



ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

Office of Community Services | 330 C Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20201  
www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs

## Social Services Block Grant Information Memorandum

**IM#:** SSBG-IM-2021-01  
**DATE:** June 7, 2021  
**TO:** Social Services Block Grantees and Recipients  
**SUBJECT:** SSBG Flexibilities in the Wake of Hurricanes Season  
**ATTACHMENT(S):** N/A

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**PURPOSE:** To remind Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) states and territories of the various flexibilities and resources available to support households impacted by severe hurricanes and/or natural disasters.

**RELATED REFERENCES:** Title XX of the Social Security Act; 45 C.F.R. § 96.70-96.74 (Subpart G)

### Use of SSBG Funding for Disaster Relief

When natural disasters occur, funding from the SSBG may be used to assist SSBG states and territories with the emergency assistance. 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. Through the SSBG, States provide essential social services that help achieve a myriad of goals to reduce dependency and promote self-sufficiency; protect children and adults from neglect, abuse, and exploitation; and help individuals who are unable to take care of themselves to stay in their homes or to find the best institutional arrangements.

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 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

### **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.

### **Health and Mental Health Needs**

Children, families, and social services staff may experience stress and even trauma related to hurricanes and other disasters. Mental health effects can be short-term or long-term. Responses may vary by the individual. Grantees are encouraged to work with local agencies and partners to support health and mental health services. In providing services to newly homeless families and children, impacted adults including those with disabilities and the elderly, SSBG grant agencies and delegate programs should consider ways to assess health and mental health status along with other immediate social service needs. Flexibility in allocating funding to address such needs at the state lead agency level is encouraged, with commensurate guidance encouraged for locally funded agencies.

The following resources are available, at no cost, to assist programs in responding to the natural disaster, as well as preparing for any future emergencies.

- **Coping with Disaster** is a series of tip sheets for adults and children on recognizing stress from an emergency and information on how to address the emotional effects of the event.
- **Psychological First Aid** is an evidence-informed approach for assisting children, adolescents, adults, and families in the aftermath of disaster. The field manual includes handouts for parents, caregivers, as well as children birth to 5.

### **Technical Assistance Consultation**

SSBG program specialist in the Division of Social Services are available to assist states and territories with technical assistance or questions regarding flexibilities. If grantees encounter other barriers responding to individuals and families with low incomes, aside from those included in this DCL, please feel free to reach out to your assigned [SSBG program specialist](#) for consultation.

We hope this information is helpful to you. We have a shared interest in ensuring children and families have what they need during this difficult time and that communities are able to recover quickly. We wish you the best as you provide vital assistance during these disasters.

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