

What is FEMA Public Assistance?

Public Assistance is a reimbursement program that provides federal funding to help communities respond to and recover from disasters.

FEMA reimburses state and local governments and certain types of private nonprofit organizations for the cost of disaster-related debris removal, emergency protective measures to protect life and property, and permanent repair work to damaged or destroyed infrastructure.

Applicants submit Requests for Public Assistance (RPAs) within 30 days of the disaster declaration. Applicants must demonstrate the damage is in a designated area, the applicant has legal responsibility to perform the work and the cost is reasonable. Throughout the Public Assistance process, FEMA reviews eligibility of the applicant, facility, work and cost. Once FEMA and the state review and approve the government agencies' or nonprofits' RPAs, applicants work with their FEMA representative to develop a damage/cost inventory.

Importance of Submitting Documents

FEMA works with applicants to compile their damage inventory, a detailed list that may include emergency work performed and disaster-damaged roads, facilities and other costs. This is the foundation of Public Assistance projects.

Applicants must submit their completed damage/cost inventory to FEMA within 60 days of the Recovery Scoping Meeting, the first substantive meeting of the Public Assistance delivery process between the applicants, state and FEMA.

Government agencies and nonprofits need to submit information and documentation so FEMA can make an eligibility determination. These may include contracts, invoices, procurement policies, labor records, lists of equipment/supplies used and maintenance records.

Documentation is important because it supports the applicants' claims before FEMA approves cost estimates for disaster-related expenses.

Site Visits, Damage Descriptions, Scopes of Work and Cost

FEMA staff visit sites identified by applicants to evaluate and collect any additional information on damaged or destroyed infrastructure. Most sites will require a physical inspection, which involves a FEMA site inspector and the applicant (or applicant's point of contact).

FEMA then helps state and local officials develop project descriptions, scopes of work and documentation of the costs to repair damage or replace a facility.

Public Assistance also encourages protection of these damaged facilities by providing additional funding assistance for hazard mitigation measures to protect them from future damage. The scopes of work may include these efforts and any additional funding must be cost-effective and reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from disasters.

FEMA reviews and validates information and documentation submitted by an applicant to ensure compliance with federal regulations for: insurance, contracts, procurement policies, permits, and environmental and historical preservation. Additional information may be requested during this step of the process. Once all reviews are complete, applicants then agree to the funding terms and sign off on the projects.

After FEMA Obligates Funds

FEMA obligates funds to the state once a project meets Stafford Act eligibility requirements.

The state is the official recipient of FEMA federal assistance. The state is then responsible for disbursing the money to applicants.

FEMA may obligate money to reimburse eligible disaster-related costs only after validating that the applicable eligibility criteria are met.

FEMA's Public Assistance is a cost-sharing program which reimburses applicants at least 75 percent of eligible costs. The remaining 25 percent share is covered by the State of Iowa and the local applicant.

Once funds are obligated, the state reimburses applicants directly based upon their policies and procedures.