

# Community-Driven Relocation

## Recommendations for the U.S. Gulf Coast Region and Beyond

More than 200 \$1 billion disasters—including flooding, freezes, severe storms, tropical cyclones, wildfires, and winter storms—have occurred in the U.S. Gulf Coast region between 1980 and 2023. The number of disasters has doubled annually since 2018 and this rapid escalation increases the urgency to develop pre-disaster policies to mitigate displacement and decrease suffering. *Community-Driven Relocation: Recommendations for the U.S. Gulf Coast Region and Beyond* offers policy makers recommendations that develop plans and implement relocation in ways that are equitable, culturally appropriate, adaptive, and resilient to future.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE, LOCAL AND REGIONAL POLICY MAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

*Community-Driven Relocation* offers 13 recommendations that span three overarching domains: Centering Well-Being, Developing and Sustaining Local Collaborations, and Strengthening Preparations for Community-Driven Relocation. Although many of the recommendations in the report target federal agencies, there are actions for state, regional, and local entities to consider for crafting evidence-based policies and participating in community-driven relocation efforts.

This document highlights the recommendations, or portions of recommendations, that primarily concern state, local and regional policy makers and practitioners.

**Planning for community-driven relocation should incorporate local perspectives about the histories, impacts, and perceptions of displacements and forced relocations, as well as generational traditions.**

- Federal and state agencies should institute systematic, Gulf-wide, community-informed, local investigations on how past and current patterns of resilience and adaptation and relevant policies influence attitudes and behaviors toward relocation and resettlement.
- Emergency management and disaster recovery agencies (and regional and state counterparts), local public works agencies, mental and behavioral health care institutes, and local and regional transportation planning entities should reevaluate their plans, expenditures, and strategies to account for discriminatory policies and practices that have exacerbated vulnerabilities, and should institute plans to redress inequities that have undermined the resilience of communities most likely to face relocation.

**Agencies that assist communities with relocation should foster meaningful partnerships to develop and execute relocation plans in collaboration with communities, including decisions about the timing and pace of the relocation process. These agencies should:**

- Develop a consistent co-creation process and work with each community to establish specific communication requirements that include face-to-face interactions and work with locally trusted, community-based organizations to build understanding, trust, and enduring relationships with communities to carry out adaptation.

#### **RECOMMENDATION FOR PROACTIVE PLANNING**

Due to the lack of proactive adaptation planning at the regional, state, municipal, and neighborhood scales to prepare receiving and originating communities, community members are often left to find their own way (see Conclusions 9-3, 9-4, 9-6, 8-1). This lack of pre- and post-relocation planning can result in ad hoc movements where people end up resettling in similarly hazardous areas (see Conclusions 8-2, 10-8) and low-resource communities are strained by either an influx of new residents (in receiving communities) (see Conclusion 8-4) or a loss of tax base (in originating communities) (see Conclusion 8-6). Land left vacant in originating communities after relocation has the potential to offer sustained benefits for the community (e.g., floodwater retention areas, habitat for essential species). However, without proper planning, the vacated land is often not effectively managed.

Regional planning entities alongside local public works, planning, and housing authorities, and departments involved in relocation, resilience, and climate adaptation efforts should account for community-driven relocation (originating and receiving communities) in their planning efforts (e.g., land use plans, hazard mitigation plans, and economic plans); revise and assess relocation strategies based on current and projected climate data and traditional ecological knowledge; and conduct land suitability analysis to identify suitable receiving areas and, in doing so, work with communities to raise their own capacities to understand land suitability.

#### **RECOMMENDATION FOR COLLABORATIVE PLANNING**

Federal agencies should engage with local governments and regional planning entities to support community-driven relocation planning across originating and receiving communities. Federal and local government

collaborations with regional planning entities should work with originating communities to establish threshold agreements for the consolidation and regionalization of local governments and tax bases as residents relocate; share data about priority receiving communities; assess the impacts of regional population shifts to aid in planning; and modify federal and other relocation funding guidelines to include a requirement that households relocate outside special flood hazard areas and work with communities to broaden understanding of the risks of living in such areas.

#### **RECOMMENDATION FOR CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATIONS AND BUILDING CAPACITY**

The process of obtaining funding and planning for community-driven relocation is highly complex and time-consuming. Cross-sector collaborations have the potential to build adaptive capacities for all entities involved in community-driven relocation through mechanisms such as knowledge sharing and the pooling of resources.

**State agencies, regional planning entities, professional associations, and academic-community partnerships (e.g., land and sea grant universities, minority serving institutions) should provide targeted capacity-building and training initiatives to assist state and local governments in planning for community-driven relocation.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION FOR SUPPORTING RECEIVING COMMUNITIES**

The ability of a receiving community to meet the immediate needs of resettlers (e.g., housing, employment, health care, education, transportation) is a critical component of community-driven relocation and the availability of necessary resources is a central criterion for suitability. Even in communities with currently sufficient resources, rapid growth patterns challenge the adequacy of those resources.

**Federal government agencies, Gulf Coast state governments, and regional planning entities should increase investments in preparing receiving communities for new residents (e.g., infrastructure, energy system capacity, broadband, schools, water supply).**

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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