Mark Peterson - Host ([00:05](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=5.98)):

I'm Mark Peterson and this is 'Before, During and After', a podcast from FEMA. In any emergency, a successful response depends on the partnership of the whole community. Certainly the response of first responders and emergency management is critical. But also the tremendous support of voluntary organizations, including the faith community, are key to providing the much needed and multifaceted support that disaster survivors need when they need it most. On today's episode, we talked to two leaders of that collaborative support and explore how leveraging the many strengths of neighborhood partners can further ensure success before, during and after disasters. All right, so I'm so excited to have a few minutes to talk to one of my good friends, Marcus Coleman, the Director of the DHS Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Marcus, I'm thrilled to hear from you and talk to you today.

Marcus Coleman ([01:13](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=73.73)):

Mark, grateful to be here man. Good to see you again, and looking forward to our conversation.

Mark Peterson - Host ([01:18](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=78.78)):

And also, somebody I'm just so thrilled to meet and hear from, April Wood from the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters. April, thanks so much for joining me.

April Wood ([01:31](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=91.72)):

Yeah. Thanks Mark. I'm looking forward to the conversation. Excited to be here with one of my colleagues and longtime partners, Marcus Coleman.

Mark Peterson - Host ([01:37](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=97.77)):

Marcus, for some of the emergency managers out there who maybe aren't very familiar with the organization of the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA, and some of the unique organizations, offices, centers within the Department of Homeland Security, yours is pretty unique. And so tell us a little bit about the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Marcus Coleman ([02:00](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=120.53)):

Sure. It is very much a unique office. I serve as the Director for the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the Department of Homeland Security. We're actually one of 11 centers of the White House Office of Faith-based Neighborhood Partnerships and what our fundamental function is, or what we're focused on, is helping to connect faith-based and community-based organizations to government, to help solve problems at the community level. And so we have centers at the US Department of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Veterans Affairs. My office, the center at the Department of Homeland Security, is actually physically located in FEMA. The impetus in creation for our office was in 2006. This came on the heels of Hurricane Katrina. And one of the big lessons at the time is that there needed to be more connectivity between all of the great resources and coordination for faith-based and community-based organizations and federal government. Excited to be on the line with one of our close partners and colleagues, the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters, it's specifically April Wood, who has been bringing her leadership to public service in a few different roles. But most recently has been selected as the President and CEO of National VOAD. And so, yeah, our center comes alongside people like April, in addition to faith and community leaders from across the country to help make sure nationally we're coordinating together and we're collaborating as appropriate. And then when disaster strikes, that we help to support disaster survivors for a number of hazards. Right? Not just natural, but manmade as well.

Mark Peterson - Host ([03:33](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=213.57)):

Marcus, one of the things we really wanna talk about is the larger connection between both of your organizations and the FEMA Strategic Plan. We're gonna get to that later in the discussion, but your center has some really significant areas of focus that you are looking to through 2025. So can you talk a little bit about those?

Marcus Coleman ([03:53](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=233.37)):

Sure. I'll touch on them briefly and then I'll focus on two kind of specifically. So all of our areas of focus are focused on the power of relationship building pre-incident because we know when things happen, it's always gonna be that social capital and social connectedness that helps people navigate the steps after, when we start talking about recovery and long term. So focus number one, is really focusing on partnerships that embeds equity. So that's in direct connection to FEMA Strategic Plan Goal Number One. And strengthening climate resilience. Area of focus two, amplifying delivery of FEMA programs post-disaster in historically underserved populations. This picks up on the Administrator's focus on equity, specifically looking at programs like Individual Assistance and making sure that we can help bolster the awareness of some of the program changes we're making pre-disaster. Improving safety and security for places of worship and community spaces...

Marcus Coleman ([04:52](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=292.22)):

I know we'll talk a little bit about that more, but really focused on this idea of looking at the places that people worship, fellowship and serve and being mindful to come alongside organizations that are seeking to create those spaces and make them safer, and then providing technical assistance to emergency managers. I think in our title, this may not be inherent, but a lot of our focus day-to-day is coming alongside state and local emergency managers. Because they often are the ones leading on safety and security, disaster preparedness, community preparedness, and helping to provide them the tools and resources they need as they conduct their outreach to the community. And then advising on the development of outreach and engagement, across the department. There are a number of challenges that we face as a department and as a country. And what we know to be true is we have some great partners internally, including the FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaisons, that do really good work. And we wanna make sure that we are working across the department for other agents of change, like our FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaisons, to help support, again, faith-based and community-based organizations that are seeking to help people before, during and after a disaster.

Mark Peterson - Host ([06:01](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=361.7)):

So before we kind of transition into talking a little bit about those areas of focus, you know, I wanted to spend a little time learning about the NVOAD. April, the NVOAD was founded in 1970 and for emergency managers who maybe haven't had the experience of working with the NVOAD, can you give a little background on the organization and how you bring entities together?

April Wood ([06:26](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=386.93)):

Absolutely. Thanks Mark. So the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters - or National VOAD - was formed by seven founding organizations really following the devastating impacts of Hurricane Camille in 1969. So these organizations, at that time, really recognized the value of what we now call our 4 Cs, which is cooperation, communication, coordination, and collaboration across agencies and programs as a whole. The National VOAD membership for us is really comprised of about 130 organizations, which also include the 56 state and territory VOADs across the country. It's these organizations that have led a growing VOAD movement, if you will, across the country that's really comprised of thousands of local volunteers and community-based organizations around the U.S. In 2019 alone, just to share a pretty powerful statistic that I, we, learned from our recent review of our membership, we had nearly 10 million volunteers contributing more than 48 million volunteer hours just in 2019 alone. And that is truly a powerful and inspirational force of good helping disaster survivors across the country. I really would encourage every emergency manager listening and community leader to get to know your VOAD leadership and identify ways to work together to be able to help communities before they're affected by a disaster, because understanding one's capacities and capabilities is truly the key to a well-executed response and recovery effort.

Mark Peterson - Host ([07:55](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=475.23)):

So April, you know, like Marcus just described, you know, the focus areas for the center... What are some of the focus areas for the NVOAD over the next couple of years?

April Wood ([08:06](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=486.93)):

We're definitely looking at, you know, four areas as we continue to implement our strategic plan. We're on year four of that five year plan, and over the next year or two, we're really focused in the areas of mobilizing volunteers and particularly diverse volunteers. Being able to recruit and mobilize diverse volunteers from a variety of communities and organizations to get them involved and help support some of these longer, more concurrent recovery events what we're seeing post-disaster response events. We're looking at leveraging tech, leveraging tech in new ways that we never have before using geographic information systems, GIS. Being able to look at our dark platform where we have a number of modules to support client intake, volunteer intake, case management. Looking at other opportunities to utilize tech around blockchain. Building digital wallets for clients or disaster survivors, being able to build volunteer service wallets to provide a way for our volunteers to easily access digital, you know, service hours and be able to track all of that.

April Wood ([09:06](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=546.74)):

The third area we're focused on is looking at engaging the private sector and in a couple of different ways. One is really aligning programmatic areas within the private sector where there are existing disaster programs. Maybe there are additional food trucks. Maybe their equipment around communication and technology that they deploy to disasters on a routine basis. And being able to align the capabilities of our membership within National VOAD with many of our partners and additional private sector organizations that just haven't had the opportunity to get to know us yet at National VOAD. And then lastly, we're looking to expand our support of long-term recovery programs, leveraging that expertise that exists within the VOAD movement around long-term recovery. Looking at expanding our grant programs to support our membership with their efforts in long-term recovery. And just overall being able to support long-term recovery in a more robust way with tools and training, hopefully using our learning management system in the future to build or provide increased accessibility to some of the greatest curriculum that has been developed in this sector, from some of the most brilliant minds across long-term recovery efforts.

Mark Peterson - Host ([10:13](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=613.45)):

April, I know that one of the ways that you bring the variety of organizations together is through your national conference. And so maybe tell us a little bit about what is unique about the conference and some of the focus areas that you had recently, this May I believe. Right? The last time you held your conference?

April Wood ([10:32](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=632.46)):

Yeah. We just recently gathered in Baltimore for our first in-person conference in about three years, due to the pandemic of course, and what a powerful week it was. You know, we had a near-record turnout and we really had the opportunity to focus our efforts on empowering resiliency and fostering diversity, equity and inclusion. You know, some of the highlights included welcoming our first-time attendees - more than 350 by the way - from organizations across the country. Some of which represented Tribal Leaders and communities of color, and hearing from more than 125 disaster experts throughout the week on various topics ranging from long-term recovery to pet care during a disaster, just to name a few. Really one of my favorite stories from the week we had, you know, we had a number of plenary speakers. We were joined by Marcus Coleman, who's with us here today, Chairman John Hope Bryant, from Operation Hope, as well as Professor Monica Sanders, who was a senior fellow at Tulane's Disaster Resiliency Leadership Academy, also known as DRLA for those of you familiar with that program. But Professor Sanders was sharing with us some of her efforts to engage at-risk youth, including those with a criminal history and background, in a community wifi collaborative to describe a program that was focused on increasing digital access in underserved communities. And it turns out one of her former students was actually present in the room, working for one of the conference vendors, and it truly validated all of the resiliency work, you know, when he showed up at the stage and said, "Look at me. Your program worked. Keep doing what you're doing. I'm here with the career path because of the efforts that you put in, in this voluntary resiliency program." So it's kind of a goosebump moment, if you will, for all of the attendees, but exciting to see the validation take place. You know, a lot of times this work can be very taxing. We also, you know, I think the greatest value of our annual conference is bringing so many people together from diverse backgrounds and organizations and understanding how we all work together across government, the private sector and voluntary agencies as a whole, really with the unity of mission and purpose to help communities impacted by disasters.

Mark Peterson - Host ([12:45](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=765.429)):

Since you were both at that conference, and obviously I can only assume you must have spoken with just countless organizations that we are likely to work with in emergencies and disasters... You know, thinking about the last two years, it's been a shift for really everybody in America and I'm sure there's been challenges for voluntary organizations as they try to work to support disasters. So I wonder if you could share a little bit about, you know, some of maybe the challenges that those organizations have been feeling, and whether or not we are starting to return to a new normal.

April Wood ([13:24](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=804.55)):

Just looking at the concurrence of so many different disasters, if you will, across the board. So looking at, you know, multiple natural cause disasters occurring, the pandemic ongoing throughout all of that, the social justice issues that we're seeing, all compounded by the economic impacts from all of those across the board. I think the voluntary agencies in the sector as a whole has been incredibly dynamic and flexible in their efforts to scale their programs and adjudicate their resources in a way that they're really focused on those disaster survivors or that community individual that needs some extra support through this difficult economic time. You know, utilizing resources in different ways has been one of the themes throughout the last couple of years, of being able to leverage technology, utilize that virtual environment in a way that we just have not previously in the disaster sector, and reaching even more people by leveraging those resources.

Marcus Coleman ([14:23](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=863.32)):

I say to add to that, I think one of the things that is true for everybody that's active in emergency management across the discipline, is we're busy. I think it's... I think more than 300 or so presidential declared disasters that are currently open and what we know for many of our faith-based and community-based groups. Right? They're not just involved for those things that reach the threshold of presidential disaster declarations. They're working on everyday emergencies. They're working on apartment fires. And what's true for all of the members at that conference and for faith-based and community-based organizations across the board. Right? Since COVID, there's been a number of incidents at the community-level at the neighborhood-level, at the city-level, that has really stretched - not just of course our government resources - but many of the resources of our faith-based NGO partners as well.

Marcus Coleman ([15:11](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=911.27)):

And the thing that I was struck most by at the conference and continue to be inspired by is every organization that I've been able to speak with, be it at National VOAD or in other places in spaces that focus on environmental justice or climate justice, they're clear on what their assignment is. Engaging with members of the community to help build out a whole community response to address many of the issues we face. But my heart really speaks, goes out to those folks that are tired. Right? I think we can't get away from the mental and emotional toll that all of this has done for us, particularly in this emergency management and crisis leadership space. And so I know many of the conversations, as people were meeting each other for the first time in two to three years in person and connecting, it provided some uplifting spirits as well.

Marcus Coleman ([15:58](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=958.03)):

And just, I think it was a moment to give us a little bit more energy. But I'm very mindful, from a government perspective, that many of our faith-based and community-based organizations often are getting multiple calls to work on many assignments. And while I'm grateful for all of the work that they continue to do as they say yes to support communities, I'm also mindful and I know April is equally committed as well, is that we need to continue to be as inclusive as possible and expand the table for folks that wanna get into the emergency management space. And the conference was a great place to do that.

Mark Peterson - Host ([16:28](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=988.69)):

I'm sure that the FEMA Strategic Plan, you know, really truly plays a very large role in the planning for both of the organizations that you represent. But specifically, you know, the focus on instilling equity, I think is common amongst both of what we're both of your organizations and what we're talking about here. But also, you know, the focus on climate resilience and readiness. So knowing that the plan is, you know, relatively new, how do you see, you know, each of your organizations playing a part in really advancing those goals? And maybe I'll start with April.

April Wood ([17:05](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1025.32)):

Yeah, thanks Mark. So, you know, National VOAD is committed to working alongside our Board of Directors and our member organizations to really assess, identify actions that we can take to promote and support equity in disaster programming. There's so much more to be done, and we recognize that. But really the first step for us is identifying the issues and then working alongside our partners, such as FEMA and our state emergency management partners and our academic partners, across the board. Our private sector partners, really as a team to address those issues around equity.

Marcus Coleman ([17:35](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1055.82)):

And Mark for my part, yes. During my plenary speech, a lot of it was very much focused on the role this Strategic Plan plays across all three goal areas and really the opportunities where we're already working together with our faith-based and neighborhood partners. When we talk about instilling equity in emergency management, a part of what it looks like is to see the work of, you know, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Buddhist Tzu Chi, organizations like the United Sikhs and others, coming alongside members that were impacted by the severe weather, tornadoes in Kentucky. And making sure that - Right? - We're amplifying outreach and engagement to all of the community. Right? And so specifically looking at some of the work that's happened in support of our Hispanic and Latino churches in the area that we're equally impacted. Right? From those severe storms. On the leading climate resilience piece, I'm super excited for the leadership and work of members of the National Voluntary Organizations of Disasters.

Marcus Coleman ([18:31](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1111.74)):

I mentioned Buddha Tzu Chi as one example. Team Rubicon, Lutheran Disaster Services, Adventist Community Services. There are a number of organizations in their own way that have been focused on climate resilience, climate adaptation, and we're continuing to expand those partnerships. Right? So I think one of the things that continues to kind of encourage and inspire me is that many of these national organizations are there. Aren't just there to lead from where they are, but they're also about co-creating a table. And I think, to part of your question, I think, where we go from here, now that the plan is new. From FEMA's perspective, and I'd say from the government perspective, to the community is not forcing people to come to the tables that we've created as government, but making sure that we're intentional about being at tables that are developed by our faith-based and community-based partners.

Marcus Coleman ([19:20](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1160.619)):

And so I know a lot of what the Voluntary Organization Active in Disaster model is about is about co-creating those tables. Right? Between sectors. And so that's something that we continue to be committed to do, including... Right? I'm actually spending time with the national denomination that's not a member of the National VOAD currently, but that is equally focused on disaster preparedness including - Right? - Safety and security for places of worship and community spaces. And so, that's where I'm at currently, and I will be leaving here and then continuing to do some of that engagement with some other groups. And I'm just grateful, again, that we have a partner in the National VOAD that is coming alongside some of those same partners. Maybe they don't even know what the word VOAD is. Right? But they very much are aware of Salvation Army, the Red Cross, and they want to get connected to help people before, during and after disasters. It's a lot of what our focus was during the conference and henceforth.

Mark Peterson - Host ([20:12](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1212.23)):

Okay. So Marcus, going back to one of the areas of focus that you mentioned, technical assistance and maybe what that looks like for emergency managers and first responders that are facing perhaps their first major event that really engages the faith community and community organizations to really respond to the needs of disaster survivors. So can you talk about, you know, really what does technical assistance from your center look like for those emergency managers?

Marcus Coleman ([20:45](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1245.6)):

So Kentucky's a unique example of a state that has made the decision, quite some time ago, to establish a state Voluntary Agency Liaison. So I know I talked a little bit about that role earlier. This is essentially a government entity, or a government partner, that works with faith-based and community-based organizations before disasters happen. Right? So they're doing things in the emergency management context. Right? They're planning, they're organizing, they're equipping, they're training, they're exercising and evaluating. In that direction towards when things happen, how are we working together? And having that state Voluntary Agency Liaison is critical because it actually helps to expedite a lot of what we know is important during response and recovery with faith-based and community groups. Our center - a few years back actually under my predecessor Reverend David Myers - went across the country and worked with state emergency management agencies, including Kentucky, to help think through what does the proper composition for this role look like.

Marcus Coleman ([21:42](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1302.14)):

Right? We know that states have very limited resources and often are trying to leverage all of the funds that are provided from the Department, and specifically FEMA, to get personnel built up. And so I think that that's a good example of where, through our work with them and thinking about what a role would look like, taking lessons learned from other states that also have state voluntary agency liaisons. I know for example, in Missouri, that there was a state VAL, as well as Georgia, some in Texas. So really trying to kind of build that national network, that in addition to the federal Voluntary Agency Liaisons, that we really come alongside and support some of our state partners, that again, are looking to build positions. When we think about programs, I'd say the program that probably is getting the most attention that we're currently focused on for technical assistance is the Public Assistance program.

Marcus Coleman ([22:29](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1349.1)):

It's a very critical part of the recovery process. Of course, we know for SLTT partners - state, local, tribal, territorial partners - but also many NGOs, are very interested in news. Right? I think we've seen this during COVID, Category B and a lot of the permanent work function. There was that policy change for Public Assistance in 2018 that affords faith-based and community partners to apply as sub-applicants to do permanent work. And one of the areas of focus from my office is making sure that we support, not just our faith-based partners with navigating our process, but listening and learning from our state partners. Right? So from the state of Kentucky to the state of North Carolina, to the state of Florida, we've been able to connect with some of our state partners on the Public Assistance side, in learning from them how they've been talking about communicating with Public Assistance about the Public Assistance program, and really trying to create more improved mechanisms. Right? From the FEMA space...

Marcus Coleman ([23:25](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1405.8)):

So we talk about the federal support that we provide to states to make sure that, you know, they're able to best manage all of the interest and desire to apply for that particular grant program. The last thing I'd kind of say in terms of what technical assistance looks like, again, it's coming alongside some of our state partners and state emergency managers in creating opportunities, not just for that near-term response like we've seen in Kentucky, but also keeping in mind some of the longer term recovery efforts. I am super proud of the work that's happened in West Virginia, between the West Virginia Emergency Management and the West Virginia Voluntary Organizations in Disasters to execute a very unique project, the Bridge Project. I know they just recently completed what's called Big Blue, a massive bridge there. And so, those are some examples. I know April may have some others in terms of just the role that state VOADs play in helping some of their state government partners get more technical assistance around engaging faith-based and community groups.

April Wood ([24:23](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1463.359)):

Thanks, Marcus. You know, I mentioned that I think it's really important to understand the capabilities and capacities of the voluntary agencies and the broader community as a whole, as well as your community influencers and mobilizers. Anybody that has that technical assistance that can really contribute to that whole community approach. You know? At National VOAD, we operate using a committee approach. We have about a dozen committees and each plays a critical role in being able to provide subject matter experts and technical assistance to the cycle of disasters occurring. And so some examples of that might be our mass care committee, where we have experts around sheltering and feeding. We have an emotional and spiritual care committee. And with many of our faith-based partners, more than 50% of our membership, is comprised of diverse faith-based partners and backgrounds, to be able to contribute. You know, we have experts in disaster case management. Some of those organizations came together after Hurricane Harvey to support the Project Comeback disaster case management program down in Texas. And really looking once again at long-term recovery and just the amount of expertise needed to address some of those complex situations in long-term recovery that we're continuing to see. Our experts, you know, once again, they represent so many different organizations and fabrics of communities across the country. Those diverse perspectives, and truly seasoned disaster experts, make up the VOAD community across the board as a whole.

Mark Peterson - Host ([25:52](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1552.109)):

Marcus, can I go back to one of the things that you mentioned about the Public Assistance program? Of course, you know, it is new that faith-based organizations, in certain situations, have now become eligible applicants. But maybe put a finer point on it. What does... Are we seeing faith-based organizations taking advantage of that grant program and what are the ways that they're doing it?

Marcus Coleman ([26:16](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1576.65)):

Yes. We are seeing it and I'll admit, man, it is a painful process if you're going through it for the first time. I know, as many of our listeners know, the Public Assistance program is a very complex, reimbursable project, project-based grant. Right? Basically. So, we have seen a number of faith-based and community-based organizations very involved, from Louisiana to Puerto Rico. As I mentioned in Kentucky, in Tennessee, absolutely taking up the program. And I think one of the areas of focus for us is just navigating what it means to - Right? - sit in the seat of a faith or community-based organization. I'll just humbly say, I think a question that I ask myself is if I'm a pastor, a rabbi or an Imam, and my place of worship is destroyed and my home is destroyed, I'm not only a disaster survivor, but now I gotta be a project manager for a construction project and all the things that come with that. Right? And my team does as well. And so making sure that we bring together the right composition of partners within my own organization. So we have - Right? - thankfully we actually just released a video that we're happy to provide in the show notes or share with you to include in the show notes that talks through from faith leaders - one in Tennessee and a few in a church in Puerto Rico - how they navigated the process and the steps that they've taken. That's one step in a larger effort, that we want to come alongside our National VOAD partners and others with. Was actually able to spend some time with Presbyterian, the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, and many of the Presbyterian groups in Kansas City earlier this year, and they had talked to me about some of the unique intricacies for their organization, just because of simply how they're structured. Right? Not every place of worship is an independent 501(c)3. There's different legal authorities we have to consider. So there's a lot of nuances and intricacies there. But I will say, we have a lot of very determined faith-based and NGO partners that are actively involved. And thankfully, we continue to have states that have been leaning forward on how to make sure, you know, from the state perspective, they can make the program as accessible and as supportive and engaging for faith-based, community-based organizations that need it as possible.

Mark Peterson - Host ([28:28](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1708.2)):

April, I think that Marcus is providing a great example of how the federal government can really, really support financially some of these organizations that are out there trying to respond and recover from these disasters. But I wonder, if you have any other examples of how the federal government or just governments - it doesn't have to be the federal government. But between, you know, community governments, state governments, federal government, how we're working together better to make responses more efficient and recovery maybe more successful for communities.

April Wood ([29:06](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1746.57)):

Yeah. So I always love the multi-agency approach, Mark. Right? Of bringing together different agencies across the sector. You know, I mentioned government, private sector partners alongside our voluntary agencies to be able to plan together, to be able to respond together and then be able to recover together across the board. Some great examples of that are things like the multi-agency feeding template, where we see these multi-agency feeding task forces that develop during larger scale complex events, where we're really tackling the problem of feeding a community together. Ensuring that we're eliminating those food deserts that open up and that we're all coordinating and understanding what each other is doing, so that we're avoiding a duplication of resources and that we're able to maximize what resources have been brought to the table. You know, another example I always love to use around multi-agency coordination are the multi-agency resource centers. MARCs, if you will. They're great examples of many, many different organizations coming together with that disaster survivor in mind. The focus being, making that journey for that disaster survivor's recovery as simple and easy as possible, to be able to support them properly along the way.

Mark Peterson - Host ([30:12](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1812.41)):

As we are in the midst of hurricane season here, what advice do you have for faith-based and community organizations and some of the voluntary organizations that are eager to support citizens that may be affected by these storms? What is the best way that maybe they can prepare?

April Wood ([30:32](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1832.29)):

From my perspective, you know, part of what makes the VOAD movement so successful, is the coalition building that takes place across the different representatives of the community, the different organizations that are present within the community. Being able to bring everyone to the table, whether that's a planning council before a disaster occurs, whether it's an unmet needs roundtable post-disaster, or long-term recovery group. Looking at ways that they can prepare ahead of time, meet each other, get to know one another, understand capacities and capabilities. Once again, I keep hammering that point home. Because I think it really is important, at the end of the day, to understand what is the make up of your community? Who does your community represent? And do you have the right resources in place to be able to address the needs - anticipated needs - of your community at the end of the day?

Marcus Coleman ([31:18](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1878.16)):

April, I love that. And I'll just add for our emergency managers, particularly some of our local and county emergency managers, as we think about the coalitions that we seek to build, we should look at coalitions that are already serving a purpose. Right? Taking a, borrowing a line from Mr. Rogers. Right? We need to find the helpers. And so you may have community groups that are focused on things that we know systemically show up during disasters, which can be homelessness. So there may be a homelessness interagency council. Maybe there's a council that's focused on youth engagement and just trying to help youth better understand and find healthy pathways to engaging. But looking at those existing coalitions that are solving some of the everyday problems, and then working to introduce yourself in a place to help them pivot towards what would those services of support look like in the event of a disaster? Be it a hurricane, a wildfire, or even some of the low visibility, long range disasters like drought. Right?

Marcus Coleman ([32:13](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1933.16)):

I think that that's something that we often are focused on, and I know many of our VOAD partners look at as well, is we recognize that the range of hazards that we all have to respond to are vast and complex. But thankfully with partners like the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters and community partners, including groups like the Chisholm Legacy Project. I know April mentioned The Undivide Project. There's a few others that are in that environmental and climate justice space. We do have the coalition. We just have to look a bit differently from the emergency management side to see who's already solving these problems. How can we come alongside them and how do we build those tables together that honors and respects the expertise that they bring to help people before, during and after disasters?

Mark Peterson - Host ([32:58](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1978.13)):

Marcus and April, thank you for the very robust conversation. And now I thought we'd take a little minute, a moment to talk about something that I think is used quite a bit amongst emergency managers, when they're thinking about, maybe something that they're regularly planning for. Or maybe something that they've explored amongst their organization, that really, you know, causes them some concern professionally. And since you are both extremely experienced emergency managers here, let's ask the question, what keeps you up at night? And I'm gonna turn it to April first.

April Wood ([33:37](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2017.76)):

Yeah, no. Great question. I always love this question in the emergency management community. So, you know, I think about it from the perspective of what I like to call the other 4 Cs, if you will. And the first one for me that jumps out is really cost. You know, we're continuing to see an increase in billion dollar disasters annually. And so looking at the increased cost of disasters as a whole. Thinking about concurrence, responding to wildfires on the West Coast while we're responding to a hurricane in the Gulf simultaneously, and the challenges that that presents around resource adjudication and decision-making across the board. You know, that third area I think about is complexity. And I'm reminded of, you know, some of the terrible fires we've had out West, where instead of rebuilding neighborhoods, we are rebuilding entire communities across the board. And so, also finally just thinking about compassion and that amount of compassion and care that it takes to respond to all of these events year after year, month after month from our volunteer community and how that can take its own toll. You know, mindful of self-care, taking care of ourselves and one another before we can take care of others is kind of what keeps me up at night.

Mark Peterson - Host ([34:47](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2087.69)):

Sure. Marcus, how about you?

Marcus Coleman ([34:49](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2089.5)):

Absolutely. So I know FEMA Administrator Criswell often talks about black swans, and I think that those are true. Right? Very unique events. But I'm equally concerned about the gray rhino. This is a concept that was developed by Michele Wucker, and a lot of what she talks about with gray rhinos - Right? - Are these big, obvious things that are right in front of us, that for whatever reason we don't take action. So she talks about this in a crisis leadership context. But we think about. Right? The things that are in front of us as April mentioned, compassion fatigue, increased costs, and how some of those things that are very obvious are gonna show up in an exacerbated way if we don't do something about them from a disaster planning perspective in response and recovery. And so I'm always mindful of the black swans that can happen.

Marcus Coleman ([35:37](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2137.48)):

I think to April's point, there are a lot of disasters that we respond to at once. If this was an exercise 10 or 15 years ago, we wouldn't have thought any of these injects would've been possible. But it's real. Right? And so I think we want to be mindful not just of those black swan things that occur, but just being mindful of, again, some of those gray rhino topics. So I think often about infrastructure and how the aging infrastructure is gonna continue to be impacted disproportionately in communities of color and places that may have had historical underinvestment in maintaining infrastructure and how that's gonna continue to show up. I think we've seen that, not just in wildfires, but in severe cold weather as well. But those are the kind of things. Right? I think we want to definitely have the right kind of subscriptions and imaginations in place for things that we can't imagine. But I'm always mindful that we should focus on the things that are right in front of us. Because often, like gray rhinos, we see them. And when they come at us, it can hurt if we're not ready for it. So that's what I think about.

Mark Peterson - Host ([36:38](https://www.temi.com/editor/t/G7A1153tng6RXcs7WRRGUrqBlHKy6_1j4R0KY-t9j11XZ9Xl7HefEi8Mh9zCtp_Kt9ryG1cDnFCQU2hz2O97urtL5fU?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2198.63)):

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