



Upper Texas Gulf Coast Regional Resilience Initiative (UTRI)



Approach

The Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) is working in partnership with the Coalition for Environment, Equity, and Resilience (CEER), and Texas Southern University (TSU) to address racial injustices and disparities in the distribution of disaster recovery resources. In addition, these efforts work to dismantle policies, practices, and formulas for resilience building allocations that unfairly disadvantage people of color.

Challenge

Over the past two decades, the Upper Texas Gulf Coast region has experienced an increase in flooding, extreme heat, and drought. Climate Change is increasing the severity of storm events like 2017's Hurricane Harvey, which dropped 60 inches of rain, shattering U.S. storm records. While we think of weather and climate events as nondiscriminatory, in actuality, they are not. Due to discriminatory planning practices, like redlining, used to target investments, neighborhoods of color have been located and displaced in floodplain areas with poor infrastructure and lack of basic amenities. One year after Harvey, a survey showed that homes occupied by Black and Latinx Texans were up to three times more likely to remain uninhabitable, compared to homes occupied by white residents.¹ Similar disparities in income existed: 50 percent of lower-income respondents weren't getting the help they needed, compared to 32 percent of those with higher incomes. As of April 2020, Harris County (TX's most populous county) had only disbursed 50 checks to homeowners applying for Harvey aid, with communities of color often subjected to disproportionately higher denial rates for relief and recovery programs.²

Exacerbating these challenges are the environmental injustices that plague the region. On the Texas Gulf Coast, under segregation, African Americans were steered to low-lying coastal areas; and, as Texas towns grew, refineries, interstates and other polluting industries moved to those areas. Texas now leads the U.S. in most African American residents living in counties with oil refineries.³ In addition to the horrific impacts on air quality and public health, flooding has caused soil contamination which in turn negatively impacts food and water quality.

To counteract these exponential and increasing threats, the region must adopt policies and practices that protect all of its residents from harm; and that advance recovery that benefits all, especially those most in need.

¹ <https://www.episcopalhealth.org/report-type/hurricane-harvey/>

² <https://bayoucitywaterkeeper.org/flooding-disproportionately-impacts-people-of-color/>

³ https://www.naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Fumes-Across-the-Fence-Line_NAACP-and-CATF-Study.pdf

Funding Partner



About ISC

Since 1991, the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) has led more than 121 transformative community-driven sustainability projects in 31 countries including the United States, China, India, and Bangladesh. ISC helps unleash the existing power of local people and institutions to address immediate social, economic, and environmental challenges and opportunities – all while building those on-the-ground solutions into national and international best practices and policy. At the heart of the organization's approach is results-focused, authentic, and pragmatic engagement with all stakeholders, which unearths locally-driven and equitable solutions to the biggest challenge we face – global climate change.

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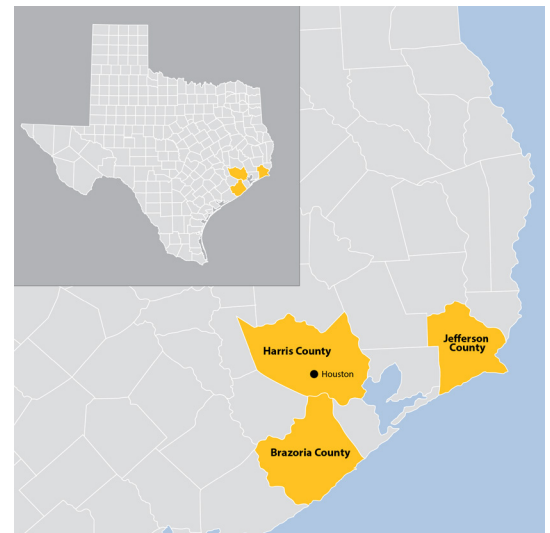
Solution

An equitable and comprehensive recovery and resilience building action plan must guide local and regional implementation as we work to increase social, economic, and environmental resilience to:

- Advance an inclusive, cross-sector collaboration that fosters equitable resilience building and recovery solutions.
- Foster informed, engaged communities that can advance equitable resilience building and recovery at local, regional and state levels.
- Educate decision-makers and other influential stakeholders about recovery and resilience inequities, and offer recommended actions towards positive change.

Project Geography

Three-county Upper Texas coastal area: Brazoria, Jefferson, and, Harris to develop a baseline assessment of regional resilience, and determine actionable strategies to increase community resilience; build partnerships and design strategies for greater local and regional collaboration.



Participants

Community-based organizations, faith leaders, advocates, government, private sector/business leaders, and institutions.

Project Leadership Team

Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC), Coalition for Environment, Equity, and Resilience (CEER), and Texas Southern University (TSU).

For more information:

Carlos Clausell

Senior Program Officer
cclausell@sustain.org