

Speaker 1:

Welcome to 'Prep Talk,' The Emergency Management Podcast. Find out what you need to know about preparedness. Get all the latest tips from experts in the field, and learn what to do before the next disaster strikes from the Emergency Management Department in the city that never sleeps, here are your hosts, Omar Bourne and Allison Pennisi.

Omar Bourne:

Hello everyone. Thank you for listening. I am Omar Bourne.

Allison Pennisi:

I'm Alison Pennisi, and you are listeners. As always, we thank you for joining us. We want you to come back as often as you can. So feel free to listen to 'Prep Talk' on your favorite podcast provider. You can also follow us on social media, on our Twitter, @nycemergencymgt, Facebook, Instagram, and much more.

Omar Bourne:

This episode, we are highlighting the John D. Solomon Fellowship for Public Service.

Allison Pennisi:

That is right, Omar. Each year the fellowship provides 10 graduate students in New York City the opportunity to complete a nine-month paid fellowship in a government agency or non-profit organization.

Omar Bourne:

It was started back in 2012, and it is also the first student fellowship in New York City devoted specifically to emergency management.

Allison Pennisi:

Joining us to discuss the John D. Solomon Fellowship for Public Service are James Solomon, the brother of John D. Solomon, and Amanda Krawczyk, deputy director of strategic partnerships at New York City Emergency Management. Welcome to 'Prep Talk.'

James Solomon:

Hi, Alison and Omar. Good to be with you.

Amanda Krawczyk:

Yes. Thanks so much for having us.

Omar Bourne:

Thank you both for being here. We're going to get right into it. Now, the Solomon Fellowship was started in memory of John D. Solomon, your brother, Jim, the late John D. Solomon. Jim, I want you to take us back to the importance of having this in place, not only to honor your brother's memory but also to provide an opportunity for graduates to gain experience in public service.

James Solomon:

Well, as you say, the fellowship was established shortly after my brother John's death, in 2010, from complications related to leukemia. John's friends and his families and former colleagues, we wanted to find a way to perpetuate John's passion for public service and for emergency management and preparedness, in particular. John was the creator of a seminal blog, which was called, In Case of Emergency Read Blog: A Citizen's Eye View of Public Preparedness.

James Solomon:

John believed that being prepared for emergencies was an essential element of citizenship in the 21st century. In light of the pandemic, and the fires out West, hurricanes, I think it's clearly our reality. But it wasn't just perpetuating John's work. John's family, friends, and colleagues, we also felt that we needed to create a fellowship program truly worthy of its namesake. I think, for your listeners to have a better understanding of the John D. Solomon Fellowship, they have to understand who John was.

James Solomon:

The best example I could think of is the way he played basketball. He was a all-New York City player in high school, and he was talented, but far... Let's just say far from physically gifted. Teammates used to joke he couldn't jump over a book. Yet, somehow when the game was over, he'd scored 20 points and had 20 rebounds. It was really through sheer will. He was relentless, and that meant he would dive on the floor for every loose ball, sacrifice his body on defense. Basically, John was about how do I make my team better? That is the spirit of this fellowship. How do I make my team better? How do I make my city better?

Omar Bourne:

I like what you said about getting to know John and John being a team player. He was also the ultimate team player when it came to the Community Emergency Response Team, or CERT as we call it. He was also active in his community as a CERT volunteer. Is that correct?

James Solomon:

Exactly, right. As I say, he gained as much as he gave. He loved that experience, loved his fellow CERT volunteers. It was a very, very important part of his life. He involved his very young daughters in his CERT, wherever possible. When he'd be handing out pamphlets, et cetera, he'd bring his girls along.

Allison Pennisi:

How many fellows have graduated from the program? How many have gone on to careers in public service following the fellowship? Amanda?

Amanda Krawczyk:

Sure. Over the years, we've had 70 fellows that have graduated from the program and have moved on to our alumni network. Of those 70 fellows, 46% of our alumni are currently working in the public sector, 15 of those, specifically at New York City agencies, which is very exciting. It really shows how the fellowship launches the class into City work.

Omar Bourne:

Thank you for that. I want to turn now to the opportunities that the fellows and the mentors have had since the inception of the fellowship. I'm sure there are lots of meaningful and memorable experiences that both of you have. Amanda, let's start with you. Take us back to some of those experiences that you've had and what they mean to you, both as a mentor and being part of the fellowship.

Amanda Krawczyk:

Sure. Actually, one that sticks out to me very clearly, when I was a fellow, we went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. We had a tour with the owners of the collection. They explained to us where they purchase this item, how they got this item within their collection, which was really interesting just as a young person in New York City who's visited the MET on several occasions. I've never had that sort of experience, where someone walked me through their process of how they acquired the collection that they have.

Amanda Krawczyk:

Fast forward a couple of years, we had a business continuity tour and chat at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with some of their emergency management personnel. Just having that perspective, it really, to me, felt so well-rounded as a fellow to not just be able to appreciate the art and the collection within a museum, but to also have the understanding of what goes into ensuring that that collection is safe, available to the public, and just taking a look at all of the different museums, cultural institutions. We've also done a similar chat with the folks at NYU. So just looking through how the City keeps itself prepared in case of an emergency, not just City agencies, but private organizations, cultural institutions, institutions of higher learning, et cetera. It was really wonderful.

Omar Bourne:

Thank you very much. Jim, how about you? Any experiences that you want to share?

James Solomon:

Well, I'd say Amanda is a perfect example of someone that is... The idea that you are a fellow, that you bring your skills to the city, not just this program to the city, and then you stay and develop a mentor relationship with fellows. Amanda's not the exception. There have been quite a number of former fellows who've been hired full-time by the City and choose to serve as then mentors to current fellows. But then there are also specific things that fellows do. We were not creating a fellowship just for the sake of a fellowship. It was for the fellows, these graduate students to have very meaningful responsibilities. Fellows have written the continuity of operations manuals for their agencies or have actually developed and implemented an emergency management curriculum for the NYPD auxiliary force. The City's first Spanish-language Twitter was started by a fellow.

James Solomon:

Then, if you ever go to a graduation, and every May, the 10 fellows graduate. The commissioner of NYCEM attends and speaks. You see the bonds that have developed between the fellow and their mentors. In many respects, they've become lifelong. Then, the other thing, and this is... I think this is perhaps a family's perspective. But to see a group of fellows, a cohort of 10 fellows from every imaginable background... We've had a burn unit nurse, a coal miner, a US military code breaker able to read 13 languages. The whole gamut of fellows, from graduate programs, and graphic design, international affairs, public health, teaching, from more than a dozen graduate universities, and all are bringing their enormous talents and abilities to meaningful responsibilities. An example is the

Department of Education, which has 1.1 million students, has a tiny department specifically focused on emergency management. At one point, in the past several years, nearly half of the people in that department were either current or former John D. Solomon fellows.

Allison Pennisi:

It's incredible. It goes back to what we say about finding your path and getting a gateway into the field of emergency management. It doesn't have to be where you graduate from school, and you just step right into an agency. It could be a fellowship. It could be a volunteer effort. It's really incredible to hear all of the memorable experiences and opportunities that these fellows have had. Amanda, I'm going to keep you in the spotlight. Since we mentioned this earlier, you were a fellow with the program from 2016 to 2017. You're now one of the individuals who not only spearhead this program, but you also serve as a mentor. Can you talk to us about how your experiences as a fellow have shaped your role as a mentor and a program leader?

Amanda Krawczyk:

Absolutely. I think that with this fellowship, it's been an amazing experience to go from being a fellow, where you're just trying to figure out, "What do I want to do?" All of our fellows are in graduate school. I was a fellow and in graduate school as well, specifically, studying emergency management. This fellowship allowed me to have that hands-on experience and network with folks that I would not have had access to otherwise. So speaking with leaders, commissioners at City agencies, to talk about how they got to where they were, what did their career path look like, networking with folks, and saying, "Hey, I'm kind of interested in this as well. Can you tell me a little bit about it?" Luckily for me, at the end of the day, emergency management did become my path and something that I stayed interested in, but just having the opportunity to speak to folks at the fire department, at the department of education, and just see how emergency management differs depending on the agency, depending on where you are, was really, really wonderful.

Amanda Krawczyk:

I think that for myself, that has really shaped how I would love the fellows to experience the program as we go forward. Every year I encourage the cohort, the class, to say, "Hey, this fellowship is what you make it." We have various events. You are placed with various agencies, and we want you to have an amazing experience. You're, of course, as Jim mentioned earlier, going to be tasked with various projects, and you're going to have the guidance from your mentors. But aside from that, really plug into the alumni network that we have created. Plug into those mentors that are at your disposal. Pick their brains. That is something that has really shaped the program moving forward.

Amanda Krawczyk:

We take the feedback from previous classes and say, "Okay, this went well, let's continue doing this. This was okay for some feedback that we received, let's make it better." I think that with this particular program, you really see that year to year, just constantly evolving and improving with the feedback that we've received. That's how you can see that the fellows move into City leadership, move into City agencies. That's really, really exciting.

Omar Bourne:

I'm glad that you both talked about the hands-on experience that this fellowship allows the fellows to have. You also talked about the evolution of the fellowship. In both of your minds, where do you want

to see this fellowship progress within the next few years? What do you think is next for this type of opportunity?

James Solomon:

What you're finding with the fellowship program now is, in a very ideal place, and that is, from day one, you are immediately not just given a front-row seat, but you're actually handed the ball. That has been the case from the very beginning of this fellowship program. Within weeks of this fellowship start, in 2012, Hurricane Sandy hit. Immediately the fellows at that time found themselves in the emergency operation center and already being tasked with considerable experiences. Now, of course, they're learning. They're not being thrown things that they have no business being done, but they have immediate role and responsibility. There are experiences that you couldn't possibly have unless you were invited into the "room," so to speak, and these fellows are in the room.

James Solomon:

So in answer to your question, Omar, I actually think the fellowship at this moment is what it should be. And that is, it is 10 fellows who are having meaningful experiences who are meaningfully connecting with each other, who are part of a community. I get this can be a cliché, but I'd say even a family, as the fellows become very meaningful parts of the Solomon extended family. As I said at the start, when we've talked about who John was, an integral part of John's life was being part of a team. That is fundamentally where this, and what this fellowship is about. Firstly, the cohort, each fellow's class, they get to know each other actually quite well across... Even though there are different universities, they find ways through social events, et cetera. It also helps to connect agencies. There are fellows at, anywhere, roughly a half dozen different agencies. So they get to know each other in the agencies, as do the mentors. They collaborate across agencies.

James Solomon:

Each of these fellows is generally within a very small department within their agency. They create teams. They become very integral parts of their team. This notion of team, which is a cliché we hear all the time, well, the fellows are creating them and participating in them. It is not an isolated experience where you're on your own. In a time of pandemic where there is a lot of isolation, you are pulled into a team working for a collective goal on behalf of the City. That's what John was about.

Amanda Krawczyk:

I couldn't agree more, Jim. I think that the fellowship really acts as a team, as an amazing network. I think that with the hands-on experience, Omar, that you mentioned earlier, the fellowship really provides that opportunity. Take COVID for example, it's at the forefront of everyone's mind. You can't forget about it. So what the most recent fellowship class that graduated 2019 to 2020... Obviously, halfway through the program, we all were experiencing COVID and trying to navigate through that response and what that looks like. They really jumped in with both hands, trying to support the team at their respective agency, as we were all figuring out what this is going to look like, what the response is going to look, how are we going to support New Yorkers, how are we going to ensure the safety and security of the city as folks are really trying to wrap their minds around this pandemic.

Amanda Krawczyk:

I think for the future of the program, I would really love to see our alumni network grow over the years. Obviously, that's going to happen as we have more classes, but the fellows should really dive deep into

that experience as well. Alumni helping the current class as well as helping more recent graduates navigate through city governments, through public service, and really figuring out how the fellows and the alumni can really shine a light on public service, specifically in New York City. I think that for me, it's been an amazing experience. I'm really excited to see how we can make this bigger and better over the years to come.

Allison Pennisi:

Beautifully said, speaking with Jim Solomon and Amanda Krawczyk. Up next, we are talking to current John D. Solomon fellow, Andrew Wasserman, from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. He will discuss his experience with the program so far. But first, here's a message from New York City Emergency Management.

Speaker 6:

Your daughter doesn't want to talk about why her room is a horrible mess. Your son doesn't want to talk about why he's wearing mismatching socks. Your spouse doesn't want to talk about their bad haircut. Families don't have to talk about everything, but they should talk, to plan for an emergency. Pack basic supplies in a go-bag: water, canned food, flashlights, batteries, medical supplies, IDs, and some cash. Talk about where you'll meet, in case you lose one another. Of course, don't forget to pack the dog treats, talk to your family, and make an emergency plan. Go to [NYC.gov/readyny](http://NYC.gov/readyny) or call 311 to make your family's emergency plan. Brought to you by New York City Emergency Management and the Ad Council.

Speaker 6:

You're listening to 'Prep Talk,' the emergency management podcast.

Omar Bourne:

You are listening to 'Prep Talk,' and we are back. We are talking with current John D. Solomon fellow, Andrew Wasserman. He is currently working with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. Andrew, welcome to the show.

Andrew Wasserman:

Thank you for having me.

Allison Pennisi:

Okay. Let's get right into it. Andrew, how did you hear about the John D. Solomon Fellowship for Public Service? What motivated you to apply?

Andrew Wasserman:

I heard about the fellowship through my graduate program at Hunter College. I'm currently studying urban planning in the Urban Policy and Planning Department. We have a fairly regular newsletter email with department news. It might include jobs, internships, scholarship opportunities, things like that. So this past January, the fellowship was listed in one of these emails. Frankly, I just thought it sounded really interesting. I'm deeply interested in environmental issues, sustainability, environmental justice, climate change, mitigation, and adaptation, which is a large part of my motivation to go back to school

to study urban planning. My interest in emergency management stems from, to some degree, from my experience of living in the city during Hurricane Sandy.

Andrew Wasserman:

The likelihood of similar storms increases as the planet warms, so all of these interests really come together pretty neatly. This fellowship seemed like a great opportunity to learn about city government from the inside, to meet the people who keep the city running, and really to help people. I guess that's my long-winded way of saying that I really want to help people.

Omar Bourne:

In wanting to help people, what do you think is your main goal for this year, at the end of these nine months?

Andrew Wasserman:

I mean, I find the work that DEP does incredibly interesting. The department supplies over a billion gallons of drinking water to the city every day and manages over a billion gallons of wastewater, too, every day. Maybe I'm an infrastructure nerd. Okay, I think I'm an infrastructure nerd. I think that's incredible. My main goal, I guess, is to learn more about how the organization works, how it functions, how it keeps all of this running. And touching on what Amanda said earlier, I'd love to speak to people in a variety of roles there, to understand how everyone works together to keep the city functioning, and how they're planning for a future in which there could be less random watersheds that supply our drinking water. There might be more storms, more flooding. There's a lot to be addressed. I really want to understand how this happens, and network, and explore the possibilities of a career in helping to continue this work.

Omar Bourne:

I know you just started the fellowship, but how has it been going so far?

Andrew Wasserman:

So far so good. I've only been there not too long; already seen some interesting things. I already had an opportunity to go out in the field and see some crews working to restore water service to some customers and figure out why some pipes had broken. It's really interesting to get some hands-on experience.

Omar Bourne:

We have Jim and Amanda, who are still with us on the show. I want to bring them back here because we have Andrew. He's bubbly. He's ready to go. We've been talking about hands-on experience throughout this discussion. So to Jim and to Amanda, what advice do you give to Andrew being part of this fellowship?

James Solomon:

Andrew, I say this to all the fellows. It's not an accident that you are at John D. Solomon Fellowship. You and your fellow fellows share a lot in common with John. A commitment to public service, a desire to help others, empathy, intelligence, sense of teamwork. In Andrew's case, he, like John, Andrew worked for media companies, spent a decade in the private sector at both the New York Times and Turner

Broadcasting. Andrew wrote something on his application. He said, and John was not musically adept, but he was a very good listener. Andrew described in his application about being interested in improvisational music, which requires people to really listen. He wrote he applies that to all aspects of his life, which is a very John Solomon quality. Andrew and the other fellows, they are provided an opportunity, thanks to the city and to the mentors, to be in the room. They can do and make, and Andrew will make as much of this experience as he possibly wants to. With the support that Amanda and her colleagues are able to provide, fellows can continually enhance the experience they wish to have.

Amanda Krawczyk:

Absolutely, Jim. I would say, Andrew, in terms of moving forward over the next nine months, that it is what you make of it. So just ensuring that as you are navigating through DEP, having that experience, plugging into the projects with your mentors, just ensuring that your interests in urban planning do stay at the forefront and you do communicate that to your mentors, so that they know, "Okay, let me ensure that he's plugged into this meeting," so that you can get a better taste of what that looks like, specifically at our agency, as well as plugging into the alumni network. We have quite a few folks who have graduated with a concentration in urban planning. So just ensuring, again, utilizing the network to the best of your ability to ensure that, when the time comes, and you are looking for future possibilities and opportunities, that you have those options available to you. So best of luck, very excited to see what you do this year.

James Solomon:

Thank you, Andrew. We thank you for your service to the city.

Andrew Wasserman:

Jim, thank you so much for those really kind words. I really appreciate that, and Amanda too. Thank you so much for that great advice.

Allison Pennisi:

Andrew, we wish you all the best of luck with this fellowship. I think it's safe to say this isn't the last time we will be hearing from you.

Andrew Wasserman:

Thank you so much for having me.

Allison Pennisi:

Up next, we have Jim and Amanda for rapid response.

Speaker 6:

If you don't know, now you know. You're listening to 'Prep Talk,' the emergency management podcast. It's time for Prep Talk, rapid response.

Allison Pennisi:

It is rapid response time. If you are a first-time listener, it's simple. Omar and I will ask questions, and our guests will give the first answer that comes to mind.

This transcript was exported on Oct 21, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Omar Bourne:

All right, let's get it started. The first question. What is the one thing you want listeners to know about public service? Jim, we're going to start with you, and then Amanda can chime in.

James Solomon:

You get more than you give.

Omar Bourne:

I like that. Amanda?

Amanda Krawczyk:

It's tough work, but definitely worth it at the end of the day.

Allison Pennisi:

Both great answers. What is the one emergency item you cannot live without? Jim, we'll start with you.

James Solomon:

I'd say my wife, but let's say my John D. Solomon Fellowship flashlight.

Amanda Krawczyk:

I'm going to say my phone, simply because it's keeper of all things for me.

Omar Bourne:

Jim, those were both great answers. We will take both of them. Amanda, just make sure that you have that phone charged. All right.

Amanda Krawczyk:

Absolutely.

Omar Bourne:

Last question. Let's sum up the fellowship in one word. Amanda?

Amanda Krawczyk:

It's tough to do one word, so I'm going to say an opportunity to launch your career.

Omar Bourne:

That's acceptable. Jim, what about you?

James Solomon:

It's easy. Art.

Allison Pennisi:

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Both excellent answers. Speaking with Jim Solomon and Amanda Krawczyk. Thank you both so much for joining 'Prep Talk.' For our listeners, if you are interested in applying to the John D Solomon fellowship for public service, you can learn more by visiting [NYC.gov/johndsolomonfellowship](http://NYC.gov/johndsolomonfellowship), or you can follow the John D. Solomon Fellowship for Public Service on LinkedIn.

Speaker 1:

That's this episode of 'Prep Talk' If you like what you heard, you can listen anytime online or through your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.