RESILIENT NJ

# Equitable Community Resilience Evaluation Toolkit

## Equitable Engagement Checklist

This engagement checklist will help evaluate how equitable engagement opportunities are for different socially vulnerable populations (SVPs) throughout the various stages of resilience planning. It should be consulted early and often in resilience planning processes, and it is generalized so that the ideas can be applied and evaluated throughout all stages. The core principles of equitable planning are also provided below as these underlying concepts are central to the recommendations in the provided checklist. It is also worth noting that co-designing an engagement plan with socially vulnerable populations at the beginning of the planning process is a best practice of community engagement.

## Considerations for All Engagements

Consider these bullet points, in addition to the principles below, as you set up and evaluate various engagement opportunities throughout the resilience planning process with socially vulnerable populations.

- ❑ **Inclusivity of Engagements**
  - ❑ Strive for **demographically representative engagement** that reflects the community or region where planning is occurring. This may entail special efforts to reach out and engage groups that traditionally have not participated in such work, for reasons like geography, economic status, age, education levels, mobility limitations or other disabilities, or cultural and ethnic differences.
  - ❑ **Community champion participation** – Community champions and trusted agents (local leaders, community representatives, community-based organizations etc.) should be constantly engaged throughout the process to provide local expertise and, when appropriate, representation for socially vulnerable populations. If unable to attend all engagements, these community champions could serve on a steering committee to be notified of key project/planning milestones and consulted for feedback regarding equitable engagement, resilience solutions development and/or future implementation efforts.
  - ❑ **Barriers to and opportunities for SVPs** – What factors could make attending or participating in planning meetings/events more difficult or impossible for socially vulnerable populations? Asking questions like this upfront can help your team identify and mitigate potential barriers to participation in resilience planning for SVPs. Try to also consider how resilience planning engagements present opportunities for SVPs to share their knowledge/expertise, lead and empower other community members, and to showcase and enhance their community's strengths.
  - ❑ **Collaborative action and decision-making** – Strive for highly participatory and collaborative engagements with socially vulnerable populations. Create spaces and opportunities for SVPs to participate in discussions and hands-on activities relevant to the resilience planning engagements. Asset mapping and visioning are just two types of engagement sessions that could be made highly participatory. Steer clear from direct lecturing *about* a community/its vulnerability or presenting data and information simply through PowerPoint presentations. Get creative to make resilience planning more relevant and accessible to SVPs so that they are much more likely to stay engaged throughout the planning process.

- ❑ **Accessibility of Engagement Opportunities -** When engaging residents throughout all stages of the planning process, it is important to continually assess how the engagement opportunities meet the needs of various socially vulnerable populations to encourage and bolster their attendance and comfortable participation.
    - ❑ **Use plain, everyday language** that could be accessible to anyone in meeting materials, media releases and online materials (asset maps, community assessments, reports etc.)
    - ❑ **Consider the needs** of people with disabilities[1] and those who speak English less than proficiently or need language translation services/materials. For example, consider offering writing materials to people with speech limitations as an alternative means of communication and/or consider moving to a quiet or private location if you are in a public area with many distractions. Find more accommodations to meet the needs of people with disabilities here.
    - ❑ **Comfort** – Host meetings at convenient times, provide food, childcare or participation incentives (e.g., gift cards or other financial compensation) when feasible. Compensating community partners for their time and expertise with these types of resources is a best practice of equitable planning because it recognizes and alleviates the barriers to participation that many socially vulnerable people face (e.g., not owning a car to drive themselves to engagements).
    - ❑ **Cultural Relevance** - Use culturally appropriate methods and materials in relevant languages at all stages of the planning process. Working with representatives from community-based organizations that serve socially vulnerable people can help the planning team design respectful, relevant and appropriate engagement opportunities and communication strategies.
    - ❑ Engage through **existing events and community channels**. Tapping into community networks can help you engage socially vulnerable residents through planned community events (e.g., religious, cultural or arts festivals, farmers' markets, beach and park/trail cleanups, community gardening days, etc.). Engaging through events or initiatives that community members are already familiar with can broaden the reach of your engagement.
- ❑ **Design effective and transparent feedback loops**
    - ❑ Early in the planning process, establish a communications infrastructure to inform participants about **the ways their input will be considered** and acted upon. Your communications strategies should be thoughtfully aligned with your engagement plan to meaningfully inform socially vulnerable populations and other community members.
- ❑ **Evaluate effectiveness of engagements and outreach strategies**
    - ❑ As you develop your engagement plan early in the planning process, **identify key performance indicators and metrics** to keep track of which socially vulnerable groups attend the engagements, who continues to attend throughout multiple stages of the process, and who is *not* attending. Identifying metrics for online channels (e.g., social media and website page views, email performance etc.) can also be highly useful in evaluating (or re-evaluating) outreach strategies and engagements.
    - ❑ Gut-check that the planning activities and process are **meeting the input and needs of socially vulnerable populations**. Look at where and how their priorities are reflected in the goals and desired outcomes for each step of the planning process.

- ❑ Evaluate **how socially vulnerable people feel** attending the engagements and participating in the planning activities. Check-in with socially vulnerable folks about how comfortable, welcome, respected and valued they feel during resilience planning engagements. Also ask questions like, "Does participating in this process feel like a good use of your time?" and "Do you think the planning is on track to achieve the intended outcomes for equity and resilience?"
- ❑ Determine how **results** or outcomes from these evaluations will be made available to those engaged, and the public (when appropriate)
- ❑ Other Methods – Beyond this checklist, will the planning team use other methods to evaluate the engagement process?

❑ **Other Qualities and Best Practices of Participatory Processes Checklist to Consider**

- ❑ Up-front and collaborative[2]
- ❑ Interactive[2]
- ❑ Foster partnerships[2]
- ❑ Barrier-free[2]
- ❑ Capacity-building and empowering[2]
- ❑ Allow for ongoing relationship-building and checking in[2]
- ❑ Compensate community members for unique expertise and contributions[2]

## General Questions to Ask

The planning team should consider the following general questions throughout all of the planning stages to evaluate equity of engagement opportunities.

- ❑ How are you continuing to ensure engagement opportunities are easily accessible and comfortable for multiple groups?
  - What accommodations are being made for those who have physical disabilities (sign language interpreters, materials typed in large print or braille, printing out copies of presentations or other visioning materials, etc.)
  - Are meetings being held within the community at places like schools, social clubs, housing associations, faith-based organizations, senior or recreation centers?
- ❑ How are you leveraging community resources and expertise to better understand social vulnerabilities and increased climate risks to socially vulnerable populations in the community?
- ❑ How are you checking in with socially vulnerable populations about their experiences participating in the planning activities? Some example questions and ideas are below.

- Do they feel comfortable and welcome? Do they feel respected and valued? Does participating in this process feel like a good use of their time? Do they feel the process is on track to achieve the intended outcomes for equity and resilience?
- Consider using "exit tickets" – like short polls or surveys – at the end of engagements to gauge participant comfort, acceptance (do they feel their participation and knowledge are valued or accepted?) validation, engagements' cultural relevance or appropriateness (have any of the exercises brought up traumatic experiences for them?), and/or planning progress towards community-identified goals.

- ❑ Did you have participation from all the respective socially vulnerable groups?
- ❑ Are you having the same people participate or new participants at engagements?
- ❑ What do your social media and online engagement metrics look like?
- ❑ What are the barriers to and opportunities for socially vulnerable populations to participate in the engagement activities for that planning stage?

## Core Principles of Equitable Planning

Remember the following principles of equitable planning as you co-create an engagement plan and conduct engagements throughout the planning process.

- **Empowerment and Inclusion** – Throughout the resilience planning engagements, socially vulnerable residents and community members and leaders should be meaningfully engaged in capacity building opportunities to feel empowered to lead their communities in future resilience planning efforts and/or plan implementation. Planners have special expertise and knowledge. That expertise and knowledge should be shared with community partners as much as possible, to increase informed participation, a shared sense of investment in decisions and implementation, and equitable relationships. The goal of mutual empowerment of planners and community members is crucial.

- **Early and Ongoing Community Engagement** – The community should be brought into planning activities as early as possible so that members, particularly socially vulnerable residents, can provide their local knowledge of climate and equity issues, vulnerabilities and priorities to shape the goals of the planning process and/or resilience plan/project. Bringing in community members early in the process also allows for greater opportunity for them to lead the process and involve other stakeholders that they feel have necessary expertise. Community engagement should not be limited to early visioning and goal setting phases though, it must continue through implementation and long-term progress monitoring so that community members build capacity and a sense of agency to sustain the proposed plans or projects and encourage new initiatives.

- **Co-development of process and solutions** – It is important that the planning or engagement process be developed in coordination with community members so that their priorities can guide the structure. This is also an opportunity to make meetings and other engagements easily accessible and welcoming for socially vulnerable populations. Solutions must be developed by planning practitioners and community members so that

lived experience, in addition to professional planning expertise, grounds and influences the strategies to enhance community resilience.

- **Whole Systems Thinking** – Inequities and vulnerabilities intersect across sectors; therefore, community resilience discussions should be broadened beyond improving only ecological and environmental health. Experts from other sectors and topic areas, like public health officials, emergency managers and economic development authorities among many others, need to be brought into resilience discussions to craft solutions that address root causes of social inequities and allow the community to bounce forward. Resilience planning should be thought of as an opportunity to better the lives for socially vulnerable populations in multiple ways. As planning goals are set and decisions are made, consider the impact of those decisions (before they are finalized) on all socially vulnerable populations, including what groups could be advantaged or disadvantaged by those decisions. Be sure to take steps to mitigate any anticipated losses of resources, status, or power by those who might be disadvantaged.

- **Continuous evaluation** - A planning team should continually self-evaluate *how* it has engaged the community, and socially vulnerable people specifically, to keep the process on track to achieve equity and intended outcomes. It is also crucial that a planning team and community representatives conduct thoughtful evaluation of implementation efforts and impacts once projects are implemented on the ground.