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Texas Innovative Practice – Finance

SUMMARY

This Texas-funded innovative program trains jurisdictions to address disaster-related financial topics such as how to track time and labor, overtime charges, and travel cost processing. Local jurisdictions reported better capabilities in handling Hurricane Harvey-related finances after completing the training.

DESCRIPTION

In 2014, a fertilizer plant explosion devastated the city of West, Texas, killing 15 people and damaging over 500 structures.ⁱ West did not have the capability to manage the complex web of post-disaster financial issues after the incident. To prevent communities from experiencing the same issue again, the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) established the Regional Disaster Finance Program (RDFP) in May 2014 to help local jurisdictions better financially prepare for disasters, promote financial responsibility, and equip jurisdictions with the required tools to track, calculate, and justify the costs of an emergency.^{ii,iii}

RDFP works by offering specialized finance training courses, such as Disaster Accounting 101, to individual jurisdictions at no cost to the jurisdiction other than providing a venue. The course is divided into five flexible modules that can be taken over a period of time depending on jurisdictional needs and timelines. Format for the modules includes face-to-face instruction and outside work assignments. Trainings let jurisdictions address a range of disaster-related financial topics, such as how to track time and labor, address overtime charges, and process travel costs. In addition to the pre-designed courses, TDEM also provides tailored classes or programs to address jurisdiction-specific needs on a case-by-case basis. By the end of the course, jurisdictions will have:

1. Reviewed the accountingsystem;
2. Identified gaps in their jurisdiction's policies and procedures;
3. Established financial standard operating procedures (SOPs)for use in future disasters;
and

4. Exercised their financial SOPs.

In addition to preparing jurisdictions for better disaster-related financial management, TDEM can deploy staff to EOCs during disasters. Jurisdictions that received training before Hurricane Harvey's landfall reported being much more prepared to handle the financial challenges related to the storm than they had been in the past. In the wake of Hurricane Harvey, more jurisdictions have contacted TDEM and expressed interest in the RDFP as they have become aware of the benefits of the program. Additionally, TDEM has identified additional areas where jurisdictions may benefit from additional training, such as debris contract monitoring. Pending additional funding, TDEM hopes to offer specific modules on these additional topics and organize Council of Government (COG)-wide trainings through the RDFP.

REFERENCES

i FEMA, National Preparedness Assessment Division. Stakeholder Interviews with representatives from Texas. September 2018.

i https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/lifestyle/west-texas-after-the-blast/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.5631425686b9

ii TDRF Executive Presentation PowerPoint iii

<https://www.dps.texas.gov/dem/RegDisasterFinance/doc/overview/RegionalDisasterFinanceProgram.pdf>

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