



Civil Rights Summit 3.0 – Back to Basics

After-Action Report

November 2022



FEMA

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Executive Summary

On November 29 and 30, 2022, FEMA hosted the “Civil Rights Summit 3.0 – Back to Basics,” a civil rights summit for external organizations and interested groups, and open to the FEMA workforce. The civil rights summit assembled a diverse and experienced lineup of speakers from both the federal family and community organizations to discuss integrating civil rights into our work. The civil rights summit sought to focus on foundational themes, theories and issues in civil rights addressing disaster response and recovery, discrimination, housing inequities, intersectionality and the vulnerabilities of underserved communities.

The “Civil Rights Summit 3.0 – Back to Basics” followed the second civil rights summit FEMA held in 2021. The summit’s goal was to engage participants in collaborative dialogue aimed at identifying actual and perceived biases impacting equal access to FEMA’s programs and services. The “Civil Rights Summit 3.0 – Back to Basics” continued the conversation from prior summits that focused on civil rights topics such as environmental justice, accessibility and equity.

FEMA Deputy Administrator Eric Hooks opened the event emphasizing the agency’s responsibility to continue to focus on the needs of underserved communities. The Deputy Administrator’s message included a recognition of the steps that the agency is taking to be diverse, inclusive and equitable, and a reminder that the job is not complete. Equity is about lowering barriers and creating opportunities that benefit everyone. FEMA has made positive and effective changes to integrate equity into its policy and program delivery activities, but the work is far from over.

The sessions included representatives from nonprofit, federal and academic organizations such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the American Red Cross, Department of Homeland Security Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, University of South Carolina School of Law, FEMA’s National Tribal Affairs Advocate, the City of Philadelphia Fire Commissioner, and leaders of civil rights organizations. The summit was held virtually using the Zoom platform. FEMA’s “Civil Rights Summit 3.0 – Back to Basics” had an estimated 700 registered participants, with active participation evidenced by approximately 150 questions in the chat function.

Summit Presenters

FEMA’s Office of Equal Rights (OER), External Civil Rights Division (ECRD) invited a robust and diverse group of presenters to ensure the “Civil Rights Summit 3.0 – Back to Basics” was inclusive. The presenters are listed below in alphabetical order:

- Adam Thiel, City of Philadelphia, Fire Commissioner,
- Demetria L. McCain, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
- Derek Black, University of South Carolina School of Law, Professor of Law
- FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell
- FEMA Deputy Administrator Erik Hooks
- FEMA Office of Disability Integration and Coordination, Director Sherman Gillums, Jr.,
- FEMA Office of Equal Rights Civil Rights Analyst Lashelle Mangrum
- FEMA Office of Equal Rights Director Leslie Saucedo
- FEMA Office of External Affairs National Tribal Affairs Advocate Kelbie Kennedy
- FEMA Office of Resilience Acting Associate Administrator Janice Barlow
- FEMA Office of Response and Recovery Assistant Administrator of Field Leadership Keith Turi
- FEMA Office of Response and Recovery Associate Administrator Anne Bink
- FEMA Recovery Directorate Assistant Administrator Dr. Melissa Forbes
- FEMA Region 10 Federal Coordinating Officer Yolanda Jackson
- FEMA Region 4 Deputy Federal Coordinating Officer Dr. Myra Shird
- FEMA Resilience Associate Administrator Victoria Salinas
- FEMA Response Directorate Assistant Administrator John Rabin
- FEMA United States Fire Administration Deputy Administrator Tonya Hoover
- John C. Yang, Asian Americans Advancing Justice President and Executive Director

- Marcus Coleman, Department of Homeland Security, Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, Director
- Peter Mina, Department of Homeland Security, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Senior Official Performing the Duties of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Officer
- Preston Mitchum, Esq., LL.M., The Trevor Project, Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs
- Shari Myers, American Red Cross, National Disability Integration Coordinator

FEMA Efforts

FEMA is working to honor and build upon the decades-long and heroic work of our nation’s civil rights leaders to advance equity and justice for all. Administrator Criswell emphasized the importance of a whole community approach to reach populations within all communities before disaster strikes to increase equity during and after disasters. In line with FEMA’s core values of compassion, fairness, integrity and respect, the summit underscored the agency’s commitment to instilling equity as a foundation of emergency management, as outlined in the [2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan](#).

To achieve this goal, FEMA has prioritized equity and civil rights to make its assistance more “survivor-centric,” eligibility requirements less rigid, and outreach more mindful of unique communities. Some examples include:

- Creating dual-language advertising campaigns to educate and remind residents about flood preparedness.
- Creating an expedited process for mitigation grant selections and assistance.
- Releasing the [2022-2026 FEMA National Tribal Strategy](#) to enhance our response and preparedness responsibilities with federally recognized Tribal Nations.
- Making a significant commitment to underserved communities by expanding Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) funding in 2023 to \$2 billion.
- Playing an integral role in the Biden Administration Justice40 initiative, which sets the goal of 40% of overall benefits of certain federal investments to flow to underserved communities overburdened by pollution.
- Expanding forms and acceptable dates of documents to prove ownership and occupancy for homeowners and renters.

“Civil Rights Summit 3.0 – Back to Basics” – Topic Review

1. Back to Basics – Civil Rights 101

FEMA’s Office of Equal Rights (OER) presenter provided an overview of civil rights laws that apply to the agency and recipients of FEMA funding. Civil rights are provided and protected by law. They are an expansive and significant set of rights designed to ensure individuals receive equal treatment, are free from unfair treatment and are protected against unlawful discrimination. Executive Orders are directives from the President of the United States guiding all federal officials or administrative agencies to engage or refrain from a course of action. Civil rights laws and related Executive Orders impose requirements to ensure non-discrimination and equity in federal programs, services and benefits.

This presenter explained the difference between disparate treatment and disparate impact to provide a greater understanding of how discrimination can manifest through intentional and unintentional inequities. During the discussion, the OER presenter discussed the legal foundation to clarify FEMA’s responsibility to deliver programs, services and benefits related to disaster work with non-discrimination based on race, color, national origin, economic status, religion, age, sex (gender identity and sexual orientation), physical or mental disability, and protected activity (retaliation or reprisal), including people who may have limited English proficiency. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provides protection on the grounds of race, color and national origin. Several Executive Orders were discussed, specifically [Executive Order 13985](#), Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. The Executive Order defines underserved communities as populations sharing a particular characteristic as well as geographic communities that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social and civil life.

The presentation closed with a message of empowerment to all attendees to know and fulfill their responsibility to prevent violations of civil rights, inclusive of the creation of systems and data, and outreach to ensure that funding and support are reaching underserved communities.

2. Panel Discussion: The Crossroads: FEMA, Emergency Management and Civil Rights

The panel members discussed the evolution of FEMA’s programs and some of the challenges executing the mission. FEMA’s Resilience panelist recognized that the influence of a community’s history, culture, racial composition and economic status can affect a community’s ability to access federal services, which emphasizes the importance of analyzing who receives grant awards.

Resilience focuses on grant delivery, specifically the hazard mitigation grant programs purposed to enhance and multiply efforts to provide technical assistance.

During this panel, presenters emphasized a common theme about the importance of information sharing between partners engaged in response operations to gain situational awareness and best address community risk reduction. FEMA is focused on understanding the communities that it serves and analyzing information to propose actionable outcomes. This theme surfaced the challenge of trust in government and the importance of rebuilding trust between all levels of government and the public. It is through engagement with state, local, tribal, and territorial governments and community organizations that we can all best strategize and ensure that underserved communities receive quality resources. As explained during the Civil Rights 101 session, civil rights laws are the responsibility not only of federal agencies, but also of recipients (including recipients acting as pass-through entities) of federal financial assistance which could include state, local, tribal and territorial governments, and community organizations.

FEMA programs continue to internally revise their processes and procedures to counter potential barriers and create accessibility for all people to agency programs, services and benefits.



“As you think about the evolution of data in your programs, how are you using it differently today to be able to be more effective than you were in the past?”

FEMA Response: “The development of a strategic dashboard incorporated the ability to overlay data such as the Social Vulnerability Index, the South Carolina Social Vulnerability Index, American Community Survey; providing visibility of potential barriers that would need to be factored in the delivery of FEMA services. The identification of populations of people with disabilities, different languages spoken, and methods of transportation combined with FEMA individual assistance data provides the ability to analyze and focus program delivery. This product is an example of the efforts of interagency partners working together to identify and address gaps.”

3. Panel Discussion: Civil Rights and Housing Inequities

During this discussion, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) panelists shared the agency’s mission to create strong sustainable and inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for everyone. HUD also has compliance authorities to ensure that grantees are abiding by civil rights laws and protections. The Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties shared their role in disseminating information to governmental and non-governmental organizations to ensure the needs of members of protected classes and underserved communities are met.

The panelists explained how DHS funds grant programs and aspects of state, local, tribal and territorial response planning for recovery efforts which include civil rights assurances, post-award

reviews, monitoring, complaint investigations, data collection, training and technical assistance for recipients of federal and financial assistance from DHS.

A key highlight for this panel discussion was the clarification of the scope of each agency in making rules and enforcing them to ensure compliance. The panel discussion further emphasized the importance of interagency information sharing, communication and response coordination. As organizations plan for response and recovery efforts, housing concerns must be incorporated into the planning. This requires that federal, state, local, tribal and territorial governments focus resources to address inequities using long term solutions. This requirement is statutory and holds grantees responsible for affirmatively furthering fair housing.

One of the thought-provoking topics the panelists discussed was building back the communities the agencies serve in a more resilient way and prioritizing community safety, individual safety and affordable housing. This topic emphasized opening remarks from FEMA leadership on the importance of unity and community to strengthen our nation to address historic and ongoing inequities in underserved communities.

In closing, the panelists shared experiences encountering housing needs during disaster response operations to paint the picture of the current housing shortage. Even with FEMA’s involvement and working with partners to address issues such as homelessness, there is a lot more to be done before, during and after disasters. It is well known that disasters can exacerbate needs. HUD is actively collaborating and supporting conversations around construction materials, zoning and other topics along the spectrum to increase housing supply. They also created a blog called [Our Way Home | HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#) where articles are published regarding housing supply.



A message from FEMA Office of Disability Integration and Coordination Director Sherman Gillums, Jr.

“Disability integration is about fostering fairness in a society, in spaces where reach of the law often ends and the social contract we have with each other begins. We need decency, integrity, and community. The Office of Equal Rights, the Office of Disability Integration and Coordination, partnerships with state, local, tribal, territorial, and non-governmental organizations are all vital to creating a symbiosis between civil rights and social dignity where the two come together for the whole person.”

4. Presentation: How Intersectionality Creates Patterns of Discrimination in our Civil Rights System

The presentation on how intersectionality creates patterns of discrimination in our civil rights system started off with an explanation of how discrimination and the identity characteristics associated with protected groups could intersect and create a new and different form of discrimination and

oppression. Professor Derek Black from the University of South Carolina School of Law provided a review of the legal foundation of civil rights laws and how each was created to protect specific groups. The presentation illustrated the complexities of applying non-discrimination statutes, which overlap or completely miss a protected group when monitoring grantees.

Professor Black emphasized how various forms of discrimination can add up to a holistic disadvantage and oppression that is not easily remedied. When analyzing these holistic disadvantages, we should consider not just discrimination under each protected class, but the intersection of the identities.

This presentation provided attendees with tools and examples, such as inequities within the education system and how the protected groups that students may fall under can overlap and create greater inequities. The key takeaway of this session was to better understand how the identity characteristics within protected groups can intersect and create new forms of discrimination and oppression.

5. Panel Discussion: The Disenfranchisement and Vulnerabilities of Underserved Communities in Civil Rights

The panel discussed framing respectful ways to address communities that historically have been disadvantaged. The panel also discussed practices that should be explored to reach underserved communities.

During this panel, the speakers emphasized the importance of recognizing that discrimination does not occur in a vacuum, and we are all sharing these experiences together. All organizations and interested groups involved in disaster planning, response and recovery should know that research and evidence on disparities play a critical role in setting a path forward. It's important to assess qualitative data and feedback from communities and act on specific needs, rather than assumptions.



Case Summary: Reed v. General Motors

A black woman sued General Motors based on race and gender under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination in employment. The court rejected the lawsuit arguing that General Motors had black people and women. The frustration was that she was arguing that General Motors was not hiring or promoting particular people, black women, to certain positions. The analysis of this case provided us with intersectional discrimination. The problem was that the court was looking at it as you are being discriminated against either as a black person or as a woman, but the complainant was really saying that her intersections were being discriminated together.

The topic of trust resurfaced during this panel and the panelists made it clear that it is of utmost importance to establish relationships before a disaster strikes.

A highlight from the panel discussion was the importance of recognizing and respecting the existence of community structure and organization when approaching protected communities. It is important that federal agencies show respect to communities while providing access to existing programs, services and benefits without belittling the plans and strategies that may already be in place.

6. Panel Discussion: The Community, FEMA, and Emergency Management

The final panel discussed centering the work that FEMA does as an agency and the experiences and expertise of community and faith leaders. A recurring theme throughout the sessions was the importance of talking directly to communities that are impacted by disasters or individuals and leaders that have a perspective on communities' needs.

During this session, panelists shared their experience in the field including engagement with networks of faith-based and community partnerships to integrate local initiatives as opposed to standing up emergency management instructors and being hopeful that the community will engage. FEMA leadership emphasized the importance of having a wide variety of programs, processes, and requirements in place and how the agency has refocused efforts to meet communities where they are to gain perspective of real time needs. The importance of feedback from the communities that FEMA serves was accentuated when the panel discussed changes in program delivery to provide flexibility in documentation requirements such as proving home ownership. These changes are set in motion because the communities, state and local partners are engaging and sharing their concerns with the agency.

Panelists emphasized the importance of including people with disabilities in all stages of emergency management. Inclusion must be at all levels, especially in practice drills and exercises to gain the perspective of people with disabilities.

A highlight of this discussion was the importance of investing time and resources to better understand the firsthand experiences of disaster survivors. An important element of change is leveraging the experiences and input of others throughout all conversations related to emergency management.

Next Steps

FEMA remains committed to ensuring that diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion remain top priorities within the agency and through the programs it implements. FEMA's core values of compassion, fairness, integrity, and respect are at the heart of what the agency and its employees stand for and represent. The agency will continue to take steps to shift its culture to one that is more diverse, inclusive and equitable. As stated by FEMA senior leaders during the opening remarks of the Civil Rights Summit 3.0 – Back to Basics, FEMA as an agency is emphasizing the importance of prioritizing the needs of underserved communities. As part of this effort, FEMA plans to hold “Civil Rights Summit - 4.0” later in 2023. These ongoing initiatives are held in succession, building upon the feedback provided the previous year. Each summit introduces new relevant topics while continuing to discuss ways to improve equity efforts at FEMA.

FEMA appreciates your interest and participation in the Civil Rights Summit 3.0 – Back to Basics. The feedback, questions and comments collected will be used to develop content that aligns with participant needs as well as helping diversify FEMA programs and activities. Following the summit, FEMA collected the feedback provided and when applicable and feasible, the information will inform program management and regulatory brainstorming sessions. Further, the content discussed will help FEMA gain a better understanding of the concerns and problems facing the public, emergency management and organizations that respond to disasters.

As outlined in the first goal of the [2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan](#), FEMA is working to “instill equity as the foundation of emergency management.” This plan was developed after meeting with interested groups engaged with disaster operations from federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, as well as with employees across the agency.

Please continue to engage with FEMA and participate in upcoming events. For more information regarding upcoming events and resources, visit [FEMA's Office of Equal Rights website](#). Contact OER at FEMA-CivilRightsOffice@fema.dhs.gov for questions regarding external civil rights or filing a civil rights complaint. Contact OER at FEMA-EqualRights@fema.dhs.gov for questions regarding equal employment opportunity, affirmative employment, or reasonable accommodations.

Additional Information

This information is meant solely for information purposes and is not intended to be an endorsement of any non-federal entity by FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or the U.S. Government.

FEMA's External Civil Rights Division - FEMA.GOV at [External Civil Rights Division | FEMA.gov](#)

Department of Homeland Security Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, - [Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#)

HUD FHEO - to discuss housing concerns or to file a fair housing complaint, individuals are encouraged to visit HUD's Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity website
https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/online-complaint

[The Trevor Project -The Trevor Project | For Young LGBTQ Lives](#)

[Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC: Home](#)

[American Red Cross- American Red Cross | Help Those Affected by Disasters](#)

[FEMA's National Tribal Strategy-Tribal Affairs | FEMA.gov](#)

Alternative Formats

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