

**SONOMA COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

GAP ANALYSIS

OCTOBER 2024





Executive Summary

Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management (DEM) is responsible for the mitigation, preparedness, planning, and coordination of response and recovery activities related to County emergencies and disasters. The Gap Analysis Report addresses the status of the County’s current response and recovery capabilities. The gaps outlined were identified through various data collection methods, including a thorough documentation review, survey analysis, and stakeholder engagement.

Each gap includes additional analysis to support its claims, utilizing industry standard best practices from federal, state, and/or local guidance, and lessons learned from disasters both internal and external to the County. The purpose of this report is not to provide detailed solutions to the outlined gaps, but to provide at least one (1) recommendation for each gap for the County to consider. Further analysis of these recommendations will be conducted in the future Solutions and Viability Study.

Key Findings

The table below outlines the gaps of this report as well as their supporting recommendations for consideration:

Table 1. Identified Gaps and Recommendations for Consideration

#	Gap	Recommendation(s) for Consideration
1.	Sonoma County does not have a Recovery Operations Plan (ROP).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft a County-wide ROP that describes the County’s approach to managing and coordinating recovery operations and replace the interim <i>Recovery Concept of Operations (CONOPS)</i>. • Adapt content in the <i>2018 Sonoma County Recovery & Resiliency Framework</i> and the interim <i>Recovery CONOPS</i> to serve as a template for developing incident specific recovery plans.
2.	Sonoma County does not have a dedicated full-time recovery manager to support its recovery efforts throughout the disaster lifecycle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign the role of recovery manager to a full-time employee, housed within DEM. • If a permanent position is not feasible, create a structure/framework for quickly onboarding recovery staff in events that require additional scaling to County operations.
3.	Existing County plans, annexes, or guidance documents do not provide adequate details to describe how the County will transition from response operations to short-term recovery operations or from one phase of recovery to another.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the County’s ROP outlines the transition to short-, intermediate-, and long-term recovery operations, including changes in organizational structures, roles and responsibilities of County departments/agencies and other critical stakeholders, and recovery objectives. • Review and revise County plans, annexes, guidance documents and other relevant plans to reference the ROP and the importance of effectively transitioning from response to recovery operations.



#	Gap	Recommendation(s) for Consideration
4.	The County is unable to maintain consistent Disaster Case Management (DCM) services throughout response and recovery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursuant to the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster's (VOAD's) DCM guidance, develop a DCM Annex alongside the Sonoma County Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) to address case management gaps between disasters, assign roles and responsibilities, and establish a consistent process for handling individual needs at the local level. • Expand the capacity in the County for providing DCM services, by establishing agreements with CBOs to conduct consistent case management throughout response and recovery operations.
5.	The County lacks the capacity to lead Business Recovery Centers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a County-level BRC capability that can be established during recovery operations in absence of a higher-level emergency declaration. • Develop a BRC Field Operations Guide. • Integrate the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) BRCs capability into response and recovery plans. • Strengthen or develop relationships with critical businesses (e.g., grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.) throughout the County.
6.	The County does not have a formalized plan for integrating spontaneous volunteers into emergency response operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a volunteer management plan. • Create a volunteer coordinator position to help oversee volunteer recruitment, training, and onboarding, as well as coordination with other local and state emergency operations centers (EOCs). • Create centralized volunteer reception centers that can effectively manage the influx of spontaneous volunteers and match them with appropriate tasks. • Implement a digital platform to register, activate, assign, and track volunteers, matching their skills and availability with the needs of response efforts.
7.	The County's current outreach and support strategies do not adequately address the post-disaster needs of temporary workers and undocumented immigrants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate existing outreach strategies, ensuring that they address the specific concerns of undocumented immigrant and temporary worker communities, with a focus on promoting trust and clarifying that seeking aid will not result in immigration enforcement actions. • Evaluate existing outreach strategies to ensure disaster alerts and warnings in Spanish and other relevant languages are disseminated simultaneously with English alerts to ensure all residents receive timely and actionable information.



#	Gap	Recommendation(s) for Consideration
8.	The County's current efforts to provide language access for non-English speakers during disasters are insufficient, posing a barrier to access services for those whose primary language is not English.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider reducing the minimum threshold required to qualify for language services (currently at 5%). • Review the County's emergency communication strategies to ensure they are compliant with The County's <i>Language Access Policy</i> and California's Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act, Government Code §7290. • Assess the County's ability to provide Spanish-speaking volunteers to serve at Disaster Recovery Centers (e.g., Local Assistance Centers (LACs), Business Recovery Centers (BRCs), etc.) to better assist the whole community during and after disasters. • Assess language access capabilities to facilitate real-time translation of critical information, such as emergency alerts, evacuation orders, and shelter locations.
9.	Community members believe post-disaster mental health services provided by the County are inadequate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the County's communication strategy in sharing mental health services information via social media, County-hosted workshops, seminars, press conferences, and events. • Incorporate the provision of mental health services into the short-, intermediate, and long-term recovery activities of Recovery Support Function (RSF)-3: Health and Human Services into the County's ROP. • Include as part of the services provided as part of DCM, the provision of information for how to access mental health services.
10.	The County's debris removal and disposal protocols are not effectively communicated to the public, risking the potential for improper debris handling and delays in recovery efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate current debris management guidance documents, including the County's Disaster Debris Management Plan, to improve communication strategies with the whole community throughout the disaster lifecycle.
11.	Access to essential transportation services for rural residents, especially those with limited mobility or lower incomes, is limited and creates inequitable post-disaster response and recovery outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and expand partnerships with local organizations and rural transportation providers through the Emergency Transportation Committee to create accessible and reliable evacuation routes for rural communities, those with mobility issues, and those with financial constraints. • Review transportation plans and resources to ensure the inclusion of populations with access and functional needs (AFN) and those living in remote areas of the region. This may include developing evacuation plans that consider transportation needs, establishing community transport networks, and ensuring that transportation resources are equitably distributed between urban and rural areas.



#	Gap	Recommendation(s) for Consideration
12.	The County's current emergency communication strategies do not effectively reach those living in remote or isolated regions of the County, resulting in gaps in access to vital information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a County-wide Crisis Communications Plan. • Partner with CBOs that provide training and assistance to people with low tech literacy to share and improve emergency communication information. • Continue to invest in alternative emergency communication channels, such as radio broadcasts, public address systems, or door-to-door notifications.
13.	Cyber-incident response and recovery planning is not integrated with emergency management planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with the Sonoma County Information Systems Department (ISD), review and align County-wide cyber incident response plans, policies, and procedures for alignment with emergency management best practices. • Develop a cybersecurity annex to the County's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). • Develop a crosswalk with the Sonoma County ISD between the Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan, existing cyber incident plans, and the EOP to address gaps within the County departments.
14.	Renters face unanticipated hardships following disasters due to gaps in renters' rights within existing legal frameworks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze current outreach campaigns to inform renters of their rights, the gaps that exist, and what options are available to them. • Add a section specifically for renters at LACs to address their specific needs. • Continue to improve renters' protection during disasters through legal frameworks like the recent <i>Residential Tenancy Protection Ordinance</i>.



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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this Gap Analysis Report is to address the status of Sonoma County's response and recovery capabilities. Based on extensive research and data collection efforts, this report outlines gaps within the County's response and recovery capabilities as well as provides recommendations for the County to consider developing or strengthening such capabilities through enhanced planning, expanded capacity, coordination with external partners, and other appropriate actions. These gaps and recommendations for consideration are critical to support the County's efforts to enhance their response and recovery capabilities, including the development of the County's future ROP.

Scope

The gaps and recommendations for consideration outlined in this report are to assess and improve the County's response and recovery capabilities prior to, during, and after a disaster impacts the jurisdiction. This report does not provide an in-depth analysis of how to mitigate all the gaps outlined in this report. While each gap has at least one (1) recommendation for the County to consider, a full analysis of how to implement the recommendations is not within the scope of this report. A full analysis of the recommendations outlined in this report will be developed and disseminated as part of a Viability Study / Cost-Benefit Analysis and Improvement Plan.

Document Organization

The Gap Analysis Report is divided into four sections:

- **Executive Summary:** This section provides a condensed overview of the gaps and recommendations for consideration.
- **Introduction:** This section provides the purpose of the analysis with additional information regarding the data collection process.
- **Gap Analysis Findings:** This section presents a more in-depth analysis of the key gaps identified through the data collection efforts. Each gap includes recommendations for consideration.
- **Appendices:** These sections include acronyms, abbreviations, and references for the reader to consider as they are reviewing this report.



Methodology

The methodology used to develop this report focused on gathering qualitative data and insights from available County documents, as well as engagement with recovery partners and community members. This approach was designed to ensure a thorough understanding of the factors impacting the County’s ability to effectively respond to and recover from a disaster. Figure 1 below outlines the four data collection methods utilized to develop this report as well as the remaining deliverables to be completed for this project.



Figure 1. Data Collection Methodology & Project Progression



Gap Analysis Findings

Gap 1: Sonoma County does not have a Recovery Operations Plan.

Mission Area: Recovery

Core Capabilities: Planning, Operational Coordination

The 2017 Sonoma Complex Fires uncovered many areas for improvement in the County's recovery efforts. Findings from the after-action report (AAR) reveal that there was no Recovery Plan in place at the time. This resulted in staff and County leadership attempting to create a recovery framework during the response phase, which led to delays in recovery operations. The delays in recovery planning led to delays in developing a recovery management organization, leading many stakeholders to attempt establishing de facto recovery governance models. In addition, a formal Recovery Unit and a Recovery Operations Center (ROC) were never established, further delaying the recovery efforts.¹ The ROP will:

- Define recovery objectives.
- Establish the recovery organizational structure.
- Establish the RSFs.
- Appoint RSF leadership.
- Define specific roles and responsibilities.
- Describe transition to recovery operations and between recovery phases.

This plan will build upon the County's interim Recovery Concept of Operations (CONOPS), which outlines the basic functions and roles within the recovery space. The ROP is the foundational guide to providing recovery support to the whole community—including those with AFN, the socioeconomically disadvantaged, the historically underrepresented, and those in rural areas that historically receive slower aid from the County.² "The ability of a community to accelerate the recovery process begins with its efforts in pre-disaster preparedness, including coordinating with whole community partners, mitigating risks, incorporating continuity planning, identifying resources, and developing capacity to effectively manage the recovery process."³ Recovery efforts extend far beyond reparation of infrastructure and buildings; it involves the restoration of community members' physical and mental wellbeing, livelihoods, independence, and their safety, especially for those who experience financial, emotional, and physical hardships. Recovery also includes the restoration of local businesses.⁴ By adopting the ROP, the County will have the authority, control and coordination to fully implement recovery operations throughout the disaster lifecycle.

¹ County of Sonoma. October 2017 Complex Fires – Emergency Operations Center After Action Report & Improvement Plan. June 2018. Accessed September 13, 2024. [June 11, 2018. After Action Report and Improvement Plan \(ca.gov\)](#)

² Sonoma County Community & Resident Workshop 2. July 17, 2024.

³ FEMA. National Disaster Recovery Framework, 2nd Edition. June 2016. Accessed September 13, 2024. [National Disaster Recovery Framework, Second Edition \(fema.gov\)](#)

⁴ Ibid.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Draft a County-wide ROP that describes the County's approach to managing and coordinating recovery operations and replace the interim *Recovery Concept of Operations* (CONOPS).
- Adapt content in the *2018 Sonoma County Recovery & Resiliency Framework* and the interim *Recovery CONOPS* to serve as a template for developing incident specific recovery plans.

Gap 2: Sonoma County does not have a dedicated full-time recovery manager to support its recovery efforts throughout the disaster lifecycle.

Mission Area: Recovery

Core Capabilities: Planning, Operational Coordination

The County does not have a dedicated full-time recovery manager to manage the planning and implementation of recovery operations. According to the *National Disaster Recovery Framework* (NDRF) and the *2019 California Disaster Recovery Framework* (CDRF), it is strongly recommended that local governments appoint a Local Disaster Recovery Manager (LDRM), a role that could be filled by the recovery manager, to lead disaster recovery activities.⁵ Recovery from disasters and incidents, no matter the size, scale or hazard, requires a specific focus and skillset different from the emergency management coordinator roles found in emergency operations. Therefore, the recovery manager should not only be someone that is familiar with the community and the County's governmental structure, but also knowledgeable with disaster-specific information pertaining to recovery needs that can inform the engagement of community members and County agencies/departments, as needed.⁶

The 2017 Sonoma Complex Fires identified many areas for improvement that could have been mitigated by a recovery manager position. For example, the County found that recovery operations did not have specific direction or leadership, which resulted in delays in developing a recovery plan, governance model, and an organizational structure for the disaster.⁷ Furthermore, as the state established its regional recovery task forces, in coordination with other federal agencies, for the fires, the County found it difficult to develop and define its relationship with these task forces during recovery operations.⁸ The primary role of the recovery manager is to manage and coordinate the redevelopment and building of the community. In the event of a disaster, the manager takes the lead in coordinating the County-led recovery organizations and initiatives and works with local emergency management to assess impacts and community local recovery priorities to the state, such as the State Disaster Recovery manager (SDRC), and Federal governments, as appropriate.⁹ In Sonoma County, the manager would also manage a standing recovery committee and maintain the recovery intake section of the Universal Disaster Intake Process (UDIP). The recovery manager's ability to effectively manage disaster recovery operations is bolstered by their responsibilities prior to disasters taking place, including the maintenance of the disaster

⁵ FEMA, Local Disaster Recovery Managers Responsibilities, July 22, 2020. Accessed: September 6, 2020. [Local Disaster Recovery Managers Responsibilities | FEMA.gov](#)

⁶ Cal OES. Post-Disaster Long-Term Recovery Plan Guide. July 2024. Accessed September 12, 2024. [Long-Term Recovery Plan Guide \(ca.gov\)](#)

⁷ County of Sonoma. October 2017 Complex Fires – Emergency Operations Center After Action Report & Improvement Plan. June 2018. Accessed September 13, 2024. [June 11, 2018, After Action Report and Improvement Plan \(ca.gov\)](#)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ FEMA. National Disaster Recovery Framework, 2nd Edition. June 2016. Accessed September 13, 2024. [National Disaster Recovery Framework, Second Edition \(fema.gov\)](#)



recovery plan or ROP and maintaining strong relationships across the jurisdiction that provide recovery resources and support systems.¹⁰

The transition from response to short-term recovery also proved to be an issue during the 2017 wildfires. After the initial response, the County's EOC did not develop a Recovery Unit and instead began to execute short-term recovery functions without formally transitioning or reorganizing the County's operations. This meant the County's focus was mainly on the immediate needs/issues, rather than planning for and addressing short-term recovery activities.¹¹ These weaknesses could have been mitigated as one of the recovery manager's many post-disaster responsibilities is to develop and manage the activities of local recovery-dedicated organizations and organize the recovery planning process.¹² As such, the recovery manager would have managed the transition to short-term recovery with County leadership and established a ROC to manage the identification and implementation of recovery activities.

Table 2. Recovery Manager Pre-/Post-Disaster Responsibilities

Pre-Disaster Responsibilities

- Serve as primary point of contact for disaster recovery preparedness.
- Manage the development, maintenance, training and exercise of the local jurisdiction's disaster recovery plan.
- Establish and maintain contacts and networks for disaster recovery resources and support systems.
- Promote principles and practices that further resiliency and sustainability in development and strategic planning initiatives.

Post-Disaster Responsibilities

- Coordinate local recovery activities.
- Coordinate with the SDRC.
- Support damage and impact assessments.
- Organize recovery planning processes.
- Ensure inclusiveness in the community recovery process.
- Communicate recovery priorities to relevant stakeholders.
- Lead the development of the community's recovery plans.
- Collaborate with State, Federal, and other stakeholders.
- Coordinate with recovery leadership.
- Manage project progress measures.

While the County has learned a lot from previous disasters such as the 2017 fires, there are some processes in place where a recovery manager could potentially enhance the County's ability to effectively recover from disasters. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government allocated \$96

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ County of Sonoma. October 2017 Complex Fires – Emergency Operations Center After Action Report & Improvement Plan. June 2018. Accessed September 13, 2024. [June 11, 2018, After Action Report and Improvement Plan \(ca.gov\)](#)

¹² FEMA. National Disaster Recovery Framework, 2nd Edition. June 2016. Accessed September 13, 2024. [National Disaster Recovery Framework, Second Edition \(fema.gov\)](#)



million to Sonoma County via the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).¹³ To help manage these funds, the County formed the Sonoma County ARPA Community Equity Work Group. This group was developed to “establish priorities, metrics, and accountability measures for the use of ARPA funds towards the recovery of Black, Indigenous, communities of color, and low-income communities.”¹⁴ With the establishment of a recovery manager position, this individual would be able to support this working group by ensuring the funds are being allocated to meet the diverse needs of the community. Furthermore, if another major disaster were to occur, the County could establish a similar working group with the recovery manager serving in a Chair position as part of their post-disaster recovery responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- Assign the role of recovery manager to a full-time employee, housed within DEM.
- If a permanent position is not feasible, create a structure/framework for quickly onboarding recovery staff in events that require additional scaling to County operations.

Gap 3: Existing County plans, annexes, or guidance documents do not provide adequate details to describe how the County will transition from response operations to short-term recovery operations or from one phase of recovery to another.

Mission Area: Response, Recovery

Core Capabilities: Planning, Operational Coordination

Incorporating the transition to recovery and outlining the various phases of recovery in emergency plans are essential for seamless movement from immediate response to short-, intermediate-, and long-term recovery. Clearly defined recovery phases ensure that the affected community can systematically restore infrastructure, services, and normalcy, which is crucial for economic and social stability. Addressing these elements in planning efforts facilitates efficient resource allocation and prioritization of efforts based on urgency, impact, and the community’s needs.



Image 1. Sonoma County Recovery & Resiliency Framework (2018)

As noted in Gap 2, the transition from response to short-term recovery during the 2017 Sonoma Complex Fires was a challenge as the EOC never formally transitioned or reorganized the County’s operations. As such, the transition from response to recovery operations was not well defined and negatively impacted their efforts, which included the lack of establishing a Recovery Unit and a ROC. The Recovery Unit and the ROC act as transition points for the County to realign their priorities and organization structure to focus their efforts on short-term goals and

¹³ County of Sonoma, County Administrator’s Office. ARPA Community Work Group. Accessed September 23, 2024. County of Sonoma. Sonoma County American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Community Equity Work Group Draft Charter. September 24, 2021. Accessed September 23, 2024. [ARPA Work Group Charter \(ca.gov\)](#)

¹⁴ County of Sonoma. Sonoma County American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Community Equity Work Group Draft Charter. September 24, 2021. Accessed September 23, 2024. [ARPA Work Group Charter \(ca.gov\)](#)



activities. Without this clear transition point, it created confusion among EOC staff where some saw a decreased mission while others continued to work at high rates of activity.¹⁵ This lack of a formalized transition also impacted staffing. As response operations began to wind down, EOC staff were not retained to support short-term recovery activities.¹⁶ Furthermore, this also impacted public messaging as it proved to be a challenge to inform the public as to when recovery was underway.¹⁷ Similar gaps were also identified during the County's response to the 2023 January Winter Storms. While the ROC was activated during the response phase and began planning for recovery operations, the EOC wound down too early into the County's response, which impacted its ability to provide support during recovery operations.¹⁸

The County has taken actions to improve their efforts to transition from response into recovery operations. For example, after the 2017 Sonoma Complex Fires, the County developed the *2018 Sonoma County Recovery and Resilience Framework* to affirm the County's vision for recovery and resilience.¹⁹ While the *Sonoma County EOP* notes the framework outlines the recovery coordination efforts, it is not consistently seen throughout the other various plans, annexes, and documents. Without the ability to effectively transition into short-term recovery and beyond, it will be difficult for Sonoma County to fully understand the needs of its community once response operations have demobilized.²⁰ Even though it is critical for the County to develop a ROP (See Gap 1) that cements the County's transition from response to recovery operations, it is also important other plans, annexes and guidance documents not only acknowledge the existence of such plan but also reinforce the importance of the transition from response to short-term recovery operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- Ensure the County's ROP outlines the transition to short-, intermediate-, and long-term recovery operations, including changes in organizational structures, roles and responsibilities of County departments/agencies and other critical stakeholders, and recovery objectives.
- Review and revise County plans, annexes, guidance documents and other relevant plans to reference the ROP and the importance of effectively transitioning from response to recovery operations.

¹⁵ County of Sonoma. October 2017 Complex Fires – Emergency Operations Center After Action Report & Improvement Plan. June 2018. Accessed September 13, 2024. [June 11, 2018, After Action Report and Improvement Plan \(ca.gov\)](#)

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ County of Sonoma. 2023 January Winter Storms & Flood After Action Report. March 2023. Accessed October 9, 2024. [2023 JANUARY WINTER STORMS & FLOOD AFTER ACTION REPORT \(ca.gov\)](#)

¹⁹ County of Sonoma. Recovery & Resiliency Framework. December 2018. Accessed September 16, 2024. [Sonoma County Recovery and Resiliency Framework \(ca.gov\)](#)

²⁰ FEMA, Local Disaster Recovery Managers Responsibilities, July 22, 2020. Accessed: September 6, 2020. [Local Disaster Recovery Managers Responsibilities | FEMA.gov](#)



Gap 4: The County is unable to maintain consistent Disaster Case Management (DCM) services throughout response and recovery.

Mission Area: Response, Recovery

Core Capabilities: Planning, Operational Coordination, Mass Care Services, Health and Social Services, Economic Recovery, Housing

DCM is defined as a time-limited process by which a Disaster Case Manager partners with a disaster-affected individual or family to plan for and achieve realistic goals for recovery following a disaster. DCM extends beyond providing relief, services, and meeting urgent needs by providing tools and processes to work with disaster survivors on their individual paths to recovery.²¹ Feedback from the Sonoma County Community & Resident Workshop #2 revealed that community members also feel the strain from DCM issues. Often, non-profits are left to pick up the pieces when adequate and consistent DCM is not available. Specific issues cited include high turnover, inadequate number of trained staff, and not enough support when there is no federal disaster declaration.

“Disaster Case Management presents a major problem across the County.”

*-Community Feedback
(Sonoma County Community & Resident Workshop #2)*

The burden of case management often falls on individuals and organizations who are already operating at or above capacity, further straining the ability of the community to recover. These strains are worsened by the loss of institutional knowledge between disasters due to staff turnover. The California Department of Social Services provides guidance on disaster grant assistance for individuals and families, including FEMA-funded Disaster Case Management Program and the state-funded State Supplemental Grant Program.^{22,23} However, both grants require a Presidential-declared disaster to be enacted, while many DCM problems can still occur during non-Presidential declared disasters. Without a well-funded and coordinated DCM system, the burden of providing this type of assistance will fall to individuals and organizations that will already be operating at or above capacity following a disaster, further straining the system and, ultimately, leaving survivors with unmet needs.

Sonoma County DEM is in the process of developing a UDIP, which will include tracking of who was assessed during disasters, their aid eligibility, where they received help, and the amount of aid they received. In addition, the UDIP can be used as a referral to DCM and long-term recovery resources. This process will be a major step in mitigating DCM issues for future disasters.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Pursuant to the VOAD’s DCM guidance, develop a DCM Annex alongside the Sonoma County COAD to address case management gaps between disasters, assign roles and responsibilities, and establish a consistent process for handling individual needs at the local level.
- Expand the capacity in the County for providing DCM services, by establishing agreements with CBOs to conduct consistent case management throughout response and recovery operations.

²¹ National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters. Disaster Case Management Guidelines. 2011. Accessed September 19, 2024. [dcmguidelines-final.pdf \(nvoad.org\)](https://www.nvoad.org/dcmguidelines-final.pdf)

²² California Department of Social Services. Guide to Disaster Assistance Services for Californians. Accessed September 19, 2024. [Guide to Disaster Assistance Services for Californians.](#)

²³ California Department of Social Services. Guide to Disaster Assistance Services for Immigrant Californians. Accessed September 19, 2024. [Guide to Disaster Assistance Services for Immigrant Californians.](#)



Gap 5: The County lacks the capacity to lead Business Recovery Centers.

Mission Area: Recovery

Core Capabilities: Planning, Economic Recovery, Operational Coordination

“Rural areas face challenges in seeking SBA assistance following a disaster. For example, disaster survivors may lack awareness or understanding of SBA’s disaster loans. SBA has taken some action that may help address these types of challenges, but they are not specifically targeted to rural areas.”

*U.S. Government Accountability Office,
Small Business Administration: Targeted
Outreach about Disaster Assistance
Could Benefit Rural Communities
(February 2024)*

The County does not have processes in place to establish their own BRCs to effectively support the local businesses impacted by disasters. Even though BRCs have been operational during previous disasters (e.g., the 2017 wildfires), the County has not been able to establish these centers at the County level without the support from the State or Federal government. Therefore, it is critical for the County to build an internal capacity to establish and operate BRCs during disasters that do not rise to the level of state or federal disaster declaration. Without this capability, the County will only be able to establish these centers through State and/or Federal funding streams.

BRCs are critical to supporting individuals and business owners who apply for low-interest disaster loans.²⁴ In presidentially declared disasters, the SBA will establish BRCs to provide these services to many organizations and individuals after a disaster impact the jurisdiction, including:²⁵

- Business of all sizes
- Private non-profit organizations
- Homeowners
- Renters to repair and/or replace real estate

These centers are typically established separate from FEMA’s Disaster Recovery Centers since BRCs are tailored to address the needs of businesses compared to individuals seeking support.²⁶ Disaster Recovery Centers offer other types of services such as providing assistance with filling out and providing updates on applications, providing referral services to voluntary organizations who may provide additional support, and providing access to the SBA for loan support and customer services.²⁷ BRCs are also differ as compared to LACs, as these centers are mainly focused on assisting individuals in recovering from the disaster.

²⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office. Small Business Administration: Targeted Outreach about Disaster Assistance Could Benefit Rural Communities. February 22, 2024. Accessed September 12, 2024. [GAO- 24-106755, Accessible Version, Small Business Administration: Targeted Outreach about Disaster Assistance Could Benefit Rural Communities](#)

²⁵ U.S. Small Business Administration. Disaster Field Operations Centers. March 22, 2024. Accessed September 12, 2024. [Disaster Field Operations Centers | U.S. Small Business Administration \(sba.gov\)](#)

²⁶ Restore Your Economy. Establishing a Business Recovery Center. Accessed September 10, 2024. [Establishing a Business Recovery Center - Restore Your Economy](#)

²⁷ FEMA. Important Differences between Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs), Disaster Survivor Assistance crews (DSA), and Disaster Mobile Registration Intake Centers (MRIC) for Hurricane Irma Survivors. October 9, 2017. Accessed September 20, 2024. [Important Differences between Disaster Recovery Centers \(DRC\), Disaster Survivor Assistance crews \(DSA\), and Disaster Mobile Registration Intake Centers \(MRIC\) for Hurricane Irma Survivors | FEMA.gov](#)



BRCs have been established during previous disasters by a County to provide an extra level of support to their communities. For example, Clackamas County and Washington County in Oregon implemented six (6) centers to provide resources and services needed to recover from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁸ Published on their website, Clackamas County was able to advertise these centers as areas to provide recovery assistance and resources for business across their jurisdiction.

During the 2017 Sonoma Complex Fires, an SBA BRC was established on November 2, 2017, and was located at the Sonoma County Economic Development Board offices in the City of Santa Rosa.²⁹ Though it should be considered a strength that a BRC was established to support local businesses in their recovery from the wildfires, there are a couple of areas for improvement. For example, the BRC was established on November 2nd, approximately 28 days after the disaster began in the County.³⁰ Many disaster-impacted communities have found it effective to establish an operational BRC within one to two weeks after the disaster impacts the area.³¹ Furthermore, the BRC was established in the City of Santa Rosa. When establishing a BRC, it is critical to select a centralized location in the most impacted area to provide close access to affect businesses. While the City of Santa Rosa was impacted by the fires, the majority of the damage from the disaster was located north of the City.³²

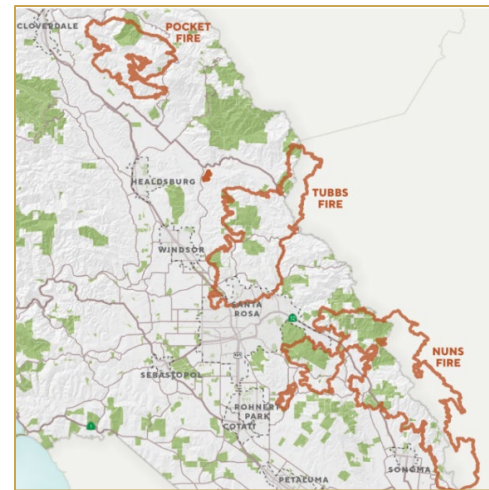


Figure 2. Sonoma County 2017 Complex Fires Map

The County has taken strides to increase their efforts to support businesses impacted by disasters. In May 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors asked the County's Economic Development Board and the Office of Recovery and Resiliency to develop an Economic Recovery Action Plan. This plan was designed to gather input from the Community to guide the County's vision for economic recovery from future disasters.³³ The plan is organized into three sections, with one of them focused on Business Recovery. As part of their data collection efforts, the County developed a Community Survey and requested feedback on four (4) business recovery strategies:

- Make funding, equipment, and facilities easily accessible to businesses.
- Provide innovative regulations, temporary laws and waivers to keep businesses operational.

²⁸ Clackamas County. Business Recovery Centers. Accessed September 12, 2024. [Business Recovery Centers | Clackamas County](#)

²⁹ Sonoma County Economic Development Collaborative. SBA Opens Business Recovery Center at the Sonoma County Economic Development Board Offices. November 1, 2017. Accessed September 16, 2024. [SBA Opens Business Recovery Center at the Sonoma County Economic Development Board Offices \(sonomaedc.org\)](#)

³⁰ County of Sonoma. October 2017 Complex Fires – Emergency Operations Center After Action Report & Improvement Plan. June 2018. Accessed September 13, 2024. [June 11, 2018, After Action Report and Improvement Plan \(ca.gov\)](#)

³¹ Restore Your Economy. Establishing a Business Recovery Center. Accessed September 10, 2024. [Establishing a Business Recovery Center - Restore Your Economy](#)

³² Sonomavegmap.org. 2017 Sonoma Complex Fires – Post-Fire Vegetation Assessment and Planning for Landscape & Community Resiliency to Fire. Accessed September 16, 2024. [2017 Sonoma Complex Fires \(sonomavegmap.org\)](#)

³³ County of Sonoma Economic Development Board. Sonoma County Economic Recovery Action Plan, COVID-19. 2020. Accessed September 23, 2024. [Economic-Recovery-Action-Plan-ALL.pdf \(sonomaedc.org\)](#)



- Support hardest-hit business sectors, while increasing economic diversification throughout the County.
- Ensure that businesses are prepared for future disasters.

While the plan states the County plans to implement all the above strategies, the majority found the third bullet point strategy as the most important.³⁴ The establishment of a BRC during both declared and undeclared disasters can support this strategy by being a focal point for all businesses to gather and receive critical resources and services during their time of need. By doing so, the BRCs can support the many business recovery actions needed during the disaster.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Develop a County-level BRC capability that can be established during recovery operations in absence of a higher-level emergency declaration.
- Develop a BRC Field Operations Guide.
- Integrate the SBA BRC capability into response and recovery plans.
- Strengthen or develop relationships with critical businesses (e.g., grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.) throughout the County.

Gap 6: The County does not have a formalized plan for integrating spontaneous volunteers into emergency response operations.

Mission Area: Response, Recovery

Core Capabilities: Planning, Operational Coordination

A number of the County's emergency plans do not outline strategies for incorporating volunteers, CBOs, or COADs into a response. While volunteer, CBOs, and faith-based organizations (FBOs) play a very active role in the disaster response process by providing operational support, financial assistance and other services, the absence of formalized, comprehensive plans for their recruitment, training, deployment, and demobilization can hinder the effectiveness of their contributions. This not only limits the capacity to leverage local knowledge and resources but also creates a disconnect between official response efforts and the grassroots support available within communities. Furthermore, the presence of unregistered volunteers can complicate response coordination.

Studies have shown that disasters often attract large numbers of spontaneous volunteers seeking to assist.³⁵ This phenomenon, called "convergence," can overwhelm local response efforts and pose challenges such as safety risks and operational inefficiencies. Additionally, some volunteer positions may require advanced credentialing or specialized training, which must be planned for prior to volunteer deployment to prevent inefficiencies and ensure that volunteers can perform their duties effectively. FEMA's *Volunteer and Donations Management Support Annex* outlines tasks, roles, and responsibilities associated with volunteer management, including assessing the need for volunteer coordination teams,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Fernandez, Lauren, et al. "Strategies for Managing Volunteers during Incident Response: A Systems Approach." *Homeland Security Affairs*, vol. 2. October 2006. Accessed September 19, 2024. <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/684>.



as well as temporary staging areas, during an emergency response, highlighting the critical need for a systematic yet flexible approach to volunteer management.³⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Develop a volunteer management plan.
- Consider a volunteer coordinator position to help oversee volunteer recruitment, training, and onboarding, as well as coordination with other local and state EOCs.
- Create centralized volunteer reception centers that can effectively manage the influx of spontaneous volunteers and match them with appropriate tasks.
- Implement a digital platform to register, activate, assign, and track volunteers, matching their skills and availability with the needs of the response efforts.

Gap 7: The County's current outreach and support strategies do not adequately address the post-disaster needs of temporary workers and undocumented immigrants.

Mission Area: Response, Recovery

Core Capabilities: Planning, Mass Care Services, Operational Communications, Public Information and Warning, Economic Recovery

As noted in several discussions with stakeholders, undocumented immigrants are often hesitant to seek assistance from the County during and after disasters for fear of arrest and detainment by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers. Compounding the issue, disaster alerts and warnings in Spanish are often disseminated later than those in English, hindering the ability of the Spanish-speaking community to act swiftly during disasters and mitigate potential risks. Furthermore, temporary workers may experience a significant reduction in income during or after a disaster if it disrupts their ability to perform their jobs, an issue that is exacerbated once federal aid is withdrawn.

Despite the significant social, cultural, and economic contributions immigrants, including undocumented individuals and migrant workers, provide to their communities, many receive inadequate support after disasters, forcing them to navigate recovery with limited access to resources, services, and financial aid. As of 2022, roughly 16% of Sonoma County residents were born outside of the United States, with the largest percentage migrating from Mexico, the Philippines, and China.³⁷ According to data from UndocuFund, an advocacy organization working to provide resources and support for undocumented individuals following disasters, an estimated 42,000 undocumented immigrants reside in Sonoma County, many of whom work temporary or low-income jobs.³⁸ Undocumented immigrants face unique barriers to disaster recovery, as they may not qualify for certain types of assistance, such as financial aid provided through FEMA, due to their lack of legal status in the United States and may be apprehensive about drawing attention to their immigration status when pursuing help.

³⁶ FEMA. Volunteer and Donations Management Support Annex. Accessed September 19, 2024. [Emergency Support Function #8 – Public Health and Medical Services Annex \(fema.gov\)](#)

³⁷ (No date) Sonoma County, CA. Available at: [Data USA: Sonoma County, CA Demographic Profile](#)

³⁸ (No date) UndocuFund. Available at: [UndocuFund.org](#)



Supporting undocumented immigrants and migrant workers during disaster recovery will have broad-reaching benefits for the whole community. By ensuring these populations have access to timely information, essential services, and financial support, the County can promote a more inclusive and equitable recovery process, helping to stabilize the local economy and foster greater social cohesion.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Evaluate existing outreach strategies, ensuring that they address the specific concerns of undocumented immigrant and temporary worker communities, with a focus on promoting trust and clarifying that seeking aid will not result in immigration enforcement actions.
- Evaluate existing outreach strategies to ensure disaster alerts and warnings in Spanish and other relevant languages are disseminated simultaneously with English alerts to ensure all residents receive timely and actionable information.

Gap 8: The County's current efforts to provide language access for non-English speakers during disasters are insufficient, posing a barrier to access services for those whose primary language is not English.

Mission Area: Response, Recovery

Core Capabilities: Mass Care Services, Operational Communications, Public Information and Warning

While the County has gone to great lengths to improve disaster messaging, outreach, and services for community members with limited English proficiency, bolstering translation efforts and ensuring equal access to information in both Spanish and English, several gaps remain. In 2017, some Spanish-speaking residents reported discriminatory treatment at LACs, stating that staff focused most of their attention on white community members, while ignoring the needs of those from other racial and ethnic backgrounds.³⁹ Moreover, the lack of Spanish-speaking volunteers at some LACs in the past has contributed to a sense of exclusion and hindered efforts to serve this population. During one disaster response, a reliance on Spanish-speaking staff from CBOs at temporary shelters and Recovery Support Centers (RSCs) led to disproportionately longer intake lines for those who spoke Spanish than those who spoke English.

The County does offer a financial incentive for employees who serve as interpreters or translators as part of their job, this bonus is not commensurate with the time and effort needed to perform these tasks. Furthermore, of the nearly 750 County employees who are eligible for the bilingual bonus, all but two speak Spanish, with little representation for other languages, such as Vietnamese, Mandarin, French, or Mixteco. The County does not have a mechanism for rapidly mobilizing employees when their language services are needed, complicating efforts to provide in-the-moment translation during an emergency response.

Community members with limited or no English proficiency face heightened risks during disasters, as they may have difficulty obtaining vital information, services, and support that may leave them more exposed to potential harm. While the County has made improvements in its communication and outreach efforts to non-English speakers, some residents are dissatisfied with the limited availability of multilingual resources across various platforms.

³⁹ 2017 IDTF Recommendations.



As outlined in the County of Sonoma’s Language Access Policy, the County will make earnest attempts to provide language access to those with limited or no English proficiency who “receive services, benefits, or information from the County.” This could encompass the translation of written material (e.g., flyers, brochures, and website content) and verbal messaging (e.g., press briefings, radio alerts, and guidance provided at LACs, as well as real-time interpretation during public meetings, emergency broadcasts, and community outreach events). The policy is written in accordance with California’s Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act, Government Code §7290, which states that government agencies serving a substantial number of people (5% or more of the people served by any local office or facility of a state agency) who do not speak English must provide informational materials in other languages common to the region other than English. With respect to Sonoma County, this may include Vietnamese, Mandarin (Putonghua), French, Khmer (Cambodian), and indigenous languages from Mexico such as Mixteco.⁴⁰

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- Consider reducing the minimum threshold required to qualify for language services (currently at 5%).
- Review the County’s emergency communication strategies to ensure they are compliant with The County’s *Language Access Policy* and California’s Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act, Government Code §7290.
- Assess the County’s ability to provide Spanish-speaking volunteers to serve at disaster recovery centers (e.g., LACs, BRCs, etc.) to better assist the whole community during and after disasters.
- Assess language access capabilities to facilitate real-time translation of critical information, such as emergency alerts, evacuation orders, and shelter locations.

Gap 9: Community members believe post-disaster mental health services provided by the County are inadequate.

Mission Area: Response, Recovery

Core Capabilities: Public Health, Healthcare, Emergency Medical Services, Health and Social Services

Community members have voiced their frustration with the availability of County-supported mental health services during and after disasters. The absence of timely and effective mental health services can exacerbate the trauma experienced by affected individuals, hindering their ability to recover and rebuild their lives. Residents have noted that children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of repeated exposure to disasters, especially as the County experiences a growing number of disasters in rapid succession, leaving little time for full recovery between events. While the County does offer some tools and resources to address residents’ mental and emotional wellbeing, such as the Sonoma County Behavioral Health 24-hour Emergency Mental Health Hotline and the Reentry and Community (ROC) program, community members have called for expanded offerings and more targeted interventions.

Findings from the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) evaluation, an assessment given to children and adults living in California over the course of almost two years, found that those residing in the northern counties of the state, a largely rural area prone to severe wildfires, were identified as having a heightened

⁴⁰ ‘Sonoma County Community Development Commission Language Access Plan’ (2019). Sonoma County.



risk of experiencing toxic stress or trauma.⁴¹ Wildfire survivors may experience a host of adverse psychological effects, symptoms that can be compounded by other major disasters or concurrent crises. Exposure to major wildfires was shown to significantly increase the likelihood of developing mental health disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, in one study conducted on the mental health impacts of the 2018 Camp Fire in California.⁴² Moreover, even indirect exposure, such as witnessing such a disaster within one's community, can have a significant impact on mental health.

According to a rapid needs assessment performed by Sonoma County's Behavioral Health Division of the Department of Health Services following the 2017 Sonoma Complex Fires and 2019 Kincadee Fire, 40% of households in the region had experienced a traumatic event like being separated from a family member, facing threat of death, or suffering a significant injury. Six in ten households reported at least one member experiencing anxiety or fear, nearly double the previous year's rate.^{43,44} Among youth in middle and high school who reported any obstacle to learning, those who were moderately or significantly affected by the fires were substantially more likely to report feeling depressed, stressed, or anxious than those who hadn't been affected by the fires at all.

Studies such as these underscore the importance of providing comprehensive and inclusive mental and behavioral health services to survivors of disasters, addressing both immediate needs and long-term recovery. The County must prioritize expanding access to mental health support during and after disasters, ensuring that services are not only available but also tailored to meet the specific needs of children, adolescents, and other vulnerable populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Evaluate the County's communication strategy in sharing mental health services information via social media, County-hosted workshops, seminars, press conferences, and events.
- Incorporate the provision of mental health services into the short-, intermediate, and long-term recovery activities of RSF-3: Health and Human Services of the County's ROP.
- Include as part of the services provided as part of DCM, the provision of information for how to access mental health services.

⁴¹ Heidi de Marco. "Children in Northern California Learn to Cope With Wildfire Trauma." California Healthline. September 8, 2024. Accessed September 19, 2024. [Children in Northern California Learn to Cope With Wildfire Trauma - California Healthline](#)

⁴² Danziger, Malinda. "Wildfires Have a Lasting Psychological Impact on Communities." UC San Diego Today. May 1, 2024. Accessed September 19, 2024. [Wildfires Have a Lasting Psychological Impact on Communities \(ucsd.edu\)](#)

⁴³ County of Sonoma, Department of Health Services. Sonoma County Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) FY2016-2019 Capacity Assessment. January 2020. Accessed September 19, 2024. [Sonoma County Mental Health Services Act FY2016-2019 Capacity Assessment January 2020](#)

⁴⁴ Gardner, Lucinda. Fire Recovery in Sonoma County. County of Sonoma Department of Health Services. June 10, 2019. Accessed September 19, 2024. [PowerPoint Presentation \(ca.gov\)](#)



Gap 10: The County’s debris removal and disposal protocols are not effectively communicated to the public, risking the potential for improper debris handling and delays in recovery efforts.

Mission Area: Recovery

Core Capabilities: Housing, Infrastructure

Several workshop participants observed that the County does not have a consistent approach to informing residents about debris management guidelines following a disaster. One participant described a past wildfire recovery effort in which they were unsure how to handle items and surfaces damaged by smoke or covered in ash. While the County does possess a debris management plan, it does not contain detailed strategies for conducting public outreach and education. A lack of clear, widely publicized guidance can hamper cleanup and reconstruction efforts, risking delays in the recovery process as well as environmental hazards.

To address this, the County could develop and implement a clear public outreach strategy within its debris management plan. This could include proactive communication efforts such as public service announcements, easy-to-understand debris management guidelines, and community workshops. Ensuring that residents are informed about proper debris handling can improve the speed of recovery and reduce risks to public health and the environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Evaluate current debris management guidance documents, including the County’s Disaster Debris Management Plan, to improve communication strategies with the whole community throughout the disaster lifecycle.

Gap 11: Access to essential transportation services for rural residents, especially those with limited mobility or lower incomes, is limited and creates inequitable post-disaster response and recovery outcomes.

Mission Area: Response

Core Capabilities: Transportation

Sonoma County's vast geographic size and numerous rural communities present additional challenges for disaster response, especially in terms of transportation and resource distribution. This difficulty is particularly pronounced for seniors and individuals with limited mobility, for whom evacuation is more complex, especially from remote areas like Cloverdale. Additionally, some farm workers living in bunk houses on the farms face limited transportation options as well, especially during disasters. One workshop participant expressed frustration with the way vaccines were distributed to Cloverdale residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, stating that because public transportation in the region is limited, residents of the town faced challenges in obtaining vaccine services.

U.S. CENSUS
BUREAU

County Residents Aged 65 and Older: 100,577 (20.6%)

County Residents with Ambulatory Difficulty: 23,393 (5.1%)

Caption 1. U.S. Census Bureau Data on Sonoma County Residents



Many older adults rely on services like Volunteer Wheels, which provides over 30,000 rides annually to seniors and people with disabilities, allowing them to access critical appointments and errands.⁴⁵ However, access to such services may be limited during disasters or evacuation scenarios, further isolating vulnerable populations. According to a transportation study involving residents of Sonoma and Mendocino Counties, individuals with very low incomes used public transportation at a rate four times higher than those with high incomes.⁴⁶ Safety, cost, and familiarity with public transportation systems were listed as the most pressing barriers for those from low-income households. Over half of rural residents sampled were unfamiliar with community transportation programs that may provide essential services during a disaster.

Supporting seniors, individuals with limited mobility, and low-income rural residents during disasters is crucial for ensuring an equitable and effective response. By addressing transportation barriers and expanding access to vital services like Volunteer Wheels and public transportation during emergencies, the County can significantly reduce isolation and improve the safety of vulnerable populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Develop and expand partnerships with local organizations and rural transportation providers through the Emergency Transportation Committee to create accessible and reliable evacuation routes for rural communities, those with mobility issues, and those with financial constraints.
- Review transportation plans and resources to ensure the inclusion of populations with AFN and those living in remote areas of the region. This may include developing evacuation plans that consider transportation needs, establishing community transport networks, and ensuring that transportation resources are equitably distributed between urban and rural areas.

Gap 12: The County’s current emergency communication strategies do not effectively reach those living in remote or isolated regions of the County, resulting in gaps in access to vital information.

Mission Area: Response, Recovery

Core Capabilities: Public Information and Warning

While the County has worked diligently to expand the footprint of its public messaging during disasters, there are still inequities in information delivery in the region. Rural areas, for instance, are not equipped with the necessary technological infrastructure or access to high-quality broadband internet to fully benefit from digital communication channels used during emergencies. According to a study done on broadband access in Sonoma County, the region “has large areas where the population is dispersed, the terrain is rugged, tall trees abound, and internet connections are poor or simply do not exist.”⁴⁷ While the County’s

⁴⁵ Sonoma Access. Sonoma County Area on Aging. Accessed September 12, 2024.

www.sonomasenioraccess.org/provider/volunteer-wheels/

⁴⁶ Sonoma Clean Power, 2024, Transportation Needs Assessment | A Qualitative and Quantitative Study. April 2024. Accessed September 12, 2024. [SCP Final Report \(sonomacleanpower.org\)](#)

⁴⁷ County of Sonoma, Superior Court of California. Broadband Access in Sonoma County. Accessed September 19, 2024. [files \(ca.gov\)](#)



Access Sonoma Broadband Action Plan enumerates various strategies for bridging the digital divide in the region, there are still segments of the population that have been overlooked.⁴⁸

Similarly, those who struggle to navigate technological devices and virtual platforms (e.g., social media, websites) may be left out of the loop during alert and notification efforts. A reluctance by some residents to receive digital communications and alerts from the County may also prevent effective emergency communication, necessitating alternative communication methods that do not rely on technology or internet connectivity.

By recognizing and tackling the inequities in information delivery, particularly in rural areas with poor broadband access and among individuals who may struggle with technology, the County can enhance its emergency communication efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Develop a County-wide Crisis Communication Plan.
- Partner with CBOs that provide training and assistance to people with low tech literacy to share and improve emergency communication information.
- Continue to invest in alternative emergency communication channels, such as radio broadcasts, public address systems, or door-to-door notifications.

Gap 13: Cyber-incident response and recovery planning is not integrated with emergency management planning.

Mission Area: Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery

Core Capabilities: Planning, Operational Coordination, Intelligence and Information Sharing, Supply Chain Integrity and Security, Community Resilience, Long-term Vulnerability Reduction

Cyber-threats pose their own unique challenges with the ability to quickly affect every facet of society, from government and military operations to economic and critical infrastructure systems. In addition to the risk that cyber-threats pose to the nation, cybersecurity represents a core capability integral to preparedness efforts across the whole community. To meet the threat, preparedness planners must not only consider the unique core capability outlined in the Protection mission area but must also consider integrating cyber preparedness throughout core capabilities in every mission area.⁴⁹ The County's Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies cyberattacks as a hazard of interest, and yet, it is not mentioned in the EOP, nor other plans and annexes reviewed during the data collection process.

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget reports that the number of cybersecurity incidents on government agencies in the United States from 2016-2022 averaged over 30,000 incidents per year.⁵⁰ A 2020 report revealed that cybercrime was predicted to reach \$6 trillion in 2021 (up 100% from \$3 trillion in 2015), a yield that would consider it the third highest gross domestic product behind the U.S. and

⁴⁸ Magellan Advisors, and Sonoma County Economic Development Board. "Access Sonoma Broadband Action Plan." Sonoma County Economic Development Collaborative. Accessed September 19, 2024. [Access Sonoma Broadband Action Plan \(sonomaedc.org\)](https://sonomaedc.org)

⁴⁹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security. National Preparedness Goal, 2nd Edition. September 2015. Accessed September 19, 2024. [National Preparedness Goal - Second Edition \(fema.gov\)](https://www.fema.gov/national-preparedness-goal)

⁵⁰ U.S. Office of Management and Budget. Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014 – Annual Report Fiscal Year 2022. Accessed September 19, 2024. [FY22-FISMA-Report.pdf \(whitehouse.gov\)](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/FY22-FISMA-Report.pdf)



China. This number is predicted to grow to \$10.5 trillion by 2025.⁵¹ In 2017, California suffered the third largest data breach involving a U.S. government entity in history when the Secretary of State’s office was attacked, resulting in upwards of 19.2 million records compromised. In addition, from 2018-2023, city and county municipal government agencies saw a 41% share of data breach incidents across all U.S. government entities, suggesting a disproportionate focus on attacking municipal governments.⁵²

In mid-October of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sonoma Valley Hospital experienced a Russian-controlled ransomware attack. The cybercriminals were prevented from system access and ultimately driven out of the system, but they may have removed a copy of a subset of data.⁵³ An August 2021 ransomware attack on Seneca Family of Agencies, a contractor used by Sonoma County, impacted 1,364 clients receiving County services during a data breach of the contractor’s networks.⁵⁴ The Press Democrat reported that in early 2024, Sonoma County Child Support Services experienced a Denial-of-Service (DoS) event when their phone lines were out of service for one (1) day amid a wider cybersecurity breach affecting a state vendor.⁵⁵

The California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and California Department of Technology formed a Cybersecurity Task Force that wrote and approved a State and Local Cybersecurity Plan in September 2023, which outlines strategies for incorporating cybersecurity planning into emergency plans.⁵⁶ While the County has made initial progress with the Technical Services Division of the Information Systems Department and their *IT Resiliency and Business Continuity Management* Business Group, further incorporation of cybersecurity principles into all its emergency plans and operations are recommended.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- In collaboration with the Sonoma County ISD, review and align County-wide cyber incident response plans, policies, and procedures for alignment with emergency management best practices.
- Develop a cybersecurity annex to the County EOP.
- Develop a crosswalk with the Sonoma County ISD between the COOP, existing cyber incident plans, and the EOP to address gaps within the County departments.

⁵¹ Morgan, Steve. Cybersecurity Ventures. “Cybercrime To Cost The World \$10.5 Trillion Annually by 2025.” November 13, 2020. Accessed September 19, 2024. [Cybercrime Magazine Article](#).

⁵² Bischoff, Paul. “A recent history of US Government Breaches – can you trust them with your data?” Comparitech. November 28, 2023. Accessed September 19, 2024. [A history of US Government Breaches - Can they be trusted with our data? \(comparitech.com\)](#)

⁵³ Ernst, Anne Ward. The Sonoma Index-Tribune. “Sonoma Valley Hospital’s ‘security incident’ was Russian ransomware attack.” October 30, 2020. Access September 23, 2024. [Sonoma Valley Hospital Ransomware Attack](#)

⁵⁴ Administrator’s Office, Sonoma County. “County of Sonoma contractor discloses data breach impacting 1,364 clients receiving county services.” November 24, 2021. Accessed September 23, 2024. [Seneca Family of Agencies Data Breach](#).

⁵⁵ Staff, Press Democrat. The Press Democrat. “Phone lines down for Sonoma County Child Support Services amid wider cybersecurity breach.” January 31, 2024. Accessed September 23, 2024. [Sonoma County CSS Cybersecurity Incident](#).

⁵⁶ Dean, Kalyn and Jessica Sankus. Initial State and Local Cybersecurity Plan Released. California State Association of Counties. October 19, 2023. Accessed September 19, 2024. [Initial State and Local Cybersecurity Plan Released - California State Association of Counties](#)



Gap 14: Renters face unanticipated hardships following disasters due to gaps in renters' rights within existing legal frameworks.

Mission Area: Recovery

Core Capabilities: Housing

Renters encounter unexpected challenges after disasters due to gaps in legal frameworks that do not fully protect their rights. "The firestorms that devastated Sonoma County did not distinguish between citizens and non-citizens, nor between renters and owners."⁵⁷ 2023 U.S. Census Bureau data reveals that there are 192,765 housing units in Sonoma County, of which 68,236 (35.4%) are renter occupied. There are 64,932 occupied units with active rental agreements with a median value for rent of \$2,061. 55% of those renters spend 30%+ of their household income on rent, compared to only 40% of homeowners who spend 30%+ plus of their household income.^{58,59} The difference is that homeowners build equity with each mortgage payment, whereas monthly rental payments are terminal for the tenant and build equity for the landlord. As a result, the landlords, not the tenants, qualify for aid to recover their housing. For renters, recovering from disasters can be even more strenuous, as they are at the mercy of their landlord to decide whether to rebuild and repair their home.

California Civil Code § 1933, 1935, 1941, 1950.5(g)(1), California Civil Procedure §1932, and California Health & Safety Code § 17975.4 holds the following:

- **If the unit is completely destroyed**, the rental agreement ends, and the renter owes no more money to the landlord. The landlord must return unpaid security deposits within three weeks.
- **If the unit is partially destroyed but not fit for living**, the renter can decide to either:
 - End the lease, owe no further rent, and find a new place to live.
 - Continue the lease *if the landlord agrees to repair* the unit and make it livable again. No rent is paid until the unit is returned to livable status.
- **If the unit is partially destroyed but still fit for living**, the renter must continue to pay rent. The renter is encouraged to request urgent repairs and contact local Consumer Affairs to file grievances.
- **Unless responsible for the damage**, the landlord does not owe any relocation costs to the renters.
- **Unless responsible for the damage**, the landlord does not owe any costs for lost possessions. Renters are encouraged to obtain rental insurance to cover such losses.

Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approved enhanced tenant protection for renters in August 2024. The new protections augment the California Tenant Protection Act of 2019, a state law that limits rent increases and requires landlords to have a "just cause" to evict tenants who have lived in their property longer than one (1) year. The new Sonoma County ruling will grant just-cause protections to renters as soon as they begin renting and, most notably, will prohibit eviction in most cases during a declared

⁵⁷ North Bay Organizing Project, Immigrant Defense Task Force, *Recommendations for Sonoma County Disaster Planning proposed by the Spanish-speaking Community*.

⁵⁸ Bureau, United States Census. "Sonoma County, California Profile." Explore Census Data. Accessed 19 Sept. 2024. [Sonoma County Profile](#).

⁵⁹ Bureau, United States Census. "Sonoma County Profile, Housing Section, DP04: Selected Housing Characteristics." Explore Census Data. [Sonoma County Housing Section](#).



emergency. The Board approved \$34,100 to fund an outreach campaign to help renters understand their rights, including the new rules adopted by the County. Finally, the new rules require the dissemination of tenant rights information in both English and Spanish.⁶⁰

While the County is taking strides to improve renter protection rights following disasters, there are still gaps in the legal frameworks to provide aid to renters in the County, especially during non-presidential declared disasters, where FEMA's Individual Assistance (IA) grants are not available to provide financial aid. Landlords are not required to repair their rental unit if it is damaged. The tenant is released from the lease obligation if the owner chooses not to repair it, but they will face not having a home upon return. The cost and effort of relocating can be burdensome for many renters, especially for those who already represent vulnerable populations. In addition, an insurance coverage crisis in California further exacerbates the hardships as renters face canceled policies and rising rates.⁶¹ Without rental insurance, renters will be responsible for funding the repair and replacement of their personal belongings damaged in their rental home during disasters, as California law releases the homeowner of liability for tenants' personal property losses.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- Analyze current outreach campaigns to inform renters of their rights, the gaps that exist, and what options are available to them.
- Add a section specifically for renters at LACs to address their specific needs.
- Continue to improve renters' protection during disasters through legal frameworks like the recent *Residential Tenancy Protection Ordinance*.

⁶⁰ County of Sonoma Administrator's Office; County Counsel Meeting. Residential Tenancy Protections Ordinance. August 20, 2024. Accessed September 19, 2024. <https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6829950&GUID=7187B184-C5EF-4F3F-95BF-637168DA0211>

⁶¹ Sumagaysay, Levi. Cal Matters. "Newsom unveils plan that would hasten insurance-rate reviews—and increases." May 30, 2024. Accessed September 19, 2024. [Newsom unveils plan that would hasten insurance-rate reviews--and increases.](#)



Appendix A: Acronyms and Abbreviations

Table 3. Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
ACE	Adverse Childhood Experiences
AFN	Access and Functional Needs
ARPA	American Rescue Plan Act
BRC	Business Recovery Center
Cal OES	California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services
CBO	Community-Based Organizations
CDRF	California Disaster Recovery Framework
COAD	Community Organizations Active in Disaster
CONOPS	Concept of Operations
COOP	Continuity of Operations
DCM	Disaster Case Management
DEM	Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
FBO	Faith-Based Organizations
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IA	Individual Assistance
LAC	Local Assistance Center
LDRM	Local Disaster Recovery Manager
NDRF	National Disaster Recovery Framework
OA	Operational Area
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
ROC	Recovery Operations Center
ROP	Recovery Operations Plan
RSF	Recovery Support Functions
SBA	U.S. Small Business Administration
SDRC	State Disaster Recovery manager
STEEPLE	Social, Technological, Economic, Ethical, Political, Legal, and Environmental
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats



Acronym	Definition
UDIP	Universal Disaster Intake Process
VOAD	Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster



Appendix B: References

- FEMA. National Disaster Recovery Framework, 2nd Edition. June 2016. Accessed September 13, 2024. [National Disaster Recovery Framework, Second Edition \(fema.gov\)](https://www.fema.gov/national-disaster-recovery-framework-second-edition)
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