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FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP)

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) provides supplemental grants to private nonprofit and local government organizations to support and expand existing programs that aid individuals and families who are, or are at risk of, experiencing hunger and/or homelessness. The EFSP is typically funded by annual appropriations provided in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act, and occasionally through supplemental appropriations. Recently, the EFSP has been funded to supplement humanitarian relief efforts for migrants encountered by DHS.

Program Authorization

The EFSP was established in 1983 through the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983 (P.L. 98-8), and later authorized under the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (P.L. 100-77), renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. It is codified at 42 U.S.C. §§11331 et seq.

Section 11352 addressed the authorization of EFSP appropriations from 1987 through 1994, via a series of amendments. However, since FY1995, the program has been authorized through the de facto authorization provided by Congress appropriating funds for EFSP's particular activities.

With regard to the EFSP migrant humanitarian relief, the supplemental appropriations bill text directed FEMA to carry out the stated purpose with the funding provided.

Program Structure

National Board: The EFSP is governed by a National Board that, by statute, includes representatives from six private nonprofit organizations: (1) the American Red Cross; (2) Catholic Charities U.S.A.; (3) the Jewish Federations of North America (referred to in statute as the Council of Jewish Federations, Inc.); (4) the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.; (5) the Salvation Army; and (6) United Way Worldwide (referred to in statute as the United Way of America). United Way Worldwide serves as the EFSP National Board's secretariat and fiscal agent, and administers the program day-to-day, along with the Director. The National Board is responsible for establishing program policies, procedures, and guidelines, which vary for different Phases (i.e., grant cycles aligning with each tranche of funding; see **Table 1**), and disbursing the funding as smaller grants.

For the migrant humanitarian relief, the National Board makes the final award determinations and disburses funding directly to awarded organizations.

Director: The National Board is chaired by a Director, which, by statute, is the FEMA Administrator.

Local Board: Each jurisdiction designated for funding must establish a Local Board. Membership mirrors the National Board, and also includes the highest-ranking local government official, a representative who is or was homeless, and a tribal representative (if applicable). Local Boards are responsible for advertising funding availability, setting funding priorities, determining community needs, establishing client eligibility, selecting grant recipients, monitoring recipients' program compliance, and grant reporting.

For the migrant humanitarian relief, Local Boards review funding applications and make recommendations to the National Board on which eligible organizations to fund.

Local Recipient Organizations (LROs): LROs are EFSP grant recipients. They can be local nonprofit, faith-based, or governmental organizations.

Program Funding Award Process

When Congress appropriates funding to the EFSP, FEMA awards the funding as a single grant to the National Board.

To determine a jurisdiction's regular EFSP grant eligibility, the National Board uses a formula that considers population data, poverty data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census's American Community Survey, and unemployment data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Jurisdictions must meet specific criteria to qualify for regular EFSP funding. These criteria may vary for different Phases. For example, per the National Board's website, a jurisdiction could qualify for grants funded by FY2021 annual appropriations if both of the following criteria were met: "300 minimum unemployed [individuals]"; and "unemployment and poverty rates at national average."

EFSP grant award amounts are determined by dividing the available funds by the number of unemployed persons within each qualifying jurisdiction, which creates a per capita rate. In addition, there is a "State Set-Aside" process that allows any jurisdiction (formula-qualified or not) to receive EFSP funding. The National Board allocates a portion of the appropriated funds (e.g., 8% of the EFSP award for the FY2021 annual appropriations) for such purposes based on the unemployment rates in the jurisdictions that do not qualify under the formula. These grants can be used to address pockets of homelessness and poverty or immediate needs. State Set-Aside Committees act as Local Boards to manage those funds.

There is no “national” or “regular” EFSP application process. Instead, LROs are selected by the Local Boards of the jurisdictions designated for funding. The National Board disburses funds directly to LROs recommended by the Local Boards.

For the migrant humanitarian relief, the National Board has directly awarded funding to eligible service organizations via a competitive award processes in which the National Board makes award determinations—rather than formula-based allocations—and prioritizes communities most affected by the humanitarian crisis. The FY2019 supplemental appropriation (i.e., Phase SAHA) set aside \$25 million (83.3%) for southern border state LROs; subsequent tranches of humanitarian relief funding have been available nationwide.

The National Board’s website provides publicly available information on the funded LROs, and jurisdiction-level data on assistance provided (e.g., number of meals provided), and amount spent by fiscal year and Phase.

Eligible Costs

The EFSP program guidance for each Phase details the eligible costs, which include, but are not limited to:

- food (e.g., served meals or groceries);
- shelter services, including mass shelter services, and hotel/motel lodging assistance (up to 90 days);
- rent/mortgage assistance (up to 90 days);
- utility assistance (up to 90 days); and
- necessary equipment (up to \$300 per item).

The above eligible costs were implemented beginning with the FY2021 regular EFSP Phases. There is also specific guidance for each EFSP humanitarian relief Phase. The National Board is not subject to agency rulemaking requirements, and can make program changes via guidance.

EFSP Appropriations

According to the National Board, more than \$5.953 billion has been disbursed through the EFSP in the program’s history. **Table 1** lists the EFSP appropriations for FY2017–FY2022, including funding provided through the annual appropriation process and supplemental appropriations. Phases funding the core EFSP mission through annual appropriations are numbered ordinally, while supplemental and/or humanitarian relief resources have acronyms.

Previous Administrations have, on occasion, proposed transitioning the EFSP and budget authority from FEMA to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or eliminating the EFSP—citing it as being duplicative of HUD’s programs and stating the provision of emergency food and shelter is primarily a state and local responsibility.

The Biden Administration’s FY2023 budget request included \$130 million for the regular EFSP and \$24 million for EFSP humanitarian assistance.

Additional EFSP Resources

- FEMA’s EFSP webpage: <https://www.fema.gov/grants/emergency-food-and-shelter-program>.
- National Board’s EFSP website: <https://www.efsp.unitedway.org/efsp/website/index.cfm>.

Table 1. EFSP Appropriations, FY2017–FY2022

Fiscal Year	EFSP Allocation Phase	Funding Measure	Appropriated Amount (millions)
FY2022	Phase 40	P.L. 117-103 (Div. F, Title III)	\$130
FY2022	HR22 ^a	P.L. 117-103 (Div. F, Title V)	\$150
FY2021	ARPA-R ^b	P.L. 117-2 (Title IV)	\$400
FY2021	ARPA ^c	P.L. 117-2 (Title IV)	\$110
FY2021	Phase 39	P.L. 116-260 (Div. F, Title III)	\$130
FY2020	CARES	P.L. 116-136 (Div. B, Title VI)	\$200
FY2020	Phase 38	P.L. 116-93 (Div. D, Title III)	\$125
FY2019	SAHA ^d	P.L. 116-26 (Title III)	\$30
FY2019	Phase 37	P.L. 116-6 (Div. A, Title III)	\$120
FY2018	Phase 36	P.L. 115-141 (Div. F, Title III)	\$120
FY2017	Phase 35	P.L. 115-31 (Div. F, Title III)	\$120

Sources: CRS Appropriations Status Table; National Board website.

Notes: HR22 = Humanitarian Relief for FY2022; ARPA = American Rescue Plan Act of 2021; CARES = Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act; and SAHA = Supplemental Appropriations for Humanitarian Assistance.

- Phase HR22 funding was appropriated to provide “shelter and other services to families and individuals encountered by [DHS].”
- Phase ARPA-R funding was appropriated for the regular EFSP (i.e., not humanitarian relief), designated by the “-R”.
- Phase ARPA funding was appropriated to provide “humanitarian relief to families and individuals encountered by [DHS].”
- Phase SAHA funding was appropriated to provide “assistance to aliens released from the custody of [DHS].”

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