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## Integrating Equity into All Aspects of Emergency Management

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### What inspires you to direct emergency management?

Emergency managers help people during what could be one of their worst days of their lives, when disaster strikes. We work long hours and typically work behind scenes without much fanfare. We're mission focused and care about people and our communities. The ability to support communities, especially those most in need and disproportionately impacted, motivates me daily.

### As the first African American to hold the post of state coordinator in Virginia, what does it mean to you to be an intricate part of history?

My opportunity to serve in this role during a critical moment in history represents a continuation of the contribution of countless past and present African Americans have made through public service. Throughout my life and career, I have been blessed to have parents and diverse mentors who have imparted in me the responsibility we all have to make a positive impact for others. This ongoing response to COVID-19 and other disasters amplifies the need for urgent equitable, action support communities of color who all too often suffer most when disasters strike.

### What makes you proudest of your team at VDEM?

I am proud of my team's ability to simultaneously manage numerous disasters' response and recovery events and support our communities throughout this last year. They have worked more hours than at any other point in the agency's history. At one point last year, we were coordinating the response to three different statewide emergency declarations which was a first in Virginia's history. The team at VDEM remains flexible, solution-oriented, and focused on our critical mission to support communities before, during, and after disasters.

### What would be your quick three points if someone asked you, "Why join NEMA?"

The ability to network with colleagues across the country to learn about innovative new approaches to emergency management. To build capacity and support other states during disasters via the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. And, leverage the power of collaboration to advocate for legislation, policies, and funding to support emergency management and make our nation more resilient.

### You serve as a co-founder to the Institute for Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management (I-DIEM). How do you see the institute moving the needle in emergency management for the future?

I believe the disproportionate impact of disasters on marginalized and frontline communities will be the most defining issue in the field of emergency management for the fore-seeable future. We will be judged by our ability to equitably administer preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery programs in the face of more frequent and impactful disasters. The ability to build a workforce that reflects the communities we serve, inclusively engage diverse communities and stakeholders, and integrate equity into all aspects of our operations will be more important than ever. I-DIEM serves as a resource for emergency management to leverage data and best practices to further these key goals.

### If you had to choose: Radford, VT, or VCU?

I appreciate the experiences at all my higher education institutions 😊

I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands; you need to be able to throw something back.

- Maya Angelou



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