

FEMA Civil Rights Summits 2020: After Action Report

Executive Summary

In November and December 2020, FEMA Office of Equal Rights (OER), External Civil Rights Division (ECRD) coordinated and hosted three civil rights summits for external stakeholders. Motivated by FEMA's core values of compassion, fairness, integrity and respect, the civil rights summits sought to engage FEMA and its stakeholders in collaborative dialogue aimed at identifying actual and perceived biases impacting equal access to FEMA's programs and services

The goal of the summits was to start a conversation about equity, equal access, and implementation with members of the public with first-hand knowledge about how FEMA can better meet the needs of underserved and historically marginalized communities before, during, and after disasters. The summits focused on three areas: multi-cultural communities, disability communities, and environmental justice issues throughout disasters. The sessions included presentations from the main FEMA program offices that serve survivors and senior level panel discussions stemming from questions presented by attendees. Due to COVID-19, the summits were held virtually. using the Zoom platform.

Summit Timeline

- **November 12, 2020:** The first summit was titled *Multi-cultural: Equity Throughout Disasters*, during which FEMA stakeholders joined the Agency for the first in a series of crucial conversations about equity in disasters. Then-FEMA Administrator, Pete Gaynor, welcomed attendees to OER's inaugural event. Mr. Gaynor was followed by introductory remarks by Bambi Kraus, National Tribal Affairs Advisor from the Office of External Affairs. The summit was hosted by Leslie Saucedo, ECRD Director, who introduced presentations by and facilitated the question and answer sessions with Christopher Smith, the Director of the Individual Assistance Division, Frank Matranga, the Deputy Director of Operations in the Public Assistance Division, and Paul Huang, the Assistant Administrator of the Federal Insurance Directorate.¹ The afternoon panel discussion and question and answer session was led by OER Director, Jo Linda Johnson, and included the Deputy Assistant Administrator of the Recovery Directorate, the FEMA Region 3 Administrator, the Acting FEMA Region 5 Administrator, and the Section Chief of the Anti-Discrimination Group of the Department of Homeland Security Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. MaryAnn Tierney, Regional Administrator, FEMA Region 3 provided closing remarks.

¹ Links to all presentations are given at the end of this report.



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- **November 19, 2020:** The second summit was titled *Disability: Accessibility Throughout Disasters* and included crucial conversations about individuals with disabilities in disasters. Then Bridget Bean, then Senior Official Performing the Duties of Deputy Administrator, Resilience, provided opening remarks to attendees. The summit was hosted by Leslie Saucedo, ECRD Director who introduced presentations by and facilitated question and answer sessions with Christopher Smith, the Director of the Individual Assistance Division, Frank Matranga, the Deputy Director of Operations in the Public Assistance Division, and Paul Huang, the Assistant Administrator of Federal Insurance Directorate . The afternoon panel discussion and question and answer session was led by OER Director, Jo Linda Johnson, and included the Director of the Office of Disability Integration and Coordination, the Regional Administrator of FEMA Region 4, the Acting Director of External Affairs, and a Senior Policy Advisor from the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. Keith Turi, the Assistant Administrator, Recovery Directorate, Office of Response and Recovery provided closing remarks.
- **December 3, 2020:** The third summit was titled *Environmental Justice: Implementation Throughout Disasters*. Jo Linda Johnson, OER Director, gave opening remarks followed by Bridget Bean, then Senior Official Performing the Duties of Deputy Administrator, Resilience. The summit was hosted by Leslie Saucedo, ECRD Director who introduced presentations by and facilitated the question and answer sessions with Christopher Smith, the Director of the Individual Assistance Division, Frank Matranga, the Deputy Director of Operations in the Public Assistance Division, and Portia Ross, the Environmental Officer and Policy Branch Chief, Office of Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation. The afternoon panel discussion and question and answer session was led by OER Director, Jo Linda Johnson, and included the Director of Hazard Mitigation Assistance Division, the Deputy Regional Administrator of FEMA Region 10, the Regional Administrator of FEMA Region 6, and a Senior Policy Advisor from the DHS Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. David Maurstad, the Deputy Associate Administrator for the Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration and the Senior Executive of the National Flood Insurance Program provided closing remarks.

Key Findings

The summit provided an opportunity for FEMA to share information with our stakeholders, and more importantly for stakeholders to ask questions and have their concerns addressed directly by FEMA leaders. FEMA takes this feedback seriously. After reviewing the discussion, feedback, and questions from the public, FEMA provides the following key findings and takeaways from the summits.

- **Engagement with external stakeholders is critical.** Open dialogues and discussions are critical to helping FEMA understand any gaps we have regarding equity and accessibility and help us improve our operations and delivery of service. It is not possible for FEMA to independently and effectively direct disaster response, recovery, mitigation, and resilience, without input and feedback from those we serve.
- **FEMA must build relationships.** Our agency and emergency managers cannot connect with communities if we haven't done the work to build effective bridges to reach and meet with them at all stages of disasters, from preparedness to recovery. That means our work is improved when we partner with local and community leaders throughout the entire disaster cycle, from mitigation and preparedness to insurance and response.
- **Acknowledge FEMA's challenges.** For FEMA to be effective, our ideas and responses must be informed by our experience, designed with each community's needs in mind and communicated clearly. The unique

circumstances and needs of each community determine the survivor experience. To ensure an equitable response for all communities, FEMA must respond in a way that recognizes these factors and addresses these concerns.

Next Steps

- The Administration's recent Executive Orders on [Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) and [Ensuring an Equity Pandemic Response and Recovery](#) have reinforced FEMA's commitment to ensure the impartial and equitable delivery of FEMA programs and services before, during, and after disasters. FEMA has taken multiple concrete actions to ensure equity in its most recent efforts to support COVID-19 response and recovery, and these steps will serve as a blueprint for ensuring civil rights and equity in future FEMA activities:
 - FEMA's National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) established a Civil Rights Advisory Group (CRAG) to help ensure equity in the allocation of scarce resources, including to ensure that Community Vaccine Centers (CVCs) in the Federal pilot program are located in areas that help serve historically disenfranchised and vulnerable populations. The CRAG includes members from FEMA program offices and federal agencies including U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. FEMA also deployed Civil Rights Advisors to guide FEMA leadership with accessibility and equity considerations, analyze demographic data to reach underserved communities, engage with local and community organizations, and conduct physical site inspections. In addition, Disability Integration Specialists were deployed to ensure the needs of people with disabilities are integrated in all facets of vaccine center operation.
 - FEMA coordinated translation and interpretation services to ensure meaningful access to information for individuals who are limited English proficient and, together with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) staff and public health officials, are engaging community and faith-based organizations to help reach underserved, hesitant, and historically marginalized groups.
 - FEMA developed and shared a [Civil Rights Checklist](#) to assist state, tribal, and territorial partners, as well as community and faith-based and civil rights organizations, in understanding and fulfilling their obligations to provide access to vaccine-related programs, activities, and services in an equitable and nondiscriminatory manner. FEMA also issued an [advisory](#) to remind Recipients and Subrecipients that receive FEMA financial assistance of their Civil Rights Data Collection responsibilities.
 - On March 15, 2021, FEMA issued an [interim policy](#) regarding COVID-19 medical care eligible for Public Assistance (PA). The interim policy makes clear that as a condition of receiving assistance under the FEMA PA program in connection with COVID-19, Recipients and Subrecipients must demonstrate their efforts to focus the use of FEMA funding to serve the highest-risk communities and underserved populations as determined by established measures of social and economic disadvantage including the CDC Social Vulnerability Index (SVI). They must also prioritize limited resources to ensure an equitable pandemic response.

- The interim policy also requires that PA funding used for vaccination administration must be consistent with equitable pandemic response and recovery. Recipients and Subrecipients are required to collect demographic data and submit the following information:
 - CDC SVI score for each vaccine administration site
 - A description of how the site location, relative to other locations, best supports equitable vaccine administration
 - A site strategy with the following elements:
 - Community outreach and engagement plan;
 - An equitable registration process;
 - A strategy for accessible physical design of the vaccine site; and
 - A plan for continuous improvement
- FEMA created an [Equitable COVID-19 Response and Recovery Recipient and Subrecipient Job Aid](#) to help state, local, tribal, and territorial governments understand how to fulfill the equity requirements in the interim policy.
- Finally, FEMA is reviewing administration and demographic data, both publicly available on state websites and internal on pilot CVC performance, to determine if efforts to reach underserved and historically marginalized communities are effective or need to be modified.
- As stated in the recent Executive Order on [Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#), FEMA will continue to consult with members of communities that have been historically underrepresented in the Federal Government and underserved by, or subject to discrimination in, Federal policies and programs. FEMA will continue to evaluate opportunities to increase coordination, communication, and engagement with community-based organizations and civil rights organizations.

Additional Information

Links to the presentations are listed below.

- Individual Assistance (IA) Presentation ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
- Public Assistance (PA) Presentation ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
- Federal Insurance Directorate (FID) Presentation ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
- Office of Environmental Planning and Historical Planning (OEHP) Presentation ([English](#), [Spanish](#))

Contact Us

- If you have any questions, please contact the FEMA Office of Equal Rights, Civil Rights Division, at FEMA-CivilRightsOffice@fema.dhs.gov.

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