

FSLI Project: Oregon State University Extension Emergency Response Plan.

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The Problem (How was it identified?)

Since 2020, Oregon has experienced increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters—particularly wildfires which have exposed gaps in OSU Extension’s ability to respond in a coordinated, statewide manner. Although Extension faculty and staff provided critical assistance during events such as the 2020 and 2024 wildfires, responses were largely ad hoc, with no unified framework to mobilize expertise, clarify roles, or align with state and federal emergency systems. Feedback from Extension personnel, state partners, and after-action reflections confirmed the need for an integrated, organization-wide emergency preparedness and response plan.

The Plan (The Project)

The project focused on developing a comprehensive OSU Extension Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan that aligns with Oregon Emergency Management and national emergency frameworks. The plan integrates agriculture, forestry, family and community health, and other Extension-wide expertise into a single coordinated structure. It establishes clear roles, communication pathways, and partnerships to support preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation, while leveraging Extension’s statewide presence and trusted relationships with communities.

Progress (Where are you now and what’s next?)

A formal statewide emergency response framework has been developed and documented, including defined leadership roles, regional coordination, and disaster-specific response teams. Extension expertise across programs has been mapped to support rapid mobilization during disasters. Next steps include implementing training, conducting exercises, refining communication systems, and pursuing dedicated leadership capacity to sustain and continuously improve Extension’s emergency preparedness and response efforts. In 2026, the Governor allocated \$60,000 for Extension to lead training for local nonprofit groups involved in disaster assistance.

What I Gained from the FSLI Program

The FSLI program strengthened my leadership approach by emphasizing inclusive, relationship-based leadership and the power of diverse teams (adaptive leadership).

Learning to engage people across disciplines, experiences, and programs helped me navigate Extension's complexity and bring units together around a shared purpose. This approach was essential in creating a cohesive emergency response plan where other Extension programs contribute their strengths to better serve Oregonians during crises.