



Unified Federal Review

Frequently Asked Questions:

Expedited and Unified Interagency Review Process for Compliance with Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation requirements under Federal Law (Unified Federal Review)

1) Q: Under what authority was the Unified Federal Review Process created?

A: The Sandy Recovery Improvement Act of 2013 (SRIA) added Section 429 to the Stafford Act which directs the President to establish an expedited and unified interagency review process by July 29, 2014 for disaster recovery actions. The Unified Federal Review is not specific to Hurricane Sandy and is intended to apply to all Presidentially declared disasters.

2) Q: What is the Unified Federal Review Process?

A: The Unified Federal Review Process is a framework for coordinating Federal agency environmental and historic preservation review for disaster recovery projects associated with Presidentially declared disasters under the Stafford Act.

3) Q: What disaster recovery projects will be included in the Unified Federal Review Process?

A: The Unified Federal Review Process will consider disaster recovery projects to encompass Federal activities, assistance, and projects that begin after the initial stabilization of the incident and reestablish the capabilities necessary to assist communities affected by an incident to recover effectively, including, but not limited to, rebuilding infrastructure systems; providing adequate interim and long-term housing for survivors; restoring health, social, and community services; promoting economic development; and restoring natural and cultural resources. The Federal activities end when the funds appropriated for the recovery have been obligated. This is consistent with the National Disaster Recovery Framework and the Emergency Management Institute's use of the term.

4) Q: What is the purpose of a Unified Federal Review Process?

A: A Unified Federal Review can enhance the ability of the Federal environmental and historic preservation review process to inform and expedite disaster recovery decisions for grant applicants and other potential beneficiaries of disaster assistance, enhance consistency in the review processed across Federal agencies, and assist agencies in better leveraging their resources and tools.



Frequently Asked Questions *continued*:

5) **Q:** Who is leading the development of the Unified Federal Review Process?

A: A Steering Group consisting of the Council on Environmental Quality, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency will be leading the development of the Unified Federal Review Process.

6) **Q:** Who else will be involved?

A: The Steering Group is informed by its working group, which brings together a broader group of Federal agencies that have various roles in disaster recovery and environmental and historic preservation (EHP) expertise to assist in developing the review process. This group of Federal agencies includes those who provide Federal assistance and permits for the implementation of disaster recovery projects and Federal agencies with a regulatory or consultation role in the EHP reviews of such projects. Initially, the Steering Group established three working groups (Policy, Capacity Building and Data/Information Technology) to assist with developing deliverables for the Unified Federal Review. In November 2013, once draft deliverables had been developed by the three working groups, the Steering Group combined the three working groups into one. This working group now meets on a weekly basis and will continue to do so until the Unified Federal Review process is complete. In addition to consulting with their Federal agency counterparts, the Steering Group will seek the views of other stakeholders including Tribal, State, and local governments, and the public.

7) **Q:** How can stakeholders and the public make their views and suggestions on improving disaster recovery efforts known?

A: The Steering Group has announced the Unified Federal Review Process to stakeholders and has solicited their input via email (Federal-unified-review@fema.dhs.gov). A website, available at http://www.achp.gov/unified_federal_review.html, was also created in order to keep stakeholders and the public informed and to allow for comment on the Unified Federal Review effort. In addition, the Steering Group will be conducting webinars in the coming weeks to provide stakeholders with information about the processes being developed and to provide an opportunity for informed input on the development of the Unified Federal Review. Please check the Unified Federal Review website for dates and times.

8) **Q:** How long will it take to complete the development of the Unified Federal Review Process?



Frequently Asked Questions *continued*:

A: The Sandy Recovery Improvement Act of 2013 (SRIA) includes the requirement to complete the Unified Federal Review Process 18 months of enactment SRIA. On January 29, 2013, President Obama signed SRIA into law (P.L. 113-2).

9) Q: How will the Unified Federal Review Process impact Sandy recovery efforts?

A: The Sandy Rebuilding Task Force, led by HUD Secretary Donovan, is addressing environmental and historic preservation review as part of their overall work to expedite and facilitate Federal assistance to advance long term rebuilding efforts following Hurricane Sandy. The Unified Federal Review Steering Group plans to support and learn from the Sandy recovery effort.

10) Q: Will the development of the Unified Federal Review Process impact other on-going disaster recovery activities?

A: The Unified Federal Review Process will develop new and compile existing procedures and methods to improve the timely and efficient review of Federal disaster recovery activities. Those procedures and methods will be highlighted and disseminated as they become available. We expect they will be used on an on-going basis.

11) Q: How is the Unified Federal Review Steering Group aligning its activities with other national initiatives focused on expediting the federal review and permitting processes?

A: The Unified Review Steering Group is coordinating its work with that of other interagency working groups, such as the Federal Infrastructure Permitting and Review Process Improvement working group and the Hurricane Sandy Task Force, in instances where the efforts of these various groups are focused on similar or related topics and issues. Such coordination is intended to help our group leverage existing efforts being undertaken by others, avoid redundant efforts across the various groups, and keep our focus on environmental and historic preservation compliance.

12) Q: What are the expected outcomes and deliverables of the Unified Federal Review Process?

A: The Unified Federal Review Process will formalize the unification/standardization of the environmental and historic preservation (EHP) regulatory requirements so that agencies can take advantage of the same mechanisms to streamline similar types of disaster recovery projects. To do this, standards and guidance for Federal agencies are being developed on unifying the EHP review process and a one stop shop of information and resources for EHP information (for both Federal agencies and external facing (applicants)) will be provided.



Frequently Asked Questions *continued*:

In addition, inter-agency agreements in order to formalize roles and responsibilities and commitments for the Unified Federal Review are being developed. Deliverables that support the continued development of the natural and cultural resource recovery support function of the National Disaster Recovery Framework are also being developed since this is a critical coordinating function to ensure the success of Unified Federal Review.

13) Q: Will projects that don't respond to a Presidentially declared disaster also benefit from the work of the Unified Federal Review Process?

A: The processes, tools, and protocols developed as part of the Unified Federal Review may have applicability during the environmental and historic preservation review of projects responding to other projects that require expedited attention - such as those associated with disasters that are not Presidentially declared. As these improvements to the environmental and historic preservation review processes are developed, those with applicability beyond Presidentially declared disasters will also be shared with tribal, state, local, and Federal agencies that may benefit from them.

14) Q: There have been several Presidentially declared disasters since development of the Unified Federal Review Process began, is the process available for on-going disaster recovery efforts?

A: As part of the development of the Unified Federal Review, the Steering Group has engaged with Federal employees currently assisting with disaster recovery efforts throughout the country. These Federal disaster recovery employees are already working to fulfill the goals of unifying Federal EHP reviews and expeditiously addressing potential project delays. In fact, the most efficient processes and review methods from current disaster recovery efforts are being used to create some of the processes, tools, and protocols under development for the Unified Federal Review Process.