

# NEMA Committee Reports

**NEMA 2025 ANNUAL FORUM**  
OCTOBER 9-12, 2025 CHEYENNE, WYOMING

**NEMA Legal Counsel Committee**  
**October 9, 2025**  
**Meeting Summary**

**Navigating the New Terms & Conditions on Grants**

Legal Counsel Committee Chair, Will Polk, welcomed everyone to the meeting and kicked off a discussion of the new terms and conditions on DHS grants. Polk began by providing a history of the FY25 Version 1, 2, and 3 Terms and Conditions documents issued in October 2024, March 2025, and April 2025, respectively. Additionally, he highlighted the impact of various Executive Orders (EO), including EO 14287 ("[Protecting American Communities from Criminal Aliens](#)"), EO 14159 ("[Protecting The American People Against Invasion](#)"), and EO 14151 ("[Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing](#)"), on the terms and conditions of the grants.

Polk then transitioned the discussion to the ongoing litigation regarding the new terms and conditions, including the impact the lawsuits are having on the states. He briefly highlighted the facts of San Francisco vs. Trump, Illinois vs. Trump, and California vs. the US Department of Transportation, among other cases. The committee discussed how these high-profile legal challenges have made some states increasingly involved in high levels of legal review, even for normal operations. These legal reviews often involve lawyers without emergency management knowledge and there is often little communication between those more senior non-emergency management lawyers and the emergency management legal counsels. Conversely, the states not involved in lawsuits have not heard much from senior officials, who largely want to avoid becoming involved.

The committee also highlighted that there has been a significant lack of information being handed down about impacts from the grant lawsuits. Many questions are being asked by non-profit organizations, locals, and other agencies. For this reason, Polk noted that agencies need to provide baseline grant managers with guidance on the impacts of lawsuits and EOs. The discussion emphasized the need for clear communication and coordination within agencies to manage the litigation and its impact. To help with this, NEMA has created a sub-group to analyze, discuss, and share information about the new terms and conditions.

**Federal Appropriations Update**

Polk then introduced Matt Cowles, NEMA's Deputy Director, to provide an update on the FY26 appropriations process. Cowles explained that the House completed their work on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations for FY26 over the summer. The biggest takeaway from that effort was the restoration of grant cuts from the FY24 cycle. The Senate was due to mark up its version of a DHS spending bill on September 11, 2025, but it was delayed, and there's no talk of rescheduling at this time. Cowles noted that Congress will first need to resolve the ongoing discussions around the Continuing Resolution and the shutdown.

Cowles stated that, in addition to restoring grant cuts, the biggest priority for FY26 appropriations will be the solvency of the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF). Due to delayed projects last year, the states saw the slow walking of project approvals and a \$5-6 billion shortfall rolled into this year. With this administration again trying the same tactic, the problem has compounded to a \$10-12 billion issue. Cowles explained that NEMA will continue to emphasize the issue to Congress and push for DRF funds to be above the FY26 level to hopefully free up these delayed projects.

### **Population Certification Requirements**

Polk then transitioned to discuss the new population certification requirement for grants, and the challenges states face in meeting the requirements. The discussion focused on the approaches different states are taking to provide the population information requested by DHS/FEMA. Common examples included leveraging state demographers, using media reports on immigration enforcement actions to extrapolate on available federal population data, and approaching universities for support. Many noted that ICE has not been helpful in obtaining the necessary data, as their own records are outdated, incomplete, and largely unavailable. There was significant agreement among the committee that population verification is not a realistic requirement for the states, and it will be important to heavily caveat any data provided to emphasize the state's lack of visibility into federal immigration missions.

The conversation highlighted the lack of clear guidance from DHS/FEMA and the challenges of using outdated census data and the broader implications of the population certification requirement and its impact on emergency management practices. The meeting concluded with a focus on the importance of collaboration and information sharing among states and the need for states to develop contingency plans and consider alternative funding sources if the population certification issue is not resolved.

**NEMA EMAC Committee  
October 10, 2025  
Meeting Summary**

EMAC Committee Chair Director Kevin Sweeney (MI) opened the meeting at 1:30 pm.

Roll call was completed. There was a quorum with two proxies from OH and AZ.

**Beyond the Call: Montana's Plan for a Faster, Leaner, Next-Gen EMAC:**

Delila Bruno, Montana Department of Military Affairs briefed on changes within Montana's EMAC program and provided the following recommendations to Directors:

- Know what resources you have
- Take EMAC training
- Develop financial SOPs and follow up with Resource Providers when completing reimbursement packages after an agency returns home
- Montana is able to pay Resource Providers from state funds. Recommend looking into any mechanisms that would allow you to pay upfront if possible
- Track deployed personnel performance
- Invest training dollars to ensure Mission Ready Packages are complete

**Leveraging Volunteers through EMAC:**

Noah McCord, Colorado Office of Emergency Management, provided an overview of Colorado's approach to integrating non-governmental organizations (NGOs) into EMAC deployments through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The collaboration enables community organizations to contribute to missions while meeting cost-share requirements, though challenges remain in establishing their role as agents of the state during deployment.

An MOU between Mile High United Way and the Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) has facilitated joint training and standardization efforts. NGO deployment assignments have included Resource and Referral Support, Disaster Case Management, DAC/DRC/MARC Implementation, Long-Term Recovery Group (LTRG) Mentoring, and Volunteer and Donations Management.

Colorado's collaboration with Virginia VOAD has further strengthened these efforts. Key benefits to the assisting state include expanded resources within CO VOAD and enhanced trust and partnership between NGOs and government agencies. Lessons learned highlight the importance of stakeholder education, engaged leadership across partner agencies, involvement of legal, logistics, and finance staff, and establishing standardized minimum training requirements.

**Update from the EMAC Executive Task Force**

Butch Wise, Arizona Division of Emergency Management, provided an update on Executive Task Force (ETF) activities and ongoing initiatives.

- **Training and Engagement:** The ETF has conducted multiple training sessions, including one with FEMA’s National Response Coordination Center (NRCC)
- **Recent Deployments:** Since the March 2025 Mid-Year Forum, EMAC member states have supported 10 events involving over 800 deployed personnel. The largest of these was the Texas Floods. Wise also expressed appreciation to California, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Massachusetts, and Virginia for assisting Arizona during its recent flooding response
- **Mutual Aid Resource Center:** NEMA has launched the *Mutual Aid Resource Center* ([www.mutualaidresources.com](http://www.mutualaidresources.com)), a publicly accessible website designed to help local officials understand mutual aid options within their states
- **Model Intrastate Legislation:** The ETF is working with NEMA to update the *Model Intrastate Mutual Aid Legislation Template* to ensure resources can be deployed through EMAC efficiently and consistently across states
- **Reimbursement Improvements:** The Special Assignment Task Force on Reimbursement is reviewing EMAC reimbursement policies to identify opportunities for simplification and standardization that will expedite the reimbursement process
- **Training Recommendations:** The ETF strongly encourages all state finance personnel - including contractors who handle EMAC reimbursements to complete the free *EMAC Reimbursement Course* available on the EMAC website. States are encouraged to include a training requirement in contracts to ensure contractors understand EMAC reimbursement procedures
- **New Micro-course Development:** NEMA is developing a “*How Do I Get Paid?*” micro-course to help Resource Providers understand how to compile their R-2 reimbursement packages. Once released, states are encouraged to make it required viewing for all deploying personnel
- **Mission Ready Packages Initiative:** This year, NEMA and the ETF will focus on the top 20 most frequently deployed EMAC resources, collaborating with EMAC Coordinators to develop Mission Ready Packages (MRPs) for those resource types
- **Upcoming Workshop:** Planning is underway for an *EMAC Coordinator and National Guard Workshop*. Additional details will be shared as the event is finalized

### **EMAC Guidelines and Recommendations for NSSEs**

Beth Zimmerman provided an overview of reimbursement challenges related to the use of Department of Justice (DOJ) funding for National Special Security Events (NSSEs). These events differ from standard EMAC activations, as the EMAC framework governs state-to-state agreements, while NSSE/DOJ grant funds are awarded directly to the host city, which then establishes a separate agreement with its state.

Currently, the only NSSEs funded by the DOJ are the Presidential Nominating Conventions, though this may expand in the future. FEMA has adopted EMAC policies and procedures, as outlined in the EMAC Operations Manual, and incorporated them into the *Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide (PAPPG)*.

Director Sweeney introduced the NEMA position paper recommending that the DOJ amend its *Grants Financial Guide* to formally recognize EMAC as the governing framework for

reimbursing interstate resources supporting NSSEs when subrecipients utilize EMAC for resource deployment.

A motion was made to recommend that the DOJ amend its *Grants Financial Guide* accordingly, ensuring consistent recognition of EMAC as the reimbursement framework for interstate resource support to NSSEs.

Motion was made by Director Bryan Fisher (AK)  
The motion was seconded by Director Greg Engle (WI)

Discussion:

Director Greg Engle (WI) stated he fully supports the motion.  
Motion passed.

### **Mutual Aid Support System**

Director Sweeney brought the Mutual Aid Support System one-pager to everyone's attention. The one-pager explains the benefits of using the Mutual Aid Support System in the EMAC Operations System. The one-pager was distributed to EMAC Coordinators and is available for anyone who wants to learn more about MASS.

### **Open Discussion:**

Director Bryan Fisher (AK) thanked the NEMA team for developing the monthly training EMAC webinars. The monthly webinars cover a variety of EMAC topics for EMAC Coordinators and a variety of disciplines.

### **Adjournment**

Director Kevin Sweeney (MI) asked if there was a motion to adjourn.

The motion to adjourn was made by Director Engle (WI)  
The motion was seconded by Director Fisher (AK)  
Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 pm.

**NEMA Resilience Committee  
October 10, 2025  
Meeting Summary**

**Committee Updates**

Resilience Committee Vice Chair, Bill Turner, welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided some brief committee updates. He thanked Sima Merick, the current Resilience Committee Chair, for her leadership over the past year and noted that she will be moving on from the Resilience Committee and moving to chair another committee next year. Turner will be stepping up to chair the Resilience Committee when she transfers over.

Turner also noted that due to time constraints, the subcommittees will not be briefing on their efforts during the meeting. Instead, they have all developed brief two-pagers highlighting their work and priorities over the last six months, which have been sent to the full committee for review.

**FEMA Mitigation: Current Program Status and Looking Towards the Future**

Turner then introduced Derrick Hiebert, currently the Practice Leader for Infrastructure Resilience at AECOM and previously the Assistant Administrator for Hazard Mitigation at FEMA, for a briefing on the status of FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation programs and some of the possible paths the agency may take in the future. Turner noted that while Hiebert is no longer a FEMA employee and isn’t speaking on behalf of the agency, he’s still very closely engaged in the mitigation space.

Hiebert began by discussing the uncertain future of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, which has been “informally canceled,” though no formal termination letters had been issued. Ongoing and obligated projects are still moving forward, while new obligations remain paused. Hiebert emphasized that until official cancellation letters are distributed, states can continue submitting reimbursements and working on existing projects.

Hiebert then described the current state of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), which is effectively on hold pending decisions from the administration. FEMA leadership is reportedly concerned about the large volume of unspent mitigation funds, now estimated at roughly \$28 billion. Evaluation criteria under review include unobligated balances, project timeliness, and potentially even building code standards. Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) and the STORM Act programs were also addressed. Hiebert noted that both are “must fund” programs with congressionally protected funding that cannot be redirected but remain stalled until FEMA republishes its Notices of Funding Opportunity.

Hiebert's brief also covered growing inconsistencies across FEMA regions, particularly the introduction of enhanced reviews that flag terms like "climate" and "equity" in grant applications. These have led to requests for project scope changes and, in some cases, threatened terminations. Hiebert advised the committee members to closely monitor how their regional FEMA offices handle these reviews. Another area of concern was the restriction of application and performance period extensions. While regional offices may still grant short-term extensions, FEMA HQ is increasingly denying longer requests. Hiebert warned states to advance their older disaster projects quickly, as FEMA's tolerance for extensions appears to be tightening. Notably, Hiebert stated that FEMA's total mitigation obligations from January to August were over \$1 billion lower than during the same period the prior year, pointing to significant slowdowns in processing and approvals.

Hiebert then transitioned to discuss the broader policy direction at FEMA and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). OMB reportedly doubts states' ability to efficiently use federal mitigation funds and now prioritizes "proven" projects over more innovative approaches. This perception has influenced decisions to withhold HMGP activations and impose stricter oversight. Hiebert described reform efforts underway before his departure, including draft proposals to merge BRIC and HMGP into a single, more flexible program. Other proposed reforms included making BRIC a formula-based program and expanding Program Administration by States (PAS), which allows states to take on greater control and responsibility for administering mitigation grants.

Hiebert focused the last section of his brief to the potential benefits and challenges of PAS. Currently, only Florida fully implements the program, though other states have experimented with elements of it. PAS enables states to assume certain FEMA functions (e.g., project review, cost analysis, and fiscal oversight) on a disaster-by-disaster basis. He noted that approach allows faster funding, supports long-term staff and system investments, and reduces inefficiencies. Hiebert emphasized that adopting PAS requires careful capacity assessments and legal preparation, as states would take on greater accountability and some risk of federal "clawbacks" if FEMA later disputes decisions. However, with well-developed agreements, he stated that PAS could significantly accelerate project delivery.

### **Roundtable Discussion: Mitigation Funding Mechanisms**

Turner then transitioned to a roundtable discussion centered on how states are adapting to decreasing federal mitigation funds and finding creative ways to incentivize local resilience projects in the absence of FEMA funding. He opened the discussion by emphasizing the importance of collaboration and information-sharing, given that many states are being denied HMGP funding.

Turner began by outlining several of his state's recent initiatives. Through its Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the Governor's Council on Climate Change, Connecticut established the Climate Resilience Fund, with approximately \$44 million set aside.

(an increase from a prior \$9 million pilot phase). The fund supports community resilience planning, project design, and implementation, particularly for vulnerable populations, with over 80% of funds going to those communities in the first round. Turner noted that the program helps municipalities meet match requirements for federal grants while fostering local innovation. Connecticut also passed Senate Bill 9, requiring home sellers to disclose flood history and educate buyers about flood insurance coverage gaps. The state has also launched efforts to strengthen microgrids, coastal infrastructure, and transportation routes affected by sea-level rise.

Other states then shared their own programs and success stories. Louisiana and Alabama were noted for their state-run home fortification programs providing grants for residential retrofitting. Western states, including California, Oregon, New Mexico, and Nevada, are implementing wildfire preparedness programs that focus on homeowner retrofits, community education, and vegetation management. These initiatives are often coordinated through insurance departments or natural resource agencies and serve as models for state-led mitigation efforts that improve resilience at the community level.

The directors from Washington and North Carolina highlighted additional approaches. Washington empowers local governments to establish user fees, create special-purpose districts, and implement locally driven mitigation activities. State programs such as Floodplains by Design and the Climate Commitment Act allocate tens of millions annually toward flood protection, habitat restoration, and climate resilience. North Carolina has funded projects through disaster recovery acts, including slope stabilization, infrastructure resilience, and early-warning system retrofits following major storms such as Hurricane Helene. A key takeaway from the roundtable discussion was that effective mitigation increasingly requires layered funding rather than dependence on federal dollars alone.

**NEMA Homeland Security Committee  
October 11, 2025  
Meeting Summary**

**State Spotlight: Nevada’s Response to a Statewide Cyber-Incident**

Homeland Security Committee Chair, A.J. Schall, welcomed everyone to the meeting and briefly introduced the first briefing on Nevada’s recent response to a statewide cyber-attack. He introduced Brett Compston and Tim Robb, both from Nevada, to highlight their efforts and provide lessons learned and best practices to other states that may face a similar attack in the future.

Compston and Robb then provided a detailed walkthrough of the cyber-attack, including how their response changed over time as conditions evolved, and they learned more about the impacts. They highlighted numerous lessons learned, including but not limited to the following:

- **Messaging for an incident like this is different from a normal crisis.** For example, despite the desire to get “out in front” of a cyber-attack, it is important to not violate or compromise the agreement you have with your insurance or with the federal investigators. If possible, get your insurance provider to vet your messages, because if you violate something that is in your agreement, you risk losing your insurance policy.
- **Until you completely understand the scale of the compromise and what you have lost and what you have not lost, it is important to be careful with what information you release.** Not only can this avoid having to correct mistaken assumptions, but it can also avoid antagonizing the attacker who may still have the ability to continue or expand the attack.
- **Insurance providers come with not only resources and expertise, but also legal counsel and ability to access certain vendors that are going to help you through an event.** Cyber insurance policies include agreements about the way you are going to respond, the way you are going to recover, what they are going to cover, and how you are going to engage throughout the process. If you do not know your cyber insurance policy right now, you need to access it and figure out what that looks like before the event. It is also important to engage with vendors that are willing to work with law enforcement, especially federal partners.
- **It is important to fully map statewide IT systems.** This enables you to know what departments/cities are reliant on your state IT infrastructure. Without this, you will be surprised by the cascading effects. Additionally, it is important to have a process in place to prioritize what systems to fix first. Mapping your statewide IT systems will help you in this process.

- **Know the cyber capabilities in neighboring jurisdictions.** Other states can provide resources that you need after an attack. In this case, California and Arizona provided significant support, including a list of every single resource that they had that we could provide to our Chief Technology Officer as a “menu of options.”
- **Implement redundancy in information and technology.** While it may be convenient to have all grants info and other documents saved in one system/location, that also means you have lost access to everything if that system is compromised.
- **Try to control communication between IT staffers.** These individuals are critical to a response but they are not crisis communicators. These informal networks can result in unhelpful leaks and/or the spread of misinformation.
- **It is important to be able to publicly counter misinformation.** Fusion centers need to monitor discussion and coverage of the incident while providing clear and accessible messaging to counter any misinformation.
- **Understand the requirements for responding to losses of PII and PHI before an event occurs.** There are processes in your state law for when you identify a loss of that information.
- **Determine whether an emergency declaration is the right approach.** In Nevada, we chose not to declare a state emergency and treat the attack as a “security incident.”

### **EM and Public Safety Partnership: Annunciation Catholic School**

Schall then introduced Allison Farole, Director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management for the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, to provide a briefing on the response to the recent shooting at Annunciation Catholic School. Farole began by providing an overview of the shooting, which took place during a school-wide mass attended by students and faculty of the school. Two children and the shooter died in the shooting, and thirty other people were injured.

Initial reports came in at 8:39 a.m., prompting the City of Minneapolis to activate its Emergency Operations Center (EOC) immediately. Farole emphasized that response efforts began locally, with the State EOC maintaining a monitoring posture before elevating activation the following week as schools reopened. She highlighted the importance of the Joint Information System, ensuring the governor and state leaders received accurate, timely updates.

Farole noted that in the aftermath, it became clear that local officials were not fully aware of all victim assistance resources available. The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) served as the primary state liaison with the city, embedding staff within the EOC and assistance centers despite being a small office. The city established two key support facilities: a Family Assistance Center for those directly affected inside the church and a Neighborhood Assistance Center for nearby residents traumatized by the event. Coordination between the city and EOC ensured broad access to emotional and practical support.

Farole then explained that the Minnesota School Safety Center, operating under Homeland Security and Emergency Management, also played a key role. Normally focused on

preparedness, it had to adapt to a recovery role in this situation. Its small team staffed a statewide hotline and guided schools seeking reassurance and safety advice. Farole noted that the center's relationships with schools helped maintain consistent communication and fostered confidence during a tense period.

Recovery efforts remain ongoing, led locally with state support. Farole emphasized patience and community-driven recovery rather than rushing the process. She also raised concern for the mental health of responders, many of whom worked extended periods without rest. OJP staff provided sustained victim support but faced fatigue from continuous deployments. Farole concluded by stressing the need for stronger local preparedness and awareness of victim-assistance resources, urging emergency managers to include these in future planning, training, and exercises to ensure faster, more effective responses.

**NEMA Private Sector Committee**  
**October 11, 2025**  
**Meeting Summary**

**Chair:** Eric Bornemann, Vice President of Planning and Risk Reduction, AC Disaster Consulting

**Meeting Overview**

The Private Sector Committee convened during the 2025 NEMA Annual Forum to present progress on its white paper titled “**Building Trust, Enhancing Resilience Recommendations for Public-Private Alignment**” and to engage attendees in a collaborative discussion on strengthening public-private partnerships in emergency management.

**Facilitators:**

- Jay Harper, Director of Government Affairs, SLS Co.
  - John Jenkins, Disaster Resilience Director for Strategic Growth, AECOM
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**Key Objectives:**

- Present highlights from the draft white paper developed over the past six months.
  - Solicit feedback from attendees to ensure the white paper reflects a comprehensive and inclusive perspective.
  - Foster dialogue on the current state and future of public-private collaboration in emergency management.
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**White Paper Highlights**

The white paper identifies:

- **Existing Strengths** in public-private coordination.
- **Barriers and Gaps** that hinder collaboration.
- **Strategic Recommendations** tailored for:
  - Public sector agencies
  - Private sector partners
  - FEMA

It emphasizes the need for:

- Ethical engagement frameworks
  - Pre-established agreements (MOUs, vetted vendor lists)
  - Empowered private sector liaisons
  - Shared planning, training, and operational readiness
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**Defining the Private Sector in Emergency Management**

The committee defined the private sector to include:

- Vendors and contractors (e.g., logistics, consulting)
- Local and regional businesses (e.g., pharmacies, hardware stores)
- Infrastructure and critical service operators
- Nonprofit and voluntary organizations

The academic sector was acknowledged but excluded from the scope of this paper.

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### Three Pillars of Public-Private Partnership

1. **Relationship Building** – Establishing trust and understanding community needs before disasters.
2. **Integration** – Embedding private sector capabilities into incident management and recovery.
3. **Technical Assistance** – Leveraging innovation, subject matter expertise, and best practices.

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### Barriers to Collaboration

- **Cultural and Institutional Hesitation:** Concerns about favoritism, ethics, and compliance.
- **Perception Gaps:** Misunderstandings between sectors about motives and capabilities.
- **Regulatory Ambiguity:** Misinterpretation of procurement and compliance rules.

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### Discussion Prompts and Participant Insights

Attendees were invited to respond to several key questions:

1. **What causes hesitation in cross-sector collaboration?**
  - Legal and ethical constraints
  - Lack of mutual understanding of disclosure requirements
2. **What should public sector leaders know about private sector engagement?**
  - Importance of pre-existing relationships
  - Value of transparency and shared goals
3. **What can private sector partners do to enhance relationships?**
  - Train on public sector compliance
  - Be clear about intentions and capabilities

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### Proposed Actions

- Develop templates and model documents (MOUs, RFPs, scopes of work)
- Create a **capability repository** on the NEMA website
- Expand learning opportunities and visibility for private sector members
- Strengthen the **Private Sector Liaison Subcommittee**
- Encourage consistent participation in NEMA meetings

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### Conclusion

The session underscored the urgency of evolving public-private partnerships to meet the growing complexity of disasters. The committee called for continued collaboration, transparency, and innovation to build resilient communities.

**NEMA Response and Recovery Committee**  
**October 12, 2025**  
**Meeting Summary**

**Briefing from Chris Stallings, Associate Administrator, Office of Disaster Recovery & Resilience, U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)**

Partnership remains a cornerstone for the SBA, and Associate Administrator Stallings has expressed deep appreciation for the strong collaboration with state and local governments. A key focus for his office is cross-training, which strengthens regional capacity and equips staff with the necessary knowledge of disaster-related terminology and procedures to better engage in response and recovery efforts. This commitment to preparedness has led to the development of a disaster playbook, piloted in Ohio, which the SBA aims to refine and eventually implement in every state. In support of improved communication and coordination, the SBA will also provide the NEMA with updated regional contact lists to ensure all states have access to current information. Business development, particularly through contracting, is another major priority. The SBA has recognized that in larger-scale disasters, a wide array of contractors is brought in, and they encourage states to engage small local businesses that may be well-positioned to contribute to recovery efforts. To further improve services, the SBA is actively conducting interviews with the individuals their program assists to gather feedback on its processes and programs. A significant outcome of this engagement is a stronger ability to communicate in the language and context of those they serve, enhancing the customer experience. In addition, the SBA is developing a mobile application to streamline the application process for disaster survivors. The SBA strongly encourages universal application, but also aims to promote its use as the entry point for a unified disaster assistance application system. Through the Rural Communities Act, the SBA has supported 39 rural disaster declarations, representing a \$61 million investment in the nation's rural areas, further demonstrating its commitment to equitable recovery and service delivery across all communities.

**New Mexico State Disaster Case Management Program**

Ali Rye, Director of the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHS/EM), along with Ashley Saulcy from Plexos Group, shared their collaborative effort in developing a state-managed Disaster Case Management (DCM) program aimed at providing more efficient and survivor-focused recovery services. Their objective was to create a program that prioritizes timely response and sustained, personal support for disaster survivors. Over time, the program evolved from requiring months to mobilize, to deploying state teams on the ground within 24 hours of an event—coinciding with initial response efforts. This continuity model ensures that survivors work with the same case managers throughout the entire recovery process, fostering trust and consistency. The program also takes a holistic approach by integrating other state services into a centralized application system, easing the burden on survivors. DHS/EM partnered with the state's Regulation Department to launch “Contractor Connect,” a vetted service platform where residents can meet licensed contractors, such as plumbers and electricians, directly in a centralized event setting. This initiative supports transparency and expedites repairs for survivors, while also decreasing contractor fraud. By collecting damage data early and preparing applications in advance, the state can accelerate the federal declaration process, with a 48-hour DCM setup timeline, now considered the fastest in the country.

The use of local hires, a directive supported by both the Governor and the DHS/EM Director, further strengthens community ties and enhances the program's effectiveness. Familiarity between the case managers and affected residents has proven vital in restoring trust and improving outcomes. State-run disaster resource centers play a critical role by maintaining consistent, ongoing service delivery, minimizing gaps once federal partners demobilize. All services and support are managed through a state-designed and state-owned technology platform, providing a centralized application system that enhances user experience and overall customer service. To ensure continuity in service delivery, the state uses primary funding sources to rotate support while awaiting federal DCM grants. This strategy enables community assistance faster and ensures alignment in program eligibility and communication throughout the recovery process.

### **Arkansas State Individual Assistance Program**

A.J. Gary, Director, and Jodi Lee, Deputy Director Recovery and Mitigation, with the Arkansas Division of Emergency Management (ADEM), shared how Arkansas has developed a comprehensive, state-managed approach to disaster recovery, building robust programs for Individual Assistance (IA), Public Assistance (PA), and mitigation, all with strong backing from the state legislature. Recognizing the unique challenges of being a rural state—where many disasters fail to meet federal thresholds yet still overwhelm local budgets—ADEM made the strategic decision to combine response and recovery funding. This funding, which is deployed at the discretion of the ADEM Director, allows the state to act swiftly and independently in supporting its communities.

When a disaster strikes, local county judges make formal declarations to ADEM, which then evaluates the data to determine the need for damage assessments. Arkansas follows FEMA's IA criteria from the outset to ensure a seamless transition should a federal declaration be issued later. The state uses a point-based system to assess county thresholds, with 25 points generally indicating eligibility; however, this threshold remains flexible depending on the type of disaster and the number of uninsured residents affected. Once damage is validated, the Governor may issue a state disaster declaration, triggering the rapid setup of disaster recovery centers and call centers managed at the state level. The program is intentionally community-centered, with local officials involved in damage verification to ensure that recovery is driven by those most closely affected. Assistance levels for residents vary based on their needs and insurance status, with support available to help even the insured offset deductibles. In cases where an SBA declaration is made, individuals must first be denied by SBA before becoming eligible for state assistance. To maintain impartiality in the appeals process, ADEM has created an in-house appeals committee that operates independently from the response and recovery teams. Should FEMA become involved, the state works to align federal support with Arkansas's established processes, allowing for smoother integration and ensuring that state-level flexibility and methods remain intact. Currently, the state refers to its assistance locations as "state survivor assistance locations," although efforts are underway to finalize a distinct title that clearly separates these centers from federal programs. By managing these centers directly, Arkansas has demonstrated its ability to mobilize quickly, provide consistent messaging, and deliver targeted support to its communities. ADEM's agility and locally driven approach continue to be a model of responsive, effective state-level disaster management for their communities.

**NEMA Whole Community Committee**  
**October 12, 2025**  
**Meeting Summary**

**Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committees in Emergency Management, Sadie Martinez, Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management**

After a brief introduction from the Committee Chair, Dawn Brantley, Sadie Martinez, Access and Functional Needs Program Supervisor for the Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, provided an overview of how to leverage Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committees.

Sadie Martinez began her presentation by discussing how practitioners can tie the must-do, or the compliance piece, with the how-to, or the approaches to identify the needs of a community. She emphasized that Access and Functional Needs Advisory Committees can help to identify strategies for planning for access needs. She explained that the Access and Functional Needs Resource Framework suggests there are resources everyone needs to function during emergencies and disasters, regardless of who they are. She then challenged the audience to use the Start, Stop, Continue, and Change Tool to examine their own practices by assessing Access and Functional Needs within their own communities and emergency management agencies. To do so, she recommended that practitioners develop a plan, work the plan, and protect the plan. She explained that this is a shift from a label-centric to a resource-centric understanding. To identify the resources needed, the CMIST Resource Framework outlines the life-saving resources required in the event of a disaster. These include communication, maintaining health, independence, support services, safety, and transportation.

Sadie Martinez suggested incorporating CMIST community representatives into planning efforts, arguing that this approach can also help agencies adhere to the compliance aspect. These groups can also serve as a force multiplier during events and in planning efforts. Some of the benefits of integrating these groups into planning efforts are fostering trust and public buy-in, meeting legal requirements, increasing local preparedness, understanding community demographics, and creating more effective plans. She emphasized that these advisory groups may be formal or informal, and they may already be embedded in existing meeting groups. She outlined some recommendations for helping to make these groups successful, including meeting regularly, maintaining an up-to-date roster, and integrating these groups throughout the planning and development cycle.

**Vulnerable Populations Mapping: How Data Mapping Can Support a Whole Community Approach: How Data Mapping Can Support a Whole Community Approach, Director Dawn Brantley, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)**

Dawn Brantley, Director of MEMA, gave a presentation covering their geographic information system (GIS) Vulnerable Populations Map. The tool utilizes the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey data to show demographic information about an area and facilitates the pairing of data with planning and approach. The director explained that the American Community Survey was chosen because it is the most widely accepted and comprehensive data set.

As part of their program launch, MEMA offered training to local emergency management agencies on how to use the tool, along with a tutorial video that is permanently housed on the tool's website, allowing for on-demand learning. The tool allows for data visualization of a specific zone, by county, or the state as a whole. For example, during a planned event, emergency managers can pull data from a specific zone that is being impacted. Categories of populations include age, population with disabilities, population with hearing difficulties, and the total civilian non-institutionalized population. In addition to viewing the data on an interactive map, you can also export it to an Excel worksheet. The Vulnerable Populations Map helps emergency managers by enabling them to pre-identify and plan for anticipated resource needs.

Director Brantley stated that having the data available is not enough to help ensure positive outcomes for emergency managers during events; instead, it is a tool that aids in identifying needs. However, this information must be operationalized in all stages of emergency management to be successful. Regarding how to make the data actionable, you may use it to increase preparedness, during response, and in recovery. The Director noted that being able to utilize the data to anticipate and plan for resource needs is beneficial for emergency management. To illustrate this point, she showed how pairing the mapping data with the CMIST framework helps bridge the knowledge and action gap. For instance, the data may indicate that you have populations with hearing difficulties, which can then inform the need for ASL interpreters in response and recovery. During the preparedness phase, consider finding a contractor who can fulfill that need. At a community level, you may identify that several households lack vehicles, so during response and recovery, there may be a need for housing close to work/school locations. During the planning phase, consider incorporating this into a mass care plan. Recognizing community needs before an event and planning to meet them enables a whole-community approach, helping to safeguard against leaving people behind in our efforts.

To close the meeting, Director Brantley explained that the Whole Community Committee's work would now be continued in the Preparedness Committee.

**NEMA Legislative Committee**  
**October 12, 2025**  
**Meeting Summary**

**NEMA Legislative Update**

Legislative Committee Vice Chair, Darin Hanson, welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided a legislative update to the committee. He explained that the House completed its work on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations for Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) over the summer. The biggest takeaway from that effort was the restoration of grant cuts from the FY24 cycle. The Senate was due to mark up its version of a DHS spending bill on September 11, 2025, but it was delayed, and there's no talk of rescheduling at this time. Hanson noted that Congress will first need to resolve the ongoing discussions around the Continuing Resolution and the shutdown.

Hanson stated that, in addition to restoring grant cuts, the biggest priority for FY26 appropriations will be the solvency of the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF). Due to delayed projects last year, the states saw the slow walking of project approvals and a \$5-6 billion shortfall rolled into this year. With this administration again trying the same tactic, the problem has compounded to a \$10-12 billion issue. Hanson explained that NEMA will continue to emphasize the issue to Congress and push for DRF funds above the FY26 level to hopefully free up these delayed projects.

Hanson then provided an update on the *FEMA Act*, introduced by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. The bill has cleared the committee and is awaiting floor action, and a NEMA-developed summary was sent to all directors. Hanson explained that, as an association, NEMA did not necessarily provide a full-throated endorsement of the bill, but did applaud the committee's efforts. Many directors wanted to maintain some negotiating space to see what the FEMA Review Council recommends. He noted that the future of the bill is unclear. It's currently awaiting a financial score by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). Depending on the CBO's cost estimate, it could prevent House floor action or consideration in the Senate.

**A Discussion on Congressional Jurisdiction**

Hanson then transitioned to a briefing about the future of FEMA reform efforts, noting that the relationship between the FEMA Review Council recommendations, executive action, and legislative reform must be discussed through the lens of congressional jurisdiction. He introduced Natalie Enclade from BuildStrong America to discuss recent research into this issue to help educate the FEMA Review Council and the broader emergency management community.

Enclade explained that the bottleneck for FEMA reform is Congress' structure and how FEMA's authority has been given to the agency. BuildStrong America has been conducting research into this topic and will be issuing a paper in the next few weeks. In their research, BuildStrong

America has been examining how Congressional fragmentation affects FEMA reform efforts and mapping how divided oversight leads to delayed reforms and diluted accountability. Enclade emphasized that robust FEMA reform requires more than just changes to the *Stafford Act*—many other authorities exist.

Enclade highlighted how BuildStrong America mapped each FEMA authority against each corresponding committee. She found that FEMA oversight is more fragmented than nearly any civilian agency with 42 Congressional oversight entities at play. As a result, any substantial reforms will move slowly.

She explained that one of the main criticisms of the *FEMA Act* is that it only focuses on the *Stafford Act*. This is because it was primarily drafted to stay within the jurisdiction of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and avoid referrals to other committees. It was ultimately also referred to the House Homeland Security Committee because of the provision pulling FEMA out of DHS.

Enclade noted that she's spoken to the FEMA Review Council about the issue of Congressional jurisdiction as they develop their recommendations for FEMA reform. She also stated that BuildStrong America is recommending the establishment of a Select Committee on Disasters. FEMA is huge political power in Congressional jurisdictions and Enclade hopes BuildStrong America's research and recommendations will spark bipartisan dialogue about Congressional modernization for disaster management and position this initiative as a part of a next-generation FEMA agenda linking oversight reform with resilience policy and resource strategy.

### **Roundtable Discussion with Local Partners**

Legislative Committee Vice Chair, Darin Hanson, then transitioned to the next topic, stating that IAEM is one of NEMA's closest partners in DC on legislative efforts. While the NEMA Forum included many discussions about the impact of changes to FEMA to state-level emergency management, he noted that local partners are struggling to make sense of what happens next as well. Hanson then introduced IAEM President, Carrie Speranza, to share that local perspective and explain how they are viewing the coming changes at IAEM.

Speranza began by emphasizing that there's no one on the FEMA Review Council that addresses the local perspective, noting that it is "deflating" and makes locals feel undervalued. While there are many states that feel less informed than they'd like about the coming recommendation, the locals know even less. She noted that the uncertainty among IAEM's members feels "dire" and many conversations about the future of emergency management include a tone of "panic." As a result, Speranza noted that she's spent the last year focusing on sharing information, and NEMA has been a fantastic partner in these efforts. She also viewed the past year as a year of teaching locals how to advocate for themselves and speak with one voice.

She issued a call to action to the states, urging them to share new information with the locals as soon as the states receive it. Not sharing information hurts the locals, as they need to start getting

creative with funding sources, but will need advanced warning to do so. Speranza noted that her biggest fear from the FEMA Review Council is that the locals are going to have to change direction with little warning—a recipe for failure that won't result in more investment.

## **FEMA Reform and EMAC 2.0**

Hanson then introduced the final topic by explaining that the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee engaged with NEMA to better understand what reforms may be needed for EMAC. He noted that this conversation aligned with conversations NEMA has been having to envision a “Next Generation EMAC,” and he then introduced Trina Sheets, NEMA Executive Director, to share some preliminary visions for what a future, enhanced EMAC could look like.

Sheets explained that the EMAC Committee, Executive Task Force, and NEMA's staff have brainstormed several initiatives that would help to evolve and grow EMAC. She emphasized several activities that are either currently underway or are being considered. These initiatives include the following:

- **Intrastate mutual aid legislation to leverage EMAC within the states.** The authority to deploy local resources through EMAC varies among the states—ranging from MOUs and policy to legislation—and many of them are specific to certain disciplines. It may be beneficial to look at a more “umbrella” approach and seek out opportunities for states to update their authorities to make the process quicker and more efficient. Eighteen years ago, NEMA developed a model interstate mutual aid agreement, and many states used that template to develop their own. NEMA plans to update the model agreement and make that available to the states.
- **Develop a new EMAC reimbursement, submission, review, and tracking system.** Reimbursement processes and systems vary between states, and a lot of them are manual and slow. The mutual aid packages that are submitted often require multiple requests for information before payment can be issued, and that delays reimbursement. As demand for EMAC continues to grow, we must fix the reimbursement challenges. To address this, NEMA has considered developing a modern reimbursement system that provides transparency, consistency, and accountability. Among the proposed features, this system would allow resource providers to upload their reimbursement packages (e.g., receipts, payroll, documentation, images, policies). States could then provide real-time feedback to the local resources providers as they upload their packages into the system. It'll allow you to see in real time where packages are where things are in the reimbursement process so that you better understand the timelines for reimbursement.
- **Standardized reimbursement guidance between states.** EMAC provides minimum requirements for reimbursement and over time, states have been adding more requirements on top of those minimums that were previously agreed upon. This results in significant complexity and delays in reimbursement. We would like to have a conversation about standardizing requirements around things like per diem, mileage, and equipment rates. This would require agreement by all states but would reduce questions and concerns between states and make EMAC faster.

- **Develop an MOU for volunteer agencies to deploy through EMAC.** Volunteer agencies are a critical part of the response capability in many states, but under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), there are strict limitations on how volunteers can be compensated without losing their volunteer status. This can create barriers for them to deploy through EMAC. NEMA is considering whether to work with an outside legal expert who has expertise in the FLSA to help develop an MOU that we know meets those requirements, that we can share with the states.
- **EMAC funds to pay resource providers.** One of the most significant issues with reimbursement is the length of time that resource providers must wait to get reimbursed after they return from deployment. This places financial burdens on them—especially those small local governments that lack the cash flow to wait for reimbursement. This can discourage some of those locals that really want to deploy but cannot because they are unable to carry that financial burden. There are a few states that have set aside funds that allow them to pay their resource providers prior to being reimbursed by the requesting state, and view this as a model practice. NEMA encourages all states to try to pursue such a funding strategy for EMAC deployments. NEMA could assist by providing justifications for the states, examples of how the process works, and explanations for how this will help build EMAC capability, both in the state and across the nation.