



Disaster Resilience Toolkit

Supporting America's Southern Rural Communities

AT A GLANCE

As natural disasters increase in frequency and intensity, they often coincide with public health crises and economic downturns. That overlap exacerbates the impact they have on millions of Americans, particularly in rural areas of the American South. Local leaders must reevaluate how they protect their communities. Workforce resilience is the key to recovery.

MAY 2021

Foreword



Maria Flynn, JFF

Local leaders have always had to navigate times of crisis, whether those crises are driven by nature, medical emergencies, civil strife, or other turbulent factors. In the past year alone, communities across our nation have battled crises on multiple fronts, from the deadly COVID-19 pandemic to hurricanes across the South, wildfires in the West, and a reckoning with racial injustice. In each case, the most vulnerable members of our society have been hit the hardest, and local officials have been called upon to step up and lead recovery efforts.

While the focus of this toolkit is on disasters in Southern rural communities, the themes of tapping a broad ecosystem and driving a people-centered crisis response hold true across various types of disasters in every community. Strengthening and activating links between residents, employers, governments, and community organizations is crucial to converting crisis to equitable economic development across the country. Above all, we must build resilient communities that are prepared for and can withstand and rise from times of crisis.

At a time when many of us are often overly focused on social media and other virtual distractions, it is critical to remember the intrinsic importance of communities and the role they play in the economic advancement of their people. JFF is proud to partner with Bloomberg Philanthropies in developing and designing this Disaster Resilience Toolkit to support communities in the rural South and across the country as they prepare for the future.



Verna Eggleston
Bloomberg
Philanthropies

Bloomberg Philanthropies responds to unmet needs, bringing with us our experience working in cities, using data and partnerships to inform our work around the world.

Internationally, whether the work is in a country that is recovering from conflict and war, a natural disaster, or a health crisis, we must stabilize, assess damages, and move to improve the lives for all members of civil society.

Closer to home, COVID-19 has exposed long existing fault lines and inequities in American society, from the way we work to the health care and emergency response services we have access to, and so much more. This crisis has required government, philanthropy, and the private sector to think differently about challenges and how to work collaboratively to meet the needs of all people.

That is why we partnered with Jobs for the Future to bring together our resources to develop and design a usable guide that examines the possibilities and opportunities for all communities that have been placed at a disadvantage due to a lack of access, resources, and information.

Acknowledgments

Bloomberg Philanthropies

About Bloomberg Philanthropies

Bloomberg Philanthropies invests in 810 cities and 170 countries around the world to ensure better, longer lives for the greatest number of people. The organization focuses on five key areas for creating lasting change: the Arts, Education, Environment, Government Innovation, and Public Health. Bloomberg Philanthropies encompasses all of Michael R. Bloomberg's giving, including his foundation, corporate, and personal philanthropy as well as Bloomberg Associates, a pro bono consultancy that works in cities around the world. For more information, visit [Bloomberg.org](https://www.bloomberg.org).



About Jobs for the Future (JFF)

JFF is a national nonprofit that drives transformation in the American workforce and education systems. For more than 35 years, JFF has led the way in designing innovative and scalable solutions that promote economic advancement for all. www.jff.org

Additional Contributors

Special thanks to former Mayor Billy Keyserling and the people of Beaufort, South Carolina.

Background and Purpose

As natural disasters become increasingly common, they often coincide with public health crises and economic downturns. That overlap exacerbates the impact that these disasters have on millions of Americans. Mayors, county executives, city managers, and other local officials and community leaders must reevaluate how they protect their communities, particularly in rural areas, where small governments may face big challenges when it comes to helping people scattered across large geographical areas.

The challenge may be most acute in the American rural South, which is susceptible to weather-related disasters and where a large portion of the population lives in locations not supported by urban resources. In addition, many of those rural residents are under-resourced people and communities who would have difficulty overcoming a single disaster, let alone concurrent challenges, but who are essential to regional recovery as members of the frontline workforce.

Workforce resilience is the key to recovery. Few efforts have more impact on disaster recovery than steps taken to create the social and economic conditions that support equitable workforce development, and creating those conditions can and should happen alongside traditional emergency management functions. Local leaders are in the best position to lead this work, because they know their communities best. But in order to do so effectively, they must tap a broader ecosystem that governs control and sharing of resources by and among local, state, and federal players. This disaster resilience toolkit provides community leaders with a framework that goes beyond immediate disaster response protocols and outlines how to activate local and far-reaching networks to address societal gaps that push economic opportunities out of reach for many people.

Note: For those who are interested in the baseline protocols and fundamentals of disaster response, we suggest consulting the Federal Emergency Management Agency's [Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101](#), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's [guide to protecting vulnerable populations in a disaster](#), and [Disaster Recovery: A Local Government Responsibility](#) from ICMA.

“By investing in our most vulnerable community members following a disaster, we can drive a faster and stronger recovery, not only for individuals, but for the region as a whole.”



Billy Keyserling
Former Mayor
Beaufort, South Carolina

THE CHALLENGE

Leading Workforce Disaster Resilience

The American South is an economically and demographically diverse region commonly understood to encompass the region south of the Mason-Dixon line and as far west as the Texas-New Mexico border.¹

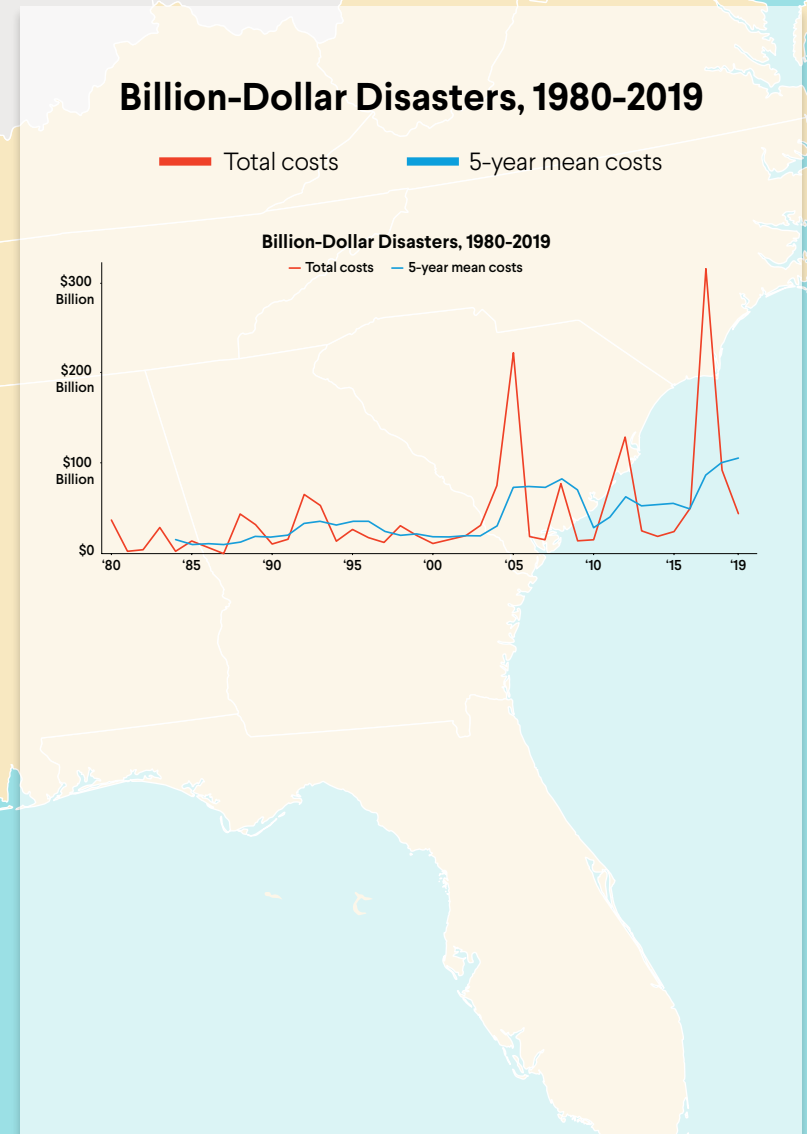
This region is disproportionately affected by natural disasters, which are increasing in severity and frequency and are causing hundreds of billions of dollars in damage annually.²

And now the twin economic and health care crises caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are overlapping with, and compounding the impact of, weather-related disasters.³ The small, diverse community of Beaufort, South Carolina, is a perfect embodiment of this situation: Since 1990, it has experienced 26 hurricanes and tropical storms, flooding, ice storms, and COVID-19.

When disasters strike . . .

- communities experience infrastructure damage and
- residents suffer physical injuries, psychological trauma, and,
- often, loss of income because they are unable to work or their employers are forced to shut down.

Disasters affect everyone, of course. But the most vulnerable communities typically experience the most severe and longest-lasting consequences. When these residents suffer those kinds of losses, the entire community struggles to rebound, because they often make up the majority of the essential workforce. Their contributions are crucial to getting the local economy moving again so the entire community—including senior citizens and children—can recover. This toolkit offers local leaders a guide to immediate steps and long-term strategies to help them get back on their feet after a disaster and advance economically so they're more resilient in the face of future disasters.



THE OPPORTUNITY

Working Toward Workforce Resilience

Many small communities in the South are on their way to greater disaster resilience. Incorporating a focus on the workforce has the potential to dramatically enhance existing disaster planning and policy.

Research shows that leaders of these communities already understand how to access disaster resources from state and federal sources, and have applied for these in the past five years. A majority have plans in place to deal with continuity of operations, hazard mitigation, and the deployment of first responders.⁴

Far fewer of these communities are prepared to provide social services during and after a disaster.⁵ These services—which typically include essential supports like case management to help residents navigate available benefits and job opportunities—help individuals stabilize their lives and return to work, representing an underappreciated recovery opportunity. By making plans to ensure a safe and swift return to work after a disaster, enacting those plans even as public safety and essential services are restored, and working to expand economic opportunity in the long term, local leaders can help to foster a more resilient workforce for the benefit of all.

Local governments play a critical role in reducing the impact of disasters, and mayors, city managers, and other local officials are on the front lines of the response.⁶ Providing more comprehensive relief packages that support income-generating activities for residents can help to accelerate a community's recovery.

Toward that end, rural county executives, local officials, and community leaders can begin building and mobilizing networks of deeply committed local residents, organizations, and businesses while tapping a wide range of available resources, including funding.



Two Ecosystems to Engage

Local leaders can engage two ecosystems—their networks of local stakeholders, and broader networks of state and federal agencies, nonprofits, and service providers—to help build a disaster-resilient workforce. Leaders of small rural communities are uniquely situated to bridge hyperlocal responses with broader state and national disaster recovery efforts.



The Local Ecosystem

Local government • Community-based organizations • Employers • Residents

When they need to mobilize the community, local government officials can tap the relationships they forge in the course of doing their jobs to connect stakeholders, communicate with residents, identify the needs of the community, deploy local resources, and motivate other civic leaders to take action. The people who make up these tight-knit rural networks share a commitment to the well-being of the local workforce. That shared commitment makes it possible for government leaders to go beyond activating municipal public safety or economic agencies and work directly with social service providers, including educational institutions, faith-based groups, and community-based organizations (CBO). For example, after Hurricane Harvey, Tejano Center for Community Concerns in Houston acted as a community recovery hub for families in the city's East End, creating a trusted source of information and helping to provide vital information to local officials managing the disaster response.⁷



The Broader Ecosystem

State government • Federal government • National relief organizations • Regional coalitions

The extended ecosystem includes state and federal government agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, state emergency management agencies or divisions, and national disaster relief organizations such as the American Red Cross. Municipal leaders can tap the broader ecosystem when they need access to a more extensive array of resources than they have locally, and when they want to advocate for policies that create the conditions for workforce resilience. Broadly speaking, after a disaster, local governments respond, while states coordinate and the federal government supports.⁸

Three Phases of Workforce Disaster Resilience

There are three interconnected phases of disaster resilience—prepare, stabilize, and recover. Here is an overview of the work local leaders can do during each phase to engage their local and extended ecosystems and ensure that necessary workforce supports are in place.



PREPARE

Leaders should do as much as possible in advance. This includes mitigating risk exposure by taking steps to identify and resolve existing crises in the workforce while developing disaster stabilization and recovery plans.



Disaster Declared



STABILIZE

During a disaster, leaders should prioritize workforce recovery for the most vulnerable citizens even as they work to meet basic needs and restore public services. They should aim to get everyone back to work as quickly and safely as possible, devoting extra attention to populations that are in crisis.



Basic Needs Met



RECOVER

When the recovery phase is underway, leaders should take steps to alleviate the long-term effects of disaster on the local workforce. They should quickly adjust to the post-disaster economy and promote economic opportunity for all residents.



Activate the Local Ecosystem

Identify and alleviate ongoing local workforce crises or challenges. Align supports to address barriers to economic mobility, like lack of access to child care or transportation.

Regularly revisit disaster recovery plans, prioritizing the safe and timely return to work.

- Create an interdepartmental task force that is representative of the community and connected to vulnerable groups.
- Ensure that there are contracts in place for core disaster services (such as housing supports, food assistance, and case management).
- Amplify the existing disaster response infrastructure. For example, [Beaufort County's Emergency Management Mobile App](#) provides disaster planning resources and real-time information to residents.

Promote economic mobility and expand opportunities in disaster-resilient, in-demand occupations.

- Semiannually, review labor market information to ensure that education and training programs focus on opportunities likely to remain viable in the future.
- Build career pathways by working with employers to ensure that they offer opportunities for advancement.
- Annually review education and training programs to ensure that skill development efforts are responsive to the community's potential disaster-resilience needs.



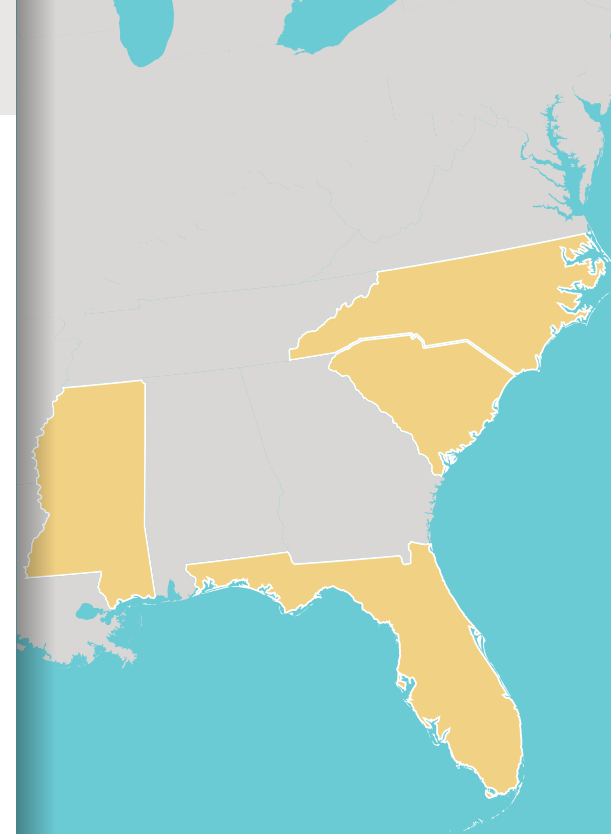
Access the Broader Ecosystem

Build regional, state, interstate, and national networks to strengthen readiness for disasters.

Set up mutual aid agreements with nearby communities. Ensure that those agreements go beyond emergency services and equipment to also cover social services.

Influence state and federal policy.

Organize a coalition of regional partners to meet with state and federal officials to share lessons learned from past disasters and advocate for policies that provide disaster preparedness resources more efficiently. For example, could damage assessments be done more quickly? What role might local governments play in identifying vulnerable infrastructure in the community?



Workforce Resilience in Action

Residents of Asheville, **North Carolina**, and other Southern cities have more flexibility to work during the day because they can enroll their children in afterschool programs that provide child care.⁹

Residents of rural jurisdictions in **South Carolina, Mississippi, and Florida** can commute to work via reliable public transit services.¹⁰

Activate the Local Ecosystem

Offer social services to impacted residents.

Ensure that service providers, including local government offices, nonprofit agencies, and workforce boards, stay up and running so they can continue to coordinate the delivery of benefits that meet basic needs and connect residents to economic opportunities.¹¹

Fill the ‘lifeboats.’ Dislocated workers can earn money and perhaps learn new skills by taking so-called lifeboat jobs that are readily available and don’t require advanced training. After a disaster, such jobs are often available in fields that are part of the recovery effort.¹²

Find funds for training programs. Work with the local workforce system to identify public sources of non-emergency funding for training. Possibilities include Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs, and Community Services Block Grants (CSBG).

Bring employment supports directly to the people. Offer employment services at the sites where residents will be seeking emergency services, such as municipal offices, community organizations, and faith-based institutions.

Access the Broader Ecosystem

Address transportation problems and safety concerns. Eliminate barriers that are preventing people from returning to work.

Work with other local leaders to make state and federal officials aware of your region’s status.

Offer services at sites accessible to residents in remote areas.

- Safe locations like school gyms and church buildings are good options.
- Deliver in-demand services, such as Wi-Fi and phone charging stations, via mobile units.

Communicate using culturally relevant messaging. Translate announcements into multiple languages and use multiple channels to provide updates about economic recovery opportunities.

Workforce Resilience in Action

During an ICMA COVID-19 webinar, an assistant city manager offered this insight:

“[Your city will] get lost in the shuffle if you are small, less than 25,000 people. The smaller you are, the harder it is to get that money. Rattle your saber and make a lot of noise.”¹³

Where can you find workforce training money locally?

Federal Program	Local Agency
WIOA	Workforce Development Board (WDB)
SNAP	Health and Human Services Agency / WDB
TANF	Health and Human Services Agency / WDB
CSBG	Community Action Agency



Activate the Local Ecosystem

Focus on long-term recovery for the local workforce. Use labor market information to adjust workforce strategies to post-disaster realities, including demographic shifts and changes in demand for talent. For example, demand for workers has decreased dramatically in brick-and-mortar retail during the COVID-19 pandemic, but automation is expected to lead to growth in demand for people to fill hybrid and fully remote roles.¹⁴

Work with business leaders to rebuild the workforce. Industry associations and labor-management organizations can help determine how the disaster affected specific types of workers. For example, after Hurricane Katrina, the Mississippi Construction Education Foundation helped identify shortages of construction workers to support the launch of the Gulf Coast Workforce Development Initiative.

Build pathways out of disaster employment. Offer retraining opportunities to residents who took jobs in industries that experienced a disaster “boom.”¹⁵



Access the Broader Ecosystem

Collaborate with other leaders to build a diverse economy. Embrace economic development as a long-term disaster mitigation strategy, and launch initiatives that attract a range of industries and address common hiring, training, and retention challenges.

Continue to seek state and federal support.

- State emergency management agencies can help

local leaders identify discretionary grant programs that cover workforce training and disaster response.

- State workforce agencies and the U.S. Departments of Transportation, Labor, and Commerce may support infrastructure and economic recovery projects. While funding flows vary greatly state by state, every state typically has a disaster emergency fund appropriated by the governor, and once that is exhausted, the state can allocate other funding from existing state and federal sources or lobby federal agencies for additional funds, such as community development block grants.¹⁶
- Up to 15 percent of a state’s governor’s reserve WIOA funding can be used for training and employment programs for disaster recovery. Local workforce boards can work with their state departments of commerce or equivalent agencies to unlock these funds when a disaster is declared.
- The U.S. Department of Labor may provide disaster response funds through the National Dislocated Worker Grant program.¹⁷

Help national partners hand projects to locals.

National volunteer organizations can help with rebuilding, but they don’t create jobs. Communities need plans for transitioning projects to locals who will hire paid workers.

Share stories. Local leaders can share lessons learned about recovery practices in programs offered by national organizations like the National Association of Workforce Boards, the American Association of Community Colleges, the International City/County Management Association, the National League of Cities, and JFF.

Workforce Resilience in Action

After Hurricane Katrina, the **Mississippi** Construction Education Foundation helped identify shortages of construction workers to support the launch of the Gulf Coast Workforce Development Initiative.

And in Hancock County, **Mississippi**, officials wrote paid labor contracts into grant funding proposals to create jobs after local contractors took over rebuilding projects from national volunteer organizations.¹⁸

Checklist for Building a Disaster-Resilient Workforce

Local leaders in the rural South can better prepare their communities to recover from disasters if they focus on developing a disaster-resilient local workforce. This checklist offers a rundown of steps they can take within their local and extended ecosystems at each phase of disaster resilience.



Prepare

Local Ecosystem

- ✓ Foster economic mobility by creating career pathways and aligning education to employer needs.
- ✓ Assemble a group of leaders from businesses, CBOs, faith-based groups, and others to share information and coordinate planning efforts.
- ✓ Make arrangements with public and nonprofit agencies for core social services to be available to residents during a disaster.
- ✓ Ensure that local training and education programs prepare learners for disaster-resilient jobs in the community.

Broader Ecosystem

- ✓ Partner with other communities, and enter into mutual aid agreements with them.
- ✓ Convene an annual summit where leaders from across the state share best practices in disaster preparedness.
- ✓ Lobby state and federal agencies to enact policies that support disaster resilience programs focused on the workforce.



Stabilize

Local Ecosystem

- ✓ Activate emergency stakeholder networks that were created before the disaster.
- ✓ Address basic needs, including sustained and connected social services (keep public transit moving and protect nutrition assistance, for example).
- ✓ Tap into local funding to support relevant, free training programs, especially for “lifeboat” jobs.
- ✓ Offer employment services at the sites where residents will be seeking emergency services.

Broader Ecosystem

- ✓ Ensure that mutual aid arrangements with other communities are in effect.
- ✓ Work with other local leaders to make state and federal officials aware of your region’s status.
- ✓ Offer services at sites that are accessible to residents of remote areas.
- ✓ Communicate with residents in multiple languages using channels they are familiar with, including SMS services, broadcast media, phone trees, and social media.



Recover

Local Ecosystem

- ✓ Turn the response task force into a recovery task force and focus on long-term planning.
- ✓ Use labor market data to adjust workforce strategies to new realities, such as shifts in demographics and demand for talent.
- ✓ Help residents transition out of lifeboat jobs and into longer-term career pathways.

Broader Ecosystem

- ✓ Collaborate with local leaders to ensure that state economic development efforts align with workforce priorities to attract a diverse industry mix that is less vulnerable to shocks.¹⁹
- ✓ Leverage state and federal resources. Partner with other local leaders to lobby state and federal agencies to include your communities in long-term recovery efforts such as infrastructure, housing, and environmental projects.
- ✓ Help national partners transition recovery projects back to locals.
- ✓ Document lessons learned and use them to prepare for future disasters.

Endnotes and Credits

1. Ferrel Guillory, *The South: Complex Landscape, Common Challenge* (Durham, NC: MDC, n.d.), <http://stateofthesouth.org/the-south-complex-landscape-common-challenge/>.
2. Sarah Beth Gehl, Komla Dzigbede, and Katherine Willoughby, *Disasters & Equity* (Atlanta, GA: Southern Economic Advancement Project, July 2020), <https://theseap.org/wp-content/uploads/SEAP-Natural-Disaster-Brief.pdf>; Adam B. Smith, “2010-2019: A Landmark Decade of U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters,” *Climate.gov* (Washington, DC: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, January 8, 2020), <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/beyond-data/2010-2019-landmark-decade-us-billion-dollar-weather-and-climate>.
3. Christine Vestal, “The South May See the Largest Share of Coronavirus Misery,” *Stateline*, The Pew Charitable Trusts, April 4, 2020, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2020/04/13/the-south-may-see-the-largest-share-of-coronavirus-misery>.
4. International City/County Managers Association (ICMA), *Disaster Resilience & Recovery Survey: Summary of Survey Results*, December 2019, [https://icma.org/sites/default/files/Disaster Resiliency and Recovery Survey Summary_0.pdf](https://icma.org/sites/default/files/Disaster%20Resiliency%20and%20Recovery%20Survey%20Summary_0.pdf).
5. Sarah Beth Gehl, Komla D. Dzigbede, and Katherine Willoughby, “Disasters and Equity,” (Atlanta, GA: Southern Economic Advancement Project, July 2020), <https://theseap.org/wp-content/uploads/SEAP-Natural-Disaster-Brief.pdf>.
6. Komla D. Dzigbede, Sarah Beth Gehl, and Katherine Willoughby, “Disaster Resiliency of U.S. Local Governments: Insights to Strengthen Local Response and Recovery From the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Public Administration Review*, May 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13249>.
7. Pho, Susanna, *Totally Familiar Yet Completely New: Opportunities for and Challenges to Integrating Disaster Risk Management in Community Development* (Cambridge, MA, and Washington, DC: Harvard University and NeighborWorks America, April 2019), https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/media/imp/harvard_jchs_pho_totally_familiar_completely_new_2019.pdf.
8. Dzigbede, “Disaster Resiliency of U.S. Local Governments,” <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13249>.
9. National League of Cities, *Afterschool and Summer Learning: A City Strategy for Workforce Development*, November 20, 2020, <https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/afterschool-and-summer-learning-a-city-strategy-for-workforce-development.pdf>.
10. Ray Khalfani, *Bridging the Transportation Gap: How Nonprofits and Local Governments Are Tackling Rural Transportation Challenges* (Atlanta, GA: Southern Economic Advancement Project, February 2020), <https://theseap.org/wp-content/uploads/SEAP-Rural-Transportation.pdf>.
11. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Human Services, Emergency Preparedness, and Response, “Disaster Human Services Case Management,” accessed December 2020, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohsepr/programs/disaster-human-services-case-management-0>.
12. Burning Glass Technologies, *Filling the Lifeboats: Getting America Back to Work After the Pandemic*, May 2020, <https://www.burning-glass.com/research-project/filling-lifeboats-getting-america-back-work-after-pandemic/>.
13. International City/County Managers Association (ICMA), “COVID 19 Resources: Fiscal and Organizational Strategies During a Pandemic,” webinar, May 8, 2020, <https://icma.org/documents/covid-19-resources-fiscal-and-organizational-strategies-during-pandemic>.
14. Sachin Waikar, “After COVID: The Future of Work, the Shifting Labor Market, and the Need for Safe 2020 Elections,” Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, Stanford University, June 4, 2020, <https://hai.stanford.edu/blog/after-covid-future-work-shifting-labor-market-and-need-safe-2020-elections>.
15. Sarah Jenness, Julia di Bonaventura, Nancy Hoffman, *From Labor Market Information to Pathways Designs: Foundational Information for Intermediaries* (Boston, MA: JFF, January 2021) <https://www.jff.org/what-we-do/impact-stories/building-equitable-pathways/labor-market-information-pathways-designs/>.
16. U.S. Department of Transportation, “Disaster Recovery: State & Local Funding Sources,” last updated March 3, 2015, <https://www.transportation.gov/highlights/disaster-recovery-funding/state-local>.
17. U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, “Disaster: Qualifying Event,” accessed December 2020, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/dislocated-workers/grants/disaster>.
18. Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Lessons in Community Recovery: Seven Years of Emergency Support Function #14 Long-Term Community Recovery From 2004 to 2011* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, December 2, 2011), <https://www.fema.gov/pdf/rebuild/ltrc/2011-report.pdf>.
19. Lauren Eyster, *Coordinating Workforce and Economic Development Under WIOA*, State and Local Finance Initiative Brief (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, October 2015), <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/72131/2000472-coordination-workforce-and-economic-development-under-wioa.pdf>.

Image Credit

Page 3: Digital photograph taken by [User:MoodyGroove |MoodyGroove] at 0750 on July 25, 2007. Harbor of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, United States.



50 Milk St., 17th Floor, Boston, MA 02109

122 C St., NW, Suite 280, Washington, DC 20001

505 14th St., Suite 340, Oakland, CA 94612

TEL 617.728.4446 **WEB** www.jff.org