



FEMA Pre-Disaster Mitigation: The Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program

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Changes to Pre-Disaster Mitigation Funding

The federal government has historically provided resources to assist in post-disaster recovery and to reduce future risk. Funding for pre-disaster [mitigation](#) changed significantly with the passage of the [Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018](#); for each [major disaster declaration](#), the President may set aside from the [Disaster Relief Fund](#) (DRF) an amount equal to 6% of the estimated aggregate amount of funding awarded under [seven sections](#) of the [Stafford Act](#). The large amount of disaster assistance associated with the [COVID-19 major disaster declarations](#) has resulted in additional funding for pre-disaster mitigation. As of August 31, 2021, there was [\\$1.637 billion set aside](#) in the DRF for pre-disaster mitigation.

Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities

FEMA introduced a new program in FY2020, the [Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Grant Program](#) (BRIC). In FY2021, a total of [\\$1 billion is available](#) in three categories:

1. State/territory allocation: \$56 million
2. Tribal set-aside: \$25 million
3. National competition: \$919 million

Each state and tribe can apply for up to \$1 million in categories (1) and (2) and may submit an unlimited number of applications in category (3), each valued up to \$50 million. The \$50 million cap for an individual mitigation project represents a significant increase; the largest amount available previously was \$10 million.

The priorities for BRIC in FY2021 are to incentivize

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- natural hazard risk reduction activities that mitigate risk to public infrastructure and disadvantaged communities;
- projects that mitigate risk to one or more [community lifelines](#);
- projects that incorporate [nature-based solutions](#);
- projects that enhance [climate resilience](#); and
- adoption and enforcement of the latest published editions of [building codes](#).

Considerations for Congress

The majority of funding for [hazard mitigation](#) comes from FEMA, which administers three [Hazard Mitigation Assistance](#) (HMA) programs and also funds [Public Assistance](#) mitigation measures funded under Section 406 of the Stafford Act. The 6% BRIC set-aside has increased pre-disaster mitigation funding significantly; however, [post-disaster mitigation still receives far more resources](#). Because the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and PA mitigation funds are only available to states following a major disaster declaration, they cannot be targeted at areas with greater risk of future losses. As a result, disasters determine to a great extent where the federal government invests in disaster resilience, and this may not correlate with the greatest risks.

Any state that has had a major disaster declaration in the seven years prior to the application start date is eligible to apply for BRIC funding. Although all jurisdictions are currently eligible for BRIC due to the [COVID-19 major disaster declarations](#), this may not be the case in future. Restricting pre-disaster mitigation funding to communities that have experienced a recent disaster could preclude communities with a clear risk under a changing climate from receiving funding when that risk has not yet eventuated, which may make it more difficult for locations facing major impacts of climate change to plan ahead. For this reason, Congress may wish to consider whether these requirements should be relaxed.

The increase in funding for pre-disaster mitigation may also lead to challenges in meeting the nonfederal cost share. Generally, BRIC's cost share is 75% federal and 25% nonfederal, but [small, impoverished communities](#) (SIC) are eligible for an increase in cost share up to 90% federal and 10% nonfederal. Many communities may find it [difficult to meet cost share requirements](#), particularly if their resources have been reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In FY2020, [\\$500 million was available](#) for BRIC. The program was oversubscribed, with 53 states and territories requesting over \$3.6 billion. FEMA has selected [406 subapplications for further review](#). BRIC received subapplications from 98 SICs (about 9.89% of the total) in FY2020. FEMA selected projects submitted by 46 SICs for [further review](#) (\$39.2 million in total project costs, about 7.84% of the overall funding available). However, 36 of these projects were selected from the tribal set-aside and 8 from the state allocations, with only 2 projects submitted to the national competition by SICs selected. This suggests that SICs were less successful than their number would suggest, particularly in the national competition.

FEMA intends to promote equity in BRIC FY2021 by prioritizing 40% of funding for disadvantaged communities, in accordance with [E.O. 14008](#) and the [Justice40 Initiative](#). Four of the six BRIC [qualitative evaluation criteria](#) require an explanation of how the project would benefit disadvantaged communities. BRIC also is to reduce the nonfederal cost share from 25% to 10% for [Economically Disadvantaged Rural Communities](#) (EDRC); however, this criterion excludes any community larger than 3,000 people and [may not support many underserved communities](#). In contrast, FEMA's [FY2021 Flood Mitigation Assistance](#) (FMA) program is to identify disadvantaged communities using the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Social Vulnerability Index \(SVI\)](#) at a threshold of 0.7501 or greater as a priority scoring criterion. The [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) (IIJA), as passed by the Senate, would provide a 90% FMA federal cost share for a property that is located in a census tract with a CDC SVI

score of not less than 0.5001 or that serves as a primary residence for individuals with a household income of not more than 100% of the applicable area median income.

Some stakeholders have expressed concern that smaller projects may be less likely to obtain support in BRIC, and disadvantaged communities may not have the capacity to apply for and administer large grants under BRIC. A related area of concern is that states and territories such as Mississippi, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands did not apply for BRIC funding in FY2020, while 57% of the selected competitively awarded projects were from three states (California, Washington, and New Jersey). The smallest federal share of the selected competitively awarded projects was \$1.05 million, with five projects with federal shares over \$30 million selected.

All of the selected competitively awarded projects are from states with statewide building codes. The most heavily weighted technical criteria for FY2021 relate to building code activities, and applications from states without statewide codes may be at a disadvantage.

Author Information

Diane P. Horn
Analyst in Flood Insurance and Emergency Management

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