

## Southeast and Caribbean Basin Town Hall Meeting

January 29, 2021

Summary

### Speakers:

- César A. Zapata, Division Director, Land, Chemicals and Redevelopment Division, EPA Region 4
- Carmen Guerrero, Division Director, Caribbean Environmental Protection Division, EPA Region 2
- Marysel Pagano Santana, Migrants Clinicians Network
- Isabel Valentin, Puerto Rican Environmental Activist
- Michelle Lockett, Be Ready Alliance Coordinating for Emergencies (BRACE)
- Omar Muhammad, Lowcountry Alliance for Model Communities (LAMC)
- Frandelle Gerard, STX Foundation

### Some key discussions:

- Participants noted the importance of and need to engage communities in a meaningful way to help them: learn about their history and issues, become involved in decision making processes, and access information about funding. The federal government needs to reach out to the community, and not wait for the community to reach out to them.
- The federal government must properly and effectively communicate with communities as many distrust the government. Therefore, language and methods of outreach must be carefully considered.
- The federal government needs to engage with communities and provide information on how to access training and resources. These resources should aim to build community capacity to be self-sufficient in addressing and reducing the impacts of disasters. “Red tape,” such as long applications and forms, should be removed so that the resources can be easily accessible.
- Communities should be involved in all emergency response exercises and be trained on the incident command system. Communities should also understand the processes that take place after a disaster, such as evacuating and locating shelters.
- Nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, private sectors, and small businesses can play a huge role in the preparedness, response, and recovery of communities. They are usually able to mobilize faster than the federal government, and can provide the necessary resources to maintain and sustain community capacity long after the federal response is gone. These groups should be involved in the emergency management planning process.
- Response should be localized as local companies and businesses understand their community, know where the resources are, and how to best respond to emergencies.
- Funding must be made easily available to those who need it the most.

\*Please note that these comments only reflect a portion of the discussion from the Town Hall Meeting. Key findings and recommendations from the meeting will be incorporated in a draft report to the EJ and Natural Disasters Subcommittee. If you have additional comments you would like to incorporate into the meeting notes, please email [environmental-justice@epa.gov](mailto:environmental-justice@epa.gov) with the subject line “EJ and Natural Disaster Town Hall.”