



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of February 1, 2024

To: Committee of the Whole
From: Daniel Atkinson, Fire Chief
Subject: Emergency Support Services and Emergency Operation Centre UBCM Grant applications
Date: January 23, 2024

RECOMMENDATION

That Council authorize and direct staff to apply for two UBCM grants worth up to \$30,000 each through the Community Emergency Preparedness Fund for Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) Equipment and Training 2024 and Emergency Support Services (ESS) Modernization Project 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks a Council resolution to support a City of Victoria application to the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Community Emergency Preparedness Fund (CEPF) for two separate grants each worth up to \$30,000. The Emergency Operation Centre Equipment and Training grant supports the purchase of workstation equipment and auxiliary communications hardware. The Emergency Support Service grant supports the modernization of equipment, recruitment, training, recognition, and engagement activities for volunteers.

The CEPF is a suite of funding programs administered by UBCM and is intended to enhance the resiliency of local governments and their residents in responding to emergencies.

The City of Victoria's Emergency Plan states that an EOC will be activated and staffed to provide site support and coordination of the overall emergency response activities within its geographical or functional jurisdiction. The proposed project will enhance the functionality of the EOC and ensure reliable communications with external organizations.

The City of Victoria's Emergency Plan also states that ESS will provide services at the site level and will be a branch of the Operations Section within the Emergency Operations Centre. This is consistent with the British Columbia Emergency Management System, the Incident Command System and the requirements of the Emergency and Disaster Management Act and associated Local Government legislations. The proposed project will reinforce the strength of the ESS volunteer team and provide volunteers with important equipment, knowledge and resources to effectively deliver ESS.

These grants will support the following activities:

- Provide equipment to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of EOC operations (monitors, headsets, keyboards, etc.).

- Provide equipment to ensure alternative communication methods exist (satellite).
- The installation of the equipment above.

And

- Provide the ESS team with equipment to support operations (laptops, hot spot, keyboards)
- Provide volunteers with training to be successful in delivering ESS.
- Reinforce the strength of Victoria's volunteer team through recruitment, recognition and engagement activities.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek a Council resolution to support a City of Victoria application to UBCM for two grants worth up to \$30,000 that, if successful, will be used specifically for EOC equipment and modernization initiatives of ESS through equipment and training for City staff and volunteers.

BACKGROUND

Under the *Emergency and Disaster Management Act (2023)*, municipalities, First Nations communities, and Regional Districts are responsible for responding to emergencies in their jurisdiction and to provide Emergency Support Services where eligible.

An EOC is the primary tool to provide site support and coordination of the overall emergency response activities as stated in the City of Victoria's Emergency Plan. EOC activities include maintaining communication with the site level, providing policy guidance, coordinating the collection of situational awareness information, and disseminating it both internally and externally, providing operational support, coordinating the local multi-agency support to the site level, acquiring and deploying additional resources obtained locally, from other EOCs, or from the provincial regional coordination level, prioritizing and coordinating critical resources and assisting with the media.

The City of Victoria's Emergency Plan states that trained ESS volunteers provide essential services to people affected by an emergency or disaster. The primary role of ESS is to care for the needs of people evacuated because of an emergency.

Emergency response responsibilities include:

- Register and provide shelter, food, incidentals, and other service referrals to eligible evacuees.
- Establish ESS reception centres, group lodging centres and volunteer centres, as required.
- Request, through the EOC, mobile support from EMBC, as required.
- Obtain and coordinate ESS resources and supplies, as required.

EMCR has been modernizing the Provincial ESS program over the past few years in order increase effectiveness and efficiencies and build capacity due to the increased frequency and severity of emergencies requiring emergency support services. The City of Victoria continues to align with EMCR's modernization of ESS and provide up to date resources and training to ESS volunteers as well as providing recognition for their commitment to providing this valuable service.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

In 2023 the Victoria Fire Department and the Emergency Management Division moved into a new location at 1025 Johnson St. This new facility includes a room purpose built to act as an EOC and equipment to support a highly effective response. Experience using the room in training and exercises, as well as the work experience of Emergency Program staff deployed to support EOC activations during wildfires in other communities, lead to the identification of areas for equipment improvement. Equipment such as supplementary laptop monitors, headsets and full-size keyboards can improve staff efficiency during activations. The addition of reliable satellite internet will ensure communications and access to cloud-based information when traditional systems lose functionality.

In 2020 the City was awarded a \$25,000 grant for ESS modernization including the purchase of equipment such as IPADS, MiFi devices, and a printer which allows the delivery of the modernized digital services. An additional grant of \$25,000 was awarded in 2023 to continue this modernization work. After working with the new equipment and the modernized program, further improvements were made by EMCR. The Emergency management division has now identified equipment, recruiting, training, recognition, and engagement activities that will continue to build the ESS program's efficiency and the ability to effectively respond to all-hazards.

The City of Victoria ESS program is committed to ESS modernization and the use of the Evacuee Registration & Assistance (ERA 2.0) tool to provide effective, efficient, and empowering evacuee-centered support. Volunteers are the core of ESS programs. The proposed project will support volunteer recruitment and ensure volunteers are engaged and recognized for their critical contributions. This engagement and recognition is crucial during this time of change and modernization. Equipment will support the deployment of technology resources necessary for the use of the ERA tool.

The proposed project will increase the capacity of the Victoria team to respond to emergencies in our own community by increasing the total number of ESS volunteers and the engagement level of current volunteers. Equipment will increase the ability to deploy technology devices, which supports the use of the ERA tool and more efficient, empowering and evacuee-centered support. Training will increase the number of volunteers comfortable using this equipment and will support them to do so more effectively and in collaboration with regional partners. Group lodging training will develop capacity specific to this function and has been identified as critical due to periodic lodging capacity challenges in the region. Recruitment and recognition activities will support the growth, retention, and engagement of volunteers.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

Impacts to Financial Plan

The current financial plan allocates funding for the emergency program which includes EOCs and ESS. This project is eligible for two allocations of up to \$30,000 of grant funding from UBCM, which will assist us in developing stronger EOC and ESS programs. If successful, these \$30,000 amounts would be added to the budget with offsetting funding from this grant.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

Emergency Management activities align with the Official Community Plan goals outlined in Section 18 – Emergency Management:

- Victoria is prepared to deal with known hazards and emerging threats, to limit the adverse impacts of events, and effectively manage emergencies.

- Victoria can respond rapidly and effectively to all emergencies, including events with long-term impacts and recovery times; and
- Victorians can rely on significant local sources for food, energy and materials to meet daily needs under emergency conditions.

CONCLUSIONS

The City of Victoria's Emergency Management Division is committed to ensuring the readiness and effectiveness of the EOC and to continued ESS modernization. These proposed projects will increase the effectiveness and reliability of the EOC and support ESS operations and volunteer engagement. Volunteer engagement and recognition is crucial during this time of change and modernization. Equipment will support the effectiveness of operations and will increase the City's capacity and ability to effectively respond to all emergencies.

Respectfully submitted,

Geoff Pendrel
Deputy Emergency Program Coordinator

Daniel Atkinson
Fire Chief

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

List of Attachments

Appendix A - Community Emergency Preparedness Fund Emergency Support Services 2024 Application Form

Appendix B – 2024 Victoria CEPF ESS Grant Expenses Estimated