



## FEMA PUBLIC ASSISTANCE GRANTS LEVERAGING FUNDS TO PROVIDE MEALS TO VULNERABLE FAMILIES AND CHILDREN DURING COVID-19 February 17, 2021

Food is one of the most critical needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional nutrition assistance operations, however, face funding and capacity challenges in meeting the growing need. State, local, tribal governments and not-for-profit organizations may be able to leverage Public Assistance (PA) grants available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in order to address these urgent challenges.

This resource provides a brief overview of FEMA PA grants and some examples of how these grants may be used by schools, nonprofits and restaurants in partnership with local governments to help combat hunger during the COVID-19 emergency.

### **Overview: FEMA Public Assistance Funds**

Federal law authorizes FEMA to issue grants through the [Public Assistance Grant Program](#) in response to an emergency or disaster. There are different categories of work that PA grants can support, including emergency protective measures (“Category B”).

After the declaration of a disaster or emergency, FEMA PA grants may be available to eligible applicants to cover qualifying costs for qualifying work.

### **Public Assistance Grants in Response to COVID-19**

FEMA has issued specific [guidance](#) on the use of PA grants for the purchase and distribution of food during the COVID-19 outbreak.

*Applicant Eligibility.* Under the Agency’s COVID-19 policy, an applicant for PA grant funding must be a state, local, or tribal government or a private non-profit organization.

*Qualifying Costs.* Necessary and reasonable costs incurred for qualifying work in accordance with project administration requirements and other federal guidelines.

*Qualifying Work.* FEMA’s policy identifies specific work that PA funding can support related to the purchase and distribution of food in response to COVID-19, including:

- (1) Purchasing, packaging, and/or preparing food commodities, fresh foods, shelf-stable food products, and prepared meals;
- (2) Delivering food, including hot and cold meals if necessary, to distribution points and/or individuals, when conditions constitute a level of severity that food is not easily accessible for purchase; and,
- (3) Leasing distribution and storage space, vehicles, and necessary equipment.

**\*New Update\*:** On February 2, 2021, the Biden administration issued a [Memorandum](#) allowing FEMA to increase the Federal cost share for all work eligible under FEMA’s existing COVID-19 policies for assistance under Public Assistance Category B from 75 to 100 percent (see FEMA’s latest cost-sharing guidance [here](#)). This full reimbursement is available beginning from January 2020 through September 30, 2021.

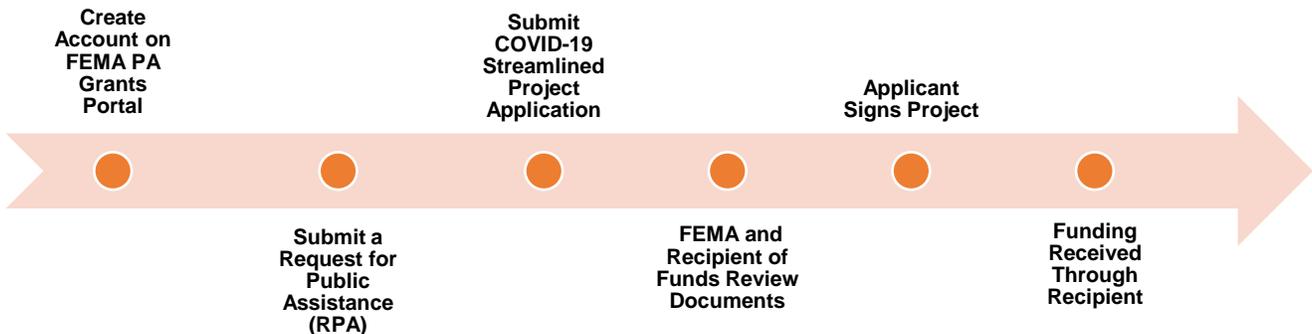


### **Prohibited Use of PA Grants: Duplication of Benefits**

Generally, federal law prohibits FEMA PA grants from providing aid while assistance exists from another federal source. However, this does not prevent PA grants from providing temporary, emergency assistance that is similar to other federal assistance if need exists while individuals impacted by the emergency transition to other federal programs or operations of those programs are otherwise impacted.

### **FEMA Public Assistance Grant Process**

In response to the scope of the COVID-19 emergency, FEMA has simplified the PA grant application process. Contact your state or local emergency management office or [regional FEMA office](#) for more information about eligibility and developing a Request for Public Assistance.



### **Using PA Grants to Cover Unreimbursed Costs for School Districts**

#### **Example:**

Schools have been on the front lines of feeding vulnerable children throughout this public health crisis. To ensure that children have access to meals while mitigating the spread of COVID-19, schools have incurred significant costs implementing non-congregate delivery models, including expenses for meal delivery, staff hazard and overtime pay, personal protective equipment, and higher food procurement costs. At the same time, school nutrition departments have experienced decreased revenue with schools being closed.

Increased costs and decreased revenues have resulted in the exhaustion of many school nutrition budgets at a time when many children are experiencing unprecedented need. PA grants may be able to cover some unreimbursed expenses associated with operation of school nutrition programs. Indeed, nutrition programs are preparing and delivering meals in response to COVID-19 and these costs are otherwise not covered by another federal program.

### **Using PA Grants to Empower Restaurants to Serve Vulnerable Families**

#### **Example:**

Utilizing PA grants to purchase meals from restaurants and deliver them to vulnerable populations is one model that may be available for governments or non-profit organizations to meet nutrition needs in



response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The critical challenge is ensuring that the population served does not already have readily-available access to other sources of nutrition assistance.

*In Practice.*

California recently announced the [Great Plates Delivered](#) also called [Restaurants Deliver](#) program, leveraging FEMA funding to provide meals to seniors impacted by the pandemic. The program—a partnership between the state government, local governments, and FEMA—will enlist community restaurants to prepare meals that will be delivered to older Californians who are isolating at home during California’s stay at home order. In addition to helping seniors who are ineligible for other federal nutrition programs, the program also supports local restaurant workers and owners who have lost business during the pandemic. Guidance on Great Plates Delivered is available [here](#).

States such as [Texas, Oregon, Arizona and Kansas](#) have also received PA grants to provide food assistance to vulnerable people including to expand the reach of their Meals on Wheels programs and reimbursements for food bank purchases.

***For more information, contact:***

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