



# Preparedness Grant Effectiveness Case Study: Washington

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FEMA



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## I. Overview

In July 2020, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) conducted a preparedness grant effectiveness case study of the State of Washington (the state). The purpose of the study was to understand the role that federal preparedness grants played in the state’s coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic response. FEMA examined how the state used grant funds to support core capabilities related to pandemics and broader emergency management capabilities and the impact those investments had on its COVID-19 pandemic response. This case study found that Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) and Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) funds significantly contributed to the state’s capability to train and staff positions critical to the COVID-19 pandemic response and also helped provide health care and emergency management staff with resources to safely deliver key services to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To inform this case study, FEMA relied on information that state officials in Washington provided through the Biannual Strategic Implementation Report (BSIR) and Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA)/Stakeholder Preparedness Review (SPR). Staff from the FEMA National Preparedness Assessment Division (NPAD) and FEMA Region X also conducted three virtual case study interviews in July 2020 with representatives from the Washington State Military Department Emergency Management Division (EMD), the Seattle Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI); the Counties of King, Pacific, Cowlitz, and Clark; and the Cities of Olympia, Kirkland, Redmond, and Marysville to discuss preparedness grant funds used in Washington’s COVID-19 pandemic response.

## II. COVID-19 in Washington

On January 21, 2020, Washington reported the first case of COVID-19 in the United States, and on February 29, the state reported its first COVID-19-related fatality. King County Executive Dow Constantine issued a Proclamation of Emergency on March 1, 2020. The state had the highest number of confirmed cases and deaths per resident of any state until mid-March. Many early fatalities were linked to a nursing home in the City of Kirkland. On March 3, Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan declared a civil emergency. On March 22, Governor Jay Inslee declared a major disaster in Washington and issued a statewide stay-at-home order (“Stay Home, Stay Healthy”) on March 23.<sup>III</sup>

## III. Funding History

Washington received over \$331,787,000 between FY 2006 and FY 2019 from State Homeland Security Program (SHSP), UASI, and EMPG (including the EMPG Supplemental [EMPG-S]) grant programs. In each year of this date range, the state received funds between \$16,020,508 to \$36,084,218 from the three grant programs combined, with EMPG grant awards comprising the largest share each year between FY 2012–2019 and SHSP awards comprising the largest share each year between FY 2006–2011.

**Table 1** displays the federal preparedness grant funds that Washington received in SHSP, UASI, and EMPG (including EMPG-S) grant programs between FY 2006–2019.

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<sup>I</sup> <https://www.governor.wa.gov/news-media/inslee-announces-stay-home-stay-healthy%C2%A0order>

<sup>II</sup> <https://www.governor.wa.gov/news-media/inslee-statement-federal-major-disaster-declaration>



Table 1: Washington Preparedness Grant Funds, FY 2006–FY 2019

Grant Program	Award Amount (in thousands)														
	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	Total
SHSP	\$12,730	\$10,030	\$19,780	\$18,190	\$18,357	\$9,179	\$4,705	\$5,646	\$6,493	\$6,493	\$6,493	\$6,476	\$6,208	\$7,000	\$137,780
UASI	\$9,150	\$10,660	\$10,340	\$11,031	\$11,054	\$7,959	\$4,365	\$5,500	\$5,500	\$5,500	\$5,430	\$5,180	\$5,000	\$6,000	\$102,669
EMPG	\$3,535	\$4,856	\$5,879	\$6,174	\$6,673	\$6,719	\$6,950	\$6,818	\$7,198	\$7,219	\$7,254	\$7,307	\$7,346	\$7,410	\$91,338
Total	\$25,415	\$25,546	\$35,999	\$35,395	\$36,084	\$23,857	\$16,020	\$17,964	\$19,191	\$19,212	\$19,177	\$18,963	\$18,554	\$20,410	\$331,787

#### IV. Investments and Capability Impacts

##### HSGP Funding

Washington did not specifically direct HSGP funds toward pandemic response because the COVID-19 pandemic was beyond the scope of HSGP’s terrorism focus. However, HSGP-funded investments made by the state in training and hiring personnel, interoperable communications and operational coordination, public information and outreach, and public health directly supported its COVID-19 pandemic response capabilities.

##### Training and Hiring Personnel [SHSP and UASI]

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, personnel in HSGP-funded roles established working relationships between the state and counties, cities, and tribes, which provided a framework for response activities during the pandemic. For example, SHSP funding was used beginning in FY 2014 to support an emergency management specialist and state agency liaison for Emergency Support Function (ESF) #11 (Agricultural and Natural Resources) within Washington State’s Department of Agriculture (WSDA). The longstanding working relationships between the WSDA and other local, state, federal agencies, and tribal entities created by this role enabled WSDA to manage the surge in demand on food banks and pantries, including demand on staffing resources, to ensure food security state-wide during the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Multiple jurisdictions also noted that SHSP funding supported training and staffing that proved beneficial during Washington State’s COVID-19 pandemic response. King County and the Seattle UASI indicated they used UASI funding starting in FY 2006 to invest in staff like the regional homeland security coordinator, who played a critical role in building relationships among partners, and also staffed the planning section chief role in the King County Office of Emergency Management (KCOEM) Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Clark County also noted that SHSP funding that supported staffing and funded training for county partners and volunteers in EOC and Incident Command System (ICS) planning significantly improved the county’s capacity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

##### Interoperable Communications and Operational Coordination [SHSP, UASI, and EMPG]

Local jurisdictions noted that the purchase of interoperable communications equipment enabled a smoother transition to telework, including when used to allow staff to quarantine, and increased operational coordination for services provided to the public. Pacific County invested approximately \$11,000 in SHSP funding in FY 2015 to close interoperable communications capability gaps by purchasing Wi-Fi, cellular technology, voiceover internet protocol, and push-to-talk cell phones, which supported staff telework and facilitated quarantine and isolation services provided by the county. This communications equipment also allowed staff in Pacific County drive-through COVID-19 testing sites to communicate effectively.



In addition, SHSP-funded personnel in Washington provided technical assistance to local jurisdictions for setting up and managing WebEOC, a web-based crisis management software. To invest in this capability, the state and its partners invested approximately \$3.5 million in SHSP and UASI funding over FYs 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2013; and approximately \$440,000 in EMPG and EMPG-S funding in FYs 2007 and 2008. An integrated and functional WebEOC platform enabled the state and local jurisdictions to 1) communicate with each other and federal partners, 2) request and distribute resources such as personal protective equipment (PPE), and 3) support staff so that they can work in a virtual environment during the pandemic response. This common messaging system in WebEOC also allowed for greater flexibility in shifting messaging approaches when needed.

### **Public Information and Outreach [SHSP and UASI]**

Washington leveraged investments in public alert and warning capabilities to inform the public about the pandemic and provide relevant updates; this messaging proved to be a key component of the state's COVID-19 pandemic response. This included \$3,595,000 in FY 2018 UASI funding for the Alert Seattle system, which serves as the official emergency notification system used by the City of Seattle to communicate with city residents during emergencies.<sup>iii</sup> King County invested in a public health planner and a public education specialist, who played key roles in establishing a public information contact center as a part of the its COVID-19 pandemic response. As part of this \$100,000 SHSP investment in FY 2007 and a \$125,000 UASI investment in FY 2014, these staff members contributed public health and pandemic planning inputs related to vulnerable populations and built relationships with local community networks to assist with donation coordination.

### **Public Health [SHSP and UASI]**

Stakeholders in the State of Washington made investments in public health equipment that proved critical during its COVID-19 pandemic response. King County and the Seattle UASI invested SHSP funding equipment to set up an access and credentialing (i.e., badging) system for staff and volunteers on the premises of the Seattle & King County Department of Public Health's Medical Area Command. In FY 2010, King County also invested approximately \$496,000 of SHSP funding in equipment used to implement a standardized personnel badging system throughout the state. King County specifically used this badging system as part of its COVID-19 pandemic response to help identify and direct medical staff and volunteers to specific locations in the building, including directing nurses to the county's COVID-19 hotline call center. Although localities used HSGP and other funding sources to purchase PPE in the past, most of these supplies were found to be expired or outdated at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple jurisdictions reported that they are exploring allocating future funding to develop an inventory lifecycle management plan, including a rotating inventory of PPE for first responders, the public, and health and medical professionals.

### **EMPG Funding**

Washington's funding allocations for EMPG have maintained an all-hazards course, which includes capabilities leveraged by the state to support its pandemic response. Specifically, the state used EMPG funds to invest in updating plans and procedures; training and hiring personnel; improving EOC facilities and acquiring equipment; and making investments related to specialized programs in mass care and public information and outreach, which improved the state's readiness for COVID-19 pandemic response efforts.

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<sup>iii</sup> <https://alert.seattle.gov/>



## **Updating Plans and Procedures**

EMPG investments supported the review and update of plans and procedures for pandemic-related activities. The state used EMPG funding to develop its Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and validate that plan through a table-top exercise in CY 2019 as part of its quarterly EMPG exercise requirement. The state also used EMPG funding to support its application and assessment for Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) Accreditation and reported that going through this process resulted in a direct benefit to its Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) and Continuity of Government (COG) plans and increased the state's readiness for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Individual cities and counties also used EMPG funding to close planning gaps. EMPG funding supported the development of a pandemic plan for the City of Redmond, which was updated and implemented in its COVID-19 pandemic response effort. The City of Redmond also spoke of positive spillover for smaller surrounding communities that lacked the staff or capacity to undertake planning operations but were able to borrow disaster preparedness plans and best practices from Redmond to better prepare themselves. The City of Olympia reported that its emergency management committee and EMPG-funded emergency manager played a critical role in developing guidebooks for its EOC, developing a training and exercise program, and conducting public outreach and education.

## **Training and Hiring Personnel**

The State of Washington and jurisdictions including the Counties of King, Cowlitz, and Pacific and the City of Redmond reported EMPG funded positions and training for crucial permanent and temporary emergency management staff. Specifically, the state reported that EMPG supports permanent staff positions for the Washington State Military EMD. Other jurisdictions, including the City of Olympia and Cowlitz County, reported that emergency managers with positions funded by EMPG played an important role in planning, operational coordination, and situational awareness during their COVID-19 pandemic response. Representatives from the City of Redmond, the City of Kirkland, and Cowlitz County reported that EMPG funding also supported emergency management and ICS training, which made it possible for personnel who otherwise may not have daily emergency management responsibilities to serve in COVID-19 pandemic response roles. Local staff members in Olympia were also better familiarized with their Emergency Operations Center (EOC) roles and responsibilities due to their participation in the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) training.

## **EOC Facilities and Equipment**

The State of Washington and multiple jurisdictions reported that they would not have had sufficient resources for the operation of their EOCs without investments in equipment, training, exercise, and planning. Specifically, the City of Kirkland used its EMPG funding to invest in laptops and EOC facilities and to set up a fully virtual EOC in a COOP exercise in the Spring of 2019. As a result of gaps identified in this exercise, the City of Kirkland relocated data and information to cloud-based storage, which supported staff in transitioning to telework during the COVID-19 pandemic response. The City of Kirkland also invested EMPG funding to support two interns, who developed an EOC Manual with procedures for all positions in the City of Kirkland EOC. This manual provided staff members who had varied experience with a common reference resource when activated for the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cities of Marysville and Redmond similarly invested EMPG funding for radios, laptops and other equipment for their EOC staff to transition to a virtual environment. The City of Redmond also used EMPG funding to purchase interactive screens for real-time mapping of resources across the city for the EOC, which allowed EOC staff to connect medical services, including ambulance services, with public health data.



### Mass Care

Jurisdictions in Washington leveraged EMPG funding to provide equipment that proved critical to providing mass care services during the COVID-19 pandemic response. In the same way that the COVID-19 pandemic’s cascading effects drove a surge in food demand in the State of Washington and on the WSDA, the City of Marysville’s food bank was unable to meet demand for food security assistance. As a result, EMPG funding was used to purchase a Central Point of Distribution (CPOD) kit to sufficiently augment its capability and help staff the CPOD with emergency management volunteers. Marysville also invested EMPG dollars to purchase portable washing stations for city staff and public use to address a sanitation gap in public spaces.

## V. Conclusion

Preparedness grant funds enabled jurisdictions across the State of Washington to invest in capabilities that have proved essential during its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Investments using both HSGP and EMPG enabled the development of plans that Washington emergency management staff could use and update while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, these investments enabled the state to train and hire personnel, which allowed it to adapt and surge staffing capacity in response to the pandemic.

Case study participants also highlighted the specific value of each preparedness grant program. Without HSGP funding, the state and its partners would not have built key relationships critical to ensuring food security during the early stages of response or been as adept in ensuring continuity of operations in a virtual environment and providing critical information and services to the public. Without EMPG funding, the state and its partners would not have had updated plans and procedures, hired and trained personnel, updated EOC facilities and equipment, and specialized programs in mass care and public information and outreach that improved the state’s readiness for COVID-19 pandemic response efforts. Case study participants emphasized the value of EMPG funding for smaller regions in particular, who otherwise would not have the workforce and capacity to undergo disaster planning without EMPG assistance.

In general, FEMA preparedness-grant-funded investments equipped the state to meet the needs of the public and its emergency management workers. As a result of lessons learned during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic response, multiple case study participants reported that they will work to update plans, including PPE inventory management plans, and implement additional training and planning to better support vulnerable populations, particularly those that do not speak English or have access to technology.



## **Appendix A: References**

<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/gov-inslee-extends-washington-states-coronavirus-stay-home-order-through-end-of-may-4/>

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