



PDA Pocket Guide

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Overview

The Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) Pocket Guide is a quick reference tool for FEMA, state, local, Tribal Nation, and territorial (SLTT) government partners conducting PDAs to determine the magnitude of damage and impact of disasters. For more detailed information on PDAs, refer to the FEMA Preliminary Damage Assessment Guide.

What are Preliminary Damage Assessments?

The PDA process is a mechanism used to determine the impact and magnitude of damage and the resulting unmet needs of individuals, communities, businesses, and the public sector. The primary objective of the PDA process is to collect data on disaster-related damages for impacted communities, inform the state, Tribal Nation, or territorial (STT) government's request for a declaration, and to help FEMA provide a recommendation to the President for a disaster declaration request.

PDAs are completed prior to the overall determination of the STT government's eligibility for federal disaster assistance, regardless of which programs the STT government is requesting. Local governments or Tribal Nations conduct initial damage assessments (IDA) first to determine if they require federal support. Once SLTT governments determine their capability to respond to or recover from the event is exceeded, the STT government requests a joint PDA with FEMA.¹

¹ See PDA Guide, pages 9 – 22.



The PDA Process

Incident Occurs

Local and Tribal Nation Government Conducts IDA

With support from the state or territory, local governments and Tribal Nations conduct the IDA by categorizing damage, developing cost estimates, and categorizing damage impacts by severity.

STT Government Reviews Damage

Local governments and Tribal Nations synthesize and package the IDA data, highlight the largest impacts, and submit the package to the Governor or Tribal Chief Executive (TCE) for review.

STT Government Requests a Joint PDA

Once the STT government has validated IDA information, the STT government may request a joint PDA by submitting a joint PDA request letter signed by the governor or TCE to the appropriate FEMA Regional office.

STT Government and FEMA Conduct the Joint PDA

During the joint PDA, the STT government develops the joint PDA plan of action. The joint PDA team then conducts site visits and assesses damage. The STT government and FEMA then compile, share, assess, and validate data. The STT government then evaluates the need for a disaster declaration request.

STT Government Requests Disaster Declaration

Using the validated damage from the joint PDA, the STT government submits a request for a Presidential disaster declaration to the FEMA Regional office.



Key Information SLTT Governments Can Provide FEMA

To expedite and streamline the joint PDA process, SLTT governments are encouraged to employ self-reporting to develop initial damage information. SLTT governments should collect and document damage during the IDA by taking pictures with geotags, using Geographic Information System (GIS) capabilities, and using drones if available to share imagery with the FEMA Region. Data to be collected includes:

- The type of damage to be validated, such as private (non-agricultural) and public property, debris damage, emergency protective activities, and/or private nonprofits (PNP) and public facilities;
- The verified costs for each category of work;
- The location and geographic spread of the damage;
- The magnitude and severity of damage and all estimates from the IDA;
- Immediate known problems, such as areas that are inaccessible, health and safety hazards, and requirements for emergency protective measures;
- A description of widespread loss of critical facilities (e.g., hospitals, grocery stores) and essential utilities;
- A description of shortages of food, water, and medical supplies;
- A summary of recent disaster declarations, including incidents when a disaster declaration was not granted;
- A summary of similar damage or repetitive damage from past events (declared or non-declared);
- A summary of the population impacted by the event; and
- A summary of activities taken by Other Federal Agencies (OFA), if any.²

² See PDA Guide, page 16.



Tribal Nation Considerations

The Stafford Act provides Tribal Nations with the authority to request their own major disaster declaration or emergency declaration from the President. At their own discretion, Tribal Nations may choose to request a Presidential disaster declaration independently or choose to join a state disaster declaration.³ Other Tribal Nation-specific considerations include:

- State, regional, and federal employees should never make unilateral decisions, and always coordinate with Tribal Nation leadership and a FEMA tribal liaison before acting;
- FEMA staff are not required to conduct site inspections of sacred sites and can accept a Tribal Nation's certified damage assessment as an alternative;
- Tribal Nations must define and identify their unique tribal community to establish the individuals eligible to receive assistance;⁴
- A declaration for a Tribal Nation is not limited to tribal lands or reservations and may include any community member living in an impacted area, tribal-owned facilities, or tribal interest lands;
- The Tribal Nation determines who is legally responsible for each damaged facility and dwelling and whether damage is eligible for Individual Assistance (IA), eligible for Public Assistance (PA), or if the damage is the responsibility of another federal agency; and
- Tribal Nations should consult closely with their FEMA regional office, and as needed, with the state(s) if they require any PDA related technical assistance.

³ See PDA Guide, pages 3 – 4, D-1 – D-22.

⁴ The tribal community, as defined by the Tribal Nation, is typically enrolled members of the Tribal Nation and other individuals that are the responsibility of the Tribal Nation (e.g., descendants, widows/widowers, adopted children, and others).



Do's and Don'ts of the PDA Process

Do:

- Be sensitive discussing damage with property owners
- Know casualties in advance
- Verify damage with visual inspection
- Confirm damage occurred within the applicable incident period
- Include impacts to businesses
- Ensure current assessments are accurate
- Use provided cost codes to validate claimed costs
- Determine insurance coverage
- Wear a FEMA badge
- Wear FEMA branded clothing whenever possible
- Coordinate with Tribal Nation leadership and complete tribe-specific cultural awareness training before beginning the joint PDA

Do not:

- Enter homes without the permission of the occupant
- Visit any sites that would put you in an unsafe situation
- Drive through flood waters
- Conduct assessments on tribal property or culturally significant sites or items without permission
- Make eligibility determinations in the field without proper leadership reviews
- Collect Personally Identifiable Information (PII), such as license plate numbers, pictures of occupants, and any personal identification numbers (e.g., social security number, driver's license numbers)
- Wear any inappropriate or otherwise unsafe clothing



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Individual Assistance

FEMA IA programs provide financial and direct assistance to disaster survivors with disaster-caused unmet needs. Support may include assistance for temporary housing and housing repairs, critical disaster-related expenses, the replacement of essential personal property, and funding to the STT government for IA program services. The joint PDA team in the field does not make eligibility determinations while conducting the joint PDA. The joint PDA team only captures damage that would meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the [Individual Assistance Program and Policy Guide](#) (IAPPG).

Degrees of Damage

FEMA has established four categories of damage that an impacted home may fall within: affected, minor, major, or destroyed. In many cases, the size and needs of the unfolding disaster will not allow PDA teams to conduct a detailed review of each home. Joint PDA teams should use the following standards for categorizing degrees of damage:

- **Affected:** Non-structural damage to a home that does not make the home unsafe to enter or occupy.
- **Minor:** Repairable, non-structural damage to a home or minimal damage from flood waters.
- **Major:** Structural damage or other significant damage that requires extensive repairs or significant damage from flood waters.
- **Destroyed:** Significant enough damage that the home is deemed a total loss.

For detailed information, refer to the degree of damage tables.⁵

⁵ See PDA Guide, page 43 – 47.



Essential Living Spaces

During the PDA process, joint PDA teams will identify damage to essential living spaces. An essential living space is a room within a home that serves the function of a bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, and/or living room that is regularly occupied or used by one or more members of the household and requires repair to bring its functionality back to the home (e.g., kitchens are considered essential as long as there is not another undamaged kitchen in the home).⁶

Inaccessible Residences

For manufactured, multi-family, non-traditional, and conventionally built homes, inaccessible residences are those in which damage to the home cannot be visually validated because of disaster-related loss of access.

- In the case of flooding incidents, flood waters may block access to residences by covering, washing out, or destroying roads, bridges, or access routes so that the degree of damage cannot be visually verified.
- In the case of non-flood incidents, debris from landslides, mudslides, severe soil erosion, or damaged infrastructure blocks access to residences by disrupting or destroying roads, bridges, or access routes so that the degree of damage cannot be visually verified.

If the number of inaccessible homes represents a significant portion of homes assessed, the PDA team should consider extending their timeline to allow for a more comprehensive assessment.⁷

⁶ See PDA Guide, page 42.

⁷ See PDA Guide, page 44.



Individual Assistance Information

To evaluate damage to homes, impact statements are used to illustrate whether the disaster is beyond the capacity of the impacted jurisdiction and if supplemental federal assistance is required to recover. Impact statements for IA requests should include:

- An outline of the incident, including whether it was human-caused or natural, the time of occurrence, and the location;
- State fiscal capacity to recover and resource availability;
- Disaster history within the last 24-month period, particularly those occurring within the current fiscal cycle;
- Uninsured home and personal property losses;
- Disaster impacted population profile;
- Impact to community infrastructure;
- Casualties;
- Disaster related unemployment; and
- Numbers or statistics that lend context to the incident.



Conventionally Built and Multi-Family Homes: Assessing Damage

Flood Damage	
Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Waterline in the crawl space or an unfurnished basement.▪ Damage to an attached structure (e.g., porch, carport, garage, outbuilding, etc.), gutters, screens, landscaping, and retaining walls or downed trees that do not affect access to the residence.▪ Essential living spaces and mechanical components are not damaged or submerged.
Minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Waterline is below electrical outlets in the lowest floor with essential living space.▪ Damage or disaster-related contamination to a private well or septic system.
Major	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Waterline is at or above the electrical outlets in the essential living space.▪ Waterline on the first floor (regardless of depth) if the basement is completely submerged.
Destroyed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ There is complete failure of two or more major structural components (e.g., collapse of foundation, walls, or roof).▪ The waterline is at or higher than the ceiling of an above-ground essential living space.▪ Only the foundation remains.▪ The residence is in imminent danger (e.g., impending landslide, mudslide, or sinkhole).

When the waterline is below the electrical outlets in an essential living space, damage may be recorded as minor or major, depending on extenuating conditions, including:

- Duration of the flood;
- Contaminants in the water (e.g., sewage, heating fuel, other chemicals, etc.); or
- Waterline in basement damages mechanical components (e.g., furnace, boiler, water heater, HVAC).



Non-Flood Damage	
Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The residence has cosmetic damage, such as paint discoloration or loose siding.• The residence has minimal missing shingles or siding.• Damage to gutters, retaining walls, or downed trees that do not affect access to the residence.
Minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nonstructural damage to roof components over essential living spaces (e.g., shingles, roof covering, fascia board, soffit, flashing, and skylight).• Nonstructural damage to the interior wall components, to include drywall and insulation.• Nonstructural damage to exterior components.• Multiple small vertical cracks in the foundation.• Damage to chimney (i.e., tilting, falling, cracking, or separating from the residence).• Damage to mechanical components (e.g., furnace, boiler, water heater, HVAC, etc.).• Damage or disaster related contamination to a private well or septic system.
Major	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Failure or partial failure of structural elements of the roof over essential living spaces, to include rafters, ceiling joists, ridge boards, etc.• Failure or partial failure of structural elements of the walls, to include framing, etc.• Failure or partial failure to foundation, to include crumbling, bulging, collapsing, horizontal cracks, and shifting of the residence from its foundation.
Destroyed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is complete failure of two or more major structural components (e.g., collapse of foundation, walls, or roof).• Only the foundation remains.• The residence is in imminent danger (e.g., impending landslide, mudslide, or sinkhole).



Manufactured Homes: Assessing Damage

Flood Damage	
Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cosmetic damage only (e.g., skirting, paint, gutters or shingles are impacted).• The water level is below the floor system (e.g., there is no visible waterline).
Minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The waterline has reached the floor system but has not entered the living space of the unit. There may be damage to bottom board, insulation, or ductwork in the floor system or to the HVAC.• There is no structural damage to the residence, and it has not been displaced from the foundation.
Major	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water has covered the floor system and entered the living space of the unit but is below the ceiling.• The residence has been displaced from the foundation, block, or piers and other structural components have been damaged.
Destroyed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waterline is at or above the ceiling.• The residence's frame is bent, twisted, or otherwise compromised.• Most of the structural framing of the roof or walls has been compromised, exposing the interior.



Non-Flood Damage	
Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cosmetic damage only (e.g., skirting, paint, gutters, or shingles are impacted).• Damage to a retaining wall or downed trees that do not block access to the residence.
Minor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some of the nonstructural components have sustained damage (e.g., damaged windows, doors, wall coverings, bottom board insulation, ductwork, utility hookups [e.g., water, electricity, gas, telephone/internet, and septic], and HVAC).• There is no structural damage to the residence, and it has not been displaced from its foundation.
Major	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The majority of nonstructural components (e.g., windows, doors, wall coverings, bottom board insulation, ductwork, utility hookups [e.g., water, electricity, gas, telephone/internet, and septic], and HVAC) have sustained significant damage.• The roof is substantially damaged.• The residence has been displaced from its foundation, block, or piers, and other structural components have been damaged.
Destroyed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The residence's frame is bent, twisted, or otherwise compromised.• Most of the structural framing of the roof or walls has been compromised, exposing the interior.



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Public Assistance

The FEMA PA program provides supplemental federal disaster grant assistance for debris removal, emergency protective measures, and the restoration of disaster-damaged, publicly owned facilities and specific facilities of certain private nonprofit organizations. The PA program also encourages the protection of these damaged facilities from future incidents by assisting with hazard mitigation measures. For more information, refer to the [*Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide*](#) (PAPPG).

FEMA uses PDA information to evaluate the need for assistance under the PA Program. Inclusion in the PA PDA is based on the likely eligibility of grant assistance following the disaster declaration. The PDA team does not make eligibility determinations while conducting the PDA but captures damage and costs that meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the PAPPG when validating damages and costs claimed during joint PDAs.

Evaluation Factors

The primary factors considered when evaluating a request for the FEMA PA program are:⁸

- Estimated cost of assistance,
- Insurance coverage,
- Hazard mitigation,
- Localized impacts,
- Recent multiple disasters, and
- Other federal agency programs.

Tribal Nations have additional considerations when evaluating requests for PA:⁹

- Achieved minimum damage amount,
- Types of damage and amount damaged,
- Tribal Nation community lifelines,

⁸ See PAPPG, version 4, page 22 – 23 and PDA Guide, pages 56 – 62.

⁹ See Tribal Declarations Interim Guidance, pages 63 – 66.



- Economic impact of the incident,
- Tribally-owned or maintained housing,
- Tribal Nation resources,
- Demographics,
- Disaster history within 36 months or recent multiple disasters that impacted the Tribal Nation,
- Insurance,
- Unique conditions that affect Tribal Nations, and
- Other relevant information.

Costs Not Considered

Costs that are not eligible for PA funding will not be considered during the PA PDA. There are also costs that may be considered for PA but are not available at the time of the PDA.¹⁰

Example costs ineligible for PA include:

- Loss of useful service life of facilities,
- Loss of revenue,
- Tax assessments,
- Increased operating expenses (with limited exceptions for specific emergency health and safety tasks),
- General surveys to assess damage, and
- Cost of restoring facilities that were not in active use at the time of the disaster.

Example costs potentially eligible for PA but not considered for a PDA include:

- Project management or administration costs, such as legal and financing costs;
- Engineering and architectural costs;
- Costs to upgrade codes and standards;
- Costs of mitigation measures; and
- Other pre/post construction expenses.

¹⁰ See PDA Guide, page 59.



Public Assistance Information

To evaluate disaster-related damage, impact statements are used to illustrate whether the disaster is beyond the capacity of the impacted jurisdiction and if supplemental federal assistance is required to recover. Impact statements for PA requests should include:

- An outline of the incident, including whether it was human-caused or natural, the time of occurrence, and the location;
- A description of the impacted population; and
- Statistics that lend context to the incident.



Deferred Maintenance & Non-Disaster Related Damage

Work must be due to an immediate threat resulting from the declared incident. The Applicant must demonstrate that damage was caused directly by the incident. FEMA does not provide PA funding for repair of damage caused by deterioration, deferred maintenance, negligence, or failure to take measures to protect the facility from future damage.¹¹

Category	Examples
Deterioration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peeling paint,• Cracked walls, or• Rust.
Deferred Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fatigue cracking,• Potholes,• Cracked foundation,• Repairing preexisting roof leaks,• Broken windows,• Missing shingles,• Loose or missing siding,• Damaged gutters, or• Overgrown landscaping.
Failure to Take Protective Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-disaster mold or mildew growth,• Failed inspections,• Failure to repair leaking roofs to prevent water intrusion and mold formation, or• Failure to install barriers to prevent further land erosion.
Negligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Failure to complete routine inspections, or• Failure to complete routine maintenance.

¹¹ See PAPPG version 4, page 52.



Work Eligibility Considerations

Emergency repair of a facility is ineligible if another federal agency has the specific authority to provide assistance for the facility (even if the repair is temporary), such as for:

- Federal-Aid highways: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Flood control works: US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)¹²

Eligible	Ineligible
Roads and Bridges	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Debris removal and disposal to eliminate an immediate threat.• Work to provide emergency access.• Emergency repairs to address an immediate threat.• Permanent restoration of minor collector roads.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removal of debris placed on public rights-of-way from commercial properties.• Removal of materials related to the construction, repair, or renovation.• Removal of debris from a privately-owned access facility.• Emergency repairs to privately-owned roads.• Emergency repair of Federal-Aid highways under FHWA authority.• Permanent repair or replacement of Federal-aid routes.• Work to address deferred maintenance.
Water Control Facilities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Debris removal and disposal (from natural feature or engineered facility) to eliminate an immediate threat.• Flood-fighting (on natural feature or engineered facility) or emergency repairs (engineered and maintained facility only) to address an immediate threat.• Debris and silt removal required to restore capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Debris removal from flood control works that are under the specific authority of NRCS and/or USACE.• Emergency repair of flood control works that are under the authority of USACE or NRCS.• Flood-fighting measures on flood control work that is under the authority of the NRCS.• Emergency repairs of flood control works under the authority of NRCS and USACE and of federally constructed coastal shoreline protective features under the authority of USACE.• Restoration of flood control works under the authority of USACE or NRCS.
Emergency Protective Measures	

¹² See PAPPG version 4, pages 135, 266 – 270.



Eligible	Ineligible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary repair of emergency breaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permanent repair of breaches

PA Work Categories	
Category A Debris Removal	Emergency Work This work must be completed immediately to save lives, protect public health and safety, protect improved property, or eliminate the threat of additional damage.
Category B Emergency Protective Measures (EPM)	
Category C Roads and Bridges	Permanent Work Work that is required to restore a facility damaged by the event to its pre-disaster size, capacity, and function in accordance with applicable codes and standards.
Category D Water Control Facilities	
Category E Buildings and Equipment	
Category F Utilities	
Category G Parks, Recreational, and Other Facilities	



Supporting Documentation

To the extent possible, the following information should be collected for each PA work category while conducting a PDA. However, this table is not all-encompassing, and other documentation may be requested during the PDA process depending on the incident type, and the magnitude and accessibility of damage.

Supporting Documentation	PA Work Category						
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Photographs (sample if multiple similar damage has occurred)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Force account (work completed)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Basis for estimations (work to be completed)			X	X	X	X	X
Historic costs for similar work (provide example for large projects)			X	X	X	X	X
Notated maps	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Contracts, bids, or invoices	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Commercial estimating source report (RS Means, Cost Works, etc.)			X	X	X	X	X
Codes and standards to be considered (provide when the code or standard will dramatically increase the cost of restoration)			X	X	X	X	X
Estimate by professional familiar with the facility (provide breakdown – especially when replacement is requested)			X	X	X	X	X
Recent safety inspection reports or maintenance records that show pre-disaster condition (provide for large projects)			X	X			
Information used to evaluate the need for conductor replacement (provide if conductor replacement is requested)						X	
Debris quantity calculation sheet	X						
Mutual aid agreements used (provide for large projects)		X					
Specifications or as-built drawings of the damaged facility (provide when helpful, only for large projects)				X			
Recent inspection reports or maintenance records that show pre-disaster condition (provide when pre-disaster condition may impact estimate of large project)				X			
Insurance documentation needed to establish deductible and limits (provide for large projects)					X		
Insurance documentation demonstrating obtain and maintain requirement					X		



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Notes:

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