

DISASTER RECOVERY

Adjusters International Disaster Recovery Consulting — FEMA Recovery Issues for Decision-Makers and Leaders **TODAY**



EDITOR'S NOTE

While FEMA is best known for emergency assistance after a disaster, the agency's support of mitigation programs to help identify and reduce risks to life and property before a disaster strikes is equally important. Furthering our theme in Issue 9 of Disaster Recovery Today, which addressed the types of mitigation programs eligible for FEMA funding, this issue provides additional insight into the value of such programs, outlines FEMA's planning requirements and discusses best mitigation practices that can be used at a community level.

Once again, it is excellent and informative reading for anyone who might have a stake in their community's preparedness for or consequences from a disaster!



Sheila E. Salvatore
Editor

Mitigation Measures: Sound Investments in Disaster Recovery

By Luanne Principe

FEMA defines hazard mitigation as "any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate the long term risk to human life and property from hazards."¹ States, local governments and Indian Tribal Nations are required to develop an *approved* Mitigation Action Plan (MAP) as a condition for receiving certain types of non-emergency disaster assistance. Mitigation

plans form the foundation of a community's long-term strategy to reduce the cycle of disaster damage. Fortunately, FEMA funding is available to develop a MAP and help fund qualified mitigation projects as well.

In *Disaster Recovery Today*, Issue 9, we discussed sections 406 and 404 of the Robert T. Stafford Act,



describing each mitigation program with an emphasis on identifying the types of projects that would meet FEMA eligibility parameters. In this issue, our goal is to demonstrate the value of the mitigation programs for communities nationwide, while outlining the planning requirements imposed by FEMA.

Additionally, we present mitigation best practices, which can be utilized at a community level to lessen the impact of future disasters and hopefully demonstrate that investments made in mitigation measures are an affordable, effective and prudent investment of public funds. These grants can create opportunities for a safer, more resilient community when future disasters occur.

The Mitigation Action Plan

To access mitigation grant funding, a community needs to have an approved Mitigation Action Plan. The planning process for the MAP is as important as the plan itself. It creates a framework for risk-based assessments and actions which can reduce losses of life, property and to the economy in general resulting from future disasters.

The process by which the plan is developed will determine its overall effectiveness. The plan will be the jurisdiction's blueprint for reducing potential losses, identified in a comprehensive risk assessment of facilities and of existing policies, programs and resources. The process can be enhanced by the community's ability to use and expand on existing tools (i.e., enhanced zoning, land use regulations and building codes).

To ensure a more comprehensive approach, the planning process should: provide opportunities for public comment during the drafting stage, engage neighboring communities in planning activities, and review and incorporate all studies, plans and technical data available.

Important Elements in Developing the Mitigation Action Plan

Risk Assessment

A thorough risk assessment will provide critical information that will enable a jurisdiction to identify and prioritize appropriate mitigation actions which can reduce losses from identified hazards.



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Profiling Hazards

It is necessary to document the locations and potential impact from all of the natural hazards that might affect a jurisdiction. The plan should include information on any previous occurrences and the probabilities for future hazard events.

Assessing Vulnerability

A comprehensive vulnerability assessment enables a jurisdiction to describe vulnerabilities to the hazards documented in the hazard profile. This process should include the following:

- 1) **Overview** — Create an overall summary of each hazard and its potential impact on the community;
- 2) **Repetitive loss properties** — Identify structures insured by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) which have been damaged repeatedly by flood;
- 3) **Identify structures at risk** — Describe vulnerabilities by determining the types and numbers of existing and future buildings, infrastructure components and critical facilities located in an identified hazard area.

In general, vulnerability assessments estimate the potential dollar losses to identified facilities, analyze development trends and provide general descriptions of land uses. Analyzing development trends within a community can identify mitigation options which can be considerations in future land use decisions.

Identification and Analysis of the Mitigation Action

It is necessary to identify and consider an extensive range of specific mitigation actions and projects to reduce or eliminate the effects of individual hazards. There should be particular emphasis on new and existing facilities and infrastructure. The plan needs to address the participation in — and continued compliance with — the NFIP.

Potential Implementation of Mitigation Actions

You must describe how any identified actions will be prioritized, implemented and administered by the local jurisdiction. Prioritization should include specific emphasis on the extent to which benefits are maximized according to a cost benefit review of the proposed projects and associated costs.

Plan Maintenance Process

The plan needs to describe the methods to be used for the scheduling, monitoring, evaluating and updating of the MAP within a five-year cycle.



Incorporation of Existing Planning Mechanisms

The planning entity needs to integrate all of the requirements of the MAP into other planning mechanisms, such as capital improvement plans, when appropriate.

Continued Public Involvement

Documenting and promoting mitigation efforts — prior, during and after disaster recovery operations — have been effectively undertaken by federal, state and local entities. These efforts have proven valuable since they have increased public awareness and compelled communities to take positive actions.



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Some Best Practices

The process by which the plan is developed will determine, to great extent, the usefulness and completeness of the plan. Developing the plan may appear to be an extremely difficult task. It need not be if the following principles are applied:

Take an All-Hazards Approach

The causes of disasters can vary greatly, but the effects often do not. As a result, you need to consider the similar effects caused by various hazards instead of having a unique plan for each type of hazard.

Use Available Guidance and Planning Materials

Sample planning materials are available through state and FEMA websites. These samples are general in nature, so your specific data and resources must be added and the contents tailored to address specific local circumstances.

Use a Team Approach

The most realistic and complete plans are prepared by a team that includes representatives of departments, agencies and groups which will execute the plan.

The preferred organization is a team of teams: a planning group overseeing the overall effort, resolving major planning issues and ensuring that various parts of the plan are coordinated; plus smaller teams of individuals representing departments, agencies and groups — brought together to work on specific annexes. This approach helps ensure that the plan is comprehensive and realistic, with minimal duplication of effort.

Involve Elected Officials

Seek the support of elected officials to make mitigation planning a priority task.

Build On What Exists In the Jurisdiction

A review of recent emergency operations and hazard events can help identify particular issues that need to be addressed in the planning process.



Seek Professional Assistance

The addition of professional experts, consultants and engineers to the planning team can be very valuable. Emergency management and disaster recovery consultants are available to provide advice and assistance from conception to completion.

Take Advantage of Training Opportunities

Few educational opportunities exist for planning processes, although certain disaster recovery consultants offer a wide range of seminars, workshops and training exercises to aid in the plan development. Additionally, www.fema.gov provides a planning aid and publication 386-1 as a resource to get started.

With the approved plan complete, jurisdictions now have the opportunity to avail themselves of numerous

programs (found in Section 404 of the Robert T. Stafford Act) which will assist in funding mitigation measures, including: the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program (PDM), the Repetitive Flood Claims Program (RFC) and the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program (FMA). The table below represents eligible projects by grant program.

How the 404 Program Actually Works

HMGP project applications are competitive and those (eligible) projects that are specifically identified in the subgrantee's MAP will have the best chance of selection.

The HMGP is funded by FEMA and administered by the state. It is not a disaster relief program for individual disaster victims or a recovery program that funds repairs

ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES BY PROGRAM

ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES	HMGP	PDM	FMA	RFC	SRL
1. Mitigation Projects	X	X	X	X	X
Property Acquisition & Demo	X	X	X	X	X
Property Acquisition & Relocation	X	X	X	X	X
Structure Elevation	X	X	X	X	X
Mitigation Reconstruction					X
Dry Floodproofing Historic Residential Structures	X	X	X	X	X
Dry Floodproofing of Non-Residential Structures	X	X	X	X	
Minor Localized Flood Reduction Projects	X	X	X	X	X
Structural Retrofitting of Existing Buildings	X	X			
Non-Structural Retrofitting of Existing Buildings	X	X			
Safe Room Construction	X	X			
Infrastructure Retrofit	X	X			
Soil Stabilization	X	X			
Wildfire Mitigation	X	X			
5% Initiative Projects	X				
2. Hazard Mitigation Planning	X	X	X		
3. Management Costs	X	X	X	X	X



to public property damaged during a disaster. It provides mitigation grants with a focused mission of providing a means to prevent or reduce future losses of life and property through the identification and funding of cost effective measures that minimize the cost of future disasters (response and recovery).

Federal funding is limited and there are usually more requests than there is funding available. Awards are made on a competitive basis, with only the most effective projects being funded. Eligibility includes all disasters declared after November 1, 2004 and all jurisdictions are required to have a FEMA-approved MAP to qualify — with the exception of MAP planning grants.

Following a presidential declaration of a major disaster, the HMGP is open to participation from all eligible applicants. Eligible applicants are invited to complete and submit a Notice of Intent (NOI) describing their prospective project, which is usually due to the state 30-60 days from the opening of the application period (date of declaration). Selected eligible applicants submitting NOIs must then complete and submit a formal application, which is typically due 60-90 days from the opening of the application period for those projects deemed eligible and meeting state priorities and initiatives.

The state is responsible for establishing the procedures and priorities for selecting mitigation measures.

Review criteria are based on the following:

- Eligibility and completeness
- Cost effectiveness
- Engineering feasibility and effectiveness
- Environmental planning and historical preservation review

This table reflects sample state rankings from the State of Texas:

404 HMGP – SAMPLE STATE RANKINGS

Taken from State of Texas DR-1709-TX

GENERAL INFORMATION (max. 85)	POINTS
Is the project specifically identified in the MAP	35
OR Is this type of project identified in the applicant's MAP	20
Was the MAP FEMA approved by (disaster date)	10
Is the project in a declared community	20
Is the project in a CRS (Community Rating System) community	20
ENVIRONMENTAL (max. 5)	
CATEX (Categorically Excluded) eligible	5
Assessment required	3
Requires full Environmental Impact Statement	1
COST EFFECTIVE (max. 25)	
Good Benefit Cost Analysis (BCA) Provided	5
Initiative project (no BCA required)	5
Weak BCA provided – no supporting documentation	-5
BCA required but not provided	-10
Engineering feasibility score	1-20
STATE STRATEGY POINTS (max. 20)	
RESIDENTIAL BUYOUTS	
Is buyout in the floodplain	10
Buyout of a Repetitive Loss home	10
Other buyouts	7
Retrofits	10
Residential elevations	3
Equipment	1
Mitigation Action Plans	1



Other Programs

PDM and RFC funds are made available through congressional appropriation. Both are nationally competitive programs that are open annually for a limited period of time.

PDM grants provide funds for hazard mitigation planning and implementation of mitigation projects prior to disaster events.

To apply for a PDM planning grant, an applicant must be at the basic level of preparedness in emergency management planning. To submit a PDM project application, applicants must have a FEMA-approved MAP. PDM projects located within a Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) are eligible only if the jurisdiction where the project is located is participating in the National Flood Insurance Program. No NFIP participation is required for PDM planning applications or projects located outside of the SFHAs.

The RFC program is authorized by the Flood Insurance Reform Act of 2004. It is an annual program that provides a means to fund residential flood mitigation projects.

Under RFC eligibility requirements applicants are not required to have a FEMA-approved MAP and do not have to be at the basic level of preparedness in their emergency management plan, as is normally the case for mitigation grants. Eligible properties must have flood insurance in place at the time of the application and have had at least one claim against their insurance. Flood insurance must be maintained at least through completion of the mitigation activity.

The RFC program provides funding to states and jurisdictions to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk of flood damage to structures insured under the NFIP which have had one or more claims for flood damage but cannot meet the requirements of the FMA program because of their cost share or their capacity to manage activities.

The PDM and RFC programs are (reimbursable) cost-share grant programs and require a commitment of local funds amounting to, in most cases, at least 25 percent of the total project cost. FEMA reimburses up to 75 percent of the total project cost; however, under certain (unique) circumstances, cost shares can be elevated up to 90 percent for the PDM and 100 percent for the RFC.

Typical application cycle for the PDM, FMA, RFC and SRL:²

Guidance Release	June
Application Period	June – December
FEMA Eligibility and Completeness Review	December – January
National Evaluation & Technical Review	January – March
Identification for Further Review	March

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Conclusion

Mitigation grant funds are enormously valuable resources for local jurisdictions. Understanding the foundation of hazard mitigation, strategizing your jurisdiction's priorities, and assessing and documenting your risks will all help break the cycle of repetitive damage — and protect against future losses. A thorough (approved) Mitigation Action Plan is the first step in this goal-oriented process.

¹ CFR 44 §201.2

² Dates may vary by state.



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Is there a topic you would like to see covered in an upcoming edition of *Disaster Recovery Today*?

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