

Lee County Recovery Task Force Community Resilience Workshop

Session 1 – Meeting Minutes

8:30 AM – 10:30 AM | JUNE 8, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | RESILIENCE HUBS

Call to Order

On June 8, 2023, the Workshop facilitators, Jon Romine, Tessa LeSage, and Lee Mayfield, convened the Community Resilience Workshop: Resilience Hubs at 8:35 AM with the following panelists present:

- Alvin Henderson
- Caitie Eck
- Ben Abes
- Madison Mitchell
- Kate Major
- Kendra Abkowitz
- Kristin Baja
- Paul Nelson

The following Branch members were present:

- Phyllis Calloway
- Troy Churchill
- Dan O'Berski
- Maria Espinoza
- Stephanie Wardein
- Therese Everly
- Marco Villalobos
- Angela Katz
- Diana Giraldo

Workshop Topic Discussion

The facilitators asked what types of Lee County assets should be looped in from a community perspective. The panelists suggested the following:

- Building upon the infrastructure that has already been created (i.e., the network of agencies United Way has established);
- Engaging with individual entities that are constants in the community;
- Creating a sense of trust with community members during “blue sky” days; and
- Leveraging relationships before, short-term, and after disasters, and during recovery efforts.

The facilitators asked how to make the network more accessible. The panelists suggested the following:

- Changing the emergency management way of thinking to see what is working well;
- Looking at the business community to provide lifeline services prior to and after disasters;
- Working with groups to figure out how to best support the community;
- Involving the business community through resilient hubs;
- Having locations prioritized in communities where they are most needed; and
- Shifting power to community members to be more autonomous and identify what resources might be needed.

The facilitators asked if there were hubs or locations where these groups were working out of. Ms. Atkin stated that United Way partners with boots-on-the-ground organizations within the communities; the organizations communicate the community needs with United Way. In terms of Hurricane Ian, many of the organizations were able to provide resources or serve as distribution centers following the Hurricane.

Mr. Romine asked what a resilient hub was. The panelists identified the following:

- Physical buildings and locations in neighborhoods that provide the daily services and support to community members within that defined area;
- A node or place for social cohesion;
- A way for organizations to funnel resources;
- Areas that can withstand the hazards and disruptions when they come up and provide support during and after a disaster;
- Trusted community institutions in a neighborhood;

- An opportunity to partner with agencies to enhance a community preparedness mindset;
- A place people trust and go to on a regular basis; and
- An opportunity to change the mentality so it is not solely FEMA-Hazard focused.

Ms. Roberts stated that one of the actions and projects to consider includes compounding synergies discussed during the Workshop. She stated that if Cape Coral will build a shelter at a recreation center or park, then capabilities for those additional functions need to be incorporated upstream in the planning for these infrastructures. She then emphasized the need for a location for the structures and the need to incorporate partnerships between different branches, to enhance education and resource availability for the community. She stated that the North Fort Myers Recreation Center would make a good resilience hub, but it is in a flood zone, therefore it might need hardening or adaptation planning. She stressed the importance of thinking outside of the box for resilience hubs.

Ms. Atkins suggested looking at schools and libraries when considering new resilience hubs. She also urged forging partnerships with local cultural organizations to ramp up education during “blue sky days.” Ms. Giraldo stated the importance of thinking of partnerships that can be activated during a disaster. Therefore, thoughts about staff augmentation are key for providing post-disaster assistance.

Ms. Hagen said that such strategies have been taking place in Lee County; building and working with community members has helped with resilience. She stated the importance of making the invisible more visible by building relationships, funding positions, and building opportunities for people to become neighborhood specialists.

Mr. Abes stated that all the components are there but have not been put together during the “blue-sky days.” He stated that there should be pre-storm planning to establish how partners will work together. Additionally, he stated the importance of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) obtaining the community needs to identify real-time gaps. Entities such as United Way and Collaboratory were organizations suggested to lead the efforts.

Mr. O’Berski stated that it could cost less to harden the current infrastructure, then asked what it would take to harden them. The panelists suggested the following:

- Pre-arranging partner organizations during “blue sky days” prior to emergencies;
- Identify facilities that can be hardened;
- Look for alternative facilities (other than schools) that can be used for any type of disruption, and that already serve year-round;
- Consider converting resilience hubs to pivot for EOC needs;

- Building a system that can shift based on nodes around community needs;
- Finding partnerships for resilience hubs for a collective response;
- See what works and formalize a strategic plan; and
- Identify organizations and build relationships ahead of time to minimize delays in responses.

Ms. Giraldo asked how resilience hubs can be prepared for disaster response when people lose their transportation and are unable to get to where resources are. The panelists suggested the following:

- Holding round tables to have community understanding of what the needs are;
- Implementation of lifelines to identify what is working well and augment them;
- Make an investment in the community; hire coordinators to build relationships with community members;
- Address silos for accountability and infrastructure needs;
- Identify fundamental infrastructure;
- Utilize resilience hubs during “blue-sky days;” and
- Having an agreement and a way to communicate with organizations about available resources.

The facilitators asked what role the regional and sustainability employees play to support the EOC. The panelists identified the following:

- Planning for sustainability prior to a disaster;
- Bring different stakeholders to the table;
- Offering training;
- Identifying redundancies;
- Using skillsets of project management and find ways to improve on the quality of life;
- Look at what other agencies are doing to form trusted relationships, and figure out ways to work across multiple jurisdictions;
- Developing micro-versions of neighborhood engagement;
- Mapping of grassroots organizations that are available;
- Formalize networks that have been invisible and fold in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) based on what is applicable to each organization;
- Creating a safe space to thank the organizations for their help;
- Identify ways to leverage assets that did not exist prior to Hurricane Ian;
- Identifying a champion for hyper-locations for community centers;
- Holding a round table where all public information officers (PIO) can come together;

- Having inventories of resources and resilience hubs already current;
- Identifying how the resilience hubs have been taken care of over time;
- Identifying a common vehicle of resources across disciplines, with a focus on a physical location;
- Making the hubs accessible (such as on a bus line and/or walkable locations) in communities;
- Mapping grassroots businesses and see how quickly they can be opened;
- Identify ways to leverage structured groups for long-term recovery;
- Look to universities (i.e., UF IFAS or Ripple Effect Mapping) to help with social mapping for communities and collecting inventory;
- Creating an opportunity for the resilience of individuals and folding in social services; and
- Capturing the lessons learned ahead of a disaster.

Next Steps and Questions

There were no next steps or further questions discussed.

Public Comment

Betsy Haesemeyer stated that when looking at resiliency, there is a significant number of people that are not leaving. Vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and immigration populations, should be considered.

Terry Mazany stated that funding opportunities should be prioritized. When thinking of a faith-based organization sustaining, resources should be considered. Additionally, the costs for hubs and funding sources should be identified.

Yamilet Santa Reyes, a representative of the Red Cross, stated that the Red Cross is trying to help the community with an enhancement process to reduce the stress on the government level.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Ms. LeSage and Mr. Mayfield thanked all members and panelists for their participation. The meeting was adjourned at 10:27 AM on June 8, 2023.