

25 PRO TIPS FOR WORKING WITH FEMA: LESSONS LEARNED THAT WORK

DISASTER LEGAL AID 2018 ROUNDTABLE SERIES

National Disaster
Legal Aid Advocacy
Center

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Discussion by

Sandra Brown,
Directing Attorney
Disaster Legal
Services
Lone Star Legal Aid

Moderated by

Liz Keith, Program
Director

1. **Call FEMA.** Practice advocacy on behalf of your client by checking the status of an application or an appeal. 6:42
2. **Explain to your client that they should ask questions when a FEMA inspector examines the property.** Your client's eligibility, acceptance, or denial will depend on their answer to this question. 9:22
3. **Don't hesitate to question FEMA's determination.** Not all inspectors have a background in adjusting insurance or construction. 11:59
4. **Empower your client to keep appealing.** FEMA's determination is not only about the Individual Assistance. It is also used to determine eligibility for other programs. 13:17
5. **Fax in your appeal.** You have the fax sheet as confirmation that you sent your appeal. 15:32
6. **Never underestimate the relationships you can build in preparation for a disaster.** Community partnerships help in the long-term process, especially in areas that are likely to be affected by disasters. 18:10
7. **For mixed families cases and people with documentation status where a child doesn't have a picture ID, you can submit the child's birth certificate, social security card, and some other form of a document, such as proof of public benefit or a Numident (Numerical Identification System) file from the Social Security Administration.** 19:40
8. **Prep your client for inspection and voluntary withdrawal denials.** Talk to your client about what a FEMA inspection is going to look like. 22:03
9. **You can appeal a voluntary withdrawal denial.** If the client doesn't respond to the FEMA inspector right away, FEMA might send your application back and get a voluntary withdrawal denial. 23:21
10. **Make sure your client estimates the damages so that the damages are not "unknown."** If you say "unknown" for damages, the assistance will be denied. 24:36
11. **Know whether FEMA administers both housing assistance and other needs assistance or if it's through the state.** 26:30

Jeanne Ortiz,
Disaster Response
Legal Fellow

Pro Bono Net

Recording
available at
[www.disasterlegalaid.org/
advocates/](http://www.disasterlegalaid.org/advocates/)

*The National Disaster
Legal Aid Advocacy
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Aid and Pro Bono Net. For
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12. Prepare your clients as you would for any representation. Explain what they should expect from the process. 27:30
13. Get detailed contractor estimates for the damages and take high-quality pictures of everything. 30:23 and 42:17
14. Ask for a Tier II worker if you call in. They are experienced caseworkers. 32:39
15. If you're calling in about a client that needs rental assistance, ask for CHAD (Continued Housing Assistance Department). This is a special group that can help you resolve the issue. 33:20
16. Your client does not need to have a legal title of the home in order to be eligible for home repairs. Encourage clients that do not have legal title to pursue their case. 34:33
17. For shared households, FEMA expects pre-disaster household members to stay together. Under certain circumstances, they can split them up if the disaster caused family members to end up in different locations. 36:15
18. Be aware of what's going on with community partners. Where are the cases going to? 37:25
19. File a consent letter with a photo ID of your client before representing them. You will need to attach this document for everything you send FEMA. 39:09
20. Request a copy of your client's file as soon as you take a case. It's really helpful if your client has access to the online application but that is not always going to be the case. 39:50
21. Talk with caseworkers at FEMA's disaster recovery centers. Let them know what you can do and what the legal issues are. 40:12
22. FEMA can reconsider an appeal decision if there is new evidence. Submit a second appeal if you have new evidence that you believe would change the determination. 44:52
23. Understand denial codes and common reasons that FEMA denies or reduces a claim. 46:15
24. Let people know about other resources such as pro bono associations or state bars so they know where to go when they learn they have a legal issue other than a FEMA appeal. 47:29
25. Visit disasterlegalaid.org/advocates/ for specialized advocacy resources. 52:07