



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

Office of Community Services | 330 C Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20201  
[www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs)

## Social Services Block Grant

### Dear Colleague Letter

**DCL#:** SSBG-DCL-2021-05  
**DATE:** October 6, 2021  
**TO:** Social Services Block Grant State and Territory Officials  
**SUBJECT:** Hurricane Ida Response  
**ATTACHMENT(S):** N/A

---

Dear Colleagues,

The purpose of this letter is to remind Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) states and territories of flexibilities and resources available to support response efforts related to Hurricane Ida. The Office of Community Services (OCS) is committed to ensuring the SSBG Network can address the critical needs of people and communities with low incomes, as consistent with the purpose and allowable uses of SSBG.

#### Use of SSBG Funding for Disaster Relief

States impacted by Hurricane Ida — as well as related tornadoes and flooding — include Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. SSBG state offices and local organizations in these states administering SSBG-funded services can serve a critical role in supporting low-income individuals, families, and communities as they recover from the hurricane and related aftermath.

Allowable uses of SSBG funds to deal with crisis situations, particularly with respect to assistance for social services related needs resulting from a natural disaster, include any costs that link to the [five SSBG statutory goals](#) and can be categorized under the 29 SSBG [Uniform Definitions of Services](#).

Unallowable uses of SSBG funds that are not social services related unless otherwise deemed applicable by Congress during a natural disaster:

- Purchase or improvement of land

- Construction
- Major capital improvement
- Most medical care
- Room and board

**NOTE:** SSBG funds may be used for social services including shelter for individuals, *if it is an “integral, but subordinate” part of an authorized social service* as defined in the Uniform Definition of Services. (See Section 2005 (a)(2) and (a)(5) of Title XX at [42 U.S.C. 1397d](#)) This includes use of funds for individuals affected by domestic violence who require “temporary emergency services as a protective measure” as noted in [45 CFR 96](#).

### **Changes to Approved Intended Use Plans**

Grantees may change their program benefits and assistance types throughout the Federal fiscal year to address unexpected natural disasters and other needs. Grantees **must submit a written plan amendment** by letter to the Office of Community Services (OCS); however, such plan amendments will need prior approval. They may be sent within a reasonable time after the disaster and/or plan modification.

### **Eligibility Determination**

When natural disasters occur, funding from the SSBG may be used to assist SSBG states and territories with the emergency assistance. As you know, the process of eligibility for SSBG services is determined by the State. However, States are to ensure that their eligibility criteria follow compliance with Federal requirements for the SSBG program. The SSBG is a flexible funding source that allows states and territories to have broad discretion in the specific services supported with SSBG funds and tailor the use of these funds over time to best meet the needs of their populations.

As noted in [SSBG IM 2021-01 “Flexibilities in the Wake of Hurricane Season,”](#) states may consider circumstances where individuals may have been made low-income by the disaster, including disaster-related unemployment, and may establish appropriate procedures based on individual and family needs. Particularly in situations that may be exacerbated by COVID-19, states are encouraged to review existing procedures and establish emergency procedures, if appropriate, to streamline the eligibility determination process following a disaster.

### **FEMA Resource Page on Emergency Response and Assistance**

The [Federal Emergency Management Agency Visit \(FEMA\)](#) has a resource website related to Hurricane Ida. Please review the content which could be helpful as you respond to Hurricane Ida, particularly as it relates to making sure individuals know how to apply for FEMA disaster assistance. To learn more about the Hurricane Ida response across all federal agencies and what would be helpful to your community, please visit [USA.gov](#).

Thank you for your attention to these matters. OCS looks forward to continuing to provide high-quality services to OCS grantees.

/s/

J. Janelle George

Deputy Director

Office of Community Services