Justin Knighten: Hello, I'm Justin Knighten, Director of External Affairs at FEMA. Since 2015, the Resilient Nation Partnership Network has strived to build partnerships that expand capacity and achieve collaborative outcomes. Now more than never investing in partnerships is critical to increasing the nation's resiliency. In April the network with support from NOAA released the Building Alliances for Equitable Resilience. This resource is the result of a significant collaboration by 26 partners across the fields of equity and resilience. Together, we inspire communities to advance equitable and resilient practices. The story you are about to hear is from an extraordinary leader, who we are honored to call a partner. You will hear from Valerie Novack of the Center for American Progress.

Valerie Novack: I was still in high school when Hurricane Katrina hit. I never expected that years after that tragedy, I would learn that people with disabilities, older adults and others were still routinely left out of emergency planning conversations. A decade later, I found myself tasked with finding best practices for accessible evacuation plans, because despite the lessons we should have learned after Katrina, this was still a problem. Instead of finding examples of successful efforts to reduce the vulnerability of disabled people by creating more inclusive processes, I found lawsuits against some of our biggest cities for discrimination in their emergency response practices. It was bad enough that Katrina had to happen before disability access became a requirement, but it was negligent to have not changed further since then. This realization filled my trajectory into not just the inclusion of, but direction by people with disabilities in response and resilience.

This was solidified further in 2017 with Hurricane Harvey. This time I was old enough to respond by volunteering on a hotline for effected people with disabilities, where the results of inequity, apathy and unawareness were overwhelming. Inaccessible shelters, separated families, forgotten residents, and then hunger and homelessness. I've continued to watch the cycle event after event in various communities. I'm fortunate to have spent the last handful of years working alongside dedicated disability advocates and disabled experts in preparing for, and responding to disasters within their own communities and helping to share what I've learned with others. We cannot continue only write and talk about building networks, practices, and communities that are prepared for and resilient to disaster events. We must actively engage in the changes necessary to make them so. And we hope that resources such as these are the start to that work.

Justin Knighten: Valerie's story represents a unique perspective on the role resilience plays. Her story reminds us that we are truly in this together because every action moves our country forward to build resilience. We thank Valerie for sharing her story, and we hope it inspires you to move towards meaningful change to make equitable resilience possible for all.