

TALKING POINTS

PA Application Simplification for Nationwide Emergency Declaration for COVID-19

Top Line Messages:

- FEMA is simplifying the Public Assistance application and funding process to address the magnitude of this event and allow local officials to receive eligible funding more quickly.
- Public Assistance applicants are empowered to drive their own recovery and directly apply for reimbursement through a streamlined process designed to eliminate portions of the process that are unnecessary for the unique circumstances of, and types of assistance available for, response to COVID-19.
- While FEMA is making adjustments to streamline processes, we are keeping the adjustments as simple as possible and not deviating from the basic process with which experienced recipients and applicants are familiar.
- Funding is immediately available should local officials need expedited assistance.
- This is a dynamic environment. FEMA will be quick and clear in communicating changes. But the entire emergency management community should prepare for further adjustments in the delivery of Public Assistance for COVID-19 as we work together to assist the American people.

Applicants are empowered to drive their own recovery and directly apply for reimbursement without an assigned Program Delivery Manager.

- The nature and scale of this national event are beyond anything the emergency management community has seen, with the most simultaneous FEMA PA applicants and project worksheets in the history of the program.
- Additionally, FEMA and recipient staff must alter work practices to follow CDC and local health official social distancing guidelines in order to slow the spread of COVID-19.
- To scale to an event of this size and maintain social distancing, it is not possible for FEMA or recipients to proactively work with every applicant to develop their subgrant project worksheets, as would be the case in a traditional disaster.
- Instead, FEMA is allowing applicants to directly apply for assistance in the PA Grants Portal at <https://grantee.fema.gov>.
- This prevents the need for applicants to wait on the availability of limited federal and recipient resources and provide applicants a transparent environment to request and quickly receive federal assistance.



FEMA

FEMA is making adjustments to simplify the application process but not deviating from the basics that experienced recipients and applicants may be familiar with.

- Since assistance is limited to emergency protective measures, FEMA's complex eligibility criteria are significantly streamlined:
 - Permanent work is not needed nor eligible for reimbursement, so complicating damage eligibility and engineering challenges will not exist.
 - Debris removal is not needed nor eligible for reimbursement, so typical complicated questions about monitoring and disposal will not exist.
- This simplification of the program's eligibility criteria enables FEMA to streamline its application steps.
 - FEMA is eliminating exploratory calls, recovery scoping meetings, and most site inspections (temporary facilities will be inspected on a case-by-case basis).
 - FEMA is reducing documentation requirements to the minimum needed to support Category B reimbursement.
 - Many steps, including most initial steps to begin the reimbursement process, will remain the same: Account creation, SF-424 Grant Application submission, Request for Public Assistance submission, Scope of Work and Cost Estimate development, compliance reviews, and eligibility reviews.
- FEMA will simplify the process for creating a Project Worksheet (PW) by creating a template PW form for Category B assistance for COVID-19:
 - Applicants will complete the form online in the PA Grants Portal at <https://grantee.fema.gov>.
 - The form will collect minimal information about the work activities being performed.
 - The form will include a few basic questions to establish eligibility.
 - The form will ensure the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are not duplicating the funding.
 - The form will require minimal documentation to support eligibility based on the project's risk of providing ineligible funding and emergency need:
 - Expedited Projects: Limited documentation but funded at 50 percent.
 - Small Projects: Limited documentation and self-certified as to basic eligibility requirements.
 - Large Projects: Limited documentation but full FEMA review based on amount of funding provided.
- Instead of using a project-specific approach to environmental and historic preservation (EHP) compliance, FEMA is developing a program-wide approach for activity types that have little to no potential to affect or impact EHP resources.

FEMA is standing by to immediately provide funding, as requested.

- These changes are coming, but FEMA can process projects now through Grants Manager and Grants Portal.
- Nothing immediately changes from a standard PA declaration: FEMA needs signed FEMA-State/Tribal/Territorial Agreements, signed SF-424 Grant Applications, and the PA Administrative Plan. Recipients can start setting up Grants Portal accounts for themselves and applicants so they can provide information sign-off at appropriate steps.
- Recipients will need to set up [Grants Portal](#) accounts for their staff and send invites to applicants to set up in Grants Portal. These requests can be targeted to those needing immediate funding since applicants, recipients and FEMA are in a response environment.

- **Expedited funding** is available to interested states, tribes and territories:
 - Expedited funding enables FEMA to provide 50 percent of the estimated project cost quickly based on limited information and provide the remainder of funding upon receipt of documentation.
 - Expedited projects can be processed in a timely manner, in most cases less than a week, when the recipient quickly provides information and responds to FEMA requests.

This is a dynamic environment, and we are doing everything we can to communicate and improve our ability to deliver large-scale assistance rapidly.

- FEMA has tutorials for applicants and recipients to [create accounts](#) and [submit Requests for Public Assistance](#) and will be sharing follow-on guidance and training materials for how to navigate the process.
 - Eligibility guidance is available and will be constantly updated on [FEMA's website](#).
 - Guidance on how to apply is available in the Resources tab in Grants Portal.

IF ASKED: Are direct application and the simplified application processes available today?

- No. FEMA is working to implement processes and tools to enable simplified application processes within two to three weeks and expects to have direct application capability available through Grants Portal in six to eight weeks.
- If applicants need immediate funding, FEMA will provide this funding using standard processes – including providing expedited funding for immediate needs. In these scenarios, until direct application is available, FEMA will assign staff to help answer questions.

IF ASKED: But what if an applicant needs a FEMA point of contact and does not want to directly apply?

- If applicants have questions about Grants Portal access they may contact the Grants Portal Hotline at (866) 337-8448 or FEMA-Recovery-PA-Grants@fema.dhs.gov.
- Applicants will also be provided a remote point of contact should FEMA have any questions about their PW.
- Additionally, recipients may choose to provide customer service to applicants requesting PA.
- FEMA may also assign program delivery managers to applicants with (1) high-risk; (2) low-capacity, or (3) an ongoing disaster recovery not related to COVID-19. However, given the national scale of the event, FEMA will not be able to assign program delivery managers to every applicant.

IF ASKED: Why isn't FEMA exploring other opportunities to simplify the application process, such as raising the simplified procedures threshold?

- FEMA is exploring all avenues to simplify the PA application process in the COVID-19 environment. Ideas can be submitted through FEMA's regional offices or the feedback button in the upper right-hand corner of PA Grants Portal.
- FEMA will make continuing adjustments to streamline and provide more timely assistance.
- FEMA is trying to balance the need for changes to scale to the unprecedented nature of COVID-19 with not making too many changes in a complex response environment.
- Raising the simplified procedures threshold (also called the small project maximum or large project threshold) would not simplify the process to *award* assistance because simplified procedures mainly simplify *post-award* processes. FEMA is targeting reducing the documentation burden, as analysis shows this is the driver of pre-award complexity and timeliness.