

Strategic Plan 2022 - 2026



Cook County
Department of Emergency
Management and Regional Security

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Foreword

As Cook County emerges from what everyone hopes are the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that our Department takes stock of its experiences with an eye towards improving the services we provide to Cook County government, its municipalities and residents. Our goal as an emergency management agency is simple – work with our partners to ensure that they are prepared for the next disaster – be it natural or human-caused.

Historically, The Cook County Department of Emergency Management and Regional Security (EMRS) has worked within Cook County Government and with both local governments and first responders (police/fire) to support their ability to respond to and recover from critical incidents. This focus is consistent with our role in coordinating the County's response to disasters and emergencies.

The pandemic has presented unique challenges with its enormous geographic and societal impact. The breadth of its effects served not only to mobilize an unprecedented County response but also to highlight an uncomfortable reality: certain aspects of our County are disproportionately impacted by disasters and emergencies due to pre-existing racial and socio-economic injustices. Throughout the pandemic, EMRS adapted its response efforts to ensure that equity considerations drove decision-making and resource and support allocations.

Ever the optimist, I strive to find the opportunities in challenging situations. What good, one might ask, could come out of a global pandemic? It has highlighted the benefits of expanding EMRS' focus beyond municipal and public safety partners to include the whole community. If we are to achieve the most good, we must nurture and support partnerships throughout our County's diverse communities to include disproportionately impacted, hard-to-reach and access and functional needs populations, among others. Emergency management is, therefore, committed to considering equity, inclusion, and collaboration in all of our preparedness, response and recovery activities. This strategic plan reinforces that commitment with its three overarching goals:

First, EMRS is committed to building a culture of preparedness throughout Cook County. This work will include an intentional focus on equity and reaching communities and populations more likely to experience disproportionate impacts from disasters.

Second, EMRS is committed to strategically increasing its external engagement. This doesn't necessarily mean putting out more information. Rather, it means being more thoughtful about our audiences and leveraging trusted community stakeholders to craft and disseminate our messaging.

Third, EMRS seeks to support its commitment to the whole community by ensuring that the County's emergency management program continues to refine and strengthen its capabilities. This means reinforcing our current response and planning strengths while building preparedness capabilities, seeking Emergency Management Accreditation Program accreditation and ensuring that County staff has the training it needs to respond to the next emergency.

While ambitious, these goals are within reach given a committed EMRS staff, supportive County leadership and the experiences of a pandemic response fresh in the minds of all involved. I am truly excited to undertake this journey as it builds towards a prepared and resilient Cook County.



William Barnes
Executive Director, Cook County EMRS

Executive Summary

The Cook County Department of Emergency Management and Regional Security will pursue the following goals and objectives from 2022-2026:

Goal 1: Build a Culture of Preparedness in Cook County

Objective 1.1: Assist Cook County municipalities in preparing high-quality emergency operations, continuity of operations, continuity of government and recovery plans.

Objective 1.2: Deliver emergency preparedness and planning training to bureaus, Offices Under the President and separately elected offices.

Objective 1.3: Support implementation of the Cook County Hazard Mitigation Plan by building municipal capacity to prioritize and fund hazard mitigation projects.

Objective 1.4: Help individuals, households and community-based organizations prepare for disasters.

Objective 1.5: Increase technical assistance to County partners seeking FEMA preparedness and mitigation grant funding.

Goal 2: Strengthen EMRS Organizational Excellence

Objective 2.1: Work toward obtaining professional organizational accreditation via the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP).

Objective 2.2: Establish a training and credentialing program for EMRS employees.

Objective 2.3: Conduct a thorough review of internal EMRS policies and procedures and both formalize and regularly update EMRS tactical procedures.

Objective 2.4: Thoughtfully invest in and implement technological solutions to strengthen regional information sharing and response capabilities.

Objective 2.5: Enhance EMRS regional critical incident response capabilities to ensure operational readiness.

Goal 3: Strategically Increase External Engagement

Objective 3.1: Develop and implement a communications plan to support and educate stakeholders on EMRS' mission, initiatives and programs that also focuses on resident preparedness.

Objective 3.2: Leverage private sector partnerships to build greater regional resilience.

Objective 3.3: Establish regular stakeholder engagement sessions with representatives from the Whole Community.

Objective 3.4: Ensure that EMRS grants Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) to a broad selection of County stakeholders, particularly those in communities with less resources.

Introduction

The Cook County Department of Emergency Management and Regional Security (EMRS) serves diverse populations and communities as Cook County's mandated emergency management agency. The EMRS 2022-2026 Strategic Plan will guide the Department's path forward over the next five years. The Strategic Plan incorporates lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic response, particularly regarding the importance of collaboration and building trusting relationships with both internal and external partners.

Emergencies and disasters are continuously evolving as environmental conditions change. Furthermore, the County's most vulnerable residents continue to experience disproportionate impacts from disasters. EMRS must remain adaptive to the changing risk environment and ensure that equity is integrated across EMRS' operations and guiding principles of innovation, integrity, transparency, accountability, fiscal responsibility and collaboration.

**Who
We
Serve**

135
Municipalities

30
Townships

5.3
Million
Residents

What We Do

EMRS serves 5.3 million Cook County residents including 135 municipalities and supports other County government offices in emergency planning, preparedness, response and recovery.

Vision

A prepared and resilient Cook County.

Mission

The Cook County Department of Emergency Management and Regional Security enhances the safety and security of Cook County and its residents by working to build capacity to prevent, protect against, mitigate the effects of, respond to and recover from all incidents, both human-caused and natural.

Key Functions

EMRS coordinates the County's response to disasters and emergencies with a focus on equity, inclusion and collaboration. EMRS works closely with other Cook County departments, bureaus, and Offices Under the President to ensure a complete government response to any incident that exceeds local capabilities. EMRS partners with the County's 135 local municipalities to strengthen their emergency management capabilities and supports the County's 5.3 million residents in becoming more disaster resilient.

EMRS is responsible for the following key functions before, during and after disasters:

Administration - EMRS works to hire and retain experienced emergency management professionals and to create a safe and supportive working environment. EMRS regularly reviews and updates internal policies and procedures to ensure professional and efficient operations.

Finance – During and after disasters, EMRS leverages available funding to support response and recovery efforts as appropriate. Additionally, EMRS receives, invests and distributes essential homeland security, justice assistance and emergency management-related grant funds. These funds help strengthen regional preparedness and build local emergency management capacity.

Operations – EMRS monitors potential hazards and threats to Cook County municipalities and residents and maintains a high standard of readiness to assist municipalities during a disaster or emergency. EMRS manages and deploys assets and personnel to assist municipalities in disaster response and recovery activities as requested. Additionally, EMRS leverages its technological investments to promote information sharing, situational awareness and mass communications before, during and after disasters.

Planning & Preparedness – EMRS works to develop high-quality planning products, such as emergency operations, continuity of operations, hazard mitigation and recovery plans. EMRS provides guidance and training to internal government and municipal partners in developing emergency management plans. Furthermore, EMRS enables residents and community-based organizations to be better prepared for disasters and emergencies.

Training – EMRS conducts critical training programs throughout the year to equip public safety partners in County government and in suburban communities with the skills and tools needed to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters.

EMRS Strategic Planning

The EMRS 2022-2026 Strategic Plan was developed in collaboration with both internal and external partners. While EMRS staff provided input to the Strategic Plan, lessons learned from emergencies and disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic, were also incorporated into the plan. EMRS conducted a series of three engagement sessions with external partners to solicit input on the Strategic Plan. Cook County's Public Safety Consortium and Board of Commissioners also reviewed the Strategic Plan and had the opportunity to provide feedback.

The EMRS 2022-2026 Strategic Plan contains three overarching goals and associated objectives to be achieved over a five-year period. A separate annual workplan document will be used to guide plan implementation and track milestones aligned to Strategic Plan goals and objectives. EMRS executive leadership will guide an annual evaluation to measure progress toward meeting Strategic Plan goals, objectives and milestones. If revisions must be made to the Strategic Plan outside of the five-year cycle, they will be made during the annual evaluation period. In year four of the five-year strategic planning cycle, EMRS executive leadership will guide a full review and revision of the Strategic Plan with input from internal and external stakeholders. The resulting final product will guide EMRS programs and responsibilities over the next five years.

Goal 1: Build a Culture of Preparedness in Cook County

Goal 1 acknowledges the foundational importance of preparedness in improving post-disaster outcomes. Communities that develop and adopt high-quality emergency plans, invest in sustainable infrastructure and prepare their populations for disasters will reduce human suffering and economic losses when disasters inevitably occur. EMRS will work to build a culture of preparedness in Cook County via planning efforts, hazard mitigation projects, preparedness education and outreach initiatives as well as providing preparedness training to both municipalities and internal County stakeholders. This work will include an intentional focus on equity to reach communities and populations more likely to experience disproportionate impacts from disasters.

Objective 1.1: Assist Cook County municipalities in preparing high-quality emergency operations, continuity of operations (COOP), continuity of government (COG) and recovery plans.

EMRS will support municipalities in developing high-quality emergency plans to enhance operational readiness. By providing planning templates, training and technical assistance to municipalities, EMRS will help build local governments' capacity to respond and recover from disasters.

Objective 1.2: Deliver emergency preparedness and planning training to bureaus, Offices Under the President and separately elected offices.

A resilient and prepared Cook County requires that stakeholders fully appreciate and understand their respective emergency management roles. EMRS will provide training to enable effective County-wide disaster responses.

Objective 1.3: Support implementation of the Cook County Hazard Mitigation Plan by building municipal capacity to prioritize and fund hazard mitigation projects.

EMRS will operationalize the Cook County Hazard Mitigation Plan by facilitating a continued dialogue around ways to prioritize and fund hazard mitigation projects. These efforts will include increasing regional collaboration and providing technical assistance to less resourced communities interested in taking mitigation actions.

Objective 1.4: Help individuals, households and community-based organizations prepare for disasters.

EMRS will help equip individuals, households and community-based organizations with the information and tools needed to prepare for disasters. This work will prioritize disproportionately impacted populations such as minority communities, older adults, children and youth, low-income residents and individuals with access and functional needs.

Objective 1.5: Increase technical assistance to County partners seeking FEMA preparedness and mitigation grant funding.

Accessing federal grant dollars can be cumbersome for local communities, particularly those that are less resourced. EMRS will increase technical assistance to County partners seeking federal preparedness and mitigation grant funding.

Goal 2: Strengthen EMRS Organizational Excellence

EMRS will leverage its existing operational strengths to pursue organizational excellence and position itself as a regional and national leader in emergency management. EMRS will seek emergency management accreditation, update internal policies and procedures and ensure that employees are appropriately trained and credentialed. Furthermore, EMRS will continue to refine its investment in response capabilities to ensure efficient responses to regional needs.

Objective 2.1: Work toward obtaining professional organizational accreditation via the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP).

EMRS will begin the process of obtaining professional organizational accreditation through the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP). The EMAP requirements provide an industry-accepted standard which will guide the EMRS pursuit of organizational excellence over the next five years.

Objective 2.2: Establish a training and credentialing program for EMRS employees.

Strengthening organizational excellence requires a prepared and trained workforce. EMRS will evaluate its mandatory training policy and ensure that all EMRS employees receive appropriate training, are afforded the ability to pursue industry-specific certifications/professional development opportunities and are best positioned to fulfill the EMRS mission.

Objective 2.3: Conduct a thorough review of internal EMRS policies and procedures and both formalize and regularly update EMRS tactical procedures.

EMRS will establish a policy review process to review, revise and regularly update internal policies and procedures. EMRS will also conduct a gap analysis to help identify and address functional areas in need of formalized tactical procedures.

Objective 2.4: Thoughtfully invest in and implement technological solutions to strengthen regional information sharing and response capabilities.

EMRS will continue investing in information sharing platforms to augment communications with municipalities and County residents. Additionally, EMRS will further implement an inventory management system to ensure accuracy and accountability in asset management.

Objective 2.5: Enhance EMRS regional critical incident response capabilities to ensure operational readiness.

EMRS will improve efficiencies in the availability of deployable technology, assets and resources as well as implement a thoughtful strategy for asset replacement and procurement.

Goal 3: Strategically Increase External Engagement

As the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated, responding to large-scale disasters requires substantial collaboration between government departments and entities, private industry, non-profit organizations and residents themselves. EMRS will prioritize the establishment of trusting and mutually beneficial partnerships with external stakeholders, including non-traditional emergency management partners such as community-based organizations. In doing so, EMRS can more effectively understand and respond to unique community needs in an equitable and inclusive manner.

Objective 3.1: Develop and implement a communications plan to support and educate stakeholders on EMRS mission, initiatives and programs that also focuses on resident preparedness.

EMRS will strengthen efforts to communicate its mission, initiatives and programs. Additionally, EMRS will leverage strategic partnerships to spread preparedness messaging to County residents.

Objective 3.2: Leverage private sector partnerships to build greater regional resilience.

EMRS will work with private sector partners to protect critical infrastructure and key resources, augment response capability and deliver business continuity training.

Objective 3.3: Establish regular stakeholder engagement sessions with representatives from the Whole Community.

EMRS will actively partner with representatives from the Whole Community to strengthen relationships and improve functional operations. EMRS will prioritize partnerships with disproportionately impacted populations to foster greater community resilience.

Objective 3.4: Ensure that EMRS grants Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) to a broad selection of County stakeholders, particularly those in communities with less resources.

EMRS will work to ensure that funding opportunities are made available to communities in an equitable manner. EMRS will employ deliberate measures to reach less resourced communities with NOFO information.

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