Disaster Response Documentation Tips

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Although every storm does not result in a disaster declaration making repairs eligible for reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Federal Highway Administration (FWHA) and/or State Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF), it is important to take steps to position your community to be eligible for reimbursement for expenses incurred during storm events in case funding does become available. It is not unusual for a disaster declaration to take several days, weeks or months.

Document all damages. Immediately photograph and label, measure (in linear feet/cubic yards), and record all damages your organization or community experienced, including costs related to responding to the event (municipal labor, equipment, materials, and volunteer hours, equipment and materials). The more documentation you capture, the easier it will be to present a detailed narrative to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and secure reimbursement from its Public Assistance (PA) Program.

FEMA Best Practices for Capturing High-Quality Photos

The Applicant provides FEMA with not only pre-disaster photos, but also damage-specific photos after an event occurs. To provide the best photos to FEMA an Applicant should follow these best practices:

- Take photos from multiple angles.
- Use landmarks for perspective.
- Include a measuring tool with pictures to provide scale.
- Ensure there is sufficient lighting to allow others to see damage accurately.
- Attempt to take photos on the inside of culverts.

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- Maintain a descriptive list of the photos, including latitude and longitude coordinates and perspective to use as a reference.

The information above is from FEMA's IS-1006: Documenting Disaster Damage and Developing Project Files course.

VEM's Guidance on Documentation to Support Costs Claimed for FEMA Public Assistance

The Applicant should submit the following to support costs claimed (not an all-inclusive list):

For Each Individual

- Name
- Job title and function
- Type of employee (i.e., full-time exempt, full-time non-exempt, part-time, temporary, prisoner, etc.)
- Days and hours worked
- Pay rate(s) and fringe benefits
- Description of work performed with representative sample of daily logs/activity reports, if available
- Representative sample of timesheets
- Fringe benefit calculations
- Pay policy

Applicant-owned (Force Account) Equipment

- Type of equipment and attachments used, including year, make, and model
- Size/capacity (e.g., horsepower, wattage)
- Locations and days and hours used with usage logs
- Operator name

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- Schedule of rates, including rate components

Rented or Purchased Equipment

- Rental or lease agreements, invoices, receipts
- Days used

Supplies from Stock

- Historical cost records
- Inventory records
- Type of supplies and quantities used, with support documentation such as daily logs

Purchased Supplies

- Receipts or invoices

Contracts

- Procurement policy
- Procurement and bid documents
- For procurements in excess of simplified acquisition threshold, a cost/price analysis
- Contracts, change orders, and invoices
- Dates worked
- For time and materials (T&M) contracts, monitoring documentation

Mutual Aid

- Written agreement
- Services requested and received
- Same information listed for labor, equipment, and supplies above (as applicable)
- Invoices

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FEMA's Public Assistance website provides detailed information on the program. Potential applicants are strongly advised to check FEMA's website for the most up-to-date guidance. For previous disasters, information required for documentation of damage and repair included:

- **Number** - Assign a number for each site for ease of tracking (suggested)
- **Location** – Be as specific as possible. Include:
    - Road name
    - Distance from nearest intersection or landmark
    - GPS Latitude/Longitude (required for reimbursement, but can be obtained after the event)
- **Date Damaged**
- **Description of Damage**
- **Photograph** damaged sites from multiple angles
- **Cause of Damage**
- **Debris Removal and Emergency Repair Measures** - For each site note:
    - **Labor** - employee/contractor/volunteer name and hours;
    - **Equipment** - municipal/contractor/volunteer equipment used and hours;
    - **Supplies and materials used**, whether purchased, on-hand and/or donated.
    - **Volunteer hours and equipment** should be tracked – these donations can be used toward the town's match for FEMA grant funds.

Federal Aid Highways – CAUTION: Funding for repair of damage to Federal Aid Highways differs from FEMA's Public Assistance Program. Check the Vermont Agency of Transportation's Federal Aid Highway Maps on the Vermont Agency of Transportation's website and contact your District Transportation Administrator in advance of the repair of damage on Federal Aid Highways!

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Buildings, Equipment & Facilities – collect all of the above information **AND,** if insured through the VLCT Property & Casualty Intermunicipal Fund (PACIF) file a claim or contact us at 800-649-7915. Providing prompt notice and maintaining close communication with adjusters can shorten the amount of time it takes to receive payment for covered losses.

Conduct Emergency Protective Measures. Do not wait for FEMA funding to conduct necessary measures to protect your community. FEMA's Public Assistance Program does not provide funds upfront. If the repair or measure is cost-reasonable and necessary to save lives and protect the community, you may procure contractors if needed, carry out the repair, and document the expense immediately. If your community needs to secure funding to cover the emergency expenses, certain loan expenses are reimbursable as part of the PA process.

Pro Tips

- **Keep notes on each site as you go!** You have a lot on your mind – taking notes during the emergency will make your life easier now and when submitting requests for reimbursement!
- **Take pictures of damage before repairs are made and label them with the GPS coordinates.**
- **Make regular contact with your Town's Emergency Management Director (EMD).** The EMD will share this information with Vermont Emergency Management to support the declaration of an emergency, both locally and statewide, which is needed to make the event eligible for FEMA Funding.
- **Include everything.** Include everything you can think of in your damage assessments, even if you think FEMA won't cover it. Let FEMA be the ones to decide that. Also, it is much easier to drop things from an application than it is to add them later.

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- **Include "Iffy" Projects.** They will not jeopardize other projects. And…they might get funded!
- **Take Care of Yourself.** You are essential to storm response and recovery efforts!

VLCT's Flood Recovery page provides complete information about FEMA's Public Assistance Program, (USDA), Emergency Relief Program for Federal-Aid Highways (FHWA), and filing claims with PACIF.

Thank you to Vermont Emergency Management, VLCT's Municipal Operations Support Program and VLCT PACIF staff for providing the technical expertise and resources used to develop this document.

Disclaimer: This resource was created by Municipal Operations Support (MOS) staff of non-legal professionals with expertise of the subject matter. It is only intended to provide information and does **NOT** constitute legal advice. Readers with legal questions are encouraged to contact an attorney. The use or downloading of this resource does **NOT** create an attorney-client relationship and will not be treated in a confidential manner. Non-legal questions about this resource can be directed to MOS staff at mos@vlct.org.

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