

Tribal Nations Listening Session on FEMA Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide

March 13, 2024, 7:00-10:00 P.M. CT

Overarching Consultation Questions

What courses of action can the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) take to ensure that Public Assistance meets the needs of Tribal Nations and their members to the maximum extent possible? What are the unique tribal considerations that FEMA should factor when developing policies and procedures? How can FEMA convey information in the Public Assistance program and Policy Guide to make the program simpler, more accessible, and user-friendly?

Background

Communities affected by hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, or wildfires often struggle to cover the costs of cleaning up debris, implementing life-saving measures, and repairing public infrastructure like roads and buildings. After a Presidential disaster is declared, FEMA's Public Assistance program supports states, tribes, territories, and local governments with grants so communities can quickly respond to and recover from major disasters or emergencies.

In 2016, the Public Assistance program released its first-ever Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide. The guide combined all Public Assistance policy into a single document which provides an overview of the Public Assistance program with links to other publications and resources that provide additional program details. The document is designed to be used by all customers of the Public Assistance program as a guide to navigate the policies that outline funding opportunities for the Public Assistance grant.

This year Public Assistance will publish a new edition of Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide. The goals are to simplify the Public Assistance program, streamline ways for customers to meet requirements, and increase accessibility through clear and concise language. Improvements were made to support Tribal Nations' ability to recover following a Presidentially declared disaster.

- Clarifications are included to support the unique funding considerations of other federal agencies on tribal owned roads and mutual aid reimbursement when there is no formal agreement in place.
- Program improvements include emphasis on the importance of safeguarding tribal sacred sites, objects, and cultures, and respecting tribal autonomy and sovereignty.
- Process improvements are included to ensure more accurate damage assessments and repair considerations for tribal-owned residential structures and tribal ceremonial buildings by recognizing Tribal Nations are the experts for this information.

Tribal Listening Session

On March 13, 2024, FEMA's Recovery Directorate is hosting a listening session to discuss Public Assistance policies and procedures under development in the Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide. FEMA would like to hear about tribal concerns and opportunities to improve delivery of the Public Assistance program to all tribal members. During the tribal listening session, Recovery staff will provide a brief overview of the Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide, the key improvements incorporated, and the simplified processes and procedures being proposed to reduce the administrative burden on applicants.

Discussion Questions

General:

1. What unique challenges do Tribal Nations leaders see as most critical in FEMA's timely delivery of Public Assistance?
2. What do Tribal Nations need from FEMA to ensure the Public Assistance program is properly communicated and supported by FEMA?
3. Are there other considerations unique to Tribal Nations that FEMA should explore to fully support tribes after a disaster?

Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide:

1. What are the anticipated challenges Tribal Nations have when applying for Public Assistance and completing the steps of the Public Assistance process?
2. Are there specific concerns when interpreting and applying the policies in the Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide?
3. Are there challenges with Tribal Nations' ability to navigate the different considerations when receiving Public Assistance as a Recipient or a Subrecipient? Has FEMA adequately conveyed the benefits and challenges of each role?

Communication:

1. What are the best ways to reach Tribal Nations to notify them that the Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide is available to review and provide comments prior to publication? Are there special considerations which may require other forms of assistance to effectively communicate the changes in the guide?
2. What types of training and/or materials should FEMA develop to supplement the Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide to assist tribal understanding of the program?
3. Are there any other ways FEMA can assist to ensure assistance is provided in a culturally sensitive manner?