

## 2024 Supplemental Department Questions

*Please answer the following questions in a word document and return to Council. The answers to these questions will be provided to council as supplemental information. While not part of the physical budget presentation to Council, departments should be prepared to answer questions Council may have on these supplemental questions. If you feel that you have provided an answer in a previous question, please don't repeat your answer, simply refer to the earlier question/answer.*

### Strategic Goals

1. Provide your 2024 strategic goals; how are they different from 2023? In what way, if at all, are your strategic changes demonstrated in your budget request?  
Our 2024 strategic goals carry forward from our 2021-2025 strategic plan:

- Deliver excellent customer service
- Improve Countywide preparedness
- Instill emergency management into the County's culture
- Increase Emergency Operations Center (EOC) readiness
- Address fiscal sustainability
- Enhance staffing

Areas of particular focus 2024:

- EOC/operational readiness. DEM and the county lost a tremendous amount of institutional knowledge during the pandemic, and it will continue to be a focus to rebuild operational procedures and deliver training to ensure that the county is ready for disasters of all kinds. This is reflected in our budget through requests for training funds and security/facilities investments.
- Accounting for the impacts of climate change in our preparedness, which we will do in the coming year by kicking off a countywide Community Wildfire Protection Planning effort as well as an Integrated Floodplain Management program with DCNR and Public Works

### National, state and local landscape:

1. What are the federal, state and local issues facing your work? What risks or opportunities does that create for you in 2024 and beyond? What is your plan to leverage the opportunity or mitigate the risk? What support do you need?

DEM is reliant on multiple federal grants to continue to implement our mission. We currently have three positions funded by FEMA's Homeland Security Grant Program and four staff partially or fully funded by the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG). Both of these funding streams have been shrinking

and are not keeping up with increases in salaries and operational costs. In particular, WA Emergency Management Division is proposing a reallocation in the way State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSP) funds are distributed—changing from a population based allocation to an allocation “in support of statewide priorities.” At a minimum this means that DEM would lose the position we currently have to support this grant program locally. It could also mean that we lose the ability to support a variety of projects with SHSP funding. In the past several years, the SHSP grant has funded training and exercises for staff, city partners and adjacent county partners, supported purchases for the first responder and amateur radio infrastructures, technology upgrades in our EOC, funded additional staffing to assist with community resilience, partially pay for our PIO and assist our Law Enforcement personnel in obtaining upgrades or replacements of aging equipment or PPE. State-determined allocations of funding have tended to support jurisdictions outside of the Seattle area, so we are concerned about our ability to compete for funding in the new model.

This past year FEMA updated their criteria for mitigation plans. A FEMA-approved mitigation plan is a requirement for any non-disaster FEMA funding. The changes specifically increase requirements related to climate change adaptation. We believe that the work currently going on in the county to coordinate climate adaptation activities will prepare us to meet these new criteria when we update our plan in 2025. The increased emphasis on climate hazards means that seismic-related mitigation or planning projects remain challenging to get approved for funding by FEMA.

2. What, if any, new mandates do you have impacting your work? Are they funded or unfunded? What is the plan for accomplishing the work?

FEMA is rolling out a requirement that jurisdictions that receive EMPG funding must implement the National Qualifications System. This does not come with any additional funding, and as mentioned above is tied to a grant pool that is shrinking and yet still vital to DEM’s ability to meet our mission. We are working with our EOC Analyst project position to prepare the county to meet this requirement—developing EOC position qualifications that will guide training for all EOC responders.

## **Programs**

1. List programs, projects and services within your department funded through federal COVID/ARPA funds. What, if any, of those programs are you recommending ongoing funding for and what is the source of ongoing funding?

The only outstanding ARPA funded project for DEM is working with a consultant to develop EOC training videos. These modular videos will improve our EOC responder classes, as well as prepare us for providing just in time training to staff during a response. This investment is a direct response to a lesson learned from

COVID: despite our best training efforts we might end up with staff reporting to the EOC who do not know what to do/how to do it. These videos will allow us to orient them without detracting from DEM capacity in order to provide training. Once we have the initial library of training videos, DEM will be able to internally manage any updates needed as processes change over time.

2. For programs funded by COVID/ARPA funds, detail the plan to close out and/or transition those programs to an ongoing funding source in 2025 and beyond. Funding for the close out of the COVID warehouse and development of a warehousing plan will end at the end of this year. The maintenance of that plan will shift to the existing Readiness team.

3. What new programs are you launching for 2024? What need or efficiency is that new program addressing? How is that program funded for sustainability? What metrics are in place to determine effectiveness?

The completion of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan will open up new grant funds for wildfire risk mitigation activities—both for the county and for the local jurisdictions who will be covered by our plan.

We also look forward to working with Public Works and DCNR on integrated floodplain management for the county. We will support this effort with existing staff. In order to address flood concerns that occur in Cities, and thus outside of the direct authority of Public Works and DCNR, DEM is applying for a FEMA Flood Mitigation Assistance grant. This grant funding would assess existing structures throughout the county, identify which ones are of most concern, and provide benefit/cost analyses (a labor/time intensive pre-requisite) for future grant applications for the highest priority ones.

4. If different than #3, what are your areas of significant investment? What are you not doing because of that investment?

Personnel costs continue to be the vast majority of DEM's needed investments. This is necessary to meet coordination needs with local jurisdictions and across county departments. We also requested funding to support training for these staff. While some training is available for free, having a training budget will allow us to deploy staff to disasters in other counties (in order to gain experience there while assisting our neighbors), as well as to bring in at cost trainings and exercises to better ensure a fully prepared work force.

## **Internal Operations**

1. What is your department doing to streamline processes or deliver services in a new way? How do your budget allocation requests play into these innovations? Are there ways which a different budget approach, e.g. several departments sharing a resource, could achieve the same or better results in a more cost-effective way?

During this last year we streamlined administration and financial responsibilities within DEM to improve overall staff efficiency and increase the amount of time program staff have to focus on meeting the needs of the county. We also implemented a new standing committee, the Emergency Management Working Group. The purpose of this committee is to increase visibility on disaster planning activities across the departments—improving efficiency by helping ensure that all departments are receiving the same message at the same time and are able to hear and respond to each other's feedback as we develop collaborative plans.

One long term goal that DEM has is to improve response efficiencies with local governments by developing standardized response procedures for all the EOCs in the county. This would allow cities to share staff and for the county and cities to provide direct staffing support to one another. Our ability to roll this out relies on the continued support of our EOC Analyst program position.

2. What, if any, hiring challenges are you experiencing? How is that affecting your level of service or internal operations? How are you mitigating those operational challenges and/or what is your plan for recruitment?

The most significant challenge we find in hiring is that the pay scale (especially for our coordinator and analyst positions) is not competitive with positions elsewhere in the region. While we have been able to fill all of our vacancies, we often miss out on incredibly talented potential applicants who cannot afford the cost of living here.

Although we have filled all our current vacancies, one residual burden from the high turnover of recent years is the training burden as we bring many new staff up to full operational capacity.

3. To help inform Council on experiences around hiring and retention, please provide a list of all vacant position titles, position codes, FTE amount (1.0, 0.5, etc.), date vacated, and date first posted. Template spreadsheet attached for convenience and conformity; if already tracking information in another format, that is acceptable as well. Please list each vacancy separately.

DEM does not currently have any funded vacancies.

4. What effect has the increase of inflation and/or supply chain issues had on your department? What, if any, services, or projects have you had to adjust to accommodate for this? (i.e. moving to outside contracted services, delaying of project starts and/or purchasing, redistribution of workload, etc.)

We are currently in a long queue to receive a truck and furniture for our Enhanced Emergency Services Communications System (EESCS) group. We are making do by repurposing furniture/shelves into ad hoc cubicle walls and

using multiple vehicles to travel for our drone mapping missions (in order to transport all the equipment).

Inflation is impacting our department through grant allocations from previous years which do not account for the increased cost of doing business—whether that is personnel costs, supplies, or support fees such as cell phone rates.

5. When was the last time your department implemented a fee increase? Do you have any plans to increase fees?

We last increased our fees in 2023.

6. Do you have any plans to do a rate/fee study? Are your current fees established based on a full cost recovery model?

We plan to reassess our fees for 2025. Our 2023 fees were established based on cost recovery of all General Fund costs minus the positions the county is required to staff per RCW (director and finance) at a proportional/per capita amount.

## **Successes**

1. Take this opportunity to share one significant success in your department over this past year. What made it a success?

In early 2023 Snohomish County received its Emergency Management Accreditation Program accreditation. This is an accomplishment not just for DEM but for the county as a whole. The majority of county departments contributed documentation and procedures in support of this achievement.