following identified:

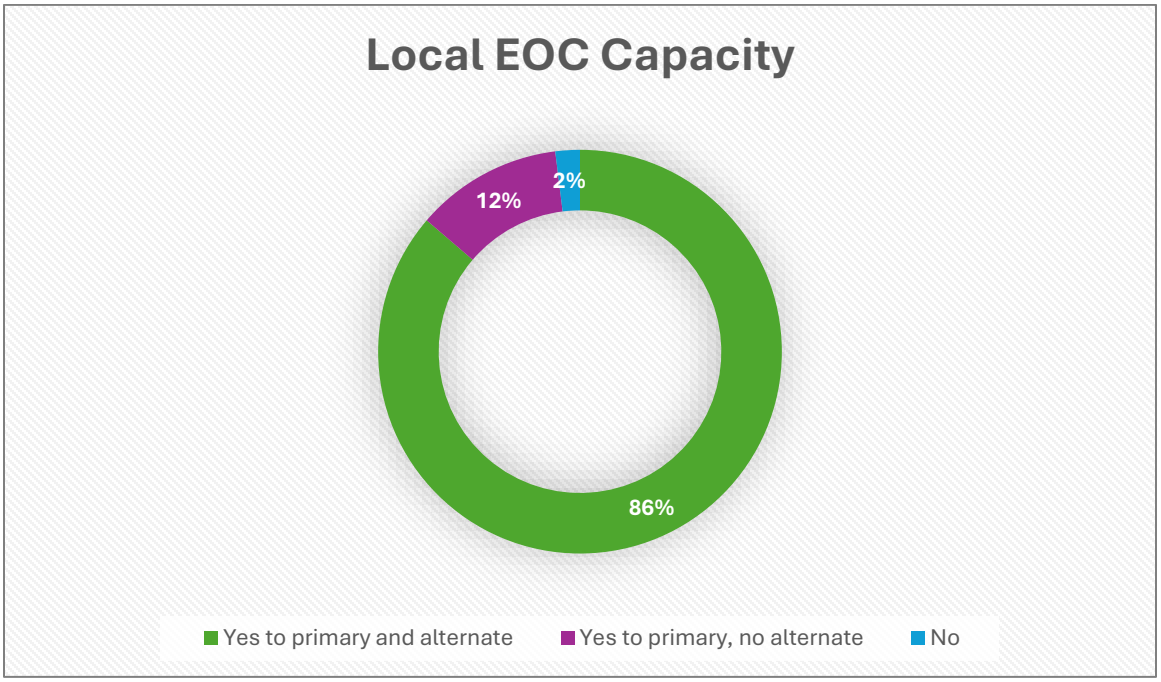


Public Information and Education

Providing public information and education for individuals and family preparedness is essential to building resilience at the most local level. It's common for EM offices to conduct public speaking, attend community events and county fairs, work with civic groups and more. Out of the 51 respondents, **80%** recognized a formal program for public information and education.

Emergency Operations Center

Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) are important elements of local, state, and federal emergency management programs. EOCs serve as a centralized physical or virtual location where multiple agencies and disciplines come together to address imminent threats, share information, provide resource support to local governments or on-scene incident management, project future needs and coordinate plans, policies, and procedures. Having local primary and alternate EOCs are essential to ensure unity of effort and a coordinated and collaborative response to emergencies. Out of 51 respondents, the following identified capacity for EOC physical or virtual structures:



Training, Exercises, and Corrective Action

Utilizing a multi-year training and exercise plan coupled with the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation (HSEEP) program, or the Ohio Hazardous Materials Exercise and Evaluation Manual, county EMA programs can develop a progressive exercise and training schedule testing plans, policies, and procedures. EMAs are adept in building exercises and training programs to find areas of improvement prior to disaster. Development of a corrective action program ensures improvements are made whether after training, exercises, or real-world events and are essential to developing strong programs.

Of the 51 respondents, **76%** conduct both emergency management and required LEPC exercises annually, 0% conduct emergency management-based exercises solely annually, 22% only conduct LEPC required exercises, and one jurisdiction was noted as not conducting exercises.

Corrective Action

County EMA has a corrective action program that prioritizes, tracks, and documents hot washes, lessons learned, and performance evaluations from exercises and real-world events	
71% Yes	29% No

Conclusion

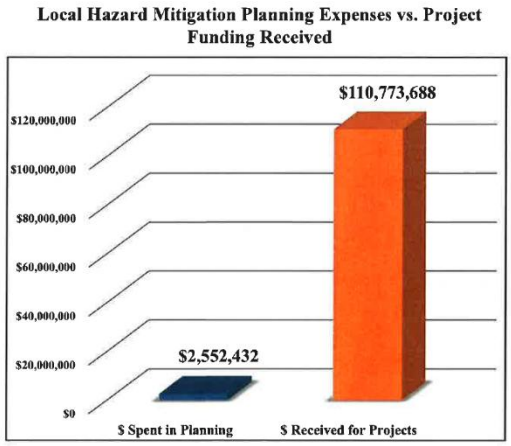


Image Courtesy of Steve Ferryman, Mitigation Branch Chief, Ohio EMA.

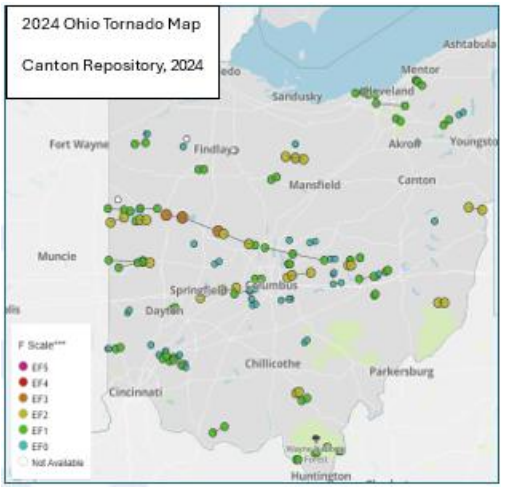
FEMA defines emergency management as the managerial function charged with creating the framework within which communities reduce vulnerability to hazards and cope with disasters. Commonly aligned with emergency response, emergency management differs in the strategic versus tactical approach as fundamentally, the management of a large-scale disaster is more wide-ranging, comprehensive, and multidisciplinary.

Emergency Management at the government level is the ***sole*** discipline focusing on ***all hazards*** that impact local communities, creating a network of people, organizations, and resources to prepare and respond, and that actively work towards mitigating the effect of such hazards. Further, EMAs are the only agency that builds the structure locally to recover and cope as quickly as possible if the County's worst day strikes. The return on investment in Ohio is undeniable as mitigation programs have returned 1 to 43 in infrastructure improvements for every dollar spent[7].

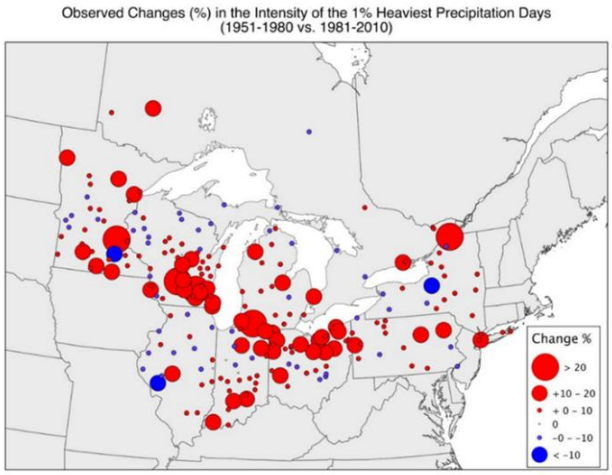
Ohio has experienced hundreds of federal presidential or major disaster declarations since the 1960s, including 28 since 1990, and a majority of those 28 since the year 2000. Since 1990, the state of Ohio has received 1.3 trillion dollars in federal disaster recovery funds while the state and local share has been $88 and $87 million respectfully. Outside federal expenditure, since 1985 the State Disaster Relief Program (SDRP) has funded 1.5 trillion in disaster related costs with a state and local share of $206 and $127 million with 65% of events occurring since the year 2000[8].

[7] Ferryman, Steve. (2025). *Local Hazard Mitigation Planning Funding Proposal*. Ohio Emergency Management Agency.
[8] Ohio Emergency Management Agency Disaster Recovery Branch. (2026). *Total SDRP and PA Funding to date*. Ohio Emergency Management Agency.

All incidents are locally managed whether or not they meet the thresholds for state or federal reimbursement spending. The International Association of Emergency Management (IAEM)[9] identified 60 out of 27,229 nationwide events in FY24 which received federal funding support. Further demonstrating the need for an advanced local emergency management program ensuring local EMAs can meet the demand of emergencies that are more costly and increasing in frequency. As on display in Ohio in 2024 when the state broke a record in tornadoes, the ability to prepare for, centralize, and streamline response and recovery efforts had a drastic impact on Ohio citizens. Of 74 tornadoes that year, only 1 day met the threshold for the FEMA Individual Assistance[10], while at that same event, the SDRP contributed $1.49 million with a local share of $496,000.00. The remaining events were managed at the local level with no state or federal expenditure.



While in recent years, EMAs have managed or had an integral role in non-emergency details like National Special Security Events[11] covering presidential nominating conventions, major sporting events, and major international meetings. This is in addition to persistent perpetual preparedness endeavors, and response and recovery to tornados, severe summer and winter weather, hazardous materials spills, potential dam failures, flash flooding, train derailments, pandemics and epidemics, mass-care issues, civil unrest, extreme temperatures, space events, utility disruptions, aircraft and other transportation incidents, active threats, and cyber-attacks.



As the federal government aims to shift responsibility, authority, and funding for resilience and risk reduction to states and local government, any further reduction or commitment to county EMA programs will be detrimental. This is as the career field across the state battles more emergency management core related requirements, less staffing, minimal funding, additional job titles, and more demand from the community and stakeholders during preparedness and repetitive natural, human caused, or technological emergencies. This is during times that are exacerbated by an increase in frequency of natural disasters, a community statistically less resilient and local response capacity diminishing as federal funding streams become fewer.

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[9] International Association of Emergency Managers. (2024) *Emergency Management Performance Grant ROI reports.*
[10] Federal Emergency Management Agency (2024, May). *Ohio tornadoes (DR-4777-OH).*
[11] Congressional Research Service. (2024, October). *Special event security and national special security events: a summary and issues for congressional consideration (R47439, Version 4).* Library of Congress.

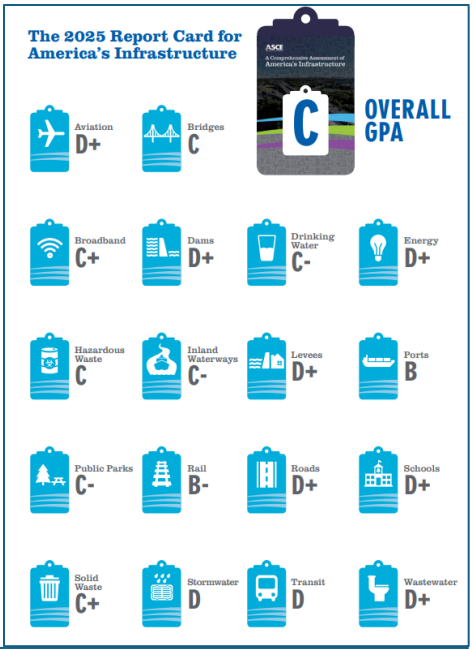

Image Courtesy of American Society of Civil Engineers, Report Card, 2025

According to the Great Lakes Integrates Sciences and Assessments (GLISA), the Great Lakes region is facing increasingly frequent and severe flooding driven by heavier rainstorms, with low-income and vulnerable populations in older, underdeveloped areas most at risk. The Midwest has experienced a 42% increase in the likelihood of 1% annual rain events (100-year storms), with parts of the western Great Lakes now receiving their annual precipitation in just 10 days and seeing a 20–30% increase over the past 40 years[12]. In Ohio, severe storms, the most common federally declared disaster, are increasing, straining community resilience and even driving insurers from high-risk areas. Financial vulnerability compounds this risk, as U.S. housing debt has risen from $6 trillion in 2004 to $13 trillion in 2024 and non-housing debt from $8 trillion to $18 trillion[13]. Leaving many households unable to absorb disaster-related costs. At the same time, 67% of Americans rely on at least one prescription and 26% on four or more[14]. While the aging population has grown from 30 million in 2000 to nearly 60 million in 2020[15], increasing demand for public health, social services, and emergency services. This is coupled with affordable housing shortages which limit recovery options for displaced residents. All while disaster costs continue to rise with 27 billion-dollar disasters recorded in 2024, averaging 64.8 billion annually since 2000[16], and critical infrastructure that is aging beyond its intended lifespan.

This document highlighted local capacity, perceived vulnerability, and a varying approach to emergency management across Ohio. All while federal, county, and local governments have shouldered the financial duty to create the current capacity that exists. As the federal government implicitly aims to put the financial onus on states for pre-disaster preparedness and disaster response and recovery, the following are reasonable outcomes following this research:

1. Continue advocacy for federal funding streams while recognizing the need for resiliency building at the state level. This includes policy and program development of a state-led EMGP, SHSP, and Hazard Mitigation programs.
    - Request Ohio to consider the consolidation, management, and empowerment of specialty emergency response TAC's, standardized equipment and resource typing standards.

[12] Great Lakes Integrated Sciences and Assessments. (2026). *Extreme precipitation.* University of Michigan Climate Center.
[13] Federal Reserve Bank of New York. (2025). *Household debt and credit.*
[14] CivicScience. (2025, February). *Trend to watch: the percentage of Americans taking four or more prescription medications daily continues to rise.*
[15] United States Census Bureau. (2023, May). *2020 Census: 1 in 6 people in the United States were 65 and over.*
[16] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Centers for Environmental Information. (2025). *U.S. billion-dollar weather and climate disasters.*

2. The need for Ohio to recognize a consensus definition and standard for program development of County Emergency Management programs.

The factors listed in this document are pushing emergency management into a reactive posture at a time when proactive preparedness and mitigation are most needed. This is underscoring the urgency of reinvesting in emergency management capacity across all levels of government to reduce vulnerability and maintain coordinated preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery to all hazards.