CONNECTING WITH INTERNAL & EXTERNAL NETWORKS FOR EXPERTISE & RESOURCES MODULE

Strategies for Community-Centric Planning

PURPOSE

Now that you have completed Community Network Mapping, this module equips community leaders, Extension professionals, and partners to identify, connect with, and leverage internal and external networks to strengthen community resilience efforts. Local networks often successfully access resources by linking to regional or national ones, whether internal or external.Community Network Mapping

Core Principle: You do not need to have all the expertise—effective resilience action depends on building strong connections to those who do and integrating that knowledge into local decision-making.

Outcome: Participants will map relevant expertise networks, establish strategic partnerships, and apply external knowledge to local resilience initiatives.

WHY NETWORK CONNECTIONS MATTER

Resilience challenges are complex and interdisciplinary. No single organization can address them alone.

Strong network connections allow communities to: - Access reliable data, research, and applied knowledge - Gain technical and planning expertise - Leverage funding and resources - Strengthen credibility and decision-making

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TYPES OF NETWORKS TO ENGAGE

1. Internal Networks

- Extension programs
- Local government departments
- Existing community organizations

2. External Networks

- Federal agencies (e.g., NOAA, USDA)

- State and regional technical experts
- University research teams
- Nonprofits and technical assistance providers

SECTION 1: MAPPING YOUR NETWORKS

FACILITATED ACTIVITY (30–45 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions: Ask participants to identify both internal and external networks relevant to their work.

Prompt Questions:

- Who provides relevant technical, community, economic, environmental, public health, or planning expertise?
- What organizations are we already connected to?
- Where are our gaps?

WORKSHEET 1: NETWORK INVENTORY

Network Type	Organization	Expertise	Current Relationship	Opportunity to Engage
Internal				
External				

SECTION 2: IDENTIFYING PRIORITY CONNECTIONS

WORKSHEET 2: PRIORITY PARTNERS

Organization	Why They Matter	Potential Value	First Step to Connect	Timeline

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SECTION 3: BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

STRATEGIES

1. Start with Relationships

- Initiate conversations, not requests
- Learn about partner priorities and goals

2. Align Mutual Benefits

- Identify shared goals
- Clarify how collaboration benefits both parties

3. Define Roles Clearly

- Establish expectations early
- Avoid duplication of effort

4. Maintain Ongoing Communication

- Schedule regular check-ins
- Share updates and progress

SECTION 4: APPLYING EXPERTISE LOCALLY

KEY PRACTICE

External expertise must be translated into local context.

WORKSHEET 3: USING EXPERTISE

Resource/Partner	What They Provide	How It Applies Locally	Who Uses It	Outcome

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SECTION 5: FACILITATED ACTIVITY – CONNECTION STRATEGY

Activity (30 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions: Have participants develop a plan to engage one new partner.

Prompt Questions:

- Who should we connect with next?
- What is our goal for the connection?
- How will we initiate contact?

SECTION 6: FACILITATOR GUIDANCE – WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS

Do This:

- Build long-term relationships, not one-time contacts
- Use existing networks as entry points
- Translate technical knowledge into practical use
- Bring partners into community conversations

Avoid This:

- Treating experts as external consultants only
- Over-relying on a single partner
- Failing to follow up or maintain relationships

SECTION 7: REFLECTION

Reflection Questions

- Where are we lacking expertise?
- Are we leveraging existing networks effectively?
- Are our partnerships mutually beneficial?

ACTION COMMITMENT

Within the next 30 days, we will:

SECTION 8: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Resilience & Data Networks

- FEMA Community Resilience. *Resilience and risk-management resources* https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/risk-management/resilience

Research & Technical Expertise

- Extension Foundation National Extension. *resources, networks, and professional development* https://extension.org
- Community Toolbox. *Community assessment, planning, and partnership tools* https://ctb.ku.edu

Extension & Applied Networks

- USDA Rural Development. *Community and economic development resources and technical support* https://www.rd.usda.gov

Community Science & Engagement

- CoCoRaHS. *Community-based weather data collection* https://www.cocorahs.org

FINAL NOTE

Strong communities are not isolated; they are connected.

By building and leveraging networks of expertise, communities can access the knowledge, resources, and partnerships needed to strengthen community resilience.

Your role is to **connect, translate, and activate expertise for local impact.**

(End of Module)