Beyond Federally-Funded Buyouts – Local Policies, Tools and Funding Streams

June 14, 2023 | 12:00 PM - 1:30 PM

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Climate-driven Relocation

An adaptation strategy involving the movement of people, homes, and infrastructure away from climate-vulnerable locations and into "receiving areas" further inland or at higher elevations.

Following relocation, vacated land can be repurposed for non-residential uses that offer community benefits and amenities, such as increased access to open space, flood protection and ecosystem restoration.

Buyouts

The government purchases properties that have either flooded or been determined substantially damaged to reduce future disaster losses.

Property Acquisition

Land Restoration + Management

Rehousing + Resettlement

FEMA

HUD
Scale

Available funding is limited, and insufficient to meet the scale of relocation assistance needed, today and in the future.

+43,000 home buyouts through FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Grant Program since (date)

14.5 million homes impacted by climate-driven events in 2021 alone.

4.9–13.1 million people could be displaced by sea level rise alone by 2100.
Funding typically only becomes available after a disaster, and can take years to receive.

**Duration of buyout process**
Source: A.R Siders and L. Gerber-Chavez, 2021
Access + Equity

Not everyone will receive equal access to federal resources for relocation.

And, even those who receive resources can encounter equity and implementation challenges.

Photo by Elizabeth Kim

Hollis, Queens residents

**Competitive grants**
Local governments must submit complex, lengthy grant applications.

**Cost-share Requirements**
Typically a 25% match required from local governments.

**Eligibility Requirements**
Favors single-family homes and is limited to U.S. citizens with a clear mortgage and flood insurance.

Source: Mach et al. 2019
What comes next?

Available funding is focused on property acquisition, and is limited for other aspects of relocation.

The process of relocation itself can reduce local income from property taxes.

Rehousing
Post-Sandy, 99% of buyout participants relocated to areas with higher social vulnerability, and 20% to areas with exposure to coastal flood hazards.

Source: McGhee et al 2019

Restoration
From 1990-2000, only 7.5% of bought-out properties were restored to flood-buffering ecosystems. 40% remained vacant or were converted to parking lots.

Source: Zavar and Hegelman, 2016
Local funding streams can help close gaps and address limitations of federal resources.

- Quicker, proactive, and ongoing relocation assistance
- Expanded services that are tailored to local needs and priorities
- More comprehensive support for all aspects of relocation

Flooding in Houston, TX
Source: Marco Yam, Getty Images