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## Supporting Our Colleagues Amid the Los Angeles Wildfires

The ongoing urban wildfires in and around Los Angeles represent a historic and devastating event. With several active fires, many residents under mandatory evacuation orders, and a rising official death toll, the region is experiencing an unprecedented crisis. Many IAEM members and their families are directly affected, not only working tirelessly to manage the disaster but also living in its path.

### A Message to Emergency Managers

To the emergency managers working relentlessly in response to this disaster: your efforts are making a significant difference in the lives of those affected. You are providing hope and stability to your communities during their darkest moments. The strength, resilience, and dedication you bring to your work are nothing short of heroic.

Remember, IAEM is more than a professional association; it’s a community of friends and colleagues. When the challenges feel overwhelming, know that you are not alone. The IAEM community stands beside you, ready to support you through this journey. And most importantly, amidst the chaos, take a moment to care for yourself—your mental and physical well-being are vital, not only for your sake but for the communities you serve. You are valued, and your well-being matters.

### How to Offer Support

For those outside the affected region, your outreach can make a difference. A simple message to a friend or colleague can provide a much-needed boost of energy and comfort during these trying times. Even if they cannot respond immediately, your support will not go unnoticed.

There are numerous ways to contribute. IAEM has compiled [a dedicated Los Angeles Fires 2025 Resources page](#), which also includes links to local, state, and federal agencies for situational reports and public assistance. Distinctly noteworthy are the mental health resources, especially “[Fanning the Flames of old Memories](#)” which was provided by Dr. Mary Schoenfeldt. To suggest additional resources, please email [dawn@iaem.com](mailto:dawn@iaem.com).

### Together in Kindness

As our colleagues in Los Angeles and surrounding areas continue their efforts, let us support them with kindness and compassion. A small gesture can have a lasting impact. To everyone working on the front lines, your IAEM family stands with you now and always. ♦

# Get to Know Your IAEM Leadership

## IAEM-USA Region 7 President

**Randy Michael Pommenville, CEM, Emergency Management Specialist, University of Kansas Medical Center**

In an effort to introduce the IAEM leadership to members and recognize their hard work for the organization, the IAEM Bulletin will be providing profiles on the current IAEM leadership throughout the year. A heartfelt thanks to our volunteers whose hard work makes IAEM successful.

**R**andy currently resides in Kansas City, Kansas, and has been an IAEM member for 16 years. You can connect with Randy on [LinkedIn](#) or email him at [USAREgion7President@iaem.com](mailto:USAREgion7President@iaem.com).

■ **Biographical sketch:** Growing up in New England, I enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1986 and became a firefighter and was stationed in Alaska. While in Alaska, I met my wife of 33 years, raised two children, got my education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (A.A.S, Fire Science and B.E.M, Emergency Management). After 6 years active duty in the USAF, I transitioned to the Alaska Air National Guard and retrained in disaster preparedness in 1993. This is the foundation of my emergency management career. I currently have my Kansas CEM and my CEM.

I transitioned to Kansas in 2013, working in risk management and emergency management.

■ **What professional accomplishment or experience are you most proud of and/or learned the most from?**

I have had a few experiences and accomplishments in the military that are noteworthy, but I feel my greatest accomplishment is helping to build the emergency management at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. I am proud to be part of the University of Kansas Medical Center, in which we get to build its first ever comprehensive emergency management program.

■ **What are you hoping to get out of being a part of the IAEM leadership team?**

I engaged in IAEM with the mindset that I can help maintain or improve IAEM for all members. In my time as an IAEM Board member, I have learned that everyone who volunteers are genuinely working on making IAEM better and for this, I am happy to serve on a Board that serves the membership.

■ **How did you get your start in emergency management?**

As a member of the Alaska Air National Guard serving as a disaster preparedness specialist (now emergency management specialist).

■ **What is the most valuable thing you receive from being a part of the association?**

My network. I have met so many people through IAEM and I value so many of the relationships I have created over the last 16 years.

■ **What country do you really want to visit?**

It is my goal to travel to Europe. I particularly want to visit Germany, France, Italy, and Greece.

■ **What are your favorite sports teams and what, if any, logo items or memorabilia do you have?**

I have been a fan of the Boston Bruins since I was little. Some of my favorite players are Ray Bourque, Cam Neely, and Patrice Bergeron. I have collected a few autographed items from each of these players.

■ **What's your superpower?**

If being nice to people is a super-



*Randy Michael Pommenville, CEM, IAEM-USA Region 7 president*

power, then that is mine.

■ **What would people be surprised to learn about your background?**

I created the A-bear (the athletic logo) for the University of Alaska Fairbanks when I worked for the hockey program.

■ **What is the hardest thing you've ever done?**

Trained for and ran a marathon.

■ **If you didn't work in emergency management, what career would you pursue?**

NHL Hockey equipment manager

■ **If you could say one thing to all IAEM members, what would it be?**

IAEM can be a source of wealth,

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in terms of networking, professional development, training, and service.

■ **Is there any advice or knowledge you would like to share with emerging professionals in the field?**

The output you seek, correlates to the input you make.

■ **What is your favorite way to relax?**

Tailgating at the Kansas State Football games with family and friends.

■ **What motto do you live by?**

"What matters most is often invisible." - Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

■ **Any parting thoughts you'd like to share?**

Do your best today, as tomorrow is not promised. ♦

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The *IAEM Bulletin* is published monthly by IAEM to keep members abreast of association news, government actions affecting emergency management, research, and information sources.

The publication also is intended to serve as a way for emergency managers to exchange information on programs and ideas. Past issues are available in the members-only [IAEM Bulletin Archives](#).

Publishing an article in the *IAEM Bulletin* may help you to meet IAEM's certification requirements. Check out the [author's guidelines](#).

Articles should be submitted to Bulletin Editor John Osborne via email at [john@iaem.com](mailto:john@iaem.com).

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# Get to Know Your IAEM Leadership

## IAEM-USA Region 5 President

**Allison Farole, CEM, Emergency Management Administrator,  
City of Grand Rapids**

In an effort to introduce the IAEM leadership to members and recognize their hard work for the organization, the IAEM Bulletin will be providing profiles on the current IAEM leadership throughout the year. A heartfelt thanks to our volunteers whose hard work makes IAEM successful.

Allison currently resides in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and has been an IAEM member for 13 years. You can connect with Allison on [LinkedIn](#) or email her at [USARegion5President@iaem.com](mailto:USARegion5President@iaem.com).

■ **Biographical sketch:** I was born and raised in Southern California where I achieved a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from the University of La Verne. After college, I left California and have followed various opportunities across the country. While living in Virginia for 10 years, I obtained a Master of Public Administration from Virginia Commonwealth University.

I have called emergency management a career for approximately 12 years with experience in the former Charlottesville-UVA-Albemarle County Office of Emergency Management and the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I am a Certified Emergency Manager (CEM) and a Professional Emergency Manager (PEM) in Michigan. Additionally, I serve as the Region 5 president and a co-chair on the FEMA Region 5 Regional Advisory Council (RAC).

■ **What professional accomplishment or experience are you most proud of and/or learned the most from?**

Serving as the emergency manager for the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County during the Unite the Right Rally incident in 2017 is hands down the experience I not

only learned the most from but also helped me grow as an emergency manager. Serving during this tragic time reinstated the importance of communication, collaboration, and coordination. This experience forever changed me and will be the reason I will constantly advocate for investment within in local emergency management and to always lean into our imagination of “what could happen.” Anything is possible and no jurisdiction is immune to tragedies.

■ **What are you hoping to get out of being a part of the IAEM leadership team?**

I have been serving in a leadership role with IAEM since 2022. As I continue serving in a leadership position, I look forward to continuing to advocate and to grow the association to serve all aspects of emergency management. The emergency management field is growing, but we need to continue to advocate for proper seats at the table and investment to ensure we are able to properly serve our communities during future emergencies and disasters.

■ **How did you get your start in emergency management?**

Many would think my time supporting recovery efforts in Lake Charles, Louisiana, after Hurricane Katrina and Rita in 2005 was the time I found my passion for emergency management. However, my passion was discovered while educating sixth graders at Be Ready Camp in Alabama while working at the U.S.



*Allison Farole, CEM,  
IAEM-USA Region 5 president*

Space and Rocket Center. Once my passion was ignited, I volunteered for the local CERT team and eventually was hired as an assistant emergency management coordinator for the Charlottesville-UVA-Albemarle Office of Emergency Management.

■ **What is the most valuable thing you receive from being a part of the association?**

The network I have built.

■ **What country do you really want to visit?**

I have wanderlust and the country I desire to visit changes daily. But I hope to visit Nepal or Morocco one day.

■ **What are your favorite sports teams and what, if any, logo items**

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### or memorabilia do you have?

I am a hockey girl at heart. Even though I tend to root for the Los Angeles Kings or the Pittsburgh Penguins, I just love a good hockey game. My office currently houses my Kelly Hrudehy, who is my favorite hockey player when I was a kid, memorabilia from my childhood.

#### ■ What's your superpower?

The ability to adapt and to create solid friend groups in every community I live in.

#### ■ What would people be surprised to learn about your background?

I have always been told I have a lot of experience in a variety of things for my age. Between managing a restaurant from the age of 16 to 22; working at Space Camp and educating all ages about the history of space programs.

#### ■ What is the most exciting thing you've ever done?

Probably studying abroad in South Africa. Africa always felt like a faraway place and one that not many would have the opportunity to experience. So, when I was selected to study the apartheid and the impacts to women while in college, I felt honored to be given such an opportunity to experience this amazing country.

#### ■ Reflecting on your career, what are some moments of pride that stand out to you?

Emergency management is hard work and is often a thankless job. However, I always find joy in the simplicity of working with community members as they go through Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training. Most people want to help and find the opportunity to be part of a local CERT program rewarding. Additionally, the family-esque environment of emergency management is one of my favorite

experiences. I have had to lean on many friends within this field to get through tragic days and it's because of them that I absolutely love this career.

#### ■ What is the hardest thing you've ever done?

Leaving my beloved support system in Charlottesville to expand my wings within the emergency management field. Even though this decision was difficult, I was instantly reminded of the beauty of having a support system that will always stand next to you as you go after your dreams.

#### ■ If you didn't work in emergency management, what career would you pursue?

International Relations. The world fascinates me, and I find diplomacy interesting.

#### ■ Is there anything you read every morning?

Right now, I read an excerpt from *The Pivot Year*, by Brianna West.

#### ■ If you could say one thing to all IAEM members, what would it be?

You get what you put into it. The emergency management field is all about connections and relationships.

#### ■ Is there any advice or knowledge you would like to share with emerging professionals in the field?

Know your why. Servant leadership is not for the faint of heart, same with emergency management. Don't lose sight of your why, especially during the hard days. Lean on each other. It's okay to ask for help.

#### ■ Looking to the future, is there growth you would like to see in emergency management or IAEM?

Emergency management needs to be at more tables and utilized as a proactive mechanism to build an adaptable and resilient future. We must authentically invest and be confident in knowing that those investing may never see the results of these investments but are building a better place for future generations.

#### ■ What is your favorite way to relax?

Mountains. Anytime I am in the mountains, especially Yosemite, I am able to fully exhale.

#### ■ What motto do you live by?

Hakuna Matata! My childhood best friend and I have had this motto since elementary school, and it is what we repeat to each other during hard times.

#### ■ What is your favorite restaurant?

Tavola in Charlottesville, Virginia. I am very picky about my Italian food and always enjoy a small, moody restaurant with a superb menu and excellent service. ♦

# GET INVOLVED WITH IAEM!

## Join a Caucus Today




[iaem.org/groups](https://iaem.org/groups)

IAEM in Action



Global Chair Robie Robinson and IAEM Middle East President H.E. Khaled Al Monsoori participated in the 2024 Riyadh, Saudi Arabia Risk, Emergency and Business Continuity Management Conference in early December. While there, the members delivered an overview of IAEM and Certification and proctored the CEM®/AEM® exams for Saudi officials.



Kristen Kolleda, chair of the IAEM-USA Healthcare Caucus, attended the National Healthcare Coalition Preparedness Conference in Orlando, Florida from Dec. 10-12.



At the Region 8 meeting in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Robert Hill, president, SDEMA (South Dakota); Doug Dodge, president of MEMA (Montana); Valerie Lucus-McEwen, IAEM Region 8 president; Stuart Moffatt, UEMA (Utah); Nathan Whittington, vice president of CEMA (Colorado); Ben Gates, president NDEMA (North Dakota); Russ Dalgren, past president of WAHA (Wyoming) gather for a group photo.

[View the photos of the 2024 IAEM Annual Conference](#)





## IAEM News to Know

### Certification

■ **Get Certified in 2025:** Ready to take your skills to the next level? The 2025 Credential Review Dates are posted on the [IAEM website](#). Whether you're aiming to upgrade your credential, start your certification journey, or recertify keep these important dates in mind.

#### Key Dates to Remember:

- Application accepted on a rolling basis.
- Reviews occur every odd month.
- To Be Included in the Awards Ceremony During the 2025 Annual Conference—Submit application by Aug. 31, 2025, and have it approved during the Sept. review meeting and pass the exam by Oct. 16, 2025.

**We're making the process smoother than ever**, with updated support tools to help you succeed:

- [Applicant Guidebook](#).
- [Sample Training Allocation Chart](#).
- [Exam Resource Study List](#).

#### Why Certify in 2025?

- Boost your career potential.
- Gain industry recognition.
- Enhance your network.
- Achieve a personal milestone.
- Questions? Reach out to IAEM at [info@iaem.com](mailto:info@iaem.com).

[com](#).

**Let's make 2025 our most certified year yet!**



### Conference News

■ The Call for Speakers is now open until Feb. 14, 2025 for the **IAEM 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference & EMEX in Louisville, Kentucky, Nov. 14-20, 2025** and upcoming IAEM Plugged In virtual events and webinars. Review the [Speaker Submission Guidance](#) for step-by-step instructions on how to submit a proposal, including all the required fields and login information.

■ The Call for Speakers will open in **April** for the Poster Showcase, and in **May** for the EMvision Talks®.

■ Be sure to save the date for the IAEM Plugged In Virtual Conference on **May 9, 2025**, featuring 15 dynamic speaker sessions on emerging topics for emergency management. ◆

### Learn Tips for a Successful IAEM Speaker Proposal in this Webinar Recording

The IAEM Conference Committee chairs hosted a webinar on "Tips for a Successful Speaker Proposal." [View the recording](#) to get insider information for a successful speaker proposal for the IAEM 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference & EMEX, Nov. 14-20, 2025.

The webinar includes details on:

- All mandatory requirements for a successful proposal.
- Insider tips from the reviewing committee.
- This year's breakout focus areas.
- How to use the online portal to submit your proposal.

**General Focus Articles:**

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**Submit an Article for the IAEM Bulletin**

The IAEM Editorial Committee is currently accepting submissions for future editions of the IAEM Bulletin. Refer to the [Author Guidelines](#) for tips and techniques for successfully submitting your article for publication.

The primary focus of the IAEM Bulletin is local. We are looking for articles that provide information and insights useful to other practitioners, in government and private sectors, who are educated and trained professionals. Appropriate topics include: new research results, unique applications, successful programs, real experiences with disasters and/or exercises, reviews of new publications, and viewpoints on important issues facing emergency management. Refer to the [Author Guidelines](#) for tips and techniques for successfully submitting your article for publication.

- **Article Format:** Word or text format (not PDF).
- **Word length:** 750 to 1,500 words.
- **Photos/graphics:** Image format (png, jpg).
- **Email article, photos, and graphics to:** [John Osborne](#).



**Message: Thinking of you. Sending you strength, support, and a little bit of caffeine. ❤️ IAEM #IAEMStrong**

*IAEM-USA sent its members in the Los Angeles area a small token to express our support as they deal with the horrific fires in their area.*



# Enhancing Cultural Competency in Disaster Management: Addressing Disparities in Emergency Response for Economically Distressed Communities

By John S. Lainé, Ph.D., COOP Director, United States Agency for Global Media

Disaster management is a profession deeply rooted in serving diverse communities during their most vulnerable moments. However, economically distressed communities often experience disparities in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery due to systemic inequities and misaligned strategies. This article builds on findings from the 2016 dissertation, *Cultural Competence in Emergency Management and Disaster Response and Recovery Efforts Among Economically Distressed Communities* (Laine, 2016), to explore why cultural competency is critical for equitable outcomes. Drawing on lessons from recent disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic, this piece offers actionable recommendations for embedding cultural competency into emergency management practices.

Natural disasters have become more frequent and intense, leaving communities to navigate their devastating aftermaths. While disasters can affect anyone, economically distressed communities often face a disproportionate burden. These populations are more likely to experience delayed resource allocation, insufficient communication, and gaps in recovery assistance due to systemic inequities (Bullard & Wright, 2018; Hernandez, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare many of these issues. In underserved communities, inconsistent messaging and inequitable access to resources hindered recovery efforts (FEMA, 2021). These disparities highlight the urgent need for a shift in emergency management strategies toward cultural competency—a framework that ensures services

are tailored to the specific needs of diverse populations. This article revisits key findings from the 2016 dissertation to assess the progress made in cultural competency integration and explores practical steps for emergency managers to ensure equitable outcomes for all.

## Why Cultural Competency Matters: Addressing Inequities in Service Delivery

Emergency management often defaults to one-size-fits-all solutions, which unintentionally exclude vulnerable populations. For economically distressed communities, the barriers to equitable disaster response are multifaceted: historic underinvestment, systemic racism, and limited access to recovery resources (Smith, Brown, & Johnson, 2018). Cultural competency bridges this gap by empowering emergency managers to design strategies that consider the unique dynamics of these communities.

## Framework for Action: The Campinha-Bacote Model

The Campinha-Bacote model emphasizes cultural awareness, knowledge, skill-building, and direct engagement with diverse populations (Campinha-Bacote, 2018). This approach equips professionals to navigate cultural differences effectively, fostering trust and improving resilience in vulnerable communities.

## Lessons from Recent Disasters

### ■ COVID-19: A Wake-Up Call:

The pandemic highlighted critical shortcomings in disaster response systems. Economically distressed communities faced delayed resource distribution and inconsistent public health messaging, resulting in higher infection and mortality rates (FEMA, 2021). However, tools like FEMA's Resource Allocation Tool demonstrated the value of data-driven decision-making in improving equity.

■ **The Importance of Partnerships:** One of the most significant lessons from recent disasters is the value of local partnerships. Community leaders and grassroots organizations act as trusted messengers, facilitating effective communication and ensuring resources reach those who need them most (Davis & Johnson, 2019). These relationships should be cultivated well before disasters occur to build a foundation of trust.

## Challenges in Implementation

■ **Lack of Resources and Leadership Diversity:** Emergency management teams often lack the resources to prioritize cultural competency training. Additionally, the underrepresentation of diverse voices in leadership roles perpetuates inequities. More inclusive leadership can provide the perspectives needed to craft policies that address community-specific challenges (Mendez, 2020; Rees, 2019).

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## An EM Career Retrospective: Preparing for the Next-Generation Emergency Operations Center

By Hal Grieb, PMP, CO-CEM, FPSEM, MEP, Director of Delivery Services/ Project Management, G&H International Services, Inc.

Beginning at the age of 17, I've dedicated my life to improving the communities I served. My first major experience in emergency response came through my enlistment in the Florida Army National Guard back in 1998. I supported airport security after 9/11 as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, worked with the U.S. Border Patrol in Yuma, Arizona, and handled my first hurricane response during Hurricane Katrina. Early on, I discovered a niche in using "off-the-shelf" technologies to address the high demands of emergencies. This discovery would shape the lens through which I saw and prepared for best practices within the emergency management community.

In 2008, while working for the City of Plano, Texas, I established one of the first official municipal emergency management social media accounts, "PreparedinPlano," to enable real-time communication between the government and our community during disasters. It's funny to think now how "innovative" it was to use social media for public safety! I even won a 2011 Texas Social Media Award for it. Later, in 2019, as the emergency management director for Alachua County, Florida, I repurposed a project management tool into a virtual EOC, which was crucial during a 27-week COVID-19 activation. As emergency management director for Jefferson County, Colorado, I received the sheriff's "Innovation Award" in 2021 for similar work managing COVID-19 testing and vaccine distribution.

With 20 years in emergency management and my current role as director of delivery services and PMO

for G&H International, a technology services company, I am excited at the progress we've made nationally to integrate technology into EM. However, we still have a long way to go. Especially as we race to leverage even newer and more exciting technologies like artificial intelligence.

This year's devastating hurricane season underscored the importance of collaboration, coordination, communication, and technological integration among emergency managers and first responders across the country. In 2019, FEMA introduced the Community Lifelines framework to help agencies communicate incident impacts in clear language, promote unity, and prioritize stabilization efforts during response. Yet, even today, many in the EM community struggle to implement this Lifeline framework at the local level. Having spent years trying to adopt it in different agencies, I understand firsthand the challenges.

I am encouraged for the next generation of emergency managers, as many of the problems I once faced now have tangible solutions. The DHS Science & Technology Directorate (S&T) is developing a no-cost tool for EM offices nationwide, built on Esri's GIS platform, to make the Lifeline framework easier to operationalize—and I'm thrilled to be part of it. Through my role at G&H International, I've worked closely with the Central United States Earthquake Consortium (CUSEC) and FEMA on the Community Lifeline Status System (CLSS). This tool integrates response plans with relevant data to provide a standardized approach for EOC impact assessment and reporting. It's designed to help any EM

agency apply the Lifelines framework while creating a foundation for data-driven emergency planning and management with future applications in machine learning and AI.

We were determined to get the CLSS into the hands of state and local emergency managers even as it was being developed. To date, over 160 agencies across 42 states and all 10 FEMA regions have tested and validated the tool, contributing valuable insights through workshops, pilots, and webinars. The tool's simplicity and scalability reflect these practitioners' feedback, ensuring it's truly built by emergency managers for emergency managers.

The CLSS is customizable and user-friendly, designed to keep up with the fast-paced demands of an EOC. Community-specific indicators can be linked to Lifelines and shared in a standardized, accessible format, providing necessary context for external stakeholders. By leveraging Esri's ArcGIS frameworks, agencies can use existing technology and data investments. Completed Lifeline impact assessments are instantly shareable, enabling cross-jurisdictional collaboration.

Hundreds of professionals have been briefed on CLSS at EM conferences across the country. At the 2024 National Homeland Security Conference in Miami, the CLSS project team and Miami-Dade County's EM team were recognized for their joint presentation, "Operationalizing Community Lifelines Through Data: A Miami-Dade Use Case of CLSS," which won the Best of Show award.

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## An EM Career Retrospective

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In late Aug. 2024, the CLSS entered deployment testing with the Maryland and Virginia State EM agencies. This deployment is expected to culminate in a multi-state exercise in spring 2025, with further rollouts planned across additional states, counties, and cities. DHS S&T will make the tool available at no cost to all state, local, tribal, and territorial EM agencies in early 2025.

If you're interested in learning more or would like to confirm interest in deploying CLSS, please visit the CLSS website at: [Community Lifeline Status System-- CLSS](#). The CLSS lays the foundation for the future of EM, reframing how we approach both learning and applying emergency management practices. Together, we're building a more resilient future. ◆

## Cultural Competency in Disaster Management

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■ **Overcoming the “Add-On” Mentality:** Cultural competency is often viewed as an optional add-on rather than a foundational element of emergency management. This perception, combined with limited budgets, means that many agencies do not prioritize cultural competency training or programs (McEntire, 2020).

## Best Practices for Moving Forward

■ **Build Community Advisory Boards:** Community advisory boards comprised of diverse local representatives can provide insights that shape relevant disaster response strategies. This approach ensures that policies resonate with those

most affected (McEntire, 2020).

■ **Invest in Advanced Training:** Cultural competency training programs should move beyond basics, incorporating real-world scenarios and emphasizing the historical and socio-economic factors that influence community behavior during disasters (Davis & Johnson, 2019).

■ **Leverage Technology:** Data-driven tools such as geospatial mapping and AI can identify high-risk populations and predict resource needs, helping professionals prioritize equitable responses (FEMA, 2021).

## Recommendations for Emergency Managers

■ **Expand Training Programs:** Regularly update cultural competency training to reflect new research and real-world lessons.

■ **Institutionalize Community Engagement:** Develop long-term partnerships with community organizations and leaders to build trust and improve communication.

■ **Promote Leadership Diversity:** Actively recruit and promote leaders from underrepresented backgrounds to improve decision-making inclusivity.

■ **Utilize Data Analytics:** Integrate advanced tools to refine resource allocation and response strategies.

## Conclusion

Disaster management must evolve to prioritize cultural competency as a fundamental element of preparedness and response. By investing in comprehensive training, fostering diverse leadership, and building stronger community partnerships, emergency management professionals can address systemic disparities and create more equitable outcomes for economically distressed communities. The lessons learned from recent disasters

provide a roadmap for making this vision a reality. ◆

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# Conquering Evacuation Management During All-Hazard Emergencies

By Michael J. Smith, Senior Vice President, Genasys, Inc.

There has never been a more crucial time to strengthen emergency evacuation and response plans to ensure you and your team are prepared at a moment's notice. In the past year, emergency managers have encountered a wide range of natural disasters requiring evacuation, including hurricanes and tornadoes in the Southeast, wildfires in the West, ongoing drought in the Midwest, and weather disruptions across the globe from El Niño.

On the whole, we are experiencing a significant shift in emergency response capabilities that necessitate an all-hazards approach as traditional emergency management methods are being tested.

In terms of evacuations, these methods are being supplemented with digital solutions focused on creating a collaborative common operating picture while also informing the public in real-time. A more comprehensive perspective on managing evacuations will foster innovative strategies in anticipation of what are sure to be disaster-related events requiring the movement of people in the future.

## Advanced Emergency Response Planning in a Tech-Forward World

In today's digital age, integrating technology into all-hazards emergency plans is not just beneficial, it is essential. Technological advancements are transforming emergency management through tools like real-time data analysis, digital zone evacuation maps, and artificial intelligence (AI).

Given the right resources, these innovations can enhance planning,

communication, coordination, and the overall efficiency of each emergency response or evacuation.

Utilizing evacuation management software with a zone-based overlay helps emergency managers facilitate evacuations ensuring public safety and providing a foundation for collaborative response efforts between multiple agencies and responders. In an emergency where a swift, organized response is needed before initiating evacuation orders, you want:

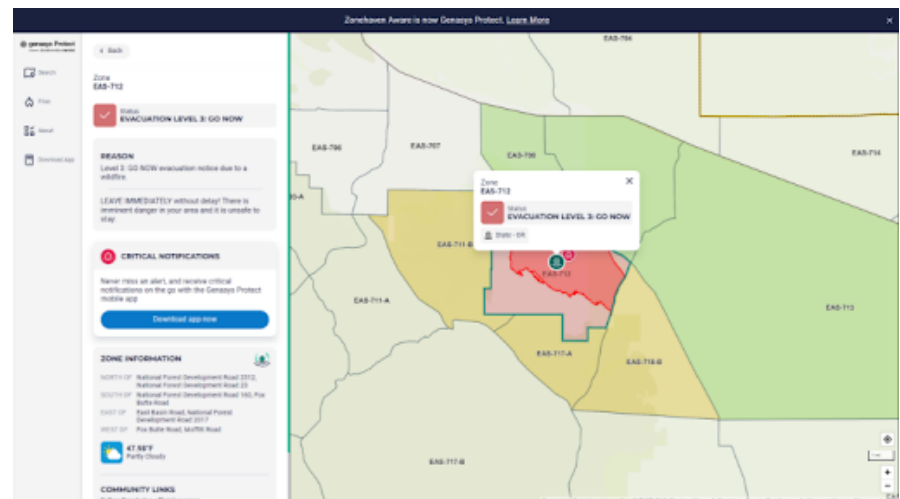
- A way to facilitate communications between teams as well as sister agencies for rapid response through a common understanding of the situation and cross-jurisdictional responsiveness.
- An organized and flexible way to define the everchanging evacuation area and a way to communicate changes to the affected residents and businesses.
- The ability to model potential scenarios in real-time to plan for

effective evacuations from wildfires, hurricanes, floods, active shooters, and more.

■ A common tool where citizens can find valuable, accurate information on shelter locations for humans and animals, road closures and safe routes, food and water locations, sandbag areas, meet-up facilities, and more.

## Almeda Fire in Southern Oregon—September 2020

Following the 2020 Almeda Fire in Southern Oregon, which swept through and destroyed 2,600 homes and multiple businesses through Talent, Ashland, Phoenix, and Medford, before spreading through the entire Rogue Valley in a matter of hours, local officials realized they would require a more resilient communications strategy. They turned to an advanced technology platform to modernize their evacuation response and critical communications systems.



Zone-based evacuation notification received by the public in the pre-defined area. Citizens and businesses within Zone EAS-712 were advised to "GO NOW" during a wildfire.

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## Conquering Evacuation Management

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In subsequent fires in Harney County, Oregon, the public-facing and zone-based evacuation solution supported emergency officials in their collective response and gave them the ability to directly notify citizens of evacuation requirements and changes in real-time. In addition, dispatchers and volunteers were not bogged down with informational calls and were freed up to keep actual emergency communications flowing.

In after action reporting, the State of Oregon’s Office of Resilience and Emergency Management (OREM) determined that in planning for future catastrophic events requiring evacuation, all of Oregon’s 36 counties and nine Tribes would be equipped with the ability to cross-manage their emergencies during evacuations and communicate with one another and their constituents.

### Keeping Your Community Informed Before, During, and After an Evacuation

During a fast-moving emergency like they had in Southern Oregon, you want to be able to identify zones, notify residents, and direct the flow of people to the safest escape routes—fast! Additionally, when the emergency is brought under control, you want to have a way to give residents the ‘All Clear’ so that they can return to their homes and businesses when it has been determined to be safe.

This requires evacuation technology that can be quickly updated in minutes and has a dedicated website and citizen’s app where any member of the community can find the information they need.



Zone-based evacuation notification with multiple zones showing resources, road closures, and weather alerts.

Agencies that have been successful in integrating tech-forward evacuation solutions have laid the groundwork through “Know Your Zone” community events and other outreach opportunities. These events create excellent relations as well as informing and training citizens on life-saving technology and many use the technology to keep their citizenry informed about non-emergent events well in advance of an emergency requiring evacuation.

### To Sum Up

As we in the emergency management field look ahead, it is imperative that emergency operations managers continue to adapt and innovate in the face of evolving threats. In an increasingly unpredictable world, embracing an all-hazards approach and leveraging advanced technologies enhances community resilience, ensures timely and effective responses, protects property, and ultimately safeguards lives. ♦



# The Integration of GIS and FEMA Strategies in Disaster Response: A Case Study of Hurricane Helene Amid Climate Change

By Ahmed Gharib Ibrahim Megahed, Master's Degree in Arts, Geography Department, Benha University/Geographic Information Systems Consultant

This research explores the integration of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) strategies in responding to Hurricane Helene, which impacted the Eastern and Southeast United States in September 2024. The study highlights how GIS technologies facilitated effective disaster response and recovery efforts, emphasizing the importance of geospatial data in understanding and mitigating the impacts of climate change. This article also examines community engagement in FEMA's response initiatives, presenting recommendations for enhancing future disaster management strategies.

Hurricane Helene, a Category 4 storm that struck the Eastern and Southeast United States in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky. It has presented significant challenges for disaster response and recovery. The intensifying effects of climate change on hurricane patterns necessitate innovative approaches to disaster management. This paper examines the role of GIS in FEMA's strategies for responding to Hurricane Helene and highlights the importance of incorporating community perspectives in recovery efforts.

## The Impact of Hurricane Helene

Hurricane Helene caused widespread devastation, resulting in significant economic losses and displacement. The storm's impact underscored the vulnerabilities in infrastructure and preparedness, highlighting the need for effective

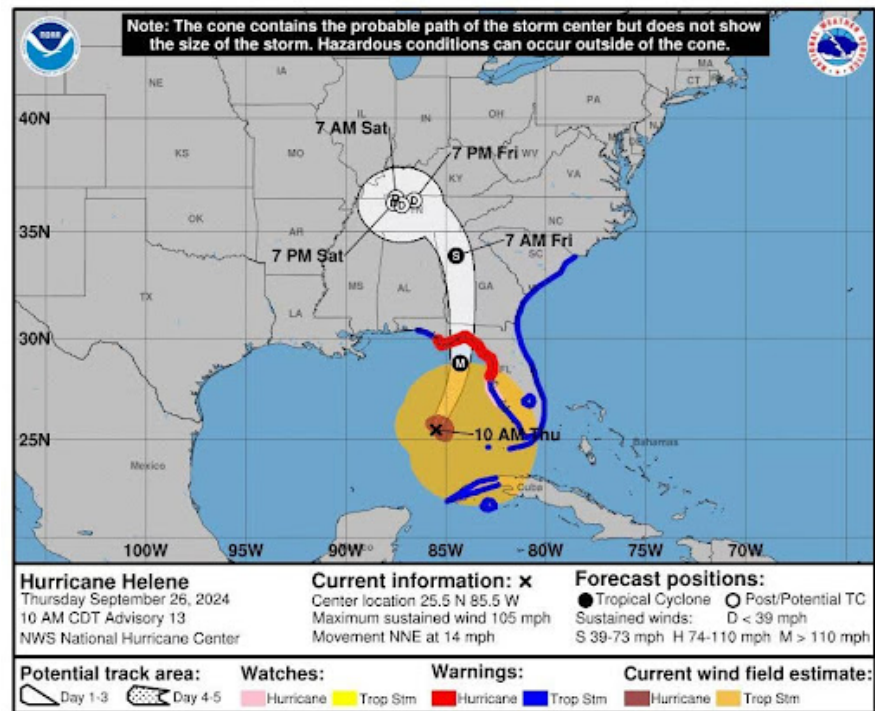


Photo of Hurricane Helene's projected path from the National Hurricane Center on Sept. 26 at 10 a.m. CDT.

disaster response strategies.

## GIS as a Tool for Disaster Response

GIS was crucial in FEMA's response to Hurricane Helene, enabling data-driven decision-making. By providing real-time data on storm tracks, flood zones, and population density, GIS allowed emergency managers to allocate resources effectively and prioritize areas in greatest need.

## FEMA's Collaborative Response Strategy

Under the leadership of Administrator Deanne Criswell, FEMA effectively coordinated resources

during Hurricane Helene, leveraging Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to optimize response strategies. The integration of real-time data into FEMA's operations enabled swift decision-making regarding the deployment of emergency services, medical aid, and logistics.

FEMA's approach involved close collaboration with local governments and other agencies, ensuring a comprehensive strategy for disaster management. This collaborative effort enhanced overall situational awareness and facilitated the sharing of critical information among stakeholders.

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## Integration of GIS and FEMA Strategies

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Additionally, community engagement played a vital role in FEMA's response. By incorporating GIS data, FEMA was able to effectively coordinate with local agencies and community organizations. This engagement helped to identify local needs, ensuring that recovery efforts were both equitable and inclusive. Through these collaborative and data-driven efforts, FEMA aimed to foster a resilient recovery process for affected communities.

### Addressing Community Needs in Recovery

The aftermath of Hurricane Helene revealed significant disparities in resource allocation and recovery support. Engaging with affected communities was crucial for identifying these disparities and addressing the unique needs of vulnerable populations. FEMA's focus on community-based recovery efforts helped to promote resilience and rebuild trust among residents.

### Suggestions for Future Disaster Management

To enhance future disaster management strategies, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Strengthening GIS Capabilities:** Investing in advanced GIS technologies and training for local emergency management teams to improve data collection and analysis.

- **Developing Community Resilience Plans:** Creating localized resilience plans that involve community stakeholders to ensure recovery strategies meet the unique needs of each community.

- **Enhancing Resource Equity:** Establishing clear guidelines for equi-

table resource allocation to support the most vulnerable populations effectively.

- **Implementing Sustainable Infrastructure:** Fostering the use of climate-resilient designs in rebuilding efforts to mitigate future disaster risks.

- **Promoting Federal-Local Collaboration:** Enhancing collaboration between federal, state, and local agencies to streamline recovery efforts and ensure quick access to resources.

- **Increasing Public Awareness:** Implementing public education campaigns on disaster preparedness to empower communities to take proactive measures.

### Conclusion


Hurricane Helene demonstrated the vital role of GIS in FEMA's disaster response strategies. The integration of geospatial data and community engagement facilitated effective resource allocation and recovery efforts. By adopting the proposed suggestions, future disaster management strategies can be enhanced to better prepare for and respond to the challenges posed by climate change.

The future of humanity hangs in the balance. "Only through decisive action can we safeguard the natural world, avert profound human suffering, and ensure that future generations inherit the livable world they deserve." —*The 2024 state of the climate report: Perilous times on planet Earth.*

In a future article on this topic, I will discuss "Building Back Better: Integrating GIS and FEMA for Sustainable Recovery Post-Hurricane Milton." ♦

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## Thoughts on Thought Leadership

By Mike Frick, JD, MBA, Senior Management Consultant, ISF

**T**hought Leader—Thought Leadership. Are there any more popular buzzwords in the modern workplace?

Search LinkedIn for “thought leader,” and you’ll find more than 1.5 million results! In a world of more than 8 billion people, the possibility that there are 1.5 million thought leaders isn’t inconceivable. But could there be more to it? For context, you’ll only find 9,100 results for effective leaders, 4,100 empathetic leaders, and about 1,000 respected leaders. So, is it possible that the number of those who see themselves as thought leaders tells more of a story about personal biases affecting self-perception?

Regardless of how you answer that question, it seems that true thought leadership ought to encompass the following principles.

Thought leadership, at its core, should be fueled by curiosity. It should challenge the status quo and question conventional approaches. Borrowing from Joey Havens, a thought leader I’ve followed for several years, it should anticipate exponential possibilities in an exponential world. When most of us think about upside potential, we frequently—even if unintentionally—limit our expectations of attainable outcomes. Consider the following three scenarios:

- If we start with 100 widgets and double them (a 100% increase), we’ll have only 200 widgets.

- If we multiply those 100 widgets by 100, we’ll have 10,000 widgets.

- But what if we could exponentially increase those same 100 widgets to the power of 100? Ask Siri, and you’ll get an answer: “The result is too big to present.” Think about that!

Thought leadership should also be less about demonstrating expertise and more about learning all that we don’t yet know or understand. It should embrace the maxim that “we don’t know what we don’t know.” Yet, it seems we’ve flipped that proposition upside-down.

There is an inclination (if not a propensity) in articles and blog posts to equate “expertise” with thought leadership. Subject matter experts can be intellectually brilliant. They are often fountains of knowledge, with freakish memory and recall. Maybe even the smartest people in the room. But none of that necessarily translates into thought leadership. Renowned author and professor Adam Grant has suggested that we tune into the most confident voices instead of the most thoughtful. There is a distinction and a difference between the two. Not all subject matter experts are thought leaders. Thought leadership is not just about acquired expertise. It’s about constant learning!

What else? T.S. Eliot is said to have asked, “Where is the wisdom we’ve lost in knowledge?” Wisdom is the effective application of knowledge to complex problems, making sound judgments, and acting with insight, discernment, and common sense. Thought leadership reflects wisdom. It creates impact. It is active, not passive.

Above all, thought leadership should reflect humility. Four observations here:

- First, thought leadership is a lonely endeavor. Thought leaders are often misunderstood. Their colleagues and stakeholders will not always embrace new perspectives or solutions that fall outside a current frame of reference. There’s a timeless saying that no one is a

prophet among their peers. Anyone who wades into the deep waters of thought leadership should do so without expecting recognition, credit, praise, or help! If there is any reward, it’s simply in the effort itself.

- The second observation about humility is a derivative of the first. Thought leadership isn’t self-promoting. Thought leaders seek to serve and advance the good of others.

- The third point regarding humility and thought leadership is that failure will come. Thomas Edison is credited with saying, “To have a great idea, have a lot of them.”

- The fourth and last point on humility is that true thought leadership requires appreciating one’s smallness in the universe. Haughtiness is the kryptonite of thought leadership.

Having served in several senior-level state government roles for nearly three decades, and now consulting with public sector organizations, I’ve experienced transformational thought leadership. I’ve also witnessed a lack of it. The public sector can be especially unkind to thought leaders. By design, our system of government was never intended to be a springboard for innovation. Built-in checks and balances frequently limit the scope and speed of transformation at federal, state, and local government levels. That reality is often exasperating and always challenging, but with it comes tremendous opportunity!

Public-sector entities that cultivate thought leaders can drive policy innovations, improve lives, leverage technology to deliver services more efficiently, reduce costs, and respond more effectively to constituents’ needs. It means being proactive, leading conversations, and always striving to solve the future! ♦



# EM Calendar

Jan. 29	IAEM Healthcare Caucus Webinar - Frontline Heroism
Feb. 11	2025 Colorado Emergency Management Conference
Feb. 11	New York State Emergency Management Association (NYSEMA) 2025 Conference
March 11	ResCon 2025
March 17	2025 Virginia Emergency Management Symposium
March 27	2025 Lehigh Valley Emergency Services Conference

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