

## BACKGROUND

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### Project Intent

Communities today face an increasingly complex set of challenges. Disruptions from a range of acute shocks, such as natural disasters, pandemics, cyberattacks, infrastructure failure, and loss of key industries, are becoming more frequent and intense. Additionally, communities and systems are experiencing chronic stressors such as aging infrastructure, environmental degradation, and persistent poverty, which negatively impact quality of life and wellbeing, worsen the impacts of shocks, and undermine our ability to recover and thrive.

Increasing national resilience is a complex undertaking and requires unified engagement across systems at all levels to build our collective resilience, so the nation not only survives, but prospers, in the face of these ever-evolving challenges. However, the connection between stressors and shocks is often not reflected in disaster and community planning efforts, resulting in many important stakeholders not seeing themselves as a core part of the solution or being unsure of their role in resilience.

FEMA is spearheading an effort to create guidance and resources for the whole community to help everyone understand and fulfil their critical roles related to increasing national resilience. These resources will promote a common understanding of resilience, incorporate the relationship between stressors and shocks, address the critical roles of all stakeholders, and inspire fresh, forward-looking and people-centered planning approaches—going beyond “business as usual”—to move the needle on increasing community and national resilience. FEMA recognizes there are many organizations and local communities that have been leading resilience efforts and research for the past decade and plans to use their knowledge and experiences to inform national guidance. FEMA seeks to build on existing research and practice, working with the whole community to fill knowledge or information gaps and expand the reach of resilience information.

With the complexity of this topic and the need to create a truly whole community effort to increase resilience, FEMA is seeking to engage a broad range of stakeholders to inform development of resilience guidance and resources. FEMA wants input from across the whole community—across disciplines, sectors, levels of government, communities, and individuals—on a range of topics, such as what actions and partnerships are needed to increase national resilience, the roles and responsibilities of whole community stakeholders, innovative approaches for successful resilience planning, and the resources needed to help the whole community understand and execute their roles.

FEMA will use previous resilience research and stakeholder input to develop resilience guidance, aiming to distribute a draft in September 2023 for national review and feedback to ensure the guidance meets stakeholder needs. The guidance will then be updated to reflect this additional stakeholder feedback, with the target of publishing the guidance in the spring of 2024. FEMA will also consider development of supplemental resources, such as case studies and example resilience metrics, to meet stakeholder needs. These supplemental resources will be developed and published on an as needed basis after the resilience guidance is published.

### Document Purpose

This document is intended to provide stakeholder groups with background on the project and key resilience concepts so that stakeholders can effectively engage in discussions and provide input and feedback into project efforts. For more information about this effort, please go to: <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/plan/resilience-guidance>.

## KEY CONCEPTS

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Below are draft key resilience concepts including a definition, vision, and principles, which have been developed based on available research and engagement with key partners. These draft concepts set the stage for development of the resilience guidance and will be revised as needed based on feedback obtained through the engagement effort and to align with other Federal efforts.

### Definition of Resilience

For the purposes of this effort, resilience is defined as the ability to prepare for threats and hazards, adapt to changing conditions, and withstand and recover rapidly from disruptions.

### Vision for Resilience

Our nation, and all nations around the globe, will continue to face a myriad of episodic and chronic shocks and stressors. We must come together as a nation to build our resilience and work towards a future where everyone collectively, equitably, and efficiently adapt to changing circumstances—or when necessary, transform; mitigate, address, and recover from shocks of all types and severity; and reduce the impacts of chronic, long-term stressors that negatively impact our communities, such as persistent poverty, despair and isolation, aging infrastructure, pervasive chronic disease, stressed food systems, endemic crime, lack of quality affordable housing, and natural resource depletion. It is essential to work across systems and sectors to build a future where the goal is not withstanding or rebounding to the prior state; but advancing resilience so that all people and communities thrive — and where all people have a fair chance to participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

The nation cannot be passive and engage reactively to shocks and stressors. National resilience will not be achieved if considered only when responding to a disruption or when primarily focused on infrastructure (e.g., buildings, power, water, transportation, communication). Instead, sustained, proactive action that encompasses systems, communities, and people is needed during non-emergency periods. Resilience is advanced by assessing and addressing vulnerabilities, proactively building capacity that benefits and protects communities, and creating integrated approaches to anticipated impacts. Further, systems must be better positioned to evolve in ways that seek to address community and individual resilience with thriving as the primary outcome of all policy, programs, and funding opportunities during blue and grey sky periods.

Our vision includes:

- **A resilient built environment** that supports a high quality of life while avoiding, minimizing, or withstanding the impacts of shocks and stressors. It includes adequate, safe, secure, and humane housing, and infrastructure systems that are robust, adaptable, and support economic growth and innovation. There is equitable access to services and amenities, such as green space, transportation, energy, and broadband. Land use and development consider current and future risks and impacts.

- **Resilient economies** that support all members of society. These economies are built around a diverse range of industries and build on regional strengths and assets. Educational and workforce development systems facilitate lifelong learning, cultivate talent, and connect the workforce to employers.
- **Resilient systems** that provide valuable networks and resources to sustain people and communities. Examples of systems include governance, food and other supply chains, education, healthcare, public health, and human services.
- **A resilient society** that has a robust sense of belonging and a high degree of trust. Empowerment and cooperation within and across communities is fostered and supports strong civic engagement. Effective, inclusive governance, transparency, and equitable decision-making with meaningful opportunities for community participation provide the foundation for establishing and fulfilling a common vision.
- **Resilient people** with optimal health and wellbeing. The whole community has a sense of security, social connectedness, and diminished vulnerability that serve as the foundation for thriving and resilient communities.
- **A resilient natural environment** with clean land, air, and water and healthy ecosystems that can withstand shocks and stressors. The strong health and long-term sustainability of the environment supports the built environment, economy, society, and community health and well-being.

### Key Principles

The following principles set the foundation for understanding and guiding action to create a resilient nation.

- **All Threats and Hazards:** To be resilient, shocks and stressors must be proactively identified and addressed. Shocks are generally short-duration or acute events that cause a disruption to normal life. Examples include natural and human-caused hazards, significant market fluctuation or failure, and sudden closing of key employers. Stressors are chronic, longer-term conditions that weaken a community or system over time and can cause disruption to community or system functions and well-being. Examples include declining industries, aging infrastructure, endemic crime, diminishing social capital, and lack of quality affordable housing. It is critical to consider the layered or compounding relationship of acute shocks and chronic stressors on people, communities, and systems. When a shock impacts one or more components of a community, consequences ripple throughout the rest of the system. Similarly, stressors to one or more components of the system typically make the entire community more susceptible to shocks. Building lasting resilience capabilities requires addressing both shocks and stressors to better address short and long-term impacts.
- **People Centered and Equitable<sup>1</sup>:** A resilient community centers the needs of people who may be harmed and addresses those needs so everyone can survive and thrive despite the shocks or stressors they encounter. Resilience requires aspiring to eliminate disparities by focusing resources on communities that have been historically marginalized or disadvantaged. There are multiple dimensions

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<sup>1</sup> EO 13985 defines equity as “the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.”

to tackling equity. Examples include addressing risk and vulnerability factors that result in underserved and marginalized communities being disproportionately impacted by shocks and stressors; increasing access to services and benefits to underserved and marginalized communities that often bear a disproportionate burden of costs; and ensuring participation in decision-making so the voices and interests of underserved and marginalized communities are heard.

- **Adaptive:** Societal and individual resilience requires that approaches be flexible and adaptable to new conditions over time. The ability to thrive despite changing circumstances depends on the ability to continuously learn and integrate that learning into systems. Healthy adaptation and forward movement balances retaining core identity while continuously growing, increasing the capability to respond effectively to future shocks and stressors from a stronger position. It is equally critical to recognize that some challenges are too big for adaptation; fundamental, transformative changes may be necessary.
- **Collaborative:** Fostering community-centered collaboration, within and outside of government, is essential to ensuring a resilient, equitable, and thriving future. The power to envision the future of the community and build its resilience through their own solutions and resources resides with community members. Communities must energize and empower everyone to help develop solutions that are informed by science using transparent processes. Assessing risk, understanding vulnerability, identifying solutions, and taking action requires meaningful participation, input, and buy-in from community members, especially those who may be underserved or marginalized. Meaningful engagement and partnerships across the public, private, and non-profit sectors are essential and must be strengthened, with clear responsibilities to ensure each contributor can participate through appropriate measures. To advance resilience, common resilience goals and outcomes need to be identified, as well as metrics to monitor progress. Without shared goals, outcomes, and metrics, progress and improvements in system resilience cannot be evaluated. It is not enough to measure process and activity. Instead, metrics need to focus on outcomes and the degree to which activities are making progress towards resilience goals. It is important that a set of common resilience goals be identified that are applicable across types of systems (e.g., economic, social, infrastructure) and have valid indicators to evaluate change and adjust action.
- **Sustainable:** Resilience requires a focus on sustainability—both for the community’s resources and approaches. The nation is fortunate to have a wealth of social, economic, and natural and built environment resources, but these resources are finite and need good stewards for future generations. A long-term approach is needed to create solutions that serve current and future needs; approaches must work for other communities, future generations, and ecosystems, ensuring the sustainability of communities and resources long-term.
- **Interdependent:** Resilience requires applying systems thinking and systems-based approaches. Communities are complex systems made up of people, traditions, and a diverse array of social, physical, environmental, and economic assets and livelihoods. Communities are also dynamic and constantly changing. Therefore, an improved understanding of systems and their interdependencies are primary to building capacities that enable resilience of people, communities, and systems. Resilience can be enhanced by increasing communities’ awareness of resources across sectors and enabling nimble access to cross-sector resources. A systems-based approach to planning and risk management acknowledges the interconnectedness of systems and applies a participatory, interdisciplinary perspective that takes both shocks and stressors into account. The system as a whole must be examined, factoring in interdependencies and preferencing solutions and investments that address a range of objectives and build lasting capacity.