



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

LEGISLATIVE ISSUE BRIEF

THE VOICE OF THE NATION'S REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

HOMELAND SECURITY PLANNING AND PREPAREDNESS

FEDERAL INCENTIVES AND RESOURCES NEEDED TO PROMOTE REGIONAL COORDINATION, PREPAREDNESS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Issue: The members of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) encourage Congress and the administration to adopt stronger federal policies for a regional approach to homeland security and emergency management prevention, preparation and recovery efforts at the sub-state and local levels. The need for improved partnerships, planning and collaboration at the statewide, regional and local levels becomes especially important as future federal grant support will hinge on the ability of state and local governments to comply with a new and extensive set of preparedness and response benchmarks.

Specifically, Congress and the administration should establish clear incentives and guidelines that encourage the use of regional development organizations* to bring public and private stakeholders together to develop, coordinate and implement homeland security and emergency management prevention, preparation, protection and recovery efforts.

Background: A common mission of federal policy makers, state officials and local government leaders is to improve the nation's preparedness, prevention, response and recovery capacity for catastrophic events. By working through the national network of 520 regional development organizations, state and local governments can establish a more effective, accountable and cost-effective framework to prepare our nation's communities. These multi-jurisdictional entities can help assess and prioritize equipment needs and assets, coordinate the integration of first responder communication systems, and most importantly, foster inter-jurisdictional cooperation and partnerships within a region and state.

NADO has identified twelve states that have already established formal contracts or agreements with regional development organizations to perform homeland security services and tasks, including providing technical assistance to local government officials and first responders. In addition, 29 states maintain contracts with regional development organizations to perform traditional emergency management activities, such as hazard mitigation planning and flood map modernization efforts.

When a disaster strikes, effective preparation, coordination and communication among response entities from all levels of government is essential for successful response and recovery. As proven in states such as Texas, Kentucky, Missouri, Massachusetts and Florida, regional development organizations are uniquely qualified to help coordinate and assist public and private stakeholders involved in planning and implementing our nation's homeland security and emergency management programs.

* *Regional Development Organization* is a term used to describe the national network of 520 regional planning and development organizations. These entities are also known as regional councils of governments, regional planning commissions, planning and development districts, area development districts, regional development commissions, local development districts and economic development districts, among other similar names.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS
LEGISLATIVE ISSUE BRIEF: HOMELAND SECURITY AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

In recent years, Congress and the administration have made modest steps toward enhancing regional emergency management coordination by encouraging the use of regional development organizations at the sub-state and local levels. While these federal guidelines and congressional report language provisions have been helpful and made an impact in some cases, there remains an immediate need for stronger federal incentives and requirements.

In May 2006, legislation (HR 5351) enacted to strengthen the structure of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) places a high priority on promoting regional approaches to emergency preparedness and mitigation and specifically identifies regional development organizations as key stakeholders in planning and preparedness activities. This language was furthered with the passage of first responder reform legislation (HR 1) in August 2007 that explicitly recognizes the network of multi-jurisdictional planning organizations as an experienced mechanism that should be utilized in the homeland security grant-making process.

The need for enhanced incentives for regional coordination and harnessing the unique strengths of regional development organizations will become especially important as future homeland security and emergency management grant assistance hinges on the ability of state and local governments to comply with a new set of federal guidelines and benchmarks.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recently published a number of tools designed to organize and synchronize national preparedness and response efforts. The National Preparedness Guidelines, National Response Framework, Target Capabilities List and National Incident Management System establish the federal, state and local roles, responsibilities and capabilities required to successfully prepare for, respond to and recover from any emergency (man-made or natural). Local communities that do not align their emergency preparedness and response systems to these plans will be ineligible for future grant awards or technical assistance from DHS.

Although these tools provide important preparedness, planning and response guidelines for state and local governments, many small and rural communities simply lack the staff capacity, organizational expertise and financial resources necessary to comply with and navigate this exhaustive set of new criteria. By working regionally, communities of all sizes can overcome these barriers.

While Congress and the administration have made modest steps toward enhancing regional emergency management coordination, stronger federal policies are needed to encourage state and local collaboration and partnerships with regional development organizations.

Action Needed: Encourage members of Congress and the administration to adopt stronger policies and programs that promote and reward the implementation of regional approaches – including tapping into the planning, regional and intergovernmental coordination, and grant management and administration expertise of the nation’s regional development organizations – in the development, coordination and implementation of homeland security and emergency management efforts at the state and local levels.

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