

FEMA Supports Nonprofits in Puerto Rico

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Guaynabo, Puerto Rico – From delivering food and offering workshops to providing shelter in times of emergency, nonprofits do invaluable work that impacts thousands of people throughout Puerto Rico. To enable them to do their important work more efficiently and safely, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) obligated over \$5.4 million to five of these entities located in San Juan, Humacao and Patillas.

“The commendable mission of each of these organizations plays a vital role in our society. Their impact on the communities and populations they serve, most of them with special needs, is an integral part of the country's recovery and here at FEMA we are committed to them,” said FEMA Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator Jose G. Baquero.

An example of the work of these civic, philanthropic, religious or community-based entities, among others, is the Centro de Ayuda Social, founded in San Juan in 1967. The center offers educational, preventive and charitable services, including assistance to thousands of homeless people, tutoring for students, workshops for parents, distribution of emergency groceries, help for pregnant women and a program to attend to the needs of older adults.

According to Lillian Doval, Centro's director, they serve about 25,000 people annually through their initiatives, which are adapted according to the needs they encounter along the way. “After the hurricane we realized that there was a community in great need in the Puerto Nuevo area. We opened a soup kitchen and gave hot meals to 400 to 500 people every day. Older people in wheelchairs, with mobility difficulties, etc. were arriving and we decided to give more emphasis to that population. We started with a visitation plan and today we have a list of almost 500 elderly people,” she explained.

In addition to providing them with special services, such as food, clothing and wheelchair distribution, every three months they hold a breakfast or lunch with a



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lecture on pertinent topics such as depression and hurricane preparedness. In fact, Centro is certified by the Puerto Rico Emergency Management Bureau as a Community Hub, and they are active members of the Puerto Rico Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster and FEMA's Long Term Recovery Group in San Juan.

Doval said that the repairs to be made with FEMA funds will help them be able to offer better services. “During the hurricane we had more than six inches of flooding and we lost office equipment, files, [...] and our electrical system was damaged,” he said.

For the center, over \$970,000 were obligated and part of the work has already been completed, such as the replacement of an electric generator, a security camera system, and repairs to the roof. These funds include over \$155,000 for risk mitigation, such as the installation of a voltage protector and the waterproofing and drainage of the roof.

Another organization that received an obligation of funds was the Puerto Rican League Against Cancer, founded in 1938, which was allocated nearly \$2 million for repairs at the San Juan Oncology Hospital, with a line item for risk mitigation measures such as a fan anchoring system on the roof. Among the work completed were the replacement of doors, air conditioning units, access control systems and surveillance cameras, among others.

On the other hand, the elderly of the Manuel Mediavilla Negrón Home for the Elderly in Humacao will benefit from an obligation of over \$1.9 million to repair this complex of some 100 apartments. The home is dedicated to promoting the development of safe housing for low-income seniors and is staffed by a social worker. Work has already been completed on the replacement of the roof slabs and other work remains to be done.

According to Cecilia Cabrer, president of the Board of Directors, the residents are very excited about the repairs to this place that “offers very attractive spaces for residents to receive an excellent quality of life”.

Similarly, in Patillas it was possible to repair the water intake and the water storage tank of the Mulas-Jagual Aqueduct Association, founded in the 1960s, with an allocation of \$85,700. The work performed included the replacement of



storage tanks, gates, roof panels and metal posts.

Nearly \$522,000 were also allocated to the Museo Casa del Libro de San Juan, founded in 1955, to provide content conservation and fungus cleaning treatments. The facility, which houses books dating from 1450 to 1501, manuscripts and posters of Puerto Rican graphics from the 1940s, among other valuable works and artifacts, will receive funds for repairs to protect its collections from deterioration due to temperature control situations.

According to the executive director of the Central Office of Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience (COR3), Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, COR3 has worked closely with nonprofits and many have been able to finance the first phases of construction through the Working Capital Advance (WCA) pilot program. “This program’s disbursement for this sector amounts to over \$70.2 million. The WCA advances FEMA allocations and has been crucial to expedite the reconstruction work in Puerto Rico for this segment, which makes up an essential part of the COR3 subrecipients, along with municipalities and state agencies,” he said.

As of December 2023, FEMA has obligated over \$1.4 billion for just over 2,000 nonprofit projects in Puerto Rico affected by Hurricane María.

For more information about Puerto Rico’s recovery, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339, fema.gov/disaster/4473 and recovery.pr. Follow us on our social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and Twitter @COR3pr.



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