

Public Assistance Grant Program



FEMA

What is Public Assistance?

The Public Assistance program provides supplemental funding to communities for emergency actions taken in response to a disaster and for work done to repair or possibly replace damaged public infrastructure. Funding is provided as a reimbursement for costs incurred.

Eligibility

Whether FEMA and the state approve a project depends on four primary factors:

- **Is the applicant eligible?** Public Assistance grants are for state agencies, local governments, Indian tribes and certain private, nonprofit organizations that perform services of a public nature (e.g., public utilities, emergency medical facilities, museums).
- **Is the facility eligible?** The facility must be the responsibility of an eligible applicant, in the disaster area, active at the time of the disaster and not the under authority of another federal agency.
- **Is the work eligible?** The work completed must be required as a result of the disaster, the legal responsibility of an applicant and within the disaster area (except for sheltering/evacuation).
- **Is the cost eligible?** Generally, eligible costs are costs that can be directly tied to the performance of eligible work. Costs must be reasonable to complete the work and compliant with procurement regulations, and will be reduced by insurance proceeds, salvage value or other duplicating funding sources.



Categories of Work

Emergency Work

A: Debris Removal

B: Emergency Protective Measures

Permanent Work

C: Roads and Bridges

D: Water Control Facilities

E: Buildings and Equipment

F: Utilities

G: Parks and Recreation/Other

Funds Disbursement

Eligible work is documented on a Project Worksheet (PW) by a Project Officer. Following review and approval of a PW, FEMA obligates funds to the state. The state will then provide both the federal and state cost-shares to the applicant. FEMA will pay no less than 75 percent of project costs, with the state and local governments responsible for the remainder.

Funding for small projects (those less than \$63,200) is based on estimates (or actual costs if available) and is obligated immediately. Funding for large projects is provided only as receipts or invoices for work completed are submitted. The process from initial federal obligation of the funds to the state's disbursement to the applicant can take from 15 to 20 business days. It will also vary depending on whether the applicant requires a check rather than direct deposit.

NOTICE: Before undertaking any permanent work, applicants must consult with FEMA and the state to ensure that all appropriate environmental and historic reviews have been addressed. Failure to do so could jeopardize disaster assistance funding.

Roles of local officials working with FEMA & State

At the beginning of a disaster each applicant must designate an applicant agent. The applicant agent may be an auditor, treasurer, emergency manager or someone else selected to serve as the primary point of contact with the state and FEMA on all Public Assistance funding matters. The applicant agent should be someone familiar with the work to be completed. The applicant agent also provides documentation of disaster damages and works with FEMA and the state should project questions arise.

In some cases, an official other than the applicant agent may be the one that works on a day-to-day basis with the Project Officer. In these instances, it is very important that the applicant agent stays in touch with the highway supervisor, engineer or any other person who is overseeing a project. Each person may have separate dealings with the state and with FEMA, and it is important for everyone to communicate and work together.

For Additional Assistance:

If you have any questions about your Public Assistance projects, you should first talk to your Project Officer. If the problem can't be resolved, ask the Project Officer for the Public Assistance Coordinator responsible for your jurisdiction. If you are still not satisfied, contact the State Public Assistance Officer.

Online Public Assistance Resources

- Policy and Guidance - 9500 Series Policies and other Publications
<http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/pa/policy.shtm>
- Application Process - Step by step description of the Public Assistance grant life cycle
<http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/pa/process.shtm>
- Roles and Responsibilities - Information on the duties of federal, state, and local partners
<http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/pa/roles.shtm>
- Documentation Requirements
http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/pa/re_documentation.shtm
- Reference Topics - Specific information and instructions on Public Assistance topics
<http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/pa/reference.shtm>
- Resources and Tools - Appeal Database, Equipment Rates, Cost Estimating Format, and other resources
<http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/pa/resources.shtm>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Question: What is the deadline to complete repairs and still be eligible for Public Assistance funding?

Answer: The deadline to complete Emergency Work (Categories A or B) is 6 months from the disaster declaration. The deadline to complete Permanent Work (Categories C through G) is 18 months from the disaster declaration. If additional time is needed to complete work, extension requests should be directed to the state.

Question: What type of documentation should I keep to help ensure I receive funding for my eligible projects?

Answer: Take photographs of the damage sites so you have a before-and-after record of disaster-related damage if work was completed prior to an inspection. As work is being done, keep documents like estimates, receipts, invoices, timesheets, equipment logs, etc. In addition be sure to maintain any local disaster declaration documents or emergency decrees (e.g. evacuation authorizations) that served as the basis for the applicant to execute any emergency authorities.

Question: How long do we need to maintain records for FEMA audits?

Answer: Records and supporting documentation must be kept for three years following the official closeout of the disaster. NDDDES will send out a letter to all applicants advising them of closeout and the start of that three-year period. The closeout may not occur until several years after the disaster.

Question: How do we appeal a decision?

Answer: A formal appeal is only required following a final decision on a PW. If the PW is not yet finalized, you should talk with the Project Specialist about any concerns to see if they can be resolved before the PW goes through the approval process. If a PW has been obligated a formal appeal must be filed with the state within 60 days of receipt of the official PW by the applicant. The appeal should include additional supporting documentation. The last option is a second appeal through the state to FEMA headquarters.

Question: Who is responsible to make sure environmental laws and regulations are followed on repair projects?

Answer: It is the applicant's responsibility to obtain any necessary permits for repair work. Permanent work that is done prior to obtaining necessary consultations or permits will not be eligible for reimbursement. FEMA and the state will work with the applicant to identify what environmental consultations are required for a specific project.

Question: FEMA says \$175,000 has been obligated to our jurisdiction but we have only received a fraction of that. Where is the remainder and how long will it take before we receive it?

Answer: Typically FEMA disburses funds to the state within 48 hours of obligating the funds. For Small Projects you should expect the state to deposit funds into your account within 15 to 20 days of FEMA obligating the funds. Also, keep in mind that the state funds Large Projects (more than \$63,200) in increments as the applicant actually expends funds and provides documentation for those costs.

Question: It has been longer than two weeks. Who should I contact?

Answer: Your jurisdiction's applicant agent can help verify which Project Worksheets have been obligated. If they don't have the answer you should contact the FEMA/state Public Assistance Coordinator (PAC) assigned to your community. If the PAC is unable to answer your question you should contact the State Public Assistance.

Step in Process	Participants	Location	What is Accomplished
Pre-Declaration Preliminary Damage Assessment	State, FEMA, Local officials (Public Works Director, Road Supervisor, Emergency Manager)	Teams typically meet at local government offices to learn about disaster damage sites, and then visit the specific damage sites.	Damage is identified to determine if a Presidential disaster declaration is warranted. This is a cursory inspection to determine general damage
Federal Disaster Declaration Occurs			
PA Applicant Briefing	State, FEMA, local Applicant Agents (Public Works Directors, Road Supervisors, Emergency Managers, Mayors, etc.)	Often a large public building with meeting space that can accommodate officials from as many as 8-10 counties.	State/FEMA provide an overview of the Public Assistance Program – how to apply, what is eligible, and steps required to receive funding.
Kickoff Meeting	FEMA/State: Public Assistance Coordinator (PAC) Local: Designee(s) (Public Works Director, Road Supervisor, etc.)	A meeting place of the applicant's choice. Can sometimes occur immediately following PA applicant briefing.	State/FEMA establish a working relationship with the applicant. Damage sites are reviewed and environmental and contracting issues are discussed.
Damage Site Inspections	FEMA/State: Project Officer Local: Designee (Public Works Director, Road Supervisor or official of applicant's choice.)	Teams visit damage sites. If repairs have already occurred, photos and documentation of the damage and repair work should be provided.	State, FEMA and the applicant review damage and reach a consensus on the work needed to return the site to pre-disaster condition.
PW Write-up and Signoff	FEMA/State: Project Officer/Public Assistance Coordinator (PAC) Local: Applicant Agent (Official of applicant's choice.)	PW write-up can occur in the field or within the FEMA/State Joint Field Office. A finalized PW will be provided to the applicant agent to sign.	The Project Officer will use information from the site inspection to formulate an estimate of the cost for the project. After resolving any differences, the applicant will sign off in concurrence.
PW Review	FEMA/State: Environmental and Historic Preservation, FEMA and State Public Assistance Officers, Mitigation Specialists.	Reviews occur within the Joint Field Office.	The project is reviewed to ensure it complies with all relevant state and federal regulations. Once the project clears review, it can be funded.
Obligation and Disbursal or funds	FEMA: Joint Field Office State: Smartlink Account Local: Applicant Agent	FEMA provides funds to the state electronically. The state can provide funds to the applicant electronically or via check.	The applicant receives funding. For small projects (<\$63,200) funding is immediate, for large projects it is provided as invoices are submitted.
Project Closeout	FEMA: Regional Office State: State Public Assistance Local: Applicant Agent	The state will meet with the applicant in person or by phone.	In its role as the grantee, the state is required to ensure that funds were used appropriately and within the scope of work outlined on the PW.