

Recover Delaware Roundtable #4: Networks for Resilience and Recovery

By Danielle Swallow, Delaware Sea Grant College Program, September 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic tested local resilience in many ways—including straining social infrastructure such as schools and healthcare systems, exposing gaps in broadband internet access, and altering supply chains and how households and individuals access essential commercial and government services. Delaware’s recovery from the pandemic presents many opportunities for our communities to take stock of lessons learned and apply this knowledge to future planning that builds resilience to the next event.

What are Networks?

Networks bring a variety of individuals, groups, and organizations together around overlapping and shared interests. They contribute to the creation of social capital that can support disaster response and recovery. Social capital refers to the extent to which an individual involves themselves in different informal networks, as well as formal civic organizations. This social capital adds capacity and extends the reach of governmental response and recovery efforts.

Networks can and should involve multiple sectors and many types of organizations, including businesses, civic associations, healthcare and faith-based organizations, schools, and government. Networks can be informal or formal, but they typically play roles related to information-sharing, resource identification, and the cultivation of relationships that can be leveraged during or after a disaster.

Network Partners to Consider for Response and Recovery Effortsⁱ

Community	Public	Private
Community councils	Government agencies (all levels and types)	Chambers of commerce and industry associations
Volunteer, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations	Emergency responders	Hotels and restaurants
Individual citizens and community leaders	School boards	Retailers, including surplus, hardware, big-box, and local
Higher education institutions	Local planning councils	Supply chain components, such as manufacturers, distributors, suppliers, and logistics providers
Disability and home care services	Animal control agencies	Media outlets
Local cooperative-extension system offices	Public transportation systems	Utility providers

Why are Networks Important to Resilience and Recovery?

Communities that draw upon networks have a faster rate of recovery from disasters.

Resilient communities have both physical infrastructure and social capital that support them in bouncing back from disasters and other disruptions more readily than other communities. Resilience directly aids disaster recovery by reducing the period and magnitude of disruptions.

Networks act as force multipliers by significantly increasing the reach and efficiency of local preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. Individuals and groups that band together around a common purpose are more effective at identifying critical needs, coordinating and mobilizing available resources, and supporting the efficient delivery of those resources. They also play a major role in sharing information, best-practices, and professional expertise. In addition, their collective voice enables them to amplify key messages, needs, and information to others, as well as facilitate communications among different government actors. Some networks play an advocacy role in terms of promoting legislation and policy initiatives, but others are non-political and focus on best practices and industry standards.

Activating Networks for Resilience and Recovery

Disaster response is federally directed, state-managed, and locally executed. Most response activities occur at the local level by local responders, networks, and community leaders, and studies show that households and communities recover faster when there are networks present. Sadri et al. (2018) make several observations and recommendations relevant to the use of networks for recovery and resilience in Delaware:

- Community resilience requires an understanding and consideration of both physical and social factors. For example, policymakers interested in confronting the immediate threat of climate change are far too prone to prioritize improvements and innovations to physical infrastructure, ahead of improving the social infrastructure in communities. Communities with stronger social relationships are more likely to overcome sudden shocks and tremendous hardships together.
- The density of people's networks is especially important. Network density measures the extent to which people in one's social network relate to each other. It is not just a matter of knowing lots of different people—it is critical for recovery that the people you know are connected to one another.
- Engage civic groups, including senior citizen groups, in both specific disaster planning scenarios and neighborhood events that build or strengthen social ties. ⁱⁱ

Recovery and resilience networks could be grassroots and organic with open membership, top-down with mandated participation, established on the back of professional associations or industry groups, or some combination of these options. Regardless of the character or composition of a network, action usually depends on champions and a common purpose that is facilitated by regular communications and meetings.

Strategic leadership and careful attention to process can help to move networks beyond a simple collection of individual and organizational assets and toward a strong effort that leverages these assets for mutually beneficial and reinforcing recovery and resilience actions. The *Strategic Doing* approach offers one process for quickly forming collaborations and moving toward measurable outcomes.^{iii,iv} Professionals throughout Delaware, including staff at both Delaware Sea Grant and the Institute for Public Administration, have been trained to facilitate *Strategic Doing* sessions with community groups and organizations.

About Delaware Sea Grant

The Delaware Sea Grant College Program helps Delaware communities wisely use, manage, and conserve our state's valuable coastal resources by fostering sustainable coastal economies, developing resilience to coastal hazards, and preparing the next generation of coastal leaders.

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About the Institute for Public Administration

The University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration (IPA) addresses the policy, planning, and management needs of its partners through the integration of applied research, professional development, and the education of tomorrow's leaders.



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ⁱ FEMA. "A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, Themes, and Pathways for Action." Federal Emergency Management Agency, US Department of Homeland Security, Washington DC (2011). fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/whole_community_dec2011_2.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Sadri, Arif Mohaimin, Satish V. Ukkusuri, Seungyoon Lee, Rosalee Clawson, Daniel Aldrich, Megan Sapp Nelson, Justin Seipel, and Daniel Kelly. "The role of social capital, personal networks, and emergency responders in post-disaster recovery and resilience: a study of rural communities in Indiana." *Natural hazards* 90, no. 3 (2018): 1377-1406. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11069-017-3103-0>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Agile Strategy Lab. "An Introduction to Strategic Doing." Agile Strategy Lab (2018). strategicdoing.net/intro/.

^{iv} Morrison, Edward, Scott Hutcheson, Elizabeth Nilsen, Janyce Fadden, and Nancy Franklin. *Strategic doing: Ten skills for agile leadership*. John Wiley & Sons, 2019.