

INNOVATIONS IN PLANNING AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

James Schwab, American Planning Association

Both our increased knowledge of post-disaster recovery processes and the ongoing development of technological tools to facilitate analysis, visualization, and public engagement in the planning process have made it clear that recovery and resilience planning is undergoing significant changes that will continue well into the future. These changes can significantly improve the preparedness and resilience of communities that undertake this process; however, much will depend on their capacity to use the tools and processes that become available to them. Therefore, developing sound, knowledgeable, and forward-looking guidance for the planners and allied professionals most likely to employ such tools and processes in advancing the recovery process is essential to helping the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), states, and communities fulfill the whole community vision of resilience in the face of future disasters.

The job of the planner is not merely to find out what the community wants in a rebuilt community after a natural disaster. It is more importantly the job of the planner to inform community members and leaders of the consequences of the meaningful choices they will make and to ensure that the best science and technical information are conveyed in ways that both raise the level of awareness of residents and develop a culture of preparedness. Behavioral scientists have long understood that this cannot be done simply through the release of technical information; it must be conveyed in ways that create accurate mental images of the alternatives for those participating in the process. Fortunately, modern visualization, scenario-building, and public participation tools are making that easier year by year. The prospect is that the conclusions people reach about desired alternatives to create a more resilient community will be better informed and lead to demonstrable improvements in outcomes.

With support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency in a first-phase agreement, APA is undertaking a three-way partnership with the University of California-San Diego (UCSD) and the National Charrette Institute (NCI), based in Portland, Oregon, to explore the best ways to use the most cutting-edge technological and conceptual tools and participatory processes to engage citizens in the recovery planning process, integrating both for pre-event planning and post-disaster recovery planning.

This one-year project will work to establish a set of web-based tools and techniques that will help planners engage their communities, integrating with the available analytical tools and civic engagement processes, in order to help them prepare for and recover from disasters. These tools and processes could be used by planners in the context of an overall community plan update, as part of special purpose plans, or in developing a stand-alone community resilience plan and implementation strategy. The essential deliverable will be an interactive web-based resource that guides a community through a decision-making process map. This presentation will outline work that will begin in October 2015 and should be about 25 percent complete at the time of the Social Coast Forum.