

WASHINGTON COUNTIES RISK POOL

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WCRP PoolCast

TOPIC: FEMA Public Assistance Application - What's different with COVID-19?

DISCUSSION DATE: April 30, 2020

Special guest, Gary Urbas, Public Assistance Program Manager with Washington State Military Department Emergency Management Division, answered questions about the application process and what's different with responding to COVID-19.

Question: What makes this Category B Disaster declaration unique?

Answer: 4481-DR-WA COVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak is declared only for Category B – Emergency Protective Measures. Cat B provides for a lot of items to be covered under – As a direct result of the COVID-19 outbreak, the << jurisdiction >> took the following actions to address the Immediate Threat to Public Health and Safety. FEMA HQs has taken a narrower view of these actions and have issued considerable number of Fact Sheets as guidance along with its FEMA HQs Q&A spreadsheet which clarifies its guidance.

Another significant item is the distinct possibility of 'duplication of benefits' under other federal funding streams – CARES, HHS, USDA, DOJ, HHS/CMS, etc. FEMA is not allowed to duplicate benefits so we will need to carefully show exactly where we are seeking reimbursement and for what items of purchase or work.

Question: FEMA has a simplified process for declaration. What are the biggest changes for applicants?

Answer: For COVID-19, FEMA has significantly modified its FEMA Grants Portal to accommodate the tremendous increase in number of Applicants – where we would have 150-200 Applicants on a large flood disaster, we are currently pushing 700 Applicants.

FEMA has streamlined its process for straight-forward items as OT Labor/OT fringe, materials usage, materials purchased, small works purchases, etc.

In addition, for Applicants with large claims, FEMA has established an Expedited Project Worksheet (PW) process which enables you to estimate up to 90 days' worth of eligible costs and FEMA would then obligate 50% of the total amount (at a 75% federal share). In essence, FEMA has a 50% retainage pending all the back-up supporting documentation to support the claims.

Question: Purchase and procurement are always a topic during disaster assistance. What should applicants be aware of regarding procurement?

Answer: FEMA has issued additional guidance – Fact Sheets on Exigent and Emergency Contracts/Procurement and purchases. In addition, they have all released a Reasonable Cost job aid to accompany the fact sheets. FEMA has also conducted multiple on-line webinars on Exigent/Emergency Contracts/Procurement as well.

Question: Other funding is available through other sources, such as Department of Health and Human Services and the Center for Disease Control. Have clear guidelines been released on what funding will cover what cost?

Answer: We are just beginning to see federal funding streams starting to flow – one of the first was CARES HHS CMS to Fire/EMS; CARES Healthcare (large hospitals); CARES States (\$1.65b); CARES (500k census); CARES Local Jurisdictions; CARES State Pass-through (non-500k census) to local jurisdictions; CARES FEMA EMPG-supplemental; CARES FTA; also we are seeing CARES HHS CMS second round application date) CARES FEMA AFG-supplemental application date; CARES FEMA SAFER-supplemental application date; we have limited Terms and Conditions information on the grants – it is available on the US Treasury CARES website.

We are seeing a possible duplication of benefits with some of the federal funding streams – which makes it all the more important to clearly delineate which items goes to what funding – CARES will not cover all costs / FEMA will not cover all costs.

Question: This disaster is continuing at this time. If counities estimate the expense based on current needs and needs later will they be able to adjust and apply for the additional expenses?

Answer: We have been told that you will be able to adjust costs – our caution is – if you set distinct Jan 20-Apr 30 costs – and you failed to include all costs, we want to make sure you have the ability to claim the costs once you get all the back-up documentation – this is particularly true for Small Projects (less than \$131,100) as small projects are usually not amended.

Question: This question is from one of our member counties. Staff overtime and temp related to the response may be eligible. In some cases, staff are incurring overtime due to the extra duties, but it doesn't accrue on their time sheets until after they have worked 40 hours. Therefore, response work at the beginning of the week is being captured as regular time, pushing the employee into overtime. How should we capturing this, and what documentation is required to gain reimbursement for the response?

Answer: We are seeing this quite a bit with the early timesheets – timesheets not showing the daily totals (and the breakout of daily totals into COVID / non-COVID) has been a problem. Unless we can see it as COVID-19 Overtime – it will not be able to be picked up. I am researching what other states are doing to capture these costs.

Question: Counties are unsure of what additional funding will be available other than FEMA, making estimates for the PA difficult at this time. When are they required to submit requests for reimbursement to FEMA PA? Does FEMA have deadlines for PA expenses at this time?

Answer: FEMA has not established deadlines (as of today) – the Incident Period is Jan 20 and continuing.

Question: Schools are closed, and the counities are dependent on first responders and essential employees to be at work. Will FEMA cover the cost of childcare for these employees?

Answer: Per the FEMA HQs Q&A spreadsheet – daycare/childcare costs are not eligible as they are not seen as a legal responsibility of government to provide.

- Question:** Are expenses covered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and/or the Center for Disease Control (CDC) also eligible for FEMA assistance?
- Answer:** No. FEMA will not duplicate assistance provided by HHS or CDC.
- Question:** How do counties make sure that cost related to additional janitorial, additional supplies for cleaning, sanitizing and PPE get approved for funding and denied based on being normal operating supplies?
- Answer:** FEMA will recognize the extraordinary costs incurred – as opposed to the increased business operating expenses – for example, if your facility had a COVID-19 positive or suspect person in your facilities, apparatus, vehicles, you may have to perform a deep cleaning which is well over the normal custodial care – well above an increase in business operating expenses – it was done solely due to the COVID positive or suspected positive.
- Question:** Where can our counites go for the most up to date information regarding this declaration?
- Answer:** We are conducting Virtual Applicant Briefings and have posted the latest guidance on our WA EMD PA Program website, <https://mil.wa.gov/public-assistance>. In addition, your FEMA/State Program Delivery Manager or myself are available at any time.
- Question:** Your department is hosting applicant briefings now, when is the next one that Counties should tune into?
- Answer:** Schedule posted. Please visit <https://mil.wa.gov/public-assistance>.
- Question:** If Counites have additional questions who should they contact?
- Answer:** gary.urbas@mil.wa.gov – 253-512-7402