

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS A CLIMATE ADAPTATION STRATEGY MODULE

Strategies for Community-Centric Planning

PURPOSE

This module helps community leaders, Extension professionals, and partners understand that **community engagement itself is a core climate adaptation strategy**—not just a step in the process.

Core Principle: Strong relationships, trust, and networks increase a community's ability to respond to and recover from climate impacts.

Key Insight (Scott Laursen): “Place-based networks and relationships are themselves climate adaptation.”

Outcome: Participants will learn how to intentionally build and strengthen community networks as a foundational resilience strategy.

WHY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT = ADAPTATION

Climate resilience is often framed as infrastructure, technology, or policy.

But in practice, communities rely on: - Relationships - Communication - Trust - Local coordination

During climate events, it is often **networks—not systems—that determine outcomes**.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Communities with strong engagement: - Share information quickly - Coordinate resources effectively - Support vulnerable populations - Recover faster after disruptions

Communities without strong engagement: - Experience confusion and delays - Have fragmented responses - Struggle to mobilize support

SECTION 1: MAPPING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

FACILITATED ACTIVITY (30–45 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions: Ask participants to map key relationships and networks in their community.

Prompt Questions:

- Who communicates with whom during emergencies?
- Which groups are well connected?
- Which groups are isolated?

WORKSHEET 1: COMMUNITY NETWORK MAP

Group/Organization	Role in Community	Connections	Strength of Relationships

SECTION 2: ASSESSING NETWORK STRENGTH

WORKSHEET 2: NETWORK RESILIENCE ASSESSMENT

Factor	Strong	Moderate	Weak	Notes
Trust among partners				
Communication pathways				
Inclusion of diverse groups				
Coordination during events				

SECTION 3: BUILDING STRONGER NETWORKS

STRATEGIES

1. Invest in Relationships Before Crisis

- Build connections during non-emergency times
- Host regular gatherings and conversations

2. Strengthen Communication Channels

- Ensure multiple ways to share information
- Connect formal and informal networks

3. Expand Inclusion

- Bring in underrepresented groups
- Address barriers to participation

4. Support Network Connectors

- Identify individuals who bridge groups
- Empower them with resources and information

WORKSHEET 3: NETWORK STRENGTHENING PLAN

Strategy	Target Network	Action Steps	Who Leads	Timeline

SECTION 4: FROM ENGAGEMENT TO ADAPTATION

KEY SHIFT

From: - Engagement as outreach

To: - Engagement as infrastructure

WORKSHEET 4: APPLYING ENGAGEMENT AS ADAPTATION

Engagement Activity	Adaptation Benefit	Who Benefits	Outcome

SECTION 5: FACILITATOR GUIDANCE – WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS

Do This:

- Treat relationships as assets
- Build trust consistently over time
- Connect different networks together
- Recognize informal leaders and connectors

Avoid This:

- Treating engagement as a one-time task
 - Focusing only on formal organizations
 - Ignoring social dynamics and trust
 - Waiting until a crisis to build relationships
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SECTION 6: REFLECTION

Reflection Questions

- How strong are our community relationships?
 - Who is not connected to existing networks?
 - Are we investing enough in relationship-building?
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ACTION COMMITMENT

Within the next 30 days, we will:

SECTION 7: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Community Resilience & Social Networks

- U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit <https://toolkit.climate.gov> *Examples of community-based resilience strategies*

- NOAA Social Science Resources <https://www.climate.gov> *Insights on human dimensions of climate adaptation*
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Community & Network-Based Approaches

- Asset-Based Community Development Institute <https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute> *Framework for building on community strengths*
 - Community Tool Box (University of Kansas) [Community Tool Box](#) *Guidance on building partnerships and community networks*
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Social Capital & Resilience

- RAND Learn & Tell Toolkit [Community Resilience: Learn and Tell Toolkit](#) *Intended to teach people about community resilience so that they can then teach others*
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FINAL NOTE

Infrastructure matters—but relationships determine how effectively it is used.

Communities that invest in trust, connection, and collaboration are better prepared to adapt to climate challenges.

Your role is to **build and strengthen the networks that enable resilience.**

(End of Module)