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**FY 2015 Cooperating Technical Partners (CTP) Grant  
Final Report:  
Lessons Learned From Resilient Neighbors Network Communities  
August 2017**

**1. Lessons Learned Through Participation In The Resilient Neighbors Network (RNN)**

The Resilient Neighbors Network (RNN) is a peer-to-peer co-mentoring network of 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:

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.
- d. 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.

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- e. Each RNN community is unique and, because of that, methodology to furthering DRR and cultivating resilience is also unique. Each RNN community 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!
  - f. 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.
  - g. 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.
  - h. 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.
  - i. 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”.
  - j. 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

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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.

## 2. Lessons Learned Through The Development And Implementation Of The NHMA's Disaster Risk Reduction Ambassador Curriculum (DRR)

Several members of the Resilient Neighbors Network have been assisting other members of the Natural Hazards Mitigation Association in the creation of the Disaster Risk Reduction Ambassador Curriculum. This curriculum is being developed to assist local communities in their disaster risk reduction efforts by providing information, best practices, and analytic tools. The goals of the DRR Ambassador Curriculum is to train community staff, volunteers, and stakeholder groups to engage the "Whole Community" in discussion of how to reduce the impacts of natural hazards and disasters through action and then enable a community to develop cross-functional solutions. Below is a summary of the lessons learned by the Resilient Neighbors Network during the development and pilot implementation phase of the Disaster Risk Reduction Ambassador Curriculum:

- a. RNN members have been involved in the Project Management Team (PMT) who is overseeing the development of the curriculum to ensure that the material being included is relevant to local communities' educational and training needs. This process has been a wonderful opportunity for RNN members to discuss the successful strategies and impediments from the "local perspective" with other members of the Natural Hazards Mitigation Association that come from federal and state government, business, and academic backgrounds.
- b. Curriculum development is another area where RNN members are providing assistance. Three modules of the curriculum have direct RNN member involvement; Module 3 – Leadership For Disaster Risk Reduction, Module 4 – Community Disaster Risk Reduction and Adaptation, and Module 12 – The Floodplain Management Process Module. Module 4 has been completed, while development continues with Modules 3 and 12. Through their assistance in developing the curriculum, RNN members have learned how to create material in a slide presentation that can be shared live with an audience or offered as a webinar format. The RNN communities have been able to share their expertise in these curriculum modules in an accessible format that will be able to be shared with other communities across the United States.
- c. Presentation of the curriculum modules at Pilot Workshops has also involved RNN members. RNN members participated in Pilot Workshops in Tulsa, Oklahoma in September 2015 and in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in April 2017. Workshop participants appreciated the information-sharing by their peers in the RNN who have experience with the successful strategies and the challenges of implementing DRR in communities. Through moving into the implementation phase of the DRR curriculum, RNN members

learned how to begin the discussion with a variety of communities with a wide array of natural hazards on how to reduce their risk. Additional outreach and awareness about the Disaster Risk Reduction Ambassador Curriculum is anticipated in the next 18 months at various venues to spread the word about the availability of this invaluable community training curriculum.