

THE HAZARDS AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE WORKSHOPS: STRENGTHENING ACTION THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

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Along the nation's coasts – particularly in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene and Sandy - it has become apparent that building resilient communities requires further investment in community engagement and stakeholder dialogue. Visualization and decision-support tools are instrumental in identifying near and long-term hazards and for the initial construction of risk profiles but these tools are most impactful when integrated within a flexible and adaptive, community-based approach. This critical learning leap resulted in the launching of a Hazards and Community Resilience Workshop process in Connecticut (USA) as developed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to assist federal and state agencies, regional planning agencies, municipalities, corporations, and other stakeholders. The Workshop process helps to build resilient communities and mainstream ecosystem services by providing a way to combine tools within a facilitated yet flexible, community-engagement construct.

At the core of the TNC Hazards and Community Resilience Workshop approach is the focus on obtaining a diverse suite of stakeholders engaged as planning commences, during, and afterwards to ensure the community champions the outcomes. The approach must include those who make decisions, have influence over decisions, or are impacted by the decisions made. Arguably this is one of the most important - yet under- emphasized - foundational requirements to ensuring comprehensive, community-driven support for actions. Once assembled, the community representatives are asked to develop 'profiles' for hazards in their communities as well as for ecosystems, infrastructure, and societal sectors – thus building on elements of the “Roadmap for Adapting to Coastal Risk” process by NOAA. TNC's Risk Matrix is used along with a facilitated, participatory-mapping exercise. The Risk Matrix allows the participants to collaboratively identify vulnerable sectors and those assets that already support resilience in their community. Once completed, participants are asked to relatively rank the importance (high, medium, low) and determine the urgency (ongoing, short-term, long-term) of each community-based action. Finally, participants are asked to further prioritize all of the high importance, short-term actions via the community's Risk Matrix and select the three top priority needs across the three 'profiles' for the community to pursue immediately.

The Workshop process using the Risk Matrix is flexible enough to address all hazards (e.g., extreme heat, drought, storm surge, tornadoes, sea level rise, landslides, tsunamis), in any setting (e.g., inland, coastal, high elevation, deserts, urban), across multiple governance/societal structures (e.g., neighborhood, municipal, multi-municipal, regional, national, multi-national) and at any geographic scale. To date, 24 municipalities in Connecticut (USA) serving over 787,000 residents have completed this Workshop process resulting in prioritized action plans to improve resilience. This presentation at the Social Coast Forum 2016 will serve as a roll-out of the Hazards and Community Resilience Workshop process for community-based practitioners everywhere.