



Department of Homeland Security

Federal Emergency Management Agency: Individual Assistance (IA)

2020 Action Plan

Who are we?

As the Nation's emergency management Agency, FEMA's mission is to help people before, during, and after disasters. Our core values are Compassion, Fairness, Integrity, and Respect.

Our mission and core values guide our customer experience efforts and help us address the needs of communities and families after a disaster. Objective 3.1 in FEMA's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan focuses on streamlining the disaster survivor experience.

FEMA's focus for the Customer Experience Cross-Agency Priority Goal is the Individual Assistance program. The Individual Assistance mission is to ensure disaster survivors have timely access to a full range of authorized programs and services to maximize recovery through collaborative partnerships with state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, as well as other federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.



How do we deliver value to the public?

Occasion

Survivor is negatively affected by a natural or man-made hazard and resides in an area with a Presidentially declared Emergency or Major Disaster Declaration. Separate from services provided to all residents in an impacted area (e.g., sheltering), survivor seeks additional assistance.

Survivor is negatively affected by a natural or man-made hazard, has registered for FEMA assistance and is awaiting resources. Regulations require verification of damages in order to qualify for a subset of federal assistance.

Survivor is negatively affected by a natural or man-made hazard, has registered for FEMA assistance and has FEMA-verified losses. Survivor has uninsured or underinsured necessary expenses and serious needs and lacks a habitable (safe, sanitary, functional) place to stay.

High-Impact Service

Depending on the type of federal aid available through FEMA, survivors may have to apply for assistance. This process includes completion of a web-based form, in-person visit to a Disaster Recovery Center, assistance from Disaster Survivor Assistance staff in the community, or phone contact with FEMA's call center staff.

To verify disaster-caused loss, survivors must request a home inspection with FEMA. This may be done via virtual means or through a FEMA employee visiting their residence. Non-housing losses can be verified by documentation submitted to FEMA.

FEMA supports non-governmental organizations, and governments at the state, local, tribal, and territorial levels, to provide congregate sheltering. FEMA provides temporary housing to eligible survivors through direct or financial housing assistance.

Offering

Outcomes from complete and accurate registration for eligible survivors include: access to a subset of FEMA resources, programs, and services and access to low-interest loans from the Small Business Administration.

The real-property loss value informs the amount of assistance from certain programs for which a survivor qualifies. Verification of real-property loss is a critical step in providing necessary assistance.

Sheltering and housing services – delivered by FEMA as well as other agencies and organizations – provide for the safety of disaster survivors. Short-term sheltering and/or temporary housing are critical steps to helping survivors begin their recovery.

Where could we improve?

Steps

Customer Steps

Name and describe the main steps that a person takes to use the service, left to right, start to finish.

Service System

Describe the channels, roles, and tools from your agency or partners.

Pain Points

Describe the highest priority problems to solve

1: Register with FEMA

Determine if your dwelling is in an eligible jurisdiction. Provide information to FEMA (name, household size, Social Security Number, current and pre-disaster address, contact information, types of insurance held, pre-disaster annual gross income, losses caused by the disaster, banking information if appropriate).

Disaster survivors can access FEMA's application process through the FEMA app, the DisasterAssistance.gov website, and the toll-free helpline (800-621-FEMA). In person, disaster survivors can visit a Disaster Recovery Center in their community or may encounter FEMA Disaster Survivor Assistance teams in affected communities. FEMA provides information in multiple languages and formats to serve survivors with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.

Survivors frequently update their FEMA registration to provide more information, clarify information, submit requisite documentation, and change preferences. Aside from updating information, one of the most frequent pain points is when survivors seek a status check on their application.

2: Verify disaster losses

Register for FEMA assistance. Provide documentation for non-home-related disaster losses. Request a home inspection. Schedule a home inspection. Be present for the home inspection.

FEMA uses multiple loss verification methods, including onsite inspection, remote inspections, geospatial inspection, and documentation. Documentation can be submitted in person, via fax, via mail, or online. FEMA representatives conduct onsite or remote inspections. Scheduling usually occurs over the phone with a FEMA inspector.

After survivors register for FEMA assistance, they must undergo a home inspection to determine eligibility for different assistance. In large events (e.g. Hurricanes), survivors have had to wait an extended period of time to complete their home inspection due to significant demand. The 2017 Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria had survivors waiting an average of 24, 27, and 39 days (respectively) to receive an on-site inspection. (See the 2017 Hurricane Season FEMA After-Action Report.)

Survivors can be served more quickly when they benefit from geospatial inspections and remote inspections, which are especially helpful in a pandemic environment. More flexible inspection options will help streamline the loss verification process for disaster survivors.

What will we do?

Project:
Cross-Agency Journey Map for Disaster Survivors

Purpose

*Why did your agency undertake this project?
What does it hope to achieve, in specific performance indicators, if possible.*

What is the problem?

Survivors often face a long road to recovery as they manage personal or professional loss, grief, anxiety, and stress. For most households, this will be the first time they are impacted by a disaster and may also be their first direct interaction with some government agencies and non-profit organizations. Survivors do not have a clear understanding of what their road to recovery looks like, what assistance is available, and what actions they should take.

Desired future state?

FEMA seeks to meet survivors “where they are” and recognizes that disaster recovery is a cohesive experience, not a set of programs, services, and tools. Survivors experience a single disaster recovery, and FEMA will provide a better end-to-end look at recovery programs that will help service providers work together to improve services to survivors.

Any measurable indicators and targets?

Long term, disaster survivors will be more confident in their disaster recovery while expending less effort navigating programs.

Approach

Describe the timeline and work plan to achieve that purpose. If this is an ongoing initiative, describe your progress.

Process, methods, and expertise?

FEMA is supporting OMB’s effort to build a cross-agency journey map from the perspective of the disaster survivor. This tool will help reframe our view of disaster recovery as well as to prioritize our partnerships and projects to better serve disaster survivors throughout their road to recovery.

Timeline, stage gates and dates?

This effort is starting in FY20 Q4. It will build off resources, analyses, interviews, and tools FEMA has collected in the last several years. Leveraging a human-centered design approach, this effort will primarily be driven by interviews with survivors, conducted by the OMB team with the support of FEMA staff.

Deliverables being produced?

In FY20, the cross-agency journey map will be limited to a manageable number of federal agencies. This will result in not just a journey map artifact, but also a new way to prioritize and execute program changes to improve disaster recovery support. In FY21 and FY22, we hope that the entire disaster recovery community can leverage, incorporate, and join in the end-to-end journey map.

Resources

Describe the stakeholders involved, financial and human capital dedicated to the work, and any partners contributing to the work.

Who is responsible?

FEMA’s Individual Assistance Division is responsible for executing this project by providing support to the cross-agency effort.

Who is contributing to the project?

A broad team across FEMA will be critical to ensuring the success of this project. Outside of FEMA, we plan to work with other federal agencies that are service providers as well as federal agencies that may be instrumental to the success of our effort. As an indicator of the potential scope of our effort, a total of 17 federal agencies are partners in the DisasterAssistance.gov website.

In FY20, FEMA is supporting the CAP-Goal funded cross-agency project by making available subject matter experts in disaster assistance for interview by the design team, assisting in connecting with a diverse set of FEMA customers for user interviews, and participating in a selection of these customer interviews. In FY21 and FY22, FEMA aims to apply findings from this project to help prioritize areas for further improvement and coordination.

What will we do?

Project:
Guided Services

Purpose

*Why did your agency undertake this project?
What does it hope to achieve, in specific performance indicators, if possible.*

What is the problem?

Current service delivery channels are limited and create inconsistent customer and user experiences, resulting in the need to contact a customer service live agent and possibly wait in long hold queues.

Desired future state?

The long-term goal is to have an omnichannel, intelligent customer support solution that provides streamlined, efficient, and consistent support to disaster survivors. This will result in an improved customer experience, reduced wait times, reduced total interactions, and improved customer and user experiences.

Any measurable indicators and targets?

Measurements are not created yet, but some Key Performance Indicators may include virtual agent to live agent transfers, wait time reductions, page views for web sites, and path(s) taken to get information, as well as a number of FEMA engagement points across channels (e.g., web first, then call 800-621-FEMA).

Approach

Describe the timeline and work plan to achieve that purpose. If this is an ongoing initiative, describe your progress.

Process, methods, and expertise?

FEMA conducted market research with solution providers who demonstrated tools and capabilities applicable to FEMA's business needs pertaining to engagement with disaster survivors. FEMA is forming project teams to create pilots for different channel-specific solutions, with plans expected to span FY20 to FY22 and beyond.

Timeline, stage gates and dates?

Project teams will determine timelines.

Deliverables being produced?

Expected deliverables include multiple pilot project plans and pilots for the agent channel, customer call service channel and/or the web channel, with the goal to explore options for other FEMA service channels, including site inspections and in-person registrations.

Resources

Describe the stakeholders involved, financial and human capital dedicated to the work, and any partners contributing to the work.

Who is responsible?

FEMA's Individual Assistance Division is responsible for executing this project. This Division includes several teams charged with providing services and disaster-related assistance to survivors.

Who is contributing to the project?

FEMA is continuing to perform market research and is exploring similar technology use across other Federal Agencies, such as United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. FEMA technology subject matter experts are actively engaged in the project team process.

In FY20, FEMA is developing pilot programs to prioritize existing agency resources towards technology modernization and engaging outside experts to address needs identified within the Guided Services suite of challenges. In FY21 and FY22, FEMA will execute viable pilot programs and evaluate viability of future improvements, to include resource scoping.

What will we do?

Project:
*Reporting Improvements
for Remote Inspections*

Purpose

*Why did your agency undertake this project?
What does it hope to achieve, in specific
performance indicators, if possible.*

What is the problem?

Challenges in quickly validating survivor-reported damage during remote inspections.

Desired future state?

Survivors will be able to livestream disaster damage or send FEMA digital video and digital images of damage for verification and validation.

Any measurable indicators and targets?

Target: 80% of remote inspections include livestreaming, recorded video, or photographs of disaster-related damages.

Approach

Describe the timeline and work plan to achieve that purpose. If this is an ongoing initiative, describe your progress.

Process, methods, and expertise?

The FEMA Individual Assistance Division is working with Agency and Department partners to seek approval to use video in support of home inspections.

Timeline, stage gates and dates?

The FEMA Individual Assistance Division plans to obtain approval from multiple FEMA offices, and begin implementation, during the June 2020 to August 2020 timeframe.

Deliverables being produced?

FEMA will produce internal guidance for inspectors to describe how to use streaming video to supplement the remote inspections.

NOTE: Slide 8 details our successes to date, which lays the foundation for the continuing improvements described here.

Resources

Describe the stakeholders involved, financial and human capital dedicated to the work, and any partners contributing to the work.

Who is responsible?

The FEMA Individual Assistance Division is responsible for executing this project.

Who is contributing to the project?

Participation from a broad team across FEMA will be critical to ensuring the success of this project. This will include offices and teams such as:

- Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration
- Privacy Branch
- Office of the Chief Information Officer
- Office of Response and Recovery:
 - Recovery Technology Programs Division
 - Individual Assistance Division
 - Recovery Reporting and Analytics Division

In FY20, FEMA is piloting and scaling remote inspection policies, processes, and technologies using existing agency resources. In FY21 and FY22, FEMA aims to further grow the use of remote inspection capabilities by exploring technology solutions, to include resource scoping determinations.

What are we proud of this year?

Service Improvement

Who is the user and what was the problem?

FEMA employs onsite (in-person) or geospatial inspections to verify disaster-caused losses and determine a survivor's eligibility for a subset of FEMA assistance programs. Onsite inspections are costly and can be time intensive. Impassable roads or other hazards can delay inspections when inspectors have difficulty reaching damaged dwellings. Nationwide, FEMA conducted 280,000 onsite inspections in 2018 and 66,000 in 2019. Onsite inspections in a pandemic environment posed a new set of challenges during the COVID-19 public health emergency in 2020.

What did you build / improve? What does it do for the public or how you deliver your mission? What was the resulting impact? (Include numbers whenever possible)

FEMA developed a remote inspection policy (FP104-009-17) that creates flexibility to continue our mission in a pandemic environment. With remote inspections, FEMA inspectors conduct phone interviews with survivors to complete the standard inspection process. Since April 2020, FEMA has completed approximately 10,000 remote inspections in the aftermath of earthquakes, tornadoes, and floods, with disaster survivors living in Puerto Rico, Oregon, Tennessee, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Disaster survivors are responding positively to the remote inspections.

Sum up what happened in two sentences.

Due to the pandemic environment, FEMA now uses remote inspections to verify disaster-caused losses. This helps FEMA meet public health and safety restrictions enforced by state, territorial, tribal or local officials.



Capacity Building

Was this a governance, measurement, organizational, customer understanding, service development, or service delivery capability?

Service delivery capability.

What was the new action taken capability and it's goal or purpose?

To help state, local, tribal, and territorial emergency managers and public health officials respond to incidents during the 2020 hurricane season amid the COVID-19 pandemic, FEMA released the COVID-19 Pandemic Operational Guidance for the 2020 hurricane season.

Further, to support an effective state-managed, locally executed and Federally supported response to disasters occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic, FEMA developed guidance to assist state, tribal, and territorial governments in planning mass care delivery.

Can you sum up what happened in two sentences?

FEMA released guidance to emergency managers at all levels to help prepare for the 2020 hurricane season amid the COVID-19 pandemic.



COVID-19 Pandemic
Operational Guidance for
the 2020 Hurricane Season

May 2020



Mass Care/Emergency
Assistance Pandemic
Planning Considerations

For State, Local, Tribal, Territorial and Non-Government
Organizational Planners, Providers and Support
Agencies

June 2020

