



RESEARCH REPORT

A Federal Policy and Climate Migration Briefing for Federal Executive and Legislative Officials

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Executive Summary

Awareness is growing of the displacement, relocation, and migration taking place within the US because of the effects of climate change, including flooding from sea-level rise and frequent severe weather events, as well as the less recognizable chronic heat, drought, and air-quality changes. Residents have been moving and continue to move away from these acute disasters and chronic environmental changes. They also relocate because of public-sector incentives, infrastructure needs, and land conversions or because the local economic base has been devastated by diminishing population from others' moves. But public recognition of these changes—and documented increases in moves—contrasts with the blind spots in federal policy.

With Enterprise Community Partners, the Urban Institute hosted the Stakeholders Summit on Federal Policy for Climate Displacement, Relocation, and Migration on November 18 and 19, 2020, to discuss the challenges and opportunities for federal intervention. Participants addressed gaps in the federal response to displacement and migration within climate adaptation, with the goal of envisioning a new framework as climate policy evolves under a new presidential administration. The following are key insights from the summit:

- **Use science.** The federal government should fund research to measure the physical exposure of all places to climate effects and assess their social and economic vulnerability—including the legacies of underinvestment, political marginalization, and capacity constraints in local government—to define “at-risk places” eligible for federal intervention and to inform residents.
- **Serve people.** Current disaster services do not meet all needs, nor would they cover climate-related relocation. A range of services—from basic housing, to employment, to “wraparounds” for health, education, and cultural integration—must be coordinated; offered to affected households clearly, consistently, and accessibly through community-based case managers; and monitored. The services should be available to any person at risk of displacement regardless of whether the local government or immediate neighborhood participates in community-wide relocation programs. Such case-based aid may require revisions to fundamental federal statutes, including the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act, along with broader reforms to the federal emergency management framework.
- **Prioritize need.** Federal service providers must prioritize low-income households in concentrated at-risk areas that have low public-sector capacity and progressively scale the total value of individual aid to make climate relocators whole. Factors that contribute to

vulnerability—such as living in a historically segregated neighborhood, having a disability, and having an undocumented immigration status—should be considered in prioritization decisions as much as income.

- **Elevate residents.** Inclusive engagement helps communities and households understand their challenges and in some cases devise solutions for themselves. Federal agencies could advance science communications and improve resident engagement techniques, build capacity in underprepared local governments, require that decisions be made by and with residents, and fund local organizers. In theory, this level of engagement will yield consensus among residents for community-wide relocation decisions. In some cases, however, local disagreement will likely create a need for individual-level relocation services that may be less ideal and less beneficent.
- **Avoid harm.** The federal government can slow losses to economies, workforces, and cultural resources in highly exposed jurisdictions through creative funding and programming—such as revolving loan funds, bond negotiations, and pilot relocation programs—but funding must also deter at-risk communities from further development of exposed land or unsustainable economic activities. Incentives, requirements, and regulations associated with the full range of federal competitive and entitlement grants for everything from local police and education to transportation and utility infrastructure can encourage state and local governments to reform development and land use laws, but, ultimately, jurisdictions must commit to reducing harm to be eligible for future federal aid.
- **Innovate.** Innovative policies and programs are needed to address unprecedented crises. Transformation starts with understanding migration with and without federal aid and continues with the devising of new responses. Areas ripe for federal originality include methods for serving and monitoring households, applying households' lived experience and wisdom to pilot programs, encouraging governance arrangements for regional planning that might produce land and infrastructure cooperatives or mutual adaptation agreements, bringing global design and social capital building expertise to local governments, and developing public education campaigns to counter xenophobia.
- **Streamline processes.** Aid must balance speed, quality, and suitability for residents. The government must understand timing (from its own timelines to the deadlines it imposes) and its effect on service quality, migrants' well-being, and community outcomes—and respond accordingly with new federal rules on disaster declarations, congressional appropriations, and agency disbursement of funds and services while providing capacity-building technical assistance to local governments as they are held accountable for their own deadlines. However,

authentic community engagement, currently the most streamlined process, should not cut corners and should begin well before crises.

- **Invest liberally.** Federal resources can support community viability, neighborhood cohesion, resident livelihood, and vernacular culture, as well as one-way tickets out of harm's way. The costs can be justified with improvements to cost-benefit analysis tools and mitigated by distributing the burden across government tiers and private-sector actors according to their proportional contribution to the risks. However, the bills will likely be too large for low-income households and low-resourced local governments. Federal intervention is fundamental.
- **Reform.** Climate policy should not be equated with disaster policy. Community planning and environmental goals should prescribe migration, but these broad approaches require clear lines of authority, oversight, and leadership in government, combined with capacity building for underresourced local jurisdictions and the promotion of "bottom up" solutions from residents. Transparent, apolitical criteria for federal investments in either in situ adaptation or resident relocation should also be developed. Both options should provide co-benefits for mitigation of future climate change as well by not increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

A Federal Policy and Climate Migration Briefing for Federal Executive and Legislative Officials

The US must respond to climate change's acute and chronic effects with substantial climate action—both mitigation and adaptation. Displacement is one effect that is already occurring (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2014; Kumari Rigaud et al. 2018; US Global Change Research Program 2018).¹ The Stakeholders Summit on Federal Policy for Climate Displacement, Relocation, and Migration—held on November 18 and 19, 2020—sought a new vision for a comprehensive federal policy on climate displacement. This vision builds from current statutes and programs across nine “pathways,” or aspirational policy areas, for federal climate migration policy while keeping the principles of evidence, equity, efficacy, and efficiency in mind. Unattributed quotations from summit participants are interspersed throughout the report.²

1. Triggers and Community Eligibility

The federal response to the growing risk of natural hazards and the need for strategic relocations of people whose communities are threatened by the effects of climate change has largely been reactive, with Congress primarily appropriating relief and recovery funding after a disaster has occurred. The process begins with a state of emergency being declared by the president. A state's governor then determines the ability of state and local governments to respond to the damage. If a state thinks the needed response surpasses its capacity, it may request a preliminary damage assessment from the regional administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Alongside state officials, FEMA will determine the extent of the damage, the unmet needs, and the total repair costs, among other important information. The president can also declare a major disaster if the event is severe enough; such a declaration speeds up the process of a preliminary damage assessment. After a presidentially declared disaster, FEMA can use the Disaster Relief Fund to fund its Individuals and Households (IHP), Public Assistance (PA), and Hazard Mitigation Grant (HMGP) programs.

Although FEMA is the agency primarily responsible for the immediate response to disasters and receives an annual congressional appropriation, the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is

the second-largest recipient of disaster recovery funds and handles efforts to help communities with long-term recovery. The CDBG-DR program, however, lacks standing authority to provide funds to disaster-affected states and localities, so it receives one-off appropriations that authorize HUD to adopt, waive, or modify standard CDBG regulations. After each disaster supplemental appropriation, HUD issues a Federal Register notice that sets the requirements and waivers for that particular allocation.

Recently, HUD adopted a more proactive approach by allocating funds for the CDBG Mitigation program, which allows eligible grantees in areas hit recently by a disaster to access funding to improve resilience in their communities and prevent future losses. The program also funds relocation efforts. Additionally, FEMA has expanded its work in mitigation with the unveiling of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program. This is one of the few federal programs for which accessing resources is not predicated on the occurrence of a disaster. The program allows for large-scale migration or relocation efforts, although the use of funds for this purpose remains to be seen as grant applications are under review.

Consequently, questions remain about which conditions should elicit federal attention, funds, and programs for climate relocation. Currently, disaster declarations trigger most federal emergency assistance (including funds to mitigate future disasters), while the persistence of poverty, large populations, low economic production, and poor housing stock typically define federal formulas for community assistance (Martín et al. 2021; Mickelson et al. 2019). Beyond disaster triggers, chronic conditions such as land erosion have forced relocation but usually with minimal governmental support (Hauer et al. 2020). Is there a mix of exposure and vulnerability or historical marginalization that defines a tipping point?

“Almost all of the current federal programs are triggered by disaster, and I think the idea of having federal intervention here triggered by disaster needs to be totally flipped on its head. Federal interventions need to be triggered by the idea that we know that certain areas are risky and that there’s a federal interest in buying down that risk...before a disaster.”

Summit Discussions

Participants overwhelmingly support changing the key trigger for supports and assistance from disaster occurrence to climate effect exposures and social vulnerability. This discussion emerged for numerous reasons. Presidential declarations are the product of bureaucratic and political decisions by counties and states that may not prioritize discrete, vulnerable neighborhoods. Furthermore, numerous places that have not experienced a disaster are facing an equal, if not higher, risk for detrimental climate change effects as those that have. Chronic effects from climate change, such as sea-level rise, are also less likely to receive a presidential disaster declaration.³ Finally, post-disaster situations, when residents are searching for stability and normalcy, are not ideal for thoughtful planning; in these times, economies, land uses, property values, household finances, cultural heritage, and social networks are in disarray. Ultimately, the current disaster framework is inadequate to activate the needed federal responses for climate adaptation.

Group Recommendations

Participants felt that the planning for moves, and people's decisions about whether to move, should occur well before a crisis. They argued for three factors that would act as "triggers" for displacement planning:

- The **exposure to a climate change effect** as defined by scientific and engineering study should be a fundamental determinant of federal intervention. If a community meets a threshold, measured either in households or ecosystems likely to be affected, the community should fall under a federal definition of "at-risk places." Exposure measures should also account for secondary environmental risks such as proximity to pollutant sources that may be breached during an acute event.
- **Social vulnerability**—measured by a place's income, racial makeup, and other characteristics, as well as the legacies of underinvestment, political marginalization, and capacity constraints in local government—should determine which exposed places are priorities for supplemental planning and capacity building and for additional implementation resources.
- **Well-informed decisions and consent** from residents after a thorough review of other options should guide community-wide relocations or individual moves. Residents could weigh options based on expected assistance and the perception of their conditions. This grassroots-based trigger is as significant as objective risk and vulnerability standards.

These three factors should be codified into transparent program rules and implementation processes to ensure that triggers, first for planning and then implementation, are fair and predictable. Many participants also suggested that the presence of a local champion or leader should prompt federal intervention, although others felt that this would put places with more needs at a disadvantage and perpetuate the politicization of federal funding.

“A main trigger we've identified for moving an entire community or relocation is [that] there has to be affirmative interest in the community, overlaid with a federal interest in reducing federal fiscal exposure, or the idea that we're going to spend more money in disaster assistance if we don't move this community out of harm's way on the front end.”

2. Individual Needs

What should the range of federal services be for someone facing climate relocation? Most foreseeable federal interventions related to climate relocation focus on households' property and possessions—including titles, insurance, damages, and temporary shelter. However, many other aspects of life are also affected, including jobs, household wealth, small businesses and customers, schools, physical and mental health, food access, recreational and cultural heritage, and housing.⁴ This applies to renters, people with physical disabilities, households of color that have been historically denied housing choices, and people experiencing homelessness, in addition to property owners.

Any displacement supported with federal funds is subject to the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act, which ensures minimum standards for property acquisition and relocation, with the objective of ensuring that assistance is provided to lessen the emotional and financial impact of displacement. However, funding constraints are a primary reason for the breadth and depth of that assistance. After major disasters, FEMA uses its annual appropriation to the Disaster Relief Fund to fund three key programs to help people in distress. PA is designed to address larger reconstruction efforts for local government buildings and damaged infrastructure. IHP primarily provides short-term housing through hotels, manufactured housing units, or other nonpermanent lodgings and helps households with essential home repairs, along with a few additional health, counseling, and funerary costs. HMGP accounts for roughly 89 percent of buyouts of flood-threatened

properties by the federal government, according to data collected by the Natural Resources Defense Council.⁵ HMGP can also be used to finance mitigation projects such as home elevations.

After major catastrophes, CDBG-DR plays an important role by filling the gaps in aid that remain after insurance proceeds, FEMA grants, and Small Business Administration homeowner loans have been exhausted. HUD uses damage assessment data from FEMA to calculate the amount of unmet need, but FEMA's damage assessment methodologies have been known to undercount damage by failing to account for underlying neighborhood conditions and the full range of factors that affect disaster survivors, including education, health care, mobility, and future hazard risk (Martín 2019). Statute dictates that CDBG-DR funding be used for necessary expenses related to disaster relief, long-term recovery, restoration of infrastructure, housing, and economic revitalization.

Eligible infrastructure activities under CDBG-DR include obtaining a waiver for “buildings for the general conduct of government.”⁶ The economic revitalization category covers funding for job training and workforce development, loans and grants to businesses, and improvements to commercial and retail districts. If a grantee wishes to address a depleted housing stock, it may use the funding for new construction or rehabilitation and reconstruction of single-family or multifamily units.

Yet to avoid duplicating other public aid, individual federal disaster assistance programs are often burdensome to apply for and restrictive in eligibility, leaving many vulnerable households to choose which service meets their greatest need. Disaster relief assistance is also restricted by time, typically lasting only for months. How could these services be coordinated and reinforced across the federal government?

Summit Discussions

Participants emphasized that climate relocation creates various basic needs such as housing and employment but also others crucial to positive life outcomes, including food access, mental health supports, and small-business owner transitions. A nuance is that each need requires a diversity of services—for example, housing needs are met with rental aid or down payment assistance, as well as supports such as apartment search and home purchase counseling. Job placement programs need accompanying training or apprenticeships, temporary child care and transportation subsidies, job equipment purchases, and more. Addressing the supply chain of needs through “wraparound services” is a proven contributor to success and has been integrated into federal workforce investments, public housing redevelopment, and rental vouchers.

The duration of services is also a concern. Some people will need services for longer than others. Consequently, time limits for services must change. One size never fits all in governmental assistance, particularly for aid related to the places experiencing climate effects. Participants also noted the importance of federal oversight because some feared that some state and local governments might not be able to fully (and, in some cases, fairly) deliver services. Ultimately, comprehensive offerings require that services are consistent, standardized, and advertised but can be received flexibly. A transition from the current federal service offerings to comprehensive offerings would require cross-authority coordination and appropriated budgets that may not match current statutes covering each agency's individual services. Legislative action is needed to relieve this bottleneck.

“People are put in positions where they have to use resources in whatever best way is fitting their needs at the moment. Then they're punished for that later; they can't get further resources down the road. So, I think we need to think about user-friendly, flexible dollars that individuals can use in a way that...they think is most important at the time.”

Group Recommendations

Because of the diversity of individual needs, according to summit participants, responding flexibly to address people's priorities over the dictates of federal programs is essential. This involves learning what people's needs are. Financial resources are crucial, but participants also noted that the most vulnerable households are often unable to take advantage of these resources. Consequently, many of the participants' recommendations focus on providing the right services, at the right level, and at the right time for households that could be displaced.

- All relevant agencies must agree to the **range of federal services**—and the variations in time frames—that should be provided to climate migrants while they have needs. These services can then be presented as a menu of options. Agencies should also centralize recipient data to ensure appropriate referrals are made and to monitor needs, in addition to tracking the services that migrants receive.
- Federal services should be **household-based**, defined with the flexibility to provide each household with what it needs based on pre-move conditions and resources (including housing

tenure and income) and the unique conditions of its destination (such as housing and job markets).

- **Case managers** can help navigate options and provide extensive but centralized information and guidance to households identified as likely to be displaced or going through displacement. These personal aides can come from **community-based organizations** that are trustworthy intermediaries and can be a consistent face of the available services regardless of which agency or level of government provides them.
- Federal legislators could review the use of the **Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act** across agencies with an eye toward its reform and its potential application in climate displacement.

3. Individual Assistance Funding and Eligibility

FEMA's IHP was not designed to cover the full costs of damage for eligible homeowners with unmet needs. For almost all federal programs, assistance is capped at a specific dollar value. The limit for FEMA post-disaster assistance, for example, is derived annually based on the Consumer Price Index. The most recently published cap on FEMA IHP is \$35,500. The average amount of disaster aid that households receive is much lower than the cap. Those amounts rarely account for the actual cost of rebuilding homes and replacing possessions, nor do they compensate for the disproportionate effects of even slight financial disruptions on lower-income, vulnerable households and the nonmonetizable costs to lives and livelihoods (Martín 2019).

Aid is also based on measurable damages to property and possessions. Lower-income households' and renters' possessions tend to be valued lower for many reasons, including historical segregation. Yet the loss of these possessions creates a greater financial shock and livelihood obstacle for low-income households than their wealthier counterparts who receive more resources. The cost burdens are, therefore, disproportionately borne by people with low incomes, communities of color, and renters (Ratcliffe et al. 2020). Consequently, other assistance programs are also inequitable. For example, FEMA's HMGP struggles to reach low-income renters, who are more likely than homeowners to lack official housing arrangements or may not have proof of residence. According to data collected by the Natural Resources Defense Council, only 12 percent of the buyout records released by FEMA were rental properties (Weber and Moore 2019).

Long-term aid, if appropriated by Congress, relies on assessments of households' unmet needs after other private and public resources are exhausted and goes to affected households with the wherewithal and patience to apply. After a household has exhausted FEMA assistance, Small Business Administration disaster loans, flood insurance payouts, and other recovery sources, CDBG-DR can address its remaining unmet needs, serving as a bridge between short-term relief and long-term recovery. CDBG-DR rules are based on those of the CDBG program, which require that no less than 70 percent of funds benefit low- and moderate-income people, with qualifying people earning less than 80 or 120 percent of area median income. Ultimately, though, because CDBG-DR is not a standing program, the authority to set the income benefit threshold is left to the federal government. The Federal Register notice that follows each disaster supplemental appropriation sets the requirements and waivers for that allocation, including the low- and moderate-income ceiling. In the past, lawmakers have pushed the low- and moderate-income threshold as low as 50 percent of area median income.

Individual aid and eligibility for disasters are already complex and skew inequitably. But many climate migrants are not disaster victims. Which income levels, demographics (including race and ethnicity), and climate-hazard exposures should be prioritized for federal climate relocation assistance to households? Eligibility for nondisaster federal household assistance programs is determined in various ways, including via means testing and according to the national, state, or local private values of the service (such as local fair market rents for housing assistance).

“Individual assistance is related to reimbursing for a loss. We need to think differently about [this]. We need to think about being proactive to avoid damage; we need to think outside of the box of “benefit cost,” how-many-dollars-does-the-market-think-your-house-is-worth, your-life-is-worth kind of thing.”

Summit Discussions

Participants agreed that focusing on the most exposed and most vulnerable people should be a priority for federal assistance. Households that meet both criteria should be eligible for planning and case management and if they consent relocation and related services. There was no debate over the need for a climate safety net for residents without the resources to move independently or the capacity to leverage insurance, housing markets, and other private institutions for their adaptation. In breakout

groups, participants expressed support for breaking from using a disaster declaration as the trigger for personal assistance.

There was debate, however, on the maximum household funding amounts. Some participants argued that large individual caps create moral hazards and deter individual mitigation and preparation. Others responded that investing in relocations is less costly than providing post-disaster relief and recovery services, even before taking into account the costs of local economic and personal financial losses (National Institute of Building Sciences 2019). Another group argued that comprehensive relocation aid could improve other life outcomes, making lives better than they were before relocation, and that this justifies additional federal investment. Regardless, all participants agreed that the current caps are inadequate and that the resulting aid has not been equitably distributed. The consensus was that more and better-targeted funding was needed.

Participants spent a significant amount of time discussing how people receive information about program eligibility requirements and application procedures, noting that, historically, a minority of eligible households apply for post-disaster recovery aid. Application differences can prevent the most vulnerable households from receiving needed services, and in many ways, patience and the capacity to apply for disaster-related assistance have become de facto eligibility requirements.

Finally, participants also expressed concern that some low-income, vulnerable households could slip through the cracks of a federal community-wide relocation program that would have its own eligibility requirements and triggers. The relationship between eligibility requirements for an entire community and those for individual households requires clarification, although participants stressed that both types of aid programs (for whole communities and for individuals where communities may not choose to participate) should be available, albeit through different channels and at varying levels of assistance.

Group Recommendations

- Federal providers must **prioritize for eligibility households with low incomes and low wealth in concentrated at-risk areas**. Factors that contribute to vulnerability—such as living in a historically segregated neighborhood, having a physical disability, or having an undocumented immigration status—were argued to be important but overlooked or undermeasured components of current eligibility requirements for disaster aid. The determination should be based on climate-related exposure and geographically concentrated vulnerability.

- **Progressively scaling the total value of individual aid** can ensure that assistance meets the need, including reparations for historical injustices, rather than simple relocation of unjust conditions. Congress and federal agencies can institute additional financial incentives both for pre-crisis planning that ensures adaptation options exist and encourages self-determination and for community-wide relocation agreements that encourage participation in community planning regardless of whether the entire community will be in the same place after relocation.
- Measures to improve cost and time efficiency—that is, **efficiency for individuals**, not federal agencies—such as standardizing eligibility requirements across programs and streamlining application outreach, access, and processing should be instituted. Maintaining an overall assistance amount cap but allowing for flexible combinations of services would better meet households’ needs while providing predictable federal costs.

“People are going to be along a spectrum...and one end of that spectrum is people who will not leave. I think making space for that is important. Thinking at the community level is important, but not doing it at the expense of romanticizing a collective experience that ultimately is an individual- or household-level decision.”

4. Community Decisionmaking

Disaster recovery programs have a history of prioritizing homeowners over renters, and this can partly be traced to inadequate community engagement. For example, HUD’s largest fair housing settlement came after the state of New Jersey failed to fairly distribute funding to help disaster survivors redevelop and repair apartment buildings, mobile homes, and single-family homes.⁷ The state also failed to communicate the availability of assistance to people of limited English proficiency.

The tremendous size of CDBG-DR grants relative to annual CDBG awards necessitates rapid capacity building for state and local government grantees so they can plan, engage stakeholders, process applicant intakes, and administer funds in a timely and effective manner. CDBG-DR guidelines only require grantees to engage the community during the action planning phase of recovery. Community input and feedback should begin during pre-disaster and mitigation planning. Beginning the engagement process before a disaster gives communities a jump start on the action plan process and

creates opportunities for residents to learn about resilient land use, elevations, buyouts, and other forms of hazard mitigation.

Self-determination and procedural justice are crucial means and ends in climate adaptation decisions for communities and households. Having seats at the table is as important as outcomes. Relocation, it is argued, should be only one of many options that people can choose, assuming that they have comprehensive information and that outreach and engagement efforts have been effective. What kinds of engagement planning, procedures, and protections could be implemented comprehensively and sensitively in adaptation planning and required in federal rules?

Local efforts that use federal funding for hazard or community planning must often include some community engagement, although it is typically limited to getting feedback on capital projects that have already been developed. Current engagement methods and community participation levels have been criticized as perfunctory and tokenistic and might presume that relocation is the preordained option for exposed communities. As part of disaster recovery, for example, engagement is often rushed because of the pressure to rebuild immediately. Engagement tools for routine hazard mitigation, large public works, and city planning such as town halls, hearings, and charrettes rarely bring in large numbers of participants, let alone representation from underserved populations. This results in the perception that planning decisions are top-down pronouncements.

These decisions not only marginalize communities but also recall the federal history of forced racist and classist relocations. Consequently, recent calls for people to have the right of return after being displaced by a disaster and other community-defined parameters seek to center self-determination in planning. With the climate clock ticking in many places, engaging with all residents in a timely and authentic manner is challenging. How can we reconcile individual self-determination—which may include staying in place or returning after a disaster—with federally identified, threatened landscapes?

“Meaningful participation is very misunderstood at all levels of government. We still see the government as a service agency rather than as a democratic institution that should fairly distribute resources. That becomes a very paternalistic process because it tells us how to make decisions about our lives.”

Summit Discussions

Participants focused on affirming the need for comprehensive engagement with populations that could become migrants and the places where they might move, either with individuals or, ideally, with entire neighborhoods. There was agreement that engagement should focus on or at least overrecruit underserved, vulnerable households from exposed populations, but how to do so remained unanswered. Participants pointed to the engagement required in the Green New Deal as a model for ensuring local determination across all climate adaptation options. Questions arose about whether federal agencies, particularly officials associated with emergency management, can sufficiently understand local sensitivities and conditions. However, state and local governments were also perceived as potential perpetrators of discriminatory and exclusionary practices.

Group Recommendations

- The federal government should work with experts to **innovate in science communications and media to improve resident engagement techniques**, including culturally relevant and accessible methods that promote dialogue and inventive solutions among community members, rather than one-way information channels.
- Service agencies and their providers must learn to **meet residents where they are**. With most residents unable to engage as much as the paid professionals, engagement must be flexibly based on constituent capacity and availability (e.g., from online surveys to town halls).
- **Investments in local community organizations**, which have institutional knowledge, can lead to communities' being better informed about available programs and their processes and can increase local capacity. The organizations should be well-funded, potentially from required set-asides from block grant programs, and reliant on strong evidence and tested outreach tools, ideally building off federally generated data. This collaboration could transform "engagement" (which implies an external agent or intervention) into community empowerment.
- The federal executive could create a **civil society oversight task force**, commission, or working group to monitor and ensure appropriate civic engagement across all program sites and federal services.

5. Needs of Governments That Face Relocating Populations

Federal disaster policy focuses on rebuilding as soon as possible after an event. How should federal programs support communities that are balancing rebuilding and relocation after a major event or those that are experiencing chronic relocation? Communities that face emigration grapple with major change across parcels, blocks, neighborhoods, or entire communities (Binder and Greer 2016; Mach et al. 2019). They lose population, economic production, and municipal revenue—the antithesis of historical federal investments in community development. Ultimately, advocates fear that many places will reach a tipping point, when property devaluation, economic and population losses, and public disinvestment escalate beyond return (Koslov 2016).

The federal government has experience helping communities rebuild in the face of nonenvironmental crises and depopulation. One program that was deployed after the Great Recession was the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, which provided grants to state and local governments and nonprofit organizations to target areas hit hardest by foreclosure and blight. Although the program helped millions of families remain stably housed and financially secure, not all low- and moderate-income communities had the same level of success (Spader et al. 2015). In some instances, the aid arrived too late and with little notice, and neighborhoods never returned to their pre-2008 condition. In other markets, an influx of private investment in development drove residents from their communities by crowding out and pricing out first-time homebuyers and longtime residents. These experiences show the importance of having federal policies that are driven by communities, proactive in nature, and deployed alongside skilled counselors who can provide adequate technical assistance.

In partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation, HUD created the National Disaster Resilience Competition, which provided roughly \$1 billion to 13 states and communities struggling with the impacts of climate change and disasters.⁸ The state of Louisiana was an awardee, and it used \$48 million of its \$93 million grant to help a tribe relocate from its inundated home on the Isle de Jean Charles.⁹ The grant was the first investment of federal tax dollars to relocate a whole community affected by the challenges of climate change.

Summit Discussions

Participants discussed how to ease communities into options that might include relocation. The conversation covered challenges associated with convincing communities that they face imminent

population and economic losses, informal migration, and governance and budgetary options for exposed jurisdictions.

Group Recommendations

- Participants agreed that **federal dollars** should be available to communities for planning, buyouts, and the conservation and stewardship of abandoned lands. However, they disagreed about how much local governments, private stakeholders such as lenders and insurers, and residents should contribute. One proposal was to have a high but transparent bar for communities' receipt of federal support based on federal policies' historical contribution to local exposures (e.g., encouraging building and rebuilding in exposed areas). Another included accounting for the federal losses that would be avoided with relocation assistance (including National Flood Insurance Program claims and disaster relief and recovery programs). In either case, these were viewed as secondary criteria after the more critical concerns of exposure to extreme climate effects and social vulnerability.
- The federal government has several ways it can **slow losses** to economies, workforces, and cultural resources in highly exposed jurisdictions to predictable and manageable rates so communities do not dissolve overnight. Several are financial, such as creating a **revolving loan fund** for strategic property acquisitions while requiring that vacated units be repurposed for green infrastructure or community benefits such as recreation or urban farming (while also avoiding gentrification or nonbeneficial commercial purposes). Authorities could also be brought in to **negotiate with bond investors** in exposed jurisdictions to redefine repayment terms and lower debt obligations to allow jurisdictions to buffer population and economic losses gradually. Federal agencies such as FEMA and HUD could encourage **regional alliances and mutual aid agreements** for transitions between communities that people are leaving and communities people are moving to. These could lead to shared tax bases and merged governments. **Pilot programs** that focus on neighborhoods or small communities could be triggered by a needs assessment and extensive technical assistance.
- The federal government can curb funding to **deter at-risk communities** from further development of exposed land or unsustainable economic activities by withholding other resources (excluding those for low-income communities). Ultimately, some local governments will be unable or unwilling to help the most vulnerable neighborhoods or their residents for reasons such as climate denial, traditional discrimination, and a lack of capacity.

“It is critical to start putting more pressure on local governments to manage their land better. We continue to develop in high-flood-risk areas. Every time there is a disaster, we see a rollback of policies at a local level around base flood elevation.”

6. Needs of Governments That Receive Migrants

In the few recent cases when federal dollars were used to relocate a whole community because of climate change effects (e.g., Newtok, Alaska, and Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana), entirely new communities were built to receive the relocating people. However, most climate-related relocations taking place today generally involve moves to existing towns and cities, particularly large ones that are seen as having employment and housing opportunities and may have different demographic contexts from those of the communities that people are leaving. On rare occasions, communities have accessed FEMA funds to help meet perceived demands on city services after people have moved there because of a disaster or an environmental hazard, although these resources are short-lived.¹⁰ This happened after Hurricanes Katrina, Sandy, Harvey, and Maria. In the past, HUD has also supported receiving communities, though much more rarely.¹¹ Should federal aid be directed to governments whose communities are likely to receive relocating people, and, if so, for what purposes?

Summit Discussions

Participants unanimously agreed that receiving communities need federal assistance to absorb families who relocate there because of an acute climate-related disaster or chronic climate effects. More specifically, participants stressed the importance of the aid’s arrival before the newcomers, for preparation, and across all likely service needs, from housing and employment to K–12 education and cultural facilities.

Two disclaimers bracket this aid, though. The first involves how to define and identify a receiving community before any moves have occurred. In some cases, communities may step up independently to receive people, as many US cities have proposed.¹² However, large metropolitan areas near exposed communities are likely to be the destination of choice for relocated households (Hauer, Evans, and Mishra 2016). Consequently, methods of identifying future receiving communities and strategies for engaging them were discussed extensively. Second, participants argued for policies that attach strings to any aid to communities that are receiving or anticipate receiving climate newcomers, such as land use

reforms that expand housing supplies and aggressive enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. Participants were especially interested in migrants' integration into communities, expressing concern that historical discrimination in US cities by race, nationality, and income would be exacerbated by "native" residents' perceptions of newcomers' differences.

Group Recommendations

Participants suggested the federal government move forward by first understanding and defining receiving communities and then piloting or encouraging innovations in those communities' preparations for newcomers.

- Participants noted the importance of **understanding current migration patterns**, starting with evidence of where and how relocation occurs. The federal government should fund more studies in this area, with an eye toward **applying research in pilot programs** to determine the appropriate way to calculate funding and to set time frames for future aid to receiving communities. Programs that induce or encourage relocation (e.g., evacuation orders) must also **monitor displaced households beyond the short term** to better coordinate with receiving communities in the long term. Being able to determine the location of residents who were moved under the auspices of the federal government will ensure that funds and services are allocated appropriately and in a timely manner. Finally, the federal government must provide data updates and incentives for planning within states and at-risk communities so it knows which communities that could receive relocating people have excess capacity or necessary services, especially beyond the evacuation period that follows acute hazard events. This will indicate whether a community may be amenable to longer-term resettlement.
- Opportunities to help communities **prepare for future settlers** were also emphasized. The federal government should **build regional capacity** by providing communities that are likely to receive climate relocators with resources to coordinate with other jurisdictions (including those whose residents are likely to leave). HUD can also promote and provide financial backstops for expanding **mutual adaptation aid agreements** and for supporting capacity growth and management within exposed communities (e.g., to provide centralized service delivery and more services such as affordable housing). HUD should also seek to improve receiving communities' ability to absorb new populations by **promoting and funding innovative service growth and capacity building**—such as land use that promotes new affordable housing and community land banks or trusts—in anticipation of future climate movement. Developing

an **infrastructure investment fund** such as tax-exempt bond projects could reduce the burden of new demand in receiving communities.

- Federal agencies should use the power of the purse and their regulatory enforcement abilities to **address entrenched NIMBYism (“not in my backyard”), racism, and xenophobia** in receiving communities. Agencies could highlight communication campaigns that promote newcomers as assets and development practices that minimize some effects of newcomers on local housing, community composition, and other civic resources and assets (e.g., displacement and gentrification).

“They are relocating to an area with no public transit, no cluster of jobs, no network of grocery stores, so we need to think about what investment is needed.”

7. Costs and Cost Share

The scale of disaster response, relief, and recovery costs to the federal government expands annually, while hazard mitigation and climate adaptation expenditures have grown minimally. Despite evidence that the benefits of hazard mitigation and climate adaptation efforts outweigh their costs (without taking into account the reduction in human suffering that they provide), adaptive infrastructure and relocation programs are often depicted as beyond the capacity of federal budgets. These budgetary concerns tend to surface when all communities that are severely climate-exposed or vulnerable and facing relocation are being considered. What would be an acceptable appropriation for a climate relocation program (or the aggregate of federal programs)?

After a presidential disaster declaration, FEMA releases in the Federal Register information on which areas qualify for assistance and what types of assistance will be available. The notice also includes what share of eligible community costs the federal government will shoulder for PA; it is typically 75 percent of costs, with the remainder covered by the state government. FEMA’s IHP is fully covered by the federal government, as are National Flood Insurance Program claims and HUD’s CDBG-DR (when appropriated and if a state or local government creates a housing program).

For severe disasters or years with multiple disasters, Congress may decide that the funds available from annual appropriations to the Disaster Relief Fund are insufficient and pass supplemental

legislation that appropriates more money. As of March 2020, the CDBG-DR portfolio includes 137 grants, totaling \$83.9 billion, to 64 grantees, including 34 states and territories and 30 local governments. CDBG-DR appropriations have markedly increased in size and frequency in the past decade to help states and local governments manage the increasing cost of natural disasters. Congress has also provided more than \$15 billion in recent years to support the work of the US Army Corps of Engineers so it can address flood risk and natural hazard damage in states affected by more than one major flood-related disaster declaration from 2014 to 2017. Yet the appropriations do not approach the size of the need. Ultimately, the costs of a comprehensive adaptation and relocation program are huge, even if limited to the most exposed, vulnerable, and willing communities (Martín 2021).

A corollary to questions about the magnitude of federal outlays for this assistance, then, is how they should be distributed to local and state governments and private-sector players (e.g., land developers and financiers, insurers, and the fossil fuel industry) that have had a hand in generating or heightening climate risk. Recent proposals that require a “disaster deductible” from states for FEMA disaster aid have ignited debates over this distribution.¹³ Given the size of the need, cost distribution is as crucial an issue for federal policy as appropriating its share of the bill.

“A federal program needs to boil down to a consistent set of standards in order to function at all, and so that forces everything toward this sort of one-size-fits-all approach...I don’t know how we get around that while still having a centralized source of money and coordination and stuff that we hope that the federal government [does].”

Summit Discussions

Participants were resolute on the need for federal dollars given the federal government’s history of enabling and supporting development on land that is now at risk and given the size and availability of federal resources (via the government’s debt capacity and its revenue streams). Participants were divided, however, on whether those funds should be distributed across states based on their levels of exposure and vulnerability or whether a third factor, the role that states and municipalities have played in encouraging exposure-inducing land use and development, should be considered in cost allocations. Ultimately, participants rejected the one-size-fits-all model as incompatible with the summit’s principles of evidence, equity, efficacy, and efficiency, nor does that model fit the social and political

contexts and ecosystems of risk. Participants agreed on the need to distribute risks and costs to increase local investments and reduce the channeling of federal funds to negligent communities.

Several other topics emerged during discussion of this subject. Participants noted that having different cost-share requirements for federal programs creates inefficiencies, including inconsistent administrative burdens across agencies and inconsistent rules for programs across disasters. This also makes it difficult to look beyond silos and comprehensively consider disaster recovery and climate adaptation needs. Whether to include the costs of restoring and maintaining abandoned properties, especially if they become natural habitats or conservation areas, in cost estimates was another sticking point for participants. Participants also encouraged mitigation and property abandonment through nationalized and private hazard insurance but did not provide specific recommendations.¹⁴

Finally, participants were concerned that recent changes in federal tax laws and the subsequent reductions in federal revenues would harm support for climate adaptation services despite their public good and fiduciary soundness. However, participants stressed creative financing if any party falls short.

Group Recommendations

- **Cost-benefit analysis** tools that are required by federal programs should (1) use standardized methods and definitions for costs and benefits; (2) equitably measure costs and benefits by subpopulations; (3) account for social and ecosystem benefits that cannot be monetized; and (4) consider past interventions that have produced current conditions, land values, and settlement to more justly determine responsibility for costs.
- The federal government should invest in incentives for innovative state and local climate adaptation that includes resettlement, as well as in programs for people who meet the exposure and vulnerability criteria but live in states and localities that do not have the resources or interest in community-wide programming. At first, this investment could be for **demonstrations that are directed federally, regionally or by the state** and can produce evidence on how to scale up a recurring program fund and authorization. A crucial component of a pilot is the **centralization of all necessary services** across all relevant agencies to quantify the total costs and reduce bureaucracy.
- In the longer term, **rules for distributing implementation costs** that account for the **three factors of exposure, vulnerability, and contribution to current risk** across levels of government and private players should be proposed after expert testimony and public input. The more exposed and vulnerable a community, and the more responsible federal actions or

investments are for those conditions, the greater the federal portion of the costs should be. Costs can also be reapportioned to weigh more heavily on local coffers (excluding low-income communities) for planning and engagement and more on federal coffers for relocation implementation (assuming that relocation is endorsed).

8. Time Frames

One challenge facing communities that need support and might need to relocate is that funding takes a long time to reach them. Although FEMA, the Small Business Administration, and other federal agencies have money available when disasters strike, HUD receives disaster recovery funding only when Congress passes special appropriations for CDBG-DR or CDBG Mitigation. As natural disasters' frequency and intensity have escalated in the past decade, so have the amount of appropriated CDBG-DR funds and the consequent delay in the flow of funds.

After an action plan is approved, CDBG-DR grantees typically take 9 to 12 months to hire staff, procure contractors, and develop grant management systems (GAO 2020b; Martín et al. 2021). Even after Congress has appropriated CDBG-DR dollars, homeowners may wait 18 months or more to receive the benefit of them because HUD and its grantees are not immediately prepared to implement them. A recent US Government Accountability Office report recommended that Congress permanently authorize a disaster recovery block grant program akin to CDBG-DR to address unmet needs in disaster-affected areas in a timely manner (GAO 2019). FEMA's HMGP allows applications for a year after a federal disaster declaration, and the window can be extended by 180 days if a state requests it. FEMA states that its goal is to deliver all funding to a state within 24 months of the disaster declaration.

The handful of federal buyout and formal relocation programs that have been created to date had a pattern of lengthy time periods between the federal decision to support moves and the actual relocation. This creates challenges for people who need to prepare for and plan around such a major transition in their lives (GAO 2020a).¹⁵ Even traditional federal aid such as FEMA's IHP and housing grants through HUD's CDBG-DR face inefficiencies and delays, often accompanied by uncertainty about whether the help will ever arrive (GAO 2020b; Martín et al. 2021). When programs are also serving receiving communities, the duration of attention rarely extends past the initial move even though most households experience a sequence of moves, especially after a hazard event. What is reasonable timing for federal aid for households, from eligibility, through consent, and after relocation?

In summary, numerous timing considerations are at play, including delays in federal appropriations and aid relative to the occurrence of a crisis event, the staging of planning and community engagement before the event, the speed of implementation of either adaptation solutions or relocation, and the duration of aid to communities facing exposure and displacement. Yet all these federal schedules are rarely synchronized to people’s time frames.

“For those that are further along, when they do relocate, there are still those needs still there, especially when they relocate further from their subsistence. It really changes the whole calculus of their lifestyle. The aid must still continue with housing, health care, transportation, and others. The needs are probably going to be greater as you go along.”

Summit Discussions

Participants discussed how deadlines could be useful for moving a process forward and ensuring accountability but could also create tension. Expediting aid may not allow enough time for authentic community engagement, and rushing to implementation may lead to inefficiencies and inferior outcomes. Speed may also not be in the best interests of some households—for example, those who have children in school or are facing difficult life events. Participants laid the blame for past aid delays at various doorsteps, including legislative appropriations, federal program rules, and local capacity. Fortunately, pre-crisis climate adaptation that leads to relocation—as set out by other summit recommendations—has phases that can be timed to meet household needs: a comprehensive, robust planning and engagement phase and a speedy implementation phase.

Fundamentally, participants stressed the most important timing for crisis aid, whether it be related to a disaster or chronic climate effects: planning and action well before the moment of crisis itself. In the unfortunate cases when a crisis is already at hand, implementation should occur as quickly as possible to avoid the commitment to rebuilding that often occurs immediately after a disaster event. This long-term, preparation-focused lens also applies to changing the more routine federal deterrents to relocation such as supports for housing, infrastructure, and other civic assets on exposed land, as well as the development of a climate relocation demonstration program.

Group Recommendations

- The federal government should **revisit the timing of past post-disaster buyout and relocation aid** to understand the justification for statutorily mandated deadlines, their effect on program quality, and their outcomes. Comparing other hazard recovery and mitigation activities such as infrastructure construction and property acquisitions may provide insights into how to design the time frames for a climate relocation program.
- Although pilot programs may not reveal the ideal time frames for a program, participants suggested that both **pilots and qualitative comparisons** of traditional federal aid programs could produce reasonable estimates for future schedules and deadlines. The implementation of pilots should also be evaluated to understand what stakeholders, including moving households, think of the time frames and what level of flexibility in timing is needed to address the needs of all households.
- If demonstrations suggest moving forward, the federal government should commit to **timely, clear, and consistent appropriations** so communities can plan.

9. Authorities

The federal government has no explicit policy or program focused on helping communities prepare for relocation or helping people relocate for any reason. The closest the US has come to creating such a program was the Resettlement Administration, an agency tasked with helping low- and moderate-income families move in search of greater economic opportunities. The agency, which was started in 1935 as part of the New Deal, was ultimately folded into the Farm Security Administration, which lasted until only 1946.

The agencies involved in climate relocation get their authority from various pieces of legislation. In 1998, Congress passed the Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, which gave the FEMA administrator the ability to rapidly deploy funding for preparedness, response, and relief to state and local governments. In 1992, Congress granted HUD the authority to use the CDBG program to provide supplemental funding to state and local governments responding to a disaster.

Three challenges related to the federal government's authority for involvement in climate relocation persist. The first is that federal agencies' missions and roles—which are partially dictated by laws and program rules that did not have resettlement, let alone climate-induced resettlement, in mind—are inconsistent. The second challenge is that the line between federal aid and state

responsibility is a shifting one. And the third is figuring out the preparation, protection, and planning obligations of different stakeholders, starting with local governments but also including quasi-public and private-sector entities like insurers and even households. The federal role in disaster assistance has vastly expanded in the last half-century (Lindsay and Webster 2020). Without a clear definition of federal authority in this area, federal interventions could grow even more. What are the appropriate roles and obligations for the federal government, if any?

In the early days of his administration, President Biden acted to address climate-related issues through executive orders. One of his first steps was to establish the White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy, which will help coordinate and implement the administration's climate agenda across 21 federal agencies and departments. How FEMA's and HUD's hazard management functions will be included and whether the office will address climate adaptation are unclear.

Summit Discussions

Participants unanimously affirmed that the federal government should have a significant role in local climate adaptation, particularly because it involves moving people between US jurisdictions. The continued vulnerability of households and the lack of action by state and local governments further justify a federal role, but the legal basis for federal intervention and the financial and administrative mechanisms need articulation.

Participants proposed two paths for action: offering direct assistance to communities and people in need and encouraging local governments to reduce exposure and vulnerability and develop plans on their own. And they debated where in the federal government these responsibilities should lie. Participants noted that interagency coordination is weak and that either a centralized coordinator or a new agency devoted to climate adaptation with a relocation program may need to be instituted. If the former is chosen, participants stressed the importance of integrating major service and infrastructure players such as the Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, and HUD's rental voucher administrators. However, neither models for coordination (such as the Mitigation Framework Leadership Group) nor centralization (such as FEMA's integration into the Department of Homeland Security or the White House's Council on Environmental Quality) is ideal for channeling new resources to vulnerable communities.

“Communities that tend to be successful eventually figure out through trial and error, through smarts, through just tenacity to actually piece [the many resources] together. And it seems what we need more than anything is a coordinating mechanism that has some authority, that would be able to say to these programs, ‘Look, you fund projects that have this kind of outcome of resilience, so why not fund this innovative type, like a relocation,’ and start busting the barriers down.”

Group Recommendations

- The national **disaster policy framework must be reformed** to invest more significantly at the intersection of hazard mitigation and climate adaptation. Participants emphasized using environmental and justice lenses, rather than the current emergency management perspective.
- Participants urged the establishment of **clear lines of authority from the federal government to local project implementers** because confusion exists in leadership across federal agencies that have related programs and those silos are mirrored by state and local governments. Political leaders at the highest levels of the executive and legislative branches of the federal government need to establish the authority and demand the program flexibility and place-based interventions proposed by summit participants. Aligning appropriations, such as those for HUD and FEMA, to a clear mission would be a good start.
- The federal government can **help underresourced local jurisdictions** build capacity, which is based on knowledge as much as money. Local emergency managers tend to have first-responder backgrounds, distinct from the community development training of planners and housing policymakers, and neither group is well-versed in environmental conditions. Distinguishing planning and operational stages from implementation could allow local governments to staff up and harness knowledge that could eliminate professional silos.
- Although federal authority could overcome many local deterrents to households’ self-determination in the face of climate change’s effects, federal intervention is “top down” by definition. Participants urged any federal programming to **embrace flexibility and community decisionmaking**, regardless of the federal implementation model, to promote “bottom up” solutions as much as possible.

- To participants, **adequate resources** are as crucial as the authority to act. Funding is needed to meet the challenge and to reduce political opposition. Participants emphasized other federal roles as well, such as collecting and providing accessible, accurate environmental and social science data to measure exposure, vulnerability, consent, and risk distributions. The reinstatement of EJSCREEN, an environmental justice mapping and screening tool, is a step in the right direction.¹⁶

“But [there needs to be] flexibility to different types of migrants, self-determination of those migrants. Working across the silos of agencies, some sort of collaborative effort and across the local and state government to the federal agencies. The integration of these policies, from hazard mitigation into zoning and land use, how they really actually fit in together.”

Conclusion

There is precedent for federal relocation of people for many reasons. Most of this history is distressing, including the enslavement of Africans, the Trail of Tears, and the mass deportation of Latino immigrants. The 1862 Homestead Act gave land directly and overwhelmingly to white Americans. In some cases, lessons have been learned. The Resettlement Administration provided relocation services to Dust Bowl migrants. Contemporary experiments in displacement by public housing redevelopment (e.g., HOPE VI) and Section 8 rental voucher mobility support a federal role in helping residents move to find better lives and livelihoods. Efforts to integrate climate-related relocation into national climate policy go back to the 2013 White House State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience, which called for “an institutional framework for responding to the complex challenges associated with climate-related displacement” (2014, 30).

Yet no explicit federal policy or program exists to help communities or people prepare for relocation or to guide the movement to safer places. The legislative creators and executive implementers of federal policy have often been the first to identify policy challenges or gaps that have, intentionally or unintentionally, shaped future climate relocation. This often happens with policies that are focused on other issues, such as hazard insurance pools, disaster response and recovery, infrastructure, or environmental protection. Climate migration also calls federal silos into question.

Federal officials have been hamstrung by several situations: the persistence of climate deniers in power and their funders, who support lobbying and disinformation; the push for a comprehensive reform of the national disaster framework as a policy goal separate from long-term community development; the community development world's inability to build capacity in low-income jurisdictions to enable them to harness funding, knowledge, and pilots; the stasis in engagement methods, complicated by social media, to educate and involve all residents; and, ultimately, the lack of funds because of diminishing tax revenue and political will to expand coffers for the public good. Until there is clarity, ad hoc decisions that set poor precedents, including an overreliance on the federal post-disaster cavalry, will continue.

“We’re adrift because this is nobody’s job, and there are no institutions that are focused on this problem.”

Stuck in Three Policy Places

Current programs address only single pieces of the challenge, and they both encourage and impede mobility for at-risk communities. Federal interventions fall into three buckets:

- **Disaster policy.** Underresourced hazard mitigation grant and technical assistance programs simultaneously support climate relocation through discrete property buyouts *and* discourage relocation by building physical protections for exposed communities. In contrast, disaster response often includes evacuation of residents and temporary housing elsewhere, and those occasionally lead to permanent relocation (but without long-term aid). Furthermore, disaster recovery programs have historically prioritized rebuilding in place. The federal government has supported community-wide relocation only twice, both through onetime funding streams that were implemented with unclear time frames and are difficult to replicate (GAO 2020a). Buyouts of damaged properties are the primary explicit support for movers, but this aid goes to those with resources and patience.
- **Community development.** The federal government provides numerous resources—funding, research, and technical assistance—to ensure that communities are socially and economically viable and physically habitable. Federal regulations, mandates, and funds often define local housing, transportation, workforce training, economic development, public works and utilities,

and environmental conditions. Decisions about most of these allocations and their requirements are rarely predicated on communities' climate exposure or vulnerability.¹⁷ Consequently, federal resources have supported communities and their extant social and economic conditions—for better or worse—and deterred relocation by encouraging staying in place.

- **Property institutions.** A wide range of federal interventions encourage—or, more accurately, do not discourage—development and ownership of properties regardless of their climate-related exposures and the resulting financial and physical risks to owners and occupants. Federally sponsored mortgage securitization corporations, mortgage insurance, and the National Flood Insurance Program all indirectly serve to make certain places affordable, accessible, and livable regardless of the climate-related risks. In turn, these places generate demand for schools, utilities, and other types of community-supporting infrastructure that keeps some populations living both in and out of harm's way.

Itineraries

Amid this push-and-pull dissonance, the federal government still emerges as a central stakeholder. Its constitutional authority and financial and information resources contribute as much as state and local governments, local economies, and personal perceptions to people's decisions and capacities to move, to the ways that communities prepare for their departure, and to the ways that other places prepare for communities' arrival. But this role is far from clear or coherent. Many proposals have emerged in just the last year for the public sector's intervention in climate adaptation generally and in climate-related relocation—from legislation,¹⁸ to federal studies,¹⁹ to political platforms,²⁰ to advocacy position papers.²¹ International multilaterals and development entities have also put forward proposals for dealing with relocation on a global scale.²²

Meanwhile, displacement, relocation, and migration because of climate-related effects—including acute weather events and chronic temperature, air, and water changes—are happening. A framework of shared principles for how the US will prepare for, fund, and implement programs—one that equitably considers people who move, the environments and communities they leave, and the places they go—eludes us. Between lessons from current programs, visions for new ones, and policy principles, officials could delineate a climate relocation framework. Yet, to date, they have not.

Appendix A. Summit Agenda

Wednesday, November 18, 2020

- 1:00 p.m.** **Session I: Convening**
Zoom login and admissions
- 1:05 p.m.** **Welcome**
- **Sarah Rosen Wartell**, President, Urban Institute
- 1:15 p.m.** **Focusing Migration Policy on Vulnerable Populations**
- **Colette Pichon Battle**, Executive Director, Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy
- 1:25 p.m.** **Proposals for a New Federal Policy**
- **Marion Mollegen McFadden**, Senior Vice President for Public Policy and Senior Advisor for Resilience, Enterprise Community Partners
- 1:35 p.m.** **Summit Themes and Format**
- **Dr. Carlos Martín**, Senior Fellow and Built Environment Practice Lead, Urban Institute
- 1:45 p.m.** **Stakeholder caucuses**
Participants will meet with peers in stakeholder groups. Facilitators from Urban Institute and Enterprise will prompt discussion on each policy theme with the goal of developing in-group consensus or principles that representatives will take to their theme breakouts.
- 2:45 p.m.** **Break**
- 3:00 p.m.** **Session II: Reforming Federal Policy**
Overview
- **Dr. Carlos Martín**, Senior Fellow and Built Environment Practice Lead, Urban Institute
- 3:05 p.m.** **Scattered Policies and Climate Diasporas**
FEMA Buyouts
- **Anna Weber**, Senior Policy Analyst, Natural Resources Defense Council
- NFIP Rate Changes**
- **Dr. Carolyn Kousky**, Executive Director, Wharton Risk Center, University of Pennsylvania

- 3:15 p.m. Response Panel**
- **Jonathan Parfrey**, Executive Director, Climate Resolve
 - **Sarah Saadian**, Vice President for Public Policy, National Low Income Housing Coalition

3:20 p.m. Policy Breakouts

Participants will be assigned a policy theme breakout for both days. The themes, defined and assigned in the summit brief, are distributed to ensure that each has at least one member from every stakeholder caucus. Representatives for each stakeholder group will present their groups' perspective to document cross-group definitions, tensions, and policy opportunities. Facilitators from Urban Institute, Enterprise Community Partners, University of New Orleans, Texas Southern University, University of Central Florida, and RAND will prompt discussion in each policy theme.

4:20 p.m. Homeroom

There will be no "report outs" from the theme breakouts, as they will be recorded. The final moments of the day provide an opportunity to air questions, concerns, or recommendations.

4:30 p.m. Day concludes

Thursday, November 19, 2020

1:00 p.m. Session III: Telling the (Policy) Story

Zoom login and admissions

1:05 p.m. Q&A with Abrahm Lustgarten

Urban Institute President Sarah Rosen Wartell will moderate an **off-the-record** discussion with Abrahm Lustgarten, senior environmental reporter at ProPublica.

2:00 p.m. Break

2:10 p.m. Session IV: Reimagining Federal Policy

Overview

- **Dr. Carlos Martín**, Senior Fellow and Built Environment Practice Lead, Urban Institute

2:15 p.m. A Climate Migration Pilot Proposal

- **Micah McMillan**, Senior Analyst, Natural Resources and Environment, US Government Accountability Office

- 2:25 p.m. Response Panel**
- **Dr. Robin Bronen**, Executive Director, Alaska Institute for Justice
 - **Mathew Sanders**, Resilience Policy and Program Administrator, State of Louisiana Office of Community Development
- 2:35 p.m. Policy Breakouts**
Participants will return to the same breakout groups around the same themes on the second day to share their visions for future policy.
- 3:35 p.m. Break**
- 3:45 p.m. Final stakeholder caucuses**
Participants will return to their stakeholder groups to reflect on the reception to their perspectives from the theme breakouts and to identify any additional policy action, research, advocacy, or practical guidance that must be explored. Facilitators will prompt discussion via questions based on the principles discussed in the first caucuses.
- 4:15 p.m. Discussion of next steps**
- 4:20 p.m. Closing Reflections**
- **Lois R. DeBacker**, Managing Director for Environment, The Kresge Foundation
- 4:30 p.m. Summit concludes**

Appendix B. Summit Participants

The following list is of invited and registered participants in the Stakeholders Summit on Federal Policy for Climate Displacement, Relocation, and Migration. The list does not include people who asked to remain anonymous.

- Zelalem Adefris, Catalyst Miami
- Marissa Aho, City of Houston, Texas
- Lauren Augustine, National Academy of Sciences
- K. Baja, Urban Sustainability Directors Network
- Nina Balan, University of New Orleans
- Robin Barnes, Resilience Resolutions
- Doug Beaver, City of Norfolk
- Chad Berginnis, Association of State Floodplain Managers
- George Besch, Designing to Live Sustainably
- Sherri Binder, BrokoppBinder Research & Consulting
- Traci Birch, Louisiana State University
- Jonathan Blake, RAND Corporation
- Dana Bourland, JPB Foundation
- Kathleen Boyer, FEMA
- Jane Brogan, New York State Governor's Office of Storm Recovery
- Robin Bronen, Alaska Institute for Justice
- Maxine Burkett, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, William S. Richardson School of Law
- Eric Burnstein, Urban Institute
- Rev. James Caldwell, Coalition of Community Organizations
- Joe Carlile, US House Appropriations Committee
- Álvaro Casanova, Climate Justice Alliance
- Carmen Cavezza, Coalition for Environment, Equity, and Resilience
- Anita Chandra, RAND Corporation
- Yvette Chen, Fair Share Housing Center
- Aaron Clark-Ginsberg, RAND Corporation

- Erin Coryell, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies
- Mayra Cruz, Catalyst Miami
- Cari Cullen, Center for Disaster Philanthropy
- Lanor Curole, United Houma Nation Inc.
- Aaron Davis, US House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
- Scott Davis, SGD Urban Solutions
- Lois DeBacker, Kresge Foundation
- Rachel Drew, Enterprise Community Partners
- Monica Farris, University of New Orleans, Center for Hazards Assessment, Response, and Technology
- Dan Fowler, Urban Institute
- Elizabeth Fussell, Brown University
- Fernando Gil-Ensenat, Alvarez & Marsal
- Ariadna Godreau, Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico
- Alfredo Gomez, US Government Accountability Office
- Iris Gonzalez, Coalition for Environment, Equity, and Resilience
- Natalie Grant, US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Human Services, Emergency Preparedness and Response
- Lisa Anne Hamilton
- Kelly Haragan, University of Texas School of Law Environmental Clinic
- Allison Hardin, City of Myrtle Beach
- Lindsay Harper, Arm in Arm
- Miyuki Hino, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
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Notes

- ¹ *Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change UNFCCC-Paris COP-21: Recommendations from the Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility*, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, November 2015, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/201511-human-mobility-in-the-context-of-climate-change-unfccc-Paris-COP21.pdf>.
- ² In this report, the terms “climate movers,” “displaced,” and “migrants” are used interchangeably, but terms such as “climate refugee” were purposely not used because of their legal implications. See Burkett (2012).
- ³ Calls have been made for President Biden to declare climate an emergency.
- ⁴ Carlos Martín, Carolyn Kousky, Amelia Adams, Kristin Baja, Donna Boyce, Mary Comerio, William Congdon, Maurice Emsellem, Adam Gordon, Yvette Chen, Jeanne Herb, Alessandra Jerolleman, Reese May, Marion Mollegen McFadden, Laurie Schoeman, Lori Peek, Jennifer Tobin, Daniel Teles, and Diane Yentel, “Improving the Disaster Recovery of Low-Income Families,” Urban Institute, <https://www.urban.org/debates/improving-disaster-recovery-low-income-families>.
- ⁵ Anna Weber, “Losing Ground: Severe Repetitive Flooding in the United States,” Natural Resources Defense Council, September 15, 2020, <https://www.nrdc.org/resources/losing-ground-severe-repetitive-flooding-united-states>.
- ⁶ Jack R. Stokvis (General Deputy Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development, US Department of Housing and Urban Development), memorandum to regional administrators and Category A field office managers, regarding “Definition of ‘Buildings for the General Conduct of Government,’” December 8, 1987, <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/CDBG-Memorandum-Definition-of-Building-for-General-Conduct-Government.pdf>.
- ⁷ Patrick McGeehan, “New Jersey Reaches Deal on Hurricane Sandy Aid,” *New York Times*, May 30, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/31/nyregion/new-jersey-reaches-deal-on-hurricane-sandy-aid.html>.
- ⁸ “National Disaster Resilience Competition,” US Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed March 9, 2021, https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/economic_development/resilience/competition.
- ⁹ “Isle de Jean Charles Resettlement,” State of Louisiana, accessed March 9, 2021, <http://isledejeancharles.la.gov/>.
- ¹⁰ In cases of evacuation, mutual aid agreements can help with shelter, although the “host state” can request FEMA funds for this temporary assistance.
- ¹¹ For longer-term displacement, two cases of CDBG-DR funds’ being used by receiving communities to support newcomers from disasters have been documented; however, in both cases, the receiving communities were eligible for funds only because they had experienced a disaster in the same year. In the first, Texas received resources for Hurricane Katrina migrants through the appropriation related to Hurricane Rita. In the second, Florida received resources for Hurricane Maria migrants through the appropriation related to Hurricane Irma.
- ¹² Abrahm Lustgarten, “How Climate Migration Will Reshape America: Millions Will Be Displaced. Where Will They Go?” *New York Times*, September 15, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/15/magazine/climate-crisis-migration-america.html>.
- ¹³ Past FEMA rule-making proposals have included a state “deductible” and a damage threshold scaled to state wealth. See Thomas Frank, “FEMA Seeks to Slash Disaster Aid as Trump Heads for Exit,” *E&E News*, December 14, 2020, <https://www.eenews.net/climatewire/2020/12/14/stories/1063720573>.
- ¹⁴ As examples, see the California Climate Insurance Working Group and National Flood Insurance Program reforms, as discussed in Kousky (2017).

- ¹⁵ “Climate Change,” Alaska Institute for Justice, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.akijp.org/policy-and-research/climate-change/>.
- ¹⁶ See recent presidential executive orders on climate change and environmental justice.
- ¹⁷ Through Executive Order 13990 (“Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science To Tackle the Climate Crisis”), President Biden reinstated the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard on January 21, 2021.
- ¹⁸ The Disaster Recovery Reform Act was enacted October 5, 2018, creating FEMA’s Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program for more comprehensive hazard mitigation, including buyouts and relocations. The Reforming Disaster Recovery Act, which the US House of Representatives passed November 18, 2019, aims to better situate long-term mitigation within HUD programs by statutorily authorizing CDBG-DR. Legislation such as the Green New Deal, the Climate Equity Act, and the Environmental Justice for All Act also addresses climate adaptation planning, engagement, distributional equity, and funding.
- ¹⁹ The recently proposed climate migration pilot (GAO 2020a), the 2020 report from the US House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis, and the 2020 report from the Senate Democrats’ Special Committee on the Climate Crisis propose demonstrations and relocation support.
- ²⁰ When he was running for president, Joe Biden proposed an environmental justice policy that provides 40 percent of new infrastructure funds for disadvantaged communities. Biden’s presidential transition plans included intentions to develop regional climate resilience plans, encourage private hazard mitigation and insurance pricing, and help developing countries better manage the adverse effects of climate change, including migration. However, the plan also seeks to help communities rebuild after disasters.
- ²¹ A sample of think tank and grassroots proposals are the Climate Forum’s Equitable and Just National Climate Platform, which urges support for displaced families to return to their communities or to relocate to improved living standards and maintained social cohesion, as well as engaged planning and management; the BlueGreen Alliance’s Solidarity for Climate Action; the Climate Justice Alliance’s protections for the rights of climate, including “a right to return to lands that remain livable and/or providing full and fair compensation for losses” (United Frontline Table 2020, 41); and the US Climate Action Network’s Vision for Equitable Climate Action, which features a rights-centered approach and equity in adaptation and managed retreat.
- ²² See Bapna et al. (2019) and Hallegatte, Rentschler, and Rozenberg (2020).

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