



# BUILDING ALLIANCES: STORIES OF INCLUSION, CLIMATE ACTION, AND EQUITY

ADVANCING RESILIENCE THROUGH PARTNERSHIP AND STORYTELLING



Resilient Nation  
Partnership Network



FEMA

“ ”

We still have a lot of work to do in resilience. We are still learning. We need to rethink how we provide clean energy, air and water in underserved communities in a way that works to undo systemic racism and poverty. We need to embed sustainability and resilience into plans that empower people. Together, we create resilience.

– Lottie Ferguson, Chief Resilience Officer, City of Flint

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# FOREWARD

Alliances for Inclusive Resilience marked the final installment in the [Building Alliances](#) initiative. Over three years, the Resilient Nation Partnership Network addressed Equity, Climate, and Inclusion with three amazing co-hosts and nearly 100 organizations as speakers.

- **2022: Alliances for Inclusive Resilience with Co-host Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI)**
- **2021: Alliances for Climate Action with co-host NASA**
- **2020: Alliances for Equitable Resilience with co-host NOAA**

The collaborations throughout the Building Alliances initiative show a commitment to a Whole Community approach to address some of the biggest challenges facing us today. These have resulted in the co-development of this document and two other partner-led resources:

- [Building Alliances for Climate Action](#)
- [Building Alliances for Equitable Resilience](#)

More than ever, adopting equitable and inclusive practices in all areas of resilience is a job for all of us. The stories from our partners have been a catalyst for action. As we shift away from the Building Alliances series, the stories of the last three years will be our foundation to build upon.

We thank you for your support and ask for your continued participation as we begin our journey advancing [Stories of Resilience](#). Your unique perspectives, insights and stories guide us in tackling the most important issues of our time. We hope that by elevating your voices, we can bring about more action to create equitable and inclusive resilience.

To continued partnership,

**Resilient Nation Partnership Network Team**

THE RNP AND FEMA WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OUR SERIES' CO-HOSTS, PARTNERS AND STORYTELLERS WHO CONTRIBUTED THEIR TIME AND PERSPECTIVES TO THE "BUILDING ALLIANCES" SERIES.



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## INTRODUCTION

As people and organizations look for ways to be more inclusive and equitable, we must highlight the criticality of trust in communities. Trust is a necessary piece of whole community resilience. To create safer communities, we need a Whole Community approach. None of us can do it alone.

Since 2015, the Resilient Nation Partnership Network has leveraged networking and built human connections. These connections lead to long-lasting collaboration to solve current and future challenges. Each year, we continue to explore ways the Whole Community can work together to build resilience while accounting for equity. These efforts are guided by our three goals:

- **Promoting natural hazard mitigation and climate adaptation actions.**
- **Advancing equitable resilience initiatives.**
- **Expanding capacity through partnerships.**

This resource highlights each story told during the Building Alliances Forum series. We hope that these stories will encourage people and communities across the country to share their resilience stories as part of the RNPN's *Stories of Resilience: Voice That Inspire*. These can be stories of equity, climate and inclusivity in resilience.



## CHAPTER 1: INCLUSIVE RESILIENCE

### INCLUSION POWERS COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN FLINT, MI

*Lottie Ferguson, Chief Resilience Officer, City of Flint*

The resilience of Flint, Michigan, is legendary. Most people think of the water crisis and other troubling news stories, but these events do not adequately depict the vibrant sense of community that is the basis for our resilience.

I am the city's first chief resilience officer. Having grown up in Flint, I watched many in my family support the community in various ways. It has been my honor to carry with me their histories of Flint. My job as a resilience officer covers social, environmental, and economic resilience in a way that uses their legacies to build equity-centered, trauma-informed, community-driven resilience for a city that has been dealt far too many blows.

My grandfather turned an old tire store into a fish market. He fed families in need. He gave advice and a listening ear. He sponsored baseball teams. His story is one of many former and current small businesses that are key to Flint's economic resilience.

General Motors (GM) was born in Flint, not in Detroit. At the height of its operations, the city was booming. Houses were being built as quickly as the vehicles were rolling off the assembly lines. Flint led the country in education with its community schools model. Life was really, really good in Flint; no one was prepared for the economic downturn that came as GM began to move operations elsewhere.

As jobs began to disappear, small business kept the community afloat. Flint saw huge increases in entrepreneurship in the 70s, 80s, and at the height of the pandemic. Small businesses partnered with community organizations to help feed and clothe each other, to provide jobs, to provide hope. Right now, Flint recognizes the integral part small businesses play in both community and economic development and is piloting a program with federal dollars that focuses on building capacity for small businesses.

Sustainability is not high on a list of priorities for cities like Flint, whose residents sometimes struggle just to meet basic needs, however it is a very necessary conversation that we are working to encourage residents to join. Flint has had its share of problems with lead in drinking water, soil, and the paint of those houses that were hastily built to accommodate factory workers. Since 2019, Flint's water has tested well below federal action levels for lead. However, there are other issues that residents have concerns with, such as mold and cracking foundations, dilapidated roofs, and housing developments built in floodplains.

We are working with the U.S. Department of Natural Resources to ensure dams are being repaired or removed. Dams must be able to handle increased rainfall events and make the Flint River accessible for recreation and ecosystem restoration.

There are issues with air quality as a byproduct of years of industrial pollution. We are teaching residents how to monitor their air quality themselves. We are also working to redevelop brownfields into usable green space.

This sounds pretty good right now, but we still have a lot of work to do in resilience. We are still learning. We need to rethink how we provide clean energy, air and water in underserved communities in a way that works to undo systemic racism and poverty. We need to embed sustainability and resilience into plans that empower people. Together, we create resilience.





Social determinants of health play a major role in our public health, fueled by the availability of clean environments and access to healthy diets, exercise and mental health supports. Doctor Kent Key is a local expert on the impacts of the social determinants of health. He reminds us that we should not view Flint residents as in need of rescue. We must find a way to encourage community mobilization that Flint is very well known for.

In Flint, we have been able to secure a couple of federal grants that help with this. Flint ReCAST is one of those. It aims to build resilience in communities after stress and trauma. There is a national problem of suicide among firefighters; Flint Fire Department continues to struggle with the suicide deaths of two firefighters. We must make sure that we reach out to our first responders and ensure that they have the support they need. Flint ReCAST does that. The city works to ensure that our first responders have the support they need through mental health training and mindfulness training. This helps them cope with the tragedies that they face. We cannot afford to lose another first responder. Flint ReCAST is led by a community advisory board made up of residents, city leaders and others that address many of these issues in a way that is both informative and empowering.

In Flint, economic, social and environmental resilience all worked because of inclusion. We learned the hard way that if inclusion is not at the core of everything that we do, lives are affected. There are immeasurable losses. We fare better, much better with inclusion.

There are lots of people that you hear of from Flint that all have the same thing in common: undeniable grit and determination to succeed beyond all odds. There is a bunch of us in the city who have shirts that say, “Just a kid from Flint.” We have been through some hardship, and we have come out stronger and shining on the other side.

Actor Terry Crews, Olympic boxer Clarissa Shields, and National College Baseball Hall of Famer Jim Abbott (a pitcher born with only one hand) all came from Flint, Michigan. These are just a few of the examples of people from Flint who exceeded expectations placed on them. They have done it all thanks to the resilience and the grit and determination that they have from growing up in Flint.





## INCLUSIVE RESILIENCE (Continued)

### HOW EVERY LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAN HELP SAVE THE PLANET—AND HAS ALREADY DONE IT

*Commissioner Brigid Shea, Travis County, Texas*

At the start of the pandemic, most of us grabbed our laptops and started working from home. Many of us started using an online video conferencing tool like Zoom; this changed how we meet and communicate. A lot of us also discovered we really liked working from home.

So my story is about how the pandemic and the need for everyone to work from home resulted in a really successful program.

Here in Travis County, we have horrible traffic congestion. Austin has grown incredibly fast, and we have not been able to keep up with transit or transportation alternatives. With everyone working from home, our most congested roadways suddenly had no one on them. It was the cheapest, quickest solution to congestion and help save the planet.

My colleagues and I saw that we could encourage telecommuting as a long-term solution to some of our really big problems, the first being traffic congestion. The other big one was reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The transportation sector is the leading source of emissions in the U.S, and fighting climate change has been my major focus for 35 years.

We put together one of the most ambitious telecommuting programs for a local government in the country. We adopted a goal of having 75% of our eligible employees telecommute on a permanent basis. About half of our 5,000 employees did not have to physically be at work to do their job. Since we sent these people home at the start of the pandemic, we knew we could do it.

It was also clear who had to be at work. In Texas, the state requires counties to run jails. The corrections officers and jail staff had to be at work. We also needed staff at community centers to give out food and rental assistance.

Our county managers got to decide who could telecommute, and also if they needed their staff to come into the office once in a while. We were clear that was their decision. We also brought in Deloitte to work with us, to create the kind of skeleton of support and whatever practices we needed.

Shockingly, we were able to boost productivity. People got to work faster. They would commute from their bedroom to their kitchen, and start work faster. Since no one was stuck in traffic, morale also improved. People also needed to buy less gas.

We were able to meaningfully reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. We had worked with the organization Local Governments for Sustainability, or ICLEI. It developed a tool called Clear Path, which is used as a standard in many local governments to conduct greenhouse gas inventories and establish a baseline. ICLEI worked with us to identify where our emissions were coming from. For most local governments, the top source of energy and emissions is the power that you use for your buildings to heat and cool and keep the lights on. The other big source of greenhouse gas emissions was our employee commute and fleet vehicle emissions. Over a year or so, we could quantify that we had reduced greenhouse gas emissions from our employee commute by about 30%. That is the equivalent of taking about 1,200 cars a year off the road every year.

OVER A YEAR OR SO, WE COULD QUANTIFY THAT WE HAD REDUCED GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FROM OUR EMPLOYEE COMMUTE BY ABOUT 30%...THE EQUIVALENT OF ABOUT 1,200 CARS A YEAR.

There are even more benefits. The energy use in our buildings is a big source of greenhouse gas emissions. By having so many employees work from home, we reduce the energy in our buildings and we save money. We estimated we saved about \$1.3 million in both energy and water conservation. We can also calibrate thermostats throughout our larger buildings and account for differences in staffing from floor to floor.

We are still figuring out what to do with our excess real estate. Deloitte is helping us to assess what buildings we may want to consider selling or re-purposing, and also how to better use the space that we need.

This is my story of how we survived the pandemic and learned how to become more resilient. We know telecommuting works. It reduces congestion, boosts productivity, improves morale, saves money and helps save the planet. These are lessons we can all use.



## INCLUSIVE RESILIENCE (Continued)

### BALTIMORE SHORES ARE MORE

*Ava Richardson, Sustainability Director, City of Baltimore*

*Photo description: Saint Paul Street with view of downtown Baltimore.*

Baltimore is more than the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and I assure you it is here to stay through the challenges of today.

More than blue crabs, what you find here is an urban lab.

More than a blue-collar town,  
the city is full of scholars with PhDs in their communities.

More than a polity embracing sustainability,  
this city is an example of true community resiliency.

More than its demographics, statistics,  
the beauties of this city can be a cryptic message. A post-industrial vestige?



**SCORE**  
**A**

**City of Baltimore, MD**

Your jurisdiction has demonstrated best practice standards across adaptation and mitigation, has set ambitious goals and has made progress towards achieving those goals.

Baltimore provides more than a grim reality of future climate catastrophe. So let me tell you about that story in 2023.

- 1% increase in tree canopy,
- Made the A-List of cities with CDP (climate disclosure project)
- Community Resiliency Hubs for which there is not sub
- 20 million bags diverted equals trash averted
- Mr. Trash Wheel cleans the bay with zeal
- Not to mention, flood prevention

Are you listening?

BUT... still there exists a tension.

Sometimes we don't all share the same vision.

How often do you question someone's intentions?

We listen to the opposition to understand their position

But yet I question, how can any NOT see this as fundamental to any city's mission?

Decisions... Decisions... Decisions.

Our programs have provided a model for the nation to follow, but we must not let these stories ring hollow.

Baltimore is more than the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and I assure you it is here to stay.

*Photo descriptions (clockwise from left):  
Baltimore Inner Harbor - Mr. Trash Wheel, Mr. Trash Wheel statistics, City of Baltimore CDP Rating.*



## CHAPTER 2: CLIMATE ACTION

### LOVE AND COMMUNITY: TWO ESSENTIAL PIECES OF CLIMATE RESILIENCE

*Dr. Alan Kwok, Northern California Grantmakers/Philanthropy California*

The passing of bell hooks, whose many works include the book “All About Love: New Visions,” reminds us that all social change requires love. As she once said, “The vision of love is transformative, that challenges us in both our private and civic lives. I see the Civil Rights Movement as a great movement for social justice that is rooted in love. And it politicizes the notion of love that says real love will change you.”

Love is an action. Love challenges us to do better, to right the wrongs of the past, and to create a future where each person can fulfill their greatest potential and be free from harm.

In communities across the U.S. and around the world, we witness institutional policies and programs in public and private sectors that marginalize certain people and communities. We deny their voices that speak against unfair systems and processes. We blind ourselves to their knowledge and experiences that challenge our assumptions and ways of doing things.

These policies and programs affect people and communities every day, and the results are felt more acutely in the face of climate change. Data show that climate change disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, and that our current ways of reducing climate hazard risks and mitigating their impacts are perpetuating racial and socioeconomic inequities, making these communities more vulnerable to future climate change risks and impacts.

This is where love and community come in. Each of us must use our relational, political and financial power to create systems and processes that affirm the dignity, voices and experiences of those who have been silenced. To stay true to those values, our road to climate resilience must be guided by the following actions:

- 1.** Listen to and be guided by our front line communities. People and communities closest to climate change risks and impacts are most attuned to issues around risk reduction, disaster relief and recovery gaps. They are also the best positioned to design and implement climate change solutions.
- 2.** Critically examine existing systems and processes that marginalize certain people and communities. For example, are members of marginalized communities represented in climate and disaster resilience planning? Are they compensated for their time and expertise, or do we need to standardize that practice?
- 3.** Embed a justice lens in climate resilience. We need to ensure that climate actions advance the socioeconomic well-being of marginalized communities, and that resources are equitably allocated to people and communities that need them most.

The pursuit of climate resilience requires us to engage the imagination and the will to create a society where everyone is free from harm. We are at a juncture in the climate emergency. This moment requires all of us — the Whole Community — to act collectively in a manner that is rooted in love.





## THE DAY THE PIANO WENT UP THE HILL

Commissioner Dennis M. Knobloch, *Former Mayor, Valmeyer, Illinois*

Valmeyer is in southern Illinois, about 35 miles southeast of St. Louis. The town was built near a towering river bluff, about 4 miles from the Mississippi River. In the late 1960s, I heard stories about World War II in my high school history class. Even though that happened less than 25 years earlier, I considered it “ancient” history. That is how it was with flooding, too. I had never stood in floodwater myself, so Valmeyer’s flooding in the 1940s seemed like “ancient” history to me.

A series of floods hit Valmeyer in the 1940s. People used boats to travel on Main Street. Graduation was canceled in 1943, with Valmeyer High School grounds under 3 feet of water. When the water receded, residents shoveled out the mud, scrubbed the walls, and moved back in. The Mississippi had other ideas; it flooded again in 1944 and 1947. This was more than the residents and farmers could handle. They rallied their elected representatives, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had built a 35-mile-long earthen levee by 1950. It protected the county’s entire 60,000-acre floodplain. The Corps touted the levee as one of the best it had ever built. For many years, it protected Valmeyer.

By the early 1980s, my wife and I settled in Valmeyer to raise our three children. About that time, FEMA rolled into town with a fresh set of flood maps. Adopting the maps would let us all purchase flood insurance, but it would also bring some major restrictions. Any new buildings in Valmeyer would have to be at least 1 foot above the base flood elevation. On average, that would put new buildings 10 feet above the ground. That meant the end of growth in this community.

I was amused to note, the new maps showed that water from a 100-year flood would cover first base on our park’s baseball diamond, but not third base. How ridiculous! I was not shy about telling anyone from FEMA what I thought about their maps. Our levee had protected the area since 1950, and we had no reason to think that would change. A village committee tried to overturn these regulations, but we did not make much progress. In 1989, I ran for mayor to help lead the battle against FEMA and the floodplain regulations. I was elected to my second term in April 1993.

At that time, river levels were higher than normal, but we had no immediate concern. In June, that changed. A weather front stalled, and it rained, day after day. River levels rose, and by July, we started to fight the Mississippi River in earnest. Our firehouse was converted to a Flood Command Center. Every day before work, residents would stop by the FCC to check on the river level and the levee's status. A group of retirees came by each morning for a daily dose of information and fresh coffee. I had total faith in our levee system. I was sure that before long, the river and our lives would return to normal. There was no reason to leave town, or even pack up. My feet were dry, and they would stay that way.

One morning I told the coffee group about a battle brewing in my house. Several years earlier, we had purchased a new piano. It was the centerpiece of our living room. Every day, my wife reminded me that she did not want anything to happen to this beautiful piano. She felt that if floodwaters came, I would be too busy to save it. I told her that we were still protected by that well-built levee, and our piano would stay dry. I wanted all our residents to stay positive and fight hard to beat the rising river. If they saw the mayor packing his things and hauling them to higher ground, that could be devastating. Every day, I would tell them, "The piano is still in our living room, and that's where it's going to stay."

On July 25, the Mississippi was 16.5 feet over flood stage nearby, and sand boils were concerning. Some surrounding towns called for evacuation, and we wondered if we should do the same. That afternoon, we issued a voluntary evacuation order. We told residents that it would make sense to pack valuables and furniture and move them to higher ground. We still had no concern about the levee, but why not safeguard our cherished possessions? In a matter of minutes, my wife called the Command Center. Friends with trucks had just arrived at our house to help us move our possessions. I told her no, but she insisted. They removed several truckloads of furniture from our home that day. The next morning, when our coffee drinkers rolled in, they asked me about the piano, as usual. I looked at them and said, "Sorry, but yesterday, the piano went up the hill." They walked out the door and went home to pack.







By August 1, the river was 19.5 feet over flood stage. It began to overtop a levee about 10 miles north of town. By August 2, water started rolling into Valmeyer. It took three days to fill the 60,000-acre river basin. By August 4, our town had water up to 16 feet deep, with swift currents and large floating debris. Much of the town was underwater for over 2 months. We found later that more than 90% of our structures were substantially damaged. And that park on the east side of town? First base was under water, and third base was dry. FEMA representatives were quick to call that to my attention.

As a community, we met in a nearby town. Many people said they never wanted to be part of this type of disaster again. A local planner suggested that we move the town. Many citizens felt this was a crazy idea, but it might be the only way to save Valmeyer. We decided to do some research. We eventually discussed the idea in a series of meetings. Most of our residents said they would support the move. In weeks, we brought more than 100 residents to the table. We gave them the task of planning their new town. We identified a plot of land about 1.5 miles from the former location and, more importantly, 400 feet higher. In less than 2 months, we completed a preliminary plan for moving Valmeyer to higher ground. One week later, I testified before Congress about our plans. Looking for support, I knocked on doors in Washington and in our state capital, Springfield. By December 1993 – about 4 months after the flood – state and federal officials helped break ground for the new town.

However, our plans would fail if we could not get buyout funds for our flooded properties. By mid-1994, we secured the necessary funding to install utility systems at the new site, funding for buying out our old properties, and funding to demolish them and return the site to green space. By the end of 1995, residents began moving into their new homes. Much of the relocation was completed the next year.

Many students in Valmeyer schools now regard stories of the 1993 flood as “ancient history.” I hope that this and future generations will study history and learn from the experiences of their ancestors. Moving Valmeyer to higher ground was not easy, and recovery took longer than expected, but we saved the town and increased our population. Looking back, we feel we made the right decision. One thing is for certain...when Valmeyer residents hear a knock at their door today, they don't have to worry that it's their destructive and uncontrollable former neighbor — the Mississippi River.



## DISCOVER PUERTO RICO, THE ‘SHINING STAR’ – ENJOY POWERFUL HURRICANES, FREQUENT DROUGHTS AND LONG-LASTING BLACKOUTS

*Dr. Pablo Mendez Lazaro, Associate Professor at the Department of Environmental Health, University of Puerto Rico*

Climate extreme events are increasing in “intensity-duration-frequency” due to human-influenced climate change, and there is an increased potential for impacts due to the location of people, urbanization and critical infrastructures. Traditionally underserved communities in the Caribbean and island territories are systematically excluded from welfare, education and other societal services and benefits that help sustain good quality of life and well-being conditions. In August 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) declared drought disaster in Puerto Rico. Since then and all subsequent years, we have been experiencing in Puerto Rico slightly dry weather and water imbalance coupled with aged infrastructure, obsolete reservoirs full of sediment, unable to capture and store water compromising population needs.

In September 2017, the U.S. Caribbean Territories (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) suffered one of the most catastrophic hurricane seasons in recent history. Puerto Rico experienced major disruptions in essential services (e.g., potable water and electric power, telecommunications) and environmental health issues (e.g., water sanitation, contaminant exposure, vector-borne diseases, food hygiene and exposure to mold). Thousands of people died in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

Energy interruption occurs very frequently island-wide after Hurricane Maria, leaving thousands of residents (the elderly, people with pre-existing health conditions and disabilities) without electricity.

These experienced extreme events, droughts and powerful hurricanes are interacting with the institutional/environmental context of the island and the social determinants of health. For instance, the government of Puerto Rico declared bankruptcy in spring 2017, impacting all essential services (including budget cutoff in education, energy/water infrastructure, emergency preparedness and response). According to the Fourth National Climate Assessment for the Caribbean Region, “High levels of exposure and sensitivity to risk in the U.S. Caribbean region are compounded by a low level of adaptive capacity, due in part to the high costs of mitigation and adaptation measures relative to the region’s gross domestic product.”

In this context, extreme events in Puerto Rico joined with marginalization, absence of government climate actions, financial and political crisis, and inefficient governance promoted actions to advance social transformation and an uprising in community-based organizations that are pursuing sustainable development. With so many crises over the island, multiple communities are developing adaptive resilience, triggered by external/internal forces like the ones mentioned above.

We have been working with many community-based organizations to co-design long-term sustainable solutions and resources to the community members with a structured problem-solving participatory process, culminating in a sustainable action plan. These plans are based on the science SETS (socioecological and technological systems) and priorities for disaster risk reduction.

As an example, Corporación de Servicios de Salud, El Otao (COSSAO) is a community-based organization located in the municipality of Utuado (rural agricultural region) with 7,000 inhabitants with high rates of unemployment, elderly communities, lack of opportunities, young adults’ migration, etc. However, they have an extraordinarily strong leadership and capacity to start working on adaptive resilience. This organization, with a network of support composed of universities, foundations, state and federal agencies, is leading socioeconomic development and social transformation in rural communities of Puerto Rico. Now every day, they are promoting public health, providing healthcare access and agrotourism initiatives in underserved communities. We strongly believe communities in Puerto Rico have the potential to improve climate adaptation and mitigation actions by fostering stronger collaborations.





## SILA ALLANNUQTUQ (THE WEATHER IS CHANGING)

Mellisa Maktuayaq Johnson, *Inupiaq, Nome Eskimo Community Tribal Member*

Growing up and being raised in Sitnasuak (a.k.a. Nome, Alaska) with my Inupiaq maternal grandparents, the conversation of climate change and any impacts weren't directly spoken of. It was always indirect teachings. Though living in an urban setting, my family lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Right after school let out each spring, we spent moments at our different camps and harvested, gathered, hunted and processed different foods, depending on the time of year and what was available. Our Elders taught us to take what we needed and, if it wasn't available, to shift to something else. Reflecting on my upbringing and what we were taught, it was apparent the values that were shared among our family members were also mirrored in our Tribes.

As Tribal members of Nome Eskimo Community, we as Tribal members work together to communicate with others when and where to obtain our foods. We share the ecosystem changes, what is occurring with our food sources, such as lack of fat or balding in those foods, and if there were any odd behaviors. We also work together in sharing weather patterns or what to expect each season.

Today, in the time of our dependence on modernized technology, we still practice some of our ways to adapt with and to our changing environment. We continue to only harvest what is needed and do not over-harvest any food sources from the land, sea and air. We continue to seek guidance and direction from our Elders. As Tribal members and leaders in our Tribal governments, we are working to mentor, educate and share the knowledge with our youth so that they will be the leaders. Also, we continue to uplift those who are in tough leadership roles, such as Tribal members, in working to share Indigenous knowledge about how the climate is always changing and ways we adapt to it.



## WE ARE OF GREEN STUFF WOVEN: TRANSFORMATIVE FAITH FOR GRASSLANDS AND GLOBE

A poem by Rt. Rev. Cathleen Bascom, *Episcopal Bishop of Kansas*

### My Motivation for Climate Action

Is a Grasslands Story.

It Is a Global Story.

It Is a Spiritual Story.

### A Grasslands Story

Although I Was Born and Raised In Denver, Colorado and The Rocky Mountains, I Was Always Drawn to The Great Plains Which Fell Away to The East. I Am Sure I Was Imbued With Denver's Environmentally Sensitive Outlooks and Policies... But It is in The Grasslands That Stretch Between The Rockies and The Great Lakes That My Climate Action Is Truly Rooted. One Set of My Grandparents Were Wheat Farmers Who Had Survived The Dust Bowl. Nine Years of Black Skies But No Rain And The Tales of Surviving on Weeds Called Lamb's Quarters Lived Large in Their Legend. Climate Adaptation. Climate Resilience.

In-Between, I Lived in England...and Chicago... But in The 1990's, as A Young Episcopal Priest I Returned To Kansas, To The Flint Hills. Heading West On I-70, Beyond Topeka, The Road Steadily Rises... You Ascend One Grass-Covered Step, Then Another Into The Vestige Of A Sea Of Grass.

Now Only Three Percent of The Original Tallgrass Prairie Remains But A Remnant Ribbon of It Stretches in Panoramic Proportions. Sporadically Grazed But, Due To Shelves of Recalcitrant Limestone, Seldom if Ever has it been Plowed. A Sea of Grasses and Forbs That Come Upon You In Waves: At Shin Level, Sideoats Grama and Daisy Fleabane Knee-To-Hip-High Wading Pools of Wine-Tipped Little Bluestem Bergamot, Liatris, Beebalm, And Goldenrod... Indian Grass Plumes Shoulder-High And Big Bluestem Above Your Head. Extraordinarily, Only One-Third of These Plants Are Above Ground!

Their Drought and Fire-Resistant Roots Stretch in Complex Systems At Least Eight Feet Underneath, Teeming With Organisms. In Those First Days, I Simply Loved the Beauty and Biodiversity Of The Prairie.

It Took a Major **Flood-Event** To Make Me See the Prairie and Its Value For Climate Justice Clearly. In 2008, I Was Dean of The Episcopal Cathedral In Downtown Des Moines, Iowa. Des Moines Had Been Devasted by A Flood In 1993, And With Record-Breaking Snows And Large Rainfalls The City and County Prepared Themselves.

This was my first introduction to FEMA. Faith leaders were invited into the mix of civic and national leaders. While the assets of downtown Des Moines survived a levee was compromised flooding many low-income residents; a few of Des Moines' most racially diverse neighborhoods with devastating results. People with no flood insurance, little means to rebuild. The man whose home we rebuilt, died of mold-induced respiratory illness.

The faith communities provided shelter and legal counsel and building teams. But for me, my love of tallgrass prairie became forever wedded with a call for economic and racial justice. Climate change undeniably lies behind the flood events of Iowa, but so does the loss of grasslands. In Iowa, only 1/1000th of the original tallgrass prairie remains. In less than two generations the deep-rooted prairie plants that in Kansas survive drought and at the same time in Iowa absorb huge snowfalls and rain... have all been pulled out for short-rooted corn, soybeans and, of course, parking lots. State laws about buffers wiped away

to increase profit, and farmers tilling in order to plant every inch of their fields... the water flows downstream to the cities where the least-resourced people often suffer.

**What I now crucially understand** is that maintaining grasslands is among the most cost-effective and scalable solutions for mitigating climate change! Prairie-scape is well-known for its ability to absorb and store carbon in roots and soil.

But we must act; the World Wildlife Fund very recently released a report showing that the Great Plains lost over 2.5 million acres of grassland last year!

Both in Iowa and in Kansas we have been leveraging both church lands and the private land of Episcopalians to plant pocket prairies and larger legacy prairies. To create a network of creation care sites where sustainable practices are taught and cells of activism can organize around local environmental issues.



## II. Global Story

It Was Just After The 2008 Iowa Flood Event That My Story Gets Global. The Episcopal Church is Part of The Worldwide Anglican Communion It is A Network, A Community...And I Began to Meet Others: A Woman Dean of A Cathedral In Venezuela Shared With Me About Flooding and Drought There Due To the Devastation Of Native Landscape... First-Nations Episcopalians in Alaska Losing Sacred Ground and Livelihoods To Rising Sea Levels. We Are a Community, Network Of Sacred Storytellers Joined By Tales of Water and Suffering. Understanding The Global Impact, People Of Many Faiths Must Act. We Too Are Organizing. I Will Participate as Part Of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's Delegation to the UN Climate Summit CoP26. Anglicans From South Africa and Taiwan And Panama They Too Are Attending CoP26 Praying...Taking Climate Action...Engaged in Advocacy.

## III. Spiritual Story

Scientist Gus Speth, Founder of The World Resource Institute Wrote:

*"I Used to Think That The Top Environmental Problems Were Biodiversity Loss, Ecosystem Collapse And Climate Change. I Thought That Thirty Years Of Good Science Could Address These Problems. I Was Wrong...The Top Environmental Problems Are Selfishness, Greed and Apathy, And To Deal With Those We Need A Cultural And Spiritual Transformation."*

Joint Appeal Signed October 4th, 2021, By Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Taoist, Jain, Faith Leaders states:

*"We Have Inherited A Garden, We Must Not Leave A Desert To Our Children."*

In September, Pope Francis, The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, and Eastern Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I Made This Statement:

*"We Call On Everyone, Whatever Their Belief Or Worldview, To Endeavour To Listen To The Cry Of The Earth And Of People Who Are Poor, Examining Their Behaviour And Pledging Meaningful Sacrifices For The Sake Of The Earth Which God Has Given Us."*

Around The Globe, Small Bands of Eco-Activists – People Like You! – Are Working to Save One Reef, One Rain Forest, One River at A Time. And Some Are Trying to Save The Ever-Shrinking Remnants of Tall Grass Prairie.

I Have Written a Novel – *Of Green Stuff Woven* – To Portray This Work.

The Title is from *Leaves of Grass* Where Walt Whitman Writes: *We Are of Hopeful Green Stuff Woven.*

For Jews and Christians, In the first Chapter of the Sacred Text Of Genesis God Intends a Reality In Which Humans and Nature Are Discovering, In Collaboration What They Can Become.

In Christian Teaching, via Augustine: *We Are Not Fully Human Without The Natural Order, And Creation Is Not What It Is Intended To Be Without Humanity.*

Chief Seattle said It This Way: *Whatever Befalls The Earth, Befalls The Sons And Daughters Of The Earth. We Did Not Weave The Web Of Life, We Are Merely A Strand In It. Whatever We Do To The Web, We Do To Ourselves*

Spiritual People, Many Faiths, Are Ready to Be Allies For Climate Action For The Sake of The Grasslands The Global Community And The Creator of All Things.



## CHAPTER 3: EQUITABLE RESILIENCE

### REMEMBERING OUR MOST VULNERABLE DURING TIMES OF NEED

Valerie Novack, *formerly Center for American Progress*

I was still in high school when Hurricane Katrina hit. I never expected that years after that tragedy, I would learn that people with disabilities, older adults, and others were still routinely left out of the emergency planning conversation. A decade later I found myself tasked with finding best practices for accessible evacuation plans because, despite the lessons we should have learned after Katrina, this still was a problem. Instead of finding examples of successful efforts to reduce the vulnerability of disabled people by creating more inclusive processes, I found lawsuits against some of our biggest cities for discrimination in their emergency response practices. It was bad enough that Katrina had to happen before disability access became a requirement, but it was negligent to have not changed further since then.

This realization fueled my trajectory into not just the inclusion of, but direction by, people with disabilities in response and resilience. This was solidified further in 2017 with Hurricane Harvey. This time I was old enough to respond by volunteering on a hot line for affected people with disabilities where the results of inequity, apathy, and unawareness were overwhelming: inaccessible shelters, separated families, forgotten residents, and then hunger and homelessness. I've continued to watch this cycle event after event in various communities. I am fortunate to have spent the last handful of years working alongside dedicated disability advocates and disabled experts in preparing for and responding to disasters within their own communities and helping to share what I learn with others.

We cannot continue to only write and talk about building networks, practices, and communities that are prepared for and resilient to disaster events. We must actively engage in the changes necessary to make them so, and we hope that resources such as these are the start to that work.





## EQUITABLE RESILIENCE (Continued)

### MOBILIZING EQUITABLE RESILIENCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

*Anna Marandi, The Pew Charitable Trusts (formerly National League of Cities)*

For many years, it was only the early adopters in local government and often just larger, “blue” cities that were integrating equity into sustainability, climate, and resilience plans.

They codified practices within their respective departments, designed toolkits, and presented their innovative ideas at climate conferences. Yet it was still a niche topic, and the majority of staff and elected officials in cities wondered, what is this whole racial equity thing about? Would it involve me? Is it mandatory? Then, over the summer, the Black Lives Matter protests transpired, and in nothing short of a momentous shift, we began to hear of elected officials who had attended a racial equity workshop and wanted to share what they learned with colleagues at the city, or communities that were reexamining policing practices, and staff who were making changes to long-standing programs to incorporate racial equity. Many local leaders and officials began to realize how budgetary changes and more inclusive planning processes could quickly impact people’s lives.

The change in attitude and eagerness to get at the root of cities’ complex challenges triggered by the events of 2020 has been remarkable to witness. However, not all communities, elected officials, or staff are on board, and we have a long way to go in providing the training and funding needed for local governments to realize their full potential as leaders in resilience and equity.



We also have a long way to go culturally and socially in encouraging individuals to engage in deep, inward reflection so we can all better understand our respective roles in a racist system—not as a personal flaw, but as something we were born into and have the power to change.

America's cities and suburbs were designed with race in mind, and the funding to do so came from state and federal governments. Now, in the age of climate change and with an urgent need for investments in resilience, we must redesign with race in mind. But cities cannot do this alone, and in fact it will be impossible for smaller cities to plan and protect for the future without collaborating with their neighbors. By their design, metro regions are fragmented by race and class, and it is ultimately at this scale that we can address challenges around infrastructure, ecosystems, social systems, and local economies. Working across jurisdictions at the metro regional scale is difficult, but essential. Funding and technical support from state and federal agencies to support regional collaboration could ensure that smaller communities—particularly those with a lower tax base—are not left behind. Cities, though they are already proving to be pivotal leaders in resilience and equity, need this critical support to address challenges that are beyond their scale and scope, such as climate-induced migration and buyouts. I hope we continue to generate and foster more of these inter-scalar partnerships and programs in the years to come.



## EQUITABLE RESILIENCE (Continued)

### NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US

*Jake White, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) –  
Houston (formerly National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders)*

“Nothing about us without us” hearkens to a dark history but also to our present, where policies are imposed on people without engaging those that the policies would impact. Credited to the disability movement, this theme has grown to incorporate multiple types of marginalized communities and subgroups. It is now a refrain that has grown louder as more and more vulnerable communities have battled with rampant increases in costs for dwindling amounts of property, while governing bodies produce sparkling multi-point plans to benefit the people and the land. Being rooted in this phrase is essential to ensuring equitable development. If you represent the “us,” it is also essential to know what you need to sustain yourself and to thrive, once you are asked what you need.

As a trained planner, I’ve used many types of indicators that diagnose a neighborhood as struggling. Most of the signs of a struggling neighborhood can be attributed to local disinvestment, but just because a neighborhood does not receive local investment does not mean that the neighborhood has not created a community with inherent worth. The difficulty those communities face is translating that worth into something that can be understood by those in decision-making roles. At the National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders (NALCAB), that is where we focus our energies. We build the capacity of local nonprofit agencies to translate qualitative values into quantitative reasons for stakeholders to support the resilience of marginalized and vulnerable



communities. We aim to redirect the flow of capital to serve those communities in a manner that benefits them. In my position, it is not uncommon to engage with an organization that is looking for a way to explain to leaders that although their community floods, its small businesses have value beyond the cost of the building in which they reside. Although a large, mixed-income development may boost my neighborhood's appeal, my community may lose residents for whom this is the only affordable area where they can get services in their primary language.

At NALCAB, we see this as a challenge to be addressed from multiple fronts. While our mission is to strengthen the economy by advancing economic mobility in Latino communities, we do this through building assets, as our name states. This has taken the form of building place-based cohorts, allowing them to connect to their communities and project their needs, and then helping them build plans of action that will serve their community. By doing this, our members can be prepared to use their own analysis and voices to strongly advocate for what is needed in the service of "us."



## EQUITABLE RESILIENCE (Continued)

### REMEMBERING AND INCLUDING THE VOICES OF NATIVE PEOPLE

*Nikki Cooley, Diné Nation, Indigenous Scientist and Educator and Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals*

I am of the Towering House Clan, born for the Reed People Clan; my maternal grandfathers are of the Water that Flows Together Clan, and paternal grandfathers are of the Manygoats clan. I am from the Earth and Sky, and of the Diné Nation.

I am very fortunate to have grown up on Diné Bikeyah, Navajo Land, which is mostly within the boundaries set forth by the U.S. government. With the majority of the land base in Arizona, there is also land in New Mexico and Utah. I grew up in Shonto and Blue Gap, Arizona, which are small but vibrant communities. Shonto has a gas station, a K-12 school, and a post office.

Families largely depended on livestock and crops, tended to carefully and lovingly in the hot, arid region. When I was not attending school, my main responsibility was to assist my grandparents in caring for their livestock and crops. I often walked after the sheep and goats as they grazed for miles, sometimes 20 miles round trip, from sunrise until sundown. I accompanied my grandfather through the cornstalks checking for rodents, insects or weeds. I listened to my relatives as they held ceremonies and prayers late into the night or in the early morning, praying for the well-being of all living things, including the plants and animals. At my parents' home, I would bring 3- to 5-gallon buckets of water

into the house from water barrels to use for food, washing and drinking. My father and mother hauled water from windmills (most are now dried up), as the Navajo Nation never had and still does not have adequate water infrastructure. From a young age, I inherently knew the value of water, fresh air, organic foods, medicinal and subsistence animals and plants. I knew the value of harvesting crops and drying them for use in the colder, leaner months. No electricity or running water—no problem. I never considered myself poor or unfortunate, because I had everything I needed to survive: water, food and love. Now I know I was one of the fortunate ones.

**OUR WORK AS STEWARDS OF THE EARTH AND SKY HAS BECOME EVEN MORE URGENT AND IMPERATIVE TO THE SURVIVAL OF OUR TRIBAL/INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND PEOPLE.**

As I entered my 41st year of life, I found myself thinking more about how I grew up. Several weekends spent in Shonto during the summer of 2020 allowed me to experience the most unforgiving heat. From growing up, I remembered the heat of summers and cold months of winter, but never the parched air and landscape and relentless heat. Now, the landscape is responding by not providing the usual lush greenery for our livestock to fatten up on, and watering holes are dried up. This forces us to drive a bit further to fill water tanks. My parents have had to reduce the number of their livestock and condense their cornfields. The corn does not grow as tall, melon and squash plants are reluctant to sprout, and animals such as ravens and rabbits are growing braver and finding ways to bust into the fenced field to feast. The rainy seasons do not fill the water holes, and winter months do not bring the many feet of snow I

often trudged through to get to the bus stop. Life is not only changing but bringing extreme hardship to a landscape and people that are already struggling to get by.

In my professional work with tribes and Indigenous communities across the country, including Alaska, I am hearing similar stories. Different landscapes and ecosystems, but the impacts on livelihoods, spiritual and physical well-being and traditions echo loudly. I hear stories of ceremonies and subsistence activities delayed or postponed due to plants not being ready to harvest or animals that have migrated elsewhere, following water and food. Elders tell of the unbalance humans have caused to Mother Earth and Father Sky. In the western way, we call it climate change. The disruption has certainly caused the delay or halt in the intergenerational sharing and teachings of knowledge and practices.

Our work as stewards of the Earth and Sky has become even more urgent and imperative to the survival of our tribal/indigenous culture and people. The climate crisis that has and will affect us for years to come has become the focus of many tribal/indigenous people, as we are often on the forefront of the impacts. Despite being sovereign nations, we are faced with poor or nonexistent infrastructures to serve our communities. Despite being sovereign nations, we are often excluded or forgotten when it comes to decision-making processes, funding opportunities, and discussions, whether on the national or international stage. Tribal/Indigenous people are the First People of this nation, survived forced relocations and removals from traditional homelands, and are now emerging as the leaders in climate change adaptation and mitigation. True, long-term partnership and engagement are required and needed. These are a few of the many reasons tribes and indigenous people should always be a part of the conversation and not just a check mark to satisfy diversity requirements.

# CLOSING

The Resilient Nation Partnership Network is honored to champion this movement with our partners. These partners work across fields in resilience, mitigation, adaptation, climate, equity and more. We hope this resource is a useful guide to help advance your resilience objectives across the Whole Community.

To learn more, or to share your thoughts and ideas, reach out to us at:  
<https://www.fema.gov/partnerships/resilient-nation-partnership-network>  
[FEMA-ResilientNation@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMA-ResilientNation@fema.dhs.gov).

To continued partnership,

**Resilient Nation Partnership Network Team**



“ ”

Fight for the things that you care about,  
but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.

– Ruth Bader Ginsburg



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