

New Data Foundation Policy Brief Outlines Six Options to Improve Efficiency and Strengthen Federal Disaster Response

Amid a near-doubling of billion-dollar disasters since 2019, a new policy brief calls for a risk-based, data-informed overhaul of federal emergency management

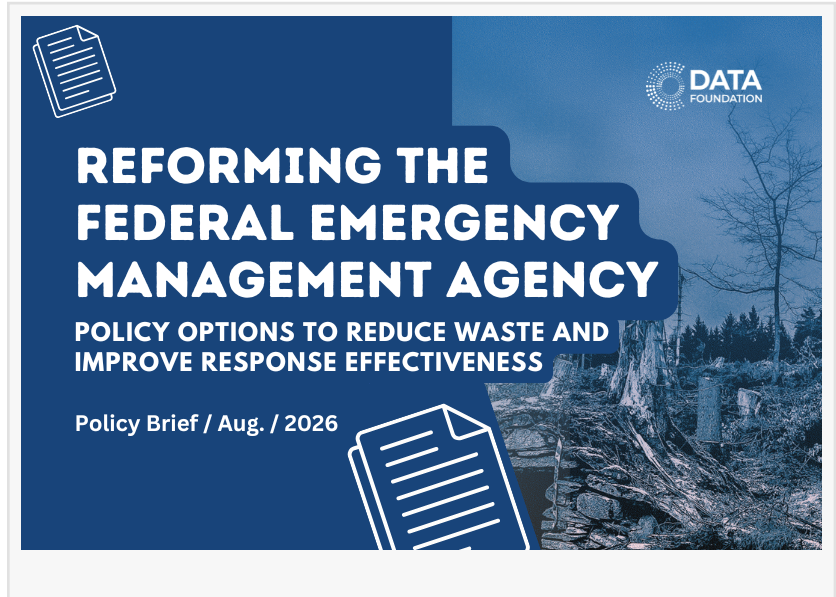
WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, August 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Data Foundation today released a

[new policy brief](#), "Reforming the Federal Emergency Management Agency: Policy Options to Reduce Waste and Improve Response Effectiveness," offering Congress and federal agencies a set of concrete, evidence-informed options to modernize the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and improve how the nation prepares for, responds to, and recovers from disasters.

The brief comes as billion-dollar disasters have nearly doubled — from 14 in 2019 to 27 in 2024 — and as FEMA faces scrutiny from Congress, the FEMA Review Council, and the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), which added federal disaster assistance to its High-Risk List in 2025. With disaster-assistance appropriations totaling at least \$448 billion between Fiscal Year 2015 and Fiscal Year 2024, the report argues that structural reform — not simply new funding — is the durable path forward.

Authored by Leremy Colf, Ph.D., a Senior Fellow at Data Foundation, the brief identifies six high-impact policy options:

1. Focus on a risk-based approach to tailor preparedness and response resources to each state's actual disaster profile.
2. Balance costs across states, since disaster funding benefits concentrate in a handful of high-risk states even though costs spread broadly across taxpayers nationwide.
3. Focus legislative reform on the highest-impact, most complex areas, given that FEMA-related



authority spans 348 statutes across 33 titles of the U.S. Code.

4. Decrease duplication between federally funded teams, such as the National Disaster Medical System, and state-run disaster medical response teams.

5. Streamline cross-state licensing and credentialing, particularly for healthcare professionals who often cannot deploy across state lines during a disaster.

6. Improve data sharing across the more than 30 federal entities involved in disaster assistance and recovery, reducing improper payments and easing the burden on disaster survivors.

"Every disaster generates a mountain of data — about risk, about cost, about who actually needs help — but that data is scattered across more than 30 federal entities that don't talk to one another," said Taka Ariga, Senior Director for Data Foundation's [Center for Data Policy](#). "The policy options in this brief show that Congress doesn't have to choose between cutting costs and improving outcomes. Streamlining data sharing, reducing duplicative capabilities, and tying federal support to a real risk-and-capacity assessment can make FEMA both more efficient and more effective at the same time."

The brief also examines the health dimensions of disaster response, including the shortage of healthcare professionals able to deploy during major disasters because of state-by-state licensing barriers.

"Too often, when a disaster strikes, paperwork stands in the way of EMTs, paramedics, and other medical professionals responding to a disaster zone in another state," said Colf, Ph.D., who is an associate professor at the University of Oklahoma Health Campus and previously worked in the federal government at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Those roles involved using science, data, and evidence to improve preparedness and response for public health and medical disasters; threat characterization and bioterrorism defense; and developing a federal data strategy at the White House. "We have working models — like the Nurse Licensure Compact and state EMS task forces — that show cross-state credentialing can be done efficiently and safely. Bringing that discipline to disaster health response, backed by better data on risk and capacity, will save lives and reduce health consequences in affected communities."

The brief recommends that Congress pair a tailored, risk-based approach with a jurisdictional capacity assessment, an approach GAO previously recommended, so federal preparedness and response resources align with both the likelihood of a disaster and a state's ability to manage it. It also highlights the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) as an underused mechanism that could reduce duplicative state and federal disaster-response capabilities while preserving state leadership in emergency management.

[Read the full policy brief.](#)

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