MECA Two-Day Seminar: FEMA Public Assistance for Electric Cooperatives

DoubleTree By Hilton Hotel, One Wenonah Park Place, Bay City, MI 48708

October 20–21, 2026

Day 1 — Managing Active Grants & Protecting FEMA Funding

Registration & Breakfast 8 a.m. – 9 a.m.

Opening Keynote (9 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.) — 20 minutes

Welcome and opening remarks setting the stage for the two-day program. The keynote will address the importance of disaster preparedness and federal funding readiness for Michigan's electric cooperatives.

Block 1 — FEMA Fundamentals (9:20 a.m. – 9:50 a.m.) — 30 minutes

Presenter: Danielle Aymond, Of Counsel, Baker Donelson

An introduction to the goals and objectives of the two-day seminar. This session orients attendees on what to expect, lays the foundation for both days, and provides a high-level overview of FEMA's role in disaster recovery for electric cooperatives.

Topics include:

- The purpose of this Seminar – why now, why you, why here
- Seminar goals, learning objectives, and structure
- FEMA organizational structure
- The roles played by the State, applicant, and FEMA in Public Assistance program administration
- Key terminology and concepts attendees will encounter throughout both days

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Activity (9:50 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.) — 10 minutes

Block 2 — Understanding Disasters and the FEMA Public Assistance Program (10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.) — 1 hour

Presenter: Erin Greten, Of Counsel, Baker Donelson

A deep dive into FEMA processes and the FEMA Public Assistance program structure, including eligible applicants, eligible work categories, cost documentation requirements, and key program rules that govern how cooperatives access and manage federal disaster assistance.

Topics include:

- Program structure and eligible applicant categories
- Categories of eligible work (Categories A–G)
- Management Costs (Category Z)
- Cost documentation requirements and eligible cost principles
- Key program rules: cost reasonableness, insurance considerations, and time limitations
- Program resources

Morning Break (11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.) — 15 minutes

Block 3 — Conversation: FEMA Reform and the State of Rural Electric Recovery (11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.) — 1 hour

Speakers: Danielle Aymond, Of Counsel, Baker Donelson, and Kelli Phillips, Regulatory Affairs Director, NRECA

A timely conversation with Danielle Aymond and Kelli Phillips of NRECA on the national FEMA reform discussion and its practical implications for rural electric cooperatives. Drawing on NRECA's recent comments to the Department of Homeland Security, this session will examine how reforms aimed at strengthening preparedness, response, and recovery—and reducing administrative burden—must also protect the unique operating realities of rural electric cooperatives and the communities they serve.

Topics include:

- The current FEMA reform landscape and why it matters to electric cooperatives
- NRECA's priorities for strengthening preparedness, response, and recovery while reducing administrative burden
- The need for reforms tailored to rural electric cooperatives and disaster-stricken rural communities
- How FEMA assistance affects affordability, resilience, and recovery for cooperative consumer-members

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Lunch Break (12:15 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.) — 1 hour

Block 4 — Current Project Compliance (1:15 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.) — 1 hour

Presenter: Erin Greten

Instruction on managing active FEMA Public Assistance projects, including ongoing compliance obligations, best practices, common pitfalls encountered by utilities administering open grants, and tips and tricks for becoming compliant.

Topics include:

- Managing active FEMA projects: timelines, milestones, and reporting
- Compliance obligations for open grants
- Documentation best practices for project worksheets and cost tracking
- Environmental & Historic Preservation
- Common pitfalls and findings for utilities
- Coordination with FEMA and the State during project execution

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Block 5 — Audit Proofing: How to Keep Your Funding (2:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.) — 1 hour

Presenters: Tom Barnard, Shareholder, Baker Donelson

A practical session on how the federal government audits FEMA Public Assistance grants, what triggers an audit, and how electric cooperatives can be ready to defend their funding. This block covers the role of the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG), audit procedures, and proactive steps cooperatives can take to maintain compliance and protect awarded funds.

Topics include:

- How federal audits work: OIG audit methodology and triggers
- Common audit findings for electric cooperatives and utilities
- Building and maintaining audit-ready files
- Strategies for responding to adverse findings and recommendations to disallow funds
- Practical tips for protecting your cooperative's funding
- Worst case scenarios – explaining suspension, debarment, and criminal risk

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Afternoon Break (3:15 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.) — 15 minutes

Block 6 — Appeals & Arbitrations (3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.) — 1 hour

Presenter: Danielle Aymond

Guidance on navigating FEMA's administrative processes when disputes arise, including the appeals process, arbitration procedures, and strategies for protecting cooperative interests when FEMA issues adverse determinations.

Topics include:

- What is a denial?
- Overview of the FEMA appeals process (First and Second Appeals)
- Arbitration: eligibility, procedures, and strategy
- Building a strong administrative record
- Common grounds for appeal and arbitration
- Strategies for protecting cooperative interests throughout the process

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Block 7 — Project Closeout (4:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.) — 30 minutes

Presenter: Erin Greten

Best practices and requirements for closing out FEMA Public Assistance projects, including final documentation, financial reconciliation, and lessons learned that cooperatives can apply to future disaster events.

Topics include:

- Closeout requirements and timelines
- Final documentation and record reconciliation
- Reconciling costs with approved project worksheets
- Retaining records post-closeout
- Lessons learned and continuous improvement

Day 1 Adjourn (5:00 p.m.)

Hospitality Room 5 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Wenonah Suite

Day 2 — Predisaster Readiness

Breakfast – 8 a.m. – 9 a.m.

Block 1 — Disaster Declarations (9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.) — 1 hour

Presenter: Erin Greten

An overview of disaster types most relevant to electric cooperatives in Michigan and discussion of the federal and state disaster declaration process and its implications on Public Assistance eligibility.

Topics include:

- Types of disasters affecting Michigan electric cooperatives (fire, ice, wind, flooding)
- The Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA) process
- Federal disaster declarations: request, evaluation, recommendation, and decision
- Thresholds and per-capita indicators
- Utility support to the process
- Appeals
- State coordination with FEMA
- Implications for Public Assistance eligibility and program access

Block 2 — Building Your Disaster-Ready Playbook (10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.) — 1 hour

Presenter: Danielle Aymond

Pre-disaster planning and organizational readiness for electric cooperatives. This session covers the documentation systems, internal protocols, and operational steps cooperatives should have in place before a disaster strikes to ensure smooth access to FEMA funding and efficient recovery operations.

Topics include:

- Pre-disaster planning: policies, procedures, and organizational readiness
- Documentation systems and record-keeping protocols
- Establishing procurement and contracting frameworks in advance
- Internal communication and coordination plans
- Designating personnel and responsibilities for disaster response
- Leveraging MECA resources and mutual support

☕ **Morning Break (11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.) — 15 minutes**

Block 3 — Procurement Compliance (11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.) — 1 hour

Presenter: Erin Greten

Detailed instruction on federal procurement standards applicable to FEMA-funded projects under 2 C.F.R. Part 200, including contract requirements, methods of procurement, common audit findings related to procurement, and how cooperatives can structure compliant procurement processes.

Topics include:

- Federal procurement standards under 2 C.F.R. Part 200 (the "Uniform Rules")
- Methods of procurement: micro-purchase, small purchase, sealed bids, competitive proposals, and noncompetitive procurement
- Required contract provisions (2 C.F.R. § 200.326)
- Ethics: Standards of conduct and conflict of interest requirements (2 C.F.R. § 200.318)
- Common procurement audit findings and how to avoid them
- Procurement file documentation and retention

🍽 **Lunch Break (12:15 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.) — 1 hour**

Block 4 — Panel Discussion: Case Studies from MECA Member Cooperatives (1:15 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.) — 1 hour

Moderator: Danielle Aymond

Panelists:

- **Allan Ber**, Presque Isle Electric & Gas Cooperative (PIEG)
- **Denne Smith**, Great Lakes Energy Cooperative

A panel featuring representatives from MECA member cooperatives presenting real-world case studies from their FEMA Public Assistance project experiences. Panelists will share practical lessons, challenges encountered, and successful strategies from actual disaster recovery efforts.

Topics include:

- Real-world FEMA project experiences from Michigan cooperatives
- Challenges encountered during the PA process and how they were resolved
- Documentation and compliance lessons learned

- Practical advice for cooperatives navigating FEMA for the first time
- Q&A with panelists

Block 5 — Mutual Aid (2:15 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.) — 30 minutes

Presenter: Erin Greten

An overview of mutual aid agreements among electric cooperatives, reimbursability of mutual aid costs under FEMA Public Assistance, and best practices for documenting mutual aid activities to ensure federal funding eligibility.

Topics include:

- What is mutual aid and how does it work for electric cooperatives?
- FEMA's treatment of mutual aid costs under the PA program
- Mutual aid agreement requirements and best practices
- Documenting mutual aid activities: timesheets, equipment logs, and cost tracking
- Coordination with neighboring cooperatives and statewide mutual aid networks

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Afternoon Break (2:45 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.) — 15 minutes

Block 6 — Hazard Mitigation (3:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.) — 30 minutes

Presenter: Danielle Aymond

An introduction to FEMA Hazard Mitigation programs, including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, with a focus on eligibility criteria and how electric cooperatives can leverage mitigation funding to reduce future risk and build long-term resilience.

Topics include:

- Overview of FEMA Hazard Mitigation programs (HMGP and BRIC)
- Eligibility for electric cooperatives
- Types of mitigation projects applicable to utility infrastructure
- Application process and cost-share requirements
- Leveraging mitigation funding to reduce future disaster costs

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Block 7 — Wrap-Up & Open Q&A (3:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.) — 30 minutes

Presenters: Danielle Aymond & Erin Greten

Closing remarks summarizing key takeaways from both days, followed by open Q&A for attendees to raise specific questions related to their cooperative's circumstances, upcoming projects, or compliance concerns.

Topics include:

- Summary of key takeaways from Day 1 and Day 2
- Available resources and next steps for MECA members
- Open question-and-answer session
- Closing remarks

Day 2 Adjourn (4:00 p.m.)