

2025-2028

Chatham EMA Strategic Plan



Chatham Emergency Management Agency
124 Bull Street, Room 140
Savannah, Georgia 31404
(912) 201-4500



*Chatham Emergency Management Agency
2025-2028 Strategic Plan*



THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY BLANK



FOREWORD

Chatham Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) is pleased to present this Strategic Plan for the County's Emergency Management Program. In preparation for a new fiscal year, a retreat was held to review the previous three-year Strategic Plan and establish goals and objectives for the next strategic planning cycle. This planning effort also allowed staff and stakeholders to evaluate and adjust our Vision, Mission and Values which ultimately drive CEMA's activities.

In 2018, CEMA focused on community involvement, applying a "Whole Community" approach to all emergency management program areas. As we look to the future, Whole Community is the backbone in which planning, training and exercise are based.

This Strategic Plan provides a blueprint of how the emergency management program is focused for the next three years. We are excited about the progress made in previous years and anticipate even greater progress in the future. It is with your support that we are able to continue growing and providing great customer service.

Dennis T. Jones
Chatham EMA Director



VISION

An informed, equipped, and prepared Chatham County.

MISSION

Helping people before, during, and after disasters by promoting emergency management preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts.

VALUES

Commitment, Professionalism, Accountability, Dependability



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction.....	5
2.0	What is a Strategic Plan?	6
3.0	Strategic Plan Development.....	7
4.0	Emergency Management Program	8
5.0	Whole Community Emergency Management	10
6.0	Vision	11
7.0	Mission	11
8.0	Values	12
9.0	Goals and Objectives	13
Goal One	Enhance Community Resilience	13
Goal Two	Develop and maintain a state of Operational Readiness.....	14
Goal Three	Ensure reliable Public Safety radio and Warning Systems.....	17
10.0	Overarching Priorities.....	18
11.0	Program Maintenance.....	19



THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY BLANK



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Chatham Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) is committed to safeguarding our community by fostering a people-centered culture that prioritizes preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. Our mission is to help people before, during, and after disasters by promoting emergency management preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts. We recognize that the foundation of emergency management lies in serving the people, and we are dedicated to building a disaster resilient community that can withstand and recover from any crisis.

Preparedness is at the heart of our strategy, ensuring individuals, businesses, and organizations have the knowledge, resources, and plans in place before disaster strikes. Through proactive training, public education, and collaboration with local, state, and federal partners, we strengthen our ability to respond effectively when emergencies arise. When disaster does occur, our response efforts are guided by professionalism, efficiency, and a commitment to saving lives. We work tirelessly to coordinate emergency services, deploy critical resources, and provide clear, timely communication to those affected.

Response is the critical phase where CEMA mobilizes its resources to provide immediate assistance to those in need. Our Agency works closely with first responders, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations to coordinate lifesaving efforts, restore essential services, and maintain public safety. By ensuring effective communication, rapid deployment of resources, and decisive leadership, we help minimize the impact of disasters and provide reassurance to affected communities. A swift, organized, and people-first response saves lives and lays the foundation for successful recovery.

Recovery is essential to restoring normalcy and rebuilding stronger communities. We support residents and businesses in navigating the recovery process, ensuring assistance reaches those in need while fostering long-term resilience. Beyond recovery, our mitigation efforts focus on reducing the impact of future disasters through strategic planning, infrastructure improvements, and risk reduction initiatives. By identifying vulnerabilities and taking proactive steps, we minimize the potential for damage and disruption.

Mitigation is a proactive effort to reduce the impact of future disasters by addressing risks before they result in emergencies. CEMA prioritizes strategic investments in infrastructure improvements, hazard-resistant building practices, and environmental protections to lessen the severity of disasters. By identifying vulnerabilities and implementing long-term risk reduction measures, we enhance the community's ability to withstand storms, floods, and other hazards. A strong mitigation strategy saves lives, protects property, and reduces the financial burden of recovery.



Disaster resilience is the key to our community’s ability to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of adversity. Through strong partnerships, innovation, and an unwavering dedication to serving our residents, CEMA strives to create a safer, more prepared Chatham County. Our Strategic Plan reflects our commitment to a comprehensive, people-first approach to emergency management—ensuring that together, we are ready for whatever challenges the future may bring.

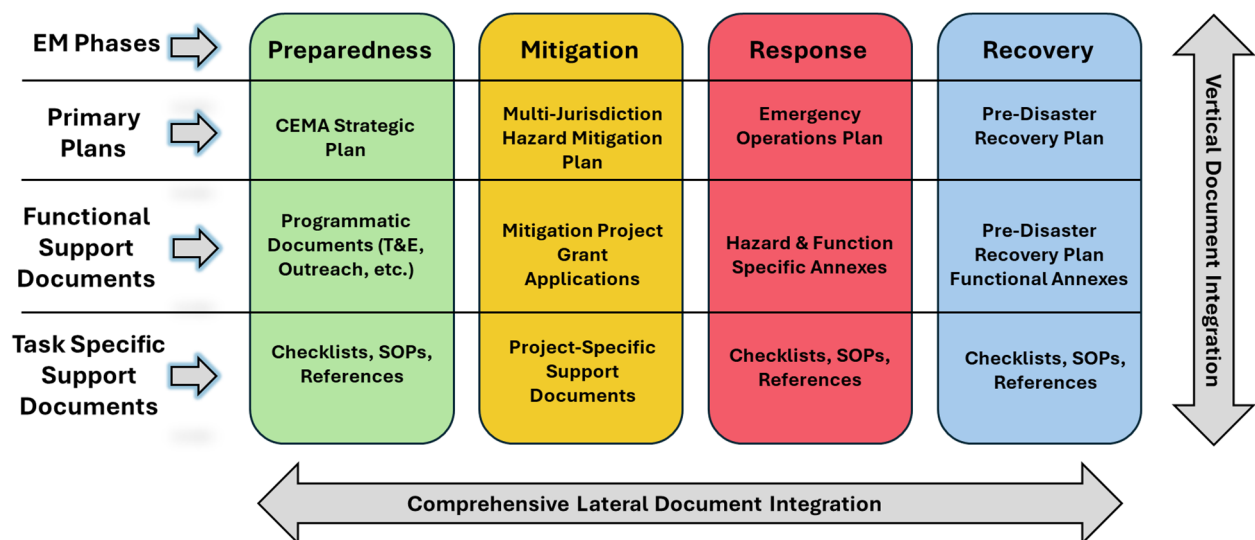
This Plan will help guide CEMA’s activities and the County’s emergency management team to make Chatham County the most disaster resilient community in the State of Georgia.

2.0 WHAT IS A STRATEGIC PLAN?

By definition, a strategic plan aligns an organization and budget structure with organizational priorities, missions and objectives. A strategic plan describes the mission and vision of an organization or unit; the criteria, values or guiding principles; and long-term goals, objectives and strategies.

A strategic plan is not a response plan or an operations plan. Response and operations plans are designed to guide agencies and individuals in the conduct of emergency activities and coordination during an emergency or disaster. This Strategic Plan captures strategic goals and objectives that will help improve emergency preparedness and increase the County’s capabilities for successfully resolving future emergencies and disasters.

The Strategic Plan is one of four primary, foundational Emergency Management Plans. The other three foundational plans are the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, Emergency Operations Plan, and Pre-Disaster Recovery Plan. Each of these plans correspond to one of the four phases of emergency management: Preparedness, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery. The figure below depicts this plan’s relationship to the other foundational documents.





3.0 STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The Strategic Plan was developed in five steps:



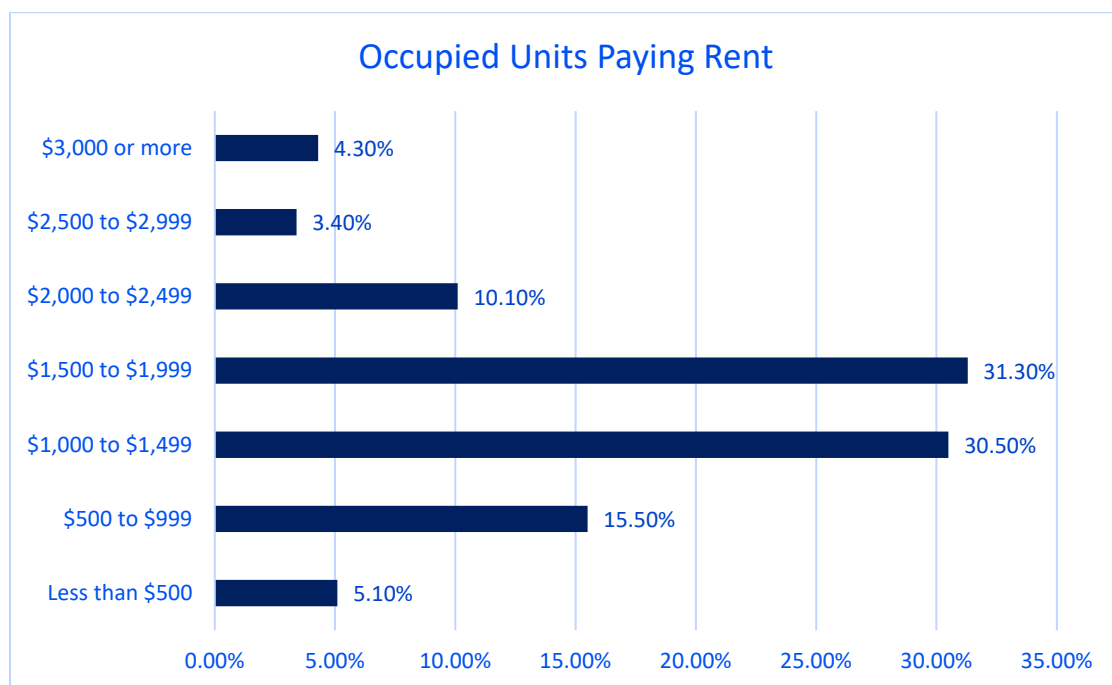
- Establish Benchmarks
In the first phase, CEMA staff met to establish a series of benchmarks that articulated the desired end state of the emergency management capabilities within three years. These benchmarks were further refined through additional stakeholder review and comment. National Standards, such as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Target Capabilities List, National Incident Management System (NIMS), Incident Command System (ICS) and Emergency Management Accreditation Program Standards, were used to develop the benchmark assessment tool.
- Assess Current Capabilities
An assessment of current capabilities were preformed through data gathering and stakeholder interviews. Once determined, the capabilities were measured against the identified benchmarks from the first phase.
- Perform Gap Analysis
After completing the capability assessment interviews and obtaining a snapshot of the County's current capabilities, a comprehensive gap analysis was performed.
- Develop Strategic Goals and Draft Plan
The Strategic Plan identifies emergency management strategic goals based on input from partners. The draft plan was reviewed by the Emergency Management Program Advisory Committee and comments were incorporated into the final plan.
- Finalize / Implement Plan
Stakeholders reviewed and commented on the Strategic Plan as it was being developed and finalized. Stakeholder support and involvement was essential to Plan development and will continue to be essential throughout implementation.



4.0 EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Chatham County has seen numerous emergency and disaster events over the past several years. Since the last strategic plan update, we have seen a global pandemic, numerous severe weather events, a winter weather event, and multiple tropical cyclone events – to include Tropical Storm Debby and Hurricane Helene, which were both Presidentially Declared Disasters.

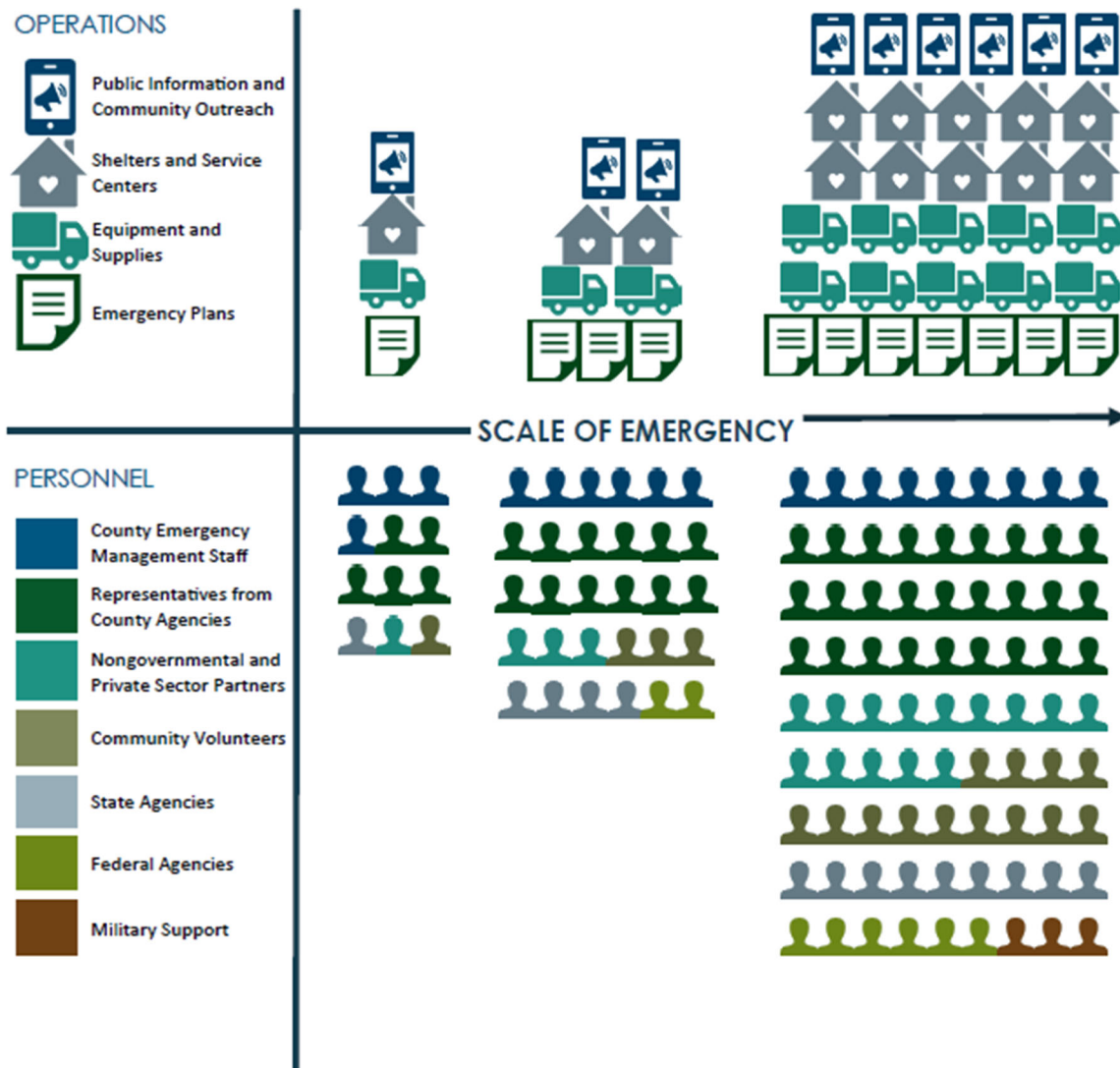
CEMA strives to be a proactive emergency management program in order to better assist the community in all phases of emergency management. We are keenly aware of the natural threats we face, and also have an eye on emerging threats and cascading impacts they have on our community. As the world becomes more interconnected, disruptions to one system may have severe consequences on another system. The costs of disasters is increasing. These “shock” events can have major consequences to communities that are already facing daily stressors such as affordable housing or poverty. Any major impact to the area’s housing stock, i.e. a devastating hurricane, can make an already challenging housing environment into an incredibly complex disaster recovery environment. This threat environment requires proactivity to provide the best possible service for our community.



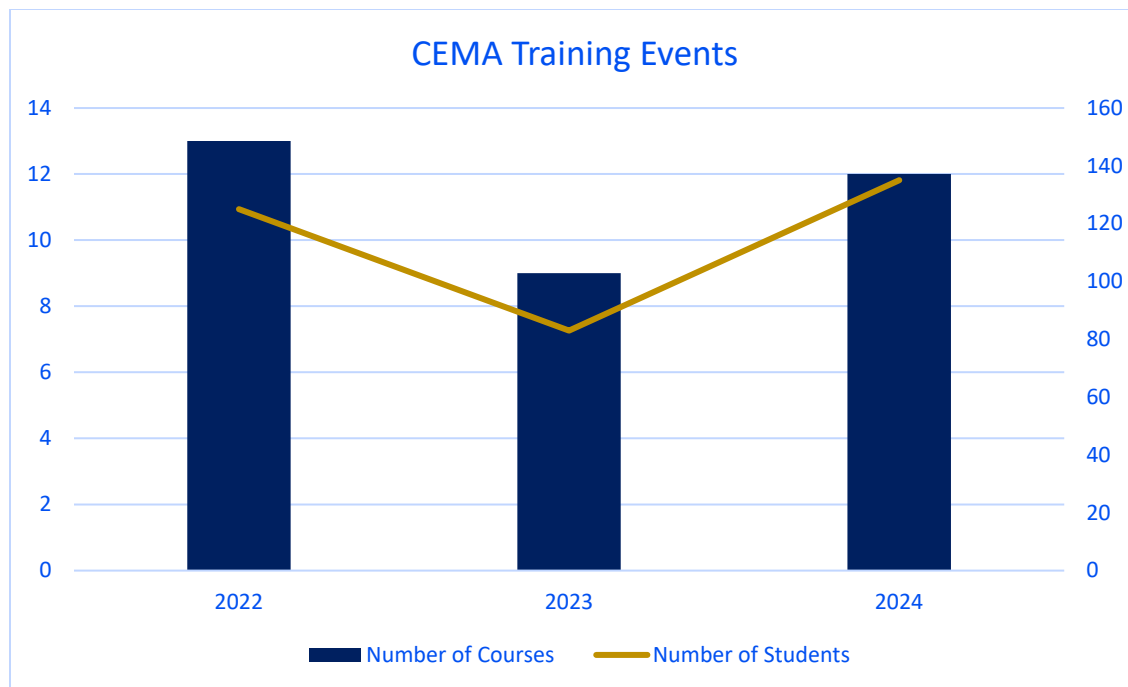
As the scale of the emergency increases, the amount of personnel and resources must also increase. In order to do this effectively, CEMA relies on its robust partnerships throughout the community. We coordinate with over 250 different organizations during times of emergencies and have numerous response plans in place to assist in a plethora of different situations. The proactivity of establishing and cultivating partnerships is key to organizational success.



SCALABLE RESPONSE TO EMERGENCIES



Training is essential to effectively respond to crises and protect the community. CEMA hosts regular training events for the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) as well as Field-Based programs such as sheltering or damage assessment. This regular training ensures that emergency personnel are well-prepared to handle their role within the disaster response framework. Training enhances coordination among different agencies, as well as across municipalities. In addition to training; drills and exercises are conducted to refine plans, policies, and procedures - consistent with the Preparedness Cycle.



Our office is dedicated to the development and enhancement of the emergency management program for Chatham County. It is through strong partnerships that success will be achieved, even in the face of a major disaster. While there will never be enough resources and support during a catastrophic disaster, the program and community can remain resilient through a cooperative and coordinated response.

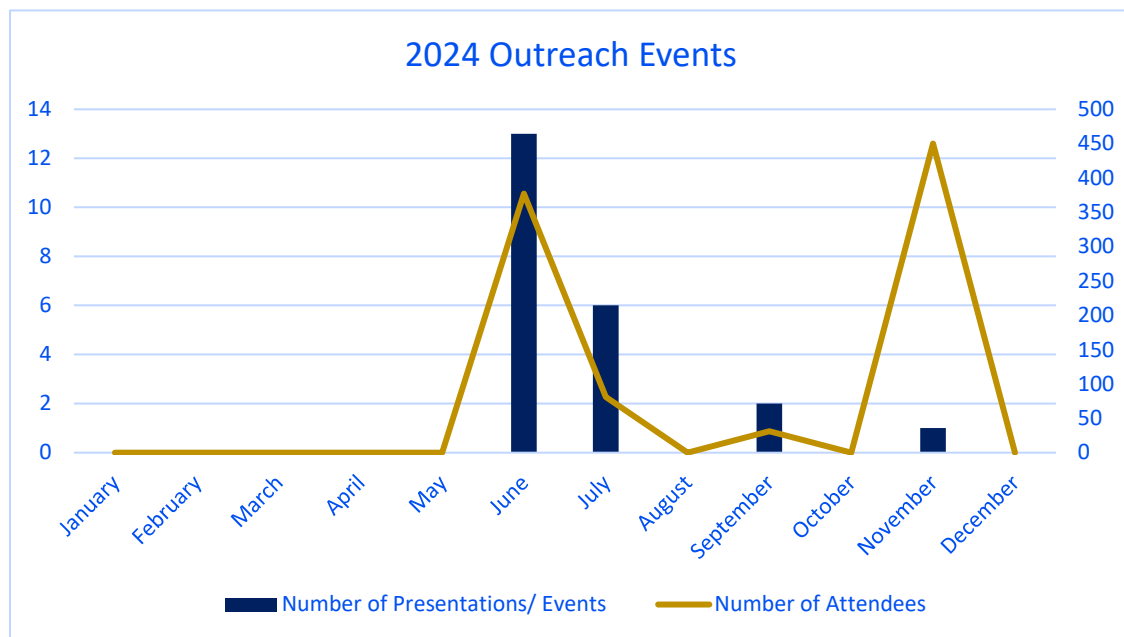
5.0 WHOLE COMMUNITY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

The County's emergency management program strength is from our partnerships with other county departments, constitutional agencies, municipalities, non-profits, faith-based and private organizations. These partnerships, forged over the last decade, have enabled the program to grow through planning, training, exercises and responding to emergencies in a coordinated effort. CEMA will continue to strengthen the program by including and working closely with new members and agencies.

CEMA recognizes the importance of engaging partners when making decisions regarding Chatham County. Planning, a cornerstone of CEMA, works more fluidly when all parties have an equal voice and the opportunity to express what will and will not work in a disaster experience. By incorporating the comments and opinions of our partners, CEMA is able to publish plans that are effective, set procedures that are approved and accomplishable by our partners, and provide information to outside agencies in a consistent manner.



We also ensure that we are able to reach as many people as possible with our preparedness message. Throughout the course of the year, we work with many different organizations and groups to share information on how to become equipped and prepared for disaster events.



6.0 VISION

The vision for CEMA is “An informed, equipped, and prepared Chatham County”.

In updating our vision, staff discussed the most important aspects in which the County and its communities relied on CEMA. Using this information, a vision statement was crafted which encompasses the focus on planning efforts and an enhanced training and exercise program.

7.0 MISSION

The mission statement for CEMA is “Helping people before, during, and after disasters by promoting emergency management preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts”.

In order to effectively embody our Vision, staff set forth the mission statement as a means of further defining what CEMA provides to its partners and the Chatham County Community. This mission statement echoes the importance of whom we serve: *the whole community*.



8.0 VALUES



When building the framework for CEMA’s Mission and Vision Statements, CEMA staff chose the values that most described them as individuals as well as the Agency as a whole. These values are the driving force of CEMA’s focus on the Whole Community. As an Agency, CEMA promises to provide the utmost **commitment** when working with partners in a **professional** manner to ensure **dependability** and **accountability** from the beginning of a project or situation to the close. As these values are important to all of the staff, each strives to embody them on a daily basis.

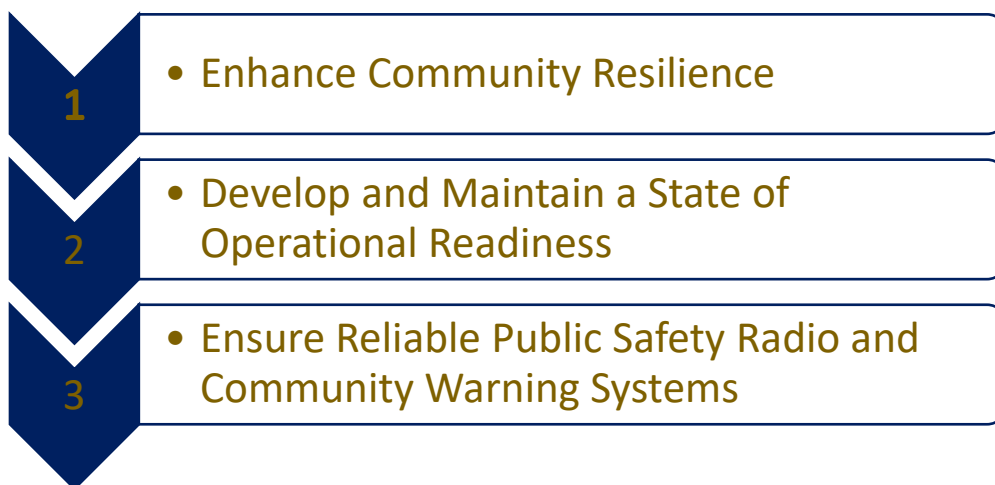
Establishing clear values help to ensure employees are focused on common activities and shape our culture. They help to create purpose, improve team cohesion, and provides a sense of responsibility in the workplace. Our core values are the beliefs that drive relationships, productivity and customer service. Nearly every facet of the organization should consider the Agency’s values in each important decision; and effort should be deliberate to ensure alignment. Organizational values are the glue that tie the Vision, Mission and Goals of the Agency together. Through a common understanding and compliance with our values, this allows a common framework for all team members to:

- follow the same guidelines,
- establish the same norms,
- develop mutual respect,
- have similar tolerances, and
- share appreciations.



9.0 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

CEMA has evolved significantly over the past several years, most notably with the expansion of staff and assuming responsibility for the County's radio infrastructure. As such, the goals and objectives need to change to align with the new structure of the organization. Chatham County has also seen its fair share of emergency and disaster events since the last plan update. Lessons learned from those events factored into the development of goals for the organization to effectively carry out the mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters by promoting emergency management preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts.



GOAL ONE ENHANCE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Objectives

1.1 Create and distribute preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery information.

Enhancing individual preparedness through the creation and distribution of disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery information is essential for building resilient communities. By equipping individuals with the knowledge and resources needed to anticipate and respond to disasters, we empower them to act swiftly and effectively, reducing the risk of injury, loss of life, and property damage. Proactively sharing this information ensures people are better prepared to navigate emergencies, make informed decisions, and contribute to a more coordinated and efficient recovery process.

1.2 Engage underrepresented populations throughout the community.

Developing and supporting strategic initiatives to engage traditionally underrepresented populations is essential to fostering inclusivity, equity, and resilience within the whole



community. By proactively addressing barriers to participation, these initiatives ensure that diverse voices, perspectives, and needs are recognized in decision-making processes, leading to more effective and sustainable solutions. Moreover, empowering historically marginalized groups strengthens community cohesion, and enhances trust in institutions, which is essential during times of emergencies and disasters.

1.3 Engage Faith-Based Organizations and Houses of Worship.

Faith-Based Organizations and Houses of Worship play a vital role in disaster preparedness and response by serving as trusted pillars within their communities, providing critical resources, shelter, and emotional support during times of crisis. Through the Chatham County Disaster Faith Network, these organizations can collaborate more effectively with emergency management agencies, ensuring a coordinated and comprehensive approach to disaster mitigation, response, and recovery. By equipping them with the necessary tools, training, and partnerships, the network strengthens community resilience and enhances the ability to support affected individuals and families in times of need.

1.4 Engage public, private sector and non-governmental partners.

Collaboration among public, private, and non-governmental partners is essential for building a comprehensive and effective disaster management strategy. By leveraging diverse expertise, resources, and networks, these stakeholders can enhance community resilience, ensure a more efficient allocation of resources, and minimize the impact of disasters. Engaging all sectors fosters innovation, improves communication, and strengthens coordinated response and recovery efforts, ultimately saving lives and reducing long-term economic and social disruptions.

GOAL TWO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A STATE OF OPERATIONAL READINESS

Objectives

2.1 Maintain the County EOCs at a constant state of readiness.

Maintaining the County Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) at a constant state of readiness is critical to ensuring a swift and coordinated response to disasters, emergencies, and other crises. A well-prepared EOC enables emergency personnel to mobilize quickly, communicate effectively, and deploy resources efficiently, minimizing the impact on communities and preserving public safety. Regular training, equipment maintenance, and up-to-date



contingency planning are essential to sustaining readiness and ensuring the EOC can function optimally at a moment's notice.

2.2 Ensure plans are current, consistent, and aligned with partners and guidelines.

Keeping emergency plans current ensures they reflect the latest risks, resources, and best practices, making them more effective in real-world situations. Consistency across plans helps prevent confusion and ensures stakeholders understand roles and responsibilities during an emergency. Aligning with partners and guidelines fosters coordination, streamlining response efforts and improving overall community resilience.

2.3 Develop and sustain a comprehensive logistics program.

A comprehensive logistics program is essential for ensuring the timely and efficient delivery of resources, personnel, and equipment during emergencies, minimizing disruptions and enhancing response effectiveness. By establishing a well-coordinated logistics framework, emergency management teams can rapidly mobilize assets and adapt to evolving situations. Sustaining this program through continuous assessment, training, maintenance and resource management ensures long-term resilience and preparedness for future crises.

2.4 Test and improve plans, policies and capabilities through a comprehensive exercise program.

Utilizing the exercise program as a testing ground ensures plans, policies, and capabilities are not only theoretically sound but also practically effective in real-world scenarios. Regular exercises help identify gaps, weaknesses, and areas for improvement allowing organizations to refine their strategies before actual incidents occur. By continuously assessing and enhancing preparedness, organizations can build resilience, improve coordination, and enhance overall response effectiveness.

2.5 Enhance readiness by developing and conducting targeted training programs.

Enhancing readiness through targeted training programs ensures individuals and teams are well-prepared to handle specific challenges and responsibilities. By focusing on relevant skills and scenarios, these programs improve competency, boost confidence, and reduce response times in critical situations. Additionally, continuous and adaptive training helps organizations stay ahead of evolving demands, fostering resilience and operational excellence.



2.6 Improve capabilities by leveraging emerging technologies and innovative systems.

Leveraging emerging technologies and innovative systems is crucial for enhancing a local government's ability to respond to and manage emergencies more effectively. By integrating cutting-edge tools such as AI, data analytics, and real-time communication platforms, the government can improve situational awareness, streamline decision-making, and optimize resource allocation. This proactive approach not only strengthens overall resilience but also ensures faster, more coordinated responses to crises, ultimately saving lives and protecting communities.

2.7 Develop and improve functionality in WebEOC

Enhancing functionality in WebEOC is critical for ensuring seamless communication, data sharing, and real-time situational awareness among emergency management personnel. A more efficient WebEOC system assists with developing a common operating picture, enables quicker decision-making, resource allocation, and coordinated response efforts during emergencies and disasters.

2.8 Utilize lessons learned from events, exercises and current trends to improve capabilities.

By leveraging lessons learned, we can better anticipate potential risks, enhance preparedness, and improve response effectiveness. This proactive approach ensures that emergency management plans remain relevant, dynamic, and capable of addressing evolving challenges in a timely manner.

2.9 Promote long-term career development to retain highly qualified staff.

Investing in long-term career development ensures emergency management professionals continually enhance their skills, stay updated on best practices, and adapt to evolving threats and technologies. Retaining highly qualified staff through professional growth opportunities strengthens institutional knowledge, fosters leadership continuity, and improves overall emergency response effectiveness.

2.10 Promote continuity in operations principles with stakeholders and community partners.

A well-structured continuity program is critical for maintaining government operations, response efforts and builds confidence in public safety during disruptions. By proactively identifying essential functions and establishing contingency plans; departments can minimize service interruptions and enhance community resilience. Effective continuity planning also fosters confidence among residents and stakeholders, demonstrating the government's



ability to respond swiftly and efficiently to emergency events, with minimal service disruptions.

2.11 Promote employee morale strategies.

Employee morale is a critical component of a successful organization, as it directly impacts staff performance, decision-making, and capacity during emergency events. High morale fosters teamwork, reduces burnout, and enhances the ability of emergency personnel to respond effectively under pressure. By prioritizing employee well-being through training, support systems, and recognition, we can ensure a more prepared and motivated workforce, ultimately leading to better outcomes for the community in times of disaster.

GOAL THREE ENSURE RELIABLE PUBLIC SAFETY RADIO AND WARNING SYSTEMS

Objectives

3.1 Maintain a robust, up-to-date, and reliable program for portable and mobile radio systems.

Maintaining a robust, up-to-date, and reliable program for portable and mobile radio systems is critical to ensuring seamless communication among first responders, law enforcement, and emergency management personnel. A well-maintained system enhances response times, coordination, and overall public safety by minimizing communication failures during emergencies. Regular updates and technological advancements will help Chatham County address evolving threats, ensure interoperability with regional and state partners, and provide a resilient infrastructure for crisis situations.

3.2 Provide reliable and effective community alerting systems.

Ensuring reliable and effective community alerting systems is critical for timely communication during emergencies, natural disasters, and public safety incidents. A well-integrated alerting system enables local governments to disseminate urgent information quickly, reaching residents through multiple channels such as sirens, mobile alerts, and social media. By investing in robust and redundant alerting technologies, municipalities can enhance public preparedness, reduce response times, and ultimately save lives.

3.3 Support SEGARRN to ensure comprehensive coverage, interoperability, and reliability.

Supporting SEGARRN is crucial to maintaining a resilient and efficient public safety communication network that serves all agencies and jurisdictions. Ensuring comprehensive



coverage enhances response capabilities throughout the area, reducing communication gaps that could hinder emergency operations.

3.4 Maintain a robust, up-to-date, and reliable program for radio towers & infrastructure.

Maintaining a robust, up-to-date, and reliable radio tower and infrastructure program is essential for ensuring seamless communication among first responders, emergency services, and local government agencies. A well-maintained system enhances response times, improves coordination during crises, and minimizes service disruptions that could compromise public safety. Investing in regular upgrades and proactive maintenance will ensure that Chatham County's communication network remains resilient in the face of evolving technological demands and potential emergencies.

3.5 Develop and promote interagency and intergovernmental cooperation and interoperability.

Collaboration with outside agencies and governments is crucial for ensuring seamless communication during emergencies, large-scale incidents, and day-to-day operations that require coordination across jurisdictions. By fostering interagency and intergovernmental cooperation, local governments can enhance interoperability, reduce response times, and improve overall public safety effectiveness. Establishing standardized protocols and shared communication systems will help eliminate technical and operational barriers, ensuring first responders can work together efficiently regardless of system coverage areas.

10.0 OVERARCHING PRIORITIES

Customer Service: Exceptional customer service is a critical component of effective disaster response and community resilience. Serving the community with compassion, efficiency, and clear communication builds trust and ensures that individuals receive the assistance they need in times of crisis. By prioritizing responsiveness, transparency, and accessibility, the agency can enhance public confidence and cooperation, leading to better preparedness and recovery outcomes. Our Mission, Vision and Values support our dedication to maximizing the service provided to all people in our community.

Emergency Operations Center: A well-prepared emergency management program includes a prepared and capable emergency operations center. Our focus is to have an emergency operations center that is 100% ready 100% of the time.

People Centric: A people-centric culture prioritizes the well-being and development of employees, placing them at the heart of an organization's decision-making, leading to increased employee engagement, productivity, and retention; by fostering a sense of value and belonging, this approach not only boosts morale but also attracts top talent, ultimately driving positive business outcomes



through innovation and improved customer service, as employees feel empowered to contribute their best work when their needs and perspectives are actively considered.

11.0 PROGRAM MAINTENANCE

The emergency management program has many elements and many stakeholders. In order for the program to be successful, it is necessary to ensure a documented schedule and plan to ensure plans are evaluated, maintained and revised as appropriate.

CEMA maintains three Emergency Operation Centers (EOC): a primary EOC located in downtown Savannah, a secondary EOC located towards west Chatham and a Mobile EOC that can be deployed to assist on-scene.





THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY BLANK