



Individual Assistance Symposium

After-Action Report

February 2023



FEMA

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Executive Summary

On January 19, 2023, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Individual Assistance (IA) Division, Office of Regional Field Coordination (ORFC), coordinated and hosted an IA Symposium for IA state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) government partners; FEMA IA employees; and voluntary organization representatives. The IA Division includes a range of programs and functions that FEMA implements during each stage of the recovery life cycle and impact regional, SLTT, and NGO partners. The IA symposium sought to engage FEMA and its IA stakeholders in topics identified to be important to the IA community.

This symposium's goal was to provide attendees the platform to collaborate and learn so that there is a shared understanding of FEMA's capability to respond to and recover from disasters. FEMA IA leadership and Individuals and Households Program staff provided presentations. The symposium was held virtually using the Zoom platform.

Symposium Presenters

The Office of Response and Recovery (ORR), IA Division, invited multiple participants to discuss the topics identified by the IA community. Those participants are listed below:

- Jennifer Bible, Program Analyst, Individual Assistance Division, Office of Response and Recovery, FEMA
- Frank Matranga, Director, Individual Assistance Division, Office of Response and Recovery, FEMA
- Dr. Elizabeth Asche, Deputy Division Director, Individual Assistance Division, Office of Response and Recovery, FEMA
- Zachary Usher, Deputy Division Director, Individual Assistance Division, Office of Response and Recovery, FEMA
- Blair McDonald, Program Management Section Chief, Individuals and Households Program, Individual Assistance Division, Office of Response and Recovery, FEMA
- Monty LeMaire, Branch Chief, Individuals and Households Program, Individual Assistance Division, Office of Response and Recovery, FEMA

Symposium Topics

1. Individual Assistance 2023 Priorities

1.1. Where We Are: The Challenges and Opportunities We Face

The last decade has seen a tremendous amount of stress placed on FEMA as emergency managers. The world is changing, and the landscape of emergency management is in constant flux. Disasters happen more often and are more severe. The people FEMA serves face chronic housing shortages and an ongoing health care crisis. Issues that are only compounded by equity gaps. Survivors come to FEMA with growing expectations of on-demand solutions in a modern world. While there were many successful initiatives from 2022, FEMA experienced challenges centered on current programs and processes, equity, and survivor experience. As the Agency continues to help survivors in 2023, we are going to concentrate on addressing those stresses and improving IA. The Agency is committed to improving the way they serve people before, during, and after disasters, and recognizes that there will always be ways to better processes and programs to help those in need.

1.2. Where We Are Going: 2023 Individual Assistance Priorities

In 2023, a priority of the IA Division is to focus on three areas of improvement:

- Supporting and growing the IA team;
- Providing help more equitably; and
- Improving survivor experiences.

The steps that will be taken in each of these areas of improvement are discussed in more detail in Figure 1. These steps are not meant to be actualized within a single calendar year, but rather they will continue to build on each other years into the future to help tell the story of how IA is working towards long term goals.



Support and Grow the IA Team

Support the team's emotional health and wellbeing by expanding workplace flexibilities, increasing access to mental health professionals, providing trauma-informed training opportunities for staff and supervisors, and reinvigorating employee-led workgroups.

Enhance readiness by building regions to handle routine disaster years through **Regional Force Structure Review**.

Reevaluate **training and development strategy** and identify recommendations to better develop and support field-based staff.

Expand the IHP workforce by increasing the baseline staff and standardizing the role of reservists in supporting call center activities.

Strengthen the administration and oversight of the **Emergency Food and Shelter Program**.

Develop a **holistic acquisition strategy** for resourcing readiness requirements.

Ensure accuracy and integrity of program delivery through **assessing internal controls** and identifying improvement opportunities.



Provide Help More Equitably

Improve coordination of outcomes for survivors by streamlining and speeding the delivery of **Disaster Case Management**.

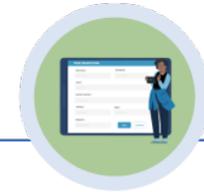
More effectively meet housing needs of survivors by implementing **redesigned direct housing** roles and processes and advocating for priority legislative proposals.

Remove inequity and barriers to assistance by implementing **regulatory changes** and advocating for **priority legislative proposals that expand assistance**.

Provide more transparent and timely assistance by developing **policy to award using damage levels** and doctrine for **inspection strategy and loss verification methods**.

Reduce barriers to assistance, increase assistance and simplify processes through the **Individual Assistance Program and Policy Guide (IAPPG) version 2.0**.

Direct technical assistance to underserved communities by developing **strategic resourcing doctrine for IA and DSA cadre operations**.



Improve Survivor Experiences

Simplify registration through **simple, plain-language, needs-based forms** to apply for assistance.

Streamline shelter experience by **evaluating hotels and other non-congregate sheltering options**. (Joint priority with PA)

Improve survivor satisfaction, maximize assistance, and formalize referrals by **implementing enhanced applicant services**.

Upgrade survivor's in-person experience with support from FEMA by **assessing and developing DRC and DSA doctrine for operations**.

Enable partners to better meet survivor needs by **improving business processes for data sharing**.

Enable survivors and FEMA staff to quickly and clearly understand status and eligibility for assistance by developing **requirements for modernized systems**.

Reduce time to award assistance through evaluating and improving automated and manual **fraud prevention** controls. (Joint priority with RAD)

Engage voluntary organizations to enhance disaster capabilities and strengthen whole community partnerships and coordination.

Figure 1: 2023 Individual Assistance Priorities

1.3. Question and Answer Section



Question Posed: “A significant barrier with negative impact to the survivor experience is the frequency of denials and necessary appeals. Are you evaluating strategies for reducing the number of cases requiring appeals?”

FEMA Response: We need to think about how we can frame or communicate things to people in a way that enables their disaster recovery and does not add confusion. We have programs under the Stafford Act that have been designed with good intention by Congress, but often with confusing priorities, which creates layers of complexity. We need to figure out how to communicate that complexity to survivors, get them answers on what support they’re going to get from FEMA, and do it in a way that that helps them on their path to recovery. One of FEMA’s major priorities is how we can communicate things in a way that survivors understand with an equity lens. If we do not do that, then we are likely to leave behind historically underserved communities and have a negative impact on survivor experience. In the Individual Assistance Policy and Program Guide (IAPPG) 2.0, there is a little bit of a movement from the appeals-oriented structure toward requests for information and then determinations. I think this will be an area of concentration for the next couple of years as we try to streamline things and make them simple on survivors.



Question Posed: “How can there be more consistency of FEMA policies and programs across the regions? It appears there are different interpretations of the same policies?”

FEMA Response: The truth is that every disaster is unique. If the expectation is that everything works the exact same way in every single disaster, that does not blend with the industry we work in. Communities look different, their needs are different, and fundamentally our job is to provide federal assistance with our partners in a way that meets their underlying needs. So, it is important to be consistent with how you get there and not try to reinvent the wheel. We should not need to re-train staff at field offices. Rather, FEMA should have good, robust policies that can expand on that. Decisions cannot look the same no matter what because it is the needs that we are trying to serve. Sometimes a solution may be approved in one instance is not going to be improved in another. Our job is to work with our partners and make those decisions as best we can with the facts we have.



Question Posed: “Expediting a disaster case management (DCM) program doesn’t necessarily ensure deployment after survival level. New Jersey and Kentucky have approved funding, but no viable program over a year since their disasters. How will FEMA support efficient implementation at the state level once a DCM program is approved?”

FEMA Response: FEMA has been building on the case management authority that was granted in 2006. One of the highlights that is that we significantly invested in the grants management expertise of our IA staff. This was new and necessary because, historically, FEMA’s IA staff did not play a significant role in

managing grants that are governed by 2 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). Over the last three to four years, we have invested a substantial amount of funding to train our IA staff in grants program management, so that they can provide technical assistance to the state as they support those programs. We recognize that there are two roles on the federal side, when it comes to administering grants: a program administration role and a financial administration role.

Another thing we did over the last four years was unify grants administration at the regional level. For several years, they were split where the financial management and oversight of the case management program was done at the regional level program, oversighted by headquarters (HQ). That was problematic because we heard from states, tribes, and territories (STT) that we were not always seeing consistent interpretation of program intent. We have also invested in training to upgrade our capabilities from a staff standpoint. We continue to hire and recruit deployable field staff. Those positions are intended to be field deployable throughout the year. So, that's 70%-80% of the calendar year, specifically for our community services programs to include DCM. Field deployments of those staff help STTs conceptualize programs and improve program delivery. We will continue to invest in those areas of effort.



Question Posed: "What are FEMA's plans to de-carbonize disaster response with renewables and other climate resiliency solutions?"

FEMA Response: Within the IA Division, FEMA is working on changing laws, regulations, and policies to allow the agency to fund survivors' actions with lower climate impact. However, FEMA's ability to solve this after a disaster is limited. As much as FEMA would like direct housing units to have solar panels to provide electricity, the current operational reality would be detrimental to survivors and require an enormous amount of time to install. For more information about how FEMA is practicing better climate resiliency, please refer to: <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20211028/fema-announces-initial-initiatives-advance-climate-change-resilience>,



Question Posed: "Are provisions being considered for relocation of communities on land that will be rendered uninhabitable by climate change?"

FEMA Response: FEMA is not taking anything on within IA in particular but there are a number of efforts across government in this area that we are supporting. Here is an example: <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20221130/biden-harris-administration-makes-135-million-commitment-support-relocation>.

2. Current Housing Initiatives

2.1. Direct Housing Reimagined Approach

As part of FEMA’s strategic priorities and annual planning guidance, the IA Division developed recommendations for how the agency should evaluate and reimagine the direct housing program through a 3-step process. The steps of this process are shown in Figure 2 and discussed in more detail throughout this section.

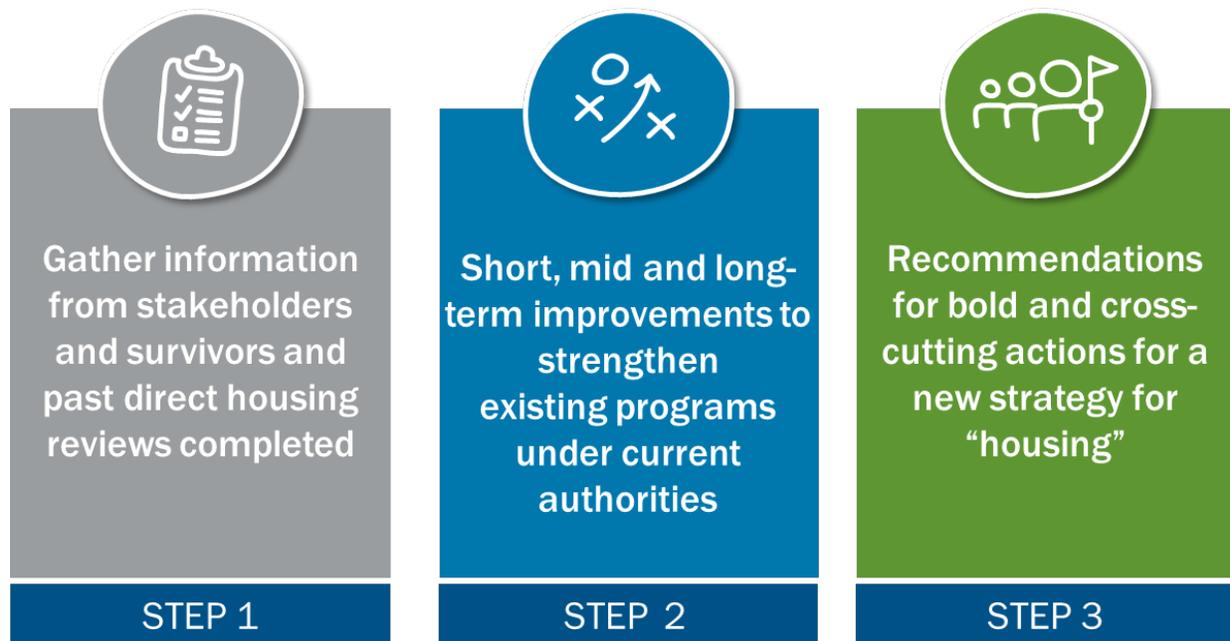


Figure 2: Three Steps of Direct Housing Reimagined Approach

2.2. Stakeholder Feedback

In 2022, the IA Division hosted a series of 28 listening groups with stakeholders to learn more about areas of improvement and gather program recommendations regarding the direct housing program. These listening groups consisted of internal and external FEMA partners, local and state officials, congressional officials, and National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) partners. Additionally, the IA Division conducted 10 survivor listening sessions and several one-on-one interviews with survivors to gather additional insights from different perspectives and reviewed 10 direct housing reviews that were conducted in 2008. All of these efforts resulted in 155 recommendations. Out of these 155 recommendations, 66 were short-term, 35 were mid-term, and 54 were long-term improvements. These improvements helped the IA Division see

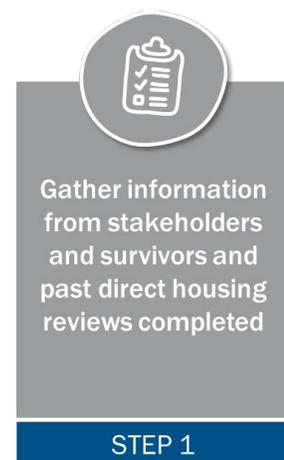


Figure 3: Step One of Direct Housing Reimagined Process

where they could strengthen and improve existing IA programs or change them completely.

2.3. Improve Existing Program

Recommendations from the direct housing reviews for improving the existing direct housing program included:

- Providing proactive casework using Enhanced Applicant Services (EAS);
- Implementing Disaster Case Management (DCM) sooner;
- Shortening the direct housing implementation timeline;
- Providing better planning for direct housing implementation, which includes establishing Temporary Direct Housing Implementation teams;
- Prioritizing/incentivizing states, tribes, and territories pre-event planning;
- Providing additional STT training, exercises & technical assistance; and
- Establishing SLTT requirements for Direct Housing.



Figure 4: Step Two of Direct Housing Reimagined Process

The following sections discuss a few of these recommendations already being implemented.

2.3.1. ENHANCED APPLICANT SERVICES

The EAS effort began following the major disaster declaration for Kentucky (DR-4633) and identified and assessed a targeted population of applicants needing to navigate the recovery process. The IA Division connected survivors with voluntary agencies and other federal agencies (OFA) to assist with any unmet or long-term needs. As part of this effort, the IA Division implemented EAS in five separate disasters and has made more than 67,000 additional callouts to assist these applicants.

As EAS continues to provide assistance to applicants, lessons learned will inform recommendations for EAS approaches. The short-term approach of EAS is to establish a separate field-based team at the Joint Field Office (JFO) that is solely focused on conducting proactive outreach to applicants. This team would consist of deployed applicant services reservists who undergo casework training to build their understanding of EAS and their roles and responsibilities. These reservists will evaluate survivors' cases and work with the applicant on their path to recovery.

2.3.2. IMPLEMENT DISASTER CASE MANAGEMENT SOONER

As a part of the effort to streamline the DCM process, the IA Division developed a modernized approach for STTs to use when implementing services under the DCM federal grant award. As part of this approach, FEMA developed streamlined OMB-approved application forms and accompanying guidance. These forms and guidance reduced the burden and timeline for STTs to apply for DCM and FEMA to make award determinations. This approach focused on the potential to ask for future modifications for additional funding and shortened the application's determination period because it allowed STTs to gather data in a more efficient and timely manner.

During DR-4633, Kentucky utilized this approach and received a DCM award within 40 days of IA declaration, compared to a previous 156-day IA declaration award.

2.3.3. SHORTEN FEMA DIRECT HOUSING IMPLEMENTATION

To better serve those with sheltering needs, the IA Division evaluated ways to shorten the timeframe to license individuals into units. The IA Division is in the process of implementing stakeholder recommendations from the Direct Housing review effort.

One way FEMA is shortening the Direct Housing implementation process is to award direct housing task orders more efficiently and effectively in coordination with partners from the Logistics Management Directorate (LMD). Additionally, they are working with LMD partners to award the task order for the Logistics Housing Operations Unit Installation, Maintenance, and Deactivation contract (LOGHOUSE). This temporary housing unit haul will install contracts faster based on the results of the mission planning contract and assessment. FEMA has also established Direct Housing Implementation teams. These teams consist of direct housing subject-matter experts (SME) who will establish operational leadership, necessary staffing levels, and focused planning for direct housing requirements.

Throughout 2022, the IA Division noticed a shortened timeline regarding direct housing implementation.

During DR-4663-KY, households started to be licensed into units in **16 days** from the time they were determined eligible for direct housing.

During DR-4673-FL, households started to be licensed into units in **22 days** from the time they were determined eligible for direct housing.

2.3.4. DIRECT HOUSING IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS

Direct Housing Implementation Teams (DHIT) are temporary teams that consist of various full-time FEMA staff with direct housing experience from Field Leadership, IA, Logistics Management, Contracting, and External Affairs. DHITs help standardize direct housing implementation by providing leadership staff for direct housing missions during the critical phases of early disaster response and recovery. Based on lessons learned during the 2022 hurricane season, FEMA will evaluate and create permanent, long-term teams.

2.4. Direct Housing Reimagined

The IA Division classified the recommendations received for housing into five categories:

- Funding STT housing building capacity;
- Establishing expanded sheltering authority and discontinuing the use of temporary housing;
- Establishing permanent grant programs for STTs to grant direct housing to disaster survivors;
- Looking at grant funding for permanent housing solutions, in coordination with OFAs, such as the Small Business Administration (SBA) or the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); and
- Analyzing how FEMA can reduce the risk to housing resources in the future.



Recommendations for bold and cross-cutting actions for a new strategy for “housing”

STEP 3

Figure 5: Step Three of Direct Housing Reimagined Process

2.5. Direct Housing Reimagined Vision

FEMA recognizes the need to empower STTs to participate in pre-event funding, direct sheltering services, and permanent housing while ensuring equitable considerations and solutions to build back better resiliently. Empowerment, equity, and resilience are the foundation of the Direct Housing Reimagined vision, as shown in Figure 6.

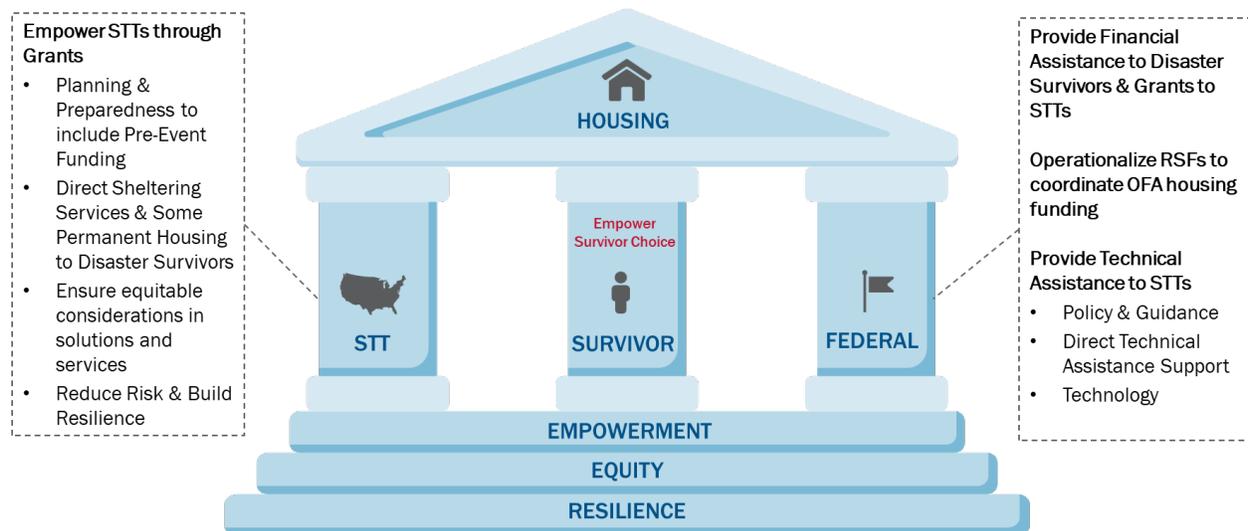


Figure 6: Direct Housing Reimagined Vision

2.6. Next Steps

The IA Division is continuing to establish a structure for implementing the Direct Housing Reimagined effort. Still, it will continue gathering additional feedback from stakeholders to inform what specific aspects of the program might look like in the future.

2.7. Question and Answer Section



Question Posed: “A major problem in some states is lack of affordable housing (in general). Will there be any initiative to create more permanent, affordable housing?”

FEMA Response: FEMA’s authorities are generally limited to post-disaster sheltering and temporary housing. However, FEMA has spoken with the HUD about what the agency can do to support states’ efforts to solve this problem more broadly. Currently, FEMA is providing solutions post-disaster that do not solve the whole problem.



Question Posed: “You mentioned pre-event funding. How would that work? What does that look like?”

FEMA Response: The next step in this effort is to do additional socialization to take these concepts and recommendations and build them into actual proposals moving forward. Many of the recommendations for the pre-event funding were about identifying ways to establish grant funds to present to STTs so they can perform pre-event planning and establish pre-event contracts so they could be ready to implement the grants that are provided post-disaster.



Question Posed: “Are contractors used for any of the Direct Housing Implementation Teams?”

FEMA Response: Currently, no, but this might change as FEMA builds out this concept.



Question Posed: “How will—with regard to housing—current and future IA support functions coordinate with other FEMA programs that may be outside the Stafford Act (i.e., New Mexico)?”

FEMA Response: A significant effort that we are working on at FEMA, in coordination with our HUD partners, is to do a lot of pre-event housing planning. There is an effort currently underway where we are collaborating to support STTs in developing pre-disaster housing plans, and this is all part of the Housing Recovery Support Function (RSF). We are looking to start this effort by working with a few states interested in developing pre-disaster housing plans in 2023 to expedite overall housing and community recovery. This is a very significant effort focused on how we can utilize the Housing RSF established under the *National Disaster Recovery Framework* to provide direct support to STTs. More information will be coming out about this effort through our regional partners. I really encourage everyone to continue being interested in pre-disaster housing planning because we know how important and effective it can be. We will be providing more information about this effort and which STTs we will be able to partner with for some of these pre-disaster housing plans in 2023.

3. Current Survivor Experiences

3.1. Disaster Impacts

Over the past 10 years, the IA Division has registered approximately 12 million survivors for assistance and provided approximately \$14 billion in assistance through the Individuals and Households Program (IHP). The IHP Branch focuses on streamlining customer experience to better serve those affected by disasters. In addition to helping survivors register for assistance, IHP is also:

- Deploying staff to survivors' homes to mitigate damages;
- Deploying disaster survivor assistance teams to begin canvassing neighborhoods in the hardest-hit areas;
- Establishing a plan to open Disaster Recovery Centers that impact communities; and
- Working with our regional, state, and local partners if there is a mission.

The following sections discuss the impacts of these increased disasters on staffing, survivors, and mitigation.

3.1.1. DISASTER ACTIVITY

The IA Division averages 17 presidentially declared disasters per year. In 2017, the IA Division deployed approximately 20,000 team members to support communities impacted by Hurricanes Harvey and Maria. In addition to helping survivors register for disaster assistance, the IHP Branch deployed staff to survivors' homes to verify disaster-related damages. 2021 was another year that had a lot of disaster activity, with Hurricane Ida impacting five states. Figure 7 shows how staffing levels increase and decrease over time as disaster activity changes.

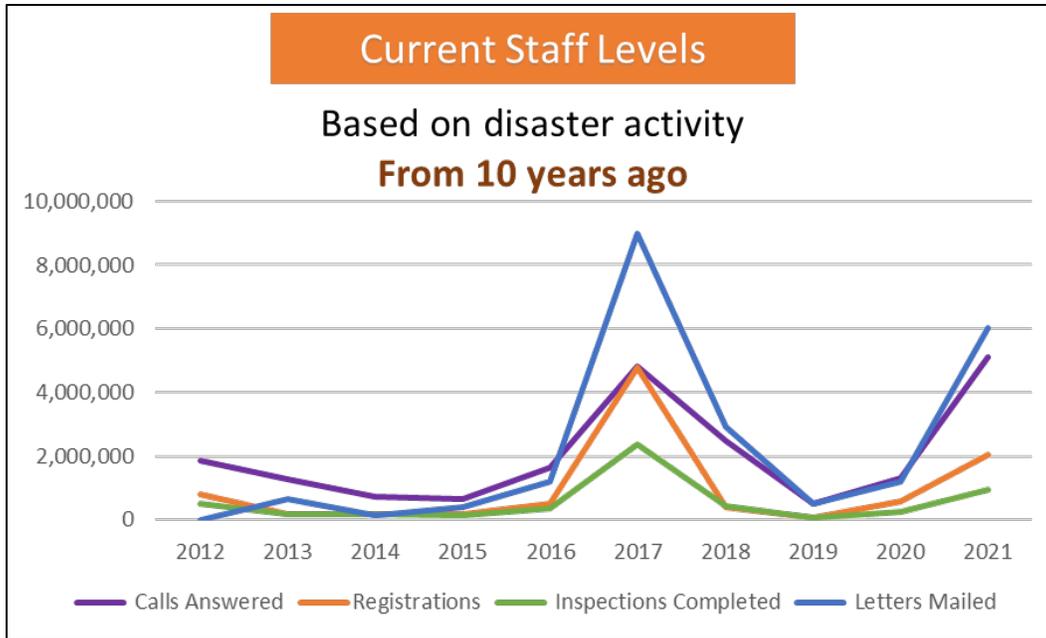


Figure 7: Ten-Year Disaster Activity Impacts on Staffing Levels

3.1.1. CURRENT SURVIVOR IMPACT

There are many channels that survivors can use to interact with FEMA to receive assistance following a disaster. Figure 8 identifies some of the methods survivors use to receive FEMA assistance and for communication purposes. About 70% of the total registrations for assistance come via mobile app or the web (disasterassistance.gov).

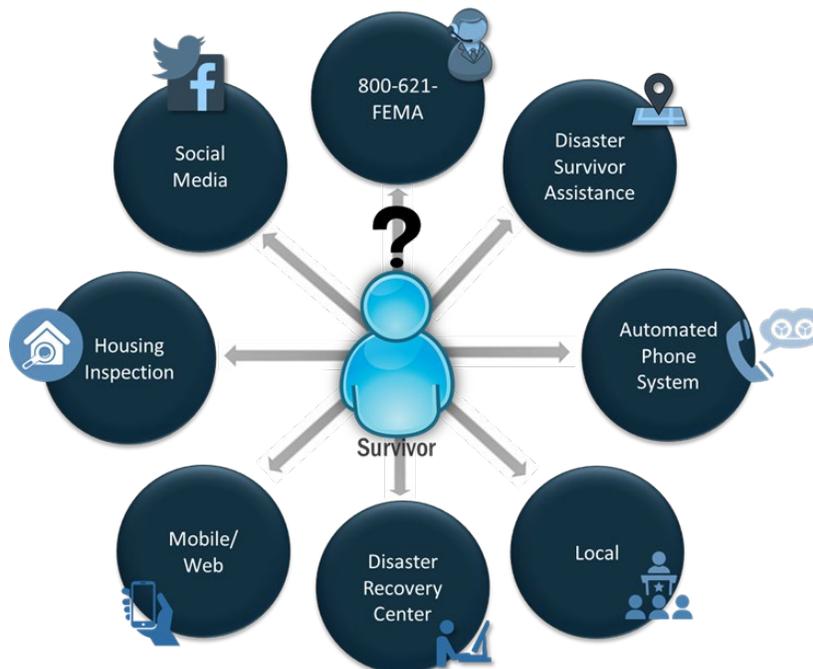


Figure 8: Survivor Methods to Communicate with IA Staff

3.1.2. STAFFING IMPACT

Figure 9 shows the impact that disasters have on IHP staff. FEMA deploys assistance teams to help those responding to the disasters as well as those suffering from their impacts. These assistance teams canvas disaster-impacted neighborhoods, establish plans to open Disaster Recovery Centers (DRC), and coordinate with regional, state, and local partners on various housing missions. Not only is IHP staff working a significant amount of overtime to meet survivor needs, but we're also straining the rest of the agency as we onboard staff.

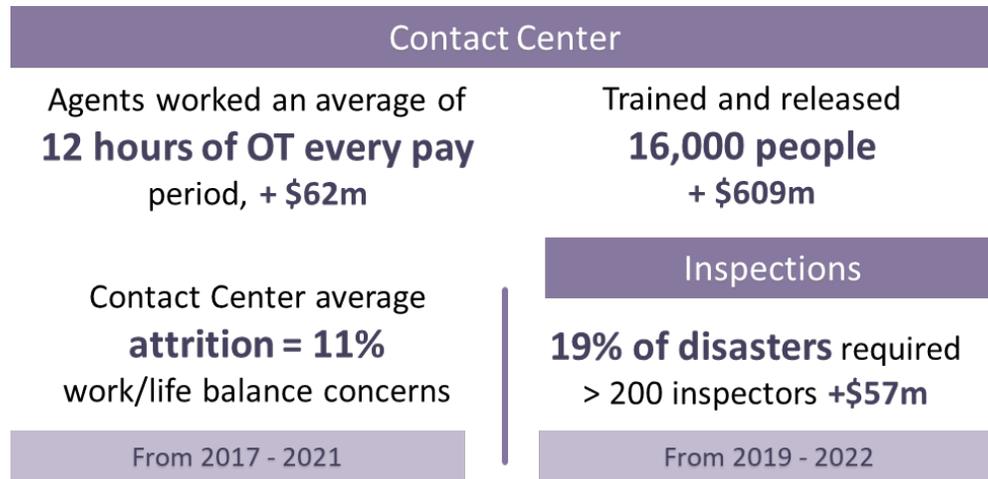


Figure 9: Disaster Impacts on IHP Staff

3.1.3. MITIGATION APPROACH

With increased methods of applying for assistance and increased numbers of staff for each disaster, there is a risk that a survivor's request for assistance will be missed. To mitigate this risk, IHP has established the following goals:

- Simplify the IA program by making information more easily accessible and navigable;
- Reduce the use of Just-In-Time trainings and increase staff's knowledge about assistance programs; and
- Invest in empathetic technology, which will bring information to both survivors and staff in a simplified format.



Figure 10: Foundations for the IHP Mitigation Approach

3.2. Investment in Human Capital

One of FEMA's commitments is doubling the size of the IHP Branch to handle most Type 2 and Type 3 incidents. This is a \$100 million annual investment that will be implemented starting in 2023 and will phase in over a few years. This investment in human capital will allow the IHP Branch to hire and train staff to handle complex survivor issues and focus on vulnerable communities and survivors. This investment will also improve service and response times, help mitigate errors, and reduce overall operating costs.

3.3. Investment in Consistent Program Application

Figure 11 depicts the current state of IHP, and Figure 12 shows what the future state could look like with consistent investment into the program application. FEMA aims to meet survivors where they are and provide a consistent level of service in the aftermath of a disaster. Although FEMA has a strong digital environment to assist survivors with registering for FEMA programs, the agency still struggles to staff up processing centers to handle survivor needs. The logistics of deploying staff on the ground take a significant amount of time and effort. However, FEMA has started to deploy more reservists and provide training at processing centers during multi-state events, which has proven to be very successful.

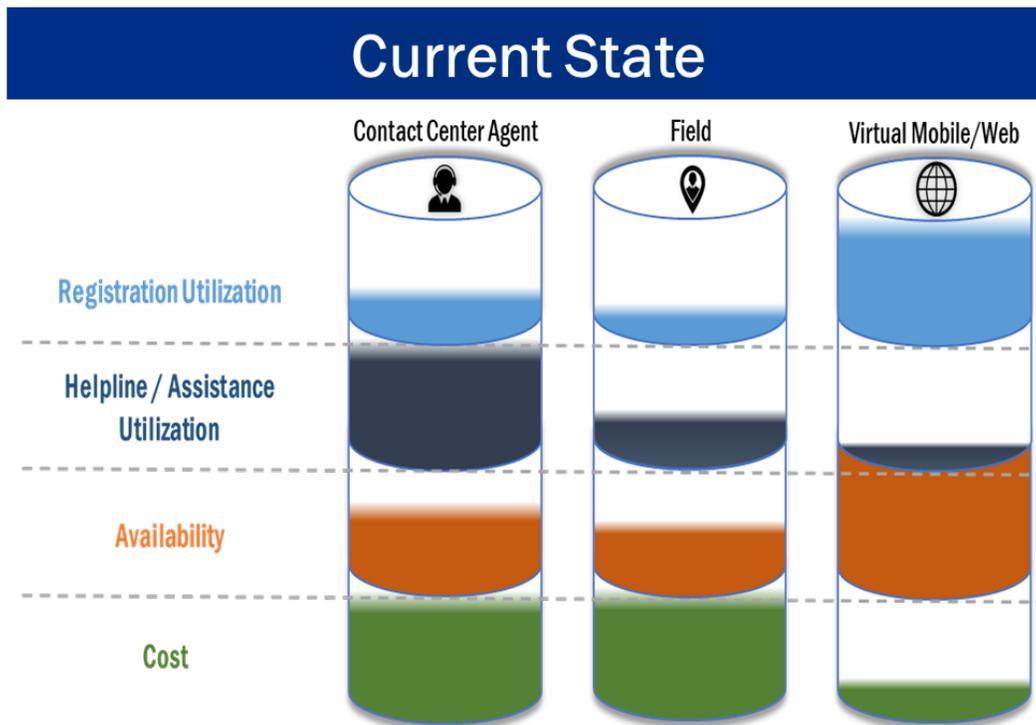


Figure 11: Current State of Program Application Investment

One way in which FEMA has already started working to achieve the future state shown in Figure 12 is by Training FEMA Reserves to work in the National Processing Service Centers (NPSC). FEMA has a structured training program that trains Reservists to speak to survivors effectively. This practice has been successful so far and helps FEMA align services provided to survivors regardless of how or where they engage.

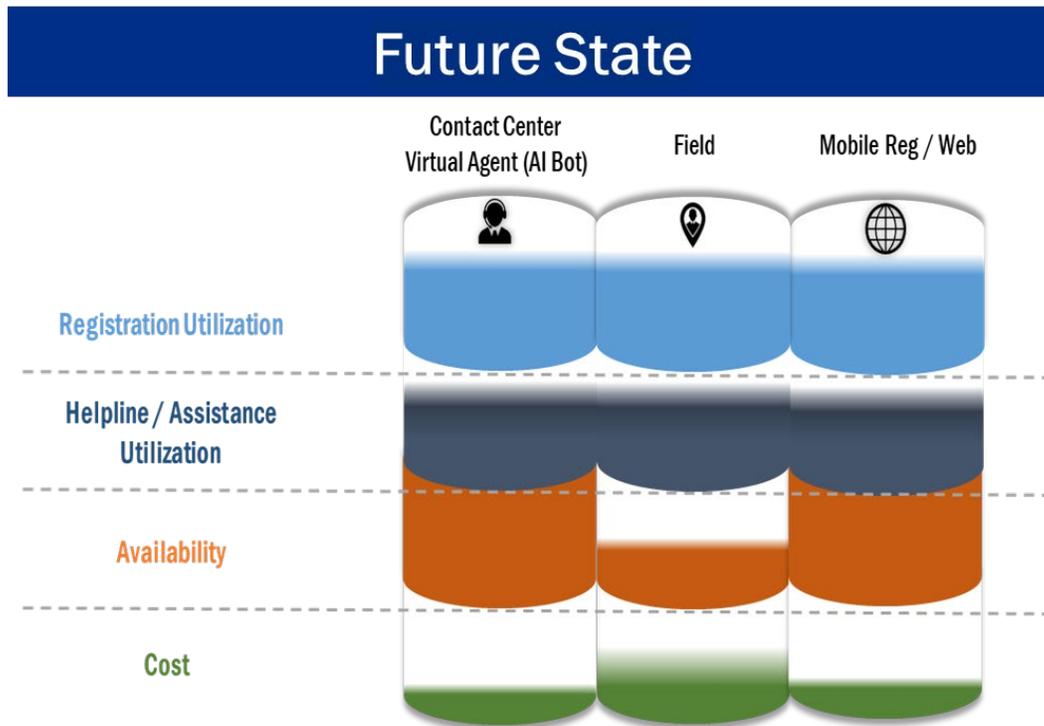


Figure 12: Future State of Program Application Investment

3.4. Investment in Empathetic Technologies

Empathetic technology allows organizations to adapt digital capabilities to individual situations. By incorporating empathetic technologies into service models, organizations and service providers emphasize accessibility and timeliness when providing services to individuals. Additional benefits of empathetic technology are shown in Figure 13.

One way FEMA invests in these technologies is by creating proactive outreach methods for survivors. For example, FEMA’s automated algorithm generated a phone menu when survivors called requesting assistance. All of these prompts have been re-recorded to increase timeliness and ease of use for survivors. FEMA is focused on having more robust technological systems to empower and educate survivors during their path to recovery.



Figure 13: Benefits of Empathetic Technologies

3.5. Future Survivor Experience

Looking forward to 2023, FEMA aims to continue improving survivor experience by simplifying programs and services and improving communications between the Agency and survivors. A few ways that FEMA hopes to do this are shown in Figure 14. By emphasizing transparency, accessibility, and service to the community, FEMA hopes to continue building and maintaining relationships that inform program improvements to help better meet the needs of survivors.

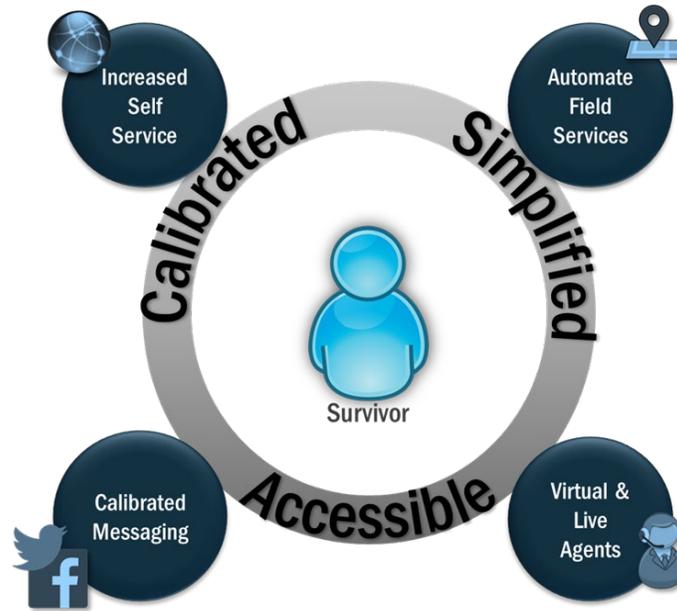


Figure 14: Enhanced Survivor Experience Using Technology

3.6. Question and Answer Section



Question Posed: “Can you share any specific actions taken to address the under-representation of minorities and vulnerable populations in successful applications?”

FEMA Response: A great summary of some specific ways that FEMA is partnering with SBA to advance accessibility can be found at: <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20230103/fema-advances-accessibility-fema-sba-partnership-provides-more-38-million>.



Question Posed: “Were there discussions about interpreter access, especially regarding people who speak lesser used languages?”

FEMA Response Yes. Currently, 95% of our inbound activity is English-speaking. We have that capability covered, but having 5% of the population that needs to communicate with us in other languages is an opportunity for us to continue to evolve and grow. We can currently answer in over 90 languages, utilizing our interpreter services and we are continuing to invest in our bilingual capability. There is an opportunity for us to continue to work on interpreter services and continue to grow that capability. It is a priority for FEMA.



Question Posed: “With survivors directly contacting and registering with FEMA, is the survivor information shared with the states for tracking and data collection, shared in real-time as well?”

FEMA Response: The information can be shared between FEMA and the state upon request and after an adjudication process, but it is not shared in real time.



Question Posed: “One group impacted is older people who are not technologically knowledgeable, especially here in Florida. Many are expecting emails for correspondence when it goes to Direct Administrative Cost (DAC) instead. Also, technology doesn’t work well in the first few weeks of a disaster due to everything being down. How can we also address this in the early stages of a major disaster?”

FEMA Response: We recognize there is still a significant population of survivors out there that need our staff on the ground. That is why we are modernizing our DRCs, where you can not only enhance the way you interface with a FEMA employee face-to-face but also enhance digital capabilities. Through our EAS approach, I think we all realize that we must navigate our own disasters. Whether it is an insurance claim or something else, there are opportunities for us to reach out and make sure that we are explaining our programs to survivors. We continue to do a lot to help survivors who still need to make sure that FEMA has a common presence on the ground face-to-face.



Question Posed: “There had been great success integrating NPSC staff within JFOs and field activities. NPSC staff assisted with case reviews and appeals and helped streamline applicant cases and award financial assistance. Will there be more integration of NPSC staff in 2023?”

FEMA Response: Yes, forward deployment of NPSC staff has been a key feature of EAS, and FEMA will continue to formalize those efforts within the priority related to implementing EAS.



Question Posed: “Being that SBA is an integral part of the IHP process, are similar conversations, upgrades, and survivor experience conversations taking place with them, so assistance is not progressing in one aspect but delayed in others?”

FEMA Response: FEMA collaborates closely with the SBA on several service delivery mechanisms. When a DRC opens, the SBA is co-located with that DRC and sometimes continues to operate out of that same facility after FEMA departs. In some cases, I have seen SBA with many proactive technologies that we would like to see FEMA adopt in terms of dual monitors and other capabilities. In DRCs, SBA also collaborates with FEMA on disasterassistance.gov, which is the entry portal for federal disaster resources, delivered to a partnership across multiple federal agencies.

On the internal side, there is also discussion on how to improve data sharing between the two agencies regarding what authorities can be provided, what can be compensated, and the sequence of delivery necessary. In summary, I would say we are in close coordination with the SBA in terms of identifying initiatives, like direct housing reimagined, where there are potential efficiencies, some of which might require a legislative or statutory change in the way programs interact with each other. FEMA and SBA look to continue that dialogue.



Question Posed: “Why do DRCs operate differently? Tasks and policies seem to change at each DRC?”

FEMA Response: They are different because the communities and survivors they serve have different needs. It is great to have our services tailored to those we serve. On a “rainy day,” DRCs change things a little more than necessary to meet community needs. One of FEMA’s goals is to improve the doctrine about how DRCs operate to drive consistent customer experiences. That is why one of FEMA’s priorities in improving survivor experiences is upgrading survivor’s in-person experience with support from FEMA by assessing and developing DRC and Disaster Survivor Assistance doctrine for operations.



Question Posed: “Do any states still have their own IA program that works with FEMA??”

FEMA Response: There are a few, but building state capacity to offer IA-like programs is an area FEMA is concentrating on.

Next Steps

Thank you for your interest in FEMA's January 2023 Virtual IA Symposium. The recordings from the Virtual IA Symposiums will be posted to

<https://www.fema.gov/assistance/individual/program/webinars>.

The IA Division is committed to providing symposiums that address topics identified as important by the regions and SLTT partners. Please collaborate with your regional partners to identify any topics you would be interested in learning about or presenting to the IA community.

For questions or more information regarding upcoming events, please contact fema-hq-regional-field-coordination@fema.dhs.gov.