

Speaker 1 ([00:04](#)):

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.

Allison Pennisi ([00:23](#)):

Hello, everyone. Thank you for listening. I'm Allison Pennisi.

Lexi Kirton ([00:27](#)):

And I am Lexi Kirton, and you are our listeners. And as always, we thank you for joining us. We want you to come back as often as possible, 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, LinkedIn, and much more.

Allison Pennisi ([00:50](#)):

In recognition of Women's History Month, we are going to be joined by several staff members of the New York City Emergency Management who will share their experiences as women in the emergency management field and their journey to their most recent role. Please welcome to the show, Lindsay Einhorn, Interagency Exercise Specialist, Shraddha Ramani, Director of Public Safety Data and GIS, and Rachel Sulaymanov, Executive Director for Government Relations.

Rachel Sulaymanov ([01:19](#)):

Hi, thanks so much for having me. I'm Rachel Sulaymanov, Executive Director of Government Relations at New York City Emergency Management. I've been working here for almost 14 years in a few different roles, but in government relations for the last nine years. In this role, I oversee outreach, communication, and strategic planning to more than 225 elected officials and community boards throughout the city. I also prepare the agency for hearings and provide legislative support on federal, state, and city bills, as well as advocacy.

Shraddha Ramani ([01:50](#)):

Hi. I'm Shraddha Ramani and I manage the GIS data center at New York City Emergency Management. I've been here for about five years and my team makes maps and reports to inform all parts of emergency management before, during, and after an event. Our maps are nothing without good data. And so we collect and maintain geographic data about New York City so that when an event happens, we can tell you who is there and what's affected. So we have data from everything from streets, subways, buildings, hospitals, business system graphics, everything we can get our hands on, really.

Allison Pennisi ([02:24](#)):

Lindsay?

Lindsay Einhorn ([02:25](#)):

Good evening. So like so many people at NYCEM, I have a blue sky or a preparedness role and a gray sky or emergency role. During blue skies, I design and conduct internal and inter agency exercises that assess our ability to implement emergency and disaster plans and then conduct the after action and

improvement planning process. Since I create conditions under which we assess these plans, I often think of myself as a one woman disaster simulator. During gray skies, I work in the emergency operations center as a human services coordinator. In the EOC, we're coordinating information between our human services agencies and supporting human service operations, such as sheltering and feeding. Many of our listeners are going to be most familiar with our cooling center program. So I'm one of the people ensuring that program activates and supporting our cooling center programs.

Allison Pennisi ([03:16](#)):

Well, we sincerely appreciate you all taking the time to speak with us. So as we mentioned earlier in the introduction, March is Women's History Month. When we look at the contribution women have made in society, whether in the workplace or at home, it's important to pause and honor the significant roles women have played throughout history. So the three of you are leaders at New York City Emergency Management. So can you share if you have one or several female role models that have inspired you? Lindsay, let's start with you.

Lindsay Einhorn ([03:48](#)):

This is one of my all-time favorite topics. I feel so lucky to live in a time when there are so many amazing women that came before me and that surround me. I truly idolize RBG. Studying her career has taught me the importance of being a good communicator and the art of changing minds and influencing people, which is, I think, it's one of the keys to being a successful emergency manager. But I think I am also looking up to Kathrin Jansen, who is Pfizer's head of vaccine research, to all the amazing female politicians that are out there, Michelle Obama, Jacinta Ardern, Kamala Harris, Stacey Abrams.

Lindsay Einhorn ([04:24](#)):

And I look to all female leaders in New York City, Shirley Chisholm, AOC, and definitely at emergency management where we're lucky enough to have some very strong female leaders, from our commissioner to my rockstar of a boss, Paula Carlson, and I'm excited about the number of female candidates we have for mayor this year. The field looks really great, considering the number of women that are there.

Allison Pennisi ([04:47](#)):

Shraddha, how about you?

Shraddha Ramani ([04:49](#)):

Lindsay had a lot of great ones. I definitely had a lot of those. Someone that I was thinking about recently, because I heard her speak, was Vandana Shiva. She's an environmentalist and feminist, and she's an advocate for small farmers. And I came across her work when I was in college and studying environmental science. And most of what I was studying had a very western focus, and it was very inspiring to me as an Indian and an immigrant to see the work done by someone done from my country and really how she linked the science and the ideas of what I was studying to the livelihoods of people. So she started her work in the 1980s after the Bhopal gas disaster, when there was a huge gas leak from a pesticide manufacturing plant that killed thousands of people. And she's really been an advocate for small farmers and against industrialized farming.

Allison Pennisi ([05:47](#)):

Rachel, how about you?

Rachel Sulaymanov ([05:49](#)):

So, I too have been incredibly fortunate in my career to be surrounded by strong female role models. So specifically I did several internships in college. One was at the state department, one was at the United Nations and one was at CARE International. And I was so lucky to be mentored at each of those by three incredible women who I'm still in touch with today. And aside from teaching me professional skills and capabilities, they also taught me things that at the time, I didn't know that I needed to know for my future career, like about work-life balance and compartmentalizing, prioritizing. And I think learning this at a young age and having those connections has really carried me forward.

Rachel Sulaymanov ([06:32](#)):

And also, I agree that we are very fortunate here at emergency management to be supported by a very strong network of female emergency managers and supervisors, including my supervisor, Christina Farrell. Emergency management is intense. It doesn't respect working hours and it's very important to have that support, and then also be able to provide that support to others as well.

Lexi Kirton ([06:56](#)):

As someone who's just starting off in the field, I appreciate those responses and know that I have so much more that I can learn from women role models in my life. And thank you all for those great responses.

Lexi Kirton ([07:11](#)):

You all have responded to a wide range of emergencies, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic response. Would you be able to share some of the biggest successes during one of these crises, as well as the biggest challenges that you might've faced and the lessons learned? Shraddha, let's have you kick it off.

Shraddha Ramani ([07:32](#)):

So thinking over the COVID-19 pandemic response, I think one of our biggest successes is how seamlessly we've been able to transition to working fully remotely and all the coordination that we've done without being in the same space. And one of the things that's made this possible for us in the GIS team is transitioning from using paper maps to working mostly online and having online maps and dashboards. One of the main advantages of this is that we can just all have access to more real-time information at our fingertips, as opposed to a paper map that's out of date as soon as you make it. And this has really changed the ways in which we share data across the city and across our agency. And it's something we've been working towards for a really long time. And as for challenge, Rachel mentioned earlier, the challenges of a work-life balance. So this pandemic response really has not... Working from home fully remotely and just the amount of work that we've had to do has been really challenging to maintain a work-life balance. And I think one of my biggest lessons learned is how the team that we work with is so supportive of each other. And I think that really makes the work that I do possible and makes it possible for me to be fully present at work and also do what I need to do outside of work.

Rachel Sulaymanov ([08:58](#)):

So I would say that one of my biggest successes has been raising the profile of emergency management as a discipline. What I mean is that emergency management is still a pretty new discipline in the broad scheme of things, and so for a lot of the stakeholders that I work with, this has been something new for them over the last 10 to 15 years, to understand what we do and how we work. And I've worked really hard to make sure that they do know that and who we are, how we can help and how we can liaise and really explain the range of emergency management. And in the years that I've been in this field, I've definitely seen a difference in this, across the country in general. And I think for me that that's been a real success, like working our way into the psyches of our stakeholders. And it does make a big difference in how we respond to emergencies and how we're successful in assisting people.

Rachel Sulaymanov ([09:52](#)):

And for challenges, similar to what Shraddha was saying. Obviously this past year has really been a challenge to everyone, and it's been a challenge to everyone in the world. So for all of the emergencies I've worked over the years, this is the first time that an emergency has impacted every single person, like everyone. And so from a crisis management perspective, that really changes the whole nature of the response to the emergency. And while we may be seeing some light at the end of the tunnel with vaccines, the truth is the emergency is far from over for many people. So there will be repercussions and consequences from this for quite a long time out in terms of recovery. So as an emergency manager, I think these are the things that we all think about, what happens down the line and how can we continue to assist people going forward. And so that's definitely been a challenge that we've been working through.

Lexi Kirton ([10:45](#)):

Lindsay?

Lindsay Einhorn ([10:47](#)):

I'm thinking about March when we were transitioning as an agency from planning for COVID to actually operationalizing the plans that we had developed. And I was leading hotel operations, and I had to explain to our leadership why hotel operations weren't a turnkey operation, why they needed to be treated like shelters. And these were very difficult conversations because I wasn't just trying to explain why this distinction was important, I was advocating for a massive influx of resources, which means money, into a program, and convincing leadership was a huge one. It's an experience I'll never forget. I hope to never repeat it. I hope we never go through this again, but it's another instance of where I just really took to heart the fact that communication is the key to our field.

Allison Pennisi ([12:28](#)):

I wholeheartedly agree with that, Lindsay, that sometimes you feel like you're building something while you're standing on it or trying to get it to actually move. For me, I have dealt with countless crises working in my role, in communications specifically at emergency management. And each disaster we've experienced, whether it was something that just affected a neighborhood, or maybe it was something that was only in a borough. The fact that, Rachel, you also said this before, that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone. And just seeing the repercussions and the magnitude of what this disaster has done to our city, to the nation, to the world, really it almost makes you feel a little small, because we've all been working really hard. Our fellow first responders, we have people who are frontline workers, essential workers, everyone is working towards the goal of making us safe and getting us back to a quote unquote, new normal. And for me, I had thought that, I had experienced Hurricane Sandy, I've

dealt with building collapses and major events like this, I did not imagine that something like this would be within my emergency management career. I'm happy to have experienced it only for the lessons and working with all of you so closely, but like you said before, this is something I hope we will never have to experience ever again.

Lexi Kirton ([14:16](#)):

So in addition to working at the same agency, you all are Peace Corps alumni. Could you share with our listeners some of the lessons you've learned during your time with the Peace Corps and how you apply it to your work now as emergency managers? Lindsay, let's start with you.

Lindsay Einhorn ([14:32](#)):

I think that two of the most important lessons I learned in the Peace Corps are what prepared me to enter the field of emergency management. I think I already talked about how important communication is, and when you're in another country and still learning the language, it's an importance that smacks you in the face every day. But I also learned about how to create programs, regardless of resource availability. In New York city, we're really lucky enough to be in a resource rich environment. But when I was in the Peace Corps, I was the resource. I had the ability to look things up, to learn how to do something new. And that was incredibly important because even [inaudible 00:15:06] experts in my community were able to identify gaps, they didn't always know how to follow [inaudible 00:15:11]. And so that was the piece that was missing for them. And I have the ability to fill that gap. And I think that I was able to also identify gaps that people didn't even know were there. But doing that in a resource deprived environment really teaches you what resources are truly necessary and how to use them well.

Lexi Kirton ([15:32](#)):

Those are some good insights. Rachel, what do you think?

Rachel Sulaymanov ([15:36](#)):

So first of all, I would say that Peace Corps is an amazing opportunity and I would really recommend it to anybody who is on the fence or thinking about it. And I was a Peace Corps volunteer long enough ago that it was before cell phones, before iPads, before Kindles. And so it's definitely a different experience, I think, than people have now. But for me at that time, I was living in a pretty remote village with a local family. And that's an amazing experience, but certainly when you start, it can be very isolating. So to counter that isolation, I really needed to become a part of that community. So one of my biggest takeaways then was the importance of belonging to a community. And that made my time in Peace Corps very rewarding to me, and hopefully I was able to do my part as well by bringing something to their community. And I think that that lesson applies here in New York City and definitely applies to my work as an emergency manager. It's the importance of community, because the city is made up of so many communities and when something happens, we need to have earned their trust and have their trust and have our buy-in in order to do our job well. So for me, that has definitely been a huge lesson that I took with me that has carried me forward all these years later.

Allison Pennisi ([16:55](#)):

Shraddha?

Shraddha Ramani ([16:57](#)):

I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador, and I totally backup what Rachel said. I definitely recommend the experience, it was really great. And one of my biggest lessons learned from it was the importance of partnerships and networks that you create, because I was one person who was showing up to this town and I didn't have very many resources at my disposal. And it was so important to network with the existing schools and NGOs and the people who are already working there, who made it possible for me to actually get a foothold in the community and do the work. And I think in emergency management, it's a similar situation where we are a very small group of emergency managers relative to the size of our city, and we are only able to do our work because we work with so many other community partners and other agencies to really help us get our job done.

Allison Pennisi ([17:53](#)):

All wonderfully said. I think it's amazing that you're able to take your previous experiences and apply it to your current role. And going back to what Rachel said about working with communities and how important it is to do that, we absolutely do that as emergency managers. Because I think that even in a global crisis, all disasters are local and you have to be mindful of who is affected and how you can best serve them. And that's what our role and that's what our goal is. So in that vein and to bring everything full circle, we talked about this in the very beginning of the episode, the emergency management field continues to evolve, especially here in New York City. We remain very committed to diversity, equity and inclusion in our workforce and how we help New Yorkers. So with this, where do you see the field in the next five years? Shraddha, let's start with you.

Shraddha Ramani ([18:58](#)):

Thinking about the people who get hit hardest by emergencies, it's always the people who are most vulnerable in our communities already who are affected the most. And so I think it would take a real shift in thinking, that we live in a society with so much structural inequality and to really bring in more local knowledge and community knowledge and changed the structures that we live within, I think, is what would make a real difference in our field.

Allison Pennisi ([19:30](#)):

Very excellent point. Rachel, how about you?

Rachel Sulaymanov ([19:33](#)):

So I mentioned this earlier about the relative newness of emergency management and as a discipline, and what I would like to see is the field in general become more diverse and inclusive.

Allison Pennisi ([19:46](#)):

Lindsay?

Rachel Sulaymanov ([19:47](#)):

So sometimes attending conferences or trainings or meetings, especially outside of the Northeast in particular, and looking around the rooms, and it's still looks very much not diverse. It looks a lot the same. And I would like to get to a point where I can look around and not think that, and see the inclusiveness of people who work in this field.

Lindsay Einhorn ([20:09](#)):

I think it's a really important point. Emergencies and disasters have a long-standing history of compounding persistent socioeconomic challenges, especially in vulnerable communities where these challenges are just compounded by the emergency or disaster. With COVID-19, we've clearly seen these long-standing health and social inequalities have resulted in both Latinx and African-American individuals being three times as likely to become infected and nearly twice as likely to die as individuals in white populations, in addition to then having an increased risk of experiencing the economic impacts of COVID-19. And so health outcome and economic impact inequality can be traced back to a myriad of factors. But I think we all know that it's mainly decreased healthcare access and utilization, that there's residential segregation and crowded housing conditions and discrimination. It's also about occupation, education level, income, wealth gaps and resource gaps that are being distributed unfairly between neighborhoods. And so I really hope that we spend the next five years and beyond recovering from this disaster and building it back stronger, because emergency management can't prevent or even solve for inequity of impact during emergencies and disaster if our society has institutional inequity.

Lindsay Einhorn ([21:08](#)):

And I guess in terms of where the field is going, I don't think it's sexy, but I think one of the biggest gaps is often data, and I'm sure Shraddha can speak to this much better than I can, but everyone from New York City emergency management to the city's department of health and mental hygiene, to the equity response group, they're truly committed to a response that is equitable. But when we have these systemic inequities, it's incredibly difficult to solve for during an emergency. But the first step is to understand where those inequities lie. We really need tools that provide for data management and visualization that can help us understand where those inequities are, where the gaps are, so that we can try to solve for them.

Allison Pennisi ([21:53](#)):

I think you all brought up very excellent points here. In order for us to move forward, we also have to look at the past and the institutions and what we can do to break down these barriers and how we can make this field, in spite of its newness, it could still evolve and it could still be a discipline that can continue to fulfill its mission, which is to serve and help others through mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Any final thoughts you would like to share before we go to rapid response discussing women's history month, the emergency management field or otherwise? Rachel?

Rachel Sulaymanov ([22:39](#)):

So I think for my final thoughts, I would really just encourage everyone to look into emergency management as a career. And specifically for young women starting out, I do still hear, and I think it's unfortunate, sometimes there might be a push into more of a quote, "family friendly," career or job environment. And I personally think that term is a complete misnomer and it shouldn't stop anyone looking into this dynamic field and really exciting discipline. And so my final thought would be just to look into it and to consider it and see if it fits because for me, it has been a tremendous career and experience and very rewarding.

Allison Pennisi ([23:26](#)):

Shraddha?

Shraddha Ramani ([23:27](#)):

I fully second what Rachel said. This is such a very rewarding and it's very satisfying to go home at night knowing that the work that we do every day, it has such an impact on the lives of people every day. So yeah, I definitely encourage everyone to consider emergency management as a career.

Allison Pennisi ([23:46](#)):

Lindsay?

Lindsay Einhorn ([23:49](#)):

I definitely want to echo what Rachel and Shraddha said. And I would also encourage everyone to look into serving in the Peace Corps. My time volunteering in Ethiopia changed my life. It taught me more than I ever could have imagined. And while the program is on hiatus during COVID, it will be back and there will be opportunities to go and serve communities abroad again.

Shraddha Ramani ([24:11](#)):

I agree.

Allison Pennisi ([24:12](#)):

Lexi, do you want to share any of your thoughts on the emergency management field as someone who is new to the field, but excited to dig her heels in?

Lexi Kirton ([24:22](#)):

Sure. I was just sort of reflecting on what Rachel and Lindsay both said earlier about how emergency management, NYCEM, can chart forward, given all of the challenges that we face as a country, as a world, globally. And I think a lot of that is just acknowledging the fact that we don't operate in a silo and how important these partnerships are to be able to lean on and learn from. And so I think as someone who's just starting out, is just not being comfortable with what I already know and expanding and exploring more of what's out there to inform myself, not only as a potential emergency manager, but just as a person living in society in this time. So I hope to continue learning and continue speaking to incredible women such as yourselves, to learn and grow from. So thank you for that.

Allison Pennisi ([25:27](#)):

I wholeheartedly agree. It has been an absolute pleasure speaking with all of you. And one thing that I absolutely love about this field is that you are constantly learning. And I learned so much from working with each of you on various projects, whether it's a blue sky, non-emergency time, or even a crisis response, we all coordinate. And that's one thing that's at the heart of emergency management is coordination and working with each other, whether it's your fellow emergency manager, or it could be somebody from another agency on a local, state or federal level. It could be an NGO, a non-government organization, or a nonprofit, volunteers. It's all a shared experience, and it's one of the things that I love about it. And I appreciate you all taking the time to share that with us. It is rapid response time. And if you are a first time listener, it's simple. 'Prep Talk' will ask questions and our guests will give the first answer that comes to mind.

Speaker 7 ([26:36](#)):

It's time for 'Prep Talk' Rapid Response.

Allison Pennisi ([26:38](#)):

Okay, here we go. What is the one emergency item that you cannot live without? Shraddha, let's start with you.

Shraddha Ramani ([26:45](#)):

My phone charger.

Allison Pennisi ([26:46](#)):

Lindsay?

Lindsay Einhorn ([26:47](#)):

Shraddha, that's funny. That's so not a Peace Corps response. I think that saying Go Bag would probably be cheating, since it's comprised of many items. So I guess I'll say flashlight.

Allison Pennisi ([26:57](#)):

Rachel?

Rachel Sulaymanov ([26:58](#)):

I would say cash. Cash, cash, cash. Not enough people carry it around on them and everyone will need it.

Lexi Kirton ([27:06](#)):

What is the best professional advice you have ever received? Lindsay?

Lindsay Einhorn ([27:12](#)):

I would bring it back to my love of RBG. She once said, "Fight for the things you care about, but do in a way that will lead others to join you."

Lexi Kirton ([27:21](#)):

Rachel?

Rachel Sulaymanov ([27:23](#)):

So this has really served me well and I still stand by it, and that is, don't be intimidated by anyone's title.

Lexi Kirton ([27:30](#)):

And Shraddha, take it away.

Shraddha Ramani ([27:33](#)):

At my first job, my supervisor told me, "You have a seat at the table, so use your voice."

Lexi Kirton ([27:38](#)):

All right. What is on your playlist? Shraddha, let's start with you.

Shraddha Ramani ([27:43](#)):

I've been listening to H.E.R. a lot.

Lexi Kirton ([27:47](#)):

One of my favorites, personally.

Rachel Sulaymanov ([27:49](#)):

So these days, comfort, working from home, I still go back to my roots. So it's been a lot of Springsteen and Bon Jovi for me lately.

Lexi Kirton ([28:00](#)):

Northeast classic. Lindsay, what do you think?

Lindsay Einhorn ([28:02](#)):

We've been listening to "Fast Car" by Tracy Chapman on repeat. I think I'm feeling the travel bug again.

Allison Pennisi ([28:12](#)):

Those are all really great answers. Last but not least, sum up the work you do in one word. Lindsay.

Lindsay Einhorn ([28:21](#)):

Rewarding.

Allison Pennisi ([28:23](#)):

Rachel?

Rachel Sulaymanov ([28:24](#)):

Lindsay took the word right out of my mouth. It's the same. It's always rewarding.

Allison Pennisi ([28:29](#)):

Shraddha?

Shraddha Ramani ([28:30](#)):

I would say supportive.

Allison Pennisi ([28:32](#)):

Great conversation with wonderful, strong, female emergency managers from New York City Emergency Management: Rachel Sulaymanov, Lindsay Einhorn, Shraddha Ramani. Thank you all for joining 'Prep Talk.' For those interested in learning more about emergency management, you can visit [nyc.gov/emergencymanagement](http://nyc.gov/emergencymanagement).

Speaker 1 ([28:57](#)):

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.