Mark Peterson - Host:

I am Mark Peterson, and this is "Before, During, and After: A Podcast from FEMA."

New Speaker:

Today we are diving into just a monumental topic for August, which is National Resilience Month, and it is all things hazard mitigation Assistance grant programs, or HMA grants. These programs play a critical role in helping communities across the nation reduce the impacts of disaster. So, we're gonna be exploring how the grants work, the types of assistance available, the benefits they bring to the communities, and understand the application process to highlight successful projects. We'll cover everything you need to know about leveraging these grants for disaster mitigation and resilience. So, whether you're a community leader, an emergency management professional, or simply interested in the disaster resilience project and what FEMA and the federal government have to offer, you're gonna have an opportunity to be informed and engaged throughout this episode.

New Speaker:

Hazard mitigation programs are certainly a big topic these days within the emergency management community, but also with regard to August being National Resilience Month, there's so much to talk about, and I'm thrilled to meet and talk with Derrick Hiebert, the Assistant Administrator for Mitigation at FEMA headquarters. Derrick, thanks so much for taking a few minutes and talking through these programs with me.

Derrick Hiebert :

Mark, thank you so much for the invitation and the opportunity. It's a really exciting time in hazard mitigation, and I'm pleased to share a little bit about it here.

Mark Peterson - Host:

I mean, I have to say, doing the regional work hazard mitigation programs and, and all that goes into them are just such a driver for potential resilience programs in small, medium, and large communities, and we're seeing that across the landscape within my region, and I know my regional counterparts in other parts of the country are seeing the same thing. There's just an enthusiasm for these programs and this, these federal dollars that, I mean, I haven't seen in my time at FEMA. So, I'm, I think this is just a great opportunity now to kind of walk through sort of the nuts and bolts of the program. So, maybe you could just start off by giving us an overview of what FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant programs are and maybe what they're not.

Derrick Hiebert :

So, I really appreciate that, and I, I like the way that you characterize, especially that idea of there being so much energy now. Five, 10 years ago, not the case. Hazard mitigation was an afterthought in a lot of cases, not because people wanted it to be, people were investing significant mitigation. I mean, huge, huge dollar totals after Hurricane Maria, after Hurricane Sandy. But at the same time, we didn't have an annual program that was as robust as we have now, and we didn't have a lot of the tools that were kind of at the, at people's disposal. So, first, let me, I'm gonna, I'm gonna say a little bit about what mitigation programs are. Then I wanna talk about kind of how we've started to fill the gaps. So, five to 10 years ago, we had Hazard Mitigation grant program, HMGP, that still exists today. That's the post-disaster mitigation program that provides mit grants for all kinds of projects, but anything that does long-term risk reduction, that's what we're looking for in mitigation. And we are required by law for that mitigation to be cost-effective and technically feasible. And that means that it has to have a benefit cost ratio of greater than one or, and it has to be technically feasible at reducing risk. That's very important.

Mark Peterson - Host:

So, Derrick, can I just stop you for a second? Those are probably the programs that most emergency managers around the country are maybe most familiar with, because they're kind of a legacy. Those are the ones that dollars are put against a disaster, right. Or set aside from a disaster.

Derrick Hiebert :

So, yes, that's absolutely right. PA - public assistance categories C through G, the permanent work, 15 to 20%, whether or not you're, depending on whether or not your state is enhanced, goes into a pot of money that can then be used for hazard mitigation grants. The state runs those grants, so it's internally competitive. So, it's a great tool if a state wants to invest in hazard mitigation at the state level. Some states do this in statewide competitions. Some states give allocations to counties or parishes, but everybody basically is investing in local priorities. This kind of project, of course, unlike public assistance grants that can do mitigation, our hazard mitigation assistance grants only do undamaged element mitigation. So HMGP, even though it's post-disaster, it still is only doing pre-disaster kind of work. So, you can imagine work that that will maybe elevate a bridge or replace a culvert to prevent damage that could have happened, from happening again.

New Speaker:

There's one exception. HMGP can be used to support disaster recovery for homeowners through three different categories of projects. There's acquisitions, where you buy out a property. You can do that either pre or post disaster. There's elevations where you take a property that's been threatened by flood and you elevate it so it doesn't get threatened anymore. And you can do that after a disaster. And there's what's called mitigation reconstruction, where damaged properties that were so heavily damaged that they're now rebuilding to a higher code can get a little bit of help from FEMA to rebuild in a more resilient manner. So, that's HMGP in a nutshell. It's our biggest program by a lot, something like 18 to $20 billion I think I've got out there right this minute. And it's really big after big disasters, billions of dollars after Harvey and Maria, for example, $4 or $5 billion after Maria.

New Speaker:

The next program is pre-disaster mitigation, which used to be the annual program. Now is typically used when members of the of, of Congress want to invest in specific projects in communities. So, that's what we call congressionally directed spending. And a lot of communities work with their members of Congress to get investments for from us that way. Third, we have the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program. This is the one everybody knows about now because it's had a couple of really big years, and it does large scale mitigation. It can also do small mitigation, but it's typically known for doing big transformational projects. It is nationally competitive with state set asides that, in the past years, have been around $2 million, as well as investments in building codes, investments in a project type called Project Scoping, which is the real secret for how you get transformational projects.

New Speaker:

It's basically money to do the design and environmental work to make a good project happen before you apply for the, the rest of the funding. And they do other kinds of capacity building. Big projects for this included anything from flood risk reduction in Princeville, North Carolina to large-scale wildfire stuff in the, in the west to retrofits, seismic retrofits, in Utah and large-scale floodplain management projects in the southeastern United States. So, really, it does everything. So, there's a fourth one called Flood Mitigation Assistance. It historically has been around since pre-disaster mitigation and before, but what it does is it invests in reducing risks to the National Flood Insurance Program. Now, thanks to the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act, we've been able to greatly expand FMA, as it's called, to almost a billion dollars a year, and do investments that go outside of the traditional benefits to NFIP and starting to do things like community scale flood mitigation projects.

New Speaker:

I've been very excited to see some this year that, that aren't yet released, but that I, I think, are, are heading toward approval that are really quite transformational. Now, the final program, and then I got a couple flavors for you. The final program is Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund. This is the STORM Act. This is the revolving loan funds. It's a, it's our, one of our smallest programs, and it's brand new, and it's investing in capitalizing state led revolving loan funds that help states give loans to local jurisdictions or individuals to do mitigation work. They're, the loans are capped at 1% a year and have either a 20 to 30 year repayment period, depending on whether or not it benefits a disadvantaged community. Now, beyond these big buckets, there's a couple of individual things, like there's one called Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Post-Fire, that's a post-fire HMGP program, and there's Flood Mitigation AssistanceSwift Current, which is a post-disaster flood mitigation assistance program that is focused on mitigating properties that are severe repetitive loss, or repetitive loss, so they have lots of flood claims to the NFIP or that are substantially damaged, which means they received serious damage, over 50%, in a disaster. The idea here though, is that we're a, we're starting to take mitigation from something that you kind of do when you have a chance, before a disaster, to something that can happen anywhere in a disaster cycle before or after, and something that can do it go away, go from anywhere, from helping a homeowner rebuild in a resilient way, to investing in a total systems mitigation through a $50 million BRIC grant. That's, that's kind of where we stand right now. It's, it's, it's been a little bit more of a menu than we had, say, five or 10 years ago.

Mark Peterson - Host:

Yeah, so I mean, if I were a community, and I'm thinking about, I mean, just all of these programs, which even if you didn't take 'em as a, you know, as looking in totality of them, each one can make a dramatic impact in communities and, and, and potentially have transformative effects. I guess the way I'm thinking about it is, if I am a community and I'm, I'm looking at some of the problems that I'm having, how can they identify the correct grant that would be the best one for them to go after to mitigate for their community?

Derrick Hiebert :

That's a great question there as well, and, and I think there's a, what we've typically advised folks is think about it like this. First, do you have any HMGP rounds open in your state? That is gonna be, if they're open and available, that's the least competitive money. And it may be that that's the money that's gonna work best for you. Oftentimes, it comes with a better cost share, because many states will take on part of the federal cost share. So this, for example, Washington State, where I come from, had a 12.5% cost share match. So, locals could only have to pay about 12.5% of the total cost of the project. So, the first place to look is, you ask the question, HMGP isn't available. The next question you ask is actually a different one. It's, what kind of project do I have and am I ready to go right now?

New Speaker:

If, my advice is, if you know you have a problem, but you have no idea how to even begin to craft a solution, you go for what's called direct technical assistance. This is the BRIC DTA program and, and you can do this either with us or you can work with any number of partners. You can work with your state, you can work with FEMA to do informal direct technical assistance. But what you're trying to do is conduct the planning and coordination activities to identify a great project. In addition to, to direct technical assistance, hazard mitigation planning grants can actually get you to the same place, believe it or not. Once you got a project in mind, if you haven't gotten it designed and developed, then you say, well, how am I going to, what, how do I get it designed and developed? Because many, many jurisdictions, what they say is, "Oh my gosh, I got an idea. There's money available. I have to apply for a grant today." Oh, no. That'll lead you to what we would call request for information purgatory, where you're gonna spend years working with us and the Office of Environmental and Historic Preservation to try to make sure all the questions are answered for your grants. Instead, go for what's called either an Advanced Assistance grant or Project Scoping. Advanced Assistance is HMGP, Project Scoping is BRIC. And what these grants do is allow you to get investments upfront. They can be millions of dollars. It can be huge investments to do all the design work, the environmental work, the other work that's gonna make it so that your project is ready to go in a future, either BRIC round, FMA round, or HMGP round, with the goal being that your project is actually more competitive because it's already crossed a lot of T's and dotted a lot of I's that other projects haven't.

New Speaker:

The third thing then, once you've discerned where you are, then it's about question about whether or not you're gonna go for, which program you're gonna go for. And what I recommend is you go for FMA if you can. So, if you have a project that's eligible for flood mitigation assistance, you go for that. That's the more restrictive grant program. There's less competition. Then you go either for HMGP - Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, or BRIC, depending on whether or not on what, where you are and what's, what's ready, where you are prioritized in comparison to the rest of the state. For a large transformational project, BRIC might be your best chance. That's a 25, 30, $40 million project. If you happen to have a smaller project and you have an open HMGP round, your best option might be HMGP. But in all cases, what you're looking for is a, the eligibility is pretty similar. Long-Term risk reduction, typically it's infrastructure. It can have all sorts of different designs and approaches to solving those problems, but that they're typically long-term risk reduction. And again, benefiting communities often it's an infrastructure project. You can pick your, you can take your pick after that, just go with what's available. And again, most restrictive first. So, FMA, if it's, if it's possible,

Mark Peterson - Host:

Yeah, I mean, I love that kind of breakdown. I wanted to see if we could just go back to the tech, the direct technical assistance conversation because I think, you know, just at least in my region, we've seen a lot of success from that accessibility to, to the, to the help. Now, will direct technical assistance also go in and help you identify which might be the most pressing risk for your community, not just maybe help you scope out the project itself?

Derrick Hiebert :

Absolutely, it does do that. And it can be very flexible depending on the need of the community. My advice on direct technical assistance is it's a highly competitive. It's ultimately quite competitive, and it's quite intensive from a resource standpoint. So, you can expect to be working with FEMA for a few years, and at the end of which you are still, you'll still probably, because these projects take a while to implement, you're likely to still be implementing your project. If, if in a, in a community like you just described, you'll have started at year one with a ideation process, where you're understanding your risks. Year two, maybe you've got a project in mind and year three, maybe you submit a grant. Well, that's the end of the DTA period. Now you will maybe get selected for that grant, maybe receive that grant and have to implement it on your own.

Derrick Hiebert :

And there's nothing wrong with that, with FEMA still there to help, as is the state, but it's it's important to ask the question early on, "am I maybe better placed to go for a mitigation planning grant and do a plan? And is part of that plan do understand my risk a little bit better? Is my challenge really that I, I'm more concerned about scoping a project and actually understanding the project, and I could use relationships with my county or my region or my state to help me better understand my risk?" And one of the things that I would always advocate is, we've gotta have lots of tools available. That's our goal. You want, we want you to be able to enter where it makes sense for you. But I would say, think about that. Think about whether or not DTA is your best option. Planning is your best option. If you've done those or, or don't need them, then project scoping may be, or even if you're, if you're a little bit further along, you just go for that full project and do a phase project. It's really about understanding where, where you are in the cycle. And the good news is FEMA, as part of expanding DTA, has also expanded our ability to engage directly in those conversations with many communities. And we're working with states to be able to do the same.

Mark Peterson - Host:

Okay. So, while we're talking about all the, all the different programs that are out there, and I think you hit on this a little bit in some of the discussion about the various types, talk to me a little bit about the differentiation between pre-disaster prevention grants and maybe some of those that are available post-disaster and those resources there.

Derrick Hiebert :

So, when we talk about pre-disaster grants, we're thinking, really all of our grants are pre-disaster mitigation. We're doing grants regardless of when the money's made available to reduce long-term risk of something that could occur. The post-disaster grants are actually where most of the mitigation money gets spent. So, I'll give you an example. Right now, this year, I think we've obligated over $2.1 billion in hazard mitigation assistance grants across FEMA in the last fiscal year. So, October through now, over 2.1 billion invested in communities across this country, just from HMA. That same amount nearly, I believe, has been invested in through public assistance Section 406 mitigation grant funding that's available post-disaster for structures that were damaged. The main thing is, it's actually most cost effective to do mitigation after disaster in a lot of cases, not in all cases, but in a lot of cases because you're at that point able to take a structure, you're rebuilding it with mitigation in mind, maybe changing, it may changing its orientation, its location, its function a little bit, whereas pre-disaster, you're typically trying to take what's there and make it stronger. Now, there's lots of cases where you wanna do that. You don't wanna lose a power plant, a wastewater treatment plant. You don't want those things to happen. So, what you're really trying to do is ask the question, "What can I not afford to lose? What are the things that are most critical to my community that I just don't think I can recover effectively if I don't have?" Then you ask the question, "Okay, how threatened are those? What are, what threatens those things? How vulnerable are they to that hazard that might happen? Do I have a an important piece of infrastructure that's likely to flood or be washed out by a, by a storm? And if it's washed out, you know, I'm just not gonna be able to get responders into my community." I come from Washington State, and again, I, my example is Interstate 90, going over the Cascades after a Cascadia subduction zone earthquake.

New Speaker:

Without it, we cannot transport the many, many, many thousands of medically fragile people from the Puget Sound region to safety on the east side. So, I would say, you can't afford to lose that. You have to protect that pre-disaster. So that's the first priority. Then the second set of options is you say, okay, so if I've done that, then if I can, I, can I be ready to implement post-disaster mitigation, if the worst does happen? So, that you're ready, you're working down your priority list, and then you are ready to go if a disaster does occur, to make sure that you're ready to ask for mitigation dollars for those infrastructure that are vulnerable after disaster occurs. Now, I wanna add one important thing here. Mitigation has been shown to be, you know, we've shown a six to one cost effectiveness ratio. That's just losses avoided. There are, there's another study I read from US.. Chamber of Commerce that showed an additional seven to one or th or some huge number to one, I forget the number actually, right this minute of, of benefits economically of from lo losses, from economic losses avoided. These are the, the commerce benefits, the tax benefits, the business benefits. Avoiding those losses is another option thing that's not counted in that six to one. And then on top of those, you have wellbeing and social losses that are not, not being captured in that six to one. These are people's lost workdays. These are children missing school. These are the somebody who is you know, who has to maybe leave a, an educational program or training program because they are, they were displaced from their home and they now live too far and now they're, they're, you know, over the course of their life, their earnings are substantially lowered.

New Speaker:

These are, this is where you find the majority of the losses. It's not really about the structure. It's about the consequences to that community of losing that structure or to the family from being displaced from housing or whatever was impacted. And so what I would say is think about what matters most, priority, rank it, and do as much pre-disaster as you can while being ready to do post-disaster during recovery to make sure that you're rebuilding in a way that is likely to prevent what happened from ever happening again. And the good news is we've actually got a lot of things that can help you with that.

New Speaker:

There's section 428. This is a public assistance program that allows what's called an alternative project, but frankly, what it basically does gives you a block brand that allows you to then spend that money on a project that does something similar, but is maybe in a different location, maybe has a little bit different function, maybe is a combination of a few projects. And, and I think some might take exception to the con to the phrasing of block grant. So I'll, I'll pause that there. But I'll say the idea is that you get a certain capped amount that you can then spend to help you recover a, a a in a way that is more fitting to your current properties. Oftentimes your population, you know, you might have a building that's 50 or 60 years old that has to be restored. Well, 428 lets you rethink how you restore it. You've got 406 - 406 is post-disaster mitigation. It helps you, it allows you to get additional dollars, sometimes quite simply built into your, the way you restore that, that project. Easiest way to think about this is roofing materials and new windows. After a major hurricane or a tornado, you're able to replace with more resistant, you know, roofing materials or, or stronger windows. Then you've got these couple of post-disaster options in addition to our things like Swift Current and some of the post-disaster hazard mitigation grant program. But if you can avoid the most catastrophic losses to the parts of your community that matter most using pre-disaster funds, you absolutely should. Because the, the, the losses really aren't just about the dollar value to that structure. It's really to the impact of your community.

Mark Peterson - Host:

What you just captured there is sort of the essence of resilience and maybe some of the things that we want people to be thinking about during August being resilience month. But we've talked generally about projects. We've talked about generally about like the types of work that each of these grants might be focused on. But you, you've traveled the country, you've seen these projects. What, what are some of the major transformative projects that are really successful that come to mind?

Derrick Hiebert :

The project that comes to mind and hits me, you know, to my core for why we do what we do, it's actually a post disaster project, and it's, it's important for a few reasons. So, in 2001, tropical Storm, Allison impacts Texas Medical Center in Houston - flooded it's non-functional. The FCO, federal Coordinating officer at the time, deploys for the very first time FEMA mitigation professionals to develop a plan to mitigate post-disaster, what happened there. Twenty seventeen, Harvey comes. Impacts Texas Medical Center again. It stays fully online. It stays fully functional. How many lives were saved from that? I don't know, but I do know it was substantial, and I do know that it required that foresight 16 years before to do things a little bit more expensively and a little bit more resiliently to get the outcome that we saw those years later. This is just the beginning of the kinds of, of, of, of projects that we see.

New Speaker:

I had another great one from showing me a project in Beatrice, Nebraska. Some of you may remember the our recently retired associate administrator, former associate administrator and current assistant administrator for flood insurance directory from Beatrice. That community had bought out over the course of a number of years, a number of highly vulnerable homes. And when they got a flood, you can just look at the area. And we had, we, FEMA, had worked at the community to surgically buyout, the vulnerable properties. Those were all families that received fair market value for their properties were able to live in a place that was more resilient, less vulnerable, and that community could have a disaster that was, yeah, no big deal. The no news here, the no nothing to report disaster that we're all looking for, because we've adapted ourselves to the challenges that we're facing with hazards.

New Speaker:

Those are just two examples. But, and, and, you know, it tends to sometimes take us a little while to find great examples, but I don't wanna understate the fact that that foresight and the mul on your worst day to say, how am I gonna recover more resiliently or that foresight now, you know, when you're got a million other things going to say, gosh, I just don't think this community could handle another hit like that, or this community could afford to lose this piece of infrastructure. That's where we find the kinds of projects that really make a difference.

Mark Peterson - Host:

I, I hear you on that. You know, sometimes it, it seems like it takes a while to, to see those successes, but honestly, sometimes those successes are apparent even amidst the, the work that we're doing every day in the disaster area, when we find communities that maybe aren't at the level of a presidentially declared disaster, because we've done so much mitigation, that is a huge success that I think we see in, in lots of parts of the country, especially with acquisitions. Right?

Derrick Hiebert :

Oh, gosh, I, I really appreciate that one. So, yes, on acquisitions, that's the case. I actually had somebody come up to me at a flood conference a couple weeks ago and say, it is so unfair the way FEMA calculates disaster damages. I have bought out nearly everything I have that's threatened, and now I'm not gonna get a disaster declaration. To which I replied, "Congratulations!" Well, you don't want that. You don't want, I understand the federal aid is nice, but the reality is, if you can get your damages to below threshold through mitigation, that's pretty fantastic. And that's the kind of things we're actually talking about. The the thing is that acquisitions are a great example because 45,000 of 'em left in severe repetitive loss and repetitive loss structures, that number is likely to climb as we face, you know, worsening consequences of climate change. But this is a discreet problem that we know how to address, and we know we have multiple tools to address it in terms of how people rebuild or whether when we can acquire their properties or not. And we have, over time, really succeeded in many communities becoming, again, adapted to these, to the flood conditions in which they live. And that's really exciting. I love hearing someone say, "I've run out of projects and can't apply anymore."

Mark Peterson - Host:

Yeah. it's a great success. And, you know, so not only is August res a month that's focused on resilience, but the whole year the administrator has challenged us on you know, focusing on resilience, the Year of Resilience. And I know you have a very large part of that. And so maybe speak broadly to some of your objectives that you're trying to accomplish this year in, in furtherance of that year resilience, and then maybe we'll, we'll transition to some of the action items that maybe communities can be thinking about this month.

Derrick Hiebert :

Absolutely. So, high level, three big things this year. One, we are trying to get more dollars out the door, particularly to disadvantaged communities. We wanna get those places invested. So, we have already awarded more grants this year than we've ever done in FEMA history for mitigation over $2.1 billion. That's, that's a triumph by itself. Then second, we are trying to, to update and modern and, and continue to evolve our programs. A lot of our programs are brand new, so making sure that we've have developed a multiple entry point system for people to apply for our grants so that they can be competitive regardless of where they are in the country, has been very important to us. That's the DTA or direct technical assistance to project scoping, to project kind of pipeline where you can pick where you fit on that curve. And then third, we've invested a lot in building codes and post-disaster mitigation. You, you know, you wanna call it compliance work, but it's really helping communities ensure that they're rebuilding resiliently. This year, we have spent quite a lot of time working with a number of communities in South Florida, a total of 23 that were impacted by Hurricane Ian a couple of years ago. And working with those communities, we were able to help 18 of those 23 avoid you know, significant compliance issues with National Flood Insurance Act of 1968. And we're continuing to work with the remaining five to try to make sure that either they get on compliance or that we we, we can help them move in that direction. The reason this matters is because resilience isn't just a grant that we give you to fix a culvert or harden a structure. Resilience can be the preparedness and training invested from National Preparedness Directorate. It can be the grants in investing in staff capacity that you see both from programs like our community assistance program, which invests in floodplain management or the grants program directorates Emergency Management Performance Grants, or EMPG. It can be compost, disaster compliance help. And even, you know, we've even seen tremendous success with just having staff deploying to disasters, working alongside public assistance to help the impacted community leaders make decisions about where to put mitigation in their recovery plans. So, in terms of year of resilience, I, I think that that's, that's what I've seen in the triumph of this past year, has been a lot of focus on how we bring the different pieces together that make up resilience so that any, we aren't just thinking kind of narrowly in our box. Resilience to me is grants. Resilience to me is training. Instead, it's something that, that people can live on, a contin, can that, can exist on a continuum, and that we can, and then we can invest where on that continuum any individual community needs.

Mark Peterson - Host:

Yeah. And so, I love that at continuum. It's not just this year, it's not just this month, but if you think about, you know, just a special emphasis on resilience in August before we go into National Preparedness Month, which kind of nicely flows out of the resilience conversation. What's your parting message to communities that are, you know, they're thinking about economic development, they are also acknowledged that they have certain risks. They're also thinking about sort of long-term climate risks. And they're balancing these things. They're balancing their costs, they're balancing their staff costs in terms of you know, focusing their attention on going after grants. What's your message this month as we want to have a renewed focus on resilience to communities around the country?

Derrick Hiebert :

Wow. So, there's a lot there. There's a lot there. So, first, if you haven't done anything, built it yet, you haven't done the planning yet. If you haven't done the, the building codes yet, that's where you start. You start with the planning, you start with the building codes. We have funding for both of those. You make sure that you get your ducks in a row. Do not need, you don't need to be knee-jerk on this. You can take your time. This is not a crisis situation. Take your time to make sure you're doing the right thing with the right methods. That is critically important. The best projects that are most successful are those that take time to plan and then to when they're ready to be delivered is when you start delivery, not before. A lot of people fall into a hole, the hole of, we gotta get started now. And that results in a lot of wasted money, time and effort in less successful projects. So, for folks starting out, that's where you gotta be.

New Speaker:

For everyone else, I'd recommend that you think about, think about what those risks are, and think about where you want your community to be over the next 25, 30, 50 years, and ask the question, "What, what threatens what I love? What threatens what makes us special? What, what are those risks that really define or could pose an existential threat to the, to, to our continued continuation as a vibrant place that maybe is good for families or good for retirees, or, you know, it's good for folks that like the outdoors?" Whatever it is that that's important to you, and make sure you're investing in preserving those values. A lot of times we talk about the values that are most important to us, and we don't actually put the dollars in our investments and time and energy into those areas that we, we say are most important.

New Speaker:

I'll give you a good example. City of Westport Washington is a, is a town on the coast, very vulnerable to to tsunami if there's a catastrophic earthquake. And it's a big tourist town and fishing town. They have multiple festivals in the year. They have a little cute downtown. And for years, their city admin engineer slash city administrator has been working to get FEMA funding for a vertical evacuation tower. This, this, they were the first in the country to do it. In fact, they did it without FEMA money in one of their elementary schools to start. Now, when they designed their vertical evacuation tower, they built it, it's designed as a reinforced parking structure because they have, they're trying to meet multiple needs here. They're trying to build long-term economic prosperity for the community. They're trying to provide for a need, a physical structure that people could use to evacuate in the case of a, of a tsunami and one that's large enough to support significant number of, of visitors who might be from out of town. This kind of combination where you're thinking about these pieces and making sure that you're making that critical investment as part of the long-term economic, social, environmental, sustainable future of your community is the way I would go about it.

Mark Peterson - Host:

So, Derrick, I, I really appreciate your time here. I know you're really busy, you know, just in thinking about all the programs that you have under your purview, it's, it's just inspirational really. Just being somebody who has worked for FEMA for a long time and seeing changes in communities and seeing them now in communities that have just been affected by major disasters who are implementing or working towards the, the seeing the fruits of this grant process in their communities that are directly affecting the challenges that they face on a day to basis. Thanks for your, for your work, but also what do you have to say to the individuals out there that are working on behalf of their community and working through these grant programs?

Derrick Hiebert :

Five years ago, I sat down with a number of colleagues involved in the field, and we made a list of why communities aren't able to apply for hazard mitigation grants and get them and basically do long-term mitigation. And there were a lot of reasons, but the four biggest ones that are really kind of cross-cutting, the big, the big dominant ones are there wasn't an available annual source of funding. There wasn't a technical capacity to develop mitigation applications, especially through things like the BCA. Non-federal cost share or match was a major, is a major impediment, and there were too much, too many communities were unable to afford local match, and there wasn't a broad space awareness or understanding of how mitigation even worked. And certainly therefore, nobody, people like generally not investing in capacity of staff to do mitigation. Well, I can tell you that now four or five years later, that has comprehensively changed.

New Speaker:

We have more funding and authorities than we've ever had. We're doing more projects than ever before. We're seeing a tremendous bipartisan upswell in willingness and interest in investing in long-term risk production. We have developed our, you know, the Building Resilient Obstruction Communities program is our annual grant program. That's our annual source of funding. Along with the expanded FMA. We have invested in direct technical assistance and project scoping to lower the barriers to actually applying for the grant. We have improved match opportunities by reducing match burden for community disaster resilience zones communities, for communities that are economically disadvantaged rural communities. And with the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund, you have another potential source of match to reduce burden on doing hazard mitigation grants. And then finally, as part of the broad based increase in awareness about the consequences of, say, climate change and need to adapt, as well as just overall awareness of hazards and vulnerability, we've seen a massive increase in people's interest in awareness of hazard mitigation in general as, and I think that this past BRIC cycle of five point, being 5.5 times oversubscribed is a great example of that.

New Speaker:

So, in other words, over the past handful of years, we have substantially reduced or addressed or made inroads on every one of the biggest problems we face that prevented people from doing mitigation. So, now when I look at the map of our mitigation projects, I'm seeing direct technical assistance communities in southeastern Missouri. I'm, and, and in, and in the middle of Alaska with Alaska Native Villages, I'm seeing project scoping grants be 50% of the state set aside pot. So 50, $60 million a year as of right now, going into project scoping grants. I'm seeing more investments in building codes and things that are, that lead to resilience. And I'm seeing the transformational projects be developed and communities of all sizes. Where this year, something like a 120 million of the five or 600 million that was available in competitive pots and competitive funds for BRIC went to economically disadvantage rural communities.

New Speaker:

And I've seen states that have stepped up like North Carolina in Washington, you know, as well as Louisiana, that have really stepped up to develop state programs that engage their communities and help them overcome the challenges of our grant programs. So, what I'm focused on right now is on making sure that, that when folks reach out to us, they have a place to plug in regardless of where they are in the process, and that they understand how to apply for these grants and how to, how to seek out the project types they need. Because I will tell you, there has never been more funding opportunity, there's never been more funding authority. There's never been a greater opportunity in terms of just the overall combination of, of authority and funding and interest to do good hazard mitigation.

Mark Peterson - Host:

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