Resilient Rural America Project: 
A Survey for Resilience Service Providers

A link to the online climate adaptation service provider survey was promoted via various mailing lists and interest groups including the Model Forest Policy Program, the American Society of Adaptation Professionals, Climate Adaptation Knowledge Exchange, and others. 56 complete or partial responses are included in the summary analysis; not all respondents answered every question.

Respondents are working in all regions of the continental U.S., Alaska, and Hawaii. Nearly all respondents work directly with rural communities; the vast majority work with local governments. Respondents were primarily affiliated with 1) universities, 2) nonprofits, or 3) were independent consultants or contractors. Their most common areas of expertise included 1) planning, 2) natural resources, and 3) climate science. Their services are most frequently supported by government grants and foundations.

Funding sources for rural resilience

The top funding sources identified by providers were:

1) Foundation grants (23 votes); such as through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation or assorted regional or community foundations,
2) Federal government (23 votes); such as NOAA, EPA, or Bureau of Indian Affairs,
3) State government (18 votes); such as the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program, the Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program, or the Colorado Division of Water Resources,
4) Nonprofit program funding (16 votes), such as the Nature Conservancy,
5) Philanthropist / major donors (11 votes).

Obstacles to rural resilience

The top obstacles for rural communities in seeking allocating, or utilizing funding for rural adaptation identified by respondents include:

1) Local government capacity – budgets, staffing, etc. (35 votes),
2) Awareness of the need for rural adaptation by community and local government (28 votes),
3) Capacity for grant writing, fundraising, financial/project management (28 votes),
4) Grant funding sources/mechanisms (24 votes),
5) Supportive political environment (23 votes),
6) Community champions to lead/advocate (20 votes).

Key obstacles hindering providers’ ability to serve rural communities include:

1) Rural community staff time and capacity (32 votes),
2) Supportive political environment (26 votes),
3) Specific and localized rural data/tools (18 votes).

Leadership

Respondents most frequently pointed to nonprofits as providing the most effective leadership for rural adaptation. Local governments received the next highest number of votes.

Top short/medium term risks for rural communities

47 respondents selected up to five top priority climate risks.

1) Extreme weather (heat, cold, storms, precipitation extremes) was selected by 72% of respondents.
   - This was also the only type of event to receive more than a handful of votes for “risk needing the most work and support at this time.”
2) Flood events received 26 votes (55% of respondents).

What works?

Respondents think incorporating resilience strategies into the following types of plans/processes/practices have been most effective:

1) Comprehensive planning (23 votes),
2) Hazard mitigation plans (19 votes),
3) Watershed management plans, water resource management, water security (16 votes).

Delivery methods. Respondents rank in-person training workshops with follow-up as the most effective educational delivery method. However, publications, guidebooks, templates, checklists, toolkits, case studies, fact sheets and infographics all received votes from just over a third of respondents. Video presentations and webinars without interaction/follow-up were viewed as least effective.

Concerning existing resource platforms:

- 40% use the Climate Resilience Toolkit,
- 35% use CAKEx.org,
- across both, case studies were by far the most used type of resource.

What’s needed?

Rural communities. Respondents described an array of ideas they thought would help advance rural resilience. Common themes included education, staff capacity/time, actionable information, and communication.

Service providers. As for what would most help providers serve rural communities more effectively, common themes included facilitation/communication and specific content.