

# DISASTER RESILIENCE RESOURCES

IF YOU DON'T KNOW  
WHERE TO START,  
START HERE.

## Start Here: First Steps for Emergency Preparedness

These are the first steps recommended by experts for municipal leaders to prepare for disaster. We have tried to list them in order of priority, but any of these actions will improve your community's readiness significantly. Each community has unique assets and needs. Circle those actions that you want to start with and take a step that is most relevant for your community right now.

**Get to know your county emergency manager.** Each county in Washington has an emergency manager that is part of a statewide network. They respond first in the event of a disaster. Introducing yourself to your emergency manager and knowing how to contact them in an emergency is one of the most important things you can do to prepare.

**Work on preparedness at the individual and community levels.** Prepared communities are composed of prepared individuals. Your town's leadership can only respond to a disaster effectively if they and their families are safe. You can model preparedness for others. Consider incorporating emergency preparedness activities into council meetings, school gatherings, or your community's special events. Personal preparedness can include steps such as:

- Developing go-kits with essentials to grab in the event of an evacuation
- Ensuring safe storage of key documents such as personal identification, property deeds, etc.
- Identifying an out-of-area emergency contact for the entire family

**Develop mutually supportive relationships with leaders in neighboring communities.** In the event of disaster, neighbors who are not directly affected will be better able to respond than impacted individuals. Establishing these relationships in advance will make a world of difference in how quickly others mobilize to help and how likely they are to know what your community

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members need most. You may also want to create simple interlocal agreements for mutual aid in the event of an emergency.

**Build local skills and knowledge.** Are there ways that you can encourage local volunteers to get involved in disaster preparedness? There are multiple avenues for community members to receive free or low-cost training from federal and state government and via the American Red Cross and other nonprofit organizations (see Learning & Training Opportunities section). FEMA supports and trains local Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs). CERTs can be organized at a local organization or high school.

**Access technical expertise from within and outside your community.** Government grants proposals such as FEMA funding can be quite technical. Find people in county and state government who “speak the language” and can help you scope a project and describe it in a way that will resonate with funders.

**Make an evacuation plan.** In the event of a disaster, how will you notify people to evacuate? Predetermine a temporary evacuation point—a safe place where people can gather outside the disaster zone—and let residents know where to go.

**Plan for how your local government will operate during an emergency.** Develop a continuity of government plan that outlines how you will communicate, what your line of succession is if the mayor is unavailable for any reason, and how key public assets will be protected.

**Think about who is most vulnerable in your community, and plan for their needs.** How will you ensure that elders, small children, people with disabilities, or non-English-speaking residents are safe in an emergency?

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