



Continuing the Conversation: Resilient Solutions

Seemingly every few weeks the news is full of stories about natural disasters. Whether it's hurricanes, wildfires, mudslides, the result is the same – communities are faced with a lengthy and expensive recovery process. But what if they were able to return to normal faster, saving money and reducing the impact on health? The Page Foundation set out to continue those conversations at AdRESS (Advocating Resilience through Environmental and Social Solutions), a one-and-a-half day thought leadership event in Houston. The conversation is still continuing online – read about the event below and share your own thoughts by sending an email to the Page Foundation at [AdRESS Ideas for Page Foundation](#).

Participants from all over the United States gathered to share expertise at AdRESS, which was co-hosted by 100 Resilient Cities. Administrators from major coastal cities Boston, Miami, New Orleans and Houston presented lessons learned from recent recovery processes and detailed changes taking place to strengthen community resilience in advance of the next event. All reiterated the message, "It isn't a question of if, it's when." Attendees spoke of innovative solutions to changed circumstances such as meeting increased demand for Meals on Wheels despite temporarily impassible roads after Hurricane Harvey. Others mentioned a challenge inherent in today's job market: individuals no longer spend an entire career with one company or department so they don't have extensive experience responding to prior disasters.

City of Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, who is still leading the fourth-largest US city to recovery after Hurricane Harvey in August 2017, opened the conference, explaining that 100 Resilient Cities had accepted Houston as its newest member city out of 1,200 applications. He spoke of significant development measures enacted after the third hundred-year storm in three years flooded Houston yet again, insisting that instead of rebuilding what previously flooded, the city should be aggressive in "building forward". Mayor Turner related that he is urging everyone to understand the world is changing as a result of climate change and that the consequence of not acknowledging this is to remain unprepared.

"Instead of resisting the changing environment, embrace it."

Alexandra Miller, AICP, Akasura Robinson

Participants brainstormed ways to keep people healthy in the face of extreme stress and temporary resource constraints as well as how to better aid the ill or injured. Brian Greene from the Houston Food Bank explained that studies showed children whose schools were closed due to damage were better able to maintain their grades and mental health if they were able to either return quickly or relocate to another school—together—as opposed to children who were separated from their peers. He also emphasized that afterschool programs were essential to helping communities get back on their feet following disasters due to their significant role in providing food to children.

"Weather events are lasting longer and old assumptions about building performance are not accurate."

Lauren Koch, MA, MENR, Health Care Without Harm



Chris Busch of the City of Boston Planning and Development Agency described the historical city's situation in stark terms, "Boston is the fourth-most vulnerable city in the United States to financial loss from rising sea levels, and the eight most-vulnerable in the world." One of the city's resilience initiatives is the creation of a large, floodable waterfront park that will serve as both a community asset and a protective barrier to the built infrastructure behind it. Busch urged the audience to consider how community challenges can become opportunities.

"Make a case for value."

Eric Bill, M. Econ, MBA, Autocase

Breakout sessions helped participants consider challenges in responding to disasters and led to out-of-the-box dialogues. Mel Navarez, CISM, of Centerpoint Energy, a Fortune 500 electric and natural gas utility serving several U.S. states, explained that if weather-related conditions make it dangerous for residents to venture outdoors, their employees responding to downed utility networks also are endangered or challenged to get around. That led to several questions and suggestions about the structure and management of networks for improving or easing access.

"Community resilience only comes when people are involved and engaged in the design process."

David Perkes, Gulf Coast Community Design

Opening keynote speaker Steve Wymer detailed how Nextdoor's position as a social media platform increases its ability to help Americans. The private social network connects residents in more than 184,000 neighborhoods across the United States and differs from other, older social networks in that members are grouped by physical proximity, not personal relationships. Although intended to be a daily resource, it also has become a go-to during disasters so neighbors can ask for help, share updates and offer suggestions in real time.

"We have to remember during planning, not everyone is online. We investigated what different neighborhoods in Miami use as resources for information, and found it was churches, it was coffee shops. In one community, it was a child care center."

Jane Gilbert, City of Miami

The closing keynote was delivered by Otis Rolley of 100 Resilient Cities, which is dedicated to helping cities around the world become more resilient to the physical, social and economic challenges that are a growing part of the 21st century. He explained the significance of urban centers is that they are home to 63% of the U.S. population and that number is expected to grow. Rolley urged the audience to think about how to build future cities today, and explained that to be successful, plans must put people first by embedding racial equality, social justice and social equity.

"[Architects] can't do it alone" when evaluating a project's environmental impact. Planners, city government, non-profits and community organizations all need to be contributing to the conversation too."

Betsy Del Monte, FAIA

The conversation is still taking place among AdRESS attendees – online. Invitations were issued to join a dedicated forum where questions have already been asked, and responses generated. To share your own thoughts, send an email to the Page Foundation at [AdRESS Ideas for Page Foundation](#).