

Fact Sheet: FEMA's Public Assistance Process

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When disasters occur in the United States or its territories, the federal government, through FEMA, can step in to assist residents, state and local governments get back on their feet.

The assistance for individuals and households is called Individual Assistance (IA). But the bulk of FEMA's grants are for Public Assistance (PA), which reimburses state and local governments when disaster costs are too much for them to absorb.

These programs are activated when the President signs a Major Disaster Declaration and orders either or both IA and PA to commence.

PA grants primarily reimburse state, county and local governments or any other political subdivision of the state including Native American tribes. Also eligible for grants are private nonprofit organizations, including houses of worship, which provide essential services to the general public.

The funds are directed to the state (the recipient), which then reimburses "sub-recipients," the state agencies, local governments and eligible private-non-profits. FEMA will reimburse at least 75 percent of the eligible costs with a local match of 25 percent.



Disaster-related costs include repairs to damaged infrastructure, public services and facilities. Projects are intended to benefit everyone.

These dollars may help repair roads and bridges people use every day getting to work and school. Grants are used to repair utilities and water systems. The dollars also help to rebuild hospitals, schools and universities and restore damaged public parks and beaches. Grants reimburse communities for cleanup and debris removal. And, they are used to reimburse emergency services such as police, fire and emergency management for extraordinary expenses for overtime pay to protect and assist community residents during a disaster.

In 2016, in order to enhance the Public Assistance approval process, FEMA rolled out a new grant management tool that promotes much greater transparency, coordination, and accuracy. The grant management tool is a web-based system that allows all parties to review and approve work each step of the way.

Approval of a project is based on:

- If the applicant is eligible. Public Assistance grants are available for state agencies, local governments, governmental subdivisions (such as school districts), and certain private nonprofit agencies, including houses of worship. These entities must be located within the designated counties and perform services of a public nature (e.g., public utilities, emergency medical facilities). Nonprofits must hold a current federal or state tax-exempt status.
- If the damaged facility is eligible. Facilities must be the legal responsibility of an eligible applicant, located in the disaster-designated counties and in active use when the event occurred. Damage must be a direct result of the disaster and not a result of negligence or deferred maintenance. Also eligible is work an applicant may have completed to repair damage that was a direct result of the disaster. However, FEMA will not duplicate any other benefits, such as insurance coverage.



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