

Community Resilience System Initiative (CRSI) Steering Committee Final Report —

a Roadmap to Increased Community Resilience

Executive Summary

August 2011



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Developed and Convened by the



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Steering Committee gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the more than 150 people who participated in the Community Resilience System Initiative (CRSI). Over the past 15 months, representatives from community organizations; local, state, and federal government agencies; private sector companies; national associations; and research institutions have tirelessly collaborated on the development of the Community Resilience System (CRS) by providing guidance on what communities need to strengthen their resilience against disruptions and crises of all kinds (e.g., economic downturns, natural disasters, and human-induced events such as terrorism). Organized into three work groups, CRSI participants devoted time and provided feedback through in-person meetings, telephone interviews, webinars, and focused surveys. Their keen insights were provided to the Steering Committee and distilled into the core components of the CRS and this report.

We also acknowledge the participation of a number of organizations that contributed significantly to this endeavor by sharing their knowledge of communities and how they operate and by providing strong representatives to participate in the Steering Committee and the work groups. Organizations such as the Center for National Policy, the International City/County Management Association, The Infrastructure Security Partnership, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the United Way, and the American Red Cross have contributed greatly by bringing their particular view of community life to the discussion. We would also like to thank the leadership and advisory groups in the Charleston Tri-County Area of South Carolina, the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, and the Memphis/Shelby County region of Tennessee who partnered with the Community and Regional Resilience Institute (CARRI) starting in 2007 and graciously shared their resilience lessons via this effort.

We appreciate the leadership provided by CARRI, in particular its commitment to understand what communities truly need to become more resilient and its patience to embark upon a community-centered, collaborative approach to developing a practical solution. In the 4 years since it began working as a convener on this topic, CARRI has amassed an impressive network of knowledge and support for community resilience. It has become a tremendous resource that shows great promise to influence thought and action for community resilience. It is our hope that CARRI will continue to strengthen its knowledge base and network through broad dissemination of the CRS and additional stakeholders convening under the CRSI.

Finally, we wish to thank the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Office of Science and Technology, for its support of CARRI and the CRSI. DHS is to be commended for its vision and approach to strengthening America's communities.

CRSI Steering Committee

August 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For much of its history, the United States has drawn on the strength of its citizens in times of crisis. However, as the threats have expanded and become more complex (e.g., nuclear weapons, terrorist attacks, pandemics), Americans have been gravitating to the sidelines while government professionals have stepped in to monitor threats, deploy resources, issue warnings, and respond when crisis occurs. This is a trend that must be reversed. With each crisis, we see more clearly that placing too great of a reliance upon professional “protectors” such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the military is unrealistic. The threats – natural disasters, acts of terrorism, oil spills, and economic downturns – are diverse, compounding, and capable of overwhelming the limited number of professional responders and the finite public resources available at all levels of government. The good news is that there is a tremendous role that civil society can play. Indeed, American communities, neighborhoods, and average citizens are the nation’s greatest asset in building resilient communities and a resilient nation. It is time to encourage and support communities in returning to the forefront so that they can do more to ensure their own resilience and regain control over their destiny in the face of disruptive risks. We have a strong history of grassroots resilience; it has been a great American strength, and with a call to action informed by helpful tools and practical knowledge, we can rekindle it.

Community Resilience System Initiative (CRSI) Process

This report presents the findings of the Community Resilience System Initiative (CRSI) Steering Committee, a diverse group of senior leaders who have served in the public and private sectors with expertise in banking and finance, economic development, emergency management, government (both as elected officials and city/county managers), humanitarian assistance,

Why Communities Need a Community Resilience System (CRS)

- **Diffuse lessons** – The lessons from previous disasters and crises are long and varied but not easily accessible to the communities who want to learn from them and take action.
- **Growing complexity within and between communities** – This increased complexity stems from interdependencies, workforce mobility, and demographic shifts such as the retirement of the baby boomers and a more diverse younger generation.
- **New spectrum of threats facing communities** – In addition to natural disasters and pandemics, communities face new threats such as terrorism, economic change, demographic shifts, and climate change impacts.
- **Increasingly constrained resources** – Demand for services and functions provided by local communities has continued to expand while the resource base has remained relatively unchanged or diminished. Communities must make informed choices between supporting current needs and addressing future challenges.
- **Diverse stakeholders** – Given the broad spectrum of individuals and groups who need to be involved in building a community’s resilience, there is a need for a systems approach that can capture the contributions of these diverse groups and help communities collaboratively develop a path forward.

hazard research, marketing, and public policy. The CRSI was a 15-month collaborative process charged with determining what American communities need in order to become more resilient to the variety of threats they face (natural disasters, economic threats and recessions, and human-induced events such as oil spills and acts of terrorism) and recommending a concrete course of action that will support communities in their resilience-building efforts. The CRSI was developed and convened by the Community and Regional Resilience Institute (CARRI), a program managed by Oak Ridge National Laboratory, with support from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. CARRI partnered with Meridian Institute to facilitate and manage the CRSI.

The CRSI involved more than 150 practitioners and researchers from diverse sectors and disciplines who worked in groups to help inform the development of the Community Resilience System (CRS), a practical, web-enabled process that helps communities to assess, measure, and improve their resilience to threats and disruptions of all kinds, and ultimately be rewarded for their efforts. These individuals came from across the United States and brought deep experience and expertise related to building and sustaining community resilience. Similar to the Steering Committee, CRSI participants were steeped in both the substance and the process of community resilience building. In addition to helping define the problems, challenges, and opportunities communities face in strengthening their own resilience, CRSI participants rolled up their sleeves and helped the Steering Committee and CARRI devise a practical solution – the Community Resilience System. This web-enabled system **has been built** by CARRI and will be used by a number of leading communities on a pilot basis, starting in summer 2011.

Community Resilience and the CRS

Resilience encompasses the core tenets of emergency management – mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery – but it also works “upstream” from the crisis to consider and address chronic conditions within a community and anticipate how core community services might be disrupted. This anticipatory focus strengthens the day-to-day life of the community and lessens impacts during a crisis. Resilient communities take a “whole community” approach and ensure that all are taken care of and, just as importantly, that the entire community regains full functionality (e.g., infrastructure, employers, schools, and child care providers) after a crisis or disruption.

Evidence gained from working with communities and community leaders from across the country, reinforced by solid academic research, has demonstrated that communities consistently ask for the following four things in their efforts to take charge of their own destinies and improve their resilience:

1. an understanding of what resilience means for their community;
2. a practical way to measure their resilience and see how far they have to go;
3. simple, usable tools and processes that will help them move forward, and
4. tangible benefits that flow from their efforts.

The CRS is designed to provide the information, tools, and benefits that communities need to become more resilient. It guides communities through a simple, easy to understand, web-enabled process that provides useful steps, detailed instructions, and robust supporting resources that lead to a practical, implementable community resilience action plan. The system makes use of existing resources and concepts from organizations such as FEMA, the American Red Cross, and the International City/County Management Association, the American Planning Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the insurance industry and directs participants to the most relevant information and examples. It captures the research and lessons that have been gained from previous crises and community disturbances into a coherent, easy-to-navigate, resilience portal. CRSI participants predict that communities will accrue a number of benefits from working through the CRS. These benefits range from strengthening social capital and mitigating risk by addressing chronic conditions within the community to improving a community's fire protection ratings and perhaps in the future securing insurance premium discounts due to participation in the CRS.

Observations and Next Steps for Increasing Community Resilience

The CRSI Steering Committee's charge was to oversee the efforts of the CRSI Work Groups and CARRI staff in conceptualizing and building the Community Resilience System. With the system built and pilot communities poised to launch their resilience-building efforts, the Steering Committee's work is done. Building on this vast body of work, the members of the committee would like to share their observations and thoughts about additional activities beyond the CRS where targeted involvement of national organizations, state, and local government, and/or the federal government could foster leadership and collaboration, provide incentives, and support outreach efforts that bolster community resilience building. These actions are intended to encourage a strong supportive environment for the CRS and community resilience building in general and to elicit the active engagement of actors who share a common commitment to strengthen the resilience of American communities. For additional information, see Section IV of the report.

There are a number of ways that collaborative approaches could bolster greater understanding, problem solving, and leadership for community resilience, including the following.

1. **Establishment of a nation-wide community resilience leadership development program for local cross-sector leaders.** Community resilience requires local leaders who understand the importance of resilience and have the ability to work collaboratively across their community. There are a number of existing leadership programs into which resilience-building concepts could be integrated. Key national partners that could coordinate this effort include the Association of Leadership Professionals, International City/County Management Association, League of Cities, National Association of Counties, United Way, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Business Civic Leadership Center.

2. **Convening, at the national level, a standing committee of practitioners and thought-leaders external to the federal government that can identify innovative ideas and practices that should inform national policy on resilience issues.** A nonprofit organization with deep expertise on resilience issues should be tapped as the convener.

Acknowledging the very useful platforms and programs already in place, the Steering Committee has observed a number of actions and activities that could significantly enhance the federal government, state and local government, and national and regional association and organization support of community resilience capacity building.

3. **Presidential Policy Directive / PPD-8: National Preparedness is an important step towards increasing community and national resilience. To support PPD-8, the White House National Security staff should direct the relevant federal agencies¹ to improve efficiencies around existing community resilience programs and redirect existing resources toward community resilience-building efforts. These agencies should review the guidelines of current federal grant and technical assistance programs and refocus the award criteria to more explicitly recognize programs that support and build community resilience.** In addition to internal reviews by the individual agencies, departments should sponsor collaborative, interagency reviews and invite external advisory input in order to strengthen and coordinate across all federal mechanisms.
4. **The White House National Security staff should convene and encourage the relevant federal agencies to create new federal grant and technical assistance programs specifically focused on developing and supporting community resilience.** Federal agencies, like those noted above, should develop programs specifically targeted at aspects of resilience consistent with their own mission and authorities.
5. **State and local governments should begin to embed community resilience support and requirements into state and local programs.** Integrating community resilience as an element that should be addressed in comprehensive planning for localities is a key step toward institutionalizing and regularizing attention to resilience requirements and will result in greater local and state awareness as well as tangible actions and progress. Other state, regional, and local programs where resilience could be introduced include plans related to state and local land use, economic development, hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness, sustainability, and coastal zone management.

¹ Some of the federal agencies and offices involved include the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Grants and Technical Assistance and FEMA; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development; U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Sustainable Communities; U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Intelligence, Security and Emergency Response; and U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability.

6. **National and regional associations and organizations should integrate resilience into their research, training, and education/awareness activities.** The International City/County Management Association, the League of Cities, Conference of Mayors, National Governors Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, United Way, American Red Cross, the Aidmatrix Foundation, and The Infrastructure Security Partnership each have activities under way that support resilience awareness and education. Similar programs and participation by the National Emergency Management Association, the State Managers Conference, National Association of Counties, the Council of State Governments, National Association of Insurance Commissioners, Transition U.S., Zero to Three, and the Council of Chief State School Officers, among others, could expedite resilience awareness and capacity throughout the country.

In addition to the externally focused observations outlined above which involve federal, state, and local governments and national nonprofit organizations and associations, there are additional activities that the Steering Committee would like to see the CRSI and its partners accomplish. These actions will help ensure that the full potential of the CRS is realized.

7. **Continue the CRSI Resilience Benefits Work Group involving government agencies, the private sector, and nongovernmental leaders to devise programs of tangible benefits that can be linked to the CRS so that communities that undertake resilience-building initiatives may receive benefits for successful efforts.** The most promising benefits include fire protection ratings, risk-based pricing of insurance premiums, linking insurance premium discounts to CRS ratings, and stronger building codes which can mitigate or prevent damage.
8. **The Steering Committee suggests the following.**
 - A. **CARRI, working with appropriate partners, should facilitate the convening of national and local banks, federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the Small Business Administration, and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation in dialogue about reforming the process and priorities for loan portfolios so that they better accommodate communities' capital needs for disaster preparedness and recovery.**
 - B. **CARRI, working with appropriate partners, should also facilitate the convening of a public-private discussion among governments at all levels, the banking industry, and institutional and private investors to identify new ways to introduce pre-disaster capital for small businesses.** Such an effort could be structured like a federal coordinating body (modeled after the White House Long-Term Disaster Recovery Working Group, an interagency team assembled in 2010 to work across government on long-term recovery issues) and should include the Economic Development Administration, the Small Business Administration, FEMA,

the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and private-sector partners.

9. **The Steering Committee encourages members of the CRSI Subject Matter Work Group to come together to continue research on community resilience, disseminate research results in scientific fora, and address specific research needs coming from the initial efforts of CRS application.**

10. **The Steering Committee suggests that CARRI work with the Center for National Policy in partnership with the national organizations referenced in this report, as well as other for-profit and nonprofit entities that undertake social media campaigns, to develop and conduct a resilience campaign with the goal of creating greater resilience awareness in order to foster and grow a strengthened national culture of resilience.** Such a national communication and awareness campaign should be launched at the 9/11 Tenth Anniversary Summit in Washington, D.C. Its objective should be to educate the American public about its inherent resilience and promote personal and institutional responsibility for community and regional resilience. Examples include national public service announcements, social media campaigns, efforts to reach youth, and social marketing approaches, among others.

Conclusion

As this report describes, resilience building is an imperative for American communities and requires across-the-board participation from virtually all quarters of society. The CRSI has been an important player in initiating dialogue about the practicalities of community resilience and championing what is truly needed to improve communities' resilience to all manner of threats. There is much more work to be done at the national, regional, and state levels to promote the CRS as a resource, to improve it, and to continue the dialogue with diverse stakeholders that will help to facilitate both. These important conversations and educational opportunities should continue, even after the CRS has been launched and is in use by a number of American communities. While this report represents the end of an intense period of dialogue and collaboration, in many respects, it also represents a beginning – a renewed and ongoing opportunity to collaboratively and systematically work to improve the foundation of America's communities.



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