

**Tribal Relations and Public Assistance**

The Public Assistance staff must be ready to deal with likely issues in delivering the program to tribal governments. Possible issues are:

- Tribes may be left out of the Public Assistance communications loop.
  - Missing and inaccurate damage estimates can prevent or delay program delivery.
  - Identifying facilities ownership will require effort.
  - Some tribes may need a thorough explanation of program requirements.
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**Tribal Participation**

Eligible tribal applicants may need help starting the Public Assistance process. Public Assistance staff members should:

- Identify tribes overlooked during Preliminary Damage Assessments (PDAs) and Applicants' Briefing notifications. Failure to clarify State, BIA, and other Federal agency roles in addressing tribal damage can result in failure to include tribes in the process.
  - Involve the State. It is a good opportunity to foster Federal, tribal, and State partnerships.
  - Observe tribal protocol when meeting with representatives. Meet first with the Tribal Chairman, or designate, who will generally direct you to the appropriate department heads.
  - Avoid promising assistance beyond program limits.
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**Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Role**

The BIA can support tribal participation in the Public Assistance program by:

- Providing FEMA-trained inspectors to serve on Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) teams.
  - Identifying BIA roads, schools, hospitals, and other public facilities.
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**Applicants' Briefing**

Tribal Applicants' Briefings usually present more detail than standard presentations. When planning for or assisting with a briefing for a tribal community:

- Determine past disaster experience. Tribes without prior program experience may have more extensive information needs.
  - Be prepared to explain questions about eligibility, floodplain management, insurance requirements, environmental and historic considerations, and Federal procurement standards.
  - Plan to explain the differences between grantee and subgrantee status and the advantages and disadvantages of each.
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**Kickoff Meeting**

Bring experienced staff members who can work with tribal representatives to explain:

- Program requirements and processes.
- Eligibility requirements.
- Documentation needed for reimbursement.
- Floodplain management considerations, insurance requirements, hazard mitigation opportunities, and compliance with environmental and historic preservation laws.

Providing sample forms that demonstrate what is required can help ensure desired outcomes.

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**Grantee Versus Subgrantee Status**

Federally recognized tribes may apply as grantees or subgrantees under the Public Assistance program. Some factors to consider are:

- A tribe may choose either status for current and future disasters.
  - As grantees, tribes need to sign a FEMA/Tribe agreement, develop a Public Assistance Administrative Plan, comply with audit requirements, and pay the required non-Federal share.
  - As subgrantees, tribes often receive a portion of the non-Federal share from the State, but do not receive the grantee administrative allowance.
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**Grant Management Issues**

All Public Assistance applicants must maintain proper documentation. Audits show that tribes, like other applicants, often have problems documenting how work is done and recording the associated costs. To prevent problems, Public Assistance staff members should:

- Encourage tribes to participate in training available through FEMA to help them administer the program.
  - Explain that failure to keep proper records can result in no funding or recovery of funds by FEMA.
  - Provide extra help and monitoring as projects begin. Early support will pay off with fewer grant management problems.
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**Environmental/Historic Preservation Concerns**

Public Assistance projects, whether located on or off Indian reservations, may raise environmental and historic preservation concerns.

Public Assistance staff should work with tribes to identify whether a project may affect the environment on tribal lands, disturb tribal historic or sacred sites, or reveal artifacts.

Tribes generally have designated representatives to assist with environmental and historic matters.

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**Resources**

Review the following weblinks:

- Public Assistance program  
<http://www.fema.gov/rrr/pa/>
  - Public Assistance Handbook  
<http://www.fema.gov/rrr/pa/handbk.shtm>
  - Public Assistance Coordinator  
<http://www.fema.gov/rrr/pa/wpac.shtm>
  - Public Assistance Glossary  
<http://www.fema.gov/rrr/pa/glossary.shtm>
  - Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources Program  
<http://www.fema.gov/hp/>
  - Environmental Program  
<http://www.fema.gov/ep/>
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**Conclusion**

This lesson presented:

- The hurdles that can block tribal participation in the Public Assistance process.
  - Strategies for helping tribes apply for Public Assistance and meet program requirements.
  - Factors that help tribes decide to apply as grantees or subgrantees for Public Assistance.
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