

# FEMA Efforts Advancing Community-Driven Relocation

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Now more than ever, communities across the nation are making, or have already made, the tough decision to seek higher ground and relocate away from harm's way. As climate change continues to displace people, FEMA alongside federal partners, strives to assist these communities every step of the way during the implementation of a climate adaptation strategy known as community-driven relocation.

This work aligns with the [2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan](#) which outlines a bold vision and three ambitious goals designed to address key challenges, which includes leading the whole-of-community in climate resilience. This work also supports the [2022-2026 FEMA National Tribal Strategy](#), which is dedicated to addressing FEMA's trust and treaty responsibilities to tribal nations when responding to and preparing for disasters in Indian Country.

## Community-Driven Relocation Subcommittee

The White House launched a [Community-Driven Relocation Subcommittee](#) as part of the White House National Climate Task Force in August 2022. This Interagency Subcommittee is co-led by FEMA and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI). This subcommittee convenes federal agencies to explore key considerations, issues and strategies for community partnerships to support voluntary movement away from high-risk regions.

The phrase "community-driven relocation" is deliberate—the intent is to collectively reinforce that it is essential for the consideration or implementation of planned relocation projects be grounded in a community's ability to define and determine their future.

The interagency Community-Driven Relocation Subcommittee aims to bridge the gap between communities seeking assistance with relocation and the resources



available across the federal government. Within the subcommittee, there is representation from the White House and 14 federal agencies.

### **Federal Agencies Represented on the Interagency Community-Driven Relocation Subcommittee**

- The Denali Commission
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of Interior
- Department of Transportation
- Economic Development Administration
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- National Science Foundation
- Small Business Administration
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

### **FEMA Is Partnering with Department of Interior's New Voluntary Community-Driven Relocation Program**

On Nov. 30, 2022 the Biden-Harris administration announced the launch of a new Voluntary Community-Driven Relocation program, led by the Department of the Interior, to assist tribal communities severely impacted by climate-related environmental threats.

Through investments from President Joseph R. Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act, the Department of the Interior is committing \$115 million for 11 severely impacted tribes to advance relocation efforts and adaptation planning. Additional support for relocation will be provided by FEMA and [the Denali Commission](#).

Recognizing the real and immediate threat of climate change, the Department of Interior's Voluntary Community-Driven Relocation Program, is designed to



coordinate closely with Tribal Leaders to help begin the process of relocating crucial community infrastructure away from imminent threats and build long-term resilience to climate impacts. These projects will yield critical information to inform replication in other communities and initiate a long-term strategy for future relocation and climate resilience efforts. Read the complete news release about these efforts on [FEMA's website](#).

## FEMA Mitigation Grants Available for Relocation Projects

FEMA will continue to provide communities with appropriate support to facilitate their relocation priorities. To date, FEMA mitigation grant funds can support relocations through multiple funding streams. This includes Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) grant programs through buyouts of individual properties, relocation of critical facilities, and in a few cases includes the movement of entire communities. Multiple FEMA programs can be leveraged for relocation funding include:

- **Building Resilience Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Grant Program**: BRIC is a competitive grant program that annually awards funds to support states, local communities, tribes, and territories as they undertake hazard mitigation projects. The program funds cost-effective projects designed to increase resilience, reduce injuries and loss of life, and reduce damage and destruction to property. Tribal nations as eligible applicants can use BRIC funding for property acquisition and relocation. For the Fiscal Year 2022 funding cycle, FEMA increased the tribal set aside for BRIC funding to \$50 million.
- **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**: HMGP assists communities in rebuilding to become more resilient to hazards. HMGP funds mitigation projects including acquisition of hazard prone homes and businesses which enable owners to relocate to safer areas. This grant funding from the HMGP is available to tribal nations after a major disaster declaration.
- **Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Grant Program**: Flood Mitigation Assistance is a competitive grant program that provides funding to states, local communities, tribal nations, and territories. Funds can be used for projects that reduce or eliminate the risk of repetitive flood damage to buildings insured by the National Flood Insurance Program, including property buyouts. In 2021, through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the program received \$350 million in



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flood mitigation funding for five years for the annual grant cycle. Communities must be participating in the National Flood Insurance Program to be eligible.

## Examples of Community-Relocation Projects Funded with FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grants

FEMA has awarded, or is in the process of awarding, approximately \$17.7 million to assist the Newtok Village, the Native Village of Napakiak, and Quinault Indian Nation in their efforts to acquire, demolish and build new infrastructure out of harm's way. These projects were funded from the following three FEMA programs: Building Resilient Infrastructure and Community, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and a 2019 sunset grant program known as Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program. In addition, through [Legislative Pre-Disaster Mitigation](#) Congressional Community Projects, the Quinault Indian Nation received an appropriation of \$1.4 million. These are the summaries of those projects:

- The **Newtok Village**, located on the Ninglick River in Alaska, is experiencing progressive coastal erosion from ocean storms and degrading permafrost. Multiple erosion studies conclude that there is no cost-effective way to halt this process, and that the people of Newtok must relocate to a new site. At the current rate of erosion of approximately 70 feet per year, the river is expected to threaten structures within two years and the village's critical infrastructure within four years. Mertarvik is the site of the new village, located approximately nine miles across the Ninglick River from Newtok. The new village site has roads but only a handful of homes.
- The **Native Village of Napakiak**, located on the Kuskokwim River in Alaska, is experiencing serious erosion that is threatening the school, fuel farm, water supply well, airport, homes and other critical infrastructure. Severe weather, storm surges and flooding are also major concerns. The ongoing erosion is estimated to be 25-50 feet per year. Most of the current critical infrastructure is expected to be destroyed by 2030. The village has comprehensive plans for managed retreat and relocation, but implementation has been delayed by lack of funding.
- The **Quinault Indian Nation**, located on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington, seeks to relocate its Taholah Village. Taholah lies at the confluence of the Quinault River and Pacific Ocean, and is particularly vulnerable to sea level rise, storm surges, and river flooding. The village also faces tsunami hazards from the more frequent distant earthquakes on the Pacific rim and the more



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destructive local tsunamis caused by earthquakes near the western coast of the United States. The Tribe identified an area at higher elevation for relocation. Efforts have been made to begin the relocation process, but the lack of funding has made relocation a piecemeal process.

In addition, the Department of the Interior announced that The Newtok Village and Native Village of Napakiak, both in Alaska, as well as the Quinault Indian Nation in Washington have been selected to receive \$25 million each, for a total of \$75 million in funding, to begin community driven relocation.

Partnership with communities will help inform future federal climate resilience efforts by providing early learning opportunities for best practices, supporting the development of standard guidelines and tools to serve as a blueprint for future efforts, and demonstrating the success of a consolidated and coordinated interagency approach on community-driven relocation. The demonstration projects will focus on the relocation and establishment of core infrastructure identified by the communities to create a center of gravity for full community relocation and will be a multi-year staged process.

