



# Issue Brief

## White House Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience Recommended Actions

April 2015

On November 1, 2013, President Obama signed Executive Order 13653, establishing the State, Local and Tribal Leaders Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience. Its creation was part of the President's Climate Action Plan (CAP), originally outlined on June 25, 2013, during a speech at Georgetown University. The Task Force assembled 26 governors, mayors, tribal leaders and county officials who'd shown leadership on climate change, and tasked them with advising the federal government on how to help communities become more climate-resilient.

One year after its establishment, on November 17, 2014, the Task Force released a 49-page report with 35 key recommendations. On the same day, the White House released a climate resilience toolkit, available at [toolkit.climate.gov](http://toolkit.climate.gov), which was assembled with input from the Task Force and addresses how climate change affects coastal flooding, food access, health, transportation, water, and ecosystems. The White House took over a dozen actions throughout the year as a result of the Task Force's work, even before the formal release of its recommendations: it backed a \$1 billion National Disaster Resilience Competition, a Climate Education and Literacy Initiative, and investments in the country's rural electricity system.

### Task Force Recommendations to the President

The Task Force's recommendations to the President encompass not only the advice of the governors, mayors, tribal leaders and county officials who comprised its membership, but also input from trade associations, civil society, academia, nonprofits, private companies and other stakeholders. The Task Force states that the federal government has an "essential and unique role" in supporting localized climate preparedness and resilience actions, by providing funding, leadership, information, and intelligent federal program design. The federal government is also well-situated to encourage and coordinate greater cooperation between jurisdictions within the United States.

Overall, one of the greatest emphases throughout the recommendations is the need for increased coordination between federal agencies. The Recommendations repeatedly say that federal agencies need to work together, create central resources, and increase transparency to help accomplish many of the stated goals. The Task Force calls for increased federal guidance, education, tools and resources to empower local officials and decision makers to take action to improve the climate resilience of their own communities. The Task Force also emphasizes the federal government's role in funding projects across the country, stating that it is important to require grant applicants to consider climate vulnerabilities and preparedness in their proposals.

The Task Force advises the federal government to align its actions with five principles. First of all, the government should be required to take climate-related vulnerabilities and threats into account as it designs and implements all federal policies, investments, regulations and programs. Secondly, the government should do all it can to take actions that both increase community resilience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Thirdly, federal agencies should strengthen coordination and partnerships with federal, territorial, state, local, and tribal jurisdictions and economic sectors. Fourthly, federal decision making at all levels needs to be supported with actionable information, tools and assistance on climate change impacts. Finally, the federal government should “consult and cooperate” with tribal and indigenous communities on “all aspects” of its efforts towards climate preparedness and resilience, and state and local communities should consider doing so as well.

The Task Force organized its recommendations into seven cross-cutting themes: resilient communities; infrastructure resilience; natural resources resilience; human health and population resilience; climate-smart hazard mitigation, disaster preparedness and recovery; the economics of resilience; and building capacity for resilience.

## Resilient Communities

“The impacts from a changing climate will stress infrastructure, strain social networks, hamstring economies, and tax available resources.”

1. The Task Force recommends accelerating the **development of community sustainability and resilience models**, and spreading best practices in community resilience. These efforts should include incorporating climate resilience strategies into the Partnership for Sustainable Communities and other locally-based programs, as well as increased collaboration between federal agencies and sharing of best practices.
2. The federal government should develop **resilience standards for siting and designing building and infrastructure**, and encourage their adoption. In particular, federal agencies should consider climate change impacts such as sea level rise and flood risks when working in and near floodplains, to ensure federally funded projects minimize climate risks.
3. The government needs to both encourage and reward **land use development and management practices** that take climate change impacts into consideration. This can be done within existing grant programs, by encouraging applicants to use integrated hazard mitigation approaches that consider climate risks.
4. “Lead by example.” The **federal government should be a model for climate preparedness and resilience**, by considering climate in its investments, programs and operations. The government should commit to using resilient design standards in federal buildings, use natural infrastructure whenever possible, and increase the use of distributed renewable energy power generation.

## Infrastructure Resilience

“Climate change impacts water delivery and wastewater treatment systems; flood risk management infrastructure; rail, road, and port infrastructure; natural infrastructure; energy production and distribution systems...”

1. The Task Force recommends that the federal government encourage **coastal infrastructure planning and investments to incorporate climate resilience**. The Army Corps of Engineers can support this aim by conducting climate vulnerability assessments along the nation’s coasts, and supplying this information broadly. In addition, any resilience planning efforts by local managers of vulnerable infrastructure such as ports or coastal highways should be supported by the government, through funding and technical assistance.

2. The government should **advocate for and prioritize natural systems and “green infrastructure,”** such as wetlands and healthy coral reefs. This can be done by creating funding and management policies that prioritize the protection and maintenance of ecological resources.
3. The government needs to **promote and incentivize climate-smart water resource management and planning,** through partnerships between federal agencies and community entities to evaluate water resources and create long-term strategies.
4. The government should help transportation officials develop a **better understanding of the threats and vulnerabilities transportation systems face from climate change.** Federal transportation funding programs should all have climate resilience and preparedness criteria.
5. **Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Programs could be expanded** to help communities invest in climate resilience measures. PACE programs fund energy efficiency, renewable energy, and weatherization upgrades on residential and commercial property.
6. The government ought to **develop and upgrade the energy grid to be more clean and resilient.**
7. The **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA),** a law which requires federal agencies to consider the environmental impacts of potential federal actions, **should be amended to require federal agencies to study the greenhouse gas emissions and climate impacts** of proposed actions.

## Natural Resource Resilience

“Protecting and conserving natural systems, including agricultural lands, rural and urban forests, grasslands, lakes, oceans, coral reefs, and other natural habitats, can help protect critical livelihoods...”

1. The Task Force recommends the **restoration and conservation of land and ecosystems** to help communities prepare for and mitigate climate change.
2. Climate change will often help **invasive species, pests and diseases** thrive – the **federal government should work with local partners to fight their spread.**
3. Climate change is causing ocean acidification, salinity changes, warmer coastal waters, increasing areas of hypoxia (low-oxygen areas, or dead zones), coastal erosion, sea level rise and more. The government should promote **solutions to advance resilience in ocean and coastal ecosystems,** and coordinate with local groups to monitor the status of the oceans.
4. Climate change is causing increased drought, evaporation, variable and extreme precipitation, and changes in snowpack. The government needs to **encourage integrated watershed management and planning, to ensure water quantity and quality.**
5. The government should expand efforts to **promote understanding of climate change impacts on natural resources,** and **give technical assistance to communities** to help alleviate adverse impacts.

## Human Health and Population Resilience

“A comprehensive approach to climate preparedness and resilience [...] must account for the resilience of people and communities.”

1. Vulnerable populations that already face health or economic problems, such as tribal populations and low-income populations, are particularly at risk from deleterious climate change impacts. The government should **prepare guidance, tools and programs to respond to the needs of these vulnerable populations.**
2. Climate change will increase threats to public health by shifting the distribution of some diseases and assisting the emergence of others. There needs to be **greater capacity to respond to threats to public**

**health**, through the expansion of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Climate-Ready States and Cities Initiative and other such programs.

3. Climate change impacts on the transportation, production and storage of food may cause food shortages. The **federal government should work to help communities build food security systems** against this possibility. The government can help by conducting research on climate risks to food and supporting subsistence food activities on tribal lands.
4. Communities in disaster-prone areas always need to prepare for the worst, but as climate change brings extreme weather to new regions and exacerbates some extreme weather events, these communities will need extra help. The Task Force asks the **federal government to help the most vulnerable communities prepare for disasters**, by providing pre-disaster training to local leaders and first responders; building supply distribution and shelter capacity; removing regulatory and technical barriers; and developing extreme weather early warning systems.
5. Climate change impacts, such as drought and coastal erosion, are already affecting the habitability of communities in the United States. The federal government should explore how it **can help communities that may face displacement**, by listening to their needs and examining barriers to relocation.

## Climate-Smart Hazard Mitigation, Disaster Preparedness and Recovery

“Scientific findings and recent experience alike demonstrate that certain types of extreme events will become more frequent or severe in a changing climate, with potential impacts to the economy and communities...”

1. After a disaster, when communities need help the most, federal government resources need to be **more highly coordinated, with clear guidance and leadership, greater community partnership, and reliable technical support**. The government can support these goals by conducting joint pre-disaster training for federal and community staff; clarifying thresholds for applicants for disaster assistance; putting the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in charge of multi-agency federal teams; and minimizing staff turnover in federal field teams that respond to disasters.
2. After a disaster, communities begin to rebuild infrastructure and repair damaged areas. The government should **remove barriers and prioritize climate-resilient construction** in the wake of such disasters.
3. The federal government should support the efforts of communities to create **Community Resilience Plans, through funding and other incentives**, to help communities plan for major disasters and reduce their risks. The government can advance resilience plans by coordinating across agencies to make pre-disaster planning and post-disaster relief both efficient and fast.
4. The federal government should **update and collect data, maps and analyses of climate change impacts**, to assist communities in effectively planning for climate threats. These efforts should include updating flood insurance rate maps, providing training so local experts can read hazard maps, and helping communities when adequate information about climate impacts is unavailable.
5. The Task Force recommends that the federal government **place a greater value on its hazard mitigation programs**, by updating them and adjusting eligibility criteria to allow more climate-resilience measures to access funding. To this end, the Task Force recommends revamping the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and the Pre-Disaster Grant Program to function like block grants, cutting out the need for time-consuming and expensive federal project reviews.
6. The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) provides federal insurance to property owners, helping many people across the country repair their homes and businesses after a disaster. The **NFIP’s minimum standards for participation should be strengthened**, to prevent insurance-holders from building in natural

areas such as wetlands that buffer storms and sea level rise; avoid construction that increases exposure to flooding; and address insurance inequities between urban and rural locations.

## The Economics of Resilience

“In the face of increasingly frequent and severe storms, flooding, heat waves, and other climate-related disruptions, investments in resilience can reduce future risk and help to protect against severe economic losses and threats to public health and safety.”

1. The private sector is primarily responsible for creating the economy – jobs, industry, etc. – that local and regional communities depend on. The federal government should **promote resilience in the private sector and the workforce** to cut down on economic disruptions from climate change impacts.
2. The federal government should consider ways to **reward climate-resilient investments**, and **use ecosystem benefits in cost-benefit analyses**. The Task Force found that government decision making can favor short-term investments, underestimating the value of the long-term environmental and societal benefits from climate-resilience investments.
3. Disaster preparedness and resilience efforts are especially important for infrastructure and facilities, such as airports, hospitals, and water distribution systems, which are vital to a community’s wellbeing. The federal government should take steps to **protect locations of particular national, economic and historical significance**, through expanded funding, technical assistance, and adaptation planning guidelines.
4. The federal government should **work together with the insurance industry to develop incentives for climate-smart building**, through government policies that reward insurance companies that use standards and practices which consider climate resilience and preparedness.

## Building Capacity for Resilience

“In order to adequately plan for climate impacts and make smart investments in resilience, communities must first have the capacity to recognize, understand, and assess relevant climate-related risks, and the impact of those threats to local economies, infrastructure, property, agriculture, natural resources, and human populations.”

1. The federal government needs to **provide reliable guidance, data and tools** to policy and investment decision makers. This should include more small-scale, regional and locally pertinent climate change impact information; greater information sharing between agencies so there is a central federal repository of data, such as hazard maps; and more guidance to decision makers about how to understand climate change projections and scenarios.
2. The government should **support and encourage cross-jurisdictional and regional cooperation** between states, territories, localities, counties and tribes, so they can use resources and plan more efficiently. The federal government can help this along by removing barriers to funding for regional initiatives, incentivizing cooperative efforts and partnerships, and providing technical assistance and training to collaborations.
3. The federal government should **create a Climate Resilience Corps** to increase capacity, resilience planning and community engagement across the nation. The Corps would focus on underserved communities.
4. The Task Force finds that supporting public education on climate risks is essential to increasing climate resilience work. To this end, the government should develop and make publicly available communications and educational tools to **encourage climate literacy and public awareness of climate change**.

In conclusion, the Task Force recommended the designation of a senior administration official who could oversee the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations across the executive branch, as well as the creation of benchmarks and a reporting process for progress on the recommendations moving forward.

## Executive Actions

The White House has already unveiled a series of initiatives in response to the Task Force's recommendations. In response to the Task Force's preliminary recommendations on July 16, 2014, the President announced a series of initiatives that same day. When the Task Force released its final recommendations on November 17, 2014, the White House announced additional initiatives, and stated its commitment to continue collaborating with Task Force members on resilience efforts going forward. The White House's key resilience announcements are listed below.

### Helping communities understand the risks

**The Climate Resilience Toolkit.** To support Task Force members and other local leaders nationally in their work on climate resilience, the White House unveiled the Climate Resilience Toolkit, a website developed with input from the Task Force. The website, available at [toolkit.climate.gov](http://toolkit.climate.gov), provides access to dozens of tools planners can use to better understand climate change impacts on their communities. The Climate Resilience Toolkit features a tool called the "Climate Explorer," which offers visualizations of different data and climate change scenarios on a map of the United States, such as different amounts of sea level rise, current areas in drought, and the mix of crops across the country. There are also 44 case studies—"Taking Action" stories—showcasing the ways in which different communities have mounted resilience efforts to protect against local vulnerabilities. The website provides a central database with 125 links to external websites with their own climate-related online tools, which range from maps of soil surveys to photo editing software that creates "before" and "after" pictures for different climate-changed futures. Finally, the website has a section offering free training courses, both online and in-person.

**A \$13.1 million 3-D Elevation Program** partnership between the Department of Interior's U.S. Geological Survey and other federal agencies, to create 3-dimensional maps of the United States. These maps will help professionals accurately model flood risks, water management, coastal erosion, storm surge, and landslide hazards. Visit <http://nationalmap.gov/3DEP/> for more information.

**A Climate Education and Literacy Initiative**, offered through the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), which will convene thought leaders in education and climate science from across the country to create steps to help students access climate science information.

**A new guide, "Assessing Health Vulnerability to Climate Change,"** released by the CDC. The guide aims to help public health departments understand climate change's impacts on health. [www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/pubs/AssessingHealthVulnerabilitytoClimateChange.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/pubs/AssessingHealthVulnerabilitytoClimateChange.pdf)

**A Hampton Roads Preparation and Resilience Exercise**, conducted by the National Security Council with assistance from the National Exercise Division, held December 2, 2014. The tabletop exercise examined how storm surge and flooding under a sea level rise scenario would affect Hampton Roads, VA.

### Helping communities become more resilient

**Two "Preparedness Pilots,"** in partnership with the City of Houston, the State of Colorado, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Johnson Space Flight Center, and the Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL). The pilots will convene federal agencies and communities to plan for regional vulnerabilities from climate change.



**A total of \$236.3 million in funding awards for eight states to improve rural electric infrastructure**, supported through the Department of Agriculture (USDA).

**A \$10 million Federal-Tribal Climate Resilience Partnership and Technical Assistance Program** to create and provide adaptation training to tribes, through the Department of Interior's (DOI) Bureau of Indian Affairs. In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the DOI created an interagency group to support tribal adaptation and mitigation efforts.

**A \$1.5 million competitive funding grant for helping states and tribes improve coastal management programs**, under the auspice of Section 309 of the *Coastal Zone Management Act*, administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

**Online climate adaptation and resilience training for local government officials**, offered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with help from the EPA's Local Government Advisory Committee. Once ready, this will be available online through the Climate Resilience Toolkit.

Funding assistance to a minimum of 25 communities for the **implementation of green infrastructure, especially green stormwater infrastructure**. This will be conducted by the EPA under the new Green Infrastructure Collaborative, and will involve help from NGOs, government agencies and the private sector.

**A disaster recovery app, called Lantern Live**, which will display in real-time which areas still have electricity and which gas stations still have fuel after a natural disaster. Lantern Live is being developed by the Department of Energy, and is currently available only on Android phones.

[energy.gov/articles/energy-department-launches-mobile-app-energy-emergencies](http://energy.gov/articles/energy-department-launches-mobile-app-energy-emergencies)

## Helping communities rebuild in smarter, safer and stronger ways after a disaster

President Obama first announced the **National Disaster Resilience Competition** in June 2014, but the July 16 announcement updated and expanded his prior comments. The one-year competition offers close to \$1 billion in resources for communities which have suffered recent natural disasters, to enable them to build "replicable models of modern disaster recovery" which will be more resilient to future disasters. Funding is provided through the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

**FEMA updated its State Hazard Mitigation Plans to ask states to consider and prepare for climate change** as they plan for future natural disasters. State Hazard Mitigation Plans aim to help states plan resilience measures, such as raising houses above flood plains and rebuilding to a higher standard, to protect against future disasters.

**The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) established a Mitigation Integration Task Force**, which was to create a Mitigation Integration Pilot Program by the end of August.

## White House Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Requests for Resilience Measures

The President's FY 2016 Budget Request contains funding for initiatives the Task Force recommended. While not yet approved by Congress, the request represents an important outline of what the White House would like to do to address the Task Force's concerns and promote national resilience. These include:

### Flood resilience funding

1. **\$400 million to fund National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) Risk Mapping**, to assist communities in understanding their vulnerability to floods.
2. \$175 million for NFIP mitigation grants, to help lower flood damage risk.
3. \$200 million for the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to use watershed-scale land treatment measures and planning in helping communities plan, mitigate and adapt before extreme weather events.

### **Coastal resilience funding**

1. **Two new programs focusing on coastal resilience would be established at \$50 million each**, one at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and one at the Department of the Interior. These would aim to reduce climate change risks to coastal ecosystems and communities.

### **Drought resilience funding**

1. **\$89 million for the Department of the Interior's WaterSMART program**, promoting water conservation and technology research.
2. The budget also provides the Department of Agriculture with strong support for its regional Climate Hubs and other efforts to integrate climate change considerations into existing programs.

### **Wildland fire resilience funding**

1. **The budget proposes a new framework for funding wildland fire suppression**, modeled on how the United States funds other natural disaster aid. This would preclude the need to modify the budget cap for any but the most severe of wildland fires, minimizing the need to transfer funds from other programs.

### **Future disaster mitigation funding**

1. **\$200 million for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Pre-disaster Mitigation Grant Program**, to support infrastructure hardening, mitigation planning, and resilience investments.

### **Climate Resilience Toolkit funding**

1. **\$20 million to continue to develop and improve the Climate Resilience Toolkit** (see above).

### **Partnering with local communities funding**

1. **\$4 million to create a resilience corps pilot program**, based out of the Corporation for National and Community Service. The resilience corps would be made up of about 200 AmeriCorps members, who would help communities plan for and address climate change impacts.
2. \$2 million for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to conduct training for the resilience corps.
3. \$31 million for the Army Corps of Engineers to work with local communities through technical and planning assistance on flood risk.
4. **\$50 million, an increase of \$40 million over current funding levels, for American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages to pursue climate change resilience.**

### **Researching natural carbon sequestration funding**

1. **\$108 million to fund the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of the Interior's Geological Survey (USGS) to research the role of natural lands in sequestering carbon dioxide.** Out of the \$108 million total request, \$83 million will support USDA's Forest Inventory and Analysis program; \$18.5 million will support USGS in R&D on carbon sequestration; and \$6 million will support EPA's greenhouse gas accounting programs.

### **National Weather Service risk outlooks funding**

1. **A \$9 million increase to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration** to gain more expertise in predicting extreme weather three to four weeks in advance.



## Conclusion

The White House State, Local and Tribal Leaders Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience recommendations are at once a request for support from the federal government, a guide for leveraging federal resources wisely, and a large and visible statement of the urgent need for help from communities attempting to grow their resilience to extreme weather in a world with a changing climate. Across the country, communities are already making large investments in resilience, confronting hard choices about how to allocate limited resources in the face of many urgent needs, and working to ensure their populations will be safe when disaster strikes. In convening the Task Force, the White House displayed its understanding of the federal government's vital role in supporting these communities. The Task Force's final recommendation to the federal government is that it should keep open the lines of communication forged by the creation of the Task Force, and continue to engage tribal, state and local leaders as it acts to promote resilience across the country.

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*The Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI) is a non-profit organization founded in 1984 by a bipartisan Congressional caucus dedicated to finding innovative environmental and energy solutions. EESI works to protect the climate and ensure a healthy, secure and sustainable future for America through policymaker education, coalition building, and policy development in the areas of energy efficiency, renewable energy, agriculture forestry, transportation, buildings and urban planning.*

### Sources

[President's State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience - Recommendations to the President](#)

[White House Webpage: State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force On Climate Preparedness and Resilience](#)

[White House Fact Sheet: Taking Action to Support State, Local, and Tribal Leaders as They Prepare Communities for the Impacts of Climate Change](#)

[White House Fact Sheet: Recommendations of the President's State, Local and Tribal Leaders Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience and New Executive Actions](#)

[White House Fact Sheet: Executive Order on Climate Preparedness](#)

[White House Fact Sheet: 16 U.S. Communities Recognized as Climate Action Champions for Leadership on Climate Change](#)

[Department of Housing and Urban Development Fact Sheet: National Disaster Resilience Competition](#)