

## South Carolina Office of Resilience

### Introduction

In 2020, the South Carolina legislature passed the [Disaster Relief and Resilience Act](#), which established the South Carolina Office of Resilience (SCOR) and the Chief Resilience Officer (CRO). SCOR is a flood-focused state agency that plans and carries out resilience strategies that address citizens' physical, spiritual, emotional, and financial needs. The agency also repairs homes after disasters, upgrades infrastructure, assists communities with flood projects, and funds resilience efforts. By having an office with clear responsibilities to address flooding, South Carolina can comprehensively tackle this issue and effectively use resources within and outside the state.

### The challenge

Before SCOR, many state agencies collaborated on different aspects of flood management, without a leading office. Some of those departments included the Emergency Management Division, the Disaster Recovery Office, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Health and Environmental Control, the Department of Natural Resources, the South Carolina National Guard, and many local agencies. Policymakers in South Carolina recognized the need for a single office tasked with building flood resilience.

In 2018, after three consecutive years of major floods, the governor created the South Carolina Floodwater Commission, which [detailed the impacts](#) of extreme weather on vulnerable populations, infrastructure, and human health. The Commission recommended that South Carolina adopt a structure and strategy to reduce flood risk and strengthen resilience. This recommendation led to the creation of SCOR.

### Design of SCOR

The Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) is a governor-appointed, cabinet-level position that leads SCOR. Duties of the CRO include overseeing grant programs for repairing and rebuilding homes after disasters, managing disaster recovery funds from the federal government, developing a strategy for risk reduction and resilience, and supervising the director and staff of the South Carolina Disaster Recovery Office.

Guided by the CRO, SCOR's 14-person operational staff focuses on communications, finance, auditing, and law, while the 38-person program staff carries out resilience work in planning, mitigation, disaster recovery, and disaster case management.

#### ***Statewide Resilience Planning***

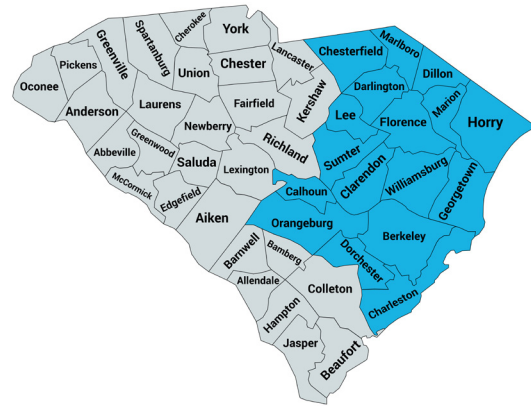
In 2023, SCOR released its first [Strategic Statewide Resilience and Risk Reduction Plan](#), which uses forward-looking data to highlight risks from extreme weather. The plan also

provides recommendations for local, regional, state, federal, and tribal decisionmakers, as well as other stakeholders involved in building flood resilience. To prioritize resilience activities and monitor progress, the plan establishes resilience metrics and includes a flood risk and vulnerability assessment.

### Mitigation Program

The [Mitigation Program](#) improves resilience in counties, particularly those that are most impacted and distressed. The program is organized by the following objectives:

1. [Infrastructure](#)
2. [Buyouts](#)
3. [Plans and studies](#)
4. [Funds match](#)
5. [Stormwater Infrastructure Program](#)
6. [USS Yorktown Remediation](#)



*Counties in blue identified as most impacted and distressed by South Carolina and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.*

### Disaster Recovery Division

The [Disaster Recovery Division](#) has provided post-disaster assistance, helping rebuild and repair over 3,300 homes following the 2015 flood, Hurricane Matthew in 2016, and Hurricane Florence in 2018. The division also provides aid for homes in Horry, Georgetown, and Charleston counties damaged by Hurricane Ian.

### Disaster Case Management

[Disaster Case Management](#) pairs case managers and citizens to create and carry out individualized recovery plans, which can include meeting financial, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. By creating solutions to restore long-term needs, the program increases the resilience of citizens.

## Cost and funding

SCOR manages and disperses state and federal funds to carry out projects and support the office’s operations.

### State funding and financing

- In 2023, the legislature [authorized \\$2.65 million](#) to fund part of SCOR’s general operations.
- The state-funded South Carolina [Revolving Loan Fund](#) has a total balance of about [\\$6 million](#).<sup>1</sup> The program provides low-interest loans for buyouts or flood-plain restoration projects. The interest rate is roughly 1.5–2%, and entities must

<sup>1</sup> As of mid-2022.

repay the loan within one to 10 years.<sup>2</sup> Eligible applicants include state agencies, commissions, and local governments.

- Through the [2023-2024 Appropriation Act](#), the legislature appropriated \$200 million to the Disaster Relief and Resilience Reserve Fund, on top of an existing \$44 million. This fund supports resilience planning (pre-disaster) and the Disaster Relief and Hazard Mitigation program (post-disaster). The latter includes Disaster Case Management, infrastructure repairs ineligible for federal funding, immediate assistance to local governments, and grants to state agencies and local governments for equipment and infrastructure repair tied to a [FEMA Community Lifeline](#).

### **Federal funding**

- SCOR's Disaster Recovery Division manages \$293 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery. SCOR uses some funds for operations.
- SCOR also received a \$162 million Community Development Block Grant-Mitigation from HUD. Of SCOR's high-level projects, infrastructure projects receive \$100 million, buyouts receive \$37.3 million, plans and studies receive \$13 million, and matching funds receive \$2.6 million. SCOR also uses some funds for operations.
- SCOR received \$55 million from the American Rescue Plan Act Stormwater Infrastructure Program; so far, the office has made available for communities [\\$47.7 million](#).<sup>3</sup> Communities have used these funds for gray or green infrastructure projects, including the SCOR Stormwater Infrastructure Program and the USS Yorktown Remediation.

## **State collaboration with local governments**

By engaging with local governments in its Statewide Resilience Plan, SCOR incorporates many on-the-ground perspectives into future resilience projects, strengthens its coordination across the state, and provides opportunities for different communities to grow resilience.

As SCOR carries out its Statewide Resilience Plan, communities will gain better access to grants and loans to reduce flooding. Those resources will be strengthened by data and training that will make it more manageable for communities to complete risk assessments and apply for grants. With watershed-based approaches to flood management, local and regional governments can collaborate on and invest in effective flood projects. To initiate this statewide watershed approach, SCOR is hiring five watershed coordinators to act as points of contact between the state government and local communities.

Additionally, SCOR is studying the creation of a Data Coordination Office, which would allow for standardized data collection and management. SCOR is also preparing to

<sup>2</sup> The South Carolina Revolving Loan Fund interest rate is set at 40% of the [U.S. Treasury Yield Curve](#).

<sup>3</sup> As of November 2023.

standardize policies to support local governments as they establish consistent building codes and design standards for stormwater infrastructure.

## Impact

The Statewide Resilience Plan provides critical information for building resilience, including state resilience priorities, ways for communities to access funding, and an overview of present data, as well as data that should be collected moving forward. With this plan, leaders are positioned to make well-informed decisions that consider resilience, and residents are safer, even in the face of extreme weather.

Leaders in South Carolina can use the Statewide Resilience Plan to prioritize projects so that their funds have the greatest impact. Already, SCOR has [awarded funding](#) to 57 mitigation projects, dedicating \$49.9 million to infrastructure, \$36.3 million to buyouts, \$6 million to plans and studies, and \$2.4 million to matching funds. State appropriations will also bring major impacts, with \$200 million contributing to SCOR's disaster recovery and resilience building. South Carolina has carried out these projects thanks to the expertise and coordination of SCOR.

## Key takeaways

The South Carolina Office of Resilience has the power to address flooding, aided by its formal plan to guide statewide resilience. Other states can learn from SCOR's staff organization, collaboration efforts, and watershed approaches.

### *Institute a sufficient number of permanent staff with an empowered leader*

South Carolina has a permanent staff — composed of [52 people](#)<sup>4</sup> with distinct roles — which is directed by a cabinet-level CRO. This number of employees is sufficient for SCOR but will vary in other states depending on their needs and the needs of the CRO. Resilience offices can hire subject-matter experts, whose permanent roles enable continuity. Although not all states will employ someone with the title of CRO, an empowered leader guides the priorities and effectiveness of flood resilience programs.

### *Lead and mobilize the entire government around a resilience plan*

SCOR engages with local communities through workshops, grant applications, and collaboration opportunities with public and private sector stakeholders to achieve specific objectives in the Statewide Resilience Plan. The office also designates specific objectives and roles to federal and state agencies in the Statewide Resilience Plan. Though SCOR engages with state agencies and various levels of government, the office does not explicitly provide formal guidance for communication among agencies. Other states can consider establishing a working group with members representing different state agencies. By encouraging collaboration between many agency representatives, such a group could prioritize resilience throughout the state government, bringing about systemic change that would be difficult for a single office to achieve.

<sup>4</sup> As of November 2023.

### *Collaborate at the regional level and consider the watershed scale*

Because flooding ignores municipal boundaries, regional or watershed-based planning is critical. By creating watershed-scale planning and technical assistance, states can address flooding and provide regional support, rather than rely on individual communities to develop their own plans.

With its [pilot project](#) in the Salkehatchie River Basin, SCOR is moving toward watershed planning, considering scaling the project to the rest of the state. This project lets SCOR engage with local communities, assess vulnerabilities, and plan for specific flood challenges. At the conclusion of this project, the Salkehatchie River Basin will develop a Watershed Resilience Planning Handbook to make building watershed-based resilience more accessible for other regions across the state.

Based on recommendations from the Statewide Resilience Plan, SCOR is bringing resilience planning and support to each of South Carolina's eight river basins, with five new watershed coordinators. Other states can follow a similar model for regional resilience, clarifying areas of uncertainty before scaling up the project to the entire state.