

Four Years After Hurricane María, 76 Percent of the Projects Have Allocations from FEMA

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Guaynabo, Puerto Rico – The rebuilding of Puerto Rico after Hurricane María encompasses a revitalization of the infrastructure, health and education sectors as well as other areas that presents and improvement in the long-term quality of life of all its citizens. For this purpose, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) allocated more than **\$25 billion** corresponding to **8,460 projects**, which boosts the growth of the construction industry on the island and helps reactivate the local economy.

Close to 2,000 projects have been completed or are under construction with the help of FEMA funds. These projects, which include roads, public service buildings and recreational facilities represent an injection of over \$44 million. These advances in recovery result from the efforts made between the federal government and the Central Office of Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3) to help address the areas affected by the biggest storm in the modern history of the United States. Each project helps restore the activities in the communities and provides a new beginning for the structures that were left inoperable after the hurricane.

“The recovery’s rhythm accelerates when working in unison with the municipalities, the state government and COR3. All the elements that are part of this historic moment for the Island play an essential part for this recovery to be a successful. This past year we allocated funds for a record number of projects and we trust that the recovery will continue moving in that direction.” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator, José G. Baquero.

Economic Revitalization

The economic injection on the island after Hurricane María is one without comparison. This is how Alba Brugueras-Fabre, President of the Puerto Rico



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Association of Economists, describes it, who mentioned that no other disaster-related federal aid for the island matches the significance of FEMA's multi-million-dollar investment in the island. Brugueras-Fabre added that “there is an impact that goes beyond the present, because as these projects are completed, we will see more changes in our country.”

She highlighted that the effect of the funds will be multi-sectoral, including the banking, housing market and construction, sectors.

In agreement is the President of the Puerto Rico Chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America, Umberto J. Donato Solís. The architect explained that the multiplier effect of the recovery funds opens the door for the development of the local economy that transcends the construction sector. Donato Solís mentioned that the sector is ready for the increase in works to be made and that the true opportunity of rebuilding falls on the sustainable growth of Puerto Rico as a result of the capital resources resulting from the recovery.

Reconstruction work progress

At a municipal level, the total of funds allocated represents access to \$1.9 billion for permanent works in order to have strengthened and more resilient structures against future disasters.

According to the Federal Recovery Coordinator, one of the areas where the reconstruction activity is most visible are parks, community centers and community recreational places in the neighborhoods of the country. “These facilities are part of the residents’ lifestyle and are the cornerstone of the neighborhoods. That was the feeling at the Juan F. “Cheo” López Baseball Park in Camuy, where the town’s AA baseball fans recently gathered for the first night game in four years thanks to FEMA funding. Likewise, today, more than 1,000 families from Hormigueros and Aibonito can now enjoy repaired basketball courts with an allocation of over \$2.2 million. This results in the broadening of the activities offered for the community’s wellbeing,” stated Baquero about the repairs to parks and recreational facilities that reach \$816 million.

For his part, the Executive Director of COR3, Ing. Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, acknowledged the need to renew the local infrastructure and the historic opportunity that this represents for the socioeconomic development of our people.



“Without a doubt, the reconstruction began and to guarantee its continuation we are implementing diverse initiatives like the State Cost Share Fund of \$750 million, we simplified the funds disbursement process and we are working alongside FEMA to address the Subrecipients doubts and facilitate the infrastructure renovation process,” affirmed Laboy Rivera.

Adjustments in face of Climate Change

On the other hand, climate adaptation is an initiative that promotes communities to be ready to face the impact of global warming, like the rise in sea levels and the development of more extreme storms.

About 84 percent of the reconstruction projects under FEMA’s Public Assistance program have funds that seek to strengthen structures beyond what they were before the disaster and address some of the major risks associated with climate change.

One of the most efficient ways to face climate variations is the use of materials that resemble nature. They help filter and channel the rain to prevent floods, among other benefits. The sowing of grass to protect the slope in various streets of the Playa Añasco neighborhood, for example, is a way of addressing the problem of land erosion. To this end, an allocation of about \$2.4 million from FEMA supports the Island’s road safety. In addition, some \$93.2 million through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) is intended to strengthen the structures that were not damaged by the hurricane. With the threat of climate change effects, these funds add long-term value and resilience. To date, the projects approved by HMGP have an estimated cost of \$1.3 billion.

According to meteorologist and climate change expert in Puerto Rico, Ada Monzón, the extreme variation in climate represents the “biggest problem facing our planet,” as it brings an increase in the Earth's and ocean’s average temperature and contributes to an increase of category 4 and 5 hurricanes, among other characteristics.

“The resilience of our island is tied to the ability to cope with extreme events and sea level rise and how we empower our leaders and communities to make the right decisions. If we do not do it, each time it will cost us more money and more lives.” said Monzón, who added that the island has the tools and solutions, but



education and willingness to think about the common good is needed.

Equity integrated into the recovery

The opportunity to rebuild the island takes into account vulnerable populations and sectors that are disproportionately affected during disasters. These areas of the country where there is a greater concentration of low-income families, people with functional diversity and where unique challenges are faced are part of the long-term planning. The Agency is collaborating with municipalities to identify barriers and incorporate viable solutions that address accessibility issues in their tourism resources.

FEMA's Disability Integration team (DI) collaborated with various municipalities on the first federal and state project to eliminate access barriers on tourism-related facilities to be repaired with federal funds. Concrete steps include the acquisition of signs in Braille writing at the Punta Tuna Lighthouse in Maunabo for people who are blind to enjoy a more inclusive tourism experience.

Together with the government of Puerto Rico, FEMA, and its local staff of over 790 Puerto Rico residents, is working to continue to allocate funds and move the recovery forward.

To access more information on the recovery of Puerto Rico from Hurricane María, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339 and recuperacion.pr. Follow us on social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and [Twitter @COR3pr](https://Twitter.com/COR3pr).

