

Pursuant to Executive Order 13985 (January 20, 2021) on "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

## Equity Action Plan Summary

# Federal Emergency Management Agency

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) serves the American public by helping people before, during, and after disasters, through its core values of respect, integrity, compassion, and fairness in its interactions with disaster survivors, colleagues, recipients, and partners.

## Delivering equity through FEMA

FEMA can enhance equity by executing a methodical, multilayered, and systematic approach to analyzing intended and actual accessibility to and impacts for underserved and marginalized communities. Starting from the highest level of leadership, FEMA is integrating equity into its strategic plan, goals and priorities, programs and activities, and foundational documents and processes. These actions will help to achieve the following impacts: underserved communities will be able to access and leverage resources in ways that meet their needs, underserved communities will be routinely consulted in decisions about policy and program implementation, staff and partners will have the training and tools required to advance equity in their programs, resources will be directed to eliminate disparities in outcomes, and programs will be routinely evaluated and address disparities in outcomes.

## New strategies to advance equity

- **Promote the participation of all small businesses in FEMA contracts through outreach, engagement, and reducing the complexity of procurement requirements**

The Office of the Chief Component Procurement Officer (OCCPO) will promote the participation of all small businesses in contracts, develop information to ensure small businesses compete for and receive a fair share of expenditures, participate and host vendor educational sessions, increase public engagement and outreach efforts, and work closely with the program office to break down the complexity of procurement requirements. OCCPO will continue to build on the outreach growth last year, including events with its Procurement Technical Assistance Centers and the Minority Business Development Agency Business Centers.

- **Expand public assistance to prioritize the needs of high risk, under-resourced communities**

Impacts of COVID-19 on underserved and marginalized communities have been particularly devastating. In response, FEMA's Public Assistance (PA) Program recognizes the important role it plays in coordinating pandemic response and recovery that prioritizes the needs of high risk, under-resourced communities. New policies, regulations, guidance documents, communications materials, and an improved website are necessary to advance equity and improve the accessibility of PA programs. FEMA will work to magnify the impact of its existing review and technical assistance capacity through the creation and distribution of webinars, job aids, and other guidance documents to ensure response and recovery efforts are conducted in an equitable manner by redeveloping the way it collects, documents, and processes information from applicants to be less burdensome, and by increasing capacity to provide more actionable technical assistance to all. Recognizing that the vaccine mission is one of the most important life-saving efforts in our nation right now, FEMA applicants are also improving resources to ensure an equitable pandemic response and are demonstrating how equity was considered a part of the vaccine administration strategy. The reporting requirements for applicants

New strategies to advance equity

on equitable vaccine administration are an opportunity to consider equity in other response and recovery activities.

- **Promote equitable outcomes for disaster survivors**

Disasters have a disproportionate impact on lower income persons, families, and communities that are under-resourced, underserved, and underrepresented. FEMA's Individual Assistance (IA) Program has a commitment to excellence in public service and dedication to creating equitable long-term disaster recovery outcomes. IA must build more equitable outcomes, reduce administrative burdens, increase eligibility for underserved and vulnerable applicants, increase access, and improve external messaging. To address this challenge, IA will improve external messaging for individuals who apply for disaster assistance, expand methods of ownership and occupancy verification for homeowners and renters to increase the potential eligibility for assistance, expand financial assistance funding, and enhance access by improving outreach and case processing for underserved and vulnerable populations.

- **Build the resilience of nonprofit organizations**

Some nonprofit organizations have elevated risk of a terrorist attack based on their ideology, beliefs, and/or mission. FEMA's Non-Profit Security Grant Program provides for physical security enhancements and other security-related activities for these organizations. FEMA is reviewing NSGP's current structure to identify and reduce or remove barriers to participation from organizations in or serving underserved communities and to promote equitable processes and outcomes. Specifically, FEMA will identify opportunities to diversify the populations of applicants; address barriers to program participation, including application, eligibility, and qualification requirements; conduct a thorough review of the evaluation criteria used at the state and federal levels; and review other FEMA-managed grant programs for practices on advancing equity goals.

New strategies to advance equity

● **Support at-risk communities to plan for and mitigate hazards**

With the increasing severity and frequency of disasters and their disproportionate impact on underserved communities, it is essential to identify mitigation opportunities to help build capability and capacity to address the impacts of climate change. FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance Programs provide funding before, during, and after disasters and fund risk reduction projects to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, and provide a tremendous opportunity to address mitigation and resilience needs. To build capability and capacity, FEMA plans to pilot programs as part of the Justice40 Initiative, coordinate with other federal agencies and across FEMA programs to use data to identify mitigation activities that have broader and more far-reaching impacts, ensure plans focus on advancing equity and incorporate climate change considerations, and develop more accessible and targeted outreach methods to reach underserved communities.

● **Close the flood insurance gap and increase the financial resilience of flood-prone, low-income households**

Several million low-income households are in high flood risk special flood hazard areas (SFHA). Flood insurance is statutorily required to be rated based on risk – its price is not based on a policyholder's ability to pay. This leaves an insurance gap for some households. FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program can close the insurance gap and increase financial resilience for flood-prone, low-income households. To do this, FEMA will advance a targeted, means-tested flood insurance assistance proposal and outreach effort, analyze publicly available datasets, strengthen external advocacy, and address flood insurance affordability challenges.

● **Invest in resources to help advance civil rights**

Advancing equity rests on the presumption of equal opportunities and protection under the law. As noted in the Executive Order, Government programs are designed to serve all eligible individuals. To meet this objective and to enhance compliance with existing civil rights laws, agencies were obligated to address the operational status and level

### New strategies to advance equity

of institutional resources available to offices or divisions within the agency that are responsible for advancing civil rights or whose mandates specifically include serving underrepresented or disadvantaged communities. To meet this mandate, FEMA is actively building a robust external civil rights program by recruiting and hiring experienced civil rights subject matter experts in the Office of Equal Rights (OER) and developing programs to enforce and ensure compliance with civil rights laws and authorities. The OER also provides technical assistance to FEMA program offices to help ensure that recipients of FEMA funding comply with civil rights and are working toward achieving equity among targeted populations.

## Building on FEMA's progress

**This equity action plan builds on FEMA's progress delivering on equity and racial justice in the first year of the Biden-Harris Administration.**

- **Developing FEMA-wide definitions of equity**

FEMA established an Equity Enterprise Steering Group that created a FEMA-wide definition of equity and framework for implementing equity into agency programs, in line with FEMA's core values: respect, integrity, compassion, and fairness.

- **Revisiting agency-wide policies, procedures, plans, and guidance**

The Equity Enterprise Steering Group reviewed and recommended revisions to FEMA-wide policies, procedures, plans, and guidance, in collaboration with FEMA's Enterprise Governance Boards to ensure the integration of equity considerations to drive equitable outcomes.

- **Expanding access to demographic data**

FEMA's Office of Equal Rights and Privacy Office are developing a System of Records Notice (SORN) that will allow the agency to collect demographic data of applicants for FEMA assistance, recipients, and subrecipients who apply for financial assistance and grants, and organizations that do business with FEMA. The SORN will allow FEMA to collect and analyze demographic data based on the protected characteristics listed in the Stafford Act. The enhanced data collection will allow FEMA to accurately identify and increase targeted resources to underserved and marginalized communities that policies and funding are intended to benefit.

- **Enhancing external engagement with the public**

FEMA issued a Request for Information to seek input from the public on FEMA programs, regulations, collections of information, and policies for the agency to consider modifying, streamlining, expanding, or repealing. In addition, FEMA is continuing robust engagement with the emergency management community at large.