



What We Heard
**Financial Assistance for
Emergency Response and
Recovery Costs Guidelines –
external engagement**

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Background and context

The Financial Assistance for Emergency Response and Recovery Costs Guidelines (Financial Guidelines) assist First Nations and local authorities in British Columbia to understand eligibility, processes and documentation required for reimbursement of emergency response and recovery costs.

The Financial Guidelines were last updated in 2008. In 2022, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) committed to a collaborative process to update the Financial Guidelines to:

- Reflect the new legislation - the Emergency and Disaster Management Act
- Reduce administrative work for communities and EMCR
- Improve clarity, ease of use and consistency in how guidelines are interpreted
- Provide clearer guidance on eligible costs during response and recovery phases

In the fall of 2025, EMCR invited First Nations and local authorities to participate in conversations and/or a survey on proposed updates to the Financial Guidelines. We sincerely thank all participants for their time and valuable expertise.

Engagement summary

EMCR held three virtual engagement sessions between October 2 and 15, 2025. These were attended by 184 individuals, representing 34 First Nations and 75 local authorities. A survey was also made available for those who could not attend sessions or wanted additional time to review the proposed updates. The survey was open from October 1 to 17, 2025 and received 38 responses.

What we heard

Contractor rates

The ministry outlined that it is considering a rate cap on non-professional contractors and that, in locations where contractors cannot be found under that rate, evidence of three quotes for higher rates would be required to approve exceeding the rate cap.

The ministry heard from First Nations and local authorities that this would be difficult to implement, especially in rural and remote communities. Respondents indicated that smaller communities often do not have three contractors offering a service in the area. It was also noted that a rate cap likely wouldn't work across the whole province as the cost of contractors varies significantly by region based on cost of living, competition (including private sector such as oil & gas companies), and other market factors. Some respondents noted concerns that a rate cap would result in hiring contractors primarily on their rate without consideration of experience, quality, and effectiveness. Others highlighted the potential for delays in response while waiting to get an approved contractor in place.

Some suggestions for how the ministry could consider this going forward included:

- Developing additional lists of pre-qualified contractors
- Exploring rate caps based on regions
- Adjusting rate caps annually to keep up with costs

Some respondents noted that there are many types of contractors, and it would need to be clear what “non-professional” means.

Blue Book Equipment Rental Rate Guide

EMCR outlined that we intend to continue to use the Blue Book Equipment Rental Rate Guide (Blue Book) for equipment costs. For situations where the equipment couldn't be sourced within the rates provided, the community will be required to show documentation of a three-quote process.

Most of the feedback regarding Blue Book rates concerned situations where the equipment wasn't captured in the Blue Book, such as sandbag machines. Participants wanted clarity on how these items are captured.

Several respondents noted that the Blue Book is not an easy to access document, that it is not available online and costs money to access.

Rural and remote respondents shared that using the Blue Book rate isn't always feasible for them and that an alternative approval method would be required. They also shared that there are not always three providers in the area to provide quotes, so an exception to a three-quote process would be needed.

Similar to contractor rates, respondents suggested that EMCR could develop pre-qualified lists of suppliers to support quick procurement during emergencies.

Buy vs. rent

EMCR outlined that we are exploring the cost-effectiveness of allowing First Nations and local authorities to buy equipment instead of renting it for responding to an emergency event. Buying would require additional documentation to show that it is more cost effective, and the community would be responsible for any ongoing costs related to maintenance, upkeep and storage of the equipment. We wanted to know what type of equipment was likely to have a business case for buying instead of renting, and what communities would need to be able to demonstrate the cost effectiveness.

We heard resounding support for allowing for equipment to be bought instead of rented. Participants explained that, especially in more rural areas, equipment may not be available nearby for rent and must be ordered from larger cities often with long delivery timelines and at a higher cost than purchasing. Suggestions for cost-effective equipment purchases included:

- Generators
- Heaters
- Air scrubbers
- Air conditioners
- Pumps
- Printers
- Temporary signage

Participants also expressed some areas for EMCR to consider when implementing this idea. Participants had questions around timing, and how far out, or close to the emergency the purchase could be made. Concerns were raised regarding long-term storage of these items. Participants also wondered if they would be able to purchase the item again in the future when it is at the end of its useful life.

Participants suggested that communities could demonstrate that they've had to rent the same type of equipment several times in the previous five years as part of their documentation.

Standby

EMCR outlined that we are proposing to make standby eligibility clearer. We are proposing that standby costs are eligible only in situations where the community has a standby policy that links standby to specific roles, identified/imminent/forecasted hazards and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) response levels. Standby would require pre-approval by the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Center (PREOC) to be eligible for reimbursement.

We heard resounding support for this idea from attendees. Some suggested that standby would help save on costs overall, as previously communities have had to fully staff EOCs in the absence of eligibility for standby.

Participants indicated that having EMCR provide samples of policies would be helpful. They would like guidance on what factors should be considered in a policy and timelines for how this would be approved in advance of an emergency.

Participants also shared that EMCR should consider how this may be implemented when it comes to leveraging staff from other communities via resource requests as well as how it might work when communities take part in a Multijurisdictional Emergency Management Organization (MJEMO).

Backfilling roles

EMCR outlined that we want to clarify which costs are eligible when backfilling roles.

The majority of feedback that we heard related to backfilling was that it is challenging to do, as there are not always others in the organization with the knowledge, skills and time to backfill positions. Several participants outlined that it's easier to find people to fill positions in the EOC than to backfill non-EOC staff and that this issue was not a focus for them.

The main area where participants suggested clarifying is backfilling in recovery. Respondents expressed a need to consider backfilling roles into the recovery phase and clarifying whether overtime during recovery is an eligible expense.

Transitioning from response into recovery

Our engagement asked how we could better clarify which costs are eligible for reimbursement where response and short-term recovery overlap.

Respondents noted having mixed experiences with recovery and expressed confusion and frustration with navigating reimbursements during response into recovery. Several participants described situations where EMCR response and recovery staff had different opinions on what costs were eligible. Some specific examples included: danger tree assessments, danger tree removal, geotechnical work and debris removal. They wanted to see a list of items that are clearly eligible for reimbursement during the overlap of response and short-term recovery.

Participants indicated they would like to submit all of their expenditure authorization forms (EAFs) and financial claims (response and recovery related) as a single submission and not to deal with two different teams/systems. They suggested one point of contact within EMCR.

As with backfilling roles, participants noted that financial claims work continues into recovery and that financial recovery officers should be eligible to help support processing and reimbursement for costs both in response and recovery.

Some participants had only ever considered recovery to consist of support through Disaster Financial Assistance (DFA) and wanted to see clearer documentation of the recovery process from short-term through to long-term recovery.

Participants from regional districts highlighted issues with current language around “work on private property” not being eligible and outlined that most land in regional districts is either private or crown. They suggested costs for activities focused on the safety of the public should be eligible for reimbursement regardless of the land ownership.

Participants from First Nation governments noted that they'd like to see eligibility for recovery related items for activities occurring on their traditional territory, not just on reserve land.

Expenditure authorization form improvements

EMCR is looking at creating a new online form for submitting expenditure authorizations. We asked participants what we need to consider when creating this form and how we can make expense authorizations more straightforward.

Participants were excited about the idea of an online form. Several features were suggested including:

- Allow duplication/copying from previous forms to avoid re-entering the same information
- Tracking of the submission to see where its at in the approvals process
- Auto-generated email of submission including a copy and a timestamp of when it was received
- Integration with WebEOC
- Ensuring space to capture situational information, not just the costs of items
- Ability to extend or add to a previously approved expenditure authorization
- One EAF for multiple expenditures, instead of one per expenditure type
- An “other” category for capturing anything not captured in drop-down sections
- Digital submissions with a check box equivalent to a digital signature
- Keep the “not to exceed” field as the actual costs are not always known

Participants from rural and remote communities requested that EMCR still allow manual submissions for forms in case of internet connectivity issues.

Several participants highlighted that an EAF is not required and that the Financial Guidelines should explain this clearly. They suggested that if the Financial Guidelines are clear, communities should be confident about what expenditures will be reimbursed. They outlined that EAFs should be for extraordinary approvals only.

Many participants highlighted that these authorizations need to be made quickly and urged EMCR to prioritize reviewing EAFs and responding to communities.

Emergency operations center costs

EMCR presented a potential idea that would involve developing a formula to capture EOC costs such as salaries, overtime, meals and basic operating expenses. This would reduce the administrative burden of tracking and itemizing these costs. The term used was “EOC in a Box”. EMCR was seeking early feedback on if and how this idea should be explored.

Participants had mixed feedback on this idea with some communities indicating that a formula for EOC reimbursements would be welcome if it was calculated thoughtfully, while others opposed the idea.

Those who were uncomfortable with the proposal had the following feedback:

- Concerns that the formula would not cover all costs and the community would not be fully reimbursed
- Difficulties with developing a formula that worked for the whole province

Some suggested that a formula could work for more simple situations. However, for longer, more complex EOC activations lasting multiple days or with multiple events, a formula wouldn't be suitable. Others thought that certain costs could be captured, such as meals, but that salaries would be difficult due to regional differences.

Others suggested that instead of using a formula, EMCR could reduce administrative burden by not requiring itemized tracking of all costs. EMCR could instead require Chief Financial Officer-signed financial claims for total amounts without detailed documentation and perform spot audits for compliance.

Another suggestion was to move forward with the EOC in a Box but allow communities to opt into using the formula or providing itemized tracking of costs if they'd prefer.

Other topics

Participants brought up other areas of the Financial Guidelines that they find unclear or could be improved:

- Provide a clear list of definitions
- Better outline how reimbursement works and eligible costs for mutual aid and intra-agency agreements
- Integrate all the separate policies that aren't in the current Financial Guidelines such as extreme cold
 - Related to this, a desire to have extreme heat included
- Clarify and reduce the documentation required for financial claims
- Ensure EMCR staff are trained consistently so approvals are consistent across the province

Next steps

EMCR intends to roll out updated Financial Guidelines including training webinars and supporting materials to First Nations and local authorities in February 2026.

The updated Financial Guidelines are anticipated to be implemented March 1, 2026.



Ministry of
Emergency Management
and Climate Readiness