

## FACT SHEET

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Public Assistance Simplified Application

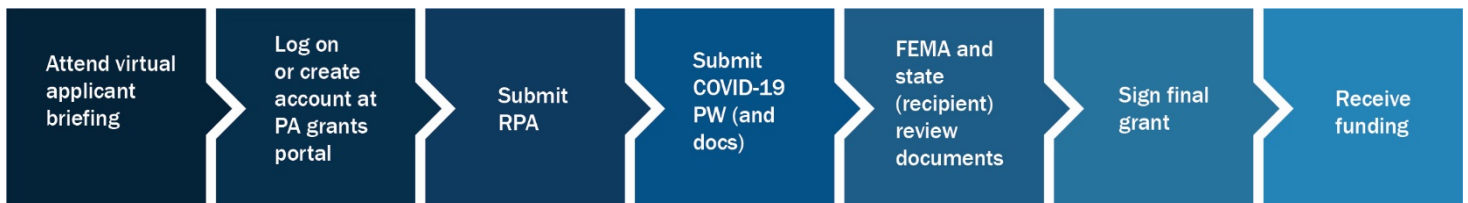
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This Fact Sheet supplements *Fact Sheet: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Emergency Protective Measures* and provides an overview of the FEMA Public Assistance application process for recipients and applicants requesting reimbursement related to federal emergency and major disaster declarations for Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). 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.

**FEMA is simplifying the Public Assistance application process.** FEMA is developing a simplified online form applicants can complete, and on which they may explain work activities, answer basic questions, provide limited supporting documentation, and provide a cost estimate. FEMA and the recipient will review this information, follow up with limited requests for additional information if necessary, and award assistance. Recipients will have access to all projects in [PA Grants Portal](#), consistent with the traditional PA process.

The national emergency declaration authorized Public Assistance Category B reimbursement for emergency protective measures. It does not include additional categories of assistance, such as infrastructure repair and replacement, which are needed after typical natural disasters. This enables FEMA to eliminate many application steps that are designed for those categories, including: eliminating exploratory calls, recovery scoping meetings, and most site inspections; and reducing documentation requirements to the minimum needed to support Category B reimbursement.

Recipients are states, tribes, or territories that receive and administer Public Assistance awards. Applicants are state, local, tribal and territorial governments, or eligible private nonprofits, submitting a request for assistance under a recipient's federal award.



**Applicants are empowered to drive their own recovery** and directly apply for reimbursement without waiting for FEMA to assign a Program Delivery Manager. FEMA is simplifying the process so applicants may directly apply for assistance through the [PA Grants Portal](#).

As FEMA and recipients implement these changes, FEMA will continue to process and fund Public Assistance projects. Funding is immediately available should state, tribal, territorial or local officials request expedited assistance. Prior to funding, recipients must sign FEMA-State/Tribal/Territorial Agreements, submit signed Federal Grant Applications (SF-424), and update Recipient Public Assistance Administrative Plans. Recipients should start [setting up Grants Portal accounts](#) for themselves and applicants at [grantee.fema.gov](https://grantee.fema.gov) so they can



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apply for assistance. Once an account is created, Applicants may [submit Requests for Public Assistance](#) to begin the application process.

FEMA is working to rapidly scale up the information, tools and technology necessary to provide assistance to all applicants. Eligibility guidance on what FEMA can fund will be updated on the Public Assistance Policy, Guidance, and Factsheets [page on FEMA.gov](#) and the [COVID-19 page on FEMA.gov](#). Application support and tutorials are available on the resource tab in [PA Grants Portal](#).

## More Information

For more information, visit the following websites:

1. [Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide](#)
2. [FEMA.gov/Coronavirus](#)
3. [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) (CDC)



FEMA

March 22, 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR: Regional Administrators  
Regions I – X

FROM: Keith Turi  
Assistant Administrator  
Recovery Directorate

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "K. Turi".

SUBJECT: Public Assistance Application Simplification for COVID-19

To address the magnitude of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and scale the Public Assistance (PA) Program to ensure local officials quickly receive eligible funding, FEMA is simplifying the PA application and funding process for the nationwide emergency declaration declared on March 13, 2020, and any subsequent major disaster declarations for the incident. As we continue to work through major questions of eligibility, deadlines, and duplications of benefits, we are in a position to start awarding funding now and are working to enable applicants to apply directly for assistance. The Recovery Directorate's goals are to: enable the rapid delivery of assistance; keep PA processes simple and consistent across the country; leverage our existing national workflows and processes; and, ensure consistency in decision making.

To address these goals we have developed a revised approach to eligibility decision making, customer service, project processing, outreach and engagement, and environmental and historic preservation that is specific to the circumstances around COVID-19. We are also issuing the *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Public Assistance Simplified Application Fact Sheet* that you may share with Recipients, as well as talking points for you to use as you engage with your Recipient counterparts.

Topline messaging that should be emphasized with your counterparts is as follows:

1. FEMA is making adjustments to simplify the application process but are not deviating from the basics we know how to do.
2. Applicants should be prepared to drive their own recovery through direct application for PA. This will enable us to ensure our limited resources do not become a bottleneck as we try to process projects for all local governments at the same time.
3. This is a dynamic environment, and we are doing everything we can to communicate and iteratively improve our ability to deliver large-scale assistance rapidly.

Additionally, we are quickly moving to build out the technology and tools to support what will be a largely direct application approach. As our processes and tools evolve, a general implementation timeline you may expect include:

- **Immediate term:** You have the ability to process projects now, and your PA staff have been given iterative guidance on how to immediately process projects. Infrastructure Branch Directors can begin working with recipients to submit projects, and Consolidated Resource Centers are standing by to process Expedited Projects per existing guidance.

- **In the next week:** We will be rolling out a COVID-19-specific templated Project Worksheet (PW) and account set up, Request for Public Assistance, and expedited funding guidance to streamline up-front PW development steps.
- **Within 2-3 weeks:** Remote customer service tools and additional functionality in Grants Manager/Grants Portal to support templated PWs and expedited project processing guidance.
- **Within 6-8 weeks:** Initial capability to process direct applications without FEMA/state providing customer service.

If you have any questions, please contact Traci Brasher, Director (Acting), Public Assistance Division at [traci.brasher@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:traci.brasher@fema.dhs.gov).

## TALKING POINTS

# PA Application Simplification for Nationwide Emergency Declaration for COVID-19

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### 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.



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**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](mailto: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.