

LISTENING SESSION SUMMARY



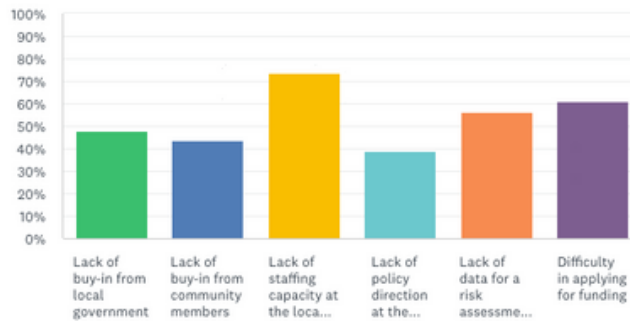
RESILIENT VIRGINIA
NOVEMBER 2023

Prepared by: Trish Porter
Director of Programs and Communications
Resilient Virginia
Published January 2024

PRE-SESSION SURVEY RESULTS

What are the most pressing issues you see as roadblocks for a community trying to build resilience? (select all that apply)

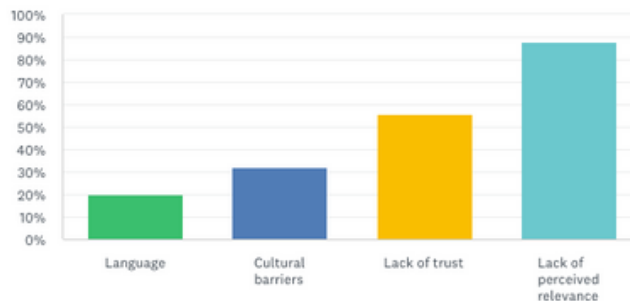
Answered: 23 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Lack of buy-in from local government	47.83% 11
▼ Lack of buy-in from community members	43.48% 10
▼ Lack of staffing capacity at the local or regional level	73.91% 17
▼ Lack of policy direction at the state or federal level	39.13% 9
▼ Lack of data for a risk assessment analysis at the local level	56.52% 13
▼ Difficulty in applying for funding	60.87% 14

What problems do you have in communicating about community resilience? (select all that apply)

Answered: 25 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Language	20.00% 5
▼ Cultural barriers	32.00% 8
▼ Lack of trust	56.00% 14
▼ Lack of perceived relevance	88.00% 22

PRE-SESSION SURVEY RESULTS



BREAKOUT SESSION 1

The first breakout session focused on roadblocks to building community resilience and strategies to overcome these roadblocks.

Government

Roadblocks

- Local governments don't focus on building community resilience:
 - Sometimes don't "buy-into" the need to focus on building community resilience
 - Often don't have the financial or staffing capacity to focus on more and bigger projects
 - Lack of community support drives a lack of interest in the government which then drives a lack of staffing
 - No clear path for funding resilience projects
 - Lack of prioritization:
 - Often seen in conflict with other concerns
 - Hard to keep up with the new challenges in addition to historic challenges
 - Resilience is seen as "nice to have" and not a "need to have"
 - Stakeholders have not been educated on the benefits of sustainable/resilience policies
 - There is a stigma about the recovery process
- Lack of communication and coordination among related efforts
- Need for leadership from decision makers
- Need for creative approaches to knowledge sharing and collaboration
- Speed of technology and software

Strategies

- Provide an adequate sense of urgency
- Use data strategically:
 - Provide a simple set of data and/or use data visualization to illustrate the problem
 - Show communities how they can use local data on risks and vulnerabilities in order to set priorities
 - Make the data easily accessible
- Identify a political champion
- Develop an anti-stigma campaign
- Coordinate community outreach and education programs
- Put pressure on the local government to take action on building resilience
 - Encourage community members to speak up and put pressure on their local government to create results
 - Organizations can advocate for political leaders to take action to build resilience

- Break down silos and work together - partnerships, collaborations, regional alliances, etc
- Provide a short list of simple actions people can take as a first step
- Highlight how other communities are building resilience
 - Find good examples and success stories to share with other community members and local leaders
 - Highlight human impact stories on real people, affecting real neighbors and businesses
- Focus on the greater good (total net benefits) and not just specific/programmatic benefits

How Resilient Virginia Can Help

- Share Listening Session discussion and survey results with all participants
- Have an annual statewide conference instead of biennial
- Be a convener and a connector:
 - Act as a communication conduit between stakeholders and government staff
 - Convene sessions with peer groups at all levels
 - Act as a hub or messenger to other resilience-interested organizations
 - Provide networking and mentoring opportunities
 - Link federal and state funding opportunities to leverage cross-sector work
- Inform and educate:
 - Provide education about how we are all in this work together - can't be all government and/or nonprofit organizations
 - Share lessons learned across communities
 - Create shareable information that leverages your knowledge of best practices and examples from other areas
 - Amplify what works
 - (Continue to) amplify opportunities to engage in state planning and projects

Academic

Roadblocks

- Lack of alignment between academic priorities (publication, funding, etc) and the priorities and conditions of local communities
 - Willingness for a 'state' university to be thinking about the resiliency needs for the 'local' community
 - Community based participatory research is challenging but resilience should be designed with collaboration between academic and community expertise
 - Effectively connecting educational resources and educational opportunities with a community's desires and needs
- Ability to effectively coordinate and collaborate with other universities - everyone has their individual expertise and this could complement each other's work

- Working with elected officials:
 - Elected officials are often unwilling to take time to look at and understand the data and/or evidence when forming policy
 - The need to invest now for far future impacts is made particularly challenging with the election cycles
- Localities are often unwilling to plan for what might happen (probability of disaster) at the expense of what they want to happen (economic growth)
- It is difficult to quickly and equitably compensate communities for their intellectual property in the resilience space
- Universities often don't have pre-existing relationships with communities before going in and telling them what they need
 - It takes a lot of time to build and maintain trust with a community which does not fit well with academic metrics
- Challenges with capacity:
 - Fitting work within the academic year parameters makes it hard to develop meaningful end products that go beyond grant requirements
 - It is hard to match needs (and potential expectations) with university capacity
- Unwillingness of almost anyone to think very long term because it becomes overwhelming to do so

Strategies

- Leveraging facilitation resources to have expert dialogue facilitators help with community meetings and conversations
- Form direct relationships with professional local government managers instead of focusing on elected officials
- Provide compensation to community members for their time and expertise. This is challenging when the compensation comes through the university because they have to meet with university finance officers to get subawards executed in a timely manner
- Leverage data dashboards and explain how they can be useful to a broad set of constituents

How Resilient Virginia Can Help

- Act as a convener at the regional level
- Spend time with the 'economic development' public facing offices at the universities (especially public) and encourage them to fold 'resiliency' into their values
- Assist community groups to define needs and then stay in the driver's seat when a community group begins collaborating with academic institutions on projects
- Develop and promote 'best practices' for working with communities/community groups.
- Provide a policy bank or clearinghouse of model ordinances that communities can pull from in setting their own policies

Nonprofit

Roadblocks

- People's attitude and perception about climate change and resilience
 - Many people don't care about climate change or understand their risks, even when they experience impacts such as flooding, wildfires, storms, etc. A lot of people are in denial until a catastrophic event happens and then they just have to cope.
 - Even when a community has committed to carbon-neutrality, there is often a reluctance to make the right choices
 - There is often a perceived conflict between carbon-neutrality/resilience and economic growth - you have to choose between the two
 - Communities have different priorities they must work through which is made more difficult when facing pressing issues
 - Projects tend to focus on "fixing" an immediate impact of climate instead of taking a strategic approach to building overall resilience
- Lack of standards, codes, and best practices to manage mainstreaming adaptation (ie governance processes to interface climate and other socio-economic goals)
- Challenge in evaluating the climate impact of new development projects
- Lack of discussion regarding the 'polycrisis' nature of risks (multiple crisis together) that requires cross-sector collaboration in order to solve

Strategies

- Focus on interconnectedness - why should people care how their issue connects to climate risk and other issues, like affordable housing and flooding, flood resilience
- Centrality of planning
- Bridge the activist sector and the "prosperity sector" that has resources and leverage partnership in terms of investment in order to move from piecemeal to real change at scale

How Resilient Virginia Can Help

- Research convenings to explore governance and mainstreaming of resilience around planning and policy development, work with Adaptation Leader.org
- Continue connecting people together

Business

Roadblocks

- Local and regional planning is 30 years out but business horizon planning is shorter
 - Relevancy - what will I be doing business-wise in 10 years?
- Threat horizon

- Grant funding
 - Not familiar with new grants that are coming out
 - Restrictive funding timeline and requirements
 - Lack of understanding of funding mechanism and instruments
 - Matching funding often required by grantor is not programmed in the annual budget
- New data is missing
- Local community is overwhelmed
- Too much red-tape
- Time constraints

Strategies

- Showing the relevance
- Thinking beyond the bottom-line
- Becoming informed about the grants and how to incorporate them in the business model

BREAKOUT SESSION 2

The second breakout session focused on communications challenges and strategies to overcome these roadblocks.

Government

Challenges

- Messaging - Timing and Format
 - Can't be "one size fits all" - it is critical to have right message at right time with right messenger
 - Having too many ongoing engagement efforts from varying levels of government can be confusing for audiences
 - People don't pay attention to data visualizations and graphs showing heat and extreme heat, normal rainfall and extreme rainfall (or drought), etc unless they are released during an event
- Proactive vs. reactive communications. Localities may be more used to reactive messaging.
- Strongly held local opinions about sources and solutions to the impacts of hazards can limit discussion or potential actions
- Hard to communicate about long-term resiliency planning when people want solutions to their immediate problems
- Communicating about resilience solutions in a way that is relevant to localities (i.e. You experience flooding... Let's figure out possible solutions to this problem)
- Making technical information easier to understand
- Many government communication channels are not used by the general public
- Government is segmented and communities want holistic solutions

Strategies

- Highlight and share stories of the impact on actual people
 - Taking and sharing photos
 - Asking local media to highlight the impact on neighbors
- Relationships
 - Maintain long-term sustained communication with communities
 - Partner with CBOs who already have relationships with the community
- Shift to virtual meetings to widen the ability of people to participate
- Focus on the benefits available now, not just future benefits
- Don't expect people to come looking for you - go find them
 - Meet folks where they are - go to gas stations to conduct surveys; hire community members to deliver content in other languages; etc
 - Engage youth voices
 - Partner with localities and leverage existing efforts

- Set and transparently communicate clear goals and approaches
- Create background info clips for social media

How Resilient Virginia Can Help

- Identify trusted community messengers and share that information with partners
- Share success stories from other communities
- Reach out to communities to see what communication formats they want
- Package agency programs and info to meet community needs
- Document negative impacts across your network and encourage other communities to share them where appropriate
- Invite collaboration on planned engagement efforts/share findings

Academic

Challenges

- Modes of communication are fractured: email, phone, text, social media direct message, and direct, in-person contact are all so different and different communities communicate in different ways
- Nomenclature & jargon can be tricky - terms need to be translated to resonate with localities
- Concern over regulatory burden incentivizes localities to not participate in research (i.e., can't have covid if you don't test...)
- Localities often don't see how the local impacts of a changing climate they are experiencing (i.e. increased flooding) are connected to broader climate shifts (the root cause of their increased flooding).
- There is a need to get broader ranges of community representation in academic research and programs. The folks who have the time/capital to represent "communities" often skew white/older.

Strategies

- Engage in community systems modeling work
- Adjust communications strategies
 - Use stories to help community members understand 'resiliency' instead of relying on terms
 - Spend time in convened dialogue sessions to construct the shared language together
 - With storytelling: use stories that illustrate "lightning striking twice in the same place" and what your neighbors are doing/did (peer encouragement)
- Ask about fears and concerns on different time scales

How Resilient Virginia Can Help

- Dial in to systems thinking - train staff to be trainers for communities on how to look at building resilience from a systems thinking approach

Nonprofit

Challenges

- Willingness of local governments to explicitly address threats (ie heat islands, etc) - resilience has a lot to do with policy concerns at local government level
- Resilience is such a broad term that covers so many diverse issues and localities are facing different sets of issues. It's hard to have standard messaging that can go out to all communities.
- It's more comfortable talking vs taking action
- The term "resilience" is about survival
- People want to see immediate results but building resilience takes longer. Often, people won't listen if it doesn't have an immediate impact.
- People with lower-income or less education have different priorities because of the pressing nature of their concerns making it harder to reach them
- Resilience is not a "common issue."
 - It's hard to explain what resilience means for a community and why it is important for the community in the long run - at least in a way that resonates with them.
- It is difficult to communicate with elected officials if they don't acknowledge that resilience is something that needs to be on the table.

Strategies

- Shift the focus from short term to long term - how we can address the issues that will make the world liveable for current *and* future generations
- Focus messaging on "What do we need to do locally to survive climate change?"
- Use common language - don't make up words or use big words that people don't understand
- Shift the value of exchange
- Empathy
- Read Ministry for the Future

Business

Challenges

- Lack of engagement at the regional level
- It has to be material for people to take time to address it
- Conflict in priorities:
 - When the focus is on making payroll, resiliency issues don't make it to the top
 - Other business issues take priority

- Use of technical language prevents communities from understanding and implementing recommendations
- Businesses are not talking enough to each other and community

Strategies

- Identify all the stakeholders and do extensive engagements:
 - Include everyone from the very beginning with clarity on the objective
- Get things on the radar of the business
- Communications with communities:
 - Educate on how the local main issue (ie sea level rise) will cause business interruption
 - Focus on how building resilience can save money over time
 - Name the risks and show how they are compounding
 - Focus communications on what is actionable now
- Higher leadership roles can show more resistance
- The business model has to work for the business

BREAKOUT SESSION 3

The third breakout session focused on collaboration, partnerships, and other ways to work with others on resilience.

Government

What effective ways have you worked with others on resilience?

- Involve community members:
 - Acknowledge citizens as experts of their own communities
 - Getting citizen volunteer work groups together and involved as early in the process as possible
 - Invite communities to the table
 - Community listening/input sessions that show the issues and work that's being done
 - Ask people what impact they have felt so far. This allows communities to build their bank of actual, local stories
 - Citizen science have helped launch heat island projects
 - Sharing simple ways for citizens to get involved - tree dips
 - Get input from citizens and businesses on climate actions and plans
- Building and maintaining relationships so that when they are really needed they already exist
- Include experts as information resources, not as decision makers
- Building on existing activities to add resilience considerations and emphasis
- Informal knowledge sharing across programs within/outside of organizations
- Periodic information sharing
- Collaborative identification with other staff of shared resilience goals/missions that can be aligned through action
- Avoid political language such as climate change

What would support more of this activity at the state, regional, and local levels?

- More funding
- Community involvement:
 - Partner with local groups or volunteers that can help collect relevant information
 - Willingness to work with local experts or citizens with intrinsic knowledge of their communities
 - Making meeting times, etc convenient for citizens that want to be engaged
 - Organizations/localities reaching out to governments
- Establishing performance metrics tied to collaboration
- A staffed chief resilience officer

Academic

What effective ways have you worked with others for resilience?

- Community involvement:
 - Co-producing side-by-side research inspired by community priorities/needs.
 - Working with communities to understand their concerns, preferences for solutions, and developing strategies for adaptation based on that information.
 - Trust building in communities is very important so that they understand that they are going to be part of the process.
 - Qualitative data-gathering (formal or informal) through conversations and active listening.
 - For policy development, work very closely with decision makers to promote community engagement up front in the process, thus helping ensure diversity of ideas early
- Pilot projects that include testing/monitoring to demonstrate value(s) of project (including the community in the process).
- Constructing a common vision of resilience with buy-in from all partners first.
- Establishing institutes and centers that transcend college and university boundaries to sandbox/prototype technical and policy solutions for resilience and sustainability. For example: <https://www.ams-institute.org/what-we-do/>

What would support more of this activity at the state, regional, and local levels?

- Grant funding agencies & foundations supporting time and \$ for capacity-building at the grassroots level
- Businesses & municipalities building time/incentives for employees to engage in resilience work
- Develop a funding mechanism at the state level that does not pit academic institutions against each other for dollars from the General Assembly.
- Interuniversity collaboration or a statewide center for climate-related needs (like an extension model)

What can Resilient Virginia do to help?

- Provide wisdom of how you hear 'resiliency' being discussed around the state to assist framing for any of the collaborative efforts

Nonprofit

What effective ways have you worked with others on resilience?

- Partnerships:
 - Partnering with other nonprofits to work together to address a specific resilience topic (ie: floods) and offering technical assistance
 - Building capacity through partnering

- Climate-action focused on urban communities
- Going into the community to raise awareness - speaking at schools, etc
- Bike share, broad based
- Mentored two students who were studying community resiliency needs and issues. The result was definite interaction with community members & great recommendations.

Business

What effective ways have you worked with others on resilience?

- Connecting communities with funding sources
- Writing grants at the business's expense
- Leading volunteer efforts
- We are part of the community, we're not here just for profit
- Awareness building
- Showcasing case studies of successful resilience projects
- Trade group meetings to bring info to the fore

What would support more of this activity at the state, regional, and local levels?

- Planning and implementing
- Funding pathways that are clearer
- Minimized red tape
- Policy direction and regulatory permits

What can Resilient Virginia do to help?

- Invite more business entities to become aware of the Collaborative Alliance
- Adapt workshops to private sector
- Collect more business data
- Incentive packages
- Business oriented workshops, incorporate into trade events

POST-SESSION SURVEY RESULTS

