



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2022.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Category: \_\_\_\_\_

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Executive Summary

During the last two years the County has dealt with the unprecedented in almost every facet of the pandemic. The expansive scale and duration of pandemic response operations has required significant funding from multiple sources to address considerable costs associated with maintaining

**F/A Unit performance metrics:**

- >75% of all eligible expenses submitted to FEMA for review at any point time
- >85% of submitted expenses in a state of final approval by FEMA
- >90% of all FEMA approved expenses submitted to VDEM for final reimbursement

emergency management capacity (e.g., personnel and supplies). Monitoring, tracking, and documenting expenditures, supporting acquisitions and procurement, coordinating across incident response functions and county departments, and obtaining funding from available sources requires a core set of standards and repeatable practices to ensure that eligible funding is accounted for, requested, and received.

One of the nation's largest relief programs, FEMA's Public Assistance program, has been a major source of funding for the last two years. Within the emergency response structure, Arlington County's Emergency Operations Center Finance and Administration Unit prioritized working with the County's Chief Financial Officers, Comptrollers, and Financial Policy experts in the Department of Management and Finance to establish financial rules and accounting standards that provided a disciplined foundation throughout the pandemic. The innovative and proactive work done by the F/A Unit was critical, not just in the volume or the large dollar amounts, but that by following newly established financial procedures and by keeping a repetitive, transparent process, the County was able to leverage programs available and rely less on local tax dollars for emergency operations. These proactive measures not only resulted in over a 95% cost recovery rate but were identified by both FEMA and VDEM as best practices and led to Arlington County being nominated as a local government representative to FEMA on Public Assistance Cost Recovery Advisory Committee. The work performed by the F/A Unit, especially during the most difficult times, has led to the codification of a process and the establishment of a Cost Recovery Strategy that the County can continue to apply going forward.

### OVERVIEW

During the last two years the County has dealt with the unprecedented in almost every facet of the pandemic. County personnel and contract support staff have worked tirelessly to slow the spread of the virus and meet the needs of affected parties by conducting contact tracing; establishing a testing operation for County residents; and providing other means of assistance through feeding programs, isolation and quarantine facilities, and response resource acquisitions and distribution. From establishing logistics and warehouse operations, to setting up testing and vaccine clinics, to the purchase of never before sourced items, the list of resources and operations seem endless.

Within the emergency response structure, Arlington County's Emergency Operations Center Finance and Administration (F/A) Unit ensured that the expenses incurred by the operation are reimbursable through the myriad of Federal grants available for this incident. One of the nation's largest relief programs, FEMA's Public Assistance (PA) program, has been a major source of funding for the COVID Emergency Operations for the last two years. As a grant program, FEMA's PA program offers public-sector emergency response and recovery assistance on a reimbursement basis to state and local governments. Expenses are reviewed to ensure the activities are eligible within the identified categories, and that the costs are reasonable and necessary. Localities must use their own internal accounting and financial principles to account for these expenses and provide the appropriate documentation to receive reimbursement.

Arlington County's F/A Unit has worked with partners at FEMA and VDEM to establish core financial principles and cost recovery measures to ensure that eligible funding comes back to Arlington County. These measures not only resulted in over a 95% cost recovery rate but were identified by both FEMA and VDEM as best practices and led to Arlington County being nominated as a local government representative to FEMA on Public Assistance Cost Recovery Advisory Committee.

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

The expansive scale and duration of pandemic response operations has required significant funding from multiple sources (i.e., federal, state, and local funds) to address considerable costs associated with maintaining emergency management capacity (e.g., personnel and supplies). Monitoring, tracking, and documenting expenditures, supporting acquisitions and procurement, coordinating across incident response functions and county departments, and obtaining funding from available sources requires a core set of standards and repeatable practices to ensure that eligible funding is accounted for, requested, and received.

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Arlington County's F/A Unit prioritized working with the County's Chief Financial Officers, Comptrollers, and Financial Policy experts in the Department of Management and Finance (DMF) to establish financial rules and accounting standards that provided a disciplined foundation throughout the pandemic. Since the County had access to multiple funding streams (e.g., FEMA PA, CAREs, ARPA, other Human Services, and CDC grants), it was imperative that rules were established to differentiate costs between the grants and establish a "source of funding" for each activity. Through the establishment of discrete financial codes, staff were able to track their expenses and projects while DMF and the F/A Unit were able to view costs from multiple streams to avoid duplication of costs and reimbursement claims.

DMF Staff and F/A Unit Staff attended weekly EOC briefings for situational awareness and attended command and general staff meetings to both glean and present relevant financial information related to the operation. This involvement was critical in understanding the scope of the projects that would become FEMA PA projects, as well as sharing financial policies so that all parties involved were aware of the procedures and rules that must be followed. This approach also allowed the F/A Unit and DMF to discuss

the appropriate funding stream, and then apply the specific coding to the purchases, therefore improving the financial accounting involved. The steps outlined above were taken *before* a single FEMA PA project worksheet was established, making it much easier to start the process of identifying projects and eligible

expenses. Once that process began, the F/A team were able to rely on established County practices to determine the eligible costs and submit for reimbursement.

The F/A Unit began working on FEMA project formulation and submission during the late summer of 2020 and one of the keys to the success was setting up a meeting with the FEMA PA liaison and outlining all the technology, tools, and reports that Arlington had access to, and how those would translate to what FEMA required. The team discussed the operations underway and worked at length to ensure the activities that were taking place were all eligible for reimbursement under approved PA categories. The team drafted official memos to have on file outlining these agreements to preserve continuity in the event the team members demobilized during the operation. These proactive steps and the transparent communication throughout the process led FEMA to label Arlington's work "best practice" within the PA program. The clear and concise reporting and documentation also led FEMA to contact Arlington County when they required a quick turnaround to [award funds for emerging vaccine solutions in the early days of 2021](#).

In addition to meeting with FEMA, the F/A Unit took the same approach meeting with team members from Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM). With VDEM serving as the applicant and paying Arlington County as the sub-applicant, it was imperative that the same rapport and documentation exist with all agencies involved in the process. The memos developed with FEMA as well as strong narratives on the activities performed with FEMA PA funding made working with VDEM staff enabled the effective transition of projects from FEMA approval to VDEM payment with minimal to no justified delays.

### Finance & Staffing

- **Expenditures:** No cost. Reimbursed under Public Assistance CAT B
- **Staffing:** 2 FTEs & 2 Contractors. No cost. Reimbursed under Public Assistance CAT B

**No cost anticipated until FY24.**

The F/A Unit leadership, in coordination with EOC leadership, worked to refine the process of ordering and the relationship between the F/A Unit and the Logistics Section. Within Logistics, the Supply Unit has streamlined the F/A Unit's workload by (1) working with requestors to refine and clearly articulate their requirements; (2) tracking and providing PPE distribution information; and (3) anticipating needs and translating those needs in terms of purchasing information. The consistently high closure rate represents a shift away from spot ordering and a successful transition to the data-driven ordering, inventory tracking, and pull-from-stock approaches that the fully activated EOC and Task Force have identified as best practices.

### RESULTS

The F/A Unit's level of organization, attention to detail, data collection and tracking processes, and understanding of costs incurred have allowed the County to ask the "right" clarifying questions and formulate strong rebuttals and responses to FEMA's inquiries related to the PA program. The section's efforts have been successful in part because of a high degree of proactive partner engagement and department responsiveness during PA interviews. The willingness to coordinate information collection within the participating response organizations and the insights they have provided to the F/A Unit have been invaluable to the PA process.

The multi-disciplinary F/A Unit has been able to quickly respond to problems and requests coming into the EOC or Task Force, obtain policy answers and decisions, and develop and implement action plans in a relatively short period of time. These relationships and processes have improved purchasing decisions, supported better allocation of resources, and enabled a more efficient triage of information throughout the pandemic and beyond. Incorporating management-level DMF personnel into F/A Unit allowed the section to function more efficiently because of the immediate access to decision-making authority. Following the initial response period, the combined efforts of the two sections, F/A Unit and Logistics

Section, to revamp the ordering process facilitated consistent achievement of a 95% or higher close out rate on WebEOC requests.

The approach the F/A Unit has taken throughout the pandemic has been:

- Talk with project managers and operations staff to better understand the response in the field
- Communicate the financial procedures to have those activities expensed to the to the correct location
- Regularly review expenses to ensure financial compliance
- Pull all documentation related to expenses
- Develop FEMA Public Assistance Project Worksheet or Amendment (amendment in most cases due to ongoing efforts)
- Submit to FEMA for approval
- Once approved, submit to VDEM for reimbursement

In following this process, the F/A Unit has been able to *maintain* these performance metrics for the entirety of the pandemic:

- >75% of all eligible expenses submitted to FEMA for review at any point time
  - Most expenses are paid by other agencies and continue daily
  - Project formulation to submittal can take 3-4 weeks of staff time, during which time expenses continue to mount and become part of the next round of projects
  - 25% of expenses not actively part of a submitted to FEMA project is very small given those factors
- >85% of submitted expenses in a state of final approval by FEMA
  - This step is out of our control but is influenced by the thoroughness and completeness of the submitted documentation

- Best practice pre-work is responsible for items moving through FEMA in a timely manner
- >90% of all FEMA approved expenses submitted to VDEM for final reimbursement
  - Clear understanding of systems and responsibilities makes the final turnaround time possible
  - Clear and accessible documentation by the F/A Unit made it possible for this number to remain this high throughout the pandemic

In closing, the innovative and proactive work done by the F/A Unit was critical, not just in the volume or the large dollar amounts, but that by following newly established financial procedures and by keeping a repetitive, transparent process, the County was able to leverage programs available and rely less on local tax dollars for emergency operations. This process has ensured that Arlington County has a reimagined process for all-hazards that has been vetted in real-life emergency situations, validated by FEMA and reinforced through the partnership with VDEM. The work performed by the F/A Unit, especially during the most difficult times, has led to the codification of a process and the establishment of a Cost Recovery Strategy that the County can continue to apply going forward.



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