

**Community Resilience as a Force in Healthy Aging, and Vice
Versa
Speech draft # 4
FINAL**

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*“The number one illness in the world is [depression](#). The number one reason for depression is stress. The number one stress is people trying to be in control of what is out of their control. ‘There is only the trying. The rest is not our business.’ T.S. Eliot” as quoted by Noah benShea, *Psychology Today*, April 12, 2013.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-journey-greatness/201304/there-is-only-the-trying>*

Thanks for the invitation! It has been several years since my last opportunity to speak to a League of Cities (Arizona) audience and that was to the League of Arizona Cities in Lake Havasu, Arizona. They had a great time at their annual meetings and hope you are also having some fun and well-deserved R & R!

A Little Context to Start: Why Am I Here Today?

I am an Emeritus Professor of Public Affairs at Arizona State University, where I was **founding Director of the School of Public Affairs**, and offered MPA and Ph.D. seminars in public management and public policy. I have a long standing interest in the important work of local governance that you are doing, public administration in general, and am especially interested in community building, conflict management, and resilience. From

2001 to 2011 I was the Co-Director of the interdisciplinary **Resilience Solutions Group at ASU**. Over that period, we conducted numerous studies of individual and community resilience and the connections of resilience to healthy aging. Our work was funded by St. Luke's Health Initiatives, ASU, and the National Institute of Aging (NIA).

The ASU/Community resilience effort has been sustained and recently blossomed into a major, exciting university/community effort **“Knowledge Exchange for Resilience.”**

<https://resilience.asu.edu/>. (To be discussed later in this talk).

Purpose of This Talk

Today, I hope some of my talk combined with your experiences will lead to a robust discussion of **sound public policy and prudent public management steps to strengthen the link between community resilience and healthy aging.**

The Resilience Narrative

Resilience is a major theme of the American narrative (Fallows, 2010; Vale & Campanella, 2005). **Seen through the resilience narrative lens, many forces have threatened the nation and its regions, but they have been matched by capacity to rebound and persevere.** As Ralph Nader once warned after elaborating on the ways public officials and media were more beholding to corporate power than ever before (his favorite theme, one that probably has more adherents today?):

“But you’ve got to be very careful about thinking things can’t rebound. My favorite phrase is ‘America is a country that has more problems than it deserves, and more solutions than it applies.’ We don’t want to be Pollyannas, but we really should believe that we can turn things around.” (Fallows, 2010, p.41)

So, even Ralph Nader, one of the most prominent social critics of our time identifies resilience as a positive; a core, enduring national strength.

I’m cautiously optimistic, but many ask: **Will the Resilience narrative and its promise of “strength from adversity” survive these times? Is resilience meaningless jargon or about real solutions?**

There are No Easy Answers but we should start with: **What Exactly is Resilience, Anyway?**

1. **It’s More complicated than the common usage synonym: REBOUND!** to win a Super Bowl by one point or a World Series by one run does not mean one team is more resilient than the other.

Rather, Resilience is the ability to:

- **cope with adversity,**
- **recover from inevitable crises and shock,**
- **sustain recovery with a sense of purpose and vitality, and**

- **learn from and emerge stronger from stressful experiences.**¹

In this way, resilience can help to maintain a positive, future oriented life course despite the interference of major negative life events.

This applies to individuals, COMMUNITIES, non-profit and profit-making institutions, sub-groups of governments and collaboratives, and various systemic combinations and collaborations of these groups.

2. And, RESILIENCE is also a PROCESS as well as an OUTCOME.

Sustaining and growing resilience involves many activities that are not only directly beneficial and enormously important in times of crises but **enjoyable and important in the development of relationships, trust, and communications**

¹ ¹ This is a current statement of the meaning that has evolved over several research projects and many discussions of the meaning of resilience by members of the Resilience Solutions Group (RSG) at Arizona State University. The author was co-director of the RSG and is immensely grateful to members of the RSG and particularly to his friend and colleague, Alex Zautra (RIP) for ideas and commentary, some of which are included in this paper. For more on definitional/classification matters and the history of our work on understanding resilience see: Alex Zautra, John Stuart Hall, and Kate Murray (2008), "Resilience: A New Integrative Approach to Health and Mental Health Research," *Health Psychology Review*, 2(1). Alex Zautra, John Stuart Hall and Kate Murray (2008), "Community Development and Community Resilience: An Integrative Approach," *Community Development*, 39 (3). John Reich, Community Resilience: An Integrative Approach," *Community Development*, 39 (3). John Reich, Alex Zautra, and John Stuart Hall (eds.) (2010), *Handbook of Resilience*, Guilford Publications, Inc. This work was supported in part by a grant from the National Institute on Aging (R01 AG 026006), Alex. Zautra (PI), John Hall (Co-PI). In addition, the author is grateful to St. Luke's Health Initiatives and the Arizona State University Office of the Vice President for Research for invaluable support of the RSG.

among different people and groups. Referred to as the Resilience dividend (Rodin, 2014)

3. STRESS, SHOCK, and RESPONSE

There are many other good questions about resilience but **one thing is certain: the existence of resilience and the opportunity to evaluate its ability to respond to threats can only take place after the onset of stress or crises.**

So far, the 21st Century provides abundant test cases of the impacts of stress and shock. Starting with the attack on the World Trade Center of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath, an increasing series of cascading severe events seem to make the U.S. a perfect laboratory for learning about the resilience response to stress and crises. You know the list. In recent times Climate change, wild fires, and related “natural” disasters, mass shootings, terrorism, divisive and inconclusive wars, increasing income inequality, immigration debates, national political polarization and division, government shutdowns and slowdowns, with many human consequences, and more are part of the current list of national traumas. **Collectively these events have provoked public debate, some actual and symbolic responses and probably made a major impact on the national psyche, and an uneven but real impact on health and well-being of individuals.**

RESPONSE, ACTION, AND SOLUTIONS:

If Nader and other believers in the Resilience Narrative are right, how can we “turn things around?” What should be done and who will do it?

I start by advising a broader and stronger focus on: **Community Resilience**. In this talk “community”² means “... a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings.” (For now, we will save the many definitions and taxonomies of the term for later discussion.)

The **test of a community’s resilience is its capacity to respond, sustain recovery, learn and grow from severe crises and stress**. But **building community resilience capacity** is a **complicated process** over time and among many groups and people within the community.

We believe that developing effective Community resilience requires thoughtful **PUBLIC planning, management, policy and action** well before the onset of major unknown, yet often inevitable crises. We also consider effective community resilience as synonymous with sound public policy and prudent public management, core interests of local public administration. **COMMUNITY RESILIENCE should be approached as A DYNAMIC, INCLUSIVE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS.** Hence, a Local focus on resilience makes even more sense in these times of **high divisiveness at the national level**

²Roger Hughes. Resilience: Health in a New Key. (Phoenix: St. Luke’s Health Initiatives) F

The Federalism Factor

A good case can be made for effective resilience strategies developed at the sub national level of the **American Federal system**, with **local governments playing a major leadership, planning and coordination role**. Of course, in our intergovernmental system which is by intention a stew of conflict and cooperation, there is always some debate about who is responsible, who should get credit for policy achievements and blame for failures.

It is **appropriate at a League of Cities** meeting to recall the advice of the late **John J. DeBolske**, the colorful former executive director of the League of Arizona Cities and Towns, once summarized intergovernmental conflict with three short axioms:

Debolske's Law

- (1) the level of government I am with is good, honest and true
- (2) any level of government above me is putting it to me,
- (3) any level of government below mine cannot be trusted and needs watching.

Which Fits with: Mile's Law

“Where you stand depends on where you sit” (Rufus Miles, Bureau of Budget, 1940’s on bureaucracy)

And, the Goldilocks Principle

"The federal government's big and bad, cities are small and bad, and somehow state government gets it just right."³ (by one critic of state govt)

Humor aside, **American federalism most often reflects the efficacy, strength and resilience of the nation’s governance structure when the path taken is cooperative. Frequently, it is at the state and local community level where domestic policy change and implementation are implemented, that community resilience is being developed.**

Yet national polices and funding can make the difference in success or failure of most experiments. Cooperative Federalism is the ideal, but that may be a topic for a different day.

Perhaps most importantly for determining the locus of many resilience efforts today, essential ingredients in the community resilience recipe such as social cohesion, trust, understanding, capacity to cultivate strong, lasting relationships are simply more easily grown, nurtured and sustained at local levels.

³ David Berman, Local Governments and the States, p. 8, draft of revised ed., chap. 1, 2-13-19

Resilience, Healthy Aging, and the Village Movement

We believe Resilience is crucial to developing a **more positive, new path to aging** because **despite such advantages of aging as experience, wisdom and accumulation, unanticipated crises and stressful events occur with age. Chronic and acute health problems, economic decline, loss of friends and loved ones, problems of mobility and transportation lead to greater social isolation and loneliness, with easily cascading health and quality of life issues for many seniors. Some of these events are predictable, but many are not. All that is really certain is that there is a high likelihood that as we live and age we become more vulnerable, bad things may happen.**

“It seems that there is a sort of calamity built into the texture of life. Frank Kermode, as quoted in Amy Bloom (January 31, 2010, New York Times).

The resilience question is not whether we can avoid calamity, but rather, understanding and planning for who, what, where, when and how to prepare and respond when calamity comes **toward us and our communities.**

Many different partnerships, combinations and collaborations at the community level are at work and being explored locally.

We can talk about some of these examples in our discussion to follow. And we will also be very interested in **hearing about Community Resilience efforts your city is taking and/or**

considering, particularly those designed to incorporate healthy aging efforts of community nonprofits, other community based organizations, educational institutions, etc.

The Village Movement as a Template for Community Resilience

The Village Movement provides important services allowing seniors to age comfortably in their own home, in familiar surroundings close to people they know, friends and relatives, in a community they know and choose.

Notably, many services for elderly are provided by elder volunteers. This process yields important **direct benefits**. It is also key to **greater resilience dividends through social connections among providers and recipients of needed services**. **In these ways, Villages provide an important resilience hedge against age related “bad things,”** by empowering older adults to “...live happily, healthfully, and successfully in their own homes as they age” (SLO Village, brochure).

Villages use trained and screened volunteers, and integrate their efforts by locating and collaborating with other community and national organizations interested in supporting healthy aging. Village volunteers, members and staff work closely together planning for and helping understand and meet needs and desires of villagers. This is a process rooted in the **Village Movement desire to have its senior members view aging rationally as a positive, fully understanding and contributing to benefits and joys of living a long and**

productive life. Merle Haggard’s old song “*I wish I was 30 again*” is definitely not the theme of this movement!

Given the action approach and collaboration capacities of the California Village Movement and looking to the future, cities and other local entities would appear to benefit by incorporating California Village Movement organization and philosophy into collaborative community resilience planning, policy, and action. Cities already partnering with CVM Villages include⁴:

- **Freemont**
- **Thousand Oaks**
- **San Francisco**
- **Brisbane**
- **Sausalito**
- **Berkeley**

BRINGING LOCAL INTERVENTIONS TO SCALE BY BUILDING BROAD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Resilience thinking and methods stress the need for long term, systemic, collaborative, innovative, dynamic, efforts undergirded by social cohesion and research. That is an “ideal type” view.

⁴ From Charlotte Dickson, “Villages and Resilient Age-Friendly Cities” *Western Cities* (September 1, 2019) For other city examples of resilience building in California, See also two additional articles in the same edition of *Western Cities*: Andrew Powers, “Resiliency Wins: Our Community’s Response to Two Tragedies.” And Doug Linkhart, “Gauging Your Community’s Capacity to solve Problems and Thrive”.

Yet, at present and probably for the near-term future, we are faced with **major increases** in the **magnitude and frequency of many potential significant stressors, and crises of a previously unimagined scope, intensity, and regularity.**

Acute and chronic events in many communities are objectively more frequent and horrific, and often appear beyond control.

This raises the question: can ideal type resilience solutions rooted in local areas be developed and implemented to the scale needed to offset these crises? If so, how long will it take, how much will it cost, what action steps are needed? Is the fit between ideal community resilience responses and likely interventions in most places at all near “ideal” anywhere? Can it be, should it be?

To meet the challenges of response **SCALE** and **SCOPE** with the full force of community resilience, I believe **first steps for communities and local governments should include, at a minimum, a reconsideration of budgeting, planning, organization and management remedies to better incorporate new acute community resilience realities with the persistent chronic stressors of the community for the long term. How?** **Here are a few Suggestions:**

- **CRO’S** Those cities that do not already have a focal point for resilience planning and development should develop one. Variations of the **City Resilience Officer (CRO’s)** (started by **Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities** program <http://www.100resilientcities.org/about-us/>. with local imitations emerging across the world) are in place and at work around world. Prominent examples in California include:

1. **San Francisco** which created the World's First CRO (Patrick Otellini)
2. **Los Angeles** which has embedded resilience as a value that guides municipal planning across all of city government. Over 30 Departmental CRO's appointed by Garcetti. ⁵

Without an organizational hub focused on building greater community resilience over time, internal business of city departments may tend to remain “morselized” in silos while work of many community nonprofits and other groups remains underfunded and less likely to be connected to city planning and resources.

- **HARVEST ASSETS, BUILD CAPACITY.** Cities and all local governments should be fully engaged in **realistic assessments of CAPACITY** needed to meet future challenges, **known and unknown.** Steps in this process should include careful **asset-based planning including searching for and unlocking existing and new ASSETS, enabling and collaborating with proficient local organizations like those of the Village Movement,** creating new and dynamic partnerships with enough community organizations to enhance the community resilience resources and make a difference in all forms of needed responses.

⁵ See Axelrod, op. cit. and Berkowitz, op.Cit.

One splendid well-studied **example** with abundant promise for the **Village Movement** and very persuasive data is the **“Experience Corps,”** which operates in several U.S. cities (<https://www.aarp.org/experience-corps/our-impact/experience-corps-research-studies.html>, Fried et al., 2004). Other innovative and successful community **collaborations in California with Villages leading innovative “Age Friendly Initiatives” in partnership with AARP⁶**

- **BUDGET FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE** In addition to intergovernmental coordination of budgets mentioned above, **city budget and organization processes should adopt an explicit community resilience focus.** Departmental budgets should be reviewed, appropriate reserves established, to help prepare for the major unknowns. Funding sources from all levels of the federal system should be explored, along with state, local and national foundations. State and federal disaster relief grants should be reviewed⁷:
- Forge Better **intergovernmental communication.** cities and other local governments should be in close contact with each other, understanding options, developing cooperative plans for regions and working on and lobbying for resilience resources that will be needed.
- **One such example would be a Community Resilience Block Grant, (CRBG, in concept, similar to the Community Development Block Grant)** would provide community level funds for potential emergency responses,

⁶ Charlotte Dickson, op.cit.

⁷ See appended HUD’s Selected Current National Grant Possibilities for Community Resilience.

while building community social coherence, and for incentives for within city/across/region community resilience planning. **Requirements for the grant should include evidence of analysis of community preparedness, vulnerabilities, and evidence of coordination and incorporation of community organizations, intergovernmental partners and public participation to enhance planning, preparation and response capacities.**

Like CDBG, the CRBG would have broad political appeal to the left and the right as it could be seen as an important needed national public policy while devolving decisions on most pressing resilience needs and best interventions to the local level.

A block grant program of this sort would reward communities for thinking forward about the unknown but likely events in their region, as well as innovative interventions and would help entities of a region work together ahead of acute events and directly on the chronic vulnerabilities of the area.

- There is some block funding available from foundations, private and government sources that supports important natural experiments— with previews of the vast **potential for wholistic block grant funding** akin to Community Resilience Block Grants: (DISCUSS, OTHER EXAMPLES?)

---FOR DISCUSSION TIME PERMITTING---

EXAMPLES... LOCAL DIVERSITY OF APPROACHES MATCHED WITH SIGNIFICANT NEW COMMUNITY RESILIENCE RESOURCES

1. **Maricopa County, Arizona –the Social, Economic, and Environmental Resilience (SEER) Knowledge Exchange For Resilience. Arizona State University, funded by Virginia Piper Foundation.** One foot in the university to develop, use and manage the data, one foot in the array of local governments, community public and private non-profit organizations (Dr. Michael Crow, President, ASU). Designed to integrate resilience data collected from community stakeholders, social media, citizen science, and local and federal authoritative organization to identify and mitigate major resilience threats to Maricopa County of Arizona, USA. <https://resilience.asu.edu/>

2. **Lake County, California**, devastated by one of the largest wildfires in the history of California, now one of five U.S. communities with significant financial, technical and human support from **WELLVILLE**, a national non-profit. “Our approach is to support the Wellville 5 in much the same way that a startup accelerator supports a promising business idea and leadership team. In this case, the community is the *startup* – and the community’s product is *health*. Just like a business startup, the

community sets its course, develops its plans, negotiates with suppliers, measures its impact, and changes course as appropriate. Along the way, [Wellville] will help the Wellville 5 make course corrections where appropriate and connect them with health and policy experts, solution providers, funders and investors – all with an interest in testing and financing innovative health strategies.”

<http://www.wellville.net/partners/>

Conclusion

Unfortunately, there is ample evidence in our daily lives of high levels of stress, shock and division. Yet **fortunately**, resilience counsels the need for a focus on preparation, response, reconciliation, and social cohesion. By definition, resilience connects people in ways that can heighten our general capacity to better cope with these and future strains, come together in sensible and creative ways and solidify our social connections. The ideas and efforts discussed today are not cure-alls nor easy, but they are positive enough to warrant attention, consideration, experimentation and replication.

The Village Movement is a splendid example of a practical yet idyllic effort that many communities would benefit from and celebrate. It is the type of innovation needed at this point that should be heeded by those who despite temptations to the contrary, persist in finding the glass half full because of the ever-present capacity of human interaction to work together to solve problems. My hunch is that many who see these Villages

in operation will be impressed and want to replicate them, just as Village volunteers and participants will want to look carefully at other community organizations and local resilience plans and efforts for partnership opportunities and ideas.

Resilience thinking offers a positive way forward in intermittent dark times. Applications of the resilience perspective fit with the Village Movement's approach emphasizing a positive alternative viewpoint on health and aging. It accepts the inevitabilities of stress and disrepair in aging, but also is aware of the resourcefulness of people and their communities. These are natural capacities that are woven through our relations with one another, unlocking greater resilience in the process.

Individuals and institutions have survived because of this motivation to find solutions that allow recovery from ills, sustainability of their best values and growth even in stressful times. In keeping with the Resilience Narrative and T.S. Eliot's famous remark quoted at the outset of this talk, resilient people and communities often find ways to solve their problems that leave them feeling better off than they would have been without the hardships.

“It's only the trying. The rest is not our business.”⁸

⁸ Eliot in, Noah benShea [op. cit.](#)

APPENDIX 1

SELECTED COMMUNITY RESILIENCE RESOURCES FOR CITIES

John Stuart Hall
For the League of California Cities
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- **Rockefeller Foundation, 100 Resilient Cities Network (July 2019). Resilient Cities, Resilient Lives: A New Report With Lessons from the 100 Resilient Cities Network <http://www.100resilientcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/100RC-Report-Capstone-PDF.pdf>**

see especially sections on city actions for:

Post disaster resilience: Houston (hurricane) and Belfast (Fire) examples

Social Equity resilience: Barcelona, (developing Resilience plans based on “Stages of Life” strategy)

Transportation and Mobility resilience: (Dallas)

Interestingly, California has played a big role in the 100 Cities effort. 100RC named Patrick Otellini the world’s first CRO when he assumed the role for **San Francisco** in 2014¹.

And **Los Angeles**, has embedded resilience as a value that guides municipal planning across all of city government. The [appointment of over 30 Departmental Chief Resilience Officers \(DCROs\)](#) by Mayor Eric Garcetti has effectively curated an in-city network of resilience practitioners to advance initiatives – from critical infrastructure to disaster preparedness and recovery. – as well as embedded ownership of the *Resilient Los Angeles* Strategy throughout each branch of city government².

Additional California example: Santa Monica

¹ Axelrod, op cit.

² Berkowitz, op cit.

Discussion, California example: the link between taxing, spending, health care, education, and economic development, from a resilience perspective.³

- **Jason Axelrod, American City and County (Oct 18, 2018)**
<https://www.americancityandcounty.com/2018/10/08/the-route-to-resilience/>.

See especially reflections on recent city resilience experiments including work of some “Chief Resilience Officers” (CRO’s):

Integration, bringing coherence to different city plans and resources and the breakdown of silos are hallmarks of resilience, (Otis Rolley, 100 Resilient Cities)

Integrating policies and plans under the fresh lens of resilience yields another benefit — what 100RC calls the resilience dividend.

City resilience dividend: budgeting money towards a cause planned using resilient thinking can buy benefits beyond just the original problem area, (Christine Morris, Norfolk VA)

[Resilience] goals don’t just involve city processes, either. In fact, they involve a macro view considering the city, regional agencies and the private sector [and nonprofit, community organizations] in determining the best ways to advance work so as to accomplish as many goals as possible.

- **Cathy Baldwin and Robin King, (2018) Social Sustainability, Climate Resilience and Community-Based Urban Development: What About the People? Routledge: London.**

This splendid book looks at numerous local cases from 14 countries around the world including the U.S., and provides an explicit framework for integrating and evaluating connections among local community development efforts, social sustainability, climate resilience, and general community planning and urban development. See especially chapters:

4. Social sustainability and urban development
5. Community resilience and environmental adversities
6. creating built environments that influence pro-community behaviors
8. Socially sustainable communities can also be resilient communities
10. Recommendations: planning and designing for the socially sustainable, resilient community

³ Paul Krugman, (2019) “The Real Governments of Blue America,” The New York Times (January 17, 2019).

- **National Civic League (NCL)**
http://www.nationalcivicleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CivicIndex_FINAL_compressed-1.pdf

This report on the “*Civic Index 4th Edition*” its use in several American cities to build stronger, more resilient communities, and offers specific suggestions for measuring and improving civic capital in cities. In addition to the Civic Index, other NCL programs such as *All American Cities*, and *National Civic Review* are fountains of information about U.S. local government efforts to boost collaboration and build greater community resilience.

NCL, founded in 1894 by civic leaders including Theodore Roosevelt and Louis Brandeis NCL is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is “to advance civic engagement to create equitable, thriving communities. We achieve this by inspiring, supporting and recognizing inclusive approaches to community decision-making.”

For a national list and description of 125 recent local projects or initiatives that use civic capital to solve problems and build equitable, thriving communities, see:

<https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/125-examples-of-civic-capital-81-90/>

- **Thomson Reuters Foundation, *Place*.**

http://www.thisisplace.org/i/?id=0f7c53c9-6869-4043-bbe8-ccf7824e2338&utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Place.

In *Place*, Thomson Reuters Foundation incorporates the ground-breaking work of *Citiscopes* founded by award winning journalist Neal Peirce and his Citigroup colleagues to provide weekly articles from around the world chronicling innovative city responses to major local issues and challenges of our time.

- **World Health Organization (WHO). *Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities*** https://www.who.int/ageing/projects/age_friendly_cities_network/en/

Describes the global array of communities around the world that are active members of this coalition, as well as best practices and tools being used.

- **Arizona State University. *Knowledge Exchange for Resilience*.** <https://resilience.asu.edu/>.

Describes a new community resilience effort at ASU to:

“build resilient communities in Arizona by sharing knowledge, discovering vulnerabilities, and solving problems together to advance social interconnection, promote economic prosperity, and enhance environmental security to create profound and enduring change.” Funded by the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, the Knowledge Exchange has quickly developed an impressive set of community resilience partnerships, data, and actions aimed at mitigating one of the region’s most severe vulnerabilities (heat resilience).

APPENDIX 2

Selected Current National Grant Possibilities for Community Resilience

- <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/community-resilience/community-resilience-other-resource-portals/>.
- [Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program \(CDBG-DR\) Resource Page](#)
- [CAKEx](#)
- [FEMA Disaster Resources](#)
- [Georgetown Climate Center](#)
- [ICLEI: Local Governments for Sustainability](#)
- [Rebuild by Design](#)
- [Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force](#)
- [100 Resilient Cities](#)
- [National Climate Assessment](#)
- [U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit](#)

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