

North Dakota Emergency Management – The Coordinating Core of an Increasingly Complex Public Safety Environment

Public Safety Subcabinet

“Emergency management is expected to hold the system together during crises, but too often we are trying to do that without the staffing, funding, or authority needed to fully succeed.”

North Dakota Emergency Management Stakeholder



Homeland Security and Emergency Management has expanded beyond disaster response to span the full mission lifecycle — mitigation, preparedness, and recovery. Emergency Managers coordinate across every discipline, leading through large technological, demographic, and environmental disruptions, all while federal funding has waned since 9/11 and public expectations have risen since Hurricane Katrina.

Emergency Management is often invisible, whether the program is thriving or quietly hollowed out. When it is working response cost-sharing is predetermined and bills are paid on time; plans carry past learnings forward so officials aren't answering for the same costly mistake twice; the right partners are brought to the table before a decision creates a downstream environmental impact; mitigation grants replacing aging pump stations and levees before the rains come and the rivers rise.

A program that isn't working looks exactly the same — silent — until a disaster forces the truth into view. By then, it's too late to have built the capacity that was needed, and the bill comes due in response costs, property damage, and lives.

It is well documented that natural disasters are becoming more frequent, complex, longer-lasting, and expensive. North Dakota averages two Presidential Emergency Declarations per year.

Limited Visibility

Emergency management is inconsistently understood — often mistaken for administrative support — resulting in unclear expectations and inconsistent backing as a core public safety function.

Coordination Challenges

Emergency managers convene, rather than command, resources across jurisdictions and disciplines. Uneven statewide alignment, governance, and authorities creates coordination challenges and inconsistent service delivery.

Limited Resilience

Staffing issues like turnover and burnout — nearly 75% operate alone — along with increasing mission complexity limit long-term sustainability, continuity, and the ability to proactively build community resilience.

The Emergency Management program is almost entirely federally funded. Extreme disruptions at the Federal level cause blockage and instability at the state and local level.

Task	Purpose	Legislative Action
Clarify emergency management function	Establish a statewide baseline for emergency management program capabilities through statutory guidance.	Update ND Century Code Chapter 37-17.1
Create a tiered Emergency Management program	Match for jurisdictions meeting enhanced planning and preparedness triggers related to their local emergency ops plan	
Increase Disaster Relief Fund state funding	Strengthen state-level investment to reduce dependence on disruptive federal funding, allowing communities to address risks, build long-term resilience, and maintain continuity of critical programs	Currently \$20M with a \$100M cap Increase to \$40M to prepare for FEMA reforms.
Grow TeenCERT Program in High Schools	Exposure to all public safety careers, including Emergency Management, while growing personal resilience	Increase from \$300/year x 3 schools to \$500/year x 10 schools

