

Alabama Emergency Management Agency: Strategic Plan

Directors Message:

Director: Jeff Smitherman

I am immensely proud and humbled to serve as the Director of such a dedicated and resilient team at the Alabama Emergency Management Agency (AEMA). Our employees and their actions continue to embody the very essence of resilience. Our state partners have defined resilience as “the capacity of Alabama individuals, communities, businesses, and systems to anticipate, prepare for, adapt to, and rapidly recover from adverse events,” and that is what we do!

AEMA will collaborate with other agencies and stakeholders to build a resilient Alabama. True partnerships will be the cornerstone of our resilience, working together to implement governance structures for our shared goals to ensure long-term success. We will continue to develop a comprehensive, statewide resilience strategy that encompasses all aspects of preparedness, hazard mitigation, emergency response, and disaster recovery. For Alabama to thrive, we must leverage the social, political, and financial resources of all those who share a vested interest in seeing our state remain strong for decades to come.

Alabama consistently exceeds expectations in emergency management’s response, recovery, and preparedness cycles. Although Alabama is 24th in the nation in population, it ranks 7th for major disaster declarations. The AEMA and its state partners continue to meet these challenges with remarkable energy and resilience.

Our agency’s strength is rooted in our unwavering dedication to understanding the “why” behind our actions. This clarity drives us to determine the most effective “how” in executing our mission. As Director, I have tirelessly worked to enhance the resources and capabilities of AEMA and the State of Alabama, ultimately benefiting the citizens we serve.

Executing the “how” requires a professional dedicated team. As I’ve often said, “Our most valuable resource is our people.”

We continually strive to surpass our team’s expectations. Completing a multi-million-dollar renovation of our building to significantly enhance work areas and provide our employees with the innovative technologies they need to support our critical mission was just the beginning. We are investing in our team by offering a targeted leadership curriculum to our mid-level managers, helping them develop the skills necessary to excel and grow in a complex operational environment.

As we prepare for future challenges, we must learn from past lessons. Our limited capacity to conduct proactive missions and manage response and early recovery operations across the state increases the risk of delayed assistance, particularly during complex, multi-jurisdictional events. We have successfully secured funding for the agency’s first Mobile Command Vehicle (MCV) to address this limitation! The MCV will enable a rapid, well-coordinated, and synchronized state response to all hazards impacting Alabama without straining already disrupted and limited resources in affected areas. The platform is projected to be available by mid-hurricane season 2025.

Our guiding principles, known as our core values, are at the heart of our agency. These values articulate the fundamental beliefs and purpose we are committed to embodying. They will serve as our internal compass, guiding our decisions and actions.

Finally, I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the AEMA team and all our federal, state, tribal, local, and private partners for their tremendous effort over the past year in developing this plan. Your unwavering commitment has ensured that we remain laser-focused on the “why,” enabling us to meet the future needs of Alabama’s great citizens. Let us never forget our “why” as we work together to create and foster a resilient Alabama!

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Why a Strategic Plan?

Strategic planning is an important tool for any organization. It assists both management and staff to focus on what matters most, use resources wisely, and meet the needs of the State of Alabama in an organized way. A strong strategic plan acts like a roadmap. It helps the organization make decisions for both the short-term and long-term, ensuring actions align with the needs of the residents of Alabama.

One major benefit of having this strategic plan is that it will guide the Alabama Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) into the future. This plan allows AEMA to handle the challenges that result from critical incidents and disasters and capitalize on the opportunities created by the growth throughout the State. As the State of Alabama continues to evolve, this plan will help make sure the right investments are made in the right places, and the agency is prepared to both maintain and restore Alabama's high quality of life.

The objectives in this plan are to help monitor progress, allowing the AEMA to stay accountable and flexible as the plan is implemented over the next five years. Having a plan also promotes transparency and stakeholder involvement. By including employees and stakeholders in the planning process through surveys and conversation, AEMA knows what its partners want to see in the future. Both internal and external input will be a vital and ongoing part of the plan implementation as well.

How Did We Arrive At This Plan?

AEMA personnel participated in a three-day workshop from December 3 to December 5, 2024. During that workshop, the team worked collaboratively to look within and develop a picture of where the agency is today, and where it wants to be tomorrow. Participants also reviewed survey results from stakeholders to develop an understanding of where it stands with those it serves and partners with. With this information, AEMA developed a mission and vision statement and several strategic themes and goals to focus on during the next five years.

What's Next?

The State of Alabama has high standards, its residents enjoy a great quality of life and want to keep it that way. The plan's five-year timeline provides a roadmap for AEMA to achieve its vision, "To be respected and trusted by all Alabamians, our staff, emergency management partners, the State, and our national peers, as an active, industry-leading organization that consistently exceeds expectations and positively contributes to the efficient management of, and resilient recovery from, critical incidents and disasters." With this strategic plan, AEMA has developed specific, measurable action items related to each goal and objective to successfully complete their plan.

Summary of Plan

Our Mission

To lead coordination, guide, and assist our emergency management partners to plan, respond, and recover from critical incidents and disasters, in order to promote community safety and to build a more resilient Alabama.

Our Vision

To be respected and trusted by all Alabamians, our staff, emergency management partners, the State, and our national peers, as an active, industry-leading organization that consistently exceeds expectations and positively contributes to the efficient management of, and resilient recovery from, critical incidents and disasters.

Our Core Values

Integrity, Compassion, Responsiveness, Commitment to Others

Strategic Themes

Service, Resources, and Incident Support

Organizational Culture

Training and Preparation

Communication

Service, Resources, and Incident Support

AEMA serves our stakeholders by being solution-focused, leading state and federal programs, promoting resiliency, being responsible with financial and material resources that are entrusted to us, and ensuring that we are compliant with state and federal regulations utilized to implement response and recovering programs.

GOAL 1: Establish and maintain internal systems and processes to help ensure resources are managed effectively and operations comply with state and federal regulations.

OBJECTIVES

1. Evaluate and maintain internal systems and processes annually for effectiveness and compliance. Conduct evaluations more often than annually, if required for compliance with state and federal regulations.
2. Review resource and operational data collection to determine if additional information should be added to the data collection process and connect all data collected, currently and in the future, to the Strategic Plan goals.
3. Engage and train agency personnel on current electronic data platforms by the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2025. Continue to pursue new technologies and processes to create efficiencies in collecting and managing operational data.

GOAL 2: Develop subject-matter expertise in all levels of emergency management to lead and engage stakeholders in an effort to provide solution-oriented services.

OBJECTIVES

1. Finalize the role/position and task analysis for initial AEMA positions that are aligned with the National Qualification System (NQS) by the end of calendar year (CY) 2025.
2. Identify training requirements and training options for each NQS role/position by the end of calendar year CY 2025.
3. Create an NQS position recruiting process by the second quarter of FY 2026, to identify potential agency personnel for enrollment into position-specific training to create personnel depth across identified skill positions.

GOAL 3: Establish a process and pattern of carefully identifying financial and resource needs that are compliant, align with output expectations, and create a monitoring process to establish the efficient use of resources before, during, and after an incident.

OBJECTIVES

1. Design and implement a system to monitor and measure the utilization of resources and funds throughout all phases of an incident by the end of CY 2025. This system will help ensure alignment with financial and operational

expectations, assess efficiency, and facilitate data-driven planning. It will also establish standardized benchmarks for optimal resource allocation based on incident-specific characteristics, such as scale, debris removal demands, geographic scope, and affected population size.

2. Develop a process by the end of CY 2025 to conduct engagement outreach with elected officials and stakeholders to increase awareness about financial and resource management. This makes AEMA and the State of Alabama compliant and aligned with output expectations.
3. Conduct solution-oriented (applied) table-top exercises on efficient use of resources before, during, and after an incident by FY 2027. Participants should include a variety of AEMA roles/positions and external stakeholders who would benefit from this exercise.

Organizational Culture

To build a supportive environment of a highly trained group of professionals who are innovative, resilient, and outcome-oriented. We strive to encourage a healthy, well-balanced, people-focused atmosphere that consistently benefits all employees, stakeholders, and partners.

GOAL 1: Build a trained, educated, experienced, well-informed, well-led, and highly competent team.

OBJECTIVES

1. Continue to enhance workforce expertise through structured professional development, cross-training initiatives, and forward-thinking strategies.
2. Continue to cultivate a forward-thinking, outcome-oriented culture.
3. Continue to enhance team effectiveness and responsiveness through a robust knowledge-sharing and communication system.

GOAL 2: Cultivate a people-focused environment that is valued by those both internal and external to our organization.

OBJECTIVES

1. Develop a comprehensive appreciation program for both internal and external team members, highlighting specific achievements that contribute to the overall Emergency Management program within six months.
2. Foster a people-focused and supportive work environment that promotes teamwork, wellness, and innovation, while addressing employee needs (one year to implement and execute annually).
3. Develop an external appreciation program (six months to implement and execute annually).

GOAL 3: Ensure that our leaders and team have the tools to empower them internally and externally to achieve our mission and vision.

OBJECTIVES

1. Continue to enhance access to resources and technology to help ensure proficiency, accountability, and resilience in achieving organizational goals.
2. Continue to strengthen operational efficiency and resilience by equipping the team with the necessary tools, professional development opportunities, and innovative practices.
3. Continue to strengthen collaboration and stakeholder engagement.

Training and Preparation

Cultivate an environment of competent, effective, and skills-based trained emergency managers. These managers will meet certification and credentialing standards that execute all hazards-based planning, training, and exercise programs, in order to continue fostering a culture of community preparedness for all Alabamians.

GOAL 1: Develop an internal comprehensive onboarding training and personal development training plan that carries employees throughout their career.

OBJECTIVES

1. Develop an onboarding training program within one year and reassess annually.
2. Develop a personal development framework for our team members within one year, which will carry them throughout their careers, and reassess annually.
3. Implement a Learning Management System (LMS) to offer and track training by the end of calendar year CY 2025.

GOAL 2: Create a comprehensive communication strategy to inform emergency managers of the expected certification and credentialing standards and provide training opportunities and experiences to meet that need.

OBJECTIVES

1. Consistently inform emergency managers of current required training and certification opportunities on a weekly basis.
2. Synchronize the training and exercise needs with the training needs assessment on an annual basis. Leverage the training needs assessment output.
3. Continually identify and provide professional growth opportunities to emergency managers.

GOAL 3: Build a comprehensive strategy to foster a culture of preparedness for leaders of state-held organizations, communities, and individuals for a resilient Alabama.

OBJECTIVES

1. Develop a consistent approach to provide training to leadership of all stakeholder organizations related to preparedness functions, in order to create resiliency within one year, and reassess annually.
2. Develop and refine the strategies needed for the delivery of outreach campaigns to various communities on preparedness annually.
3. Continually educate individuals on how to be more prepared with alert notification systems, what to do in common local disasters, and how the recovery process works after a disaster impact.

Communication

Alabama EMA fosters effective communication with all stakeholders by nurturing relationships, utilizing innovative technology, and enhancing connections to all partners to achieve a mutual understanding of the agency's missions, goals, and objectives.

GOAL 1: Enhance communication efforts with elected officials to cultivate a collaborative effort, create a mutual understanding of the agency's mission, and support its needs.

OBJECTIVES

1. Create a deliberate outreach program designed specifically for elected officials by October of 2025.
2. Institute a mechanism to collect and analyze data to create reports showing agency impact in jurisdictional boundaries in the next 18 months.
3. Create an internal program to promote agency efforts to resource local jurisdictions in the next nine months.

GOAL 2: Research and implement emergent technologies to enhance agency systems and processes.

OBJECTIVES

1. Create and distribute an agency technology survey to evaluate current statewide technology platforms in the next three months.
2. Evaluate internal technology systems to assess for duplication, overlap, and redundancy within the next 12 months.
3. Update the communication and technology infrastructure to enhance capabilities and processes. This objective is ongoing, considering technology continues to advance.

GOAL 3: Encourage consistent communication with all stakeholders to promote interorganizational collaboration and outcomes before, during, and after disasters.

OBJECTIVES

1. Conduct and participate in regularly scheduled meetings to cultivate relationships and obtain a mutual understanding of available resources.
2. Continue to establish standards, preprepared content, and customizable templates for consistent messaging, a more trusted social media presence, the use of simple terminology, and outreach content for the understanding of processes; increase inclusiveness in the communication network with partners and stakeholders, including the public.
3. Continue to increase partner, stakeholder, and public awareness of the emergency management mission and role in disaster management, emphasizing

collaboration and stakeholder engagement to include volunteer organizations, non-governmental organizations, governmental agencies not traditionally part of disaster management, and the private sector.

GOAL 4: Establish lines of communication and cultivate relationships with new stakeholders to promote resiliency and share success stories.

OBJECTIVES

1. Continue to grow the collaboration network of community partners and stakeholders with capabilities and capacities that can be used in collaboration with AEMA and local Emergency Managers (EMs).
2. Continue to enhance the communication plan with all community partners and stakeholders, including planning, training, how to ask questions, and risk/crisis information.
3. Continue to increase awareness of unmet partner needs in disaster management and develop a process by the end of the calendar year CY 2025 to address those unmet needs.