

Federal

FEMA Faces Deep Cuts and Layoffs Amid Major Budget Overhaul

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With tornado outbreaks and hurricane season looming, the nation's primary responder to natural disasters, FEMA, is at a crossroads.

President Trump's 2026 budget proposal calls for a \$646 million cut to FEMA, targeting grant programs that the administration says duplicate existing state and federal efforts, while the department, which responds in the aftermath of natural disasters, has lost at least one-third of its staff since Trump's second term began in January.

The financial proposal, which passed in the House of Representatives with a vote of 215-214, eliminates several longstanding programs, such as the Rural Development Community Facilities Grant and Loan Program and the Community Development Block Grant Program, both of which have supported local disaster preparedness and recovery for decades. The administration argues these cuts are necessary to "reduce wasteful and woke FEMA grant programs" and to refocus the agency on "sound emergency management".

However, independent assessments highlight that legislative and coordination challenges, rather than deliberate waste, often drive these redundancies.

The FEMA-related programs and initiatives the administration has specifically targeted for cuts or elimination include:

- **Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program**
This major grant program, designed to help communities prepare for natural disasters like flooding and wildfires, has been fully terminated. All pending and future applications have been canceled, and undisbursed funds are being returned to the federal treasury.
- **National Domestic Preparedness Consortium**
The administration argues this program lacks congressional authorization and duplicates other federal and state efforts, so it is slated for elimination, although it delivers specialized training and technical assistance to emergency responders and local officials to enhance preparedness for terrorism, natural disasters, and other hazards.
- **Targeting Violence and Terrorism Prevention Program**
This program funds initiatives aimed at preventing targeted violence and terrorism through community engagement, education, and intervention strategies. It was cited as “weaponized” by the administration.
- **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**
While not fully eliminated, the administration has stopped automatically approving new allocations under this program and is considering further redesigns and possible cuts, especially for smaller disasters and certain types of events like snowstorms. This program offers post-disaster funding to states and communities to implement long-term hazard mitigation measures that reduce future disaster losses. Research shows that every \$1 invested in disaster mitigation saves up to \$13 in future damages and recovery costs. Cutting these investments will likely increase the long-term economic toll of disasters on families, businesses, and taxpayers.
- **Preparedness Grants Portfolio (unspecified reductions)**
The administration references reducing or consolidating grants within this portfolio, which encompasses a variety of grant programs that support state and local governments in building capabilities to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from emergencies, arguing that state-level programs are better suited for many of these needs.

- Programs and activities related to “equity,” “diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI),” and “multicultural training”

The budget proposal explicitly states it will end funding for activities promoting these priorities within FEMA, including webinars and training sessions. These programs generally ensure disaster response and recovery programs are accessible and effective for all communities, including those historically underserved or marginalized.

Additionally, while not FEMA-specific, the budget also eliminates the following programs that often support emergency management and disaster recovery at the community level:

- Rural Development Community Facilities Grant and Loan Program
Provides loans and grants for community projects, including fire and EMS stations and apparatus.
- Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)
A long-standing program providing financial assistance to state and local governments, including for disaster recovery and resilience.

Many local and rural governments lack the tax base or financial reserves to cover the high costs of disaster response, debris removal, infrastructure repair, and emergency housing, making federal grants essential for immediate and effective action. Federal funding ensures that underserved, rural, and disadvantaged communities can access technical assistance, planning resources, and capacity-building support, helping them overcome barriers to recovery and resilience that wealthier areas might not face.

The budget cuts have been accompanied by an unprecedented reduction in FEMA’s workforce. At least 2,000 of the agency’s roughly 6,100 full-time employees have either left or plan to leave due to waves of terminations and voluntary retirements ordered by the Department of Governmental Efficiency (DOGE), a new office established to streamline federal agencies. These departures represent nearly a third of FEMA’s permanent staff, not including additional reductions expected in the coming months.

The timing of these cuts has alarmed both current and former FEMA officials, as the nation heads into hurricane and wildfire season. FEMA was

already facing a 35% staffing gap in 2022, according to a Government Accountability Office report, and has struggled to keep pace with the growing number and scale of disasters fueled by climate change.

The impact of these staffing reductions is already being felt on the ground.

The Trump administration has recently granted federal disaster assistance through FEMA, but the delays in FEMA presence after floods and tornadoes have left elected officials sounding the alarm.

President Trump approved a major disaster declaration for Kentucky on May 23, 2025, following tornadoes and severe storms on May 16-17. This action made FEMA assistance available to affected individuals in Caldwell, Laurel, Pulaski, Russell, Trigg, and Union counties. Residents can receive grants for temporary housing, home repairs, and other needs not covered by insurance. Disaster Recovery Centers have opened in the affected counties to help survivors apply for aid.

Arkansas' request for federal disaster assistance was initially denied but later approved after an appeal by Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders and direct discussions with President Trump. On May 13, the administration granted a major disaster declaration for the March 14-15 tornadoes, providing FEMA aid for temporary housing, home repairs, and other recovery needs in several counties. However, while individual assistance was approved, some requests for public infrastructure aid were denied, leaving local governments to cover a significant portion of repair costs.

St. Louis and surrounding areas have also received a federal disaster declaration following recent storms. While FEMA funding is available, St. Louis Mayor Cara Spencer has publicly voiced concerns about the timeliness and adequacy of FEMA's response. Local officials worry about whether the aid will be sufficient for long-term recovery.

FEMA has provided disaster aid to North Carolina in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, but the state's request for an extension of 100% federal reimbursement for debris removal was denied. The cost-share reverted to the standard 90% federal and 10% state split, which Governor Josh Stein

says could cost North Carolina taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars and slow recovery efforts. FEMA's decision stands in contrast to previous disasters where 100% cost-share extensions were granted..