



NJ Office of Emergency Management

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CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION SECURES \$1.5 BILLION IN FEMA PUBLIC ASSISTANCE OBLIGATIONS

State Technical Assistance and Streamlined Reimbursement System Help Municipalities Recoup Disaster Costs

TRENTON – Nearly two years post-Sandy, the Christie Administration has received \$1.5 billion in financial commitments from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to reimburse municipalities, school districts, public agencies and eligible private-nonprofit organizations for costs related to Superstorm Sandy. More than 80 percent of the largest projects funded by FEMA Public Assistance grants include hazard mitigation measures that will better protect communities in future storms.

FEMA Sandy Recovery Office officials have said that New Jersey's approach to managing Public Assistance (PA) is a model program.

"We knew that local officials would need guidance and support to navigate FEMA's Public Assistance program in order to maximize federal reimbursement for costs associated with this historic storm," said NJ State Police Superintendent and State Director of Emergency Management Colonel Rick Fuentes. "At the outset of the storm, we increased staffing to handle the influx of funding requests and to provide technical assistance throughout the process. We also aggressively pursued the inclusion of mitigation measures in repair and rebuilding projects to ensure that we weren't simply replacing what was lost, but instead rebuilding stronger to better prepare for future natural disasters."

Authorized by the Stafford Act, FEMA's Public Assistance grant program is the primary mechanism for rebuilding public facilities following a disaster. In addition to funding repairs to damaged facilities, Section 406 of the Stafford Act also allows for projects to incorporate mitigation measures if an applicant can show it meets certain criteria. The New Jersey Office of Emergency Management (NJOEM) -- the State agency responsible for coordinating and submitting state and local Public Assistance projects to FEMA -- worked with local applicants to incorporate mitigation measures into their rebuilding plans wherever feasible. NJOEM also joined local partners in advocating for federal approval of these measures.

To date, the State has incorporated Section 406 mitigation into over 87% of its large Public Assistance projects (i.e., projects over \$500,000).

In July, the State received the largest mitigation grant of its kind FEMA ever has issued through the public assistance program: a \$260 million grant to the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission. The funding will be used to build a comprehensive flood protection system at the wastewater treatment facility in Newark and incorporate microgrid technology to allow the facility to continue to operate when the larger electric grid fails.

Public Assistance program specialists at NJOEM have also assisted communities that were initially denied FEMA funding. Their knowledge of the program guidelines has allowed NJOEM to apply strategies to make sure that communities receive the maximum reimbursement to which they are entitled.

To date, NJOEM has successfully advocated for \$92 million in federal funds that were initially denied by FEMA.

"We know that the process can be frustrating, and we're here to help Sandy-affected communities get the total federal assistance for which they qualify as quickly as possible," Fuentes said.

As a part of Sandy recovery, the NJOEM successfully leveraged the available, but seldom authorized, "[Private Property Debris Removal \(PPDR\)](#)" program in the State of New Jersey. This program allowed municipalities to obtain reimbursement for removal of debris from private property if it presents threats to life, public safety or health.

To streamline and organize the State's management of FEMA Public Assistance applications and funding, New Jersey implemented a web-based disaster grants management tool known as "NJEMGrants." Through this system, more than 2,000 grant applicants have been integrated with the State's financial system, which allowed NJOEM to fully automate the grant reimbursement process, including digital archiving and establishment of an applicant helpline. The NJEMGrants system provides complete transparency to the grant process, and allows applicants to review the status of their applications in real time.

As of October 15, approximately \$740 million has been paid to Superstorm Sandy Public Assistance applicants. A complete list of applicants, reimbursements to date, and amount of the reimbursement can be found on NJOEM's [website](#). The NJOEM Public Assistance staff is also conducting [a series of PA training seminars](#) throughout the State, through December. Day and evening sessions are available.

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