



Stakeholder Engagement Findings for Road to Resilience

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FEMA

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
1. Key Themes.....	1
2. Overview of Engagements	1
3. Engagement Timeline	3
Common Themes from External Engagements	4
1. Enhance Organizational Design to More Effectively Deliver on the Mission.	4
1.1. Adapt the Role of Convener.....	4
1.2. Create an Ombudsman Office for Resilience.	4
1.3. Establish a function to provide national guidance and help define common terms, to include “resilience” itself.....	5
1.4. Increase resources for and outreach to under-resourced communities.	5
2. Strengthen and Streamline Program Delivery.	5
2.1. Reduce the Burden:	6
2.2. Increase Accessibility:	8
2.3. Build Capacity:	10
2.4. Incentivize and Educate on Resilience:	11
Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback into Organizational Design	15
The Way Forward.....	18
Appendix A. List of Stakeholder Groups Engaged	20
Appendix B. Group-Specific Listening Session Takeaways	22
1. National Resource Defense Council:.....	22
2. Resilient Cities/Chief Resilience Officer Network:.....	22
3. International Code Council:	22
4. U.S. Chamber of Commerce:	23
5. State Hazard Mitigation Officers:	23
6. State Administrative Agencies:.....	23

7. Association of State Floodplain Managers:.....	24
8. Urban Sustainability Directors Network:	24
9. International Association of Emergency Managers:	24
10. National Emergency Managers Association:.....	25
11. Black Resilience Network:	25
12. Resilience21:	25
13. Big City Emergency Managers:	26
14. International Association of Fire Chiefs:	26
Appendix C. State, City & County Workshop Takeaways	28

Executive Summary

In early 2022, Administrator Criswell directed FEMA Resilience to conduct an internal assessment of the Resilience organization to identify opportunities for improved customer service and accelerate resilience building for all communities. The assessment highlighted opportunities to improve organizational effectiveness to ensure that FEMA builds the Resilience organization that the nation needs and deserves. In November 2022, the Administrator approved several changes to begin addressing the assessment’s findings including strengthening the Office of the Deputy Administrator, creating for the Office of Business Management and Office of Resilience Strategy, and elevating the Office of Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation.

From December 2022 - April 2023, FEMA Resilience held internal and external engagement sessions to pressure-test findings from the internal review and gain additional stakeholder feedback on ways to continue to strengthen the organization’s ability to deliver on its mission. This resulted in dozens of in-depth engagements with close to 800 FEMA Resilience staff and stakeholders at the Regional, state, and local levels and a deeper understanding of their priorities for FEMA Resilience. The purpose of the *Stakeholder Engagement Findings for Road to Resilience* is to capture and present a comprehensive picture of key feedback from recent engagements. This document summarizes key themes and recommended actions and will be part of the Road to Resilience future structure.

1. Key Themes

Over the course of the many engagements FEMA Resilience leadership hosted with stakeholders key themes frequently emerged:

- Define the term resilience and FEMA’s role within the space.
- Coordinate resilience-building resources across the nation.
- Simplify and improve grant access for customers and stakeholders.
- Increase accessibility and engagement with local communities and build bridges to at-risk and under-resource populations.
- Build local capacity focusing on systemic resilience.
- Weave resilience concepts throughout FEMA, particularly focusing on “resilient recovery.”

2. Overview of Engagements

Prior to completing its initial organizational assessment, FEMA Resilience leadership began engaging with emergency management organizations to include the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), Big City Emergency Managers (BCEM), and National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) between July and November 2022. Following the initial findings assessment and subsequent evolution in initiative scope, FEMA recognized a need for more extensive deep dives with an even broader set of stakeholders.

In January 2023, FEMA Resilience hosted a day-long State, County, and City (SCC) Workshop, inviting State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial representatives recommended by the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM), Big City Emergency Managers (BCEM), and National Emergency Management Association (NEMA). The workshop focused on identifying shared goals for building resilience, understanding attendee's pain points, and determining opportunities for FEMA Resilience to improve its service delivery model. A complete list of SCC Workshop key takeaways is available in Appendix C.

Building on the workshop takeaways, FEMA Resilience leadership next hosted listening sessions with a diverse list of key stakeholder organizations spanning all aspects of emergency management and resilience-building. Between January and March 2023, FEMA Resilience leadership hosted nearly 20 stakeholder listening sessions with stakeholders from around the country to hear about their visions for the future of national resilience, identify opportunities for further collaboration, and discuss improvement areas for FEMA Resilience service delivery. A complete list of stakeholders engaged is shown in Appendix A.

From these engagements, Road to Resilience leadership identified more than 50 key takeaways and approximately 25 short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations for Leadership to prioritize. Stakeholder and FEMA staff feedback shaped the key takeaways and recommendations shared below and presented to Administrator Criswell on April 5, 2023.

The following timeline and subsequent report reflects the wide span of feedback received across engagements from December 2022 to March 2023. The purpose of this report is to capture all the key feedback shared through our listening sessions. Some recommendations are not able to be implemented as some suggestions fall outside of current statutory authority.

It is important to note that some observations contradict one another, as different communities have different needs. A solution that works for one may not work for all, and moving forward, we need to reconcile those areas to fairly reach and support our many stakeholders at the state, city, and local level. Page 22 outlines those suggestions that have either informed Resilience's new structure or are being immediately implemented at the programmatic level. Additional work will be done to assess those recommendations not immediately addressed.

3. Engagement Timeline



Figure 1. Timeline of Recent Road to Resilience Listening Events

Common Themes from External Engagements

Across nearly 20 listening sessions and multiple engagements with hundreds of participants, stakeholders across the emergency management community and Resilience workforce identified several shared common challenges and opportunities for action. The following key takeaways outline the top structural and programmatic recommendations provided by staff and stakeholders alike.

1. Enhance Organizational Design to More Effectively Deliver on the Mission.

In its current form, Resilience services are viewed as disconnected, rather than an integrated suite of mutually reinforcing tools to build holistic resilience. Across listening sessions and engagements, Resilience staff and stakeholders provided valuable feedback that is being considered as we shape the future resilience organizational structure.

1.1. Adapt the Role of Convener.

FEMA learned stakeholders need a federal coordinator and resource for resilience building. This is particularly true with the increasing scope and breadth of resilience-building resources available within FEMA and across the federal government. Stakeholders identified challenges in their ability to learn about, access, triage, integrate, and coordinate resilience-building resources into their mission.

Even FEMA's most frequent partners only knew of approximately 25% of the services FEMA Resilience offers, and were surprised by all the assets, programs, and resources available. This is something the future organizational design can help implement through the Office of Resilience Strategy, which is intended to focus on many of these issues to help define and support a shared vision and goals for national resilience.

FEMA Resilience is well-positioned to bring the right stakeholders at the federal, state, and local levels together, particularly with regards to building resilience to emerging threats and hazards and climate risks that have no natural leader. FEMA Resilience should also provide leadership in post-disaster operations to advance "resilient recovery". Resilience leadership should more closely integrated with FEMA Recovery to help ensure that the recovery resources we are providing support the longer-term view for national resilience.

1.2. Create an Ombudsman Office for Resilience.

FEMA Resilience received recommendations to create an Ombudsman Office within FEMA Resilience or FEMA to help smaller communities navigate FEMA programs. An Ombudsman could provide direct support to communities to help them better navigate the process and focus on the resources most

relevant to their needs. The Ombudsman could serve a similar role as the Office of the Flood Insurance Advocate within the National Flood Insurance Program.

1.3. Establish a function to provide national guidance and help define common terms, to include “resilience” itself.

Resilience lacks clear definitions, national goals, and flexibility/scalability that works for the whole community. This feedback reinforces the original plan to stand up a Resilience-wide strategy directorate to serve as a focal point for convening a shared vision for resilience and bring additional clarity and structure to the mission space.

One point that came through clearly in our listening sessions was the need for a future structure that will maintain the well-known pillars, in particular preparedness and mitigation, while making organizational adjustments that increase integration and support a customer-centric approach. The team is currently iterating and establishing an ideal organizational design that is logical and user-friendly, without becoming unrecognizable to stakeholders.

1.4. Increase resources for and outreach to under-resourced communities.

Reaching at-risk, under-resourced populations through existing community organizations, investing in State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial capacity-building, and examining FEMA’s authorities to proactively support State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial needs, are among several suggestions that would transform FEMA’s ability to support under-resourced communities. While Resilience strives to be responsive to stakeholder needs, some of these recommendations would require a statutory change or contracting hurdle to be addressed. As a start, FEMA Resilience hopes to support short-term changes ahead of embarking upon longer-term solutions through Equity Advisors and Partnerships branches.

Simplifying access to FEMA’s portfolio of grants is another way in which to increase opportunities for access, as many stakeholders cited grant application complexity as a barrier to access for many under-resourced, smaller communities. Improved integration of timelines and Technical Assistance (TA) throughout the grant application and management process are efforts that will continue to deliver a more user-friendly and accessible grants management system.

2. Strengthen and Streamline Program Delivery.

While listening sessions were designed to focus on data to help inform Resilience’s future organizational state, we received significant feedback on our programs themselves and particularly, how FEMA can both strengthen and streamline existing programs. The input below reflects program-specific feedback that can help guide Resilience’s efforts to be more customer-centric in program delivery.

2.1. Reduce the Burden:

2.1.1. MEET COMMUNITIES WHERE THEY ARE.

FEMA Resilience should reduce barriers to access within current programs to allow communities to build resilience and address their unique challenges, hazards, and stressors. Vulnerable communities would benefit from the ability to define resiliency for their community, advocate for funding programs rather than specific projects, and have FEMA Resilience “meet communities where they are.”

Local governments are overwhelmed by available opportunities, Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs), listening sessions, etc. Staff are not leaving more informed, rather more overwhelmed. To improve this, communication of information should be consolidated. Local governments also need more clarity on who to engage. Some local governments are at odds with their state counterparts. Going directly to local governments with direct grants and TA, rather than through states, would help reach under resourced communities more efficiently and effectively.

2.1.2. SIMPLIFY THE GRANT APPLICATION PROCESS.

Across sessions, Road to Resilience leadership heard overwhelmingly from stakeholders that reducing grant program complexity, especially for the communities FEMA Resilience is not effectively reaching now, should be a top priority for FEMA Resilience. Duplicative reporting and overlapping, complex grants requirements pose some of the top challenges to grants managers and other FEMA Resilience customers utilizing FEMA programs and services. For those who are awarded a grant, the significant burden that comes with administering the grant presents additional challenges for already overburdened emergency managers. While some larger organizations advocated for a coordinated deadline, smaller communities prefer better spacing between grants so that they avoid being overwhelmed by multiple grants applications at once.

There is a significant barrier to smaller communities even applying for grants. Quick turnarounds and gaps between federal, state, and local priorities creates confusion, difficulty in tracking grant funding, and challenges with getting grant funding to the communities most in need. Stakeholders notes that annual priority changes and current timelines do not give local jurisdictions time to develop strong programs. Aligning state and local priorities with frequently changing national priority areas is a substantial challenge for local emergency managers. NOFOs should be distributed earlier or, at a minimum, major changes to criteria should be shared with states to provide adequate time to review and prepare. Additionally, the timeline for application review and award is also lengthy and often delayed by Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP) requests for information.

Customers would also benefit from FEMA providing feedback on grant applications. Creating a centralized repository of examples of past successful applications and projects, as well as more templates, would enable greater autonomy over projects and funds. To guide grant applicants, FEMA should create a list of successful project and portfolios where funding has been granted.

Building Resilience Infrastructure & Communities (BRIC) Opportunities:

BRIC could be improved and expanded by incorporating elements of the US Forests' Competitive National Program, which is broken down by Region. There is currently an emphasis on larger, more complex priorities, but this causes a disconnect for under resourced, understaffed communities as they want to focus on smaller scale projects but are unable to come up with the 10% match. Drought should be included, along with a wider breadth of hazards, in the Safeguarding Tomorrow through Ongoing Risk Mitigation (STORM) Act; it is not specifically mentioned in BRIC.

In addition, there were suggestions to create a centralized repository of projects and portfolios to better inform grant applicants. For example, if you authorize a project under BRIC, there is a requirement to publish the highlights of that project for the community. Model templates would also help expedite resilience post-disaster recovery funding.

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) Opportunities:

The complexity of the HMGP could be reduced in several ways including reviewing and modifying the statewide mandatory building code requirement, considering a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) or a Community Assistance Mitigation Program (CAP), allowing management costs to be used at the state level for capability and capacity building, and considering localities that meet FEMA's desired building codes even if the state does not adopt them. These potential changes would allow for increased flexibility beyond the typical standard project, re-modeling mitigation Technical Assistance after the Community Assistance Program – State Support Services Element CAP-SSSE. Process adjustments would also be beneficial, like examining the application process and resolving the common delays that EHP reviews and Requests for Information (RFIs) create.

2.1.3. IMPROVE GRANTS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.

Lowering the digital barrier to entry for Technical Assistance and simplifying grant management through an enterprise system (e.g., FEMA GO) represents key equity advancements. By simplifying the grants application process, providing TA earlier in the application process and allowing for more flexibility in the use of needs-based funding, Resilience can better serve communities.

There was also a request that Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) be released earlier and communicated to states in advance of major changes in the scoring criteria. These would both provide local jurisdictions with the time needed to develop strong applications, which is currently very difficult with only 30 days of planning time. Developing and hosting Region-specific grant group meetings for collaboration would also be a useful learning tool for jurisdictions.

Additional grant and funding programmatic shifts and adjustments were recommended, such as designating funding to run state mitigation programs, similar to the approach the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) takes with CAP-SSSE, standardizing sharing with a sub/applicant why or where their applications do not meet the outlined goals or requirements, allowing states to provide

state-support investments as a way to waive national priority requirements, increasing funding given the expectation to deliver more with rising costs and stagnant allocations, developing a common application for pre-disaster and post-disaster programs, and considering a turbo grant opportunity similar to the National Institute of Building Sciences.

2.1.4. ELIMINATE COST-SHARE.

Suggestions around cost-share include simplifying the BCA tool and incorporating more flexibility into the benefit cost requirement. FEMA should remove it from serving as a deciding factor for grants approval, develop a revolutionary cost benefit model, and eliminate cost-sharing for grants to enhance equitable outcomes and reduce administrative burden for applicants.

Hazard Mitigation Plan requirements can be improved by allowing Climate Adaptation Plans to count towards local Hazard Mitigation planning requirements and allowing flexibility, so the contents of plans are not scrutinized during the grant review and do not dictate approval.

2.1.5. CREATE CONSISTENCY ACROSS REGIONS.

FEMA Resilience should help standardize the support Regions provide states, as it currently varies. Stakeholders would like to evolve their relationship with the Regions so that Regional staff serve as thought partners to states. It was also noted that there is a need for consistency from Region to Region regarding grant reviews and other support mechanisms. There was also a recommendation for region-specific grant group meetings to foster collaboration and streamline the guidance and support given to each state.

2.1.6. INCREASE STATE INVOLVEMENT IN DIRECT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.

States would benefit greatly from revamped toolkits with plain language on how to assess and address inequities. Additionally, state leadership discussed the challenges when FEMA Resilience provides Direct Technical Assistance directly at the local level. To support capacity building at the state level, Direct Technical Assistance in the mitigation space should be restructured to align more closely with Technical Assistance offered for the Community Assistance Program – State Support Services Element (CAP – SSSE) program.

2.2. Increase Accessibility:

2.2.1. POSITION FEMA RESILIENCE AS A CONNECTED SUITE OF MUTUALLY REINFORCING TOOLS.

FEMA Resilience programs are not logically organized to help small communities with the basic building blocks of resilience: understanding risk, reducing risk, transferring risk, and investing in resilience. Stakeholders indicated that FEMA Resilience services are usually seen and accessed in an “a la carte” manner and not viewed as a set of tools that work together sequentially to build resilience. The current service delivery model is highly siloed, creating confusion and difficulty for those utilizing FEMA Resilience services.

Through these engagements, FEMA Resilience learned many communities do not understand how it is organized and is not geared towards helping FEMA Resilience programs are not logically organized to help small communities with the basic building blocks of resilience: understanding risk, reducing risk, transferring risk, and investing in resilience. However, FEMA Resilience must be careful in any major restructuring to preserve the key pillars of the former Protection & National Preparedness organization, particularly preparedness, grants, and mitigation, as many of our long-standing stakeholders have organized themselves to mimic the FEMA structure. Upheaving hard-won relationships and organizational synergies would cause significant setbacks. Many stakeholders also spoke of FEMA Resilience's need to shift from a transactional approach with State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial emergency managers to a "get-to-yes" mentality.

2.2.2. FOCUS ON THE RESILIENCE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND IMPROVE THE USER INTERFACE

As part of a holistic effort to improve the customer experience, FEMA Resilience should develop personas to better understand recipients and incorporate human-centered design principles into its program development.

From a user experience, some resources and tools are too buried within the FEMA website, making them difficult to access. Local emergency managers would benefit from more user-friendly websites, less technical documentation, less strict grant application requirements, faster allocation timelines, timely training opportunities, and a narrower interpretation of Personally Identifiable Information (PII). Local emergency managers are also looking for better access to risk information and additional training opportunities. Showcasing risk information in digestible ways, such as story maps, could help improve information distribution to State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial counterparts.

2.2.3. PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS TO REACH AT-RISK, UNDER RESOURCED POPULATIONS.

Stakeholders want FEMA Resilience to be a partner, not a transactional entity as it is seen now. A partnership-based approach requires creating the capability to be more community-centered. As trust in government dwindles, federal agencies must identify new ways to partner with existing trusted organizations, who know their communities and how to best deliver relevant services.

Throughout discussions, stakeholders continually recommended that FEMA Resilience should work directly with a diverse range of local organizations that have already built trusted relationships within their community. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the interconnectedness of our society, pointing to the need for increased resiliency across every sector and industry. To adapt to such emerging threats and cascading impacts, FEMA Resilience should have a role in addressing non-traditional emergencies at the local level, such as mass shootings, fentanyl, homelessness, housing crises, and economic instability.

2.2.4. SUPPLY TOOLS AND RESOURCES WITH THE CUSTOMER IN MIND.

FEMA Resilience should provide toolkits and best practices to states and locals to assess and address inequities – emergency managers often do not have capacity to address equity alone.

Although communities recognize the suite of preparedness resources available to them, local communities have limited capacity to effectively leverage those resources. Individual preparedness programs need new tools and support mechanisms that account for the realities of low-income Americans and other under resourced populations living paycheck to paycheck. Preparedness solutions are needed at every income level.

2.2.5. MAKE GRANTS TRAINING TIMELY AND ACCESSIBLE.

States would benefit from better timing and scheduling of grant-related trainings. For example, webinars on the STORM Act were made available in the weeks after the application period opened. Scheduling the trainings prior to the opening of an application period would better prepare states to understand changes and develop more successful applications. Local jurisdictions would benefit from additional training on topics, such as the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program.

2.3. Build Capacity:

2.3.1. EXPAND PREPAREDNESS DIRECT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.

Making Direct Technical Assistance more accessible to all communities to help build and expand capacity is a top priority and is viewed by many as one of the greatest opportunities for FEMA to advance equity in its programming and service delivery. Direct technical assistance helps communities to increase their efficiency and capacity in building resilience. One of the most consistent challenges identified is in the inverted pyramid of assistance, with FEMA having significant resources to develop programs that are difficult to carry out at the local level, especially with limited local staff and bandwidth.

FEMA Resilience has been asked to expand Direct Technical Assistance to support states in helping counties to start scoping out solutions to problems. This would enable local jurisdictions to put plans into action and better utilize tools like the NRI and RAPT to support hazard mitigation plans and efforts. FEMA Resilience should also provide local and state governments with specific guidance on how to effectively use climate science data in their code development, assess and address inequities, and utilize different flood datasets.

FEMA Resilience should also consider providing support to develop contingency and continuity plans for businesses and pre-develop more clear guidance materials to support individual progress in establishing these plans.

2.3.2. INVEST IN AND INCENTIVIZE COMMUNITY-DRIVEN TOOLS AND SERVICES.

CERT is not necessarily a one-size fits all tool for community preparedness – it requires a significant amount of time to qualify members and disproportionately disadvantages lower income communities who may not have the ability to volunteer time to participate. There is no immediate return on investment when at-risk populations participate in preparedness programming, therefore, those who have financial concerns may be less likely to participate. Incentives could help increase the number

of at-risk populations participating in programs like CERT. Additionally, it may be beneficial to offer “lighter” CERT programming or create resilience neighborhood response programs that could train community leaders skills and allow them to teach others in their community.

2.3.3. FOCUS ON BUILDING SYSTEMIC RESILIENCE AND PLANNING FOR CASCADING IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

Pre-disaster preparations and investments are key to building sustainable resiliency and equity in under-resourced communities. Existing inequities exacerbate the vulnerabilities we collectively face and make it more difficult to build place-based resiliency. Stakeholders recommend FEMA Resilience should prioritize working with and providing direct financial support to State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial and local organizations to bolster their current resilience efforts. New and evolving hazards will increasingly demand FEMA Resilience’s agility and flexibility.

FEMA Resilience should examine how it qualifies and addresses slow-onset climate emergencies, such as drought and extreme heat to ensure communities get the help they need. Climate change will exacerbate existing challenges and create new stressors across all communities.

FEMA Resilience should diversify its focus on climate change to incorporate emerging threats, such as extreme heat and cold, wildfires, and drought, into the STORM Act and drive legislative action on these issues to cover the full breath of hazards, including non-traditional FEMA emergencies. FEMA Resilience should work directly with state and local governments to make resilience investments at the state level, provide location-specific guidance for using climate science data, plan for extreme weather events, and improve service delivery to those who are marginalized.

2.3.4. ENGAGE DIRECTLY WITH COMMUNITIES.

FEMA Resilience needs to focus on “meeting people where they are” and proactively anticipating the needs of particularly vulnerable communities. FEMA should work directly with and empower local community organizations to deliver on the FEMA Resilience mission more effectively. Working with local governments to streamline the current work should be a top accessibility/equity priority for FEMA. This includes improving communications with under-resourced communities through trusted local counterparts, providing Technical Assistance for developing contingency plans for small businesses, ensuring post-disaster recovery units are placed in the most vulnerable neighborhoods, and investing in resilience hubs, civic commons, and trusted social infrastructure to create resilience within every community. FEMA Resilience should deputize native organizations like Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) who are trusted and focused on equity.

2.4. Incentivize and Educate on Resilience:

2.4.1. CREATE A CLEAR, FLEXIBLE DEFINITION AND NATIONAL GOALS THAT HELP BUILD SYSTEMIC RESILIENCE.

Throughout all listening sessions, participants identified a clear need and desire for a single, shared definition of “resilience” that both FEMA and its stakeholders are collectively working towards.

Creating a space for developing national guidance and doctrine within FEMA Resilience Strategy would help build universal norms, improve understanding of goals, and enable FEMA Resilience to measure success more effectively. FEMA Resilience should operationalize resilience through a clear definition, national goals, and flexibility/scalability that works for the whole community.

As part of this definition, FEMA Resilience should account for how communities define resilience at the local level and how they define success, with an eye towards flexible, long-term investments, particularly in infrastructure. A common, yet flexible definition of resilience is key to ensuring emergency management is addressing the same priorities and working toward shared goals. Stakeholders encouraged FEMA Resilience to expand its vision to one that centers around building back stronger, supporting adaptability to future hazards, and allowing measurement of progress against shared national resilience goals.

Since one of the expressed goals of Road to Resilience is to reach more under resourced communities, stakeholders encouraged FEMA to re-think how we define under-resourced and disadvantaged communities, whether we are using them synonymously, and set basic criteria and pre-defined thresholds based on those definitions, as the way in which both terms are used vary widely.

2.4.2. REFRAME RESILIENCE LANGUAGE.

Stakeholders also proposed placing a focus on “precovery” (pre-planning recovery) to allow people and communities to survive, adapt, and thrive in face of regular shocks and stressors from natural and manmade hazards. FEMA Resilience’s approach to resilience-building should be human-centered, rather than property-focused. Preparedness, mitigation, and response solutions need to be more holistic and the concepts of “poly-shock,” “poly-crisis,” and “co-benefits” need to be a focus of programming and doctrine moving forward.

2.4.3. ADDRESS BUILDING CODES.

Stakeholders presented two differing opinions regarding building codes. The first was that FEMA Resilience should incorporate more of a focus on building codes into its grant application process in a way that incentivizes building back stronger and more resilient. Stakeholders of this opinion held that codes are a way to bring all pieces of the resilience-building landscape together and add an underlying level of resilience to all communities and infrastructure. In addition, FEMA should work with international code development agencies to identify global opportunities to advance resiliency standards and guidelines.

The second opinion was to eliminate state building code requirements for grant applications. Many states do not have statewide mandatory building codes that satisfy FEMA’s requirement and, as a result, are unable to compete for funding. FEMA should consider localities that meet the Agency’s desired building codes, regardless of their state’s status. This ensures projects are built to the standard desired and brings new communities to the table where they previously did not have a voice.

2.4.4. STRENGTHEN AND BETTER LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS.

Collaborate and work more closely with universities, non-governmental organizations, philanthropies, and the private sector. Many of these institutions, particularly those with ties to higher education, have the tools and resources to work with FEMA on TA, community outreach, and nationwide research projects. Setting clear expectations, goals, and proposed outcomes for these partnerships is key to their success. Increasing capacity and funding these projects would help alleviate the workloads of already over-burdened FEMA HQ and Regions staff, as well as their State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial counterparts. As the impacts of climate change increase, FEMA no longer has concrete seasons for natural disasters; piloting programs in disaster-prone areas would enable FEMA to respond, recover, and build back more resilient communities more effectively and efficiently.

Additionally, the business community can, and should, play a key partnership role with FEMA in building community resilience. FEMA Resilience must closely engage the private sector earlier in the policy development process and provide clear guidance on their role in resilience-building. State mitigation plans are a strong way to solidify the private sector's role.

2.4.5. IMPROVE DATA AVAILABILITY AND INTEGRITY.

Making data, such as that from the National Integration Center (NIC), more accessible to planners at a local level would give communities a more well-rounded understanding of their risk landscape and enable them to better prepare. Local governments want to be able to include future conditions into regulatory maps/future mapping products, like flood insurance rate maps, to keep people and development out of harm's way. It is critical that FEMA Resilience review its internal data biases.

2.4.6. FUND EMERGING THREAT ANALYSIS.

FEMA Resilience needs to create a Research and Development system and act as a federal leader for identifying and studying emerging threats. FEMA Resilience should also fund a national assessment on social vulnerabilities to align future federal priorities and urge Congress to enforce higher national standards for keeping developments out of hazard areas to reduce future risks.

2.4.7. ENGAGE STATES IN POLICY DECISION-MAKING.

States advocated for additional funds to hire staff to support the development of mitigation programs, through things like a Senate bill.

FEMA Resilience should also work more directly with states prior to implementing policy or changes; creating an opportunity for state-level feedback on policy development will help highlight what may be realistic or problematic at the program level. Additionally, the definitions for some of the terms used within the resilience space vary widely, and it would benefit FEMA Resilience to better define these terms. For example, there are different definitions of the term "disadvantaged communities," which leads to varying thresholds to meet that definition.

2.4.8. INVEST IN BUILDING LOCAL SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND REIMAGINE “RESILIENCE” METRICS.

FEMA Resilience should invest in methods to measure community vitality and quality of life to better understand our social fabric through factors such as connectivity, belonging, and care. The way people care for members of their community is a key aspect of resilience building.

Non-traditional metrics, such as crime rates, unemployment, and access to resources are important factors in measuring resilience. Rethinking data biases, such as “low wealth” versus “low income” communities, can add a new equity lens to our analysis. “Wealth” typically refers to possessing assets that can quickly be liquidated during a disaster, as opposed to “income” which refers to the amount of money earned in a given time period. A wealth measurement tool, such as a net worth or asset index, is a better measure of capacity than community income alone, which can be easily impacted by future conditions, shocks, or stressors.

2.4.9. ENABLE DATA SHARING AND MANAGEMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.

Local emergency managers and communities often lack the technical expertise needed to interpret the data made available by FEMA, and, therefore, do not know how to use tools like the Resilience Analysis and Planning Tool (RAPT) and National Risk Index (NRI) to support their hazard mitigation plans and efforts. FEMA Resilience should increase its data-sharing at the community level, giving local jurisdictions a better understanding of the threat landscape.

Local governments want to be able to include future conditions into regulatory maps like flood insurance rate maps. Increased NIC data and land-use decision maps, including future conditions for planning purposes, shared with local communities would keep people and development out of harm’s way. It is important for businesses to be equipped with contingency plans to understand their risks and capabilities—65% of small businesses currently do not have a plan in place.

Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback into Organizational Design

FEMA Resilience strives to be responsive to stakeholder needs and is taking the next steps to analyze, prioritize, and act on feedback provided. The following table highlights common themes shared by our stakeholders and corresponding actions that FEMA Resilience will take to help shape the future of Resilience.

Table 1: Common Themes and Actions

<i>Common Themes</i>	<i>Action</i>
FEMA should be a convener and lead coordinator for disaster and climate resilience efforts.	The newly formed FEMA Office of Resilience Strategy is intended to focus on many of these issues to help define and support a shared vision and goals for national resilience, as well as to assess FEMA’s role as a convener and coordinator for federal resilience in close coordination with OEA and other FEMA offices.
FEMA Resilience services are not viewed as a connected suite of mutually reinforcing tools to build holistic resilience.	In spring and summer 2023, the Road to Resilience Team is hosting internal staff “deep dives”. These sessions will explore how the team can better share the services and resources offered and what can be done to help communities use the tools to approach resilience in a sequential, holistic manner. Feedback will be utilized to inform the final Road to Resilience organizational shifts by late summer 2023.
FEMA Resilience should structure its organization in a way that is logical to building resilience while preserving the key pillars of our current structure.	The Road to Resilience Team is re-thinking how FEMA Resilience can maintain well-known pillars, in particular preparedness and mitigation, while making organizational adjustments that increase integration and support a customer-centric approach. The team is currently reviewing the existing organizational design and looking for ways to improve effectiveness in customer support.

Common Themes	Action
<p>Build flexibility into our programs and grant guidance that allows communities to address their true needs and focus on community driven resilience efforts.</p>	<p>Solutions are also being discussed that would provide more tailored support to smaller communities through the FEMA Office of Resilience Strategy Partnerships and Engagement Branch to provide the direct support they need and “meet communities where they are”.</p>
<p>Operationalize resilience through clear definition, national goals, and flexibility/scalability that works for the whole community.</p>	<p>Defining resilience and establishing national guidance is the top priority for the FEMA Office of Resilience Strategy. This feedback reinforces the original plan to stand up a FEMA Resilience-wide strategy directorate to serve as a focal point for convening a shared vision for resilience and bring additional clarity and structure to the mission space.</p>
<p>Simplify access to FEMA’s portfolio of grants through better integration of timelines and improved Technical Assistance throughout the grant application and management process.</p>	<p>This request is an example of work that is currently underway. These efforts will continue to deliver a more user-friendly grant management system (FEMA GO), display the commitment to FEMA Resilience customers, and actively respond to customer feedback.</p>
<p>The best way to reach at-risk, under-resourced populations is through existing community organizations.</p>	<p>These three themes will help FEMA Resilience transform how support is offered but would require a statutory change or contracting hurdle to be addressed.</p> <p>As a start, FEMA Resilience is exploring short-term opportunities ahead of embarking upon longer-term solutions through Resilience Equity Advisors and the Resilience Strategic Communications and Partnership Division.</p>
<p>Invest in State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial capacity-building and utilize their strengths and credibility to support community-focused resilience.</p>	
<p>Examine FEMA’s authorities and proactively identify new ways to support State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial preparation for and response to future threats and hazards.</p>	

The Way Forward

The input from listening sessions has been integral to developing the future state of FEMA Resilience. Frequent and direct engagement will be a core tenet of how FEMA Resilience seeks to work with all its stakeholders going forward. The following lines of effort emerged from the stakeholder and staff listening sessions and will be explored as FEMA Resilience works to respond to the needs of the communities we serve:

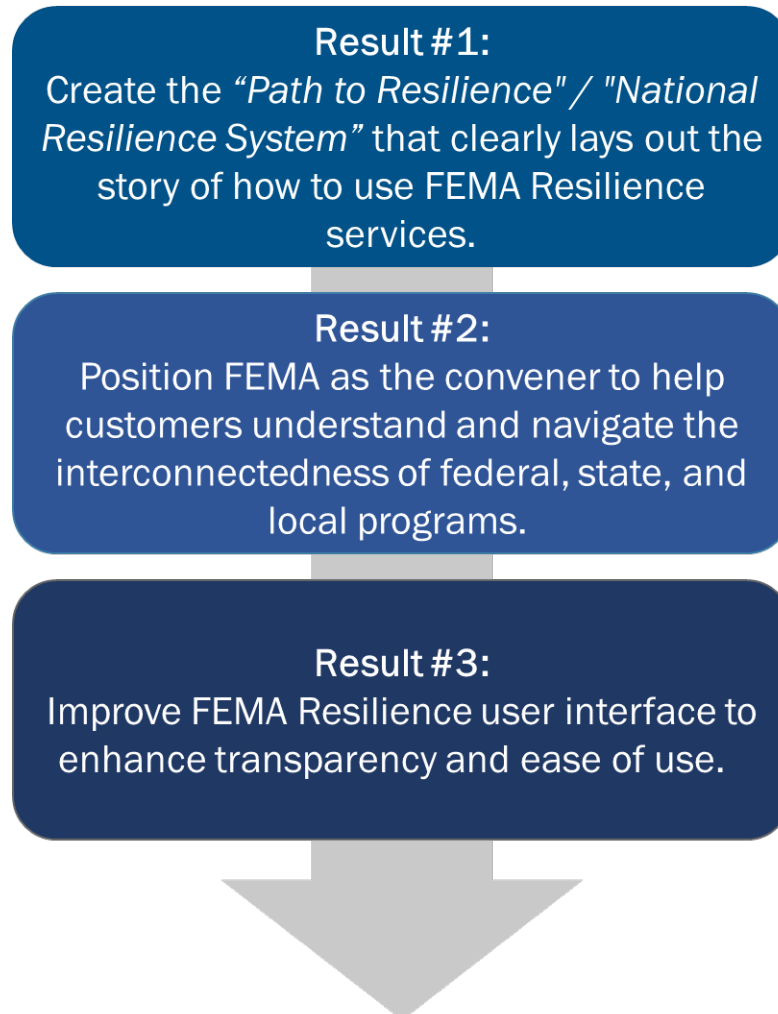


Figure 2: Lines of Effort Emerging from Listening Sessions

This report will be disseminated to and discussed with participating stakeholders through a series of stakeholder webinars. The intent of these sessions is to update attendees on the valuable inputs the team gathered from all engagements and share how Leadership has (or plans to) implement their feedback. On at least an annual basis, FEMA Resilience will invite stakeholders to an open house to hear about actions we have taken to address stakeholder feedback.

Facing a world of increasingly frequent disasters and new emerging threats and hazards, continued collaboration with a diversity of FEMA Resilience stakeholders is more critical now than ever. Building upon these key relationships to streamline and improve service delivery will remain a top priority as FEMA Resilience continues to build a prepared and resilient nation.

Appendix A. List of Stakeholder Groups Engaged

Table 2: List of Stakeholder Groups Engaged

<i>Stakeholder Groups</i>	
Association of State Floodplain Management (ASFPM)	Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Big City Emergency Managers (BCEM)	Northwest Central Joint Emergency Management System (IL)
Black Resilience Network	Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management (PA)
DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency	Ramsey County Emergency Management & Homeland Security (MN)
Hamilton County Emergency Management & Homeland Security Agency (OH)	Resilience21
Harris County Homeland Security and Emergency Management	Resilient Cities Network - Chief Resilience Officers
International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)	San Francisco Department of Emergency Management (CA)
International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC)	State Administrative Agency (SAA)
International Code Council (ICC)	State Hazard Mitigation Officers (SHMOs)
Maryland Department of Emergency Management	State of Louisiana Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness
Miami-Dade County Emergency Management Department	U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Montana Disaster & Emergency Services	Union County Emergency Management Agency (OH)
National Advisory Council (NAC)	Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN)

Stakeholder Groups	
National Emergency Managers Association (NEMA)	Vermont Emergency Management

Appendix B. Group-Specific Listening Session Takeaways

1. National Resource Defense Council:

- Capacity-building and obtaining more BRIC funding are top challenges facing preparedness. States are a big area for addressing capacity building challenges.
- There is an opportunity for the creation of an Ombudsman Office for Mitigation; it currently exists within the Flood Insurance Office, but helping people better navigate the difficult process would be well received.
- Resilience data, particularly flood insurance data, should be made more accessible so customers can learn about their individual risk.
- Drought, water scarcity, and extreme heat are critical emerging climate threats. FEMA should play a leading role in getting an interagency discussion going on these issues, as there is no agency with a natural ownership/lead responsibility.
- The National Flood Insurance Program is not set up for a future where hazards will continue to be exacerbated by climate change, and therefore is unequipped to adapt to and mitigate these emerging and evolving challenges.

2. Resilient Cities/Chief Resilience Officer Network:

- Systemic resilience is key – COVID-19 showed us how interconnected everything is and the need for resiliency across every sector and industry. Silos need to be broken at the local level, not just in the funding realm, so FEMA and emergency managers can take a micro and macro level approach to problem-solving.
- Placing a focus on “precovery” (pre-planning recovery) is what will allow people and communities to survive, adapt, and thrive in face of shocks and stressors, on a regular basis.
- FEMA’s role in helping drive a national conversation around resilience is taking the top/common stressors and getting in front of these with assistance in mitigation and preparation.
- Procurement process for post-disaster funding needs to be expedited. Creating model templates for streamlining this process would be ideal.
- There is a need for direct allocation to cities and frontline communities – states are not best way to expedite. FEMA Resilience needs to give states support to be the missing link to bring things to scale faster.

3. International Code Council:

- FEMA’s role should be convening the right stakeholders at federal, state, and local levels on issues with no “natural” leader, such as certain subsets of climate (ex. Wildfires, extreme heat).
- FEMA should incorporate more of a focus on codes into the grants application processes.

- Building science should not be disconnected from programs; FEMA would benefit from more collaboration on building science across the entire Agency, not just FEMA Resilience.
- Making Technical Assistance more accessible to all communities is a top priority and is viewed by many as one of the greatest opportunities for FEMA to advance equity in its programming and service delivery.

4. U.S. Chamber of Commerce:

- As we collectively look to the future, new and evolving hazards will increasingly demand FEMA's adaptation and flexibility. The government should examine how it qualifies and declares climate emergencies such as drought and extreme heat.
- FEMA Resilience should adopt the role of convener at the federal level on the topic of climate adaptation.
- FEMA Resilience should invest in defining key metrics and measures for success. This will unify and focus stakeholders around shared outcomes.
- The business community can and should play a key partnership role with FEMA Resilience in building community resilience. To do so, FEMA Resilience must engage the private sector more closely and provide clear guidance on their role in resilience-building.

5. State Hazard Mitigation Officers:

- Mitigation is the future of our Nation's resilience.
- Building code requirements are a major pain point. Many states do not have statewide mandatory building codes that satisfy FEMA's requirement, leaving them unable to compete.
- Reducing the complexity of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMPG) is a top priority; consider a block-style grant such as Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) CDBG Disaster Recovery program.
- States want to use management costs for capability and capacity building, as well as program building across mitigation and recovery.
- Improvements to the FEMA GO system are needed; reducing the timeline to get grants approved is also much needed change.

6. State Administrative Agencies:

- Duplicative reporting and overlapping, complex grants requirements pose some of the top challenges.
- FEMA Resilience should prioritize reducing grant program complexity. Aligning state and local priorities with frequently changing national priority areas is a substantial challenge for customers.
- Working directly with states prior to implementing policy changes is critical, as is engaging states for feedback early in the policy development process.
- Cost-sharing is a burden for small, under-resourced communities when trying to initiate projects. Eliminate cost-sharing for grants to enhance equitable outcomes and reduce administrative burden for grant recipients.

7. Association of State Floodplain Managers:

- There is significant interest in a heavier emphasis being placed on mitigation in the new structure.
- Suggestions for ways to increase mitigation include delegating mitigation programs to the states and/or considering a Mitigation CAP.
- The current grants process is too complex and burdensome for communities who are already understaffed/resourced.
- Technical Assistance in the mitigation space should be re-thought and made more like the CAP-SSSE program, which leverages building capacity at the state level to engage communities and those that are under-resourced at the local level.

8. Urban Sustainability Directors Network:

- A common, yet flexible definition of “resilience” is key, including a vision for building back stronger and more adaptable in the face of future hazards.
- Investing in trusted community organizations/stakeholders and understanding the social fabric of a local jurisdiction is critical for sustaining and increasing capacity, preparedness, and resiliency.
- Completing grants applications is a major challenge due to strict and unfeasible application requirements, and duplicative reporting.
- Working with local governments to streamline the work they are already doing should be a top accessibility/equity priority for FEMA Resilience.
- In its role as convener, FEMA can and should advocate for higher protection standards to accommodate for future risks.

9. International Association of Emergency Managers:

- Better awareness, collaboration, alignment, and synchronization of efforts is needed. Communities would benefit greatly if FEMA expanded collaboration efforts to other federal agencies – such as the EDA, DOE, and DOT – and engaged with a wider group of community organizations, such as faith-based institutions and economic development groups.
- Local emergency managers and communities often lack the technical expertise needed to interpret data made available by FEMA and therefore do not know how to use tools, such as the NRI and RAPT, to support their hazard mitigation plans and efforts.
- States that are successful in BRIC (Washington, North Carolina, and California for example) have strong state programs that do Technical Assistance in communities. FEMA’s Technical Assistance program should be shifted to focus on supporting states in building sustainable programs. Local governments would benefit from having someone on the ground who knows the community and can help them through the process. Alternatively, a repository of best practices and examples of successful projects and programs in other communities could help encourage additional community/national buy-in.
- Integration of disaster resiliency funding streams and programs will be critical in building nationwide resilience.

10. National Emergency Managers Association:

- Simplicity in funding opportunities and streamlining execution of grants programs remains a top priority.
- FEMA Resilience should fund a nationwide study for hazard mitigation to see if we're meeting the need and accomplishing hazard mitigation as a function/mission.
- Although communities recognize the suite of preparedness resources available to them, there is a capacity limitation at the local/community level which prevents jurisdictions from fully utilizing them. Additionally, from a user experience, some resources and tools are too buried within FEMA.
- Cost-share remains a barrier for socio-economically disadvantaged communities as it limits their ability to interact and engage. From an equity perspective, lowering the point of entry to begin with can help make programs itself more accessible.
- The desired national outcome for the CERT program needs to be more clearly defined, keeping in mind that it is just one program, and that individual preparedness and resilience looks different in every community.

11. Black Resilience Network:

- In marginalized, rural, and/or historically disadvantaged communities, there are often “non-traditional” organizations– not official emergency managers, Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs), or members of government agencies – already pursuing preparedness efforts. For several reasons, the government’s approach is not working there; FEMA Resilience and other organizations interested in reaching these communities need to nest themselves in a meaningful way to build trust.
- Resilience-building would be more successful conducting outreach through local trusted entities, accessible communication formats, and actionable messages.
- Marginalized communities could better access services if FEMA Resilience minimized layers of bureaucracy and provided on-the-ground Technical Assistance to eliminate barriers to resilience-building efforts.
- Resilience looks different from community to community. Likewise, the definition of community varies in different places. Communities – including marginalized, disadvantaged, at-risk ones – are not a monolith. It will take significant investments are needed on the ground to understand the specific needs of each one. That is why partnerships with and direct investment in the people already doing the work within their community are imperative.

12. Resilience21:

- Inequity is not a recent phenomenon; it is historical. To improve service delivery to marginalized or at-risk communities, FEMA Resilience should invest in infrastructure and work more closely with locals at the community level.
- Preparedness, mitigation solutions, and response need to be more holistic – the concepts of “poly-shock,” “poly-crisis,” and “co-benefits” need to be a focus moving forward.

- Funding opportunities are not always accessible to under-resourced or marginalized communities. Examples of barriers to accessing services include time and level of effort required to access, complicated processes, and funding that is not broad enough to cover all hazards experienced.
- It would be beneficial to have FEMA Resilience representatives join local meetings and have a consistent presence with the people on the ground – the ones that people turn to during times of emergency. This would help build trust in communities and help FEMA Resilience better understand needs and barriers.
- One way that FEMA Resilience could understand how to better serve communities would be to work closely with other, non-disaster agencies, such as HUD or health organizations; these agencies often have different insight into their communities' needs, resources, and avenues of communication.

13. Big City Emergency Managers:

- It is critical to plan for unhoused populations in cities as extreme weather events are becoming the new normal. Extreme weather events cause big city emergency managers to pivot in planning and create competing priorities as they try to build resilience in their cities.
- FEMA Resilience should help cities prepare for non-traditional emergencies, such as the train derailment in Ohio or migrant surges.
- Cities would benefit from FEMA providing feedback on grant applications. Additionally, FEMA should consider eliminating the need to resubmit applications annually for grants that try to re-establish the same goal.
- Cities get stuck on the technical aspects of the grant application process. Customer service from grants-providing agencies needs to be stronger. Additionally, it would be helpful to receive quick answers from FEMA regarding the application process.
- There is no immediate return on investment when at-risk populations participate in preparedness programming, therefore those who have financial concerns may be less likely to participate. Incentives could help increase the number of at-risk populations participating in preparedness programs, such as the CERT program. It may be beneficial to offer “lighter” CERT programming or create resilience neighborhood response programs that could teach community leaders skills and allow them to teach others in their community.
- Showcasing risk information in digestible ways, like story maps, could help improve information distribution to State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial counterparts.

14. International Association of Fire Chiefs:

- Do not move the NIC. Keeping this intact with National Incident Management System (NIMS) is important for community coordination/access. NIMS from a doctrine standpoint also need to stay intact – do not separate Doctrine out.
- Ensure NIMS retains its visibility and importance. IAFC agrees with FEMA Resilience Leadership's recommendation to elevate the NIMS from the branch to divisional level.

- Within the NPS, exercises and training should remain at a high priority level within the new structure. As the Nation faces a different set of threats (i.e., mass shootings), the importance of and demand for training and exercises will only increase.
- There is a strong appetite for national resilience guidance. The country needs a standardized societal and government-wide approach to addressing chronic stresses. When FEMA focuses on resilience as a standalone concept, not tied to the country's socioeconomic status, public health systems, etc., it does not represent a complete picture.

Appendix C. State, City & County Workshop Takeaways

FEMA's Role: On multiple occasions, participants referred to FEMA's value as a convener across the federal government. There was discussion of the role of FEMA HQ and relationships between Federal /Regional / State / Local government with communities; particularly that hierarchy is important from a state perspective (i.e., FEMA should not be focused on directly serving local communities) but the state to local government process is limiting from a local perspective (indicated in pre-work).

Reducing Complexity: A frequently repeated topic was the complexity of the FEMA grant process, and that the time consuming and burdensome process inhibits small communities from even applying. There was consensus around the assertion that seeking assistance should be a more straightforward and less time-consuming process and should not require contract resources to complete, particularly if FEMA aims to engage currently underserved communities.

Flexibility: Discussion frequently returned to one key question: How do we design programs that are flexible to meet the needs of communities, and not limited to addressing only specific risks? Program and service delivery requirements should allow for more flexibility at the State, County, and City-levels so that communities can adapt and modify these services to fully meet their needs.

Timeliness: Opportunities exist to streamline and increase efficiencies across processes and critical service delivery areas. For example, by providing technical assistance earlier in the grant application process at the local level and allowing for more flexibility in the use of funding based on needs, the timeliness of applying grant funds increases considerably.

Capacity and Capability Building: As we look to the future, risks and disasters will only continue to increase and create new demands of our communities and of FEMA. How do our partnerships allow us to promote preparedness for and recover faster from disasters?

Engagement: Conversations like this *State, County, and City Workshop* are critical to engage stakeholders at all levels to focus on improvement areas that provide the greatest benefit to communities. These types of workshops should also occur for the policy making processes, versus what is currently perceived as surface level / check-the-box engagement.

Equitable Service Delivery: Complex, burdensome application processes and required cost shares make access difficult or even prohibitive for underserved, at-risk communities.

Partnership: The most common message was that FEMA is most helpful when it approaches support as a partner, versus the current perception that FEMA is the decider-in-Chief of what communities need.