



NYC EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

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For Immediate Release
#11-22

BEING PART OF THE CHANGE: NYC EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT'S EQUITY & DIVERSITY COUNCIL

February 7, 2022 — NYC Emergency Management has more than 200 staff members who proudly represent the communities they serve. While remaining steadfast in its pledge to help all New Yorkers before, during, and after emergencies, NYC Emergency Management has taken an additional step to demonstrate its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion with the creation of its own equity and diversity council.

“In order to fulfill our agency’s mission and perform the great work that we do, our staff members have significant subject matter expertise earned through work experience, acquired through education and training, and in some cases, a combination of both,” said **Sonja Orgias**, acting chief deputy counsel and co-chair of the equity and diversity council. “I personally believe that our diverse backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities embody the collective fabric that allows this agency to serve our communities. In that same vein, we must foster an atmosphere of inclusivity that celebrates our diversity while making our colleagues feel valued and celebrated.”

The council’s development came at the heels of what has been a challenging year for the city and the nation at large.

“These events — especially the COVID-19 pandemic and high-profile social injustices — were a catalyst to the creation of the council,” said **Nancy Silvestri**, equal employment opportunity (EEO) officer and co-chair of the equity and diversity council.

Acknowledging that individual social, economic, and cultural identities shape and influence experiences and perspectives, the equity and diversity council is representative of all agency bureaus, units, and staffing levels.

“[The council] prioritizes including individuals of different education levels, gender identity, and abilities. It is representation of every form,” Silvestri said.

Internal improvements lead to external change

Support for the equity and diversity council has been swift and unprecedented: Its charter was ratified in early 2021, making it a permanent entity to the agency and its mission to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion on all fronts.

To help others in their time of need, the council recognizes that it must work to promote initiatives and escalate concerns into productive programs. It is made up of five committees — messaging and data, recruitment, programming and awareness, community and partnerships, and



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retention — and has committed to a broad range of work to ensure equity across all phases of the disaster cycle: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

A key example of internal work shaping external operations is how the council is informing diversity tasks and standards to help employees understand how they can be part of NYC Emergency Management's goals to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion. Such workplace culture changes, council members said, will give way to addressing emergency planning gaps to ensure the communities hardest hit by disasters are prioritized and receive the resources they need to be both ready and resilient. (Emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, have further demonstrated how certain communities are more disproportionately affected by disasters.)

“I recognize the need for constant discussion and substantial action to address systemic issues, particularly those that affect our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) colleagues and communities that we serve,” said Caroline Nguyễn, NYC Emergency Management’s CBRNE Planning Program Manager and council member. “As a woman of Vietnamese descent, I especially want to highlight the Asian community’s successes and ongoing challenges while elevating the voices and perspectives of my peers.”

While the council’s committees are led by council members, all NYC Emergency Management staff are welcome — and strongly encouraged — to be involved.

Looking ahead

Some efforts are subtle but have a lasting impact. The agency’s records management unit has expanded the agency’s library to include published works and various media to strengthen staff members’ knowledge of racial equity and encourage conversations around diversity and inclusion. NYC Emergency Management’s website now reflects new language that underscores its position as an equal opportunity workplace and employer.

Going forward, the council will continue to raise awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion topics to foster an inclusive environment that is not only respectful of New York City’s diverse workforce, but also represents the city it serves, said Brandon Hill, a member of the council and the NYC Emergency Management’s director of disabilities, access, and functional needs and legal compliance.

“Addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion issues shows that we accept, support, and thrive on the differences in our workforce for the benefit of our colleagues, the services we provide, and our community,” Hill said. “Integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion into our agency is critical to our success as a leader in emergency management.”

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