CASE STUDY
Isle de Jean Charles

The tribal-led planning process that served as the basis for the State of Louisiana’s grant application to the National Disaster Resilience Competition was an incredibly intensive process with over 40 tribal members deeply involved over the span of several years. The process was led by Tribal leaders in partnership with over forty different institutions, subject matter experts from dozens of related disciplines, partners for neighboring tribes, local government officials, and many others.

The Tribal Council and leadership participated extensively in the NDRC planning process, raising funds for and holding several large workshops over the span of two years, as well as weekly meetings during the application phases. Many tribal members also participated, including some Island residents, but others preferred to have the Council act on their behalf. Several prior efforts, as well as the duration of the application process had resulted in some planning fatigue.

The planning process utilized a systems approach, in which efforts were made to map the complexity of the process, and to incorporate the many voices and perspectives that were at the table. This approach is in sharp contrast to the process followed by the State of Louisiana following the awarding of the grant, in which the Tribe is only a stakeholder and the resettlement is not solely for the Tribe. Between 2016 and 2019 the State has utilized contractors to re-do site assessments, conduct a master planning process, and to re-do all of the site design. The decision by the State to re-do a planning process, and to discount the efforts of the Tribe, further exacerbated planning fatigue.

This case illustrates the problems that arise and how existing rules and regulations are utilized for complex problems, such as community-led resettlement. Despite the significant role played by the Tribe in the creation of the grant application, and despite the substantial community-engagement, the final award is entirely controlled by the State and an entirely new planning process was undertaken—one that treats the tribe as just one of many stakeholders.

The Tribe itself, having publicly been part of this large award, is now in a precarious position in terms of seeking any further funding for a community-led process. The media attention attached to such a large award has made it appear as though the Tribe’s needs have been met, when in fact they have not.

Left: The National Academy of Sciences grant supported a tribe-led process in which the Tribe was at the center of the decision-making process.
Right: In a prior, tribe-led planning process in 2016, members of the Tribe participated in the selection of their lots based on familial and community ties, views, and adjacencies.

GUIDING QUESTION
What would a community-centered process look like for your community?