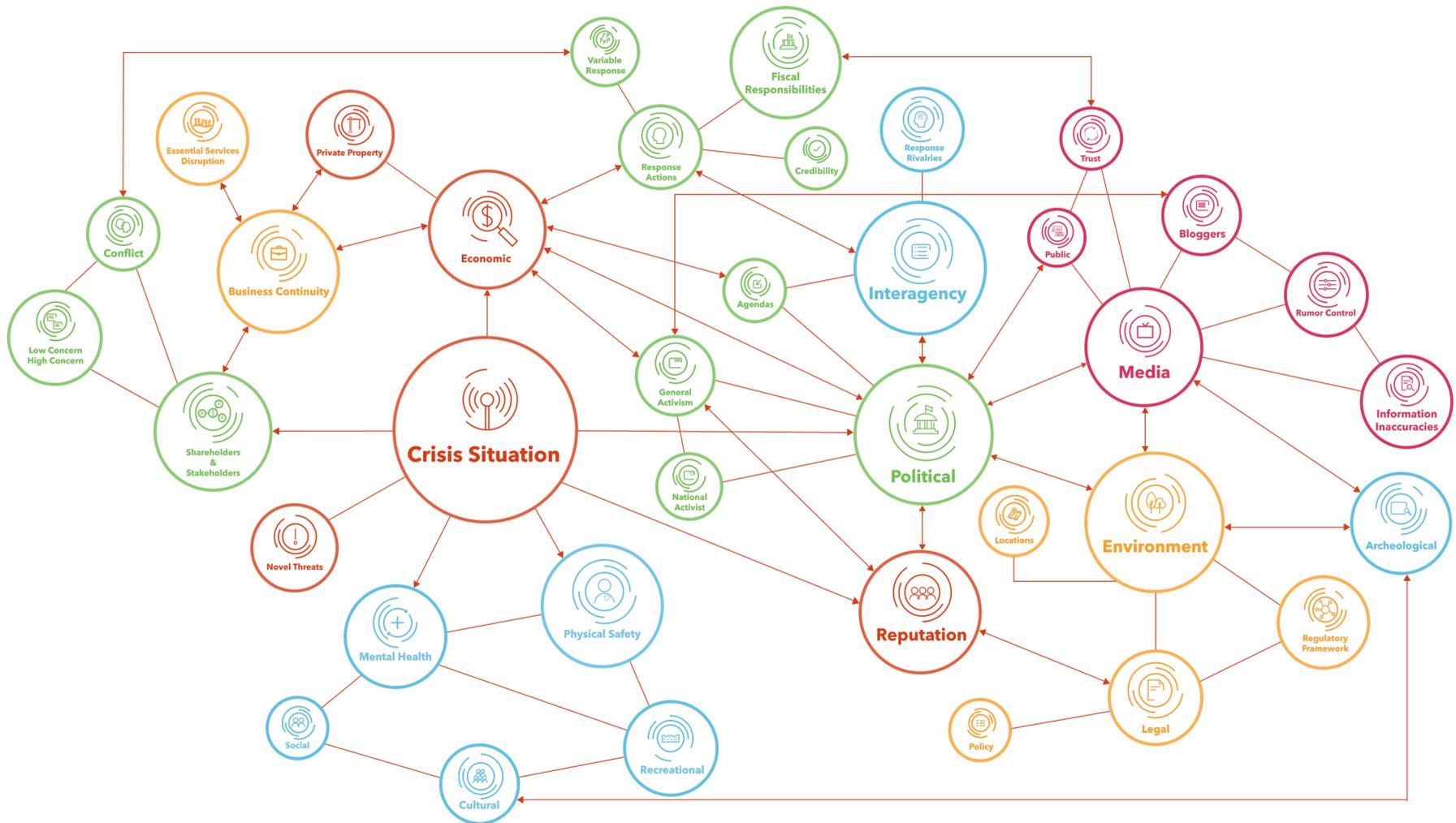


WHEN IT COUNTS: CONTRACTS-IN-PLACE SUPPORT EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT WITH CAPACITY AND EXPERIENCE

Authors

Scott Stoermer, Managing Director of Response Operations, Witt O'Briens
Norberto Dueñas, Associate Managing Director, Witt O'Brien's





Contracts-In-Place For Emergency Response Support Deliver Critical Capacity And Experience When It Counts

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Scott Stoermer, Managing Director of Response Operations, Witt O'Brien's
 Norberto Dueñas, Associate Managing Director, Witt O'Brien's

After any major disaster, affected communities absorb the brunt of the physical and economic impacts of the destruction. Following Category 4 storm Hurricane Ian, hundreds of thousands of people were immediately displaced and struggled to find temporary housing in a real-estate market that was challenging before the storm. Approximately 2.7 million Floridians were left without power in the immediate aftermath of the storm and more than 140 were killed. Hurricane Ian stands as the 4th strongest recorded hurricane to hit Florida with total damages currently estimated between \$41 and 75 billion, putting Ian amongst the top 10 most costly disasters on record.

As with all major disruptions to a community's economy and way of life, ensuring recovery efforts begin rapidly and efficiently is necessary to building long-term prosperity and resilience. While state and local responders on the front lines of disaster management are acutely aware of this need, a significant and growing number of challenges face even the most experienced and best-equipped emergency managers - including the exponential rise in disaster frequency, severity, and costliness. In each of the last two years, there have been at least 20 separate billion-dollar weather and climate eventsⁱ in the United States, the most of any year previously recorded. Coupled with the rise in disaster events, emergency managers face a growing expectation on behalf of affected stakeholders for immediate and continuous real-time information-sharing, as well as mounting awareness and demand for inclusive and equitable disaster response initiatives.



The growing complexity of today's response efforts often require years of continuous activity across multiple, simultaneous fronts. This includes navigating immediate and prolonged public health needs, engaging in extensive state and local inter-agency collaboration, and robust community outreach to various stakeholders (e.g., local organizations, small businesses, religious groups, disaster volunteers, etc.). Expanding Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activations to meet these needs can stress existing resources, leading to staff burnout and high turnover that can place an agency's overall response capacity in jeopardy. These same agencies may also lack sufficient complex incident response experience, particularly at junior-to-mid levels.

With these challenges in mind, emergency managers should consider a staff capacity augmentation strategy that enables them to rapidly engage and deploy seasoned emergency management and disaster response practitioners. Such individuals can seamlessly integrate into existing EOC functions, general administrative roles, and specialized positions such as disaster response program grants management, crisis communications, and community outreach. Two contracting vehicles enabling this strategy are Master Services Agreements (MSAs) for state-level programs and zero-cost standby contracts for local agencies, which are a form of defined services, pay-per-use arrangement.

How do emergency response MSAs and zero-cost standby contracts work?

Both MSAs and standby contracts allow agencies to procure emergency response services prior to a natural disaster and deploy them quickly after the emergency event. MSAs function most similarly to Cooperative Purchasing Agreements in that they provide the contracting agency with a full suite of service offerings from which to choose. In addition to post-disaster activations, MSAs can also be utilized to respond to a particular need. In this case, MSAs are commonly used by jurisdictions nationwide for the procurement of materials and/or specific and routine services like janitorial or lawn maintenance, among others.

An MSA for emergency response services is typically created by a state-level Office of Emergency Management, Public Safety, or Homeland Security involved in emergency and non-emergency disaster response and recovery efforts.

Witt O'Brien's Services

Preparedness

- Whole-Community Planning
- Emergency Operations
- Continuity of Operations
- Threat/Hazard Identification
- Disaster Recovery
- Public Health
- Strategic Planning
- After-Action Reviews
- Organizational & Program Reviews
- Training and Exercise Programs

Response

- Emergency and Incident Staffing
- Field Staffing and Operations
- Logistics Support
- Disaster Debris Assessment and Monitoring
- Right-of-Entry (ROE) Program Management

Recovery

- Grants Program Administration
- FEMA Public Assistance (PA)

Mitigation

- Hazard Mitigation Program Administration
- Flood Mitigation Program Administration
- 404/406 Grant Coordination



Depending on the provisions of the MSA and state procurement rules, other state and local governmental agencies as well as universities and educational systems can also leverage these contracts to procure needed services.

MSAs are generally managed through the state procurement process, put out for competitive bid, and cover a defined contract period - generally one to two years - and include a one- or multi-year extension period. From initiation to completion, an MSA can be concluded in as little as 90 days.

As a competitively procured vehicle, MSAs meet federal procurement and contracting requirements as documented in Title 2, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 200. Subsequently, the contract can be used to disperse federal monies after a disaster under Public Assistance (PA) policy.

A standby emergency response contract is primarily used at the local government level and activated in response to a specific event or requirement (i.e., debris monitoring and removal). The agreement outlines the scope of services, fee schedule, payment terms, and other financial and compliance aspects of hiring a third-party emergency response firm. Perhaps the most important aspect of the standby agreement is that there are no costs to establish the contract, and none are incurred until the contract is activated and services are authorized. As such, they offer the jurisdiction guaranteed expert support when needed with no risk or advance financial outlay.

Staff augmentation through MSAs and standby contracts is smart emergency management

While deploying sufficient response capacity is critical during and after an event, ensuring the skills and capabilities of the responding personnel align with the needs of the contracting agency is equally important. In times of high stress, staff burnout and exhaustion, or simply under-resourced capacity, staff augmentation support can drastically improve long-term recovery. MSAs and standby contracts can assist by providing immediate access to teams of highly credentialed and experienced personnel within hours or days of the disaster event.

Via staff augmentation, response personnel can be effectively scaled up or down depending on the stage and requirements of the effort to ensure appropriate staffing levels are always maintained. Effective staffing partners can also serve as an intermediary or additional advocate for the contracting jurisdiction or agency to liaise with public outreach groups and other essential stakeholders through the duration of the disaster. Such support can be a powerful means to protect the first responders' reputation by ensuring consistent messaging and transparency and validating the effectiveness of their response strategy and activities. The strategic and diverse skillsets of support staff can also lead to highly valuable knowledge transfer to local emergency responders that can positively impact the management of future events and enhance preparedness and long-term mitigation efforts.

Important considerations when establishing an MSA or standby contract

To establish an MSA or standby contract, strong articulation of the needs and benefits can be required with both key internal and external stakeholders.



Outlined below are several approaches emergency managers can deploy to maximize the opportunity for a swift and efficient contracting process:

- Identify a broad range of response and recovery functions beyond EOC operations that might require augmentation and structure the agreement to avoid the need for renegotiated scopes or addendums (e.g., grants funding management and compliance, crisis communications, community outreach, stakeholder management, etc.)
- Make sure the agreement allows for pre-event planning and coordination meetings to clearly define response plans and ensure activations can be implemented immediately.
- Thoroughly research the contractor's experience and capacity to support existing operations. Partners should have direct emergency management experience and include experts with a personal background in public office or in emergency response departments. It can be especially useful if the partner has served with FEMA, HUD, state and local government, or corporate emergency management departments. The partner should be able to demonstrate capacity to respond and scale their teams to handle any size operation - including multiple, simultaneous activations across the spectrum of anticipated disaster events. Additional specialized program expertise in environmental, endangered species, historic preservation, and permitting processes is beneficial to ensure adequate support for all unforeseen response needs.

MSAs and standby contracts are a force-multiplier in emergency response and recovery

The ability to deploy the right-sized teams of experienced disaster response experts quickly and effectively is critically important to restoring a community's wellbeing and confidence in the recovery process. Through the strategic use of MSAs and/or standby contracts, contracting agencies can pursue impactful staff augmentation programs and access a diverse, highly skilled cadre of emergency practitioners with demonstrated experience delivering both immediate and long-term resilience solutions.

APPENDIX

i. 2021 U.S. billion-dollar weather and climate disasters in historical context | NOAA Climate.gov

