Resilience for Rural and Small Communities - User Survey

The rural user survey was distributed to the 1,679 chief administrative officers (or assistant chief administrative officers) for whom ICMA has an email address in municipal and county governments located in counties classified as nonmetro (according to the USDA Rural-Urban Continuum Codes). A general link was also promoted via the Model Forest Policy Program and the National Association of Counties. 178 complete or partial responses are included in the summary analysis; not all respondents answered every question.

Who responded?

Respondents were distributed across the U.S., with the Midwest region overrepresented and the Great Plains region underrepresented. 92% of respondents identified their role as local government administrators.

Roles in resilience

Respondents most frequently indicated that resilience work was the responsibility of these local government units:

1) administration/manager,
2) emergency management,
3) public works/engineering,
4) planning,
5) elected officials.

71% spend less than a quarter of their time on resilience and sustainability; 14% spend no time at all.

Local impacts and activity

Equal shares (39%) of respondents perceive the local impacts of shifting climate conditions to be mild or moderate. 17% perceive no local impacts.

Of all the impact areas included on the survey, responding local governments are more likely to be active on extreme weather preparedness/response – mainly storms and floods.

- 39% have assessed vulnerability,
- 45% have developed a plan or strategy,
- 21% are implementing adaptation measures.

Activity around water resource degradation was the next most common. 50% or more local governments were inactive on agriculture/forest decline and invasive species, catastrophic wildfire, public health impacts, wildlife stress, and sea level rise (85% are inactive on that issue).

Immediate local risks

When asked to identify up to two most immediate risks to their community:

- 68% selected extreme weather preparedness/response for mainly storms and floods,
- 39% selected water resource degradation,
- extreme weather preparedness/response – mainly heat and drought and catastrophic wildfire were each selected by a quarter of respondents.

Support desired

Regarding extreme storms and floods, respondents were most interested in example/model policies and guidance on adaptation strategies or plan development, but all examples of support were viewed as helpful. More people selected monitoring and evaluation, messaging and outreach materials, guidance on risk assessment, support for use of technology or equipment, and economic analysis on this topic than the top vote-getters in each of the other topic areas.

Responding local governments are most interested in updating the following plans with climate-informed resilience recommendations:

1) hazard mitigation/emergency response plans (51%),
2) comprehensive or master plans (41%),
3) infrastructure or capital improvements plans (26%).

Training interest and preferences

Nearly half of respondents are somewhat (29%) or very (17%) likely to participate in a training program in the near future.

A large majority (72%) of respondents say 2-4 hours per month is practical for participation in a 6-8 week resilience training course. Just over half prefer recorded, 30-60 minute webinar-style sessions available on demand. 60% prefer to participate individually.