



February 13, 2024 | Issue 78

Resilience Report

Brief insights and the latest innovations in emergency management and health security.

FEMA Reforms the Individual Assistance Program



For many years, FEMA's [Individual Assistance \(IA\)](#) program has struggled with administrative hurdles and red tape. Most critically, the limitations on federal assistance have [exacerbated disparities](#) for historically marginalized and underserved communities. As part of the agency's 2022-2026 Strategic Plan, FEMA vowed to "remove barriers to FEMA programs through a [people first](#) approach." [Reforms](#) to the IA program, announced on January 19th, represent an important step toward achieving this.

What you should know: The changes will take effect for new disasters declared on or after March 22, 2024. Below are some of the critical changes announced by FEMA. Please review [FEMA's press release](#) for a full list.

- **Replacement of the Critical Needs Assistance program with a Serious Needs Assistance program:** The Serious Needs Assistance program will be available in all disasters receiving IA and will offer a payment of \$750 to households to cover

immediate expenses. Previously, the Critical Needs Assistance program was only provided on a disaster-by-disaster evaluation basis as analyzed by the FEMA IA Division Director and offered a \$500 payment.

- **Creation of a new benefit for Displacement Assistance:** Displacement assistance will provide survivors who cannot return to their homes after a disaster with funds to meet up-front housing costs.
- **Removal of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) Loan Application Requirement:** Survivors no longer need to apply for an SBA loan before being considered for IA. This previous requirement caused extensive confusion for applicants, as evidenced by FEMA's frequent clarifications, including [fact sheets](#), press releases, and [website content](#). The SBA's [Disaster Loan Program](#) has also been criticized for perpetuating barriers to access in underserved communities.
- **Enabling Accessibility Improvements to Homes Damaged by a Disaster:** FEMA funding can now be used to make accessibility improvements when a home is damaged by a disaster, making a home more accessible than it was pre-disaster.
- **Simplifying the Application Process:** In addition to removing the requirement to apply for an SBA loan, FEMA's reforms also remove barriers for late applications, streamline documentation requirements for temporary housing assistance, and remove the requirement for a signed, written appeal letter when appealing FEMA eligibility decisions.

Resources to support your agency: Changes to any existing programs are complex and can be difficult to navigate. As FEMA and its partners continue to provide information through updated communication materials, guidance, training, and technology systems, here are a few resources that you can turn to in the meantime:

- **Engagement with External Partners:** FEMA held its first public engagement with partners on the reforms to the IA program on January 25th, engaging with nearly 2,700 participants. Representatives for FEMA included the FEMA Recovery Directorate Assistant Administrator, IA Division Director and Deputy Directors, and the DHS Center of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Director. The slide deck from the call can be accessed [here](#).
- **The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies Community Call on FEMA Reforms with FEMA Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (ODIC):** ODIC Director Sherman Gillums, Jr. [summarizes the reforms](#) to the IA process with focus on accessibility improvements, displacement assistance, serious needs assistance, and the streamlining of application requirements.
- **The Official Federal Register IA program final rule.** The [interim final rule](#) goes into extensive detail behind each reform to the IA program, its justifications, and its anticipated impacts. The interim final rule focuses heavily on equity, the impacts of climate change, the previous SBA loan application requirement, and more.
- **DisasterAssistance.gov Website:** FEMA has updated the [Disasterassistance.gov](#) website to include visual progress tracking and individualized information collection, reducing registration time by 15%.
- **IA Fact Sheet:** FEMA's updates to the IA program are simplified on this one-page [fact sheet](#) for distribution.
- **Opportunity for Public Comments:** [Public comments](#) on the IA program will continue to be collected for the next six months.

The Latest from CONSTANT

20th Anniversary

Logo

CONSTANT proudly unveils a commemorative anniversary logo, marking 20 years of making the world a safer place.



CONSTANT is proud to unveil our special 20th anniversary logo, celebrating our upcoming 20-year anniversary in August! As we reflect on our journey throughout 2024, join us in commemorating this milestone. The logo symbolizes two decades of growth, innovation, and unwavering commitment to meeting our clients' most pressing needs. Read more in our [press release](#).

Blog

Human Resilience: How Emergency Managers Can Promote Disaster Behavioral Health

The blog provides tips for state and local communities to strengthen their disaster behavioral health planning.



Disaster behavioral health services are a key component of emergency response and recovery, particularly as disasters increase in frequency, severity, and duration. In our [latest blog post](#), CONSTANT explores the role of emergency management in disaster behavioral health.

Upcoming Conferences - Meet CONSTANT

CONSTANT is attending a number of conferences in February and March! Look out for CONSTANT team members at the following conferences. We are excited to meet you and discuss how CONSTANT can provide solutions to your agency's most pressing needs.

- **Association of Healthcare Emergency Preparedness Professionals (AHEPP) Annual Conference (02/26-02/28):** Tobias Watson, Exercise Planner, will present an interactive session about healthcare exercises during the pre-conference.
- **National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) Mid-Year Forum (03/17-03/21):** Portfolio Leads Mona Bontty and Ali Leis will be in attendance in Washington, DC.
- **Preparedness Summit (03/25-03/28):** Senior Associate Jessica Driskill and Portfolio Lead Ali Leis look forward to the Prep Summit in late March.

In the News



More News from FEMA

Going into February, FEMA has more news to share! This includes a 2023 Year in Review for the [Office of Response and Recovery](#), a new fact sheet on the intersection of [art and culture](#) and emergency management, and [expanded actions](#) to fund net-zero energy projects. FEMA's National Exercise Program, which CONSTANT proudly supports as a subcontractor, is also accepting requests for support through March 1st (read below).

[Read More](#)



Healthcare Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity across the health care sector remains a hot topic. As of late, [HHS released](#) new voluntary performance goals and a new gateway website to implement cybersecurity practices. Also new are reports from [the WHO](#) about the far-reaching impacts of cyber attacks on health care and the threat of disinformation in the context of public health emergencies. Finally, Harvard University has produced a Digital Safety Kit for Public Health (access below).

[Read More](#)



Atmospheric Rivers Impact California

Last week, [California was impacted](#) by atmospheric rivers that brought excessive rainfall, dangerous flooding, loss of power, and mudslides throughout the State, most significantly to Southern California. A [State of Emergency](#) was declared by Governor Newsom. Given these historic storms, scientists continue to analyze the link between atmospheric rivers and climate change - check out articles from [the Weather Channel](#), [NPR](#), and ABC News (below).

[Read More](#)

The Fun Stuff



Honoring Black History Month

CONSTANT celebrates [Black History Month](#) and joins the ASALH in recognizing this year's theme, [African Americans and the Arts](#). We commemorate the achievements of African Americans throughout history and take the opportunity to propose a call to action to learn, reflect, and commit to an equitable present and future.



Recognitions in February

February is a busy month for recognitions and celebrations! Since we've already past Groundhog Day (looking forward to an early spring!) and the Super Bowl (congratulations to the Chiefs!), join us in celebrating [Valentine's Day](#), [Presidents' Day/Washington's Birthday](#), [Mardi Gras](#), and [Leap Day](#).



We're Here to Support You

If you need help with disaster preparedness, COVID-19 AARs, or anything in between, send us an email at staff@constantassociates.com. We are here to help.

CONSTANT is certified as an 8(a) and Economically Disadvantaged Woman Owned Business (EDWOSB) and as a Great Place To Work. We are an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Got this as a forward? You can subscribe to receive future issues of Resilience Report by clicking [here](#).



