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## What Makes a Pandemic Response Successful? Collaboration!



The **COVID-19 pandemic** peeled back many insights on how we respond to a **public health threat**, **how we protect communities**, and above all **how we work together to combat unexpected but not unimaginable turns**. For the most part, the United States scored fair in a global game of combatting a virus. But the journey was mixed with successes as much as it was with lessons learned. In an effort to do better the next time, we must explore all angles of the response. NEMA, with a grant funded by the CDC, created the opportunity to explore such angles through a **public health** and **emergency management** lens – the two primary response agencies of the pandemic. The review focused on the period from January 2020 – January 2022. This effort brought together state emergency management and state public health leads to capture recommendations from that time for the creation of the white paper, [Preparing for the Next Pandemic Response Through Strengthened Collaboration](#).

The workshop and white paper were designed and co-authored by [Curtis Brown](#), [Donell Harvin](#), [Lauren Powell](#), and [Jessica Jensen](#). Their intense research helped drive an interactive workshop bringing together the emergency management directors, public health officials, and subject matter experts from Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Mississippi, Oregon, Tennessee, Virginia, ASTHO, FEMA, and the CDC to discuss their decisions, and actions in the response from January 2020 – January 2022. **NEMA is grateful for the coordination of the researchers and for the state and federal representatives who came to the table.**

Much like any workshop, there was a ton of discussion. But the key for this one was the recommendations that brewed to the top were ones that emergency management and public health stealthily in their separate breakout groups agreed on, to find out they were one in the same once the two groups came together. **Yes, collaboration is key, but what the group established were four, agreed upon recommendations from both sectors:**

- Establishing joint-agency training and agreements related to data collection and information sharing.
- Collaboration on data dashboards to achieve a common operation picture.
- Diversifying hiring practices and infusing equity considerations into their policies and actions.
- Structural changes such as joint planning efforts, collocating organizations during a disaster, and embedding staff in each other's agencies were suggested.

COVID-19 posed a unique challenge that exposed successes and key areas of improvement. For emergency management this included the need to enhance data collection, sharing, and analysis with public health and federal partners, enhancing collaboration, and addressing equity. Public health key areas of concern were workforce challenges, fractured infrastructure, and a need for more agile decision-making. **Preparing for the Next Pandemic Response Through Strengthened Collaboration underscores the importance of collaboration between emergency management and public health during pandemics, focusing on enhancing their relationships, clarifying roles, and addressing identified challenges prior to the next response.** The report highlights the success too, particularly in information sharing, testing, vaccine distribution, equity considerations, and continuity of operations. Lastly, it addresses opportunities for federal integration with state efforts, emphasizing data sharing, supply chain resilience, and prioritizing equity and vulnerable populations.

Once again, **NEMA would like to thank the state emergency management and public health officials who shared their honest assessments of how the nation can be better prepared for the next pandemic – through collaboration.**

**"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."**

— Henry Ford

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