

# Helping Disaster Impacted Communities with the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program

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FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) provides mitigation funding after a major disaster declaration. HMGP has provided over \$16.3 billion to state, tribal, territorial, and local governments since its inception in 1989. In 2023, FEMA conducted a review of the equitable distribution of HMGP assistance.

## HMGP: Helping Disaster Impacted Communities

The Robert T. Stafford Emergency Response and Disaster Relief Act (Stafford Act) authorized HMGP in 1988. FEMA makes HMGP funding available after a major disaster declaration. Since 1989, HMGP has been authorized for over 1,900 disasters. The program has obligated over \$16.3 billion to help communities and Tribal Nations develop hazard mitigation plans and rebuild in a way that reduces, or mitigates, future disaster losses. The projects funded by the program save lives and protect communities from the impact of future disasters.

Mitigation is crucial to saving lives and protecting property. HMGP is FEMA's largest and oldest mitigation grant program. As a post-disaster program, ensuring program access is critical. The distribution of disaster assistance must be equitable and impartial<sup>1</sup>. FEMA reviewed HMGP assistance between 1989 and 2023 to analyze how much assistance has been provided to socially vulnerable and high-risk communities. This review focused on place-based activities, which are activities that could be tied to a census tract.

## Distribution of HMGP Assistance

FEMA reviewed assistance distributed across 1,854 disasters from 1989 to July 2023 (Figure 1). During that period, FEMA obligated over \$14.9 billion. FEMA's analysis focused on 16,743 projects that had physical construction activities. These projects had over \$11.5 billion in federal obligations. FEMA verified 23,000 project sites and 143,000 mitigated properties<sup>2</sup>. All figures in this document are based on this subset of projects. The analysis identified mitigation activities across 24.5% of all census tracts in the U.S.<sup>3</sup> These projects ranged from acquisitions

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<sup>1</sup> [42 USC 5151: Nondiscrimination in disaster assistance \(house.gov\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Analysis restricted to projects where FEMA could verify the physical locations of where mitigation activities took place. This excluded most non-construction projects including mitigation plans, Advance Assistance, and outreach activities. All location data were based on applicant and subapplicant data submission.

<sup>3</sup> Includes all 50 states, District of Columbia, and US territories.

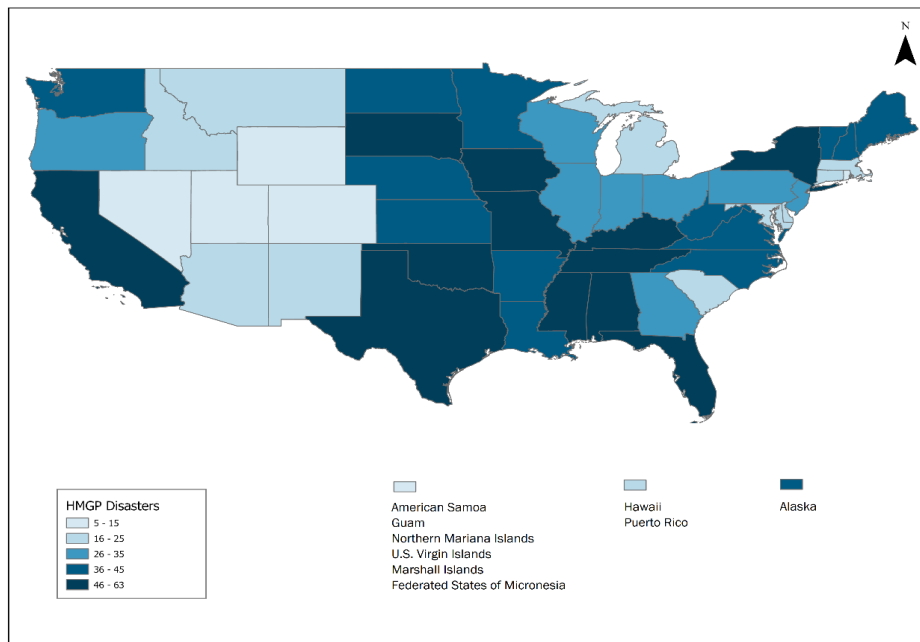


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to floodwalls to safe rooms. FEMA used existing datasets and tools to characterize these tracts<sup>4</sup>. This included respective natural hazard risk and social vulnerability.

## HMGP INVESTMENTS IN DISASTER PRONE AREAS

Most mitigation activities were concentrated in communities that had a higher hazard risk. FEMA used the National Risk Index to identify high-risk areas. The National Risk Index assesses the risk of 18 natural hazards. This includes the Estimated Annual Loss (EAL) from these hazards. Tracts with a high to moderate EAL were considered higher risk. FEMA found that 71% of projects were linked to these census tracts. This included over 108,000 mitigated properties. These projects accounted for over \$9.6 billion or 83.7% of federal obligations<sup>5</sup>.

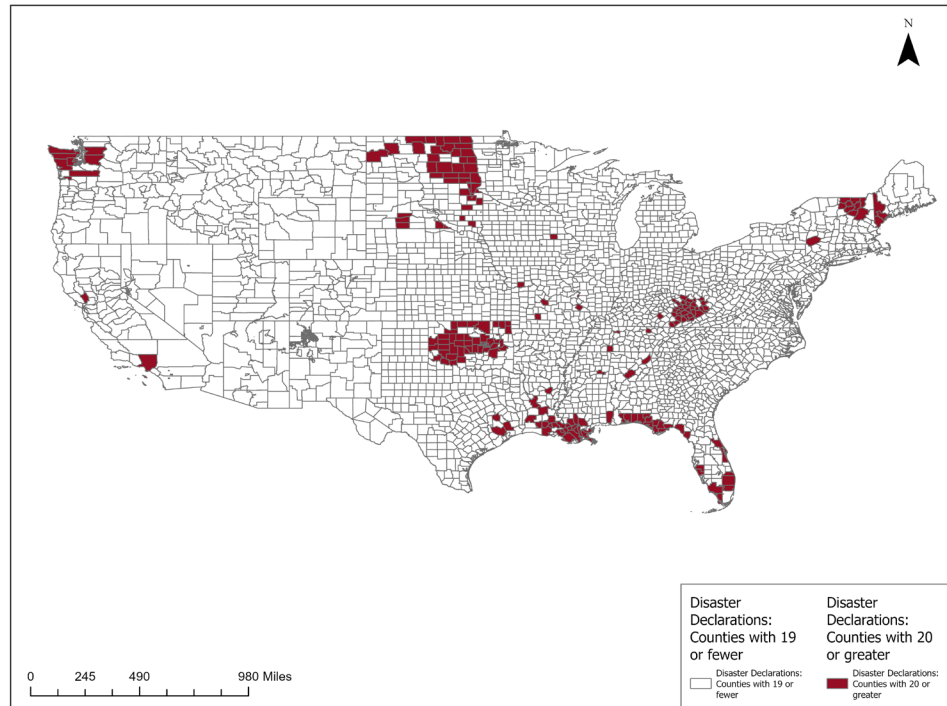


**Figure 1. HMGP has been authorized for nearly 98% of all declared disasters. This map shows the distribution of HMGP authorized disasters across U.S. states and territories, 1989 – July 2023.**

An indicator of hazard risk is federal disaster declarations. States, Tribal Nations, and territories request federal assistance when an event exceeds their resources. FEMA observed that 5.3% of U.S. counties or parishes had received 20 or more disaster declarations (Figure 2). These areas have had frequent disaster damage and loss of life during the analysis timeframe of 1989 to 2023. FEMA observed that HMGP has funded significant mitigation activities across these counties and parishes. This includes mitigating over 49,000 properties in these counties and parishes alone. Over \$4.8 billion or 37.8% of the federal funding in this analysis has gone to these areas.

<sup>4</sup> FEMA used several datasets for this analysis. To identify disadvantaged and vulnerable communities, FEMA used the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool \(CEJST\) or Justice40 Tool](#). To identify high-risk communities, [FEMA's National Risk Index](#) was used with [data from federal disaster declarations](#).

<sup>5</sup> Percentage based on total federal obligations for projects included in this analysis.



**Figure 2. Regions of the continental United States with the highest frequency of disaster declarations. Identified counties or parishes have 20 or more disaster declarations (red polygons). All other counties or parishes have 19 or fewer disaster declarations (white polygons). No counties or equivalent in Alaska, Hawaii or U.S. territories met the high-disaster threshold.**

## HMGP INVESTMENTS IN VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Everyone can be impacted by a disaster. However, not everyone experiences the same level of impacts. Some households and communities are more vulnerable to the impacts of a disaster. FEMA used a new data tool, the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool \(CEJST\)](#), to identify vulnerable or disadvantaged communities. This tool designates communities as being disadvantaged or not disadvantaged. This tool is not specific to natural hazard risk or vulnerability. Instead, the tool is a proxy for understanding the characteristics of a community.

FEMA found that 47.5% of projects had activities in CEJST disadvantaged communities. Over 61,700 properties mitigated by HMGP are in disadvantaged communities. This accounts for 42.1% of properties in this analysis. These projects received over \$7.1 billion or 61.7% of the federal obligations.

**Table 1: HMGP Investments in Vulnerable Communities<sup>6</sup>**

Community Characteristics	Funded HMGP Projects (%)	Mitigated Properties	Federal Obligations (\$)
CEJST Disadvantaged	47.5%	61,764	\$7,128,079,810
CEJST Not Disadvantaged	51.2%	81,971	\$4,354,596,009

**INTERSECTION OF RISK AND SOCIAL VULNERABILITY**

FEMA analyzed whether communities with higher social vulnerability had equitable access to HMGP. FEMA compared communities identified as CEJST disadvantaged or not disadvantaged. These CEJST communities all had high to moderate hazard risk, according to the National Risk Index. All projects included in this subset of the analysis had activities in either high to moderate risk tracts and were either CEJST disadvantaged or not disadvantaged census tracts.

FEMA found a similar distribution of projects between disadvantaged and not disadvantaged high-risk communities (Table 2). FEMA found that 34.8% of projects were in CEJST disadvantaged communities, compared to 36.2% in communities identified as not disadvantaged by CEJST. Communities identified as disadvantaged received a higher percentage of funding, with more than \$5.4 billion or 47.2% of the total funding analyzed. This indicates a more equitable distribution of funding across high-risk communities.

**Table 2: Intersection of Risk and Vulnerability<sup>7</sup>.**

High Natural Hazard Risk Communities	Funded HMGP Projects (%)	Mitigated Properties	Federal Obligations (\$)
CEJST Disadvantaged	34.8%	46,907	\$5,450,844,297
CEJST Not Disadvantaged	36.2%	61,356	\$4,210,033,111

**DISTRIBUTION OF PROJECT TYPES AND ACTIVITIES**

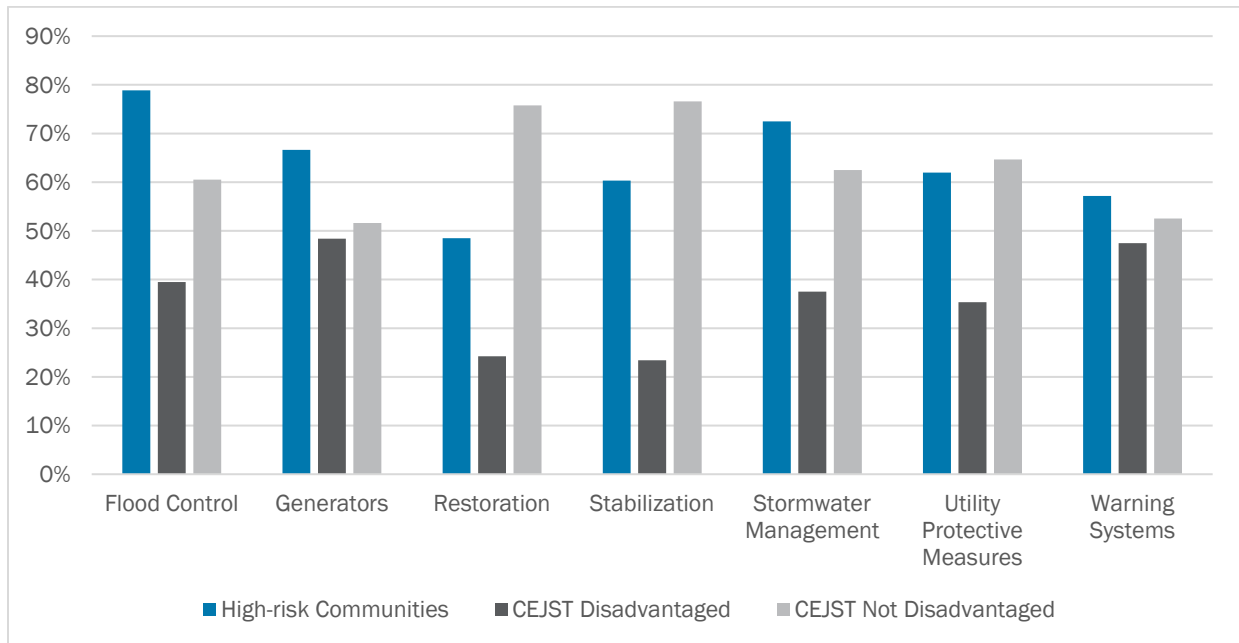
FEMA also reviewed the distribution of mitigation activities. Some projects mitigate a physical property, for example, elevating a home to reduce flood risk. Other projects mitigate community infrastructure, such as building a flood wall. FEMA reviewed both types of projects.

For community infrastructure projects, FEMA selected a few common types for analysis. FEMA compared the number of sites for each project type between communities (Figure 3). High-risk communities had a higher distribution of project sites across all types. This includes flood control (78.9%), stormwater management (72.5%) and generators (66.6%). CEJST disadvantaged communities had more life-safety mitigation projects, such as

<sup>6</sup> Not included in this table are projects that occurred in tracts that do not have CEJST data.

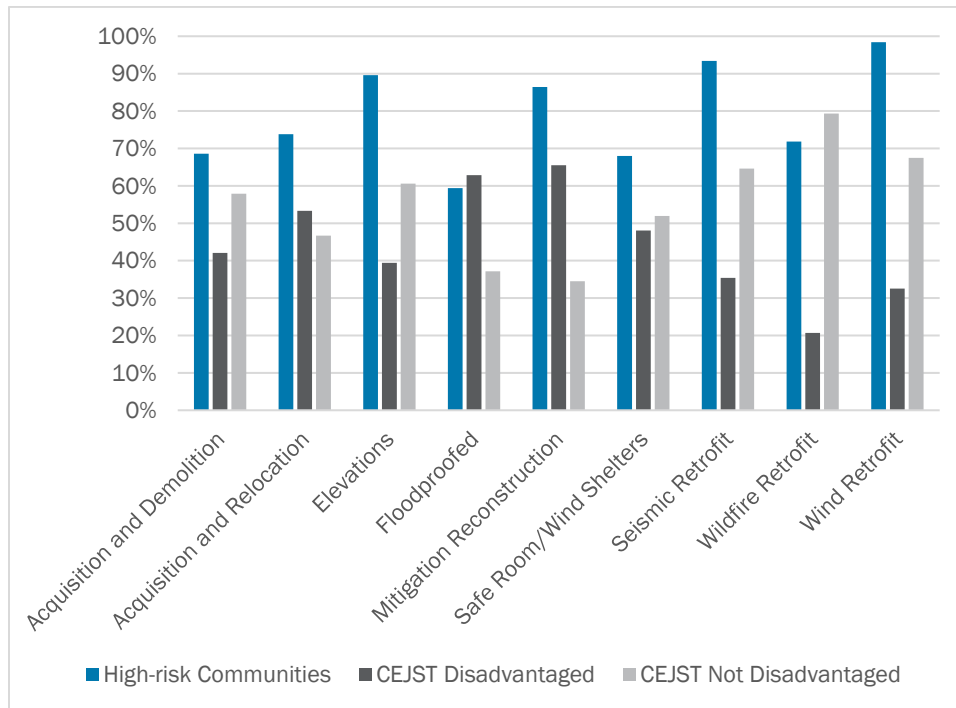
<sup>7</sup> All communities in this table met the criteria for a very high to relatively moderate EAL (National Risk Index). Not included in this table are a percentage of projects that were in census tracts designated as low or moderately low risk.

warning systems (47.5%) and generators (48.4%). Communities identified as not disadvantaged had the highest percentage of stabilization (76.6%) and restoration (75.8%) projects.



**Figure 3. Distribution of project sites within disadvantaged and high-risk communities. These sites are for several popular community-level mitigation activities. Distribution is compared between the percentage of project sites in National Risk Index high-risk, CEJST disadvantaged or not disadvantaged census tracts.**

HMGP can fund mitigation projects for public and private structures, including homes. Some projects involve acquiring a damaged home. Other projects might retrofit a property to reduce future risk. FEMA reviewed the distribution of different property actions (Figure 4). High-risk communities had more retrofits and elevations. For example, 98.4% of wind retrofitted properties are in high-risk census tracts. Disadvantaged and vulnerable communities had fewer retrofit projects. Instead, mitigation reconstruction had the highest distribution in disadvantaged communities. Acquisitions, floodproofing, and safe rooms were also popular activities.



**Figure 4. Comparison of property mitigation activities across communities. Distribution is compared between the number of mitigated properties in National Risk Index high-risk, CEJST disadvantaged or not disadvantaged census tracts.**

### Moving HMGP Forward

As FEMA’s largest and oldest mitigation program, HMGP helps communities build back better after disasters. FEMA found that HMGP has invested billions in disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. This funding supported thousands of mitigation projects. These projects help remove people and property from harm.

FEMA continues to make equity a foundation of our programs, as identified in the agency’s 2022 – 2026 Strategic Plan. This analysis is intended as a baseline for measuring equitable program access. Results from this analysis will help inform future action to improve equitable access to HMGP. To learn more about the program and access resources, visit [FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov).