

Equity Action Plan Digest: Federal Emergency Management Agency

Summarized by Travis Reginal

This is one in a series of Urban Institute digests summarizing federal agencies', subagencies', and commissions' 2022 equity action plans, which were released in response to the Biden administration's January 2021 executive order, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's equity action plan is available at https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_equity-action-plan.pdf (PDF).

Overview

What problem is the agency trying to solve?	Underserved communities do not have equal access and opportunity to leverage FEMA resources (p. 2)
Priority groups	Historically underserved and marginalized communities
Historic harm mentioned?	No
Partners in implementation	Department of Housing and Urban Development, Environmental Protection Agency (p. 14), Minority Business Development Agency (p. 5), White House (p. 9)
Equity defined as	In addition to the equity principles set forth in Executive Order 13985, FEMA added "ensuring all people are helped before, during, and after disasters, based on their specific needs" (p. 2)

Pillars and Principles of Equity

Acknowledgement of past harm and present barriers	Communities of color and underserved communities are disproportionately impacted by natural disasters (pp. 8–9)
Impact goals	Ensure inclusiveness in procurement (p. 4); treat equity as a foundation for public assistance (p. 7); achieve equitable outcomes for disaster survivors (p. 9); build resilience (p. 12)
Actions and activities	Expanding access to demographic data by developing a system of records notice (p. 2); development of community engagement plan to enhance outreach (p. 3); targeted outreach before and after a hurricane to engage minority-owned and small businesses in the impact area (p. 5); reducing administrative burden for public assistance (p. 7)
Accountability measures and approaches	Report to chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security (p. 6); gather feedback from external stakeholders (p. 8); provide updates via fema.gov for the Individual Assistance Program (p. 11)

Note: For the rubric we used to evaluate these components of the equity action plans, see the appendix to the Urban Institute's 2023 brief "Pathways to Equity at Scale: An Analysis of the 2022 Federal Equity Action Plans and Recommendations for 2023 Plans," available at https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Pathways%20to%20Equity%20at%20Scale%20Appendix_0.pdf.

Types of Equity and Related Activities

Procedural (example: expanding language and translation services; simplifying the vendor application process)	Reducing the complexity of procurement requirements (p. 4); improving messaging to people who need disaster assistance (p. 9)
Distributional (example: creating new procurement program)	Creating an external civil rights program (p. 2); prioritizing the needs of underresourced communities through the Public Assistance Program (p. 7); leveraging the National Flood Insurance Program to target resources to low-income households (p. 16)
Structural (example: policy change via proposing legislation related to an equity goal; changing organizational functions)	Creation of Equity Enterprise Steering Group (p. 1); hosted “Equity Day,” which brought the entire FEMA workforce together to create a shared understanding of equity and how FEMA will advance equity through its 2022–26 strategic plan (p. 3); annual equity and civil rights assessment agenda (p. 3); updating the agency’s policy guide for the Individual Assistance Program based on public comments received on FEMA programs regarding equity (p. 11)

Key Metrics to Measure Progress on Equity

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ percentage of occupancy verification done through new documentation process (p. 10) ■ additional applicants and amount of financial assistance provided for clean-and-sanitize assistance (p. 10) ■ additional applicants and amount of financial assistance provided for mold remediation assistance (p. 10) ■ percentage of ownership verification done via in-person inspector visits (p. 10) ■ decrease in flood insurance gap (p. 17)
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Looking Ahead: Key Reflections for Plan Implementation

Where is the agency set up for success?	Developing system to record demographic data (p. 2); developing civil rights expertise (p. 2); internal advancement of equity (p.3); diverse methods of community outreach (p. 5); expanding access to disaster and financial assistance for underserved communities (p. 10); closing the flood insurance gap (p. 16)
Areas for future investment and growth	Acknowledgment of FEMA’s role in historical and current inequities, including distributing funds unevenly and slowly in underresourced communities; meeting procurement goals for historically underutilized business zones (p. 6); cross-agency collaboration (p. 16); creating systems to determine eligibility and disburse funds more quickly