

Obtaining Disaster Assistance for Public Infrastructure

After a disaster, the President may designate “disaster areas.” In these areas, local governments and private non-profit (PNP) organizations may be eligible for a variety of disaster assistance programs to help with the repair, replacement or restoration of damaged facilities. The main sources of assistance and information are the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in conjunction with the State of Texas Governor’s Division of Emergency Management.

FEMA will communicate with local governments about the process of applying under its Public Assistance Program. The information also is found on the FEMA Web site <http://www.fema.gov/rrr/pa/>. Eligible applicants include local governments, Indian tribes and certain PNP organizations. Eligible PNP facilities are those that are open to the public and that perform essential services of a governmental nature.

Eligible PNP facilities generally include the following:

- Medical facilities, such as hospitals, outpatient clinics and rehabilitation facilities.
- Custodial care facilities that provide institutional care for persons who require close supervision and some physical constraints in their daily activities.
- Educational facilities, such as primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities.
- Emergency facilities, such as fire departments, rescue squads and ambulance services.
- Utilities, such as water, sewer and electrical power systems.
- Museums, zoos, community centers, libraries, homeless shelters, senior citizen centers, shelter workshops, and facilities that provide health and safety services of a governmental nature.

Briefly, the application process is as follows:

- Applicants should attend a state-sponsored applicants’ briefing to receive information about the Public Assistance Program and state requirements.
- Applicants should complete and submit to the state a Request for Public Assistance form. Applicants may submit the form at the briefing or within 30 days following the designation of the area in which the damage is located as a disaster area.

- After receiving the request form from the state, FEMA will assign a Public Assistance Coordinator to work with each applicant throughout the disaster recovery period.
- The state will also assign an Applicant Liaison to help the applicant.

There are other types of assistance besides that available from FEMA.

The **Office of Rural Community Affairs (ORCA)** administers the following programs:

- **Rural Health Disaster Relief and Recovery Grant**

<http://www.orca.state.tx.us/whatsNew/pdf/Rural%20Health%20Disaster%20Relief%20Recovery%20Grant.pdf>

Those eligible for this program include:

- rural hospitals in counties with populations of 150,000 or fewer and that have been designated as Medically Underserved Areas (MUA) or Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA);
 - hospitals designated as Texas Critical Access Hospitals (CAH); and
 - federally designated Texas Rural Health Clinics.
- **Disaster Relief Fund**

<http://www.orca.state.tx.us/whatsNew/pdf/Disaster%20Relief%20Summary%20Handout%20rev.pdf>

Funds can be used to restore basic human needs after natural disasters. Applications must be addressed no later than 6 months from the date of the disaster declaration. Generally, these funds can be used only to restore damaged items to their condition before the disaster. These funds may also satisfy the matching requirements associated with the FEMA Public Assistance program, the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), and other aid programs.

USDA Rural Development assistance for water infrastructure may be available through Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants.

<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/2005funding.htm>

Grants can be made in rural areas and in cities or towns with populations of 10,000 or fewer and with median household incomes of 100 percent of a state's non-metropolitan median household income.

The **Economic Development Administration**, part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, has two programs that may be applicable in affected counties. Further information can be found on the Web sites:

http://www.commerce.gov/Katrina_Commerce_Efforts.htm

<http://www.eda.gov/AboutEDA/Programs.xml>

- **Public Works.** This program helps distressed communities revitalize, expand and upgrade their physical infrastructure to attract new industry, encourage business expansion, diversify local economies, and generate or retain long-term, private sector jobs and investment.
- **Economic Adjustment Assistance Program.** This program helps state and local interests design and implement strategies for economic development. The program focuses on areas that have experienced or are under threat of serious structural damage to the underlying economic base. For information, call the Austin regional office at 512-381-8144 or contact the regional director at pgarza@eda.doc.gov

The **National Endowment for the Humanities** may make emergency grants to libraries, museums, colleges, universities, and other cultural and historical institutions. To apply, the director of the organization should write a letter with the following information:

- Describe the mission of your institution;
- Summarize its humanities programs, activities and collections;
- Define the nature and extent of the emergency brought on by the hurricane;
- Outline your plan of action for addressing your institution's immediate recovery needs; and

- Provide a budget summarizing the funds you are requesting (up to \$30,000) to cover costs you expect to incur in your recovery effort.

Send your letter (NEH recommends using a commercial delivery service rather than USPS) to:

Chairman
National Endowment for the Humanities
Room 501
1100 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20506

If you have additional questions, contact the Division of Preservation and Access Programs at preservation@neh.gov 202-606-8570.

The **Texas Historical Commission** can be contacted at <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/disasterrelief/drdefault.html> or 512-463-6100. The THC does not have a grant program specifically designed for disaster assistance; however, the **Texas Preservation Trust Fund** <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/grantsincent/gratptf.html> may be able to assist in the rehabilitation of historic properties damaged by disasters.

References

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<http://www.fema.gov/rrr/pa/>
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<http://www.orca.state.tx.us/downloaded>
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- Disaster Relief Fund, ORCA
<http://www.orca.state.tx.us/>
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- Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants, USDA/RD
<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/disastersdisassistance.html>
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- Governor's Division of Emergency Management,
(512) 424-2138,
<http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/>
- Public Works, EPA
http://www.eda.gov/ImageCache/EDAPublic/documents/pdfdocs/ffo_5fgeneral051210_2epdf/v1/ffo_5fgeneral051210.pdf
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- Disaster Relief, The Texas Historical Commission
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