

An Interview with Kelly Echeverria

Perspectives from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leadership and Learning in Nevada

Produced by:

The University of Nevada Las Vegas
The Lincy Institute
2024

Principal Researchers:

Magdalena Martinez, Ph.D. and Kelliann Beavers, Ph.D.

The following interview was a part of the “Perspectives from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leadership and Learning in Nevada” research project. The recorded interview and transcript were made possible through the generosity of The Lincy Institute at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The goal of the project was to understand and document how Nevada organizations and leaders responded to the myriad challenges that the pandemic engendered. The interviewees thank The Lincy Institute and their supporters for the opportunity to reflect on their roles throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers also acknowledge the following individuals who contributed to the conceptualization, data collection, and analysis of the project: Dr. John Hudak, Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie, Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio, Taylor Cummings, Peter Grema, Kristian Thymianos, Saha Salahi, Madison Frazee, and Katie Lim.

Each interviewee had the opportunity to review their transcript. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the interviewee. This interview features Kelly Echeverria, Emergency Manager for Washoe County, and was conducted on 9/22/22 by Kelliann Beavers. This interview covers topics including reflections on leadership, organizational challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

Interview with Kelly Echevarria

Date: 9-22-2022

SPEAKERS: Kelliann Beavers, Kelly Echevarria

Kelliann Beavers [00:02]

Okay. So to confirm, you're comfortable with us recording the interview, and then I will provide you with the transcript to review. And if we would like to quote you, you're comfortable with us using your name.

Kelly Echevarria [00:15]

Yes.

Kelliann Beavers [00:16]

Okay, great. So the first question, really generally, can you describe your position and your role in your organization?

Kelly Echevarria [00:22]

Sure. I'm the County Emergency Management Administrator, and I fall under – my department falls under the Office of the County Manager. I report directly to the Assistant County Manager with a dotted line to the County Manager for times of emergency. And then our responsibility is to activate the Emergency Operations Center and staff it in support of any response efforts in the community in times of disaster, to provide resources and vetted information. And then in Blue Skies, in times of non-disaster, to work through planning, training, exercises, operational, efficiencies, and that sort of thing, and my office is also responsible for sending out alerts and warnings.

Kelliann Beavers [01:19]

Okay. That makes sense. The center that you described is a physical facility?

Kelly Echevarria [01:25]

It is, yes.

Kelliann Beavers [01:26]

Oh, okay, interesting. Yeah, I know the City of Henderson described something similar. And can you help me understand the distinction, as best as you can describe it, between the role of the county, versus the role of the city, versus the role of whatever other agencies are involved at a time like this when you're responding to an emergency? Basically, just how you see the role of the county itself.

Kelly Echevarria [01:48]

Sure. Well, so we all have similar roles, the two cities, as well as the two tribes, Reno-Sparks and then Colony Paiute Tribe all have emergency managers. And we all work together because in this

area, so many incidents impact all of us, or need the support of one another. We're limited on resources in that way.

So "all disasters are local," as we like to say, in the business. So if something happens in a city jurisdiction, and they're overwhelmed, then they would reach out to the county for support with resources – or activation of the Emergency Operations Center. So this we call the Regional Emergency Operations Center, with a REOC. The REOC is something that is co-managed by the cities and the counties; so we share it, so in any instance, it can be activated by the cities, and the county would just support it as needed. Because the county is the only staff that works in the EOC on Blue Sky days.

So that's kind of how that works. And so with emergency declarations as well, the cities would declare, first, to the county. And then if the county needed to declare, we would all declare together, up to the state. So it kind of rolls up in that capacity. Now, the county can also be impacted without the cities being impacted if it's on county land or in county jurisdiction. Then we can activate without the cities, but we typically call in the cities to help us with that response.

Kelliann Beavers [03:50]

That makes sense. And thanks for explaining that. I didn't know a lot of that, and it helps me organize, in my mind, what you mean when you say "different" parts of it.

Kelly Echevarria [04:00]

We are a little bit different than other parts of the state. And I know that in Clark County, Las Vegas, Henderson, it's a little bit different. But that's how we operate up here.

Kelliann Beavers [04:11]

Yeah. It sounds like – feel free to clarify this or add anything to it – but from the conversations I've had here, I've learned about the existence of the MAC that's required by FEMA. And I spoke to the emergency manager in Clark County, and at the City of Las Vegas, and the City of Henderson, and noticed that in the county, at least here, he's a part of the fire department.

Kelly Echevarria [04:39]

Mm-hmm.

Kelliann Beavers [04:41]

So it's just completely different from the other two folks, who I spoke with, who worked for the city. But what I don't observe that you're describing; it sounds like it would be a really meaningful way to structure things is having a sort of mutually-owned center, that was regional, and it sort of thereby being like a regional response – not just a necessity to the moment, like the FEMA/MAC, where there is a regional response that's sort of mandated.

Kelly Echevarria [05:11]

Mm-hmm.

Kelliann Beavers [05:13]

But it's always a regional resource, basically.

Kelly Echevarria [05:18]

Yeah. And I think in the past, there has been pushback on – well, it's not really regional if it's just Washoe County.

Kelliann Beavers [05:26]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [05:29]

But we also include the tribes: so the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe and the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony are able to use this facility as well.

Kelliann Beavers [05:38]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [05:41]

So it is kind of regional at capacity. I mean Washoe County's big, but also, you know, tribal land is separate.

Kelliann Beavers [05:49]

Right. Exactly. And I know that this probably isn't how every, single person would interpret the word "region." But at least, in studying policy and doing what I do, it is regional just based on what you described to me; about the fact that there are a range of jurisdictions that are involved in it. So regardless of whether you're trying to define the geography as [overtalking 06:12] regional. It isn't just one entity, which I think would be strong during a crisis like the pandemic, as far as things unfolded.

The next question is, which groups do you believe were hardest hit by the pandemic and the downturn, and how did your response essentially accommodate those goals – those groups, or respond to those groups?

Kelly Echevarria [06:43]

For every incident, you're going to see those who are the disproportionately affected individuals – usually are lower socioeconomic, or don't have access to the resources that others have. I think all of us were impacted by the pandemic, right, and in different ways. So I can speak to my own experience. I have two kids who are four, (laughs) so they were home. And both their parents are first or secondary responders, EMT being a secondary responder, so we're required to keep working. Childcare was impacted. Obviously, you know, resources that you are able to get at the grocery store were impacted. We really looked at the things that we were seeing in our own community. So access to water because water fountains were not available. Access to bathrooms because public spaces were no longer open. And so we had porta-potties placed into the public, for public use, because we also saw more people going out into parks because there was nowhere else to go. And that's a mental health thing, and we needed to support that, but there also had to be those basic necessities like restrooms and hygiene. So with wat[er] – with handwashing abilities.

We looked at our hazard mitigation plan, first and foremost. So we, in our region, identified 13 hazards, one of which is infectious disease. So immediately when the pandemic hit, we cracked that thing open and looked at what are identified actions to reduce the impact of infectious disease. And I'm not kidding there was *one*, and it was "improve air quality." And we were in an office of two at the time, and my predecessor was still here, and we sat down, and we were like "What does that mean?" "What do you mean, improve air quality? This is a disease."

And so we called the health district and our partners in public health preparedness, and they were like "I don't know. We didn't put that." And we had just done the plan, and so the Hazard Mitigation Plan, we just updated it.

Kelliann Beavers [09:20]

Yeah.

Kelly Echevarria [09:23]

And so we ended up out to Air Quality specifically, and asking "What did you mean?" "Like you must have put this; what does this mean?" And it was a master class on air quality and how it ties into pandemics. And so, typically, I guess, pandemics are respiratory in nature. And the worse the air quality – which we certainly see in our region – we just saw it with the effects of the Mosquito Fire. If the air quality is worse, you're more susceptible to getting the disease. And if you get it, then your symptoms are more likely – you're more likely to have symptoms, first of all, and then, if you have them, they're more likely to be exacerbated by the air quality.

And so we kind of stepped back. At some point – I was working on logistics throughout COVID – but at some point, I transitioned to Recovery Manager. And in recovery, which happens at the same time as a response, we thought, how can we address the things that were seen, like hygiene issues in public and food scarcity, and those things that everybody was seeing, but also address air quality. Because if that's the one thing that we have in our hazard mitigation plan, we have to address it. And we did a lot of research; I think something came out of Colorado, where they were doing what was considered "green recovery."

Kelliann Beavers [10:59]

Mmm.

Kelly Echevarria [11:02]

And so – or they had talked about it, or something.

Kelliann Beavers [11:04]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [11:06]

And so it was mentioned to us, and we were like "Let's deep-dive on this." And it was really, what we found was happening in Europe, more so than in the United States.

Kelliann Beavers [11:14]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [11:16]

But we decided that it had to be a part of our recovery. So when we restructured our recovery, we made sure to include, in our objectives, the air quality piece. So things like wildland-urban interface, so fuels reduction. Reducing carbon dioxide through programs like investing in EV infrastructure or investing in an urban forester within the county and a tree tracking system as well.

Kelliann Beavers [12:01]

Uh-huh.

Kelly Echevarria [12:02]

And then investing in multimodal infrastructure, which a lot of these things were already happening. But within our region, things tend to happen piecemeal, so the city will do something, or the county will do something similar. I love to give the example of defensible space, and how our fire districts and jurisdictions all have different programs.

Kelliann Beavers [12:34]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [12:35]

And wouldn't it be great if there was some overlapping umbrella organization, charged with mitigation, that could standardize the program, and ensure that people with functional and access needs are able to utilize these programs? Because if you have it, but you don't have the ability to rip out vegetation; you don't have a truck to take it to green waste days. We don't have green waste service in this region. Like all of that – tie that together and make sure that that's happening. So green waste was another – because otherwise, people are just putting it in the trash, and then it's creating carbon dioxide at the landfill.

So we looked at all of those things as ways of improving air quality, and it was really interesting once we got everybody in the same room, once we were physically allowed to do so. How many of these plans and projects overlapped, and how we were able to use examples like what the city is doing with their urban forester and the impact that *he's* having? And how that could amplify if the county invested in that as well.

So we did it by how much effort it would take to put this initiative into place, how much the cost would be, and then what the impact on equity and inclusion would be, and the impact on the goal that we are trying to achieve as well. We did this through all of our objectives in green recovery; we're presenting it to the Board of County Commissioners next month.

Kelliann Beavers [14:19]

That's really interesting. I haven't heard of anything like this, and it definitely – when you really start to think about all the pieces of the picture, like you're describing, is impactful, not only for the sake of something, potentially, like an infectious disease but just in general.

Kelly Echevarria [14:35]

It is like general betterment wrapped up in a bow of infectious disease.

Kelliann Beavers [14:41]

Yeah.

Kelly Echevarria [14:42]

And if you're going to find a silver lining in it, it's that it's not provided us this opportunity and the lens to see it. Because at the beginning of COVID, we were like "What do you mean, air quality?"

Kelliann Beavers [14:50]

Right. You're like "What do we do right now? Because I'm not sure that I can just jump out the door and improve air quality. I kind of need to know, right now, what to do."

Kelly Echevarria [15:03]

Yeah.

Kelliann Beavers [15:04]

But I can see that big picture-wise, the recommendation is one of the better recommendations that can be made.

Kelly Echevarria [15:11]

Mm-hmm.

Kelliann Beavers [15:13]

Especially for things that are within your authority. You're not going to be able to leave the hospital and certain aspects of response that are very relevant to infectious disease. There are only certain pieces that are sort of under the realm of the county itself.

Kelly Echevarria [15:31]

Yeah. It's difficult with infectious diseases. It's not like one of your more tangible, visible disasters like a hurricane [overtalking 15:39] or a fire, where you see the impact – physically see it – and then you say, "Okay, we can rebuild. And let's rebuild better, and let's do it strategically. We are trying to rebuild better, in a strategic way, but it's not as visible.

Kelliann Beavers [15:56]

Yeah. It's good to hear, though, that there is a continued response, even though it's not, at least observably, the height of the emergency.

Kelly Echevarria [16:09]

Yeah. I think the county, outside of green recovery, is also making sure – well, the region – because the cities and the county are all tied in this together. We're investing in broadband, and all of the things you're seeing in other jurisdictions, that came out of the funding sources, like ARPA. Those sorts of things. The foodbank – we're working with the foodbank to ensure healthier options, and it's just captured in the recovery plan.

Kelliann Beavers [16:39]

Yeah, that's great. And the recovery plan, is that what you were describing, that you're going to

be presenting? Or you're presenting the "green" aspect, like a part of the recovery plan? In fact, I didn't even know the recovery plan existed, so it's nice to hear you describe it.

Kelly Echevarria [16:54]

Yeah. So the recovery plan is just a tool, to make sure that we are outlining our goals and objectives, and we're moving forward towards achieving them. Some of them are ongoing forever, like we'll constantly be reviewing our response, and making sure we do better, and we're tracking our plans, and stuff like that. It's just ongoing. So recovery's really difficult if you like to check boxes.

Kelliann Beavers [17:18]

But that seems like a strategic, ongoing, you know – to declare that you're going to, in an ongoing way, review your practices and work to improve them is a change, and it is impactful, and it is exactly a part of the plan. I get it.

Kelly Echevarria [17:31]

Yeah. And so part of the recovery plan is green recovery. So I'll be presenting the whole thing, and then I'll also be highlighting aspects of green recovery.

Kelliann Beavers [17:44]

That is really neat. And thank you for sharing it with me. I'm excited to learn more about it and see the benefits for your community, too.

Kelly Echevarria [17:52]

Yeah.

Kelliann Beavers [17:55]

The next question is, can you discuss if there were collaborative efforts across municipalities, agencies, or even among nonprofits that stood out to you? Anything that comes to mind that you saw unfold?

Kelly Echevarria [18:13]

I really loved how quickly the cities and the county came together. There were ongoing recurring meetings between senior leadership, but also at various levels below that, to ensure that we were all on the same page. The county and the cities were given an equal voice at the table to talk about what was happening in their jurisdiction, what challenges we needed to overcome, how we were going to do that together, and did everyone agree. And if not, how could we get to a place where everyone agrees? And I think that that's not super-common. So I feel very blessed to live in a region that does operate that way. Where we all ride for the brand that signs our paychecks. But we're able to kind of set those egos aside and work together for the collective good of the region.

Kelliann Beavers [19:13]

Yeah.

Kelly Echevarria [19:16]

And I don't know if that's because maybe we're in a bowl together (laughs). But for whatever reason, we're very lucky to be able to operate that way, and we are tied in with nonprofits. Like I mentioned earlier, the food bank – when I reached out through our county grants coordinator and said, “Okay, here are our objectives for recovery. What are you doing with the ARPA funds? Who are you talking to? How are you going about this?” She was able to say, “We're already talking to the food bank. We've already talked to this organization or that one, and they're tied in.” And so they also pushed out grant opportunities to that sector, and they were able to apply for whatever their needs might be. Because they know, more than we do, what they experienced in the pandemic, and how they wanted to tackle that moving out of it.

Kelliann Beavers [20:07]

Yeah. What you're describing is interesting to me too, from the perspective internally of you recognizing or implementing the reaching out to the person who leads grants for the county and ensuring that what they're doing aligns with what you were thinking about in terms of goals and if not, learning from them. And that's a whole piece of it that I think is really interesting.

The next question is, is there anything that you wish – this doesn't have to be about the county – but is there anything you wish that different levels of government would have done, or could have done differently, during the pandemic or during the economic downturn? And this could be at any level of government.

Kelly Echevarria [20:54]

I think one of the biggest challenges was, initially, that supply chains with PPE were overwhelmed. So then, once we had the funding to purchase PPE, it came in droves. But then you run into the situation of where do you put it?

Kelliann Beavers [21:21]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [21:23]

And what's its shelf life? And so I think there were times where different levels of government overreached and said – reached out to communities specifically, instead of going through the emergency management chain to say, “Do you need PPE? Contact us. Because we need to empty our warehouse, and then we'll give it to you.” And so then they're bypassing the locals, who have a stockpile as well, and don't have all this warehouse space, and need to get these things moving into the community as intended, and so that was a challenge.

And then I think, also, sometimes, for us, we had a resource request maybe for gowns – Level 2 isolation gowns, or non-permeable gowns. And what we were given (laughs) we called “Grandma's Curtains,” because it literally – looked like you had made a gown out of Grandma's curtains – better than nothing. Still took forever to get. But not usable in this scenario, right?

Kelliann Beavers [22:31]

Yeah.

Kelly Echevarria [22:33]

It wasn't like "I need a ball gown." It was just like [overtalking 22:35]

Kelliann Beavers [22:38]

Yeah, like "We're not taking a picture in these."

Kelly Echevarria [22:41]

So then we said, "Well, we didn't ask for this." And it was basically "No, takesie-backsies."

Kelliann Beavers [22:48]

Also, then you just had to figure out what to do with them.

Kelly Echevarria [22:50]

Then we had to figure out *more* space for the things we didn't ask for but still were given. And so I recognize that the logistics aspect of PPE was a madhouse, and we were figuring out, as it was going, and every day was different. And even though – like our ordering was based on mathematical calculations of requests that had come through, now we have too much because the supply chain's open again. And so then, what do you do, and how do you find alternative resources? It just required a lot of management – and still does. So that was difficult.

Kelliann Beavers [23:34]

Yeah. It had to have been difficult to measure, ahead of the moment, how different pieces of the response, and how much effort in people it was going to take, right? Because you could just say the words "someone," or "some of us" need to be thinking about and managing the PPE aspect, without realizing how enormous that was going to be, and that it might require a miniature department to manage. I'm sure there were a lot of things like that.

Kelly Echevarria [24:05]

There were. And I think, you know, the situation was changing so quickly that initially we thought "Okay, we're going to need a space to isolate people," or "What if people can't go home?" or "What if first responders are exposed, and they can't go home?"

Kelliann Beavers [24:16]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [24:19]

"So then, where do we put them?" And we put resources into creating a place like that, and then it was determined that that wasn't it. But then you saw situations like Renown], where they built out their parking garage to accommodate overflow for two levels, and they were used.

And so, you know, I think we tried to get ready for what might come, and some waves didn't come, and some waves did. And so we were able to say, well, at least, we were ready if we needed, but it was difficult. This is the first time I've heard the phrase, but "they were building the plane while they were flying it" I heard, probably, the first week of the pandemic. And then I still hear it today. (laughs) So that's kind of what it felt like, though.

Kelliann Beavers [25:14]

Yeah, that is a really good analogy, and I'm glad you used it. Because I don't think I've heard anyone say it during my interviews, and it is exactly accurate. I think a lot of people have articulated that kind of feeling.

You mentioned earlier, when you were describing what you do, in your job, that the times which are not an emergency are the Blue Sky days. And the role that you play then is obviously different from the role that you play at the height of a crisis. How do you think that – I guess I don't know what color the skies are right now. It's not like the pandemic is completely gone.

Kelly Echevarria [25:54]

Right.

Kelliann Beavers [25:55]

During these "light blue" Blue Sky days or whatever you would like to describe them as. What are the takeaways, now, for you from the pandemic – I guess both in how to respond to a crisis, should one arise, of this nature, ever again. Then, also, for the Blue Sky days, right? What is there, in terms of laying groundwork, that maybe you have learned – similar to what you're describing about the recovery plan in general? But, I guess, just in general, in terms of response to emergency?

Kelly Echevarria [26:31]

Great, complicated question. So I'll do my best to answer it and let me know if I'm missing any part of it. I think all disasters are local, right – I've mentioned that already – that's what we say, anyway, and in this instance, it impacted everyone. So we had actually done a pandemic tabletop exercise shortly before COVID happened. And we had one guy stand up and say, "Our issue is going to be that the strategic national supply will be depleted, and we won't have supplies," and I said, "Whoa, that's a pretty big statement there, guy! What's the solution?" And he said, "You have to stockpile PPE on a rotating basis because it expires, and nobody wants to do that." And sure enough, here we are with that supply, and nobody wants to do it. It's difficult. It's a full-time job, as you [overtalking 27:28]

Kelliann Beavers [27:29]

Even now, is what you're saying. Hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [27:32]

So, even now, no one wants to do it. And it's hard – you have to find warehouse space. You have to track the items. You have to move them and keep buying them, and it's difficult. And so it's kind of like well, the federal level will do that. Hopefully, the feds learned from this, and the Strategic National Stockpile will be more robust in the future. But who's following up on that? I haven't heard. So he was right, unfortunately. It was depleted incredibly quickly.

I think we learned a lot, as far as the logistics that go into distribution, testing, and I would say, vaccinations. But also, communicating with the public, and how important that is.

Kelliann Beavers [28:27]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [28:29]

And who sets the tone for response and resilience, and how important that is in the nation. I think locally, we work with our public information officers, all the time, to make sure that we're crafting appropriate messages for the public. And we're telling them verified things; they know they can come to us for information. We're trusted. I had a family member say, "How do I know that this is accurate?" and I said, "Look, man, the people in our health department – our health district – are brilliant. I've worked with them for almost a decade. They're brilliant, and they're also just people who really, genuinely, want the best for everyone in our community."

Kelliann Beavers [29:27]

Right.

Kelly Echevarria [29:29]

And so breaking it down to that, and humanizing that, and just sharing my experience in this region, really seemed to make some headway with "Okay, I'm open to digesting this." And I think a lot of times in disasters, we forget them. And so it's important to be able to remind people, you know, we're all in this, for the betterment of our community, together. And that's any disaster, right, especially if you're impacted, and you don't have the resources to rebound as quickly as you might like. That's when we turn to other organizations for help, and if that help isn't there, it can be incredibly frustrating.

So I think, you know, being able to communicate with the public about what is going on, what the jurisdiction is doing to help them, what the hazards are, and how they can appropriately respond is incredibly beneficial. And that's something we try to do now, with preparedness, and talking about mitigation, even with defensible space. What can you do? Who can you reach out to for help?

I just met with a community called Warm Springs, which is out by Pyramid Lake and is incredibly rural. And we were talking about having a plan, staying informed, and having a "go kit" ready to go. And they're like "Well, we're not Reno. We're not Sparks. We have a lot of land out here." And so we had the conversation of "That's why you have to make a plan that works for *you*."

Kelliann Beavers [31:10]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [31:11]

"We're all individuals. And if you can make that plan first – for you, it's not a template that fits everyone – but you have to individualize it for yourself."

I've gone down a rabbit hole – but I'm just saying, the ability to have those conversations with community members is so crucial to every part of any disaster.

Kelliann Beavers [31:35]

Yeah. You're getting at something that I think is really important that's about building trust, not just superficially, but building trust by helping individuals come to the place at which they accept that something bad could happen, right?

Kelly Echevarria [31:54]

Mm-hmm.

Kelliann Beavers [31:57]

Like that's really scary, and it probably won't, in many of the cases of emergencies. But to create preparedness, you have to get people to come to the place at which they recognize that something bad could happen.

Kelly Echevarria [32:10]

Mm-hmm.

Kelliann Beavers [32:12]

And that's really scary. So if there's no trust, then the next step just doesn't happen, like you said. You get a sort of defense mechanism from the person about how they don't know how to do what you're asking them to do.

Kelly Echevarria [32:23]

And this isn't just people. This is jurisdictions and seeing your leadership. I won't say my own senior [overtalking 32:29]

Kelliann Beavers [32:31]

Sure.

Kelly Echevarria [32:32]

We're very blessed to have their buy-in, and their understanding of why emergency management and preparedness, and all of this is important. But not every jurisdiction gets that.

Kelliann Beavers [32:40]

Right.

Kelly Echevarria [32:42]

"It won't happen to me" mentality, or "Our resources are better served elsewhere, so we'll give people their minimum."

Kelliann Beavers [32:48]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [32:51]

And maybe that's all they can do. But I think culturally, it's important to have this built-in, that it could happen, and we should be prepared. We see that a lot with the LDS community, and it's

culturally built-in; that you have a stockpile of goods, should you need it; that you check in on your neighbors; that we're all in this together, and it's better that you're prepared.

Kelliann Beavers [33:20]

Yeah. That is really interesting, and I hope something that we continue to deepen and learn from in many communities because I think it's kind of crucial for the future.

I have two more questions that have come to mind, that are not necessarily on the list of things, and then there's one more part of the list questions. The first one is that you mentioned the tribes earlier. And I would – we have not spoken with tribes, to the degree that I would have liked to, mostly because it has been hard to get in touch with someone and create an opportunity for an interview. But if there's anything that you'd like to share about their experience, or your experience of working with the tribes, or anything you might suggest for us, in terms of what we should look at there. I feel like it's a really important part of the story of our state, and because you said that I'm realizing that I should ask for anything, really, that you'd like to share about it.

Kelly Echevarria [34:15]

I'm happy to share the context with the tribes. There are 27 of them, so someone will get back to you. But the tribes are such a critical partner for us. We just did an alternate EOC exercise last week. And the tribes came and observed and told us how we can improve and do better. But they also brought their unique experience, and they are interwoven with our community; Reno/Sparks and the Indian colony are in the heart of Reno, and we're so much better for their partnership.

And then we are constantly reaching out to the tribes, asking them "Hey – don't forget, you can ask us for help." Because we want to be there for them, and sometimes they do. So I think, in 2020, they had an issue with a well, and we were able to provide potable water until they could overcome that issue at Pyramid Lake, specifically. And it's not the first time that's happened, and we're happy to be able to be a partner in their response.

I can't speak specifically to their experience with COVID because they did have a lot of things that were separate from our jurisdiction, and I wasn't engaged with that. They didn't need our help. The tribes are unique, in that they can go to the state, or they can go straight to the feds. It's their choice. So they don't need to come to the county at all. (laughs) We certainly like it when they do because we like to support them as best as we can, and they support us in turn. We're getting ready to honor Don Pelt, with the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe next month, I think, at the Board of County Commissioners because of the awesome partnership that he provides us in Gerlach, which is a county jurisdiction. But it's so far out there that we have difficulty staffing and maintaining our firehouse and first-responding services for that area. And the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe has stepped in and created a partnership with the county, in which they're able to provide that.

Kelliann Beavers [36:31]

That's really interesting; I mean, the scale of the county that you're working for and leading this effort in is no joke. So that's a really interesting part of the partnership and sort of support that you have there. You can only have your eyes in so many places at one time, so it's good to feel that you have that thread.

Kelly Echevarria [36:55]
Mm-hmm.

Kelliann Beavers [36:58]

The next question, I have just invented, and I'm pretty sure the answer is "no." But you made me think of it because it should be happening. And it's almost – I can't believe that it's not. I want to understand if there are any – like now that this is over, is the federal government reaching out to counties to be in dialogue about the future, and readiness, and their takeaways from this; versus what were your takeaways about things that unfolded, as far as what they did? There is so much happening at the national level that I think I've just deleted, that that should be happening, ideally, in a world that is perfect. But did it just end at the point at which there isn't a high crisis, or how do you see that?

Kelly Echevarria [37:50]

It's always difficult to have conversations at all levels.

Kelliann Beavers [37:57]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [38:01]

It just is sandwiched away in that way, and it's hard. So, a lot of times, the locals will have the conversation with the state, the state will have it with the feds, and vice versa.

Kelliann Beavers [38:12]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [38:15]

And sometimes we filter out information that's not needed. For me, and again, I can only speak to my own experience. I've been lucky to be invited to the table to have conversations with Senator Rosen's office, specifically around wildfires. But we also set up times afterward, where I have been able to talk to her office about challenges that we see coming from the federal government. My specific soapbox is related to mitigation funding, which has the 25% match requirement on it., and does not fund programs, but will fund projects. But how can you have a project if you don't have a program?

Kelliann Beavers [39:02]

And how sustainable is a project if there isn't some type of program that it's incorporated with? That seems-

Kelly Echevarria [39:07]

Who's going to run it?

Kelliann Beavers [39:08]

-really risky.

Kelly Echevarria [39:07]

Yeah. So I think that maybe, overall, the structure of mitigation funding, in that aspect, you know, maybe used to be set up a certain way, and maybe it's changing now.

Kelliann Beavers [39:21]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [39:22]

Because we're having these conversations.

Kelliann Beavers [39:23]

Yeah.

Kelly Echevarria [39:25]

Because the local level is able to say, both to the state and the feds "This is an issue." And then a lot of times in emergency management, it's how frequently you beat the drum, right?

Kelliann Beavers [39:34]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [39:37]

What's the tone of the message that you're trying to send, and how frequently are you saying it? Because if at the federal level, they hear it once, they're like "Well, maybe it's probably just this one girl having this issue." But if they're consistently hearing it, and they're hearing it from the state and from the locals, then it's like "Okay, maybe this is a bigger issue." And so that's one way that we have those conversations.

Another is, individually, I'm a member of IAEM and I go to the conferences. Well, at the conference in Grand Rapids, FEMA was there, and they each – I'm going to keep on this soapbox of mitigation – because each of the heads of their funding sources was in a panel, and this room was packed. And they were saying, "Oh, we have all this money." "We're pushing it out; more money than ever before." "Isn't this great?"

Well, someone from Chicago stands up and they're like "You're only funding coastal cities." And they were like "Well, you can submit your plan, and we're going to pick what we pick." But they're saying, "You're only funding coastal regions," and I was like "I don't think Nevada's on the coast, but I get what you're saying." So, the edges, and not the center, and certainly, Chicago probably has a large need.

Kelliann Beavers [40:54]

Yeah.

Kelly Echevarria [40:58]

And so that was one. So we're able to hear what other issues people are having, from the local level, whether or not it goes in the ears of the people on FEMA, sitting up on the table, I don't know, but it's that 'beating of the drum' that I'm talking about. And I spoke up and said, "Hey,

what do you think are issues with getting the funding to the locals related to mitigation? Now the person spoke. They didn't ask me if I thought that was accurate, or what my perception of what they had said was. It was just like "Here's my answer. Next?"

Kelliann Beavers [41:30]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [41:31]

So it was really interesting to not ask the feedback from the locals of "Is that our perception as well?" Which was not on the mark. [overtalking 41:45] for sure.

Kelliann Beavers [41:47]

Yeah, that is what would be powerful, is if there was an opportunity for listening to the local level. And to your point – but I do think what you're saying is a real positive, in the sense of, as you said, you're able to learn what is happening elsewhere, what other people's perspectives are, and to the point of what you said about the beating of the drum – if you can help someone else play their song, you could play that song and help strengthen things that need to be articulated more strongly.

Kelly Echevarria [42:19]

I will say also, it was a huge, huge benefit that FEMA even came to the table. That they even sat down and did this panel was amazing because I think maybe in the past, we haven't had that.

Kelliann Beavers [42:30]

Right.

Kelly Echevarria [42:31]

There wasn't an opportunity for that discourse to take place. But the caveat to that is, you have to be a member of IAEM, and you have to be able to attend the conference.

Kelliann Beavers [42:42]

Yeah, and there are a lot of caveats. I mean that's really good, but at the same time, I find myself thinking that this kind of discourse should be in place, and the federal level should be leading the fact that it is in place. Like this should be a part of what they do to establish this kind of discourse. Because that instills a sense of overall interconnection and improving processes.

I want to be respectful of your time, and we're approaching the time. There's one other question, which may not apply to you because I don't know how long you've been in your role, or what you were doing at this time. But the question is whether you feel that there were more effective policies or programs, at any level, in place to deal with this recovery, compared to the Great Recession, in terms of the economic downturn?

Kelly Echevarria [43:39]

Hmm, that's a great question. I can't speak, really, to the policy level. I think right now, we're seeing, or at least, I'm seeing and feeling a little inflation.

Kelliann Beavers [43:53]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [43:56]

It's something that my family has discussed. It's possible to go in a grocery store [overtalking 44:00] and be more strategic about what we're doing. But I think also, it's important to keep that high-level perspective of what are all of the pieces that play into inflation. We're feeling it at the local level, and there are things that are happening at the state and federal levels that maybe we're not all aware of – or it takes a lot of focus to tie in all of those pieces.

Kelliann Beavers [44:31]

Mm-hmm.

Kelly Echevarria [44:32]

And to really, comprehensively understand each of the aspects that play into why is it the way that it is, and how can we interject and stop it. Obviously, most recently, gas was a huge issue, and a lot of people like to blame certain things on administrations or people in place. But really, isn't it more of like the policy that allows that to happen?

Kelliann Beavers [44:59]

Yeah.

Kelly Echevarria [45:01]

And how can we make that change? How can we cross the aisle and prevent this from happening in the future? Because it happens all the time, every decade, multiple times – a rush to the gas pump. And why is it costing me five to six dollars? And am I able then to get to where I need to go? But also, I will say at our level in recovery, we're investing in multimodal transportation, safer bike lanes, and safer routes of transportation. We're providing electric scooters – the city has a contract with an electric scooter company. So if you need to use that to get from point A to point B, you can do that. I've seen people tooling around with their kids on those things. And they're building walking and bike paths that are separate from the road, so there's less chance of being hit by a car.

Kelliann Beavers [46:03]

Wow, that's an expensive and important thing to do. Urban design and urban planning are where I came from, essentially, prior to being on this project. So I recognize that that is a real accomplishment.

Kelly Echevarria [46:16]

Yeah. I used to bike as a commuter, and definitely, almost died at least once, and it was terrifying because I was sharing the road with cars. And just very scary stuff, and it shouldn't be. If you go to Europe, there are such amazing examples of standalone bike paths integrated into city planning, and walking paths built in right with that. And examples of how you can use those for other things.

And so, I've had a conversation with the Nevada Division of the Department of Forestry about how you can use bike paths to widen firebreak on each side of the highway.

Kelliann Beavers [47:07]

Oh, good for you!

Kelly Echevarria [47:10]

Yeah. I have loved getting creative with this stuff.

Kelliann Beavers [47:12]

That's really smart.

Kelly Echevarria [47:14]

Yeah. So it doesn't matter when the winds are like 80 miles an hour [overtalking 47:20] over. But at the same time, if it's not 80 miles an hour, and you have a wildland fire, and you using these bike paths to widen the road firebreak that's there, you're also investing in multimodal transportation opportunities. And then that brings with it visitation and commerce. Because people are coming to your region to bike – because it's beautiful here!

Kelliann Beavers [47:42]

Yeah. That's an undersold aspect of why to invest in it. But I recognize that it can be really costly. It's just that you see so many things that are like efforts to create pedestrian spaces, and you're like that's terrifying. It's next to an 18-wheeler. Like the pedestrian could touch the cars.

Kelly Echevarria [48:04]

Yeah. There is a stretch of road, if I were to bike to work now, where I cross over a major road, and there's a graveyard right there. And I ask my boss pretty regularly because I'm annoying that way "Should I just pull in, or are you going to put a bike path-

Kelliann Beavers [48:19]

Exactly! (laughter)

Kelly Echevarria [48:23]

And he's like "Please, don't pull in. Keep going," and I'm like "Okay." Because the speed limit is 35, but people are going 70, and there is a standalone bike path.

Kelliann Beavers [48:32]

Yeah. You're right, and I hear you. I appreciate you so much for talking with me, and you've shared a ton of things that I could have not known otherwise. So it's really nice to meet you. If you are ever this way, it would be great to connect in person. You're welcome to come by Lincy Institute and connect with us. Also, I will be sharing your transcript, and as we produce research, I'll reach out and share anything that we produce.

Kelly Echevarria [49:01]

Yeah, please do. If you are up in Washoe County and want to nerd out about city planning (laughs) we're here.

Kelliann Beavers [49:09]

Yeah, thanks for saying that. And that's a thing that could absolutely happen. So I appreciate you saying it.

Kelly Echevarria [49:13]

All right. Well, thanks, Kelliann. I appreciate your time.

Kelliann Beavers [49:16]

Thank you. Have a good one.

Kelly Echevarria [49:17]

Okay, bye.

End of audio: 49:21