

Resilience Planning for Washington D.C. Universities



Background

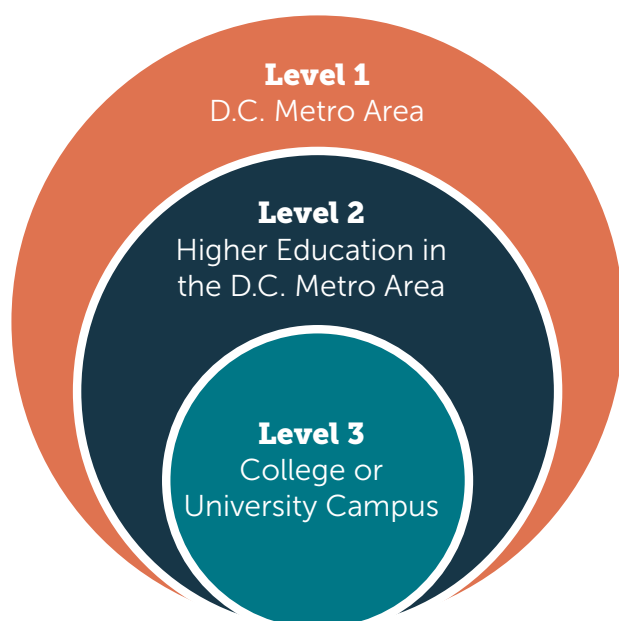
The [District of Columbia Mayor's College and University Sustainability Pledge](#), signed in 2012, is a cross sector agreement between the District higher education sector and local government to advance sustainability. The District Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) urban sustainability staff, along with Sustainability Directors from partner universities, invited Second Nature to help organize a one-day workshop on climate resilience. The goal was to increase higher ed. institutions' understanding of District resilience planning initiatives, and provide a framework for colleges and universities to undertake their own resilience assessment and planning processes on campus.

ORGANIZING PARTNERS

- Second Nature
- The Nature Conservancy
- Department of Energy and the Environment (DOEE)
- Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA)
- George Washington University
- American University
- University of the District of Columbia

Concept: Levels of Resilience Work in D.C.

To better understand the layers of resilience work in the District area, we illustrated three different tiers of resilience planning:



Level 1: D.C. Metro Area.

This level addresses resilience planning for the entire District. The Chief Resilience Officer works at this level. Citywide plans such as [Climate Ready D.C.](#) and the [Sustainable D.C. Plan](#) are also at this level.

Level 2: Higher Education in the D.C. Metro Area.

This level addresses how colleges and universities in D.C. relate to the D.C. Metro Area resilience initiatives and plans. This includes the role that colleges and universities can play in supporting city level resilience goals, and how city planning may impact campuses' individual resilience plans. D.C. has initiatives such as the [Mayor's Sustainability Pledge](#) that are at this level.

Level 3: College and University Campuses.

This level includes campuses and their immediate surrounding community or neighborhood. Each college or university will likely develop their own climate resilience plan addressing needs this level.



Workshop Format

The Nature Conservancy has been delivering [Community Resilience Building \(CRB\)](#) workshops for more than a decade. Based on the CRB model, The Nature Conservancy and Second Nature helped design a two-part workshop focused on higher education resilience planning, which could be completed in one day.

1

THE FIRST PART OF THE WORKSHOP focused on Level 2, Higher Education in the DC Metro Area. During this session, representatives from universities came together with representatives from different city offices to discuss climate resilience in D.C. The Deputy Chief Resilience Officer for D.C., DOEE, and HSEMA all presented on key points from their resilience initiatives and existing climate adaptation plans for the city. Through facilitated activities, campus representatives discussed how universities could contribute to these initiatives, as well as what the unique needs of campuses were with regards to climate resilience.

Desired Outcomes from Part One: **Higher Education in the DC Metro Area**

- All participants understand climate hazards impacting DC
- Participants have common understanding of different DC resilience planning initiatives at the city level
- Participants identify initial high-level action steps to increase DC resilience and support climate resilience planning

2

THE SECOND PART OF THE WORKSHOP focused on Level 3, College and University campuses. The goal of this session was to prepare university representatives to return to their campuses and complete their own processes to build climate resilience. This included a Training of Facilitation Teams in how to organize and facilitate a Community Resilience Building Workshop.

Desired Outcomes from Part Two: **Training of Facilitation Teams**

- Teams from each campus have a full understanding of the Community Resilience Building workshop process
- Teams feel confident in organizing and executing their own Community Resilience Building workshop at their college or university campus

Community Resilience Building (CRB) process



The CRB workshop is a process developed by Dr. Adam Whelchel, Director of Science at The Nature Conservancy, CT, to help communities improve their extreme weather and climate resilience. During the workshop, participants discuss top climate hazards, identify strengths and vulnerabilities, and prioritize actions steps to increase resilience. The CRB workshop is an opportunity for campuses to develop and strengthen relationships with their surrounding communities. Schools can use this process to complete their Resilience Assessment for the Presidents' Climate or Resilience Commitment, and begin creating a climate action plan that incorporates resilience goals. Second Nature is collaborating with The Nature Conservancy to bring the CRB workshop to universities that are signatories of the Presidents' Climate or Resilience Commitments.



Workshop Outcomes

Reflection and Regional Resilience: Facilitated Discussion Summary

The Deputy Chief Resilience Officer, HSEMA, and the DOEE each presented on climate resilience planning for the District. This covered DC's participation in 100 Resilient Cities, hazard mitigation and resilience planning, and the Climate Ready DC plan. Participants were asked their general perceptions and reflections from these presentations, which are summarized here.

Strengths in Existing City Resources and Initiatives:

- The different District resilience plans are thorough, organized, and very thoughtful. Significant work has gone into these initiatives. Resilience planning in DC is well underway, and these efforts provide solid groundwork for campuses to engage in resilience planning.
- There are many resources in DC that campuses can take advantage of, including climate-related data and analysis, and adaptation/mitigation grant opportunities from different agencies. There are also many opportunities for schools to contribute to making DC more climate resilient.

More Coordination and Implementation Needed:

- While participants agreed that existing DC resilience initiatives are thorough and forward-thinking, there were questions about how the different plans connect. More explicit coordination of plans might be helpful for campuses to see where they fit in and how their own plans can relate.
- Some participants reflected that while there are many comprehensive plans for the city, going forward there should be more focus on actions and implementation of these plans.

Campuses can Provide Connection to Communities:

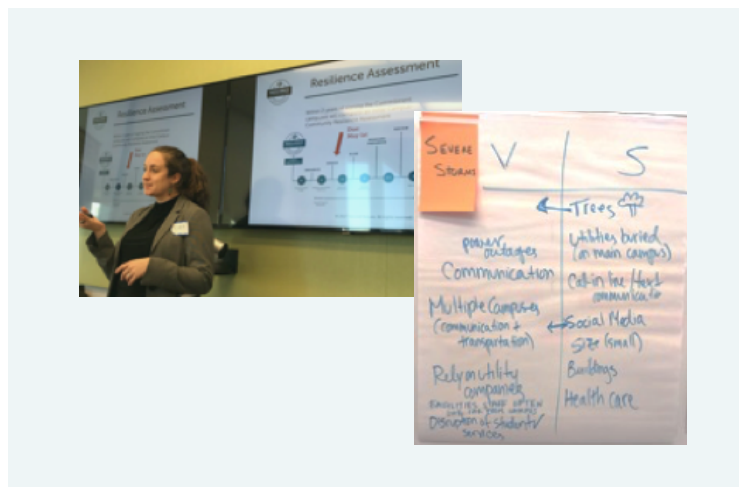
- Many participants also noted that while these plans are great resources, they are high level. Campuses do more work on the community level. The DC plans provide a good basic framework that campuses can expand on to meet the specific needs of their communities.
- Campuses mentioned the importance of clearly communicating these initiatives with all stakeholders, and incorporating the voice of all communities (especially the most vulnerable) in the climate resilience planning process. Universities may be well positioned to help do this because of their community connections.

ATTENDEES

- University of the District of Columbia
- Georgetown University
- George Washington University
- American University
- Howard University
- Gallaudet University
- Department of Energy and the Environment (DOEE)
- Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA)
- Office of the City Administrator: Resilient DC



Participants were then asked to consider how the D.C. plans relate to their campuses, and how colleges and universities can contribute to increased resilience in D.C. Overall participants reflected that climate change and climate resilience planning present opportunities for schools to rethink campus infrastructure renovations, and to develop new relationships with community stakeholders. Participants felt that campuses should build off of the frameworks and plans already provided by D.C. agencies, while adjusting the scale and tailoring to their unique audiences.



Campuses brainstormed ways they can contribute to city resilience initiatives:



Take Responsibility for Campus Populations. Universities are host to a large population within D.C. (residential students). By taking responsibility for campus residents, along with employees, and having plans to reduce their vulnerability and remove them from risk if needed, universities can help increase D.C. resilience and allow District agencies to focus on other at-risk populations.



Connect with Vulnerable Populations in Community. Faculty, staff, and students, interact closely with their neighborhoods, and many already have relationships with community groups. Universities may have unique experience connecting with vulnerable communities, and can help ensure that underrepresented groups have a voice in the resilience planning process and access to resources.



Serve as Community Resilience Hubs. A University can designate a space on campus as a resilience hub. This may include community relationship-building, education, and innovation. It could also include providing cooling centers and emergency shelters. Schools should consider whether they are sufficiently prepared to serve their campus community and neighbors in an extreme weather event.



Address Food Insecurity. Universities can help address food insecurity both among the campus population and in the community. They can engage in and promote urban agriculture initiatives, develop food hubs, and provide trainings.



Improve Campus Infrastructure. Universities can invest in infrastructure improvements, and leverage funding opportunities to develop more resilient campus infrastructure. This will also benefit the surrounding neighborhoods. For example, schools should consider how their buildings are designed and used. They should conserve energy use, and develop responsible storm water management.



Demonstrate Resilience Implementation. Participants also discussed how campuses can serve as examples for the city. Universities face many of the same challenges as city agencies, and can model actions and pilot initiatives on a smaller scale.



Research Innovative Solutions. Finally, universities may have capacity to contribute research on both the scientific understand of climate change and on potential solutions. Faculty can educate and engage their students on climate resilience, and support students in research, outreach, and implementation of projects. Various university stakeholders can also provide feedback on city resilience plans and projects.



Participants also discussed how best to engage their campus leadership. They recognized that successful resilience planning needs the support of top university leaders and decision makers. American University and George Washington University are Climate Commitment signatories, and Gallaudet University is a Carbon Commitment Signatory. All of the schools could further explore how they can work across silos and leverage networks to make sure that climate resilience is consistently on the radar of and supported by their presidents or chancellors.

Post Workshop

American University (AU) was the first institution to organize its own campus Community Resilience Building workshop. A diverse array of campus stakeholders participated including faculty, students, and representatives from offices of sustainability, facilities, planning, campus life, marketing, and more. AU hired an outside facilitator for the workshop in order to have an impartial guide for the group and to keep the focus on content. The external facilitator role created a neutral setting, and allowed all attendees from the university to participate equally.

The report from American University's CRB workshop is [available online](#), and outlines AU's identified strengths, vulnerabilities, initial indicators of resilience, and potential action areas to increase resilience. This formed the core content of the [Resilience Assessment](#) that AU submitted as part of the Presidents' Climate Commitment.



American University organized a resilience assessment workshop in January 2018 based on the CRB workshop model.

For more information on this process,
contact Resilience@Secondnature.org

