

# FEMA Announces Initial Initiatives to Advance Equity

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**Release Date: July 21, 2021**

Today, FEMA announced two initiatives to advance equity across the agency, which are the first step in focusing the agency toward reducing barriers and increasing opportunities. The two major initiatives are the formation of an Equity Enterprise Steering Group and the establishment of a robust stakeholder engagement process to develop the agency's 2022 – 2026 Strategic Plan. Both initiatives include internal and external stakeholders to reflect the agency's commitment to advancing equity. These actions are just the first of many planned for the coming months.

Too many disaster survivors face barriers in accessing assistance programs and resources to support their recovery. Certain populations – specifically low-income neighborhoods, communities of color, people with disabilities and older adults, those with language barriers and those living in rural and isolated areas – are disproportionately impacted by disasters. FEMA is committed to ensuring disaster assistance programs do not exacerbate existing inequal conditions.

“We’re turning a page at FEMA and infusing equity throughout our agency, programs, and policies to better serve people who face unique barriers before, during and after disasters,” said FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell. “Systemic racism across institutions and society has sidelined generations of people of color and low-income households and that practice needs to end.”

The new Equity Enterprise Steering Group is focused on assessing issues like access and delivery of FEMA programs, services, and activities. Members include representatives from each of the major offices across the agency and is co-chaired by the Office of Equal Rights and the Office of Response and Recovery. The group is designed to drive forward our commitment to equity in every part of the agency, not just certain programs.

FEMA is developing the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan through inputs from stakeholders within the agency and beyond to reflect a whole of community



perspective. Stakeholders will inform the agency's goals and objectives, with equity as a foundational priority for the coming years.

Administrator Criswell added: "As emergency managers, we must meet people where they are. Our first steps forward will shape future decisions by engaging our teams, partners, key stakeholders, and the public to boost access and reduce barriers. In time, we hope our work will ultimately lead to systematic generational change for underserved populations in disaster-prone communities."

## Increasing Additional Equitable Measures

FEMA continues to use equity as a lens to drive response operations and deliver better services to marginalized and other vulnerable populations. While FEMA continues to work towards creating equitable outcomes for survivors, the agency is working within this specific authorities and responsibilities to make changes, including:

- **Spearheading a successful Community Vaccination Centers Mission** to combat COVID-19 and administer vaccinations, in which more than 58% of all vaccines were given to individuals of color, provides a model for how equity considerations can be incorporated into other policies and programs.
- **Encouraging active employee engagement** to ensure internal discussions generate new ideas on workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion. Diverse organizations such as FEMA's Employee Resource Groups and other employee-led groups have partnered with senior leadership to seek ideas and input.
- **Hosting a Command and General Staff "Equity Stand Down"** with over 400 FEMA field leaders on Aug. 4-5. This will provide critical information on civil rights law, equity levers field leaders can pull to enhance equity, and training on how to use the many tools available within FEMA to incorporate equity into tactical decision making (e.g., where to place Disaster Recovery Centers).
- **Issuing a request for information and began soliciting public comment on our programs to help identify regulations and policies** that may benefit from modification, streamlining, expansion or repeal to better address climate change and underserved communities and populations. The [request for information](#) closed today, July 21.



- **Assessing several programs** to determine where the agency can make improvements and where there is a need for support from other federal partners and the legislative branch.
- **Expanding eligibility criteria for Critical Needs Assistance** to include applicants who state they have a need for shelter but have not been able to leave their damaged dwelling.
- **Expanding access by integrating a Documentation Drop Off Center model** for Disaster Recovery Centers that enables survivors to submit documentation in-person, notifies survivors when a representative is available, and provides estimated wait times.

## Contact Us

If you have any questions, please contact FEMA Office of External Affairs:

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Also, follow Administrator Deanne Criswell on Twitter [@FEMA\\_Deanne](https://twitter.com/FEMA_Deanne).

## FEMA Mission

Helping people before, during, and after disasters.

