

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR FSM NATIONALS STRANDED DUE TO COVID-19 TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS - November 10 Update

INSTRUCTIONS TO SUPPORT APPLICATION FORMS

I. Introduction

On January 30, 2020 the FSM President declared a Health Emergency and imposed restrictions on travelers' originating in COVID-19 affected countries which in turn affected FSM citizens who were travelling abroad for various reasons (i.e. health emergency, completion of overseas employment, vacation and relocating back to the FSM etc). Further to the Health Emergency, on March 25 FSM completely shut down its borders in each State to eliminate the risk of COVID-19 from entering.

As a result, there are a number of FSM citizens who found themselves stranded in transit on their way home. Thus, the FSM National Government has agreed to provide 'initial' assistance to FSM citizens who have been stranded abroad due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. This financial assistance is to provide some relief to travelers who have had to incur extraordinary costs due to being stranded but it is not meant to cover 100% of their costs. Further assistance may be granted depending on travel lockdown extension and funding availability.

A stranded FSM citizen must complete an application form and provide all the relevant details to support their application (main applicant and family members) for financial assistance.

II. Entitlement

The entitlement is as follows:

- \$1,000 per single adult application (18 years or older)
- \$1,500 per family application - 'family' can mean adult couple, adult plus dependent(s) or adult couple plus dependent(s)

Initially, this is a one-off payment but the President, if the lockdown continues, may decide to make additional payments. When approved by the President, any additional round of payment would not require another round of applications, but would utilize information on the initial approved applications, Payment methods for any additional round of disbursement will be in the same amounts to each individual and family.

Exceptions can be made, based on verifiable medical needs, and subject to Task Force approval, whereby limited additional funding can be provided.

III. Who can file an application?

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

- 1) FSM citizens only
- 2) Relocating citizens: booking and travel from originating destination **started prior** to Health Emergency Declaration affected flights to the FSM
- 3) Returning citizens: whose travel originated from the FSM and they were returning to the FSM but upon return the citizen was stranded in transit on the way back to FSM.
- 4) Those who have received financial assistance through other US Federal, FSM National or insurance programs may not be eligible. Each case will be individually considered and cross-checked through official channels.

IV. Where can applications be lodged?

Applications can be found on the DOFA website www@dofa.gov.fm or be collected from the Consulate Offices on Hawaii and Guam.

Applications and supporting documents can be lodged online to covid19stranded@dofa.gov.fm. Applicants must ensure there is sufficient information on the application form so DOFA can make an eligibility determination or can follow up with the applicant if more information is required.

Applications can also be lodged at the consulate based in Hawaii and Guam. If the applicant requires personal assistance, staff at each Consulate will assist with the completion of application forms and scanning of relevant documentation.

V. Disbursement approval procedure

A. REVIEWING AND APPROVING OFFICIAL:

1. The Secretary of Finance & Administration or designee will review all documentation sent via the official email or through from the Consulate Offices.
2. Once satisfied that all information is in order, the Secretary of Finance or designee will determine whether the application is eligible.
3. Should the information provided be insufficient, then the Secretary of Finance or designee may request further information from the applicant.
4. In cases, where the Secretary or designee deems that the application does not qualify then they will notify the applicant of the decision. The applicant can appeal the decision by notifying DOFA in writing why they disagree with the determination.

B. DOCUMENTATION:

1. A completed application form. One form per family unit.
2. Traveler(s) **MUST** provide a copy of the passport biopage for the main applicant and each family member included under the application.
3. Traveler(s) **MUST** provide a copy of the itinerary receipt/ticket for the main applicant and each family member included under the application; or
4. For Medical patient who travelled on a one-way ticket they will need to provide a medical clearance that treatment is complete and they can return home; or
5. For those returning to employment, provide a copy of leave approval or evidence from employer on expected return date to work; and
6. Traveler(s) **MAY** provide any other documentation they deem appropriate to support their application.

The FSM Government reserves the right to request further information should the need arise. The waiver of any of these documentation requirements for funerals, or medical related travel is at the discretion of the Stranded Citizen Fund Administrator.

Where an applicant has had the assistance of a Consulate Office to complete and send the form to DOFA, the signature of the Consulate Officer will be deemed as confirmation that a citizen is genuinely stranded and qualifies for the assistance.

VI. Payment procedure

The applicant will designate in the main application form which payment method they prefer i.e. cash check through Consulate, direct deposit to Bank of Guam account or direct deposit to Bank of FSM account. For those who do not have access to their own bank account while overseas and cannot get to the nearest consulate or embassy they may designate a relatives account or request a wire transfer.

Cash check through Consulate

1. Upon approval of the request, Secretary of Finance & Administration or designee will prepare a cover letter addressed to the Consulate Head of Mission and cc to the Assistant Secretary of Finance (Division of Treasury) listing the claimant names and the total amount payable to the main applicants for each application.
2. The cover letter will inform the Assistant Secretary of Finance (Division of Treasury) to process one check amounting to the total listing payable to the appropriate Consulate office. Treasury will then deposit the approved amount into the FSM Consulate Offices operation account for further disbursements to the appropriate recipients.

3. The same cover letter will also inform the Consulate Office the name of the claimant(s) with one check to be issued for each family unit.
4. Approved staff of the Consulate Office will contact claimants when checks are available for collection. The cover letter will be used as the signature registry for each claimant to sign upon presentation of passport ID and collection of their check.
5. As soon as all checks have been issued, the Consulate Office must provide to the Assistant Secretary of Finance (Division of Treasury) a scanned copy of:
 - a. Completed signature registry
 - b. Copy of checks issued to each claimant
6. Upon receipt of the information listed above, Treasury will enter all check details into Fundware.

Direct deposit to Bank of Guam or Bank of FSM

1. Upon approval of the request, Secretary of Finance & Administration or designee will prepare a cover letter addressed to the Bank of FSM/Guam and cc to the Assistant Secretary of Finance (Division of Treasury) listing the claimant names, bank account details and the total amount payable to the main applicants for each application.
2. The cover letter will inform the Assistant Secretary of Finance (Division of Treasury) to process one check amounting to the total listing payable to the appropriate Bank. Treasury will then deposit the approved amount to the Bank to deposit in the recipient's bank account (as provided).
3. The bank must provide a stamped receipt/deposit slip for each deposit to confirm the name, account number and amount deposited.
4. Approved staff of Treasury must contact claimants when checks have been deposited with a scanned copy of the deposit receipt.

VII. CONTACT DETAILS

Should there be any queries relating to this Finance Assistance package please contact COVID19stranded@dofa.gov.fm or your nearest Consulate.