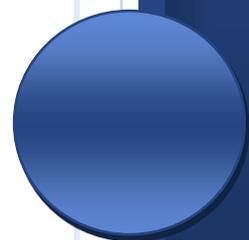


# SUCCESS STORIES: THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

*October, 2013*



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# SUCCESS STORIES: THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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## OVERVIEW

The enclosed collection of seven community resilience success stories is the second in a series of three collections to be published by the Community Regional Resilience Institute (CARRI). These short stories share a common theme of community engagement. They were captured by CARRI from actual community experiences to help teach users of CARRI's Community Resilience System (CRS) about fundamental characteristics of community resilience.

CARRI believes that a community's resilience is measured by its sustained ability to prepare for, respond to, and fully bounce back from a variety of crises – in short, to effectively manage change in turbulence. The events of Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, the 2012 wildfires, and the BP oil spill each posed unique challenges and exposed different areas of vulnerability in our communities and nation. CARRI strengthens our national resilience by assisting communities in understanding their vulnerabilities, taking positive collective actions to limit the impact of a disruptive crisis, and recovering rapidly from disasters of all kinds. The goal of CARRI and the CRS is to strengthen any community's or region's ability to prepare for, respond to, and rapidly recover from significant human caused or natural disasters with minimal downtime to basic community, government, and business services.

In this report, you will read about how Cedar Rapids, Iowa's efforts to engage the community in developing a shared community vision later enabled the community to quickly come together to respond to a devastating flood. You will learn how a disastrous tornado in Greensburg, Kansas led the community to join hands in building a new path for the future. In addition, prompted by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil spill, find out how a citizen-led effort in Alabama engaged hundreds of leaders in outlining strategies for making southern Alabama more resilient to future catastrophes. You will also learn how Shelby County, Tennessee solicited citizen input to help identify and fulfill community needs in order to improve the community's resilience to potential threats and how community members in Soldiers Grove, Wisconsin, conducted initial land assessments to determine where to move the town to higher ground in an energy-efficient way to avoid future flood damage. Learn how Hillsboro, Oregon reached out to over 1,500 citizens to produce a community vision and action plan and continues to involve the community in revising the plan every five years. Finally, learn how Boulder, Colorado launched the Boulder County Healthy Communities Initiative, which engaged community leaders, stakeholders, and the public to identify core community values and goals.

The final story collection of this series will be published in November and will focus on the importance of building partnerships in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

## ABOUT CARRI AND THE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE SYSTEM

*In 2010 CARRI, formerly housed at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, began an 18-month effort to build a Community Resilience System (CRS), based on the needs identified by community members during a three-year research initiative in a number of US communities funded by the Department of Homeland Security. Working in partnership with Meridian Institute, CARRI convened working groups to gather input and advice from general community members, researchers, government officials, and private sector representatives to build the CRS.*

*The CRS brings together the resources, tools, and processes needed to improve community resilience.*

*The CRS consists of:*

- *A knowledge base of what community resilience is, what makes communities more resilient, what tools can help communities assess their resilience, and what resources can help communities take action to become more resilient.*
- *A process that helps communities use the knowledge base to become more resilient.*
- *A web-based set of tools and resources to make the process and knowledge base available to a wide array of communities.*

*The CRS helps communities create a vision for the future and establish the necessary actions to improve overall resilience to disasters and other disturbances. The information, the process, and the system will help them prepare for and recover from any challenge. The final CRS product and report summarizes the work of these groups and reflects a strong consensus of community, business, academic, and policy thought leaders who see a greater need for community resilience.*

*In 2011, CARRI was incorporated into Meridian Institute, a not-for-profit organization that helps people solve problems, make informed decisions, and craft solutions to address society's most complex and controversial issues. That year, the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) tasked CARRI and Meridian to launch the CRS pilot program with these objectives:*

- *Test the CRS as a means of implementing the Whole Community philosophy and improving community resilience in at least five US communities;*
- *Understand community acceptance of the Whole Community philosophy and insights into what is required to implement that philosophy in US communities;*
- *Identify programs, processes and tools that best support the community leaders in adopting the Whole Community approach and improving resilience; and*
- *Understand how the CRS can be amplified into a nationwide effort to support FEMA's implementation of the Whole Community approach.*

*The CRS was piloted in seven communities where leaders and citizens were committed to engaging the full fabric of their society to foster preparedness and resilience. These communities are Anaheim, California; Anne Arundel County and Annapolis, Maryland; Charleston and the Tri-County Area, South Carolina; Gadsden, Alabama; Greenwich, Connecticut; The Mississippi Gulf Coast; and Mount Juliet, Tennessee.*

## SUCCESS STORY | COMMUNITY PLANNING FOR A PROSPEROUS FUTURE, CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

*“The first few meetings were very much focused on, ‘How do I get back to normal?’ but community members soon shifted their focus to the needs of the broader community. That was an awesome thing to see.” Sarah Else, Steering Committee Vice-chair, Neighborhood Planning Process*

THEN



NOW



*Photo Credit: Flickr user CR*

The residents of Cedar Rapids are very familiar with floods. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Cedar Rapids experienced seven significant floods; in every instance, the river crested over 21 feet above flood stage.

On June 13, 2008, the Cedar River rose 31.12 feet, a record-setting high. There were no flood-related deaths, but the floods affected more than 14 percent of the City, displacing about 10,000 residents. The destruction was widespread; water flowed through nearly every business and public building downtown, among them, all of the city’s core service buildings including Central Fire, Police Headquarters, Public Works, Public Transit, and City Hall. Fortunately, steps taken before and immediately after the disaster expedited the recovery process.

Months prior to the flood, the City Council and Manager implemented a broadly inclusive community engagement process to develop a shared community vision and establish a systems approach to government operations including strategic, financial, and operational planning. This existing engagement process – in addition to the vision and planning system – made it easier for the community to come together shortly after the flood to develop a flood protection and neighborhood reinvestment plan. Between two and three thousand residents engaged in the process. A year after the floods, the final product was the Cedar Rapids Flood Recovery and Reinvestment Plan, which includes a Long-Term Flood Management Strategy, the River

Corridor Development Plan, Neighborhood Reinvestment Action Plans, and a Public Facilities Replacement Plan.

The rapid pace, at which the plan was developed combined with broad public engagement and support, has made Cedar Rapids a model for other communities. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the American Planning Association (APA), and the International Downtown Association (IDA) have all recognized Cedar Rapids for its work. In 2011, it won the APA's National Planning Excellence Award for Best Practices in Hazard Mitigation and Disaster Planning and in 2009; it won IDA's Pinnacle Award, Downtown Achievement.

The arduous task of plan implementation began immediately after the June 2008 flood and continues today. It may take up to 15 years for the redevelopment to be complete, but the community's desire to rebuild as a better and safer place to live is evidenced by their ability to come together, in the aftermath of the flood, to develop a plan that meets everyone's needs.

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## References

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City of Cedar Rapids, [A Story You Can Tell](#), accessed April 23, 2011.

City of Cedar Rapids, [Flood 2008 Facts & Statistics](#), accessed April 23, 2011.

Schultz, Jill. [The Road to Recovery](#), American Planning Association, accessed April 23, 2011.

Prosser, Jim. [Cornerstones to Resilience](#), APA Recovery News, accessed August 2, 2011.

## SUCCESS STORY | FORGING A NEW PATH: GREENSBURG'S STORY

*"Towns are about people, they're not about buildings. And it's a huge opportunity to rebuild — not just rebuild it the way it was but maybe rebuild it a little bit better than it was," School Superintendent Darin Headrick.*

BEFORE



*Credit: Daniel Bernasconi*

AFTER



*Photo Credit: Lauren Ayres*

Greensburg, Kansas, is a resilient community, as anyone who knows its story can confirm. On May 2007, a category F5 tornado, estimated to be 1.7 miles in diameter with 205 mph winds, struck Kiowa County and its county seat, Greensburg. The destruction was catastrophic; over 90 percent of structures suffered severe damage and 1,400 residents lost their homes.

Before the devastating tornado, Greensburg had been experiencing a different crisis – four decades of economic decline characterized by vanishing jobs and population loss. It is not surprising then, that initial reconstruction discussions included a plan to revitalize the town instead of simply rebuilding it.

Reconstruction efforts started with the drafting of a Long-Term Community Recovery Plan. Greensburg's leadership saw this process as an opportunity to engage the community in developing a new path for the future. They reflected on social and economic challenges prior to the tornado, sharing ideas and concerns, and more importantly, developed a new identity based on their collective vision for the future.

The process was intense and involved multiple meetings and discussions over the course of 12 weeks. It brought together the recovery planning team, government officials, business owners, civic groups, and citizens, with meetings averaging 400 attendees. Through the recovery planning, Greensburg decided to adopt a new "green" identity, incorporating sustainability as a major priority in its recovery plan.

This unprecedented crisis gave the community an opportunity to reinvent itself and build upon its strengths, and to build back better, safer, and in a more sustainable manner. Together the townspeople dreamed about the possibilities and outlined a plan to make their vision a reality. Many new business opportunities emerged from this process, transforming a previously struggling local economy.

Greensburg is now considered the “greenest” town in America and is featured in television documentaries and in print, inspiring other communities across the nation and the world. Though their journey is not over, they are strongly committed to creating a greener and more resilient tomorrow.

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Greensburg and Kiowa County’s [“Long-Term Community Recovery Plan,”](#) accessed March 25, 2011.

[How Greensburg, Kansas Became Greentown, USA,](#) accessed April 20, 2011.

Center for American Progress, [The Reinvention of Greensburg: It's Easy Being Green,](#) accessed April 20, 2011.

## SUCCESS STORY | COASTAL RECOVERY COMMISSION OF ALABAMA IDENTIFIES VULNERABILITIES

In the wake of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Alabama Governor Bob Riley launched the Coastal Recovery Commission of Alabama. In recognition of the encompassing nature and scale of the impacts of the oil spill on Alabama's ecology, economy, and social institutions, the Commission was charged with creating a roadmap to build regional capacity for long-term resilience. The Commission was comprised of an Executive Committee, Commission members, three Committees – Healthy Environment, Healthy Society, and Healthy Economy – and several subcommittees. This citizen-led effort involved hundreds of leaders from all walks of life and resulted in a comprehensive document outlining strategies for making southern Alabama's environment, economy, and society more resilient to future catastrophes.

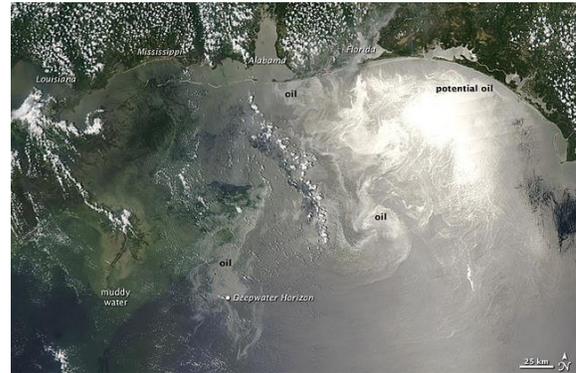


Photo Credit: NASA Goddard Photo and Video

The Commission and each of its three Committees began by informing themselves – to the degree possible at the time – about the impacts of the spill and identifying vulnerabilities and threats. For example, the Healthy Environment Committee categorized vulnerabilities in three areas:

- management, coordination, and communication;
- data and monitoring;
- and ecosystem health.

In the first area, the committee noted that while federal entities experienced in disaster recovery were put in command, there was no provision for coordination with local officials and opportunities to tap local expertise to help respond to the spill were missed. This lack of coordination contributed to poor communication with the public which resulted in a lack of trust. In terms of data, soon after the spill, it became clear that a lack of baseline data – on issues such as Gulf currents, water quality, and seafood testing – delayed or impaired the response to the spill. Finally, the committee found that even prior to the spill, the Gulf Coast ecosystem was stressed, and this hampered its ability to bounce back from the spill as well as other types of man-made and natural disasters. Identifying these vulnerabilities up front helped the Healthy Environment Committee to examine and target ideas that would help the region recover from the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill and improve its ability to respond to future challenges.

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## Resilience Insights

- When identifying vulnerabilities, engage a diverse group of individuals and institutions affected by or likely to be affected by a disaster or crisis to ensure a comprehensive analysis is performed.
  - Vulnerabilities can be part of criteria used to prioritize and sequence your resilience action plan.
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## References

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## SUCCESS STORY | READINESS CAMPAIGN IDENTIFIES ACTIONS TO PREPARE RESIDENTS FOR EMERGENCIES

The Memphis/Shelby County, Tennessee community conducted a survey of local residents to identify actions to address the community's goal of preparing citizens for emergencies. A research-based approach enabled leaders to identify actions that would provide residents with timely, relevant information to help them prepare for a range of potential disaster situations.

A 2006 study by the American Disaster Preparedness Foundation (ADPF) found the Memphis/Shelby urban area likely to experience an earthquake intensity of 6.0 or greater in the next 50 years, but unprepared to deal with such a disaster. Following the study, and with support from the Assisi Foundation of Memphis, eight mayors from the area formed the Mayor's Collaborative on Preparedness to develop an action plan to educate the residents and prepare them for potential disasters. Through research funded by the Assisi Foundation of Memphis, the Collaborative identified the following actions to achieve the goal of preparing citizens for a disaster:



*Photo Credit: Jimmy Emerson*

- Develop localized messaging about disaster preparedness that: avoids tones of fear or a strong focus on past disasters; provides topical information structured around themes such as preparing one's family, home, pets, and automobile; addresses seasonal threats; takes into account the diverse educational levels in the community; targets vulnerable populations; and utilizes a variety of media including the internet, radio, television, a calendar highlighting monthly preparedness activities, and a preparedness kit that includes a CD and booklet.
- Select an entity to develop the emergency preparedness campaign.
- Launch the campaign.
- Implement a dissemination plan for the messages within a specified timeline.
- Conduct a follow-up survey to measure the campaign's effectiveness.

By soliciting citizen input, Shelby County leaders were able to identify actions that were tailored to the community's needs and preferred methods of communication and therefore more likely to be effective at improving the community's resilience to potential threats.

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## Resilience Insights

- Review and/or conduct research to identify priority resilience goals.
  - Engage local residents in the process of identifying actions to address resilience goals to ensure actions are tailored to the specific needs of the community and to encourage broad participation in executing those actions.
  - Once specific actions are identified, test and monitor them so that adjustments can be made if needed to enhance their effectiveness.
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## References

*I'm Ready Campaign Prepares Citizens for Various Disasters: A Community Resilience Lesson from Shelby County, Tennessee:* A Lesson in Community Resilience presented by Ted Fox, Director of Public Works, Shelby County Division of Public Works [http://www.resilientus.org/library/Fox\\_ImReady\\_12\\_4\\_09\\_1263397959.pdf](http://www.resilientus.org/library/Fox_ImReady_12_4_09_1263397959.pdf).

## SUCCESS STORY | SOLDIERS GROVE, WISCONSIN, ASSESSES BARRIERS TO ITS RESILIENCE STRATEGY

For about a century, Soldiers Grove was located in the floodplain of the Mississippi River. After experiencing numerous floods, the community decided to re-locate and rebuild using renewable resources in order to make their town more sustainable and resilient. Soldiers Grove initially pursued construction of a flood control project to protect their town in 1937. However, after reviewing plans for a levee in 1975, they learned that the structure would cost nearly



*Photo Credit: Cliff Portch*

three times as much as the property value it could protect, and annual maintenance costs would outstrip the town's budget. Community leaders suggested that federal funding be used to re-locate the town to higher ground instead, and that the village explore using solar-heating and energy efficient design in buildings in its new town center.

As part of this investigation, community members looked at local barriers to solar and other forms of renewable energy. They conducted the initial assessment themselves because they determined that having local information – rather than standardized estimates based on state and national research – was important for precision. In addition, Soldiers Grove residents found that the data collection process was educational and prepared them to interact more knowledgeably with contractors.

Soldiers Grove learned that barriers to alternative energy sources included several types: physical (buildings and trees), attitudinal (individuals or companies focusing on up-front costs rather than life-cycle costs), legal/institutional (building codes and tax policies), and financial (delays in and uncertainty regarding funding from external sources). A report on the Soldiers Grove experience prepared by the U.S. Department of Energy entitled, "Rebuilding for the Future...A Guide to Sustainable Redevelopment for Disaster-Affected Communities," suggests strategies for addressing several of these obstacles. For example, attitudinal barriers can be assessed through formal and/or informal surveys of people most likely to be affected by the resilience plan. Assessment of legal barriers may require a review of local, state, and national ordinances and regulations. Delays in funding can be avoided by maximizing the use of local resources.

By evaluating factors that might affect their ability to execute their re-location and redevelopment plan, Soldiers Grove was able to overcome hurdles associated with existing

town and state codes and concerns about the up-front costs of including solar elements in new buildings and design a new town center that helped achieve a range of community development goals.

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## Resilience Insights

- Avoid surprises by assessing barriers to your community resilience action plan during the planning phase.
  - Consider a range of factors, such as physical, attitudinal, legal and institutional, and financial.
  - Engage local residents and business owners in initial information gathering to increase community members' understanding of issues and options and help you make more informed decisions regarding implementation of your resilience plan.
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## References

Becker, William S. and Roberta Stauffer. ["Rebuilding for the Future...A Guide to Sustainable Redevelopment for Disaster-Affected Communities"](#). U.S. Department of Energy, September 1994.

## SUCCESS STORY | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HILLSBORO, OREGON

In 1997, Hillsboro, Oregon, began a comprehensive community visioning and planning process, producing the *Hillsboro 2020 Vision and Action Plan*. Community engagement and input was a hallmark of this process, with over 1,500 citizens providing input through public opinion polls, focus groups, public meetings and workshops, written surveys, web site questionnaires, and other venues. The engagement process was conducted bilingually, providing all materials in both English and Spanish. The final plan was adopted by the Hillsboro City Council in 2000.



Photo Credit: Flickr User born1945

Hillsboro, however, did not stop community engagement with the adoption of the plan. The community committed to revising the plan every five years, using the same robust community engagement process used to develop it. Through extensive outreach, Hillsboro received over 400 suggestions for the 2005 revision, all of which the Vision Implementation Committee took very seriously. Work groups were formed to categorize, combine, and refine these suggestions as well as remove redundancies. In the end, 36 new actions were proposed. John Coulter, chair of the Vision Implementation Committee characterized their commitment to incorporating community input by noting, "... it's probably not if it stays in, but *where* it will go in the plan." Of the 36 new actions proposed, 33 were ultimately adopted in the revised plan.

Including community suggestions in the plan yielded tangible outcomes. For example, in September 2007, the city's first off-leash dog park opened. The idea for this park came from the community and the action was added to the plan as a part of the 2005 review.

## Resilience Insights

- Soliciting input from the community is just the first step. Conduct an engagement process that allows the community to see how their input is considered and reflected in the final action plan.
- The more time you spend engaging the community in action plan development, the more ownership the community will feel over the plan. This will strengthen implementation efforts.

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Rollins, Ian. [“Public can offer input on 2020 Vision Plan at Wednesday town hall meeting.”](#) The Argus, May 17, 2005. Accessed August 3, 2011.

## SUCCESS STORY | BOULDER COUNTY COMMUNITY HEALTH INITIATIVE

Boulder, Colorado sits at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. Many factors, including the beautiful natural setting, strong businesses, the main campus of the University of Colorado, and strong schools make Boulder a desirable place to live.



*Photo Credit: Rob Ketcherside*

In order to control growth and preserve the natural setting of the community, Boulder implemented a number of policies to slow development and population growth. All development was prohibited above a certain elevation in the foothills

on the western edge of town; population growth was capped at 2% per year and was controlled through the building permit issuance process; and thousands of acres of open space were bought to preserve the boundaries of the Town.

While these policies slowed growth and helped maintain many of the positive characteristics of Boulder, they also led to a sharp increase in housing prices in the City of Boulder, which forced many people who work in Boulder to live in the surrounding suburban communities. In the mid-1990's, 43% of Boulder's workforce commuted in from outside communities.

To stem these unintended consequences, in January 1995, Boulder launched the Boulder County Healthy Communities Initiative to develop a comprehensive growth and development plan for the City of Boulder and the neighboring communities. The Initiative engaged community leaders, stakeholders, and the public to identify core community values and develop a vision and set of goals to be included in the comprehensive plan.

Guided by the input from the collaborative process, a draft report was released and three sub-initiatives were formed to address specific concerns highlighted by the public. The Neighborhood Initiative program focused on how to develop affordable housing. The Principles of Sustainability Initiative worked to identify ways the region could continue the sustainable and environmentally-friendly policies that were important to the region. The Report Card Initiative identified ways the community could measure progress against its vision and goals.

Each of the initiatives was comprised of key stakeholders and staffed by volunteer and/or professional facilitators. They based their work in broad community participation and consensus-based decision-making processes.

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## RESILIENCE INSIGHTS

- Develop sub-initiatives, teams, or working groups to develop specific components of an overall action plan or vision. These work groups should reflect the most important components and/or challenges for the community. These work groups may also continue into the implementation stage, taking charge of carrying out the actions they develop.
  - These work groups should conduct their processes in an open and transparent process similar to the process used to develop the vision and action plan.
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## References

[Boulder County Healthy Communities Initiative](#). Sustainability in Action: Profiles of Community Initiatives across the United States. Sustainable Communities Network. 1998. pp. 19-20. Accessed July 22, 2011.