



NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER
BRAD LANDER

**URBAN
OCEAN
LAB**

Social Cohesion as a Climate Strategy

Reflections on Superstorm Sandy

BUREAU OF POLICY AND RESEARCH

OCTOBER 2022



Contents

Introduction	5
What is “Community Resilience”?	6
Community Responses in the Aftermath of Superstorm Sandy	7
From Response and Recovery to Resilience in the Decade Since Sandy	8
Organizational Growth and Development.....	8
Education and Capacity Building	9
Community-Owned Infrastructure	9
Community-Led Planning.....	10
Government Engagement.....	11
Building Community Resilience in New York City.....	12
Recommendations to Better Support and Scale Community Resilience Efforts.....	13
Conclusion	20
Notes and Acknowledgements.....	21
Methodology.....	22

Introduction

Social capital plays an [important role](#) in facilitating community disaster response and recovery: Neighbors coming together to help neighbors can make all the difference when disaster strikes. Ten years ago, Superstorm Sandy changed New York City forever—the storm [resulted in](#) the loss of 43 lives and caused \$19 billion of damage. As government agencies scrambled to respond, formal and informal community organizations mobilized quickly to provide critical services to those in need.

Ten years later, community organizations remain essential to the strength of our city and our people, and have been building the [social cohesion](#) necessary to prepare for, respond to, and recover from [worsening climate impacts](#), including extreme heat, [rising seas](#), and more intense coastal storms and flooding.

For the 10-year anniversary of Superstorm Sandy, the Office of the New York City Comptroller and Urban Ocean Lab partnered on an assessment of community-led climate resilience initiatives that developed in the wake of the storm. We spoke with leaders of community organizations across New York City, as well as other community resilience practitioners, to document the evolution of their work—from response and recovery to resilience; identify best practices and successful models; and put forward actionable recommendations for the City of New York to better support communities and scale their efforts. Grounded in those conversations, we recommend that New York actively support community-led preparation for, response to, and recovery from climate impacts by:

1. Moving from models of community engagement to collaborative governance.
2. Creating dedicated flexible funding for community organizations to implement resiliency solutions.
3. Establishing on-call emergency contracts for community organizations to institutionalize their role in climate disaster preparedness and response.
4. Developing a comprehensive community organization training program for climate preparedness and resiliency.
5. Investing in the resilience of community organizations' physical spaces, establishing them as "Community Resilience Hubs."

What is “Community Resilience”?

While there is [no single definition](#) of “community resilience,” the organizations we spoke with highlighted several key elements: (1) honoring and leading with local expertise; (2) the connectedness and cohesion of social networks and relationships; (3) grassroots communication; and (4) the capacity to prepare for, bounce forward from, and thrive in the face of adversity and uncertainty. While this report focuses on resilience in the context of climate change, community leaders also mentioned resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community leaders we spoke with also emphasized the barriers to community resilience. Specifically, they identified the relationship between resilience and systemic inequities, and noted that climate change [is compounding](#) long-standing issues of [housing](#), [food](#), and [financial](#) insecurity that result from [disinvestment](#) and [discriminatory policies](#).

Conversations with the following NYC community organizations informed this report

Carey Gardens Resident Association
The Flossy Organization
Fresh Creek Civic Association
Good Old Lower East Side
Lower East Side East River Residents Committee
Natural Resources Protective Association
Red Hook Initiative
Rockaway Initiative for Sustainability and Equity (RISE)
Science and Resilience Institute at Jamaica Bay
Staten Island Long Term Recovery Organization
Staten Island Non For Profit Association, including Staten Island COAD
WE ACT for Environmental Justice

Community Responses in the Aftermath of Superstorm Sandy



Volunteers gather outside the GOLES office in the days after Superstorm Sandy. Photo Credit: Damaris Reyes

New York City was unprepared for Superstorm Sandy. In the days following the storm, community organizations characterized the local and federal government’s response as inadequate, slow, uncoordinated, and poorly communicated. As a result, communities across New York City mobilized to provide essential services to those in need—they performed wellness checks on neighbors, distributed food and water, shared information and resources, and opened their physical spaces to those in need of shelter or a place to gather and organize. Established nonprofits led some efforts, while newly formed volunteer mutual aid drove others. Many community groups did not have prior training or experience in emergency response—their efforts required determination and creativity to secure resources to meet urgent needs.

As the [Staten Island Long-Term Recovery Organization \(SILTRO\)](#) put it, many organizations felt a “moral mandate to help regardless of their missions or programs.” Members of the Carey Gardens Resident Association in Coney Island, Brooklyn recalled being first on the scene to check on neighbors and deliver food to older adults with limited mobility. In Red Hook, Brooklyn, where residents of the Red Hook Houses [went without](#) power for three weeks, heat for 17 days, and running water for 11 days, the [Red Hook Initiative \(RHI\)](#) opened its doors to over 1,200 residents to get a hot meal, charge cell phones, receive medical attention or legal support, and obtain supplies. RHI, like many community groups across the city, became a critical hub for its community, serving as a trusted source of information for local residents and a trusted voice to represent the ongoing needs of the neighborhood to public officials. RHI also worked collaboratively with new mutual aid efforts that arose in Sandy’s wake.

From Response and Recovery to Resilience in the Decade Since Sandy

As emergency response needs subsided, community organizations in Sandy-impacted areas shifted their focus to resilience: They expanded their organizational capacity and services; formed coalitions to coordinate emergency preparedness efforts; offered new educational and training programs to raise awareness and increase climate readiness; expanded the scope of their work into new areas like community-owned resilient infrastructure; facilitated community-led planning efforts and advocated for implementation; and worked to improve social cohesion within their communities and engagement with city, state, and federal government.

Organizational Growth and Development

As a result of their experiences with Superstorm Sandy, many existing community organizations shifted their focus towards climate resilience—creating new programs and hiring staff. RHI reflected that Sandy was a pivotal moment of growth for their organization to add capacity and new services as the needs of the community evolved. [WE ACT for Environmental Justice](#) started a 504(c)(4) arm, [WE ACT 4 Change](#), to more effectively engage political processes, holding elected officials and candidates accountable to climate and environmental justice commitments.

Following Superstorm Sandy, entirely new organizations were also created to coordinate community recovery and now resilience efforts. Fresh Creek Civic Association was founded by community volunteers after Canarsie, Brooklyn was initially left out of some post-Sandy recovery programs—residents helped secure additional resources for their community and seats at decision-making tables. In Staten Island, SILTRO, now a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, was founded by faith and community groups to advance [an equitable long-term recovery](#). And the [Staten Island Not For Profit Association \(SINFPA\)](#) established a new Staten Island coalition of [Community Organizations Active in Disaster \(COAD\)](#), with dedicated staff to coordinate emergency preparedness efforts across the borough. Although created to respond to a natural disaster, the [Staten Island COAD](#) built important capacity for community resilience that has been essential during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

¹ The Staten Island COAD received grants from the NYC Department of Health for COVID-19 response, and played a leading role in outreach, communicating health and safety information to Staten Island residents.

Education and Capacity Building

To increase climate preparedness in their communities, many community organizations now offer educational and capacity building programs. These include youth programs that build climate and environmental literacy such as [Rockaway Initiative for Sustainability & Equity](#) (RISE)'s [Shore Corps](#) program for high school students to participate in environmental stewardship, civic engagement, and community planning. Emergency preparedness programs have also been developed, such as training workshops and peer exchanges hosted by the Staten Island COAD, and the [Be A Buddy Program](#), which WE ACT participated in to mobilize volunteers to check on at-risk older adults and people living alone during heat waves.

Community organizations themselves also participate in education and training programs, in order to build their capacity to better serve their communities. Leaders from the Fresh Creek Civic Association participated in volunteer stewardship training through the NYC Parks Department to be able to educate their neighbors about climate change mitigation; and the civic association is now in the process of creating workshops for their community on green infrastructure and nature-based solutions. Along with other Canarsie partner organizations, the Fresh Creek Civic Association also participated in the [Cycles of Resilience](#) program, organized by the [Science and Resilience Institute at Jamaica Bay \(SRIJB\)](#). This multi-year program allowed the cohort of Canarsie leaders to shape the types of training and workshops that would be most useful for them to engage decision-makers and carry out priority initiatives in their neighborhood.

Community-Owned Infrastructure

In the decade since Superstorm Sandy, communities across New York City have worked to ensure that the physical infrastructure of their neighborhoods—including energy and telecommunications systems—is more resilient. One example is RHI's [Red Hook WiFi](#) network. RHI designed and installed its own mesh WiFi network² before Superstorm Sandy, and it became the [communications backbone](#) of the neighborhood when the internet was out after the storm. This infrastructure provided a foundation that federal emergency responders could build upon: When Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials arrived in Red Hook days after the storm, they were "[pleasantly surprised](#)" by the neighborhood network and deployed a satellite link to boost the broadband connection of the community WiFi network. As part of its recovery efforts, RHI built upon the success of the local network and created Red Hook WiFi to provide free resilient internet access in the neighborhood. Red Hook WiFi also serves as a [workforce development program](#) for

² Mesh WiFi networks consist of a series of connected WiFi devices hosted in local establishments and supported by solar-powered backup systems that are built to withstand strong storm conditions.

the community where “digital stewards,” who are largely young adult community members, receive digital and technology training and are paid to install and maintain these networks.

Beyond telecommunications, community organizations are also investing in community-designed, -owned, and -maintained green infrastructure as a foundation for lasting resilience. [The Flossy Organization](#) (a Canarsie advocacy group focused on empowering residents and building a stronger community), Fresh Creek Civic Association, and Canarsie residents have installed community gardens and native plantings in their neighborhood to increase water capture during flooding. These kinds of green infrastructure projects can also create [educational opportunities](#) for community members, provide fresh and healthy foods, and improve [physical and mental health](#).

Community-Led Planning

Since Superstorm Sandy, many community organizations have developed their own climate resiliency and action plans to address the specific needs and priorities of their communities, and help guide advocacy efforts and programming. While some of these planning efforts have taken place as part of official city-led processes, others have happened outside of it—with many of the independently-led efforts initiated in response to inequities in city-led processes and plans. Private or philanthropic funds often support these independent community-developed plans.

In 2015, WE ACT developed its [Northern Manhattan Climate Action Plan](#) after a series of workshops that asked residents for their ideas on how to prepare their community for the climate crisis. The plan offers a vision to build wealth through climate interventions, with community banking, community solar, community gardens, and resilient multipurpose waterfront infrastructure. Now, with so many community-led plans in place—like the one in Northern Manhattan—Rebuild by Design, the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), and the Regional Planning Association (RPA) developed a [tool](#) to catalog climate action and resiliency plans, and serve as a central resource to better understand community needs, priorities, and visions for the future.

Government Engagement



Maria Garrett tours new stormwater infrastructure in Canarsie.

Superstorm Sandy catalyzed \$15 billion in federal disaster recovery funding for New York City to repair damaged infrastructure and increase coastal protections. From the suite of [Lower Manhattan Coastal Resiliency](#) projects, to new [high-level storm sewers](#), to [dune](#) and [boardwalk](#) restoration, these projects entailed years-long planning and design processes, as well as a significant amount of time and energy from community organizations. In response, Lower Manhattan

residents founded organizations like the Lower East Side (LES) East River Residents Committee to amplify public and affordable housing residents' voices to the many resiliency efforts in the area. While residents [do not always agree](#) on approaches to resilience, community organizations like LES East River Residents Committee play an important role involving them in the process.

Beyond Superstorm Sandy, community organizations have been advocating for their communities on a myriad of issues and at all levels of government. Environmental justice organizations were crucial to the passage of milestone legislation, including the federal [Inflation Reduction Act](#), the [Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act \(CLCPA\)](#) and [Environmental Bond Act](#) in New York State, and the [Climate Mobilization Act](#) in New York City. Community groups are also advocating for greater investments in green infrastructure in their neighborhoods, such as bioswales, rain gardens, street trees, and community gardens and vegetation.

Building Community Resilience in New York City

Superstorm Sandy clearly demonstrated the realities of climate change and the need for urgent action. Ten years ago, our physical and social infrastructure was put to the test—and as our streets and subways flooded and utilities failed, our communities came together to respond and recover, and then invest in a more resilient future. The work of community organizations is critical as we face worsening and emerging climate threats. When asked how the City could better enable and support their work, the community groups that we spoke with identified a few key areas:

More effective and equitable community engagement processes. City government-led community engagement efforts have required a lot of time and resources from community organizations, which has resulted in mistrust when residents do not understand how or if their input is being used. In tallying the number of plans, reports, and studies that the City of New York has released since Superstorm Sandy, one organizer recalls counting over 80 documents. Another was exasperated at the lack of government coordination of engagement processes, having voiced the same set of community priorities to different agency representatives at various public forums and listening sessions. On the other end of the spectrum, some neighborhoods—like Canarsie—have felt overlooked, and said that getting the attention of decision-makers is their biggest challenge. The range of experiences communities have had when engaging the City underscores the need for better, more streamlined, and more inclusive policies and processes that are tailored to the communities most at risk.



City signage provides information about infrastructure upgrades in Fresh Creek Basin.

Increased funding. Community organizations are often under-resourced and carry out critical work on limited budgets. They rely on a range of funding sources, from philanthropic grants to small government contracts to individual donations. Those who rely on City funding find the application process challenging for small organizations with limited administrative capacities, and the short-term nature of the funding makes it hard for them to manage long-term budgets for multi-year initiatives. Most of the groups interviewed for this report identified the need for more flexible funding to continue their work and invest in their neighborhoods in new ways, like green infrastructure and nature-based solutions. Community organizations are well-suited to implement and steward such local interventions that can complement larger infrastructure investments that municipal and federal governments are making. But to do this work, communities need more accessible funding.

Additional dedicated and trained staff. Many community organizations rely on volunteers, with limited permanent staff or sometimes no staff at all. Several community organizations we spoke with were driven by volunteer efforts, particularly among retirees who have time to devote to community organizing. Some community organizations identified the lack of funding as a barrier to expanding paid permanent staff needed to carry out resilience work. Further, after Superstorm Sandy, many organizations initiated emergency response and recovery work with no prior training. SINFPA members reflected on helping neighbors remove debris from flooded homes without protective gear, or sufficient safety training—as a result, some reported [respiratory impacts](#). Several organizations we spoke to expressed interest in more comprehensive emergency preparedness and resiliency training for staff so that they could be better equipped to lead this work in their communities.

Recommendations to Better Support and Scale Community Resilience Efforts

Supporting the climate-readiness of communities requires investments in both social and physical infrastructure. Resources to build community resilience must prioritize the needs of our most vulnerable residents, enable community self-determination about the future of their neighborhoods, and build community wealth by ensuring that meaningful funding for preparedness and recovery is accessible to community organizations. The recommendations below are a set of actions the City can take to better support and partner with community organizations in leading the critical work of strengthening community resilience.

1. Move from models of community engagement to collaborative governance.

Traditionally, planning and decision-making are top-down, government-driven processes that include some form of community consultation. While several community organizers we spoke with had provided feedback to the City of New York about climate plans and projects, many did

not feel that their voices were heard or that their feedback was meaningfully incorporated into final decisions.

Community members know their neighborhoods best. They know which blocks and homes flood repeatedly, and which neighbors to check on after a heavy storm. City policies must shift from solely seeking community input to institutionally embedding community members into climate planning, ranging from neighborhood to citywide long-term resiliency plans. A “[collaborative governance](#)” approach to planning and decision-making institutionalizes the expertise of community members to be able to facilitate [community-driven planning](#).

Collaborative governance is a [form of governance](#) that “brings public and private stakeholders together in collective forums with public agencies to engage in consensus-oriented decision making.”

Applying this approach in New York City requires commitment to collaborative governance between the City of New York and community groups, followed by investments in community capacity to lead such work and resources to implement the community’s vision.

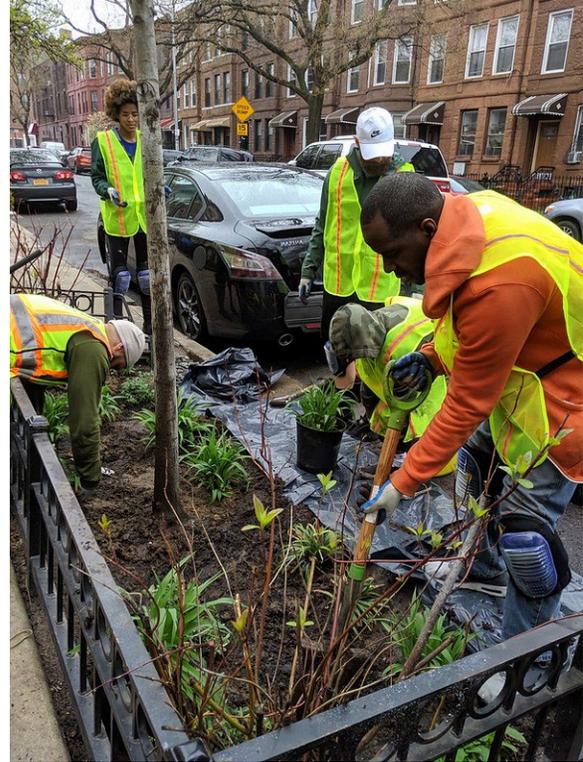
The City should adopt a framework for community co-leadership—this could be modeled off of [Providence’s Climate Justice Plan](#), which documents such an approach. [The process](#) began with a formal agreement that delineated the roles and responsibilities of an integrated project team (comprising the Racial and Environmental Justice Committee, the City, and a third-party facilitator) and defined what a community-centered process ought to look like. The team designed the process to support community power-building: They created peer-led trainings and interviews so that all participants had a shared foundation on which to embark on a process that centered community members to envision the future of their neighborhoods and shape the strategies for implementation.³

Formalizing and properly resourcing community leadership in resilience planning is an important step towards improved community resilience in New York City.

³ For more information on the development of Providence’s Climate Justice Plan, see the case study in [this report](#) from the Urban Sustainability Directors Network.

2. Create dedicated flexible funding for community organizations to implement resiliency solutions.

Many community organizations expressed the need for streamlined funding to implement community-defined resilience strategies. Building on City programs like the [Strengthening Communities Program](#), which offers unrestricted funds to community networks to develop community emergency preparedness plans, the City should establish a flexible funding program for communities to implement the types of resilient solutions they want to see in their neighborhoods. Alongside funding, the City should incorporate technical assistance, such as how to secure permits or assess feasibility to support community groups in carrying out their visions. This sort of funding, bolstered by technical support, will enable communities to define and implement resilient solutions grounded in their deep understandings of local risks and vulnerabilities. A potential model for this type of program is California's Transformative Climate Communities initiative (see box below).



Rain Garden Stewardship Program. Photo Credit: NYC Department of Environmental Protection

California's [Transformative Climate Communities](#) (TCC) initiative provides 2- and 5-year grants for cross-sectoral collaboratives of community organizations, local governments, and businesses to implement resiliency solutions. Funded through a combination of California's general funds and revenues from the state's cap and trade program, TCC awards grantees \$35 million on average to jointly implement proposed resilience initiatives, allowing communities to take a holistic approach. To ensure collaborative decision-making, the partners must have memorandums of understanding (MOUs) that codify how they intend to work together. TCC grant managers provide hands-on technical assistance, from pre-application to implementation, joining biweekly meetings as part of the project teams. TCC and its grantees co-develop measures of accountability, and focus on proactively resolving issues beyond just post-program performance evaluations. TCC provides the funding on a reimbursement basis, which poses a barrier for smaller groups, but the State and its grantee teams work together to identify higher-capacity fiscal sponsors who can subcontract with smaller partners.

The City can explore funding this initiative by creatively leveraging federal grants. Several precedents exist for using federal funds for nonprofit efforts in New York City and beyond,⁴ but those efforts have focused largely on affordable housing and nonprofit capacity building, not resiliency.

In addition to providing funding and technical support, the City should actively share funding notices and other relevant opportunities with community organizations, in line with the recommendations from Enterprise Community's [Strong Prosperous and Resilient Communities Challenge report](#). Building on the work of the NYC Mayor's Community Affairs Unit or the forthcoming NYC Office for Nonprofits, City staff can collaborate with community organizations to develop an efficient and effective system to share funding announcements, Requests for Proposals (RFPs), and capacity building and training opportunities relevant to organizations working in community resilience.

3. Establish on-call emergency contracts for community organizations to institutionalize their role in climate disaster preparedness and response.

Following a disaster, community organizations are often the first on the scene to provide critical services to residents. Because these groups are more attuned to the specific needs of their community and can be more nimble than emergency responders, they are [well-suited](#) to help lead community preparedness and disaster response efforts. But this work takes resources and requires institutional support. Resourcing community groups to provide these services would improve the overall disaster response and preparedness capacity of New York City.

The City should establish a community preparedness program that annually contracts with community organizations for two critical functions: 1) to carry out ongoing outreach and education to community members about emergency preparedness, and 2) to activate community groups for disaster response.

On 'blue sky days,' participating organizations would receive a guaranteed base amount of funding to raise awareness about heat, flooding, and other risks, share preparedness actions and resources with residents, and support neighbors in developing their own household emergency plans. Community organizations would have the ability to design their outreach program to meet their community's needs, whether engaging door-to-door with neighbors, holding resource fairs, hiring local residents to develop and maintain resilient infrastructure, or otherwise integrating

⁴ The City of San Diego developed a [Nonprofit Accelerator](#) using HUD block grants; King County, Washington created a [Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Program](#) for community based organizations using federal COVID-19 grants, and Philadelphia launched its [Strengthening Communities Fund](#) with American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding.

outreach into their existing programs or community events. These activities would go a long way to buttress community organizations as trusted local entities and strengthen social cohesion that can be lifesaving during a disaster.

Under such a community preparedness program, participating organizations would also be on-call for activation in the event of a disaster. The City already maintains an existing set of on-call emergency contracts for debris removal, emergency shelter, environmental testing and remediation, building assessment and demolition, and various other functions geared toward physical recovery—none focus explicitly on community services or designed for community organizations to access. This existing model should be expanded to include community services. To start, the City and interested community groups should jointly identify the types of activities best suited for communities to lead, alongside an appropriate level of funding for carrying out these on-call services. For instance, community organizations could be contracted to canvas potentially vulnerable neighbors and inform government officials about residents' needs for safety, heat, power, shelter, or food; coordinate food distribution efforts; and connect people to housing, financial, or legal assistance.



Residents at Red Hook Initiative for a hot meal after Superstorm Sandy. Photo Credit: Red Hook Initiative

To ensure equity and accessibility of this program for all community organizations, the City should designate culturally and linguistically competent contract and program managers, and design the contracts in line with [Recommendations to Support Small Community-Based Organizations](#) that a coalition of New York City groups developed. Such measures include streamlining contracting processes; identifying back-office support for smaller organizations that may have limited finance, development, or operations departments; and facilitating subcontracting between larger organizations and smaller ones that have the capacity and expertise to work with targeted communities.

4. Develop a comprehensive community organization training program for climate preparedness and resiliency.

As climate impacts worsen, all community organizations will have to contend with climate change in their work—from the impacts of extreme heat on houseless populations to the flood preparedness of their own facilities and neighborhoods. While some training opportunities exist, such as the City’s Community Emergency Response Team program for individual volunteers, a comprehensive and tailored program does not. We recommend the City create a training program for community organizations in order to better integrate climate preparedness and resiliency into their services and programs.

Beyond readiness workshops, the program could also provide technical assistance to support community organizations with limited staff capacity to access funding for their resilience efforts. For example, nonprofits are technically eligible for HUD Community Development Block Grants and FEMA Hazard Mitigation grants, but rarely apply or receive those funds because application processes are so complex and resource intensive. City grant managers can offer technical assistance for grant writing and management, as well as the permitting, design, and execution of community resilience projects in support of the community-defined vision and goals.

A community organization training program should be informed by the groups participating. In our conversation, Canarsie leaders expressed that SRIJB’s [Cycles of Resilience](#) program was effective because participants were able to shape the workshops to their needs. As a first step, we recommend that the City conduct a survey or roundtable with interested community organizations and relevant emergency management agencies to identify priorities and training formats that will inform program design. We suggest working closely with [NYC-based COAD’s](#) and their established networks of organizations working towards preparedness. The City can explore using [FEMA Preparedness Grants](#) to fund this type of program.

5. Invest in the resilience of community organizations’ physical spaces, establishing them as “Community Resilience Hubs.”

To best serve the needs of residents, community organizations’ physical spaces must also be climate ready. The City should work with communities to designate [Community Resilience Hubs](#) across neighborhoods to provide safe places for residents to use in the event of emergencies. This designation should be accompanied by a clear set of standards for the types of protections that Community Resilience Hubs provide, such as flood-proofing measures, and resilient energy, communications, and heating/cooling systems.

Community Resilience Hubs can include both privately and publicly owned spaces, such as libraries or nonprofit centers. While the City would directly implement resilient improvements in publicly owned assets, the City should also provide capital investments for community

organizations to make resiliency improvements to their physical spaces. With more substantial investment, these Community Resilience Hubs could also incorporate sustainable building design with net-zero emissions, on-site stormwater capture and filtration, community-owned solar, energy storage, geothermal systems, and community gardens.

The process of designing Community Resilience Hubs presents an opportunity for communities to define their needs and priorities for their physical space. With more resilient spaces, Community Resilience Hubs can host a variety of programs for climate education, workforce development, disaster training, health and wellness education, and other services depending on the communities' needs.

[Resilience Hubs](#) are becoming more common. For instance, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)'s climate plan includes a strategy for retrofitting community spaces to serve as Resilience Hubs for public housing residents. Outside of New York, [California](#) is funding new construction and upgrades of neighborhood resilience centers, and [Seattle](#) recently announced a \$2.4 million investment to identify and develop resilience hubs in the city.

Conclusion

New York City's ability to withstand the impacts of climate change relies in significant part upon the strength and social cohesion of our communities. Community organizations were leaders in response and recovery after Superstorm Sandy, and in the decade since, stepped up and evolved to meet the moment and the needs of the neighborhoods they serve. In the decades to come, they will continue to play an important role in transforming our social and physical infrastructure to be more resilient as sea levels rise and storms, flooding, and extreme heat intensify. But to do this, they need support from and partnership with the public sector.

The City's investments in the resilience of our public spaces and infrastructure are helping to ensure that the built environment is ready to withstand climate impacts. However, large public works projects alone are not enough, and must be complemented by community-based and community-led solutions. The City has an obligation to do all that it can to protect the health and safety of its residents. The recommendations in this report center community leadership and social cohesion as key strategies for climate resilience. By supporting and partnering with community organizations, the City of New York — and other climate vulnerable and impacted places — can better prepare all residents for the future.

Notes and Acknowledgements

Louise Yeung and Steve Fox from the Office of the New York City Comptroller and Lara Croushore, Laier-Rayshon Smith, and Alexandra Swanson from Urban Ocean Lab authored this report

Conversations with community leaders across New York City informed this report and its recommendations. Innumerable organizations across the city also do vital community resilience work, and the list of groups we interviewed is not exhaustive. While Superstorm Sandy anchors this report as a major catalyst for resilience initiatives in New York City, the recommendations presented take a forward-looking and multi-hazard approach to building community resilience to address a wide range of threats facing our city. This report and its recommendations are rooted in an understanding that the principles of racial, environmental, and economic justice must guide resilience. And while we offer recommendations to the City of New York to help strengthen communities' capacity to respond to the climate crisis, we recognize that larger systemic changes are needed to achieve an equitable, just, and resilient city.

The Office of the NYC Comptroller and Urban Ocean Lab are grateful for the work done by many community organizations and resilience practitioners to build a more equitable and resilient New York City. Interview with the following people and organizations informed this report:

Tatiana Arguello, Executive Director, Staten Island Non For Profit Association

Frank Avila-Goldman, Chair, Lower East Side East River Residents Committee

Dr. Brett Branco, Executive Director, Science and Resilience Institute at Jamaica Bay

Jane Brogan, Disaster Recovery Program Director, APTIM

Annie Carforo, Climate Justice Campaigns Coordinator, WE ACT for Environmental Justice

Lisa Cowan, Vice President, Robert Sterling Clark Foundation

Julia Daniely, President, Carey Gardens Resident Association

Jeanne DuPont, Founder and Executive Director, Rockaway Initiative for Sustainability and Equity (RISE)

Maria Garrett, President, Fresh Creek Civic Association

Reverend Karen Jackson, Executive Director, Staten Island Long Term Recovery Organization

Jibreel Jalloh, Founder and President, The Flossy Organization

Michele Marano, Community Development Coordinator, City of San Diego

Catherine McBride, Director of Community Building, Red Hook Initiative

Mike Menser, Associate Director for Public Engagement, Science and Resilience Institute at Jamaica Bay

Damaris Reyes, Executive Director, Good Old Lower East Side

Ida Sanoff, Executive Director, Natural Resources Protective Association

Tevina Willis, Community Organizing Manager, Red Hook Initiative

Sophie Young, Program Manager, Transformative Climate Communities, California Strategic Growth Council

Methodology

The Office of the NYC Comptroller and Urban Ocean Lab conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 leaders from 12 community organizations across New York City. We contacted and identified these organizations to interview based on the impacts their communities sustained from Superstorm Sandy; their climate vulnerability; their response efforts in the aftermath of the storm; and their ongoing community-based resilience work. Not all organizations contacted elected to participate in an interview. All conversations took place virtually in the weeks leading up to the ten-year anniversary of Superstorm Sandy. We offered all interviewees an honorarium for their time.

The goal of the interviews was to understand how community organizations responded to and recovered from Superstorm Sandy (if applicable); how they have supported their communities with long-term resilience efforts; and what resources they need to continue or expand this work. We used the information provided in these conversations to develop recommendations to the City of New York to help support and scale community-led resiliency work. Outside of the New York City context, these recommendations can help enhance community resilience in other climate vulnerable or impacted areas. We shared a summary of our findings and recommendations with interviewees prior to the release of this report.

The NYC Office of the Comptroller and the Urban Ocean Lab co-developed interview questions. While we pre-prepared questions, we intended the conversations to be flexible based on the participants' experiences and what they wanted to share. At times, we asked follow-up questions when we needed additional clarity on a topic or had specific questions about programs or projects mentioned in the interview.

The list of pre-prepared interview questions is below:

- What does 'resilience' mean to you and your community?
- Tell us about your community and your organization:
 - How was your community impacted by Superstorm Sandy?

- Ten years later, what challenges do you continue to face?
- Did your organization's experience with Superstorm Sandy change the way you think about how you carry out your mission or the programs that you offer? If so, how?
- What do you believe government has gotten wrong when working with your community on response, recovery, and resilience efforts since Superstorm Sandy?
- What types of resiliency solutions do you want to see implemented in your community?
- What resources does your organization need to strengthen long-term resiliency in your community?
- What haven't we asked you? What else would you like to tell us?





NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER
BRAD LANDER

**URBAN
OCEAN
LAB**