

FEMA Awards Nearly \$10.5 Million for the Central Specialized School of Visual Arts

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Guaynabo, PUERTO RICO — The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) allocated nearly \$10.5 million to restore the Central Specialized School of Visual Arts, a century-old institution included in Puerto Rico's National Register of Historic Places.

“La Central”, as it is colloquially known, belongs to a select group of specialized schools of the Puerto Rico Department of Education, created to develop specific skills in the fine arts, sports and academic programs.

“This FEMA award is crucial to restore an institution that is part of our historical heritage, vital for the formation of future artists. Its preservation guarantees that it will continue to be a benchmark in Puerto Rico's art education, while strengthening its resilience in the face of future disasters,” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José G. Baquero.

The Central Specialized School of Visual Arts is one of the most important schools on the island. It was built in the early 1920s and shows the solemn design used by early 20th century U.S. architects, known as “school specialists.” In this trend, the magnificence of the architectural design serves as a vehicle to evoke the academic and cultural aspirations of the student body.

The wide and long windows take advantage of the location of the campus in an elevated and spacious green area to provide natural light and ventilation inside the school's U-shaped aisles. This attribute, although aesthetic and functional, contributed to the damage caused by Hurricane Maria, as many of these windows succumbed to the force of the hurricane winds.

The approved funds will restore structural damage to the roofs, doors and windows, architectural elements that reflect the historic character of the building.



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Other areas to be restored include floor and ceiling slabs, light fixtures, air conditioners and the interior gymnasium, whose beams and columns will be replaced. To strengthen the campus, FEMA approved a mitigation item of over \$1.1 million, which will allow for the installation of impact- and hurricane-proof windows.

FEMA works in collaboration with the Puerto Rico Historic Preservation Office (OCHPR, in Spanish) to ensure the compliance with the current environmental and historic laws, regulations and executive orders during the restoration of buildings and structures of historic value such as “La Central”. In this way, it seeks to ensure that all historic elements are considered when evaluating the project to avoid, minimize and mitigate the possible adverse effects that the proposed repair may have on the structure.

“For FEMA, preservation of historic buildings and environmental resources is a key issue during the review and approval of reconstruction projects. This component is fundamental in the approval process for federal funds,” Baquero said.

FEMA has allocated over \$34.6 million for about 11,060 projects that address the recovery following Hurricane María.

For more information about Puerto Rico’s recovery, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339, fema.gov/disaster/4473 and recovery.pr. Follow us on our social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and Twitter @COR3pr.

