



Preparing Governments for Future Shocks Emergency Preparedness and Response Roundtable: Read Ahead Materials

Introduction

Government leaders increasingly indicate that what were previously viewed as rare Black Swan events are now becoming more frequent — and more destabilizing — shocks. The global pandemic exposed governments to a host of mostly unexpected challenges, and governments have captured valuable lessons and gained an understanding of critical areas of focus.

However, one event now follows closely on the heels of another, and multiple events occur at the same time. For example, the pandemic continued as the Russian invasion of Ukraine occurred, and various climate challenges arose such as severe flooding in France, drought and bushfires in Australia, water shortages in California, and extreme heat in China. And the economic fallout from the pandemic and the war has the World Bank and others concerned about a period of stagflation.

Governments must focus on preparing for such “future shocks,” carrying the momentum from rapid pandemic-driven innovation into their preparation. IBM, working through the [IBM Center for The Business of Government](#) and the [IBM Institute for Business Value](#), and in partnership with the [National Academy of Public Administration](#) (NAPA) and a range of other partners, has launched an initiative to help government identify core capabilities critical to building resilience.

Collaborative action to address anticipated threats requires focus and cooperation across a broad ecosystem of partners and stakeholders. Every step forward helps build progress toward addressing major national and international priorities, including the [Grand Challenges in Public Administration](#) put forth by NAPA. Over the coming months, we will convene a series of international roundtable discussions with global leaders from across the public, private, academic, and non-profit sectors to capture lessons across six key domain areas: Emergency Preparedness and Response, Cybersecurity, Supply Chain, Sustainability, Workforce Skills, and International Cooperation.

In each of these domains, we will harvest insights from the roundtables to identify strategies and solutions for governments to address the challenges that lie ahead. You can learn more about this effort by reading the blog, [‘Preparing Governments for Future Shocks’](#) or [listening to the podcast](#).

Emergency Management Background – Highlights from Research

In the domain of emergency preparedness and response, tremendous knowledge and experience have been acquired at all levels of government around responding to and surviving disasters and crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate catastrophes. Emergency management is complex and nuanced, with contributions from a diverse set of stakeholders including the public, business community, civil society, and all levels of government.

A vast body of research and literature informs the topic of emergency management. To focus the roundtable discussion on actionable insights from the distinguished attendees, we have highlighted some critical components of emergency preparedness and response and building resilience going forward. Key topics and recommendations for governments in preparing to address future shocks follow.

1. **Risk management and capability assessment** – governments and agencies need an evolving understanding of potential risks and vulnerabilities and how they may change over time. Understanding potential impact can inform a risk mitigation strategy. In addition, governments must be able to measure current capabilities at all levels of government – Federal, state, provincial, local, tribal, etc., to identify gaps and set realistic capability targets.
2. **Pre-crisis planning, communication and coordination** – the confusion and disorientation following the onset of a shock requires that much coordination is needed ahead of time to identify roles and responsibilities during an emergency response exercise. Coordinating at the interagency level as well as across borders poses challenges but is critical to successful response.
3. **Testing** – effective testing that provides accurate assessment of response capabilities, including first responder health and well-being, is needed. Insights gained from testing must result in plans-of-action to address and re-test areas of deficiency.
4. **Situational awareness and communication** – real-time, quality information is difficult to obtain in times of crisis. Yet the quality of information matters greatly for quality decision making and effective response. Misinformation and disinformation further complicate the ability of decision makers and those at risk during a crisis to make sound judgements and take decisive action.
5. **Transparency and trust** – the public must have trust in government agencies providing emergency response services. A large component of that trust involves sharing accurate information with the public at appropriate times. Distrust and a lack of trust can blunt the effectiveness of emergency response and disrupt coordination between responders and the public.
6. **Inclusion and equity** – emergency response must also plan for and account for serving the most vulnerable of the population, whose safety can require unique capabilities and whose ability to move away from danger can be limited.
7. **Learning and accountability** – government agencies need to systematically gather and apply lessons learned. They must further be accountable to their citizens for maintaining public order and offering emergency response.

Key Reports for Reference

The Department of Homeland Security and FEMA issued the [National Preparedness Report](#), discussing the need for the emergency management community to continue to have agile policies to address emerging risks in complex operating environments and the ability to continue to operate when normal operations are disrupted. The FEMA report, [Lessons Learned from FEMA's Initial Response to COVID-19](#), examines the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and provides recommendations to improve current and future response operations.

The NAPA report, [Agile Regulation: Gateway to the Future](#), provides insight into current federal regulation, often seen as an inhibitor, and presents an Agile Regulatory Framework to address the need for regulation but also how to navigate digital transformation and unprecedented events. This report also contains case studies that can be referenced as examples.

The IBM Center for The Business of Government report, [Managing the Next Crisis: Twelve Principles for Dealing with Viral Uncertainty](#), investigates how governments have responded to global uncertainty and how they have developed strategies in addressing these challenges, preparing for the next crisis.

The OECD report, [First lessons from government evaluations of COVID-19 responses: A synthesis](#), examines governments responses to COVID-19 and how they ultimately responded to this unprecedented challenge. This report developed lessons learned, providing key insights to draw upon for future emergency preparedness discussions.

The GAO report, [Disaster Resilience: Opportunities to Improve National Preparedness](#), evaluated the federal efforts in place to address national preparedness and resilience, providing key examples of campaigns that strengthen resilience capabilities and also areas that need improvement. Reference GAO's [Disaster Resilience Framework: Principles for Analyzing Federal Efforts to Facilitate and Promote Resilience to Natural Disasters](#) for more information on additional federal operations to strengthen preparedness.

The World Bank Group report, [Frontline: Preparing Healthcare Systems for Shocks from Disasters to Pandemics](#), focuses on outlining five principles and priority areas for action to address and prepare for future disasters.

The Public Budgeting & Finance report, [Budgeting for existential crisis: The federal government as society's guarantor](#), provides a framework to be used to assess budgetary needs in response to a crisis and how procedures can affect response development and execution. Reference the report [Practical Imagination: A Possible Future for Federal Budgeting](#) for additional discussion around the federal budgeting process, data, and the benefit to updating strategies to better respond to crises.

The Covid pandemic exposed weaknesses in the UK's approach to managing extreme risks. [Managing extreme risks: How the new government can learn from Covid to be better prepared for the next crisis](#) from Institute for Government looks at some of the problems that emerged and sets out recommendations for how government could strengthen risk management to better prepare the UK for the next crisis.