Tribal Listening Session on FEMA COVID-19 Funeral Assistance Framing Paper

Recovery Directorate | March 4, 2021, 2:00-4:00 P.M. ET

Overarching Consultation Questions

What courses of action can the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) take to ensure that delivery of funeral assistance meets the disaster-related needs of tribal nations and their members to the maximum extent possible during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic? What are the unique tribal considerations that FEMA should take into consideration when developing policies and procedures for implementing this program during this public health emergency?

Background

On March 13, 2020, the President declared a nationwide emergency for the COVID-19 pandemic for all states, tribes, territories, and the District of Columbia under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. Additionally, every jurisdiction in the country is covered by major disaster declaration.

On December 27, 2020, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 was enacted, authorizing FEMA to provide Funeral Assistance for COVID-19-related fatalities. This assistance is a category of the Other Needs Assistance provision of FEMA's Individual Assistance, Individuals and Households Program.

- Additional assistance for COVID-19-related funeral expenses incurred after December 31, 2020 or in excess of the $2 billion authorized will require further congressional action for the assistance to be continually funded at 100% federal cost.

- If the President approves continued assistance for COVID-19-related expenses incurred beyond December 31, 2020, the assistance would be authorized at 75% federal and 25% cost-share, unless additional congressional action provides otherwise.
- Currently, all tribal members would be eligible for funeral assistance. Because this is a 100% federally funded and administered program assistance is provided directly to the eligible applicant.

Tribal Consultation Session

On March 4, 2021, FEMA's Recovery Directorate, in partnership with FEMA's Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs Division, is hosting a virtual listening session to consult with tribal nations on Funeral Assistance policies and procedures under development to deliver the funeral assistance program. FEMA would like to hear about tribal concerns and opportunities to improve delivery of the funeral assistance program to all tribal members. During the tribal consultation session, Recovery staff will provide a brief overview of the FEMA funeral assistance, the key provisions of the proposed interim policy, and the simplified processes and procedures being proposed to reduce the administrative burden on eligible applicants.

Discussion Questions

General:

1. What unique challenges do tribal leaders see as most critical in FEMA's timely delivery of funeral assistance directly to tribal members?
2. What additional support do tribes need from FEMA to ensure the funeral assistance program is properly communicated and delivered to tribal members?
3. How can non-local and/or non-tribal voluntary organizations play a role supporting a tribe before, during, after a disaster?

Individual Assistance Program Delivery (Funeral Assistance):

1. What are the anticipated challenges tribal members may have when completing critical steps of the FEMA registration process?

2. Are their specific questions on the types of eligible costs, especially for cultural/ceremonial items?
3. What are the available resources/technology that tribal members utilize to send and receive documentation? Are there any gaps?
4. Are there concerns with tribal members ability to verify their identity, obtain a valid death certificate, or obtain and sending documentation supporting costs they have incurred?

Communication:

1. What are the communication challenges in reaching all potential applicants? Are there special considerations which may require other forms of assistance to reach the target population and ensure the process is completed?
2. What type of media and/or materials should FEMA develop to assist in communication of the funeral assistance program to tribal members?
3. What types of training and/or materials should FEMA develop to supplement Individual Assistance policies and assist tribal leaders in communicating with their members on the program?
4. Are there any other ways FEMA can assist to ensure assistance is provided in a culturally sensitive manner?