



Needed: More Effective Resources for Homeland Security

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It can be argued that the foundations of homeland security and emergency management are built on state and local resources and capabilities that the federal government uses for *national* security purposes. Which is another way of saying that the U.S. government is, in effect, leasing public-safety and public-health/hospital infrastructure from state, local, and private interests.

Prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the federal government initiated a few relatively small grant programs to engage state and local governments and begin to influence their behavior. After and in reaction to the 9/11 attacks, that approach was expanded and the funding available was increased significantly. The results have been mixed, though, and have raised concerns about such related issues as unfunded mandates, value received vs. funding provided, and intrusion into states rights.

Today, the federal government's homeland-security and public-health grant programs are somewhat fragmented, with too many independent requirements, and are hard to manage. Governors are forced to serve as de facto integrators of federal programs – if they choose to accept that role. States and local governments have frequently expressed concern about having to hire effectively trained personnel, but the grants make it difficult to cover personnel costs or to plan for a sustained effort.

This does not have to be the case. A recent analysis of 2006 census data reveals that states, cities, and other local jurisdictions, and healthcare organizations themselves spent about \$300 billion on public-safety and public-health/hospitals that year. During that same time frame, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) identified \$52 billion in federal resources, including \$3 billion for grants, spent for the same purposes. That contrast in funding totals raises two questions: (1) If federal grants are only about 1 percent of total state and local expenditures in this area, is the federal government providing appropriate compensation for the state and local resources provided? (2) Is this the best and/or only way to develop the nation's highest-priority national-security capabilities?

Would Direct Federal Assistance Be a Better Option?

A persuasive case could be made that the federal government should consider another possible approach – namely, a system of Direct Federal Assistance, funded through carefully negotiated cooperative agreements, to meet high-priority federal requirements at the state and local levels, and less reliance on grants in the future. Here it should be emphasized that certain grants that have resulted in positive systemic contributions – e.g., the Emergency Preparedness Performance Grants (EMPGs) and the Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFGs) – still make sense to continue.

There are several positive examples of federal direct assistance that already have been tried and proven effective. The Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) model provides federal resources and support while integrating state and local resources into the JTTFs. In Maryland for example; from 2004-2006, 60 percent of the JTTF was staffed by state and local officers.

DHS also has provided a number of highly trained analysts to serve at fusion centers throughout the United States, and has assigned critical-infrastructure PSAs (protective security advisors) to most of the states. An even more relevant and longer-term example, perhaps, is the National Guard, which has a long history of serving as a state asset while being supported by the federal government in a dual role. The development of the Guard's Civil Support Teams is a good example of recent forward-looking innovations that have made the Guard even more valuable in its dual federal/state role.

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An important factor to consider in rethinking the distribution of DHS funds to the states is that the federal government has catastrophic-incident responsibilities that are often different from state and local priorities. Preparedness for catastrophic incidents requires detailed and rigorous operational planning. However, state and local governments do not usually maintain operational planning resources for scenario-based plans. To avoid the duplication of some rather expensive capabilities, state and local governments rely on the dual use of resources – as demonstrated by the all-hazards/capability-based concept of planning that has become increasingly popular in recent years. The FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) regions throughout the country could provide trained planners directly to the states to bridge this gap.

The federal government also could provide program management resources directly to the states, through the FEMA regions that have experience in developing requirements, both to assist the states in that task and to coordinate the development and testing of new and improved capabilities. In addition, the same FEMA regions – working in close coordination with other federal agencies, of course – could be a reliable conduit for providing access to Federally Funded Research and Development Centers (FFRDCs) to provide development services.

To summarize: The U.S. public rightly expects, and deserves, seamless government collaboration. This requirement in itself puts a premium on individual, state, and local preparedness capabilities. The challenge is to reconcile the various resource issues related to the frequently different roles, responsibilities, personnel, and capabilities of the several levels of government involved. It may well be that precisely targeted Direct Federal Assistance funds could ease this challenge significantly.

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