

Hurricane Milton – Initial Disaster Assistance and Recovery Response



Inspection Report

Report 25-20

July 2, 2025



Make a Difference

To report fraud, waste, or mismanagement, contact the U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Inspector General Hotline at <https://www.sba.gov/oig/hotline>. You can also write to the U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Inspector General, 409 Third Street, SW (5th Floor), Washington, DC 20416. In accordance with the Inspector General Act of 1978, codified as amended at 5 U.S.C. §§ 407(b) and 420(b)(2)(B), confidentiality of a complainant's personally identifying information is mandatory, absent express consent by the complainant authorizing the release of such information.

NOTICE:

Pursuant to the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Public Law 117-263, Section 5274, any nongovernmental organizations and business entities identified in this report have the opportunity to submit a written response for the purpose of clarifying or providing additional context as it relates to any specific reference contained herein. Comments must be submitted to AIGA@sba.gov within 30 days of the final report issuance date. We request that any comments be no longer than two pages, Section 508 compliant, and free from any proprietary or otherwise sensitive information. The comments may be appended to this report and posted on our public website.



U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hurricane Milton – Initial Disaster Assistance and Recovery Response (Report 25-20)

What OIG Reviewed

This report presents the results of our inspection of the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) initial disaster assistance response to Hurricane Milton.

On October 9, 2024, Hurricane Milton made landfall on the west coast of Florida near Siesta Key in Sarasota County. It generated over a dozen deadly tornados and life-threatening storm surges. The President declared the hurricane a disaster on October 11, which authorized SBA to provide assistance through its disaster assistance loan program.

Our objective was to assess SBA's initial response to Hurricane Milton, including staffing, loan application volume, response time to applicant queries, and timeliness of disaster loan approval.

We visited seven recovery centers to observe SBA's operations and interactions with survivors, interviewed program officials, and reviewed applicable laws, regulations, and training guidance. We also reviewed disaster loan application processing data and recovery center staffing.

What OIG Found

We found that in SBA's initial disaster assistance response to Hurricane Milton, the agency promptly established a field presence, adequately staffed recovery centers, and responded timely to applicant queries.

Although SBA processed loan applications in 17 days on average, the agency was unable to disburse all but one of those loans during a 68-day funding lapse. As a result, the overall

processing time from application receipt to disbursement of funds was 73 days on average for applications submitted before or during the funding lapse and 19 days on average for applications submitted after supplemental appropriations were approved. We have initiated a separate review to evaluate SBA's processes to forecast and timely request appropriation dollars for its disaster assistance account.

Lastly, we determined the agency's outreach efforts were limited due, in part, to a shortage of public affairs specialists, and we identified opportunities for SBA to optimize its outreach efforts so disaster survivors are aware of the assistance available to them.

What OIG Recommended

We recommended SBA review current outreach strategies, including staffing assignments, and make appropriate changes to optimize resources, thereby ensuring maximum awareness of available assistance to disaster survivors. We also recommended the agency implement processes to gather feedback from applicants that would assist in monitoring the effectiveness of its outreach methods.

Agency Response

Management partially agreed with Recommendation 1 and agreed with Recommendation 2. Management's response and planned action satisfy the intent of both recommendations.



**OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

MEMORANDUM

Date: July 2, 2025

To: Kelly Loeffler
Administrator

From: Sheldon Shoemaker
Deputy Inspector General

Subject: Hurricane Milton – Initial Disaster Assistance and Recovery Response (Report 25-20)

This inspection report presents the results and findings of our review of the initial disaster assistance and recovery response for Hurricane Milton recovery efforts. We considered management's comments on the draft of this report when preparing the final report. SBA management partially agreed with Recommendation 1 and fully agreed with Recommendation 2.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact John Provan, Director, Disaster Assistance Programs Group, or Andrea Deadwyler, Assistant Inspector General for Audits, at (202) 205-6586.

cc: Wesley Coopersmith, Chief of Staff, Office of the Administrator
Ben Grayson, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Administrator
Robin Wright, Chief Operating Officer, Office of the Administrator
Wendell Davis, General Counsel, Office of General Counsel
Michael Simmons, Attorney Advisor, Office of General Counsel
Nathan Davis, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Risk Officer, Office of Performance, Planning, and the Chief Financial Officer
Deborah Chen, Deputy Chief Financial Officer, Office of Performance, Planning, and the Chief Financial Officer
Sharon Kirkley, Accountant, Office of Performance, Planning, and the Chief Financial Officer
Anna M. Calcagno, Director, Office of Strategic Management and Enterprise Integrity
Alex H. Wilson, Senior Policy Advisor, Enterprise Risk Management
James Stallings, Associate Administrator, Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience
Rafaela Monchek, Deputy Associate Administrator, Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience

Chiante Thomas-LaCount, Supervisory Management and Program Analyst, Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience

Sheena McShan, Management and Program Analyst, Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience

Thomas Kimsey, Associate Administrator, Office of Capital Access

Peter Meyers, Senior Advisor, Office of Capital Access

Contents

Introduction	1
Background	1
Objective	2
Results	3
Finding 1: SBA Provided an Adequate Customer Service Response	3
Recovery Centers	3
Staffing	4
Customer Service Center	5
Finding 2: SBA Processed Disaster Loan Applications Timely, but Disbursements Were Delayed	5
Loan Application Volume	5
Loan Application Processing	7
Disaster Assistance Funding Lapse	8
Finding 3: Opportunities Existed to Improve Outreach	9
Recommendations	10
Evaluation of Agency Response	10
Summary of Actions Necessary to Close the Recommendations	11

Tables

1 Hurricane Milton Filing Deadlines	2
2 Staffing Levels at Recovery Centers	4
3 Average Number of Days to Process Hurricane Milton Loan Applications	7
4 Loan Processing Goals	8

Figures

1	Total Applications Received by Date Compared to Total Applications Processed by Date	6
2	Applications Recieved but not Processed by Date	6

Appendices

1	Scope and Methodology	1-1
2	Agency Response.....	2-1

Introduction

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) provides low-interest disaster loans to assist businesses of all sizes, most private nonprofit organizations, homeowners, and renters impacted by declared natural disasters that occur in the United States and its territories. In addition, the agency provides eligible small businesses necessary working capital to help overcome the economic injury of a declared disaster. A Presidential disaster declaration activates SBA's physical disaster assistance loan program, which covers repairs and replacement of physical assets damaged in a declared natural disaster, and SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program, which covers the costs and expenses for small businesses that incurred substantial economic injury from a declared natural disaster.

When a natural disaster is declared, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) establishes Disaster Recovery Centers near affected communities to provide information about disaster assistance programs provided by federal, state, and community organizations. SBA deploys staff to these centers to assist survivors with loan applications and answer questions about the agency's programs. Additionally, SBA may establish its own recovery centers in affected areas, such as Business Recovery Centers, which are sites established and staffed by the agency to assist survivors with loan applications, answer questions about the loan program, and direct business owners to available resource partners for specialized business counseling.



Background

On October 9, 2024, Hurricane Milton made landfall as a Category 3 hurricane near Siesta Key in Sarasota County along the west coast of Florida with 120-mile-per-hour sustained winds. The hurricane generated over a dozen deadly tornados and life-threatening storm surges, produced torrential rain across much of the state, and caused widespread flooding and heavy destruction. Two days later, the President declared that a major disaster existed in the state of Florida, authorizing SBA to provide assistance in the form of physical damage

loans and EIDLs to individuals, businesses, and other qualifying entities in 36 urban counties, 6 rural counties, and 8 tribal nations that were adversely affected by the disaster. As of March 27, 2025, damages from Hurricane Milton were estimated at over \$34 billion.

Shortly after Hurricane Milton made landfall, SBA announced it had exhausted all funds in the disaster loan program due to responses to other disasters that affected areas throughout the United States. As a result, the agency paused new loan offers but still encouraged applicants to apply for loans, citing assurances from congressional leaders that additional funding would be provided upon Congress’s return in November 2024. SBA continued to process new applications but could not send loan offer letters or disburse funding. These applications were held in a precommitment queue until funding was available.

On December 21, 2024, the American Relief Act, 2025, was enacted by Congress and appropriated additional funding for the disaster loans program account. SBA began sending loan offer letters to applicants held in the precommitment queue that same day. As of March 14, 2025, the agency had disbursed 9,825 loans totaling \$448 million for Hurricane Milton.

Hurricane Milton loan application filing deadlines vary depending on the type of loan (physical damage or EIDL) and type of assistance (individual or public). Presidential declarations activate SBA’s disaster loan program for eligible homeowners, renters, businesses, and nonprofit organizations for physical damage and economic injury. While SBA has established the deadlines listed in Table 1, there is a 60-day grace period after the deadline during which SBA will continue to accept applications.

Table 1: Hurricane Milton Filing Deadlines

Disaster Number	Physical Damage Filing Deadline	EIDL Filing Deadline
FL-20015	April 27, 2025	July 11, 2025
FL-20016	December 16, 2024	July 16, 2025
FL-20017	April 27, 2025	August 5, 2025
FL-20018	January 6, 2025	August 5, 2025

Source: SBA website

Objective

Our objective was to assess SBA’s initial response to Hurricane Milton, including staffing, loan application volume, response time to applicant queries, and timeliness of disaster loan approval.

Results

We found that in SBA’s initial disaster assistance response to Hurricane Milton, the agency promptly established a field presence, adequately staffed recovery centers, and responded timely to applicant queries. Although SBA processed loan applications in 17 days on average, the agency was unable to disburse all but one of those loans during a 68-day funding lapse. As a result, the overall processing time from application receipt to disbursement for loan applications submitted before or during the funding lapse was 73 days on average. In addition, we found that SBA’s limited resources for outreach efforts may have left disaster survivors unaware of the assistance available to them.

Finding 1: SBA Provided an Adequate Customer Service Response

In accordance with strategic goals and the Hurricane Milton action plan, SBA established a field presence within 3 business days of the disaster declaration and opened a Business Recovery Center within 10 business days of the declaration. Further, we found the agency adequately managed the distribution of staff at its recovery centers. During our site visits to recovery centers, disaster survivors we spoke with stated they were satisfied with SBA’s customer service response. Lastly, we analyzed Customer Service Center data and found the agency had provided timely responses to applicant queries.

Recovery Centers

SBA established an immediate field presence – the same day as the disaster declaration for Hurricane Milton – by utilizing a Business Recovery Center already established for Hurricane Helene. In addition, the agency opened a Business Recovery Center specifically for Hurricane Milton relief in Manatee County, Florida, on October 14, 2024, 3 days after the disaster declaration. SBA later established another Business Recovery Center on October 16, 2024, to further relief efforts for the affected areas.



Staffing

SBA established a Hurricane Milton action plan to project staffing requirements based on population and demographic information of the anticipated landfall area. Early projections called for three to five customer service representatives per recovery center for effective assistance and to ensure reduced wait times. We found SBA averaged two customer service representatives at each recovery center during the first month of the disaster recovery operation. Just 3 days after the declaration, the agency reported there were 16 staff members available at 6 recovery centers to initiate applications, answer questions, and assist customers. By October 31, 2024, SBA had 16 total customer service representatives at 15 recovery centers to assist disaster survivors. The agency averaged 1 to 3 staff members at the recovery centers throughout the first 60 days of the disaster declaration, and by December 10, 2024, the agency reported that there were 27 customer service representatives available among 18 recovery centers supporting Hurricane Milton relief (see Table 2).

Table 2: Staffing Levels at Recovery Centers

Number of Days After Declaration	Number of Staff Members at Hurricane Milton Recovery Centers	Total Centers Supporting Hurricane Milton	Average Number of Staff per Center
3	16	6	2.7
20	16	15	0.9
35	31	26	1.2
50	29	20	1.5
60	27	18	1.5

Source: SBA Office of Inspector General analysis

While SBA’s assignment of customer service representatives did not align with its staffing projections, we found that wait times at recovery centers were not adversely affected. We conducted site visits to seven recovery centers on the western coast of Florida and the Joint Field Operations Center located in Tallahassee to observe recovery operations in terms of site location, signage, and customer wait times, and to conduct interviews of recovery center staff and disaster survivors. During our visits, we found the recovery centers were easily identifiable and had adequate SBA branded signage, there were no wait times, and the disaster survivors we spoke with were satisfied with SBA’s customer service.

Customer Service Center

We analyzed Customer Service Center data and determined SBA had provided timely responses to queries from applicants who contacted the Center. It is important to note that SBA's Customer Service Center responds to all customer queries, not just Hurricane Milton queries. From the onset of the disaster until November 30, 2024, the Center had an average of 136 dedicated staff members each day. On average, phone calls were answered in under a minute and lasted approximately 7 minutes. Further, only approximately 1 percent of the calls were abandoned. All email queries were answered within 1 day of receipt.

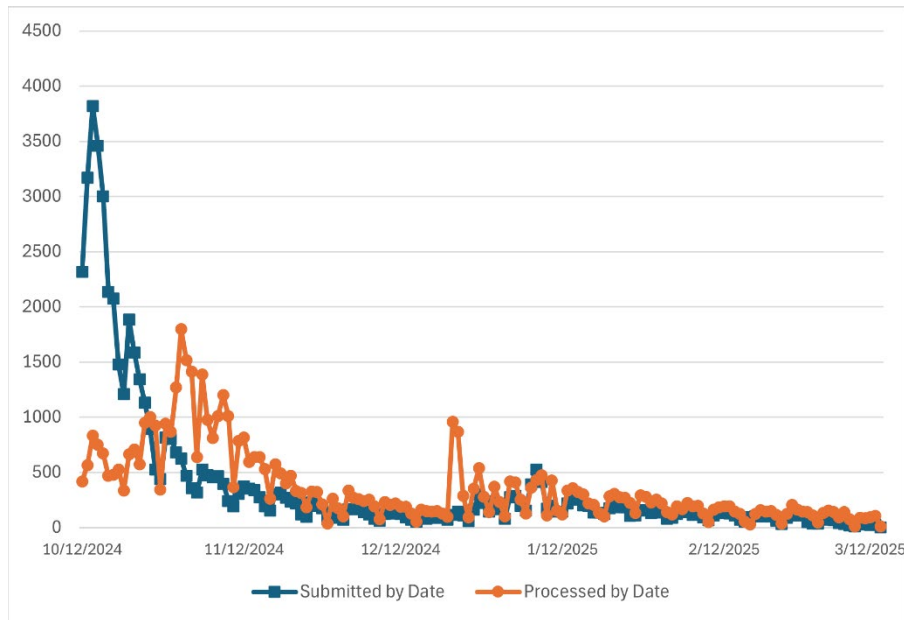
Finding 2: SBA Processed Disaster Loan Applications Timely, but Disbursements Were Delayed

SBA processed loan applications for Hurricane Milton in a timely manner and within their annual goal; however, disbursements were delayed. SBA processed all disaster assistance loan applications for Hurricane Milton from submission to the point of what would have been loan approval, had there been sufficient funding, in 17 days on average, surpassing its most stringent performance goal. Further, the funding lapse lasted 68 days, delaying disbursements for loan applications submitted during that time. With the delay, it took SBA 62 days on average overall to process and disburse loans related to Hurricane Milton. Loan applications submitted before or during the funding lapse, representing 80 percent of all Hurricane Milton applications, were processed and disbursed in 73 days on average. Loan applications submitted after the funding lapse, representing 20 percent of all Hurricane Milton applications, were processed and disbursed in 19 days on average.

Loan Application Volume

Fifty-two percent of all loan applications that SBA received for Hurricane Milton disaster assistance were submitted during the first 13 days of the declaration period, creating an initial high volume of loan applications waiting to be processed (see Figure 1 below).

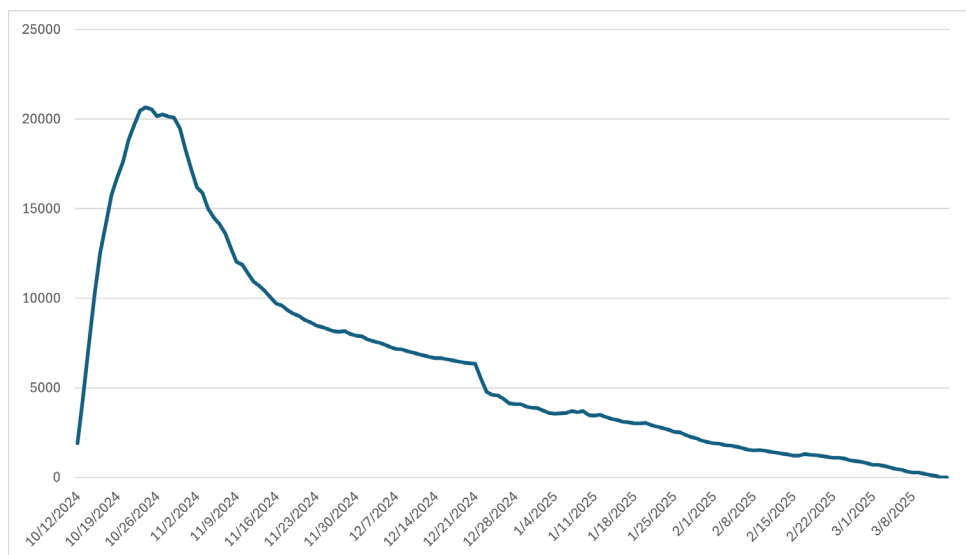
Figure 1: Total Applications Received by Date Compared to Total Applications Processed by Date



Source: SBA Office of Inspector General analysis

This initial influx of disaster loan applications caused a high volume of applications submitted but not processed. On day 14 of the declaration period, loan application submittals began to decrease, and SBA started reducing the number of applications waiting to be processed (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Applications Recieved but not Processed by Date



Source: SBA Office of Inspector General analysis

Loan Application Processing

Disaster assistance loan processing entails many steps after an application has been submitted, including, but not limited to, risk verification, credit checks, property verification, loss verification, validation of tax transcripts, ownership verification, and checking the availability of agency funds. An application can be declined or withdrawn at any of these stages, and the applicant can either submit a reconsideration request or a reacceptance request, respectively.

We calculated the processing time of disaster loan applications by counting the total number of days SBA had possession of the application, from the time of submission, either original, reconsideration, or reacceptance, to the time the agency approved or declined the application, or it was withdrawn¹ (see Table 3).

Table 3: Average Number of Days to Process Hurricane Milton Loan Applications

Application Type	Average Number of Days to Process Loan*
Home	14
Business	22
EIDL	20
Total average	17

* Note: The average number of days to process a loan may include periods of time that SBA was waiting for the applicant to provide documentation or other information.

Source: SBA Office of Inspector General analysis

Despite the initial high volume, SBA processed disaster assistance loan applications within 17 days on average from application submission to the point of what would have been loan approval had there been sufficient funding. This encompassed each time an applicant submitted an original application, reconsideration request, or reacceptance request; SBA either approved or declined the application; or the application was withdrawn. While home loan applications were processed the fastest, averaging only 14 days, EIDL and business loan applications took the longest, at averages of 20 and 22 days, respectively. EIDLs and business loan applications

¹ The Office of Inspector General calculated the overall processing time from application receipt to disbursement of funds, whereas the agency started the clock when it accepted the application. The time in between, from when the applicant submitted the application and SBA accepted it, can include the risk review process, which is when the agency validates the applicant's identity, conducts other fraud checks, and the time SBA is waiting for the applicant to provide documentation.

typically take longer to process than home applications because they require more documentation, such as proof that the business suffered an economic injury from the disaster or forms from each owner of the business.

SBA's Processing and Disbursement Center sets annual goals for processing all disaster loan applications based on the number of applications the agency receives in a fiscal year. These goals are used to evaluate the overall performance of loan processing at the Processing and Disbursement Center as well as the individual performance of loan officers.

As of March 5, 2025, SBA received 181,853 applications for fiscal year 2025, placing them in the second tier of their strategic goal framework. To receive a level 5 performance rating within the second tier, disaster loan applications must be processed in 25 days or less on average. SBA processed Hurricane Milton loan applications in 17 days on average, exceeding the level 5 performance goal (see Table 4).

Table 4: Loan Processing Goals

Total Number of Disaster Loan Applications Received During Fiscal Year	Fiscal Year 2025 Goal for Total Number of Days to Process Disaster Loan Applications		
	Level 3 Performance	Level 4 Performance	Level 5 Performance
0–50,000	10 days	9 days	8 days
50,001–250,000	31 days	28 days	25 days
250,001+	45 days	42 days	39 days

Source: SBA 2025 performance goals

Disaster Assistance Funding Lapse

From October 14 until December 21, 2024, eligible applicants with processed applications did not receive disbursements from SBA due to a funding lapse. Instead, the agency placed these applicants into a precommitment queue if they were found to be eligible. SBA then sent these applicants weekly notifications via email and telephone until funding was available. Eighty percent of all applications for Hurricane Milton were submitted before or during this lapse.

Overall, it took SBA 62 days on average to disburse loans to eligible applicants. Due to the funding lapse, eligible disaster loan applicants who submitted their application before or during the lapse did not receive disbursements for 73 days on average. Conversely, eligible loan applicants who submitted their application after the funding lapse received disbursements in 19 days on average. These loan applications represented 20 percent of all applications received

for Hurricane Milton. We did not include an examination of the root cause of the funding lapse in this inspection; however, we have initiated a separate review to evaluate SBA's processes to forecast and timely request appropriation dollars for its disaster assistance account.

Finding 3: Opportunities Existed to Improve Outreach

Opportunities existed for SBA to improve the effectiveness of its outreach efforts during the Hurricane Milton response. We determined the agency's outreach efforts for the hurricane were limited due to a shortage of public affairs specialists (PAS), a reliance on FEMA, and a lack of feedback solicitation from disaster loan applicants. Without SBA optimizing its outreach efforts, disaster survivors may be unaware of the assistance available to them.

The mission of the Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience is to connect individuals, businesses, and private nonprofits with SBA disaster assistance programs and improve disaster recovery outcomes and economic resilience by helping communities prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate against disasters of all types. SBA hires PASs to conduct outreach efforts by working with the media, stakeholders, and local officials to promote an interest in the SBA disaster assistance loan program. The role of a PAS is to market SBA's disaster assistance loan program by effectively disseminating program information to disaster survivors, congressional offices, media, government agencies, underserved organizations, and the general public.

According to the Hurricane Milton execution plan, which is a high-level overview that explains how Field Operations Center-East would execute its outreach and engagement activities, SBA anticipated a need for 14 PASs to effectively provide outreach and engagement activities in addition to conducting joint field operational planning. However, based on our review of SBA staffing reports, we determined there were only 7 PASs assigned to cover a total of 50 counties affected by Hurricane Milton, averaging approximately 7 counties per PAS. Agency officials told us the lower staffing numbers were due to multiple disaster responses occurring at the same time.

Moreover, SBA relies on FEMA to disseminate information about SBA's disaster assistance loan program. PAS training materials explain that SBA outreach is primarily dependent upon coordination with FEMA to participate in congressional visits and briefings, distribute joint FEMA/SBA flyers, and be included in FEMA distribution lists for press releases, media clips, and reports. We asked SBA if they utilized targeted ads on social media or streaming services to reach disaster survivors who may not watch television, listen to the radio, or otherwise know to

visit FEMA’s website to learn about SBA assistance. Agency officials stated that the agency does not have a budget for targeted ads or any branded items, such as pens or water bottles, to distribute while conducting outreach.

Finally, SBA officials stated they do not solicit feedback from applicants regarding how they heard about the agency’s disaster assistance loan program. This is a missed opportunity to optimize outreach efforts and determine what strategies are successful in reaching disaster survivors, thereby allowing SBA to focus its limited resources in the most effective ways. By expanding its outreach efforts, SBA could enhance its ability to fulfill its purpose of helping communities prepare, respond, recover, and mitigate against disasters of all types.

Recommendations

To address opportunities to improve outreach, we recommend the Administrator direct the Associate Administrator for the Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience to:

Recommendation 1: Review current outreach strategies, including staffing assignments, and make appropriate changes to optimize resources, ensuring maximum awareness of available assistance to disaster survivors.

Recommendation 2: Implement processes to gather feedback from applicants that would assist the agency in monitoring the effectiveness of its outreach methods.

Evaluation of Agency Response

SBA management provided formal written comments that are included in their entirety in Appendix 2. Management partially agreed with Recommendation 1 and agreed with Recommendation 2.

Management’s planned action for Recommendations 1 and 2 satisfy the intent of the recommendations, and they are resolved. These recommendations will be closed upon receipt of documentation supporting the implementation of the planned action.

Summary of Actions Necessary to Close the Recommendations

The following section summarizes the status of our recommendations and the actions necessary to close them.

Recommendation 1

To ensure adequate staffing is available to provide effective outreach and engagement processes, we recommend the Administrator direct the Associate Administrator for the Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience to review current outreach strategies, including staffing assignments, and make appropriate changes to optimize resources, ensuring maximum awareness of available assistance to disaster survivors.

Status: Resolved

SBA management partially agreed with this recommendation, stating that although SBA did not reach its optimal staffing strength for PASs, the agency operated on a minimum staffing strategy to ensure there was an appropriate and effective response to the Hurricane Milton declaration.

Management stated that based on the way they assign staff and track data and outreach activity, one cannot assess Hurricane Milton independently, as SBA was responding to three declarations that impacted the state of Florida simultaneously. Therefore, the number of PASs assigned to Hurricane Milton will not paint a true picture of each specialist's responsibility in supporting overlapping declarations. Management listed seven counties that overlapped across the three declarations and asserted that a PAS conducting outreach activities in any of these counties provided disaster program information, simultaneously, about all three declarations.

In response to this same recommendation in Report 25-19, *Hurricane Helene – Initial Disaster Assistance and Recovery Response*, management stated that SBA is hiring additional PASs to meet projected staffing requirements. This recommendation is resolved based on management's response in Report 25-19 and can be closed once management provides documentation of projected future PAS staffing needs and evidence that those staffing levels have been obtained.

Recommendation 2

To ensure resources for outreach efforts are being used efficiently, we recommend the Administrator direct the Associate Administrator for the Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience to implement processes to gather feedback from applicants that would assist the agency in monitoring the effectiveness of its outreach methods.

Status: Resolved

SBA management agreed with this recommendation, stating that a process should be implemented to gather feedback from applicants.

Although management agreed with this recommendation, their response did not describe how they will gather feedback from applicants to assist in monitoring the effectiveness of the agency's outreach methods. We resolved this recommendation and will follow up with management regarding its plans and timeline for implementation. This recommendation can be closed once management provides evidence of an updated process to monitor their various outreach campaigns and their effectiveness.

Appendix 1: Scope and Methodology

This report presents the results of our inspection of the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) initial disaster assistance response to Hurricane Milton. Our objective was to assess SBA's initial response to the hurricane, including staffing, loan application volume, response time to applicant queries, and timeliness of disaster loan approval.

To answer our objective, we interviewed SBA officials from Field Operations Center-East, the Processing and Disbursement Center, the Customer Service Center, and the Joint Field Operations Center. Further, we reviewed applicable laws and regulations, SBA's standard operating procedures, and other SBA operating policies and guidance. We accessed and reviewed the agency's dashboards using the Unified Lending Platform to assess loan application volume and disaster loan application processing. We also reviewed staffing data provided by Field Operations Center-East from the Field Activity and Scheduling Tool. Lastly, we visited the following eight centers in Florida:

- Entrepreneur Collaborative Center (Business Recovery Center), Tampa, Florida
- South County Regional Park Mobile (Disaster Recovery Center), Punta Gorda, Florida
- Sarasota Municipal Auditorium (Disaster Recovery Center), Sarasota, Florida
- Rocky Bluff Branch Library (Business Recovery Center), Ellenton, Florida
- Botanical Gardens Magnolia Room (Disaster Recovery Center), Largo, Florida
- West Hernando Branch Library (Disaster Recovery Center), Brooksville, Florida
- West Citrus Community Center (Disaster Recovery Center), Homosassa, Florida
- Joint Field Operations Center, Tallahassee, Florida

We conducted this review in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*. These standards require that we plan and perform a review to obtain sufficient and appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our objective. We believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our objective.

Use of Computer-Processed Data

We relied on computer-processed data of loan application processing contained in the Unified Lending Platform and daily field operations and staffing reports analyzed from the Field Activity and Scheduling Tool reports.

We received access to the Unified Lending Platform and conducted limited testing on data extracts to verify reliability of the data by ensuring consistency between common data points on the dashboards extracted from the Unified Lending Platform and the applicants electronic loan file. We believe the data is sufficiently reliable to support the report conclusions.

Prior Audit Coverage

The following lists the Office of Inspector General’s previous audit coverage related to the objective of this report:

Report Number	Report Title	Report Date
21-05	<i>Consolidated Results of SBA’s Initial Disaster Assistance Response to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria</i>	December 22, 2020
24-11	<i>Maui Wildfires – Initial Disaster Assistance and Recovery Response</i>	April 2, 2024
24-12	<i>Hurricane Idalia –Initial Disaster Assistance and Recovery Response</i>	April 3, 2024
24-13	<i>Hurricanes Fiona and Ian – Initial Disaster Assistance and Recovery Response</i>	April 9, 2024
25-19	<i>Hurricane Helene – Initial Disaster Assistance and Recovery Response</i>	June 17, 2025

Appendix 2: Agency Response

U.S. Small Business Administration
Response to Draft Report



U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20416

To: Sheldon Shoemaker
Deputy Inspector General
U.S. Small Business Administration

From: Kem R. Fleming *Kem R. Fleming*
Director
Field Operations and Disaster Recovery

Date: June 9, 2025

Subject: Response to OIG Draft Report – Hurricane Milton Initial Disaster Assistance and Recovery Response (Project 25802)

We appreciate the role the Office of Inspector General (OIG) plays in working with management in ensuring that our programs are effectively managed, and for the feedback provided in this draft report.

We offer the following comments to the draft and Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Review current outreach strategies, including staffing assignments, and make appropriate changes to optimize resources, ensuring maximum awareness of available assistance to disaster survivors.

SBA Response: SBA Partially Agrees. Although SBA did not reach its optimal staffing strength for Public Affairs Specialists (PAS), SBA operated on a minimum staffing strategy to ensure there was an appropriate and effective response to the Hurricane Milton declaration.

Based on the way we assign staff, track data and outreach activity, you cannot assess Hurricane Milton independently; you must include declarations for Hurricanes Debby and Helene as well, as staff were responding to all three declarations simultaneously. Therefore, the number of public affairs specialists assigned to Hurricane Milton will not paint a true picture of each PAS's responsibility in supporting overlapping declarations. Hurricane Milton

declaration was approved on October 11, 2024. On this date, FOCE was actively responding to 3 Presidential declarations (Hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton) that impacted the state of Florida. Due to the path of all 3 Hurricanes, the seven (7) counties of Citrus, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pinellas, Sarasota, Charlotte, and Hernando were overlapping primary counties across the 3 declarations. A PAS conducting outreach activities in any of the seven (7) counties provided disaster program information, simultaneously, about all 3 Presidential declarations.

Recommendation 2: Implement processes to gather feedback from applicants that would assist the agency in monitoring the effectiveness of its outreach methods.

.

SBA Response: SBA Agrees that a process should be implemented to gather feedback from applicants that would assist the agency in monitoring the effectiveness of its outreach methods.