Disasters can strike at any time. Governors and emergency managers work year-round to ensure their states are prepared and in readiness, both to respond to and recover from the impact of these events.

State-emergency plans, community participation, and the sharing of resources through partnerships and agreements help to improve and ensure national preparedness. This effort involves engaging public, private, and non-profit resources to make sure citizens and businesses are informed, protected, and ready for a variety of emergencies. When disaster strikes, everyone must work together.

When a disaster occurs, the governor may request a presidential emergency declaration to assist in the response and recovery efforts. If the governor determines that the damage exceeds state, tribal, and local resources, the governor may submit a declaration request to the President through the FEMA regional administrator.

Types of Presidential Declarations

Emergency Declaration:

- The President makes an Emergency Declaration when an incident occurs, or threatens to occur, that poses a threat to life, the protection of property, public health, and safety. This declaration covers any instance in which federal assistance is needed to provide assistance. This declaration does not include any restoration or permanent repairs to public infrastructure. An emergency declaration does not have to be a natural disaster or fire, flood, or explosion.
- A governor must submit his/her request as soon as the need for assistance becomes apparent and within 30 days after the incident occurs.

Disaster declaration process for federally recognized tribes.

Major Disaster Declaration:

- The President makes a Major Disaster Declaration when a natural catastrophe or fire, flood, or explosion (regardless of cause) occurs, that the President determines caused damage of such severity that it is beyond the combined capability of the state, tribal, or local government to respond to this disaster.
- This declaration type provides a wide range of federal assistance programs for individuals and public infrastructure.
- A governor must submit his/her request within 30 days of the incident.

Types of Federal Assistance

- Financial Assistance
- Emergency Management Assistance
- Public Assistance
- Individual Assistance
- Validation of Damage

Did You Know?

- Tribes have two options for requesting federal disaster assistance. After an emergency or disaster occurs, federally recognized tribes may seek financial aid assistance. Requesting a Federal Aid Act amendment provides tribes with the option of requesting a presidential declaration on their own, or being included in the state’s request. This guide will not discuss the separate declaration process for federally recognized tribes. For more information, contact your FEMA regional office.

Fire Management Assistance Grants

FEMA also provides financial assistance to states that are battling large wildfires on public and private lands which threaten destruction that would constitute a major disaster.

- FEMA will pay 75 percent of a state’s eligible firefighting costs. Eligible costs can include expenses for crew costs; equipment use, repair, and replacement; mobilization, demobilization, and site preparation costs; and labor costs.
- To request a Fire Management Assistance Grant, the state must send requests for assistance to the FEMA regional office. For more information, visit www.fema.gov/fire-management-assistance-program.

Reviewing the Declaration Request

After a review of the governor’s request, FEMA makes a recommendation to the President on the approval or denial of the disaster or emergency declaration.

FEMA assesses a number of factors to determine the severity, magnitude, and impact of a disaster event.

Factors Considered

- Amount and type of damage
- Impact on infrastructure of affected areas
- Impressive threats to public health and safety
- Impact to essential government services and functions
- Dispersion or concentration of damage
- Level of insurance coverage in place for homeowners and public facilities
- Assistance available from federal, state, tribal, local, and voluntary organizations
- Recent history
- Any other relevant information

Did You Know?

- As a factor for Public Assistance, FEMA uses a per capita indicator to evaluate the impact of an event. In PF 2055, the indicator is $1.41 per capita (2001 constant dollars) statewide for state consideration, and $3.56 per capita statewide for county consideration. These figures are adjusted annually for inflation.

Establishing a Joint Field Office

- To effectively deliver disaster assistance in coordination with the state, FEMA establishes a Joint Field Office (JFO) soon after the presidential declaration is issued. The JFO is a temporary facility established locally to provide a central location where federal, state, tribal, and local governments can coordinate efforts. The JFO helps the community recover from the disaster. The virtual JFO may be established in the FEMA regional office. In the event of multiple incidents in one state, multiple area offices may be established.

FEMA appoints a federal coordinating officer (FCO) to oversee state operations during the disaster. The FCO will oversee the agreement that provides the terms of assistance. As the state learns more about the damage and other assistance that may be needed, the state may request adjustments within 72 hours of the declaration.

Governors designate a Governor’s Authorized Representative (GAR) to approve and submit certain requests on behalf of the state, such as requests for additional programs and areas, time extensions, and cost-share adjustments.

After the Presidential Declaration

When a presidential declaration is issued, the state and FEMA sign an agreement that provides the terms of assistance. The state would learn more about the damage and other assistance that may be needed, the state may request adjustments within 72 hours of the declaration.

Quick Checklist for Governors

- Execute your State Emergency Plan and carry out all appropriate emergency response activities.
- If warranted, ask the FEMA regional office for a joint Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA).
- Based on the PDA findings, determine whether the event is beyond the capability of the state and affected local and tribal governments, and activate the supplemental federal assistance needed.
- Determine what types of federal assistance to request.

Requesting a Declaration

- FEMA makes a Major Disaster Declaration when an extraordinary federal disaster is deemed to exceed the combined capability of affected state, tribal, and local governments. The President makes the declaration.
- Following the President’s declaration, the state, tribal, and local governments respond to this disaster.
- To effectively deliver disaster assistance in coordination with the state, FEMA establishes a Joint Field Office (JFO) soon after the presidential declaration is issued. The JFO is a temporary facility established locally to provide a central location where federal, state, tribal, and local governments can coordinate efforts. The JFO helps the community recover from the disaster.

Appealing a Denial

- Should a state’s request for a presidential declaration be denied, the governor can appeal the decision by submitting a request for appeal within 30 days of the state’s decision.
- The appeal should include additional information to establish that the severity and magnitude of the disaster exceeds state and local capabilities.
- The governor should submit the appeal through the FEMA regional administrator.

Quick Checklist for Governors

- Execute your State Emergency Plan and carry out all appropriate emergency response activities.
- If warranted, ask the FEMA regional office for a joint Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA).
- Based on the PDA findings, determine whether the event is beyond the capability of the state and affected local and tribal governments, and activate the supplemental federal assistance needed.
- Determine what types of federal assistance to request.
There are three categories of disaster assistance available following a presidential declaration of a major disaster.

**Public Assistance Programs**
- Aid to state, tribal, and local governments and certain private non-profits for emergency work, the repair or replacement of disaster-damaged public facilities, and infrastructure. The program provides assistance for debris removal, emergency protective measures, and the repair, replacement, or restoration of disaster-damaged, government-owned facilities. Local governments and certain private non-profit organizations may also be eligible.

**Individual Assistance Programs**
- Individual and household programs that provide financial assistance for non-federal costs that are not eligible for federal funding.

**Post-Disaster Hazard Mitigation Program**
- Grants to state, local, tribal, and certain private non-profit organizations for loss reduction activities to prevent future losses to public and private property.

### Disaster Assistance Programs

**Public Assistance Program**
- The Public Assistance Program is an important source of recovery funds for disaster-damaged public facilities and infrastructure. The program provides assistance for debris removal, emergency protective measures, and the repair, replacement, or restoration of disaster-damaged, government-owned facilities such as schools and roads. Certain private nonprofit facilities may also be eligible.

**Post-Disaster Hazard Mitigation Program**
- The Post-Disaster Hazard Mitigation Program encourages protection of these disaster-damaged facilities from future events by providing assistance for cost-effective hazard mitigation measures during the recovery process.

### Cost Share

FEMA generally funds 75 percent of eligible work. The state is responsible for the remaining 25 percent.

**What May Be Covered**
- Debris removal
- Emergency protective measures (e.g., sheltering, feeding, evacuation)
- Roads and bridges
- Repair of disaster-damaged facilities
- Buildings and equipment
- Parks and recreational facilities
- Property acquisition
- Structure elevation
- Flood control projects
- Infection control
- Safe rooms
- Soil stabilization
- Wildlife mitigation
- Generators
- Hazard mitigation planning
- Management costs

**Disaster Unemployment Assistance**
- Provides financial assistance to unemployed individuals due to a major disaster.

**Disaster Case Management**
- Provides for the delivery of disaster-related case management services to those disaster survivors who have unmet needs and serious needs that are unmet through other means, such as insurance.

**Disaster Legal Services**
- Grants to state, local, and certain private non-profit organizations to provide pro bono legal services to disaster survivors with disaster-related legal needs.

**Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program**
- Loans to small businesses, private non-profit organizations, and agricultural cooperatives that are not eligible for SBA 7(a) loans.

**Hazard Mitigation Planning**
- Grants to state, local, and certain private non-profit organizations for planning to create, update, or implement activities to mitigate future hazards in affected communities.

**Emergency Protective Measures**
- Includes immediate actions to protect communities and provide for the public safety.

**Individual Assistance Program**
- The Individual Assistance Program provides supplemental assistance to individuals and households affected by a major disaster. The President may authorize all or some of the following categories.

**Individual Assistance Programs**
- Individuals and Households Program
- Disaster Unemployment Assistance
- Disaster Case Management
- Counseling Assistance and Training

**Mitigation Assistance**
- Grants to state, local, and certain private non-profit organizations to reduce future losses to public and private property.

**Disaster Assistance**

A QUICK CHECKLIST

- To apply for disaster assistance, survivors should:
  - Be set up locally after a presidential disaster declaration.
  - Apply for on-the-spot registration for disaster assistance.
  - Provide information on available resources that match the survivors’ disaster-caused unmet needs.

**Regional Offices**

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**Disaster Case Management Program**
- Provides funding to supplement case management services in affected communities.

**Disaster Unemployment Assistance**
- Helps individuals who have lost work or become unemployed as a result of a major disaster, but who are not eligible for regular state unemployment insurance.

**Disaster Legal Services**
- Grants to state, local, and certain private non-profit organizations to provide pro bono legal services to disaster survivors with disaster-related legal needs.

**Disaster Case Management**
- Provides for the delivery of disaster-related case management services to those disaster survivors who have unmet needs and serious needs that are unmet through other means, such as insurance.

**Disaster Legal Services**
- Grants to state, local, and certain private non-profit organizations to provide pro bono legal services to disaster survivors with disaster-related legal needs.

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**Did You Know?**

- FEMA is a federal agency that can also use other federal agencies to provide resources or conduct activities to assist with the response to, and recovery from, a disaster.

- The DRF also funds Fire Management Assistance Grants, which are available to help respond to large wildfires.

- The Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) is a Congressional appropriation upon which FEMA can draw to fund eligible response and recovery efforts associated with presidentially declared major disasters and emergencies, pursuant to the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.

- Using DRF funds, FEMA can also direct other federal agencies to provide resources or conduct activities to assist with the response to, and recovery from, a disaster.

- The DRF also funds Fire Management Assistance Grants, which are available to help respond to large wildfires.