

## Issue Brief

# Administrative Preparedness: Strategies for Managing and Streamlining COVID-19 Response and Recovery

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### OVERVIEW

A strong COVID-19 response requires state and territorial health departments to be nimble and aggressive to quickly mobilize manpower and resources. In order to provide necessary surge capacity, health departments must carry out accelerated administrative processes to ensure a timely public health response. Administrative preparedness encompasses a broad range of processes that may include emergency fund management, service contracting, critical supply and equipment purchasing, fiscal reporting, staffing, and volunteer management. This brief will provide leaders with considerations to support their administrative response, including examples of state policy actions that facilitate efficient pandemic response and recovery efforts.

### STRATEGIES FOR STATE AND TERRITORIAL HEALTH AGENCY LEADERSHIP

- Consider issuing emergency declarations, which are the most comprehensive of all administrative preparedness authorities. Emergency declarations can be enforced through executive orders to modify, streamline, or waive administrative laws and procedures that may address procurement, staffing, and reporting.
- Work closely with your emergency management agency; they may have plans, procedures, and model practices in place for financial and administrative tracking during emergencies.
- Communicate with funders and be transparent about administrative challenges. Identify and discuss flexible options for managing funds, reporting expenses, internal controls, and tracking mechanisms.
- Delegate appropriate administrative and financial resources to the incident management system from the beginning of the response. Encourage collaboration among preparedness, administration and finance, and legal staff to ensure administrative operations support response activities.
- Leverage flexibility to procure goods and services on the open market and use cooperative purchasing arrangements to reduce the time it takes to acquire goods and services.
- Use tools from peers such as project templates to expedite administrative processes. Reach out to colleagues in your region and use peer sharing sites such as [my.ASTHO](https://my.astho.org) for support.
- Note lessons learned from this pandemic to improve future responses:
  - Ensure an administrative preparedness plan is in place and routinely exercised.
  - Ensure institutional memory by documenting administrative response actions, including processes, tools, templates, and lessons learned.

*“At the Washington State Department of Health, our health official and leaders were involved with the Incident Management Teams from the beginning to ensure appropriate resources for a finance section, so that time and cost is tracked appropriately, and governing authorities are informed. Resources were pulled from various programs to assist us, and we worked with funders to identify flexibility with resources. Weekly calls with initially impacted local public health jurisdictions were held to advise in tracking costs.”*

**- Amy Ferris, CFO, Washington State Department of Health**

- Set aside time and resources for quality improvement and systems evaluation. Update administrative plans and improve financial systems to track resources and ensure timely reimbursement. Map business processes to identify bottlenecks and delays that can be streamlined to better support emergency responses.
- Inform legislative and executive decision makers about the need for streamlined processes in both emergency and non-emergency situations.

## RECENT STATE POLICY ACTIONS

Legal and regulatory requirements may be barriers to rapid administrative emergency response. Through executive orders and legislation, several states have taken action to relax rules and regulations to accelerate key administrative processes. Examples include:

### I. Procurement

- Not requiring strict compliance with procurement statutes and regulations.
  - [Louisiana's](#) executive order waived strict compliance with the state's procurement, telecommunications procurement, and information technology procurement statutes.
  - [New York state's](#) executive order suspends sections of the state's finance and public authorities' laws to allow the purchase of essential commodities, services, technology, and materials without following standard processes.
- Waiving competitive bid requirements.
  - [The U.S. Virgin Islands'](#) executive order waives provisions of the island's competitive bid advertisement code.
  - Proposed [Ohio](#) legislation would allow counties to purchase public health items and communication equipment without competitive bidding. The bill also allows the solicitation of electronic bids and bidding during electronic meetings.
- Providing for measures to ease procurement of medical supplies and hospital space.
  - [Montana's](#) executive order temporarily waives the state's procurement act and any rule that would hinder acquisition of additional patient space and medical supplies.

### II. Hiring

- Waiving certain licensing, certification, education, or registration requirements to increase the public health workforce.
  - Executive orders in [Nevada](#), [Nebraska](#), and [Guam](#) waive professional licensing requirements for providers of medical services.
  - [Tennessee's](#) executive order gives the commissioner of health the authority to grant a license, certificate, or registration to healthcare professionals who have been out of practice without having to demonstrate competency or submit to an interview.
- Waiving fingerprinting requirements and deadlines for certain employees.
  - [Illinois's](#) executive order waives the requirement that CNA applicants have their fingerprints collected electronically and submitted to the Department of State Police within 10 working days.

- Waiving criminal history checks for certain employees.
  - [Louisiana's](#) executive order waives requirements for criminal background checks for laboratory personnel conducting COVID-19 testing.
  - [Iowa's](#) executive order suspends regulations requiring healthcare facilities and assisted living programs conduct criminal history checks on new personnel prior to employment.

### III. Contracting

- Suspending rules for awarding and executing contracts.
  - [Louisiana's](#) executive order suspends certain rules for awarding and executing public works contract.
- Amending existing contracts.
  - [New York's](#) executive order suspends sections of the state's finance law to allow agencies to add additional work and time to emergency contracts.

### RESOURCES

- [Administrative Preparedness Legal Guidebook](#). National Association of County and City Health Officials.
- [Guide for Incorporating Administrative Preparedness into Exercise](#). National Association of County and City Health Officials.
- [Conceptualizing and Defining Public Health Emergency Preparedness](#). Nelson, et al. American Journal of Public Health. 2007.
- [USVI Hurricane Response Focus Group Report](#). ASTHO and the USVI Department of Health.
- [Administrative Preparedness Strategies: Expediting Procurement and Contracting Cycle Times During an Emergency](#). Hurst D, Sharpe S, Yeager VA. Public Health Reports. 2017.
- [2015 National Snapshot of Public Health Preparedness](#). CDC.

For questions, feedback, or follow-up questions, please email [preparedness@astho.org](mailto:preparedness@astho.org).