



Preparedness Grant Effectiveness Case Study: Georgia

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FEMA



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I. Overview

In May 2021, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) conducted a preparedness grants effectiveness virtual case study with the State of Georgia. The purpose of this case study was to understand the role of FEMA preparedness grants in Georgia’s coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine rollout. This case study used data gathered from one interview with the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA/HS). It also drew from information that Georgia emergency management personnel provided through the Biannual Strategy Implementation Report (BSIR) and the Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA)/Stakeholder Preparedness Review (SPR).

This case study found that preparedness grants funds created strong working relationships among GEMA/HS and vendors, which helped GEMA/HS acquire supplies and equipment critical to establish vaccination sites. In addition, GEMA/HS invested preparedness grant funding in personnel to manage the vaccination sites, in supporting public information officers, and to purchase vehicles that allowed field staff to access the various mass vaccination sites more readily. Together, these investments enabled Georgia to effectively manage the COVID-19 vaccination process.

II. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Rollout in Georgia

On March 14, 2020, the Governor of Georgia declared a public health state of emergency as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Between March 2020 and May 2021, Georgia reported 886,772 confirmed COVID-19 cases, 62,206 hospitalizations, and 17,702 deaths.² In December 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine,³ with an EUA for the Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen COVID-19 vaccine issued in February 2021.⁴ These EUAs allowed the vaccines to be distributed and administered to adults across the United States for the prevention of COVID-19.⁵ On March 4, 2021, the Georgia Department of Public Health published a COVID-19 Vaccination Plan, which details Georgia’s protocol for distributing the COVID-19 vaccine.⁶ As of May 2021, GEMA/HS administered two of the three FDA-authorized vaccines at eight mass vaccination sites throughout the state.⁷

III. Funding History

Georgia invested a total of \$1,713,936.30 of FY 2013–FY 2020 EMPG and SHSP funds in projects described in this report that have had an impact on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The State also received \$201,900,516.32 in FEMA Disaster Recovery funds during this same time to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

IV. Investments and Capability Impacts

Vaccination Site Personnel and Staffing [EMPG]

The increase in vaccination efforts in Georgia led to an increased need for vaccination site management. At the time of publication, GEMA/HS has used \$579,370 of FY2019 EMPG funds to support 16 field staff members to create and sustain eight drive-through vaccination sites throughout Georgia, with over 357,000 people receiving vaccinations at those sites.

Field staff are responsible for the daily setup and maintenance of the sites, coordination with nurses and other on-site medical personnel, as well as managing the allocation of on-site National Guard personnel and resources. GEMA/HS reports that the successful coordination, implementation, and flexibility of the field staff engagement at the vaccine sites provide a template for future planning and response efforts outside of the COVID-19 response. In addition to the roles played by GEMA field staff, GEMA/HS used \$1,089,179.76 in DR-4501-GA funding to hire sign language interpreters to engage with the deaf and hard of hearing communities using the vaccination sites, which greatly expanded vaccine accessibility.



GEMA/HS field staff briefing at vaccination site.

Vaccine Site Infrastructure [EMPG/Disaster Recovery Funding]

FEMA preparedness grant funding played an important role in helping GEMA/HS build vaccination sites infrastructure by supporting critical vendor relationships through prior EMPG-funded investments. These relationships were built by EMPG-funded positions, such as field and administrative staff, who have engaged with multiple vendors through disaster and event preparedness and response over the years. A majority of the vaccine site infrastructure, including tents, chairs, medical waste management, administrative supplies, and signage, was purchased or managed with Disaster Recovery (DR-4501-FA) funding through contracts initially created under EMPG-funded projects. The relationships established during the EMPG-related contract creation allowed for a lower administrative burden for GEMA/HS to establish the vaccine site infrastructure.

“If it weren't for the COVID relief package and the Supplemental EMPG, none of this would have been possible.”

—Ashley Larrow, THIRA/SPR Manager, GEMA/HS



Drive-through vaccination site.

In addition to FEMA funded support, Georgia worked with private industry to identify resources for the COVID-19 response. For example, when searching for sites to establish vaccination centers, GEMA/HS collaborated with Delta Airlines, which offered space in the company's flight museum for vaccine distribution in the Atlanta metropolitan area. This partnership between GEMA/HS and Delta Airlines provided a central location for vaccinations and sufficient space for the establishment of a vehicle drive-through area and led to over 116,000 people being vaccinated.



Public Information and Warning [EMPG]

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, public information officers (PIO) have been critical for conveying information related to combat the spread of the virus, increase awareness of vaccines, and highlight Georgia’s response efforts. In particular, PIOs at the state and local level have served as a primary source of information for the public regarding COVID-19 and the vaccination process. Additionally, PIOs within GEMA/HS coordinated with other state and local entities to send a unified message on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines and counter vaccine misinformation. These entities are also regularly engaged through training and exercises held by GEMA/HS. PIOs with GEMA/HS are funded with \$200,623.30 of FY2019 EMPG grant dollars.



PIO Operating at Mass Vaccination Site

Equipment [HSGP/EMPG]

From FY 2013 to FY 2020, GEMA/HS invested \$284,563 of HSGP and \$649,380 of EMPG funds to purchase 31 pickup trucks, sport utility vehicles, and other vehicles for staff use. During the COVID-19 response, these vehicles enabled field staff to more easily travel to all of Georgia’s 159 counties, all of which were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the vehicles were used by the field staff managing the mass vaccination sites. This investment is credited with enabling a smoother management of the overall COVID-19 response, as well as helping maintain the relationships among state and local emergency management and public health officials that are so critical for incident management.

Disaster Recovery and EMPG funds were also used to replenish supplies needed to meet the ongoing COVID-19 threat and prepare for future pandemics. Ventilator stockpiles were rebuilt with \$7,472,393.98 in Disaster Recovery funding. GEMA/HS contracted with a private-sector provider to store the ventilators purchased with DR funding in a climate-controlled warehouse that will extend the shelf life of that equipment.

V. Conclusion

FEMA preparedness grant funding has played an important role in Georgia’s vaccination rollout. Through prior EMPG-funded projects, GEMA/HS established relationships with vendors to assist with acquiring critical supplies and equipment needed to set up vaccination sites. With the help of Disaster Recovery funding, GEMA/HS worked with these established vendors to acquire the infrastructure for vaccination sites, which involved the acquisition of administrative supplies, medical tents, and storage equipment for vaccines. GEMA/HS also used FEMA preparedness grant funding to invest in personnel to help manage the vaccination sites and to purchase vehicles for personnel, which has allowed field staff to access the various mass vaccination sites more readily. Together, these investments have enabled GEMA/HS to effectively administer COVID-19 vaccinations across the state.



Appendix A: References

¹ <https://gov.georgia.gov/executive-action/executive-orders/2020-executive-orders>

² <https://covid-hub.gio.georgia.gov/>

³ <https://www.fda.gov/media/144636/download>

⁴ <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-issues-emergency-use-authorization-third-covid-19-vaccine>

⁵ <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine>

⁶ <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-vaccine>

⁷ <https://gema.georgia.gov/emergencies/coronavirus>