

Partnerships Pave Path to Strengthen Recovery from Irma and Maria

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ST. CROIX, U.S. Virgin Islands -- The U.S. Virgin Islands is charting a course to strengthen its infrastructure four years after Irma and Maria tore through the territory. Hurricane recovery projects are taking shape to make facilities used every day by Virgin Islanders more resilient through support of \$3.27 billion from FEMA.

FEMA's partnerships with the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA), U.S. Virgin Islands Office of Disaster Recovery and the Office of the Governor will ensure recovery projects support the whole community with an emphasis on hardening the infrastructure to decrease damage from future storms.

The \$3.27 billion obligated for 1,417 projects through FEMA's Public Assistance Program includes \$1.7 billion for emergency protective measures, \$1.25 billion for permanent work and \$309 million for state management costs. Emergency work includes debris removal and emergency power restoration, permanent work comprises repairs and replacements to damaged facilities, and state management costs help Public Assistance applicants manage projects.

"We will continue to leverage our resources to support the U.S. Virgin Islands with its vision of strengthening the infrastructure across the territory for a recovery from the 2017 hurricanes that benefits all Virgin Islanders. Our partnerships with the Office of Disaster Recovery, VITEMA, and the Office of the Governor will pave a path toward making critical facilities and housing communities fit to withstand the rigors of future storms," said U.S. Virgin Islands Recovery Director Kristen Hodge.

Public Assistance funding obligated toward key areas includes:

- \$1.35 billion for energy, \$836 million for housing and \$119 million for transportation.



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Projects to repair facilities damaged in the 2017 hurricanes include hazard mitigation measures for a focus on breaking the cycle of disaster damage and reconstruction. Projects developed through collaboration between FEMA and the territory include \$424 million obligated for 159 Hazard Mitigation Proposals funded under Public Assistance.

Hazard Mitigation Proposals applied to Public Assistance projects include making damaged roofs, doors, and windows of housing communities more resistant against wind-driven rains and applying repairs to roads near waterways to make them less susceptible to flooding and erosion. These measures will directly reduce the potential of future, similar disaster damages to the eligible facility.

The 2017 storms have provided the U.S. Virgin Islands an opportunity to prioritize projects to reduce the loss of life and property from future disasters and focus on development of a territorial hazard mitigation plan. FEMA continues to collaborate with VITEMA on these endeavors, which have led to \$99.1 million obligated through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. The \$99.1 million includes \$84.5 million obligated for 80 projects and \$14.6 million obligated for state management costs.

Territory-wide Hazard Mitigation Grant Program projects include:

- The U.S. Virgin Islands Slope Stabilization Analysis Project will identify locations across the territory that need slope stabilization systems. The advance assistance obligated for \$2.5 million will allow the Virgin Islands Department of Public Works to stabilize slopes along the territory's roads, which is in line with the Territorial Hazard Mitigation Plan's goals.
- The Territory-wide Culvert Analysis Advance Assistance Project will identify culverts across the territory that need to be upsized to handle heavy rains. FEMA has provided \$2.3 million for the culvert analysis, which has a total proposed cost of \$3.5 million. The balance of \$1.1 million is scheduled for obligation later this month.

The Territorial Hazard Mitigation & Resilience Plan is being developed by the University of the Virgin Islands and VITEMA through support of \$4.9 million from FEMA. Incorporating resilience into the plan will enable the territory to better think about how critical infrastructure and essential services are operated to ensure communities have access to the services they need.



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UVI and VITEMA are integrating the core principles of resilience, reliance on the territory's economic and natural resources, adaptation to the impacts of climate change and economic/technical capacity building with the plan. The plan will be accessible online and allow the territory to meet FEMA's requirement for disaster relief funding.

A host of federal partners are collaborating with FEMA and the U.S. Virgin Islands to advance recovery from the 2017 storms. FEMA's Interagency Recovery Coordination (IRC) team supports these efforts through the coordination of approximately \$8 billion in federal investments, with a focus on multiagency funded projects to repair and rebuild airports, seaports, roads, power grids, hospitals, public housing, agriculture, historic buildings, and other key infrastructure in the territory. Coordination workgroups include health, housing, economic recovery, natural and cultural resources, transportation, utilities, and philanthropy coordination.

IRC supports territorial partners with resources for recovery projects through funding requests, federal partner technical assistance, capacity building, and subject matter expert technical assistance. Through coordinated efforts between federal and territorial partners, the IRC enables outcome driven recovery by preventing duplication, leveraging funding and project scoping, sequencing recovery projects, and streamlining permits.

Destruction from Irma and Maria occurred within a matter of hours after both hurricanes made landfall in September 2017. The path to recovery demands diligence and FEMA will continue to deliver its recovery programs with an equitable approach to support capacity building toward completion of projects.





Workers from Custom Builders perform roof repairs in July at Paul M. Pearson Gardens Housing Community on St. Thomas. Numerous roofs at the Virgin Islands Housing Authority community were damaged from the winds and rains of hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2017. FEMA's Public Assistance Program is supporting hurricane repairs at Pearson Gardens. FEMA/Eric Adams

