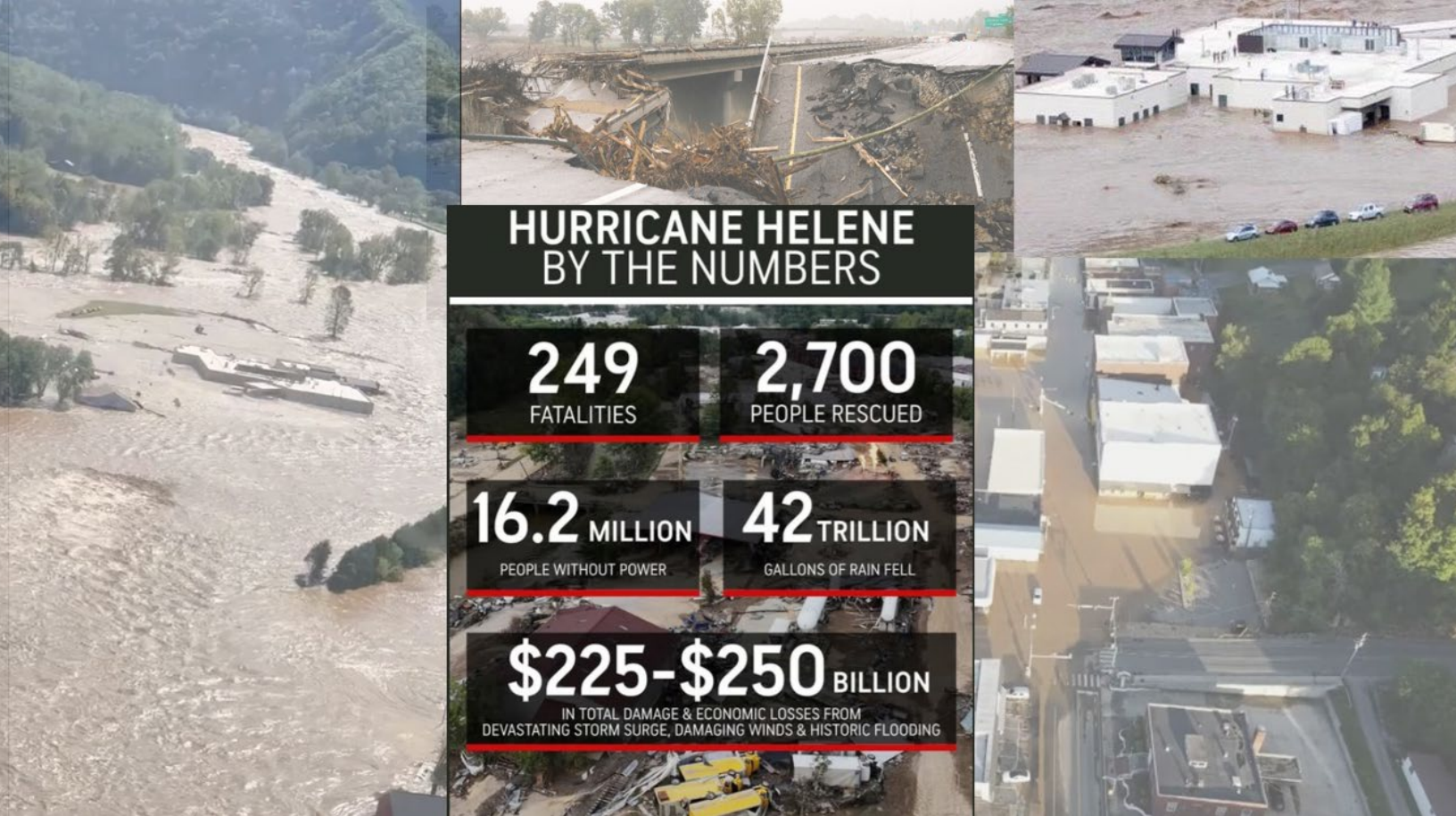




Strategic
Technology Solutions

Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA)

NASCIO Category: **Cross Boundary Collaboration**

Project Title: **Hurricane Helene Response**

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Executive Summary

Rainfall started impacting Northeast Tennessee days before Helene made landfall so that on September 27, 2024, catastrophic flooding impacts from Helene brought massive amounts of debris which destroyed numerous homes, infrastructure, and utilities.

the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) faced a critical operational challenge: coordinating a sustained, multi-week disaster response across state agencies, regional offices, local emergency management partners, volunteer organizations, and field operations while maintaining a connected and situationally aware State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC).

The Northeast Tennessee Disaster Relief Center was established just days after the storm at Bristol Motor Speedway in Bristol, Tennessee. The large community partnership was supported by TN National Guard and State Guard Volunteers, the Unicoi County Chamber of Commerce, United Way of East TN Highlands, Eastman Chemical, and Sunbright Rentals. The Center opened on October 2, 2024, and was operational for 135 days. The Center served as a donation hub to support survivors and fulfill requests for impacted counties, organizations, and local communities.

TEMA's mission required more than activating emergency operations. It required bringing together multiple organizations, systems, users, and communications channels into a shared response environment. As flooding impacts expanded across Tennessee and neighboring regions, TEMA needed to ensure that executive branch agencies deployed to the SEOC, regional personnel, local emergency management partners, volunteer organizations, and field staff could communicate, share information, access response systems, and coordinate missions in real time.

To meet this need, TEMA partnered with Strategic Technology Solutions' (STS) IT team to sustain the technology foundation required for emergency coordination. STS supported the systems and services that allowed TEMA to collaborate across organizational boundaries, including network connectivity, account provisioning, device deployment, Web Emergency Operations Center (WebEOC), Microsoft 365 and Teams, access to the state's secure virtual private network (VPN), phones, mobile devices, conference room technology, A/V monitoring, command center displays, and situational awareness systems.

As the response escalated, STS shifted into an elevated support posture to meet TEMA's operational needs. This included 24/7 on-site coverage during the first week of activation and continued elevated support for two weeks. Through this partnership, TEMA was able to support more than 150 users, all executive branch agencies deployed to the SEOC, four regional offices, local emergency management partners, volunteer organizations, and field operations.

The results were immediate and measurable. TEMA maintained a connected emergency operations environment with 100% network uptime during the activation period, sustained WebEOC as a primary emergency coordination tool, preserved SEOC A/V monitoring and situational awareness capabilities, supported three conference rooms, and avoided vendor escalations. This enabled operational briefings, resource coordination, damage assessment, situation reporting, logistics coordination,

public information coordination, local/state/federal coordination, remote access, and field connectivity.

By identifying the operational need and leveraging STS as a technology partner, TEMA ensured that emergency response remained connected, coordinated, and mission-focused during a major disaster. The project demonstrates how emergency management agencies can use enterprise IT partnerships to strengthen cross-agency collaboration and improve disaster response outcomes.

Idea

Hurricane Helene created a widespread and sustained emergency response that required TEMA to coordinate across many boundaries at once: agency to agency, state to local, field to SEOC, regional office to headquarters, and government to volunteer organization. The incident involved hurricane-related flooding across Tennessee and North Carolina, with response operations lasting weeks and recovery continuing beyond the initial activation period.

The challenge TEMA faced was a coordination challenge and a technology challenge. TEMA needed to bring together executive branch agencies, local emergency management partners, regional offices, field personnel, volunteer organizations, and other response partners into a shared operational environment. These partners needed reliable access to emergency coordination platforms, communications tools, devices, dashboards, conference rooms, phones, remote access, and situational awareness systems. Without this shared technology foundation, response operations could have experienced slower coordination, degraded situational awareness, reduced access to WebEOC, communication gaps, and diminished ability to coordinate resources and information across jurisdictions.

TEMA recognized that effective disaster response depends on reliable enterprise technology. The agency used its partnership with STS to solve the operational problem of keeping emergency partners connected during a rapidly evolving incident. STS provided the technical expertise and support model needed to sustain the systems that TEMA and its partners relied on for coordination.

This approach was important because the response environment was complex. The SEOC was not supporting only one agency or one user group. It served as a central coordination hub for agencies deployed to the SEOC, regional offices, local partners, volunteer organizations, and field operations. Technology had to support in-person operations, remote operations, hybrid coordination, shared dashboards, conference room briefings, mobile users, and real-time situational awareness.

TEMA's innovation was in treating IT as an integrated part of emergency operations. Rather than waiting for technology issues to disrupt response work, TEMA embedded STS support into the operational environment. This allowed technology needs to be addressed in real time and ensured that emergency personnel could stay focused on mission execution.

The project is relevant to other states because emergency management increasingly depends on digital coordination. Disaster response today requires reliable networks, shared platforms, secure remote access, mobile connectivity, real-time dashboards, video-enabled briefings, and cross-agency collaboration tools. TEMA's Hurricane Helene response demonstrates how an emergency management agency can use an enterprise IT partnership to strengthen coordination, reduce operational friction, and maintain response readiness during a major disaster.

Implementation

TEMA activated its emergency operations posture as Hurricane Helene created flooding risks and response needs across the region. As impacts expanded, TEMA needed to sustain coordination among the SEOC, regional offices, local emergency management partners, executive branch agencies, volunteer organizations, and field operations.

To support this need, TEMA partnered with Strategic Technology Solutions to maintain the technology environment that made cross-agency coordination possible. STS began supporting the response immediately following agency activation and increased support as flooding began in low-lying areas. The elevated support posture continued for two weeks, with 24/7 on-site coverage during the first week of activation.

STS supported the major technologies TEMA needed to operate the primary SEOC and coordinate with partners, including:

Technology	Role in TEMA Operations
Network connectivity	Kept the SEOC and response partners connected
VPN and remote access	Enabled regional and remote users to access response systems
Microsoft 365 and Teams	Supported communication, collaboration, file sharing, and briefings
WebEOC	Supported situation reporting, mission coordination, and emergency documentation
Phones and VoIP services	Enabled voice communication across response partners
Mobile devices and hotspots	Supported field and mobile connectivity
Workstations and printers	Supported deployed agency and SEOC staff
GIS and dashboards	Supported situational awareness and decision-making
Workstations and printers	Supported deployed agency and SEOC staff
Conference room technology	Enabled operational briefings and partner coordination
Command center displays and A/V monitoring	Maintained shared situational awareness in the SEOC
Account provisioning and permissions	Ensured users had timely access to required systems

A critical part of the implementation was maintaining WebEOC as a primary emergency coordination tool. TEMA relied on WebEOC to support emergency documentation, situation reporting, resource coordination, and information sharing. STS provided dedicated support to help ensure WebEOC remained available and usable during the response.

STS also maintained the SEOC's network environment through an SD-WAN architecture supported by four full-time network providers. This helped TEMA maintain 100% network uptime during the activation period, preserving the connectivity required for briefings, dashboards, communications, WebEOC access, and partner coordination.

Conference room and A/V support were also essential. TEMA's response required frequent operational briefings, shared monitoring, and coordination among deployed agencies. STS maintained three conference rooms, command center displays, and the SEOC A/V monitoring system, helping TEMA preserve a common operating picture throughout the incident.

The implementation was especially notable because STS supported TEMA's disaster-response technology needs while continuing to support normal agency requirements. By embedding support into the SEOC and maintaining 24/7 coverage during the most intense portion of the activation, STS helped TEMA avoid after-hours delays, reduce escalation needs, and resolve user issues as they occurred.

This partnership allowed TEMA to focus on emergency coordination while STS sustained the systems, access, devices, and communications tools required to support that mission.

Impact

TEMA's partnership with STS directly improved the state's ability to coordinate emergency response during Hurricane Helene. By using STS to maintain the technology foundation behind the SEOC, TEMA preserved communication, collaboration, situational awareness, and operational continuity across multiple response partners.

Confirmed measurable outcomes include:

Outcome	Result
Users supported	150+
Network uptime during activation	100%
Primary SEOC supported	YES
Regional offices supported remotely	4
Conference rooms supported	3
Extended 24/7 support	7 days
Elevated support posture	2 weeks
Number of state agencies supported at the SEOC	23 cabinet-level departments
Vendor escalations required	None
After-hours calls required	None, because of 24/7 STS staffing

These outcomes enabled TEMA to sustain critical disaster-response functions, including operational briefings, resource coordination, damage assessment, situation reporting, public information coordination, logistics coordination, local/state/federal coordination, remote access, and field connectivity.

The most important impact was collaboration. TEMA was able to bring together state agencies, local emergency management partners, volunteer organizations, regional offices, and field personnel in a connected response environment. STS support ensured that users could access the systems and tools needed to communicate, share information, make decisions, and coordinate resources during a complex disaster.

The project also reduced operational risk. By maintaining 100% network uptime, TEMA avoided connectivity disruptions that could have slowed response operations. By sustaining WebEOC, TEMA preserved access to a primary emergency coordination platform. By maintaining SEOC A/V monitoring and conference room technology, TEMA supported real-time situational awareness and coordinated briefings. By embedding STS support into the SEOC, TEMA reduced delays and avoided vendor escalations.

The public value was significant. While the technology work itself was largely behind the scenes, it enabled the coordination required to support local jurisdictions and disaster-response missions. Emergency response depends on fast, accurate, and coordinated information flow. TEMA's ability to use STS support to maintain that flow helped the agency and its partners remain focused on protecting communities, coordinating resources, and supporting recovery operations.

The project also produced long-term value for future activations. Lessons learned from Hurricane Helene strengthened TEMA's SEOC support model, improved technology playbooks, reinforced inventory readiness, updated escalation contacts, and improved cross-agency communication patterns. These improvements will help TEMA respond more effectively to future severe weather events, flooding incidents, planned events, and statewide emergencies.

Ultimately, this nomination recognizes TEMA's leadership in identifying a complex emergency coordination challenge and using its partnership with STS to solve it. Hurricane Helene demonstrated that emergency management and enterprise IT must work together during major disasters. Through this collaboration, TEMA maintained a connected, coordinated, and situationally aware response environment when Tennessee needed it most.