

FEMA Continues Collaboration with Territorial and Federal Partners to Strengthen Recovery from 2017 Hurricanes

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ST. CROIX, U.S. Virgin Islands – Seven years have passed since hurricanes Irma and Maria impacted the U.S. Virgin Islands, and FEMA remains steadfast in its commitment to provide financial assistance to the territory as it continues the rebuilding process. Long-term recovery requires continued coordination and collaboration among multiple federal and territorial partners. FEMA's partnerships with the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR) and the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) aim to ensure support for the whole community with an emphasis on building back in a more resilient manner, thanks in part to the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (BBA) which allows FEMA to fund non-disaster damages, restoring the facility to industry standards.

“FEMA continues to leverage resources in support of the Territory's mission to strengthen infrastructure as long-term recovery efforts from the 2017 hurricanes continue. Our partnerships with the Office of the Governor, the Office of Disaster Recovery, and VITEMA pave a path toward making critical facilities better able to withstand the effects of future storms,” said U.S. Virgin Islands Recovery Director Kristen Hodge.

As of September 1, \$11.9 billion has been obligated for 1,539 projects through FEMA's Public Assistance Program, including funding for emergency protective measures, permanent work, and management costs. Emergency work includes debris removal and emergency power restoration; permanent work comprises repair or replacement of damaged facilities, while management costs help the Territory and applicants manage and administer their PA grants/subgrants.

Public Assistance funding has been obligated toward key areas including:



- \$1.68 billion for energy, \$988 million for housing, \$3.94 billion for education, and \$2.84 billion for health and medical facilities.
- 1. Hazard Mitigation (406) proposals applied to Public Assistance projects include culvert upsizing, composite poles, electrical undergrounding, and applying upgrades to roads near waterways to make them less susceptible to flooding and erosion. These measures are intended to directly reduce the potential of future, similar disaster damage to the eligible facility.
- \$1.07 billion in Hazard Mitigation funds (406) has been approved for eligible projects including roads and bridges, buildings and equipment, parks, and recreation facilities, as well as protective measures for utilities.

The BBA allows FEMA to provide PA Section 428 assistance to restore industry standards to disaster-damaged facilities or systems that provide critical services regardless of the pre-disaster condition. This authority was issued exclusively to the USVI and Puerto Rico following the 2017 major disaster declarations from Irma and Maria. In the USVI, 81 projects have been found eligible for BBA funding, allowing permanent facilities such as potable and wastewater systems, schools, hospitals, and clinics to be repaired or replaced to current industry standards.

1. FEMA's 404 Hazard Mitigation Grant Program provides funding to the USVI to develop mitigation plans to reduce future disaster losses in our communities. An example of this grant program is to fund projects to include resilience measures such as safe rooms to be used as community shelters during wind-driven events.
- To date, \$199.4 million has been obligated through the 404 HMGP program for projects including solar micro-grids, drainage/culvert improvements, retrofitting or hardening of structures as well as erosion stabilization efforts across the territory.
 - 1. FEMA's Interagency Recovery Coordination (IRC) team supports the territory by coordinating with nine other federal agencies that address unmet needs of the USVI and local businesses. Coordination workgroups include health, housing, economic recovery, natural and cultural resources, transportation, utilities, and philanthropy coordination. IRC continues to collaborate with



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federal and local transportation and utility agencies on several projects.

- The nine other federal agencies have obligated more than \$2.3 billion to the territory to support recovery.
- 1. IRC was also instrumental in coordinating the Insular Areas Act (IAA) Technical Assistance in early 2024. This technical assistance provided project and construction management services through staff augmentation, project management and project-specific technical services for the territory. In addition, the support provides recommendations for tools, solutions, and strategies to streamline processes to help advance disaster recovery in the USVI.

According to Office of Disaster Recovery Director, Adrienne Williams-Octalien, “So far, the Territory has completed 990 emergency and permanent repair projects, expending over \$3.5 billion to recovery from the devastating 2017 hurricane season. As reconstruction efforts continue, there are approximately 400 projects in various stages of the construction phase. ODR is working closely with local and federal partners as it continues its mission to build a resilient Virgin Islands.”

“The recovery and rebuilding of the U.S. Virgin Islands after the devastation of Hurricanes Irma and Maria is steadily progressing, thanks to the unwavering commitment and partnership of FEMA and our federal and territorial agencies. Together, we are not only restoring critical infrastructure but making it more resilient to withstand future challenges. As we continue moving forward, these efforts are a testament to the strength and determination of our people and our collective resolve to build a stronger, safer future for the territory,” said Governor Albert Bryan Jr.

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FEMA’s mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters.



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