

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## FEMA, VITEMA And Houses Of Worship Partner To Promote Resiliency

VIC News / **Published On July 11, 2019 07:25 PM /**

Staff **July 11, 2019**



The faith-based community across the Virgin Islands is partnering with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) and the Long-Term Recovery Groups (LTRG) to build a more resilient territory, FEMA said in a release Thursday.

Recently, Department of Homeland Security's Office of Faith-Based and Opportunity Initiatives Director Kevin Smith, conducted a two-day visit to St. Thomas and St. Croix to stress the important role houses of worship have in disaster recovery work across the nation.

On the first day, Smith spoke about building resiliency within the faith-based and nonprofit organizations at a summit hosted by the Episcopal Diocese of the Virgin Islands at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Sugar Estate. The summit was held in conjunction with the St. Thomas LTRG and VITEMA.

"Houses of worship across the Virgin Islands are already doing a great amount of work to drive the recovery of the territory," said Smith. "It is important for houses of worship to count volunteer hours as well as donated resources to their community projects. These hours and other donated expenses can help to offset a local match for a grant to a house of worship which can then give them access to more technical and financial resources from the Territory and federal government."

More than 50 people from houses of worship across the U.S. Virgin Islands shared their goals with Smith, FEMA Caribbean Area Division Director Justo Hernandez and VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen, for building a more resilient community after hurricanes Irma and Maria.

"Houses of worship are able to reach people within their individual communities and ensure that the needs of survivors are not only met during this recovery but are prepared for whatever may come as we continue to move into the height of hurricane season," said Jaschen.

On the second day of the trip, Smith and members of the FEMA team conducted a briefing at the FEMA Joint Recovery Office in St. Croix to discuss ways FEMA can work better with houses of worship and nonprofit organizations to make the territory more resilient. Invited guest Pastor Gary Moore, Territorial Voluntary Agency Liaison, gave the history of how each LTRG began in the territory post 2017 hurricanes and highlighted their uniqueness.

Smith and other FEMA staff visited a construction project on St. Croix where volunteers from the mainland are replacing the entire roof on the home of an elderly survivor in Frederiksted. This volunteer group has completed more than 30 homes.

FEMA provided invitational travel funding for volunteers. FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaisons worked with the LTRGs while coordination of volunteers was done by Chris Finch of Lutheran Disaster Response and housing for volunteers was provided by Sunny Isle Baptist Church. This joint initiative is an example of federal, local and community organizations partnering to assist the community in building back a more resilient territory.