

FEMA Defines Equity in its Mission of Making Programs More Accessible

Release Date: September 9, 2021

WASHINGTON -- Today, FEMA announced its new equity definition to ensure alignment and coordinated progress across the agency. The definition clarifies how the agency addresses gaps, barriers and challenges experienced by vulnerable populations to ensure all survivors have access to disaster assistance.

The definition is a result of recently announced [initiatives](#) on how the agency is advancing equity. At FEMA, our definition of equity is: ***“The consistent and systematic fair, just and impartial treatment of all individuals.”***

Leaders across the agency and emergency management community have voiced their support of this urgent work. Here’s what some of them had to say:

“The role and responsibility of emergency managers requires sensitivity to the needs of all disaster survivors and equitable and fair distribution of assistance to all those affected -- especially those disproportionately impacted. NEMA shares FEMA’s renewed commitment to equity in disaster response and remains a trusted partner in their mission to help people before, during and after a disaster strikes.” – **Sima Merick, President of the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA)**

“Most disaster response and recovery operations are complex, but those without equity further exasperates those vulnerable populations that are traditionally marginalized. As the world’s premier leader in emergency management, FEMA is setting the bar high with the adoption of the equity definition as it seeks to ensure the removal of barriers in the delivery of programs and services we provide tribes, states, locals and territorial jurisdictions.” – **Kevin Sligh, Adviser to the FEMA Administrator**



FEMA

Page 1 of 3

“FEMA helps people during their worst days, and that starts with recognizing the disproportionate effects disasters have on marginalized and underserved communities. Equity must be at the core of FEMA’s mission to ensure we can all be more resilient against disasters and quickly recover from them when they do happen.” – **MaryAnn Tierney, FEMA Region 3 Regional Administrator**

“The adoption of this definition is an explicit commitment by Administrator Criswell and the Biden Administration that FEMA works to ensure that all communities are treated in a fair, just and impartial manner. I am pleased that this commitment to equity will undergird the development of FEMA’s vision and strategy.” – **Ramesh Kolluru, FEMA National Advisory Council Vision 2045 Subcommittee Chair**

“FEMA is taking a much-needed step towards tackling the barriers that harm medically fragile and historically disenfranchised communities. As disasters become more extreme and more frequent, this is a step towards supporting all communities, especially those most harmed by these events.” – **Nicolette Louissaint, FEMA National Advisory Council Member**

“Equity must be baked into the front end of the federal declaration process, not an afterthought. Critical to the process is for decision makers to be intentional in all phases of the disaster management cycle to minimize discriminatory actions to prevent undesired outcomes that plague underserved and marginalized communities.” – **Warren D. Miller, FEMA National Advisory Council Equity Subcommittee Vice Chair**

“Along with FEMA, the African-American FEMA Employee Resource Group remains steadfast in the implementation of accessible resources and services and will work with our colleagues to continue to advocate and move the needle forward in advancing our mission through an equity-focused approach.” – **Vallee Bunting, African-American FEMA Employee Resource Group Chair**

“Changes FEMA has made and will continue to make will benefit communities of color, individuals experiencing homelessness,



FEMA

individuals with disabilities, older adults, neighbors living in poverty -- including those who lost their livelihoods due to the pandemic -- communities that have been historically marginalized. When systemic wrongs are addressed, everybody wins. A rising tide raises all sails.” – **Jo Linda Johnson, Director, FEMA’s Office of Equal Rights & FEMA Equity Enterprise Steering Group Co-Chair**

Our equity definition comes from Executive Order 13985, [Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#), which requires agencies [to] assess equity with respect to race, ethnicity, religion, income, geography, gender identity, sexual orientation and disability. And, integrating equity into everything we do is a key principle of FEMA’s 2021 Annual Planning Guidance.

To hear more about what partners from across the agency and the emergency management community are saying about FEMA’s initiative to advance equity, visit FEMA’s [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) pages.

