FY 2015 Cooperating Technical Partners (CTP) Grant
Interim Report:
Lessons Learned From Resilient Neighbors Network Communities
May 2016

The Resilient Neighbors Network (RNN) is a peer-to-peer co-mentoring network of thirteen communities spread throughout the United States with the goal of sharing communication, knowledge, and resources to strengthen disaster risk reduction and hazard mitigation at the local community level. Through the funding period of the FY 2015 CTP grant, the communities have been continuing to develop mentorship connections with each other, particularly through monthly conference calls. These monthly conversations have allowed individual communities to present immediate challenges and get feedback from the group regarding potential resources, partnering organizations, funding sources, and best practices. During this mentorship process, the RNN communities' lessons learned have been centered around discovering who they are as a group and how to work effectively together, relying on both the unique character of each individual community as well as the common challenges and goals they share. Below is a summary of the lessons learned by the Resilient Neighbors Network:

- Peer-to-peer mentoring can be an invaluable resource at the local community level in navigating the complexity and challenges of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and community resilience.

- Communities in the Resilient Neighbors Network (RNN) use a multi-hazard approach in their communities to mitigate natural hazards. This approach allows for shared management strategies, continuity in both planning and implementing resources, and enables a unified response.

- RNN communities all use a whole community approach to engage the diverse members of their communities in furthering DRR and cultivating resilience. As part of this whole community approach, RNN communities are also aware that they need to make efforts to connect with the typically underserved and particularly vulnerable populations.

- Communities in the RNN represent the diversity of communities across the U.S. The RNN communities are urban, suburban, and rural; are coastal and in-land communities; deal with an array of primary natural hazards including floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis, and winter storms; possess local economies with a wide range of financial resources from minimal to abundant. This diversity among the RNN communities is a valuable asset because it enables more effective mentoring between communities to address a broader range of challenges.

- Each RNN community is unique and, because of that, methodology to furthering DRR and cultivating resilience is also unique. Each RNN community in itself is a living research and learning laboratory based on its particular location in the US, risk-exposure, population, demographics and a whole host of other factors. RNN is a vehicle to share "good practice" in working toward community resilience within each of these unique locations and circumstances. This transfer of knowledge and capacity building between communities covers a broad range of topics and issues such as community participation, building a sense of place or a sense of community, how the "whole community" can contribute to community resiliency, community empowerment, dealing with the "politics" surrounding resiliency, learning more about the science behind our risks, promoting physical actions that protect people and places from harm, ensuring resources are geared at community resilience (both short-term and long-term), and a fostering a link (or maybe better put a relationship) between the practitioners and the people. RNN's successes are that a "piece" of each participating community can be found in each of the participating communities – it can't be put any simpler than that!

- There can be many political implications at the local level with the term "climate change". Many RNN communities focus on the implementation of DRR, resilience, and climate adaption strategies to move their communities to being safer places rather than expending energy and resources trying to convince elected officials and community stakeholders on the causes of increased amounts of severe weather and other climate impacts.

- At the local level, RNN communities work with a variety of partnering organizations and stakeholders. Sharing information about successful partnerships within individual RNN communities has helped other RNN communities develop similar partnerships.

- RNN community representatives hold numerous positions in local, regional, and state government, creating a level of expertise in mentoring suitable to handle the complexities of implementing DRR at the community level. RNN community representatives have expertise in community engagement, resource protection, engineering, planning, fiscal management, hazard mitigation, emergency management, grant writing, navigating multiple levels of government, partnership development, volunteer management, and leadership.

- Because of the diversity of the RNN communities, the broad geographic area that is covered, and the numerous responsibilities of each of the RNN community representatives, the biggest challenge the RNN has faced is staying connected through monthly calls and sporadic in-person meetings. But even despite this challenge, successful mentoring has occurred through referral of resources, peer connections to experts, and communication of best practices and "stumbling blocks".

- The RNN member communities are committed to peer-to-peer mentoring not only within the group but also to and from other communities throughout the U.S. RNN communities are extremely willing to share their knowledge and expertise and are as equally enthusiastic to learn from other communities in the areas of Disaster Risk Reduction and community resilience.