



Taking Stock & Staying on the Vanguard Closing the Resilience Gap through Transformative Action

A Summary of a Workshop at the
4th National Adaptation Forum

Madison, WI

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Taking Stock & Staying on the Vanguard: Closing the Resilience Gap through Transformative Action

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Introduction

The adaptation field in the US continues to grow in size, scope and diversity. This was clearly evident at the Fourth National Adaptation Forum in Madison, WI. While attendance at the Forum appeared to have grown, a plenary show-of-hands suggested that the majority of participants at these biannual events are first-time attendees, and the Forum program indicated that a focus on social equity has clearly become stronger.

This report offers a high-level summary of a 2.5-hour long workshop, held on April 25, 2019 within the Forum, which aimed to take stock of the progress in the adaptation field, surface innovative developments and help participants identify transformative adaptation approaches and practices which – if applied more widely – would help close the resilience gap. The workshop built on a 2017 US adaptation field assessment and a similar workshop at the Third National Adaptation Forum in that year.¹ The workshop agenda is available in Appendix A.

Workshop Objectives

- Take stock of where the adaptation/resilience field is and is not yet
- Learn from one another by building on, connecting, augmenting, and expanding good work
- Enliven the concept of “transformation²” with real-life lessons from panelists and participants
- Inspire one another to scale our work deep, out and up with new ideas, partnerships and other resources

Workshop Participants and Supporters

- More than 70 participants participated in the event, representing a variety of sectors (Figure 1);
- 40% have worked less than 5 years in the field, 36% 5-10 years, and 24% more than 10 years
- The workshop was facilitated by Susi Moser and Joyce Coffee
- Pre-workshop implementation partners included the Science to Action Community, Union of Concerned Scientists, NAACP, Urban Sustainability Directors Network, and American Society of Adaptation Professionals; the Aspen Global Change Institute served as fiduciary agent and implementation partner.
- The workshop and follow-up work were partially supported by The Kresge Foundation.

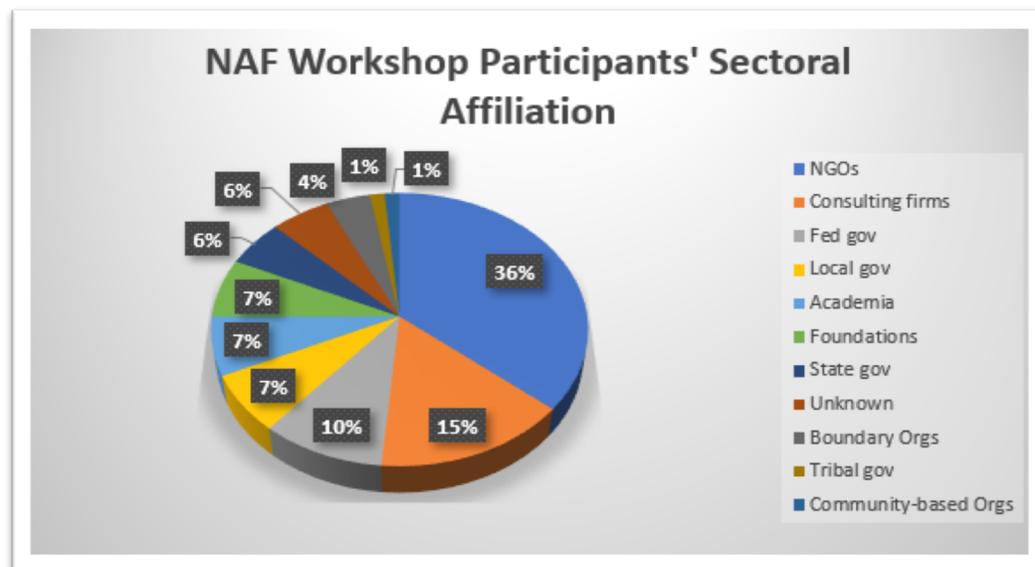


Figure 1:

Sectoral affiliations of NAF workshop participants (see Appendix B for a List of Participants)

¹ Workshop Foundation: Moser, Susanne, Coffee, Joyce & Seville, Aleka. (2017). *Rising to the Challenge, Together: A Review and Critical Assessment of the State of the US Climate Adaptation Field*. Troy, MI: The Kresge Foundation. Access the full report at: <https://kresge.org/content/rising-challenge-together> as well as the [executive summary](#) and [appendixes](#) identifying field-building actions by sector.

² Transformation in the workshop context is addressing the systemic drivers of climate vulnerabilities, including deep-seated inequalities concurrent with climatic and non-climatic stresses by changing underlying beliefs, structures and institutions.

Immediate Workshop Outcomes

- Participants gained and affirmed the following insights:
 - a. Social equity is or should be at the core of climate resilience, and significant progress is being made, even if there is still a long way to go in implementing effective/new/better ways to integrate social equity into adaptation professionals' practice;
 - b. As climate impacts and extreme events become ever more pressing, the field needs to further accelerate and deepen its practices to address the scope, pace and scale of challenges from current and future climate change and concurrent stressors.
 - c. Transformative adaptation is increasingly necessary and there are some initial examples now that are beginning to point to ways to approach transformative change.
- Participants made new and renewed connections with others; some of these may lead to new partnerships that will be helpful for innovation, scaling up or deepening practices (Figure 2).
- Participants were moved and inspired by the joint exploration of the challenges before us, but also by the illustrations and sharing of existing transformative adaptation stories, investigating how to bring transformation about (i.e., what about my work can change, how do I need to change, who can I work with, how do we work together?), participants particularly noticed the need for self-care, networking and power-sharing to sustain their work into the future.

Expected Future Workshop Outcomes

- Workshop participants were invited to commit to next steps to help advance the field and foster transformative thinking and action. Most of the commitments focused on project ideas; others included events, gatherings, collaborations, development of tools and better self-care. Few were truly "transformative", which is not surprising given the limited time available to develop ideas.
- To increase the likelihood of implementation of these commitments, however, the workshop facilitators and Aspen Global Change Institute (AGCI) will follow-up with participants.
- The Kresge Foundation opted to allocate the limited funds available to support follow-on activities to capacity building consistent with its programmatic interest in fostering social equity and inclusion in the adaptation field.



Figure 2: participants engaged in exploration of needs and opportunities for transformative action

Workshop

Background and Motivation for this Workshop

Rising to the Challenge, Together found a budding professional field in need of rapid expansion, accelerated and deeper practice, a clearer common purpose, and much stronger policy and financial support to realize its promise. In the face of recent scientific reports, the emerging reality of climate change impacts and extreme events clearly observable in many locations, and an unsupportive federal administration, these field building needs appear not to have diminished in the intervening two years. The benefits of a strong professional field still beckon, including:

- The necessary expertise and skilled workforce;
- clarity on good/best practice, established as “common” practice;
- advancing shared goals and values;
- professionals networks and leadership;
- adequate training;
- political and public support;
- problems being solved effectively, efficiently, and in an integrated manner; and
- as a result, reduced societal burdens and maximized opportunities (see Moser et al., 2017)

If the adaptation field were more fully developed, it would have the nationwide capacity to effectively and equitably close the resilience gap for all (Figure 3).

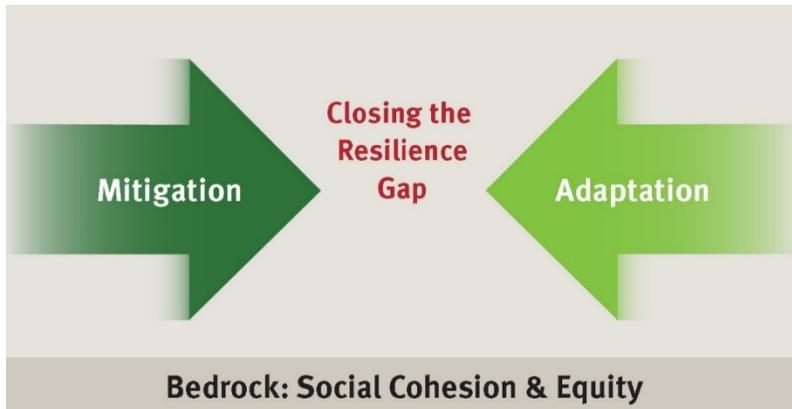


Figure 3: Closing the resilience gap for all requires much accelerated emission reduction efforts as well as upscaled adaptation efforts, both resting on a foundation of inclusion, social cohesion and equity. (Source: Moser et al. 2017, *Rising to the Challenge, Together*)

To realize such a vision, *Rising to the Challenge, Together* proposed the 4 P Field-Building Framework, which calls for efforts to strengthen the field’s Purpose, People, Pillars of Support and Practices (Figure 4).

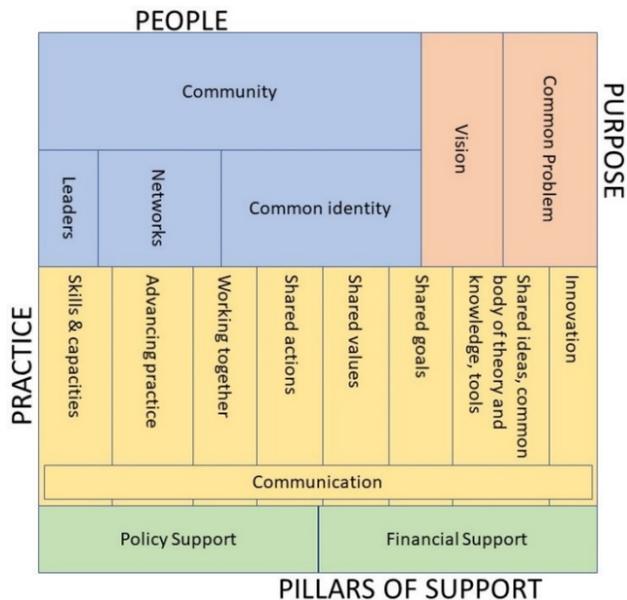


Figure 4: 4 P Field Building Framework (Source: Moser et al. 2017, *Rising to the Challenge, Together*)

The 2017 field assessment also noted that most adaptation efforts to date aimed at “mainstreaming” adaptation into ongoing efforts (such as urban planning, conservation, public health preparedness). Only in the environmental/climate justice community was there really evidence of transformative thinking and ambition aimed at systemic changes that fundamentally change vulnerability and resilience (Figure 6).

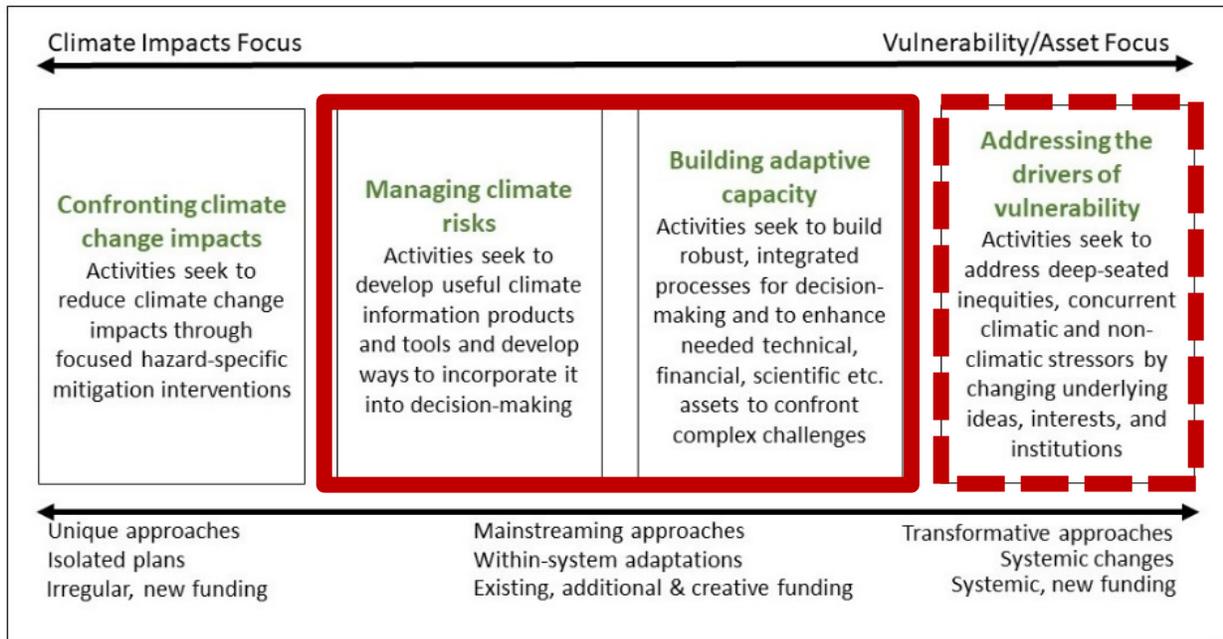


Figure 6: Adaptation along a spectrum from sector or impact-specific risk reduction efforts to transformative efforts aimed at addressing underlying drivers of vulnerability. Most of US adaptation efforts focus on “mainstreaming” in the middle of the spectrum, rather than on transformative action. (Source: Moser et al., 2017, *Rising to the Challenge, Together*)

Among the positive development, *Rising to the Challenge, Together* found

- Encouraging trends in capacity and skill building;
- Emergent activities in most sectors;
- Greater numbers of people entering the adaptation arena;
- Much tool building and experimental practices; and
- Network building to accelerate learning (particularly in the urban sector).

Inadequate or incommensurate with the growing challenge were the following:

- Lack of integration of adaptation efforts across sectors, geographies, and segments of society;
- Inefficient social learning (lack of on-ramping and sharing);
- Inadequate efforts in skill-building, education, professional certification and standard-setting;
- Adaptation thinking/approaches to meet the scope and speed of the challenge;
- Lack of acceptance/embrace of need for transformation; and
- Inadequate efforts in making social equity and cohesion central to resilience-building efforts.

At a previous workshop with adaptation field actors, not surprisingly, participants not only called for more policy support and greater funding, but felt it was crucial to improve the framing of adaptation so it would appeal to more people; find ways to scale adaptation out, up and deep; identify ways to measure progress more effectively (along each of the 4 P dimensions of the field, and to communicate more effectively).

The 2019 workshop at NAF was meant to engage participants in “sensing” where the field is two years later and jointly identify areas of opportunity for achieving just that: an acceleration in field building so as to support transformative action commensurate with the challenge.

Insights Gained During the 2019 NAF Workshop

Current State of the Field

During the workshop, participants were polled electronically to offer their opinion and thoughts on various discussion points (see Appendix C for a compilation and brief interpretation of all instant-polling results). After introducing the 4P Framework, participants were asked to assess the current state of the field (Figure 7) and which factors had affected its evolution to the current state (Figure 8).

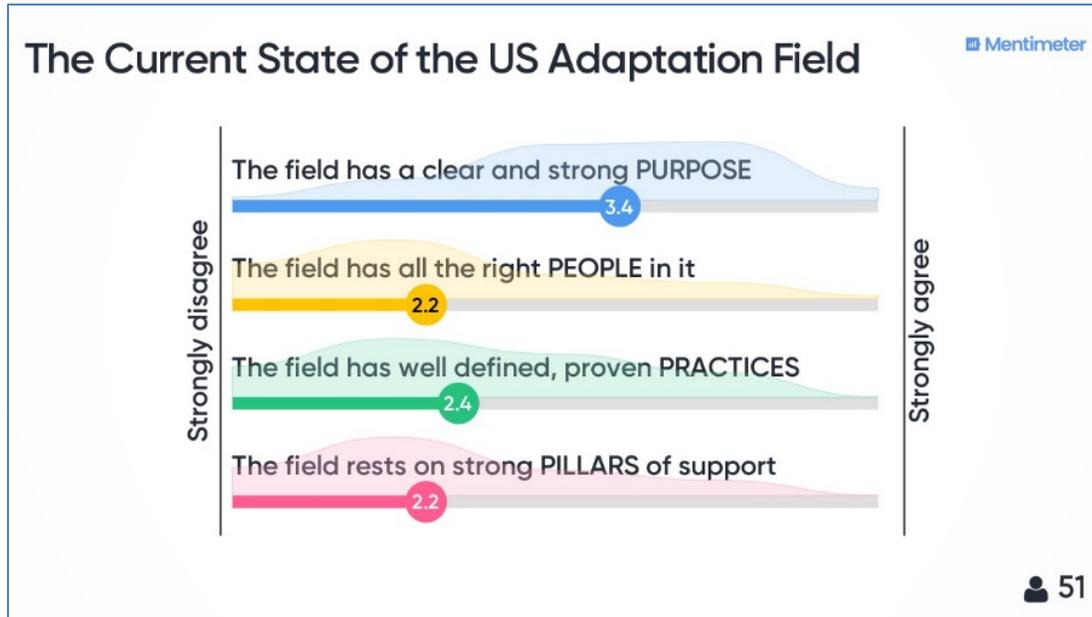
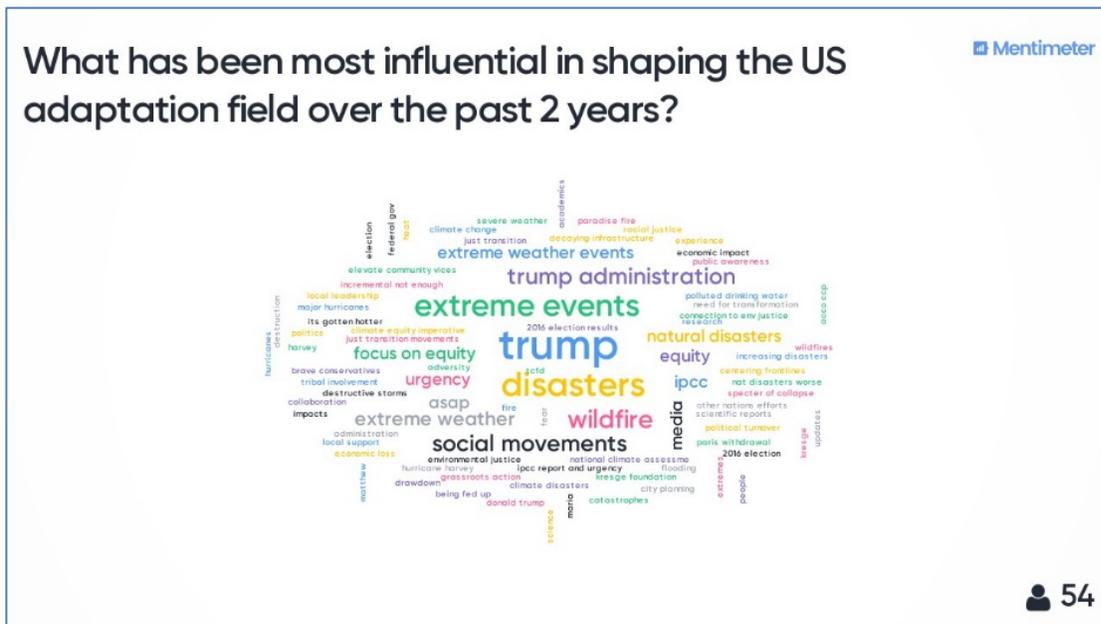


Figure 7:

2019 Workshop participants' view on the current state of the US adaptation field.



Figure

8: 2019 Workshop participant's views on influential drivers of field evolution over the past 2 years.

Participants felt the field's Purpose is the most developed dimension of the field at this point, while People, Practices and Pillars of Support are notably weaker. In their view, most progress had been made on coalescing around a shared purpose and the least progress on the policy and funding side (Appendix C). In 2017, Purpose was viewed as notably weaker than now, whereas the Pillars of Support were already inadequate then, suggesting that the gap between need and support may have widened.

Interestingly, the driving forces behind the field's evolution are seen as being dominated over the past two years by similar forces as before: extreme events and disaster (mentioned several more times in similar ways in smaller script), federal (lack of) leadership (in 2017, the second strongest driver was federal leadership under the Obama Administration). The corollary is that social movements are rising in importance. This is also evident in the most exciting transformative work noted by participants, along with legislative/policy changes at lower levels of government. Important shifts in the narrative are also noted. Factors affecting the field's evolution also emerged from the timeline exercise that participants were invited to at the state of the workshop (Figure 9).



Figure 9. 2019 Workshop timeline exercise. Participants highlighted influential factors such as the election of the Trump Administration (2016), various extreme events over the course of 2017-2019, the IPCC's 1.5 C Global Warming report (2018), the Fourth US National Climate Assessment (2018), as well as influential policy shifts at the state, federal and international levels (e.g., the recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures, various California laws), and influential shifts such as the Rockefeller Foundation's announcement to end the 100 Resilient Cities program.

Examples of Transformative Action

Four panelists briefly shared an example or lessons learned from transformative work underway anywhere in the United States. Their observations focused on instances of transforming power relations and policy in the process of passing the Portland Green Energy Fund in 2018 (Pham), on transcending government silos in work with the City of Atlanta and the Partnership for Southern Equity (Sawin), on transformative changes with potentially positive and negative effects in the financial sector (Coffee), and on shifts in the public climate narrative toward despair, requiring personal resilience and transformation (Moser) (see Box 1).

After the stage-setting panel contributions, workshop participants were asked to share their own observations of transformational resilience-building efforts and needs (see also polling results in Appendix C). Common themes that emerged from the break-out group discussions included the following:

- **Recognition of the interdependencies** among sectors is growing, such as between health, housing and economic development and natural resources, resulting in more cross-sector conversations and collaborations;
- **Corporate and private sector** are more present, including as purveyors of adaptation products and services, but also to examine their own vulnerabilities;
- The **hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness fields** are more engaged and interested in building long-term resilience, not just focusing on immediate response;
- **Indian country** is engaged, feels agency and brings considerable expertise; some reported tribes are making climate adaptation headway;
- The **self-reliance movement** is growing while decreasing dependence on global economic systems;
- **Shifts in state governmental leadership** (after elections) can (re)open dialogue and emphasis on climate change and resilience building (e.g., New Jersey, Florida);
- **Capacity, funding (in some areas), and networks** are growing;

- The **narratives and conversations are shifting**; resilience is increasingly recognized as a co-benefit of other necessary activities;
- There is a notable difference in **attitude and understanding of racial justice** among the younger generation that is entering the climate resilience arena;
- The **common language of “resilience”** is helpful, including with government officials;
- In some communities, there now is a **real conversation about retreat and receiving communities**;
- After years of stalemate, some communities are now engaged in **science-based conversations** while more scientists engage with practitioners and communities in identifying solutions;
- **More small and mid-sized communities interested**, engaged, ready to act on adaptation; and
- **Regionalism** is growing in how adaptation is being approached.



Box 1: Panelists at the 2019 workshop offering examples of transformative adaptation efforts and needs

Gaps to Advance Transformational Adaptation

Workshop participants also shared their observations about gaps in the field which – if filled – could help advance or accelerate transformational adaptation (see also polling results in Appendix C). The types of gaps mentioned across break-out groups included:

- **Tools** (e.g. for finance) are still artisanal with each community creating their own solutions; better tools are required to more accelerate and scale up funding solutions;
- **Certain actor-groups are still not sufficiently engaged** on the adaptation side of climate action (e.g., faith-based communities, labor);
- **Successful examples of transformative adaptation** are needed to persuade decision-makers to engage in such efforts;
- **Disclosure of risks** is only beginning to emerge, and set to grow; disclosure would raise awareness and accelerate the demand for solutions;
- **Legal frameworks** are required to address issues such as liability, authority, and support consistency and integration across scales and systems;
- The **persistent rural/urban divide** produces both physical risks and political risks; both have great resilience challenges that the respective other can help address;
- After disaster, a brief period of **social cohesion and risk awareness** is not sufficiently leveraged to implement more profound resilience improvements; often years of preparation is needed to have relevant plans ready in case such windows of opportunity arise;
- The **resilient infrastructure** debate has picked up steam across the country, but **racial equity and meaningful inclusion** of communities is still not happening enough; for example, decaying water infrastructure offers a pathway to elevate, understand and address racial inequity;
- The need for **personal resilience** is a growing for field actors grappling with climate and equity realities.
- **Professional pathways** into the adaptation field are growing, but still not clearly visible and accessible;
- **Learning from different but related circumstances**, such as riverine and coastal flooding, buy-outs etc., is still not happening often enough (although the “Climigration Network” has formed to foster such exchange); opportunities for acceleration and sharing of pathways to funding thus are missed.

Closing the Resilience Gap: Commitments to Enact Critical Actions in Next Two Years

Participants at the workshop were encouraged to commit to taking actions over the next two years that would facilitate more transformational changes. While break-out group discussions focused on different transformative actions and capacities: Power relations, Governance, Finance, Personal Resilience, the commitments made were often more personal or focused on activities in participants’ home institutions. Categorically, the commitments fell into several categories:

Transforming power relationships – fostering social equity and inclusion

- Performing environmental justice assessments;
- Enhancing legal resources related to promoting adaptation;
- Involving faith communities (see also personal below);
- Furthering tribal leadership in adaptation and assertion of sovereignty;
- Planners and government creating adaptation planning processes that recognize structural racism and changing power relationships;
- Creating a resilience advocacy platform with labor unions to protect worker health from climate change;
- Creating centralized resource hubs for community and local governments including for funding;
- Researching municipalities who have funded community-based organizations for equitable engagement;
- Paying community-based organizations to participate in adaptation efforts; and
- Offering hazards mitigation/disaster preparedness training to communities of color.

Transforming governance – transcending silos

- Increasing the number, scope, scale and impact of regional collaboratives;
- Creating legal support tools for local governments who are pursuing adaptation strategies but are getting sued by developers; and
- Leveraging local government conferences with workshops and other sessions re: climate adaptation and social equity.

Transforming finance – resourcing equitable resilience

- Identifying alternative financing to fund important projects, e.g. public health money for energy efficiency projects;
- Exploring feasibility of negative return social impact investing for transformative community resilience;
- Exploring feasibility of business financing that promotes a shift in business management from supply chain to value network upstream and downstream;
- Influencing planning and funding for flood risk reduction to ensure nature-based adaptation (e.g. Including green infrastructure);
- Creating a practical community/local government how-to-guide re: fiscal/tax policy, general obligation bonds, credit ratings etc.; and
- Working with banks to create small business reserves and resilience/preparedness plans & trainings.

Transforming the workforce: Building personal resilience – meeting hearts and minds

- Creating a support group for burned out adaptation professionals;
- Raising funds for project that aims at building psycho-social resilience across the adaptation field;
- Training actors in the adaptation field via the tools offered by the Climate Disobedience Center;
- Reaching out to people in other disciplines through professional societies to learn about their on-ramps;
- Deepening understanding how racism underlies inequities, plays into problems and relates to transformative change;
- Helping local faith groups be more engaged on climate action; and
- Infusing personal resilience (psycho-social, spiritual) into past, current and future vulnerability assessments and adaptation planning efforts.

Conclusions

Overall, the 2019 NAF workshop was a great success, maybe first and foremost in offering participants a 2.5-hour long opportunity to sit down, connect with each other, reflect and think about how to accelerate and deepen adaptation action. All too often, adaptation professionals say, they don't have the occasion to do that. The session also provided an efficient way to "read the pulse" of the field. While not as extensive and systematic as the 2017 field assessment, the framework developed then, gatherings such as these, and available technologies like instant polling, offer a way to quickly tap into the collective wisdom of those working across the country and in different sectors, at different levels and with different challenges and communities.

Workshop participants and panelists noted the general trends toward greater attention to social equity and inclusion, collaboration and networking, cross-scale and cross-sector integration, changed narratives and more purposeful engagement as positive developments. The group also found that attention to both personal and professional advances are necessary and significant.

We appreciate The Kresge Foundation supporting the development of this workshop and NAF organizers providing community and convening.

Participants expressed gratitude for the session felt that the workshop discussions were engaging, informative and inspiring, and some made exciting new connections. It is our hope that the workshop continues to inspire us all to scale our work deep, out and up with new ideas, partnerships and other resources. It is as true in 2019 as it was in 2017 that building the adaptation field will *only* be possible if we work together. At the workshop and in our respective practices, we find there are countless opportunities to engage current and new audiences in resilience action through the 4P field framework. For all of us, the persistent effort to take on the hard work of transformative change is not only worthwhile but fundamental to staying on the vanguard and closing the resilience gap.



Building the field
of adaptation
and closing the
resilience gap will
only be possible if
we work together.

Appendices

Appendix A: NAF Workshop Agenda in Brief

What: NAF Workshop “Taking Stock and Staying on the Vanguard: Closing the Resilience Gap through Transformative Action”

Where: NAF₄, Madison, WI, Ballroom D

When: Thursday, 8:00-10:30 am

Workshop objectives and outcomes:

Workshop objectives of this session are to:

1. Take stock of where the adaptation/resilience field is and is not yet (this continues a biannual check-in) and mobilize/activate people working in the field.
2. Inspire resilience field leaders, builders and participants to scale their work deep, out and up. Participants will also inspire one another through their active engagement in working through an encouraging and challenging agenda.
3. Learn from one another by building on, connecting, augmenting, and expanding existing good work as a way of accelerating field-building
4. Enliven the concept of “transformation” with real-life lessons from panelists and participants

Agenda:

7:45-8:00	Arrival, Sign-in Timeline exercise
8:00-8:15	Welcome and Introductions
8:15-8:45	The State of US Resilience: The Need for Accelerating Action and Ready for Transformation
8:45-9:50	Closing the Resilience Gap with Transformative Action Panel presentations by Khanh Pham, Elizabeth Sawin, Joyce Coffee and Susi Moser Table discussions
9:50-10:25	Closing the Resilience Gap: Transformation in Action - Critical Next Steps in the Next Two Years (Power Relationships, Finance, Governance, Personal Resilience) Table Discussions
10:25-10:30	Participant Commitments Closure
10:30	Adjourn

Appendix B: NAF Workshop Participant List

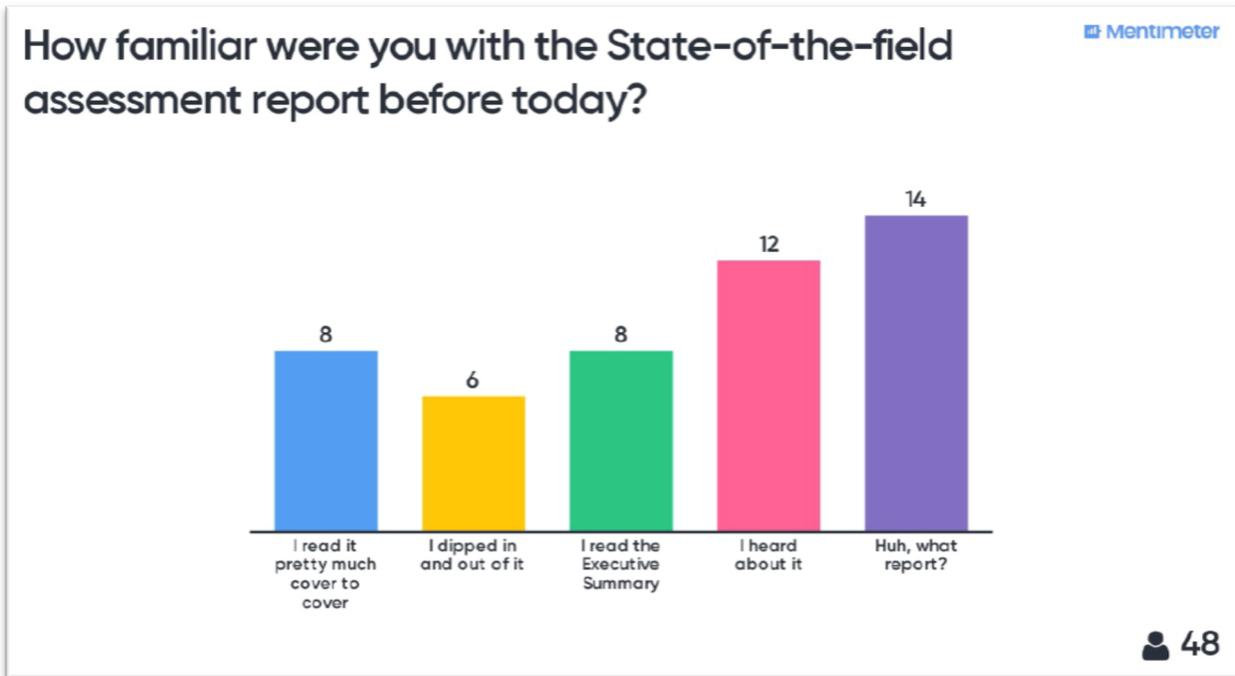
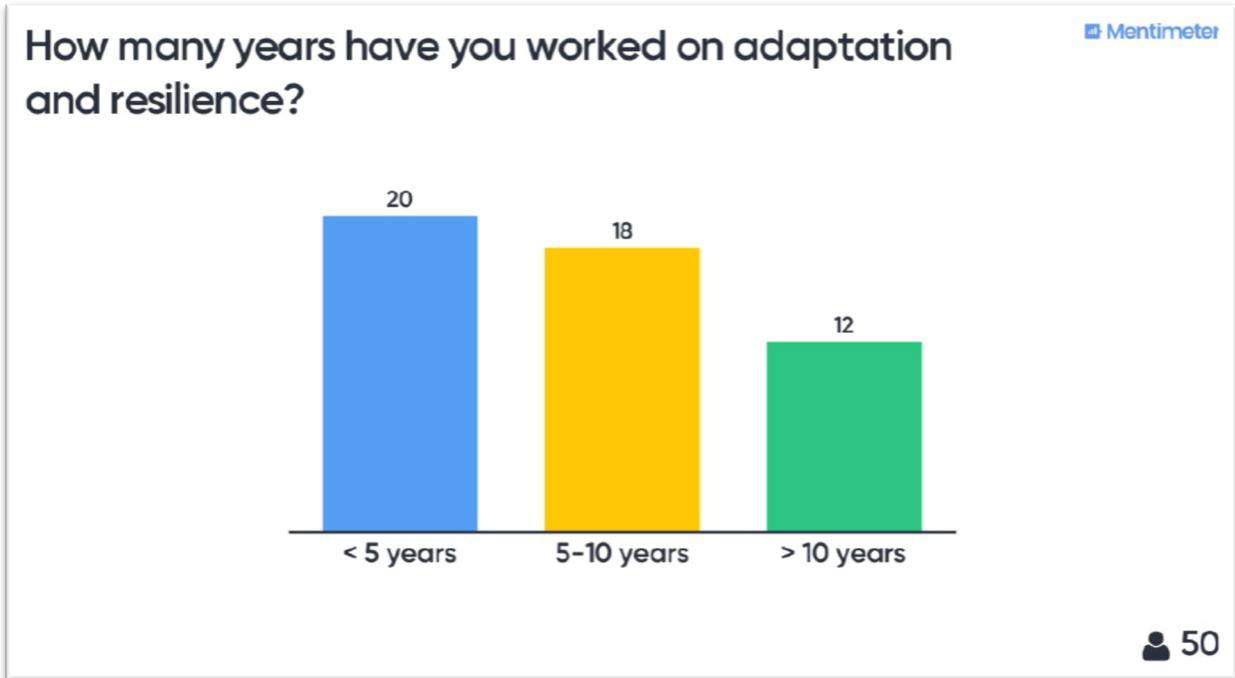
*** Thank You to Volunteer Table Note Takers**

First	Last	Affiliation
Steve	Adams	ISC
Meg	Arnold	GSD Consulting
James	Arnott*	Aspen Global Change Institute
Huda	Aucaff	Wisconsin Green Muslims
Ann	Baughman*	Freshwater Future
Marci	Bortman	The Nature Conservancy
Jesse	Carpenter	
Karina	Castillo	Miami-Dade County
Joyce	Coffee	Climate Resilience Consulting
Carol	Consadine	Old Dominion University
Juanita	Constible*	NRDC
Annie	Cox	Wells NERR
Janet	Custing	USGS Climate Adaptation Science Center
Lois	DeBacker*	The Kresge Foundation
Gavin	Dillingham	Houston Advance Research Center
Carolyn	Enquist	USGS-CASC
Jill	Gambill	Georgia Sea Grant
Beth	Gibbons	ASAP
Nancy	Gilliam	Model Forest Policy Program
Tonya	Graham	Geos Institute
Patty	Gude	Headwaters Economics
Rebecca	Guerrero	The Kresge Foundation
Rebecca	Herst	UMass-Boston Sustainable Solutions Lab
Kristiane	Huber	C2ES
Emily	Jack-Scott	Aspen Global Change Institute
Katherine	Jung	WCS Climate Adaptation Fund
Nick	Kasza	National League of Cities
Julia	Kim	Local Government Commission
Corrie	Knapp	Western Colorado University
Jill	Konmeger	Network for Public Health Law
Stefanie	Krantz	Nez Perce Tribe
Jill	Krueger*	The Network for Public Health Law
Dave	Lawrence	NPS
Maryann	Lazars	Washington University
Laura	Lengnick	Cultivating Resilience
Eva	Lipiec	Congressional Research Service
Fred	Lipschultz	USGCRP

Rebecca	Lupes	Federal Highway Administration
Kelly	Malinowski	CA State Coastal Conservancy
Anna	Marandi*	NLC
Patrick	Marchman	Resilience Action Partners
Fawn	McGee	NJDEP Blue Acres Program
Katy	McLaren	City of Fort Collins (CO)
Elena	Mihuly	Conservation Law Foundation
Sara	Moore	California Energy Commission
Deanna	Moran	Conservation Law Foundation
Susi	Moser	Susanne Moser Research and Consulting
Jonna	Papaefthinijou	City of Portland (OR)
Liz	Perera	Sierra Club
Khan	Pham	OPAL
Emily	Powell	NWF
Christine	Pulver	Keystone Community Services
Ted	Redmond	Pale Blue Dot
Anastasia	Roy	APTIM
Kara	Runsten	Kim Lundgren Associates
Jennifer	Rupert	ECFRPC
Liz	Russell	Foundation for Louisiana
Jessica	Ruvinsky	Bellwether Collaboratory
Elizabeth	Sawin	Climate Interactive
Taj	Schottland	Trust for Public Land
Ken	Sharratt	Sharratt Water Management
Zoe	Siegel	Resilient by Design
Ryan	Silber	CA Strategic Growth Council
Amy	Snover	Climate Impacts Group
Erika	Spanger-Siegfried*	UCS
Jeff	Steuban	CRRC
Missy	Stults	City of Ann Arbor (MI)
Steve	Thompson*	NCAT
Darryl	Young	Summit Foundation
Emma	Zinsmeister	EPA

Appendix C: Mentimeter (Instant Polling) Results and Brief Interpretation

After a practice question (results not shown), the following two questions help characterize the workshop population and participants' familiarity with the 2017 *Rising to the Challenge, Together* report. Results indicate workshop participants are relatively new to the field and 50% were not really familiar with the report's contents.



When asked about the state of the Adaptation field, using the 4P framework introduced during the workshop, participants felt the field’s purpose is the most developed dimension of the field, while People, Practices and Pillars of Support are notably weaker. They saw most progress having been made on coalescing around a shared purpose and the least progress on the policy and funding support. In 2017, Purpose was viewed as notably weaker than now, whereas the Pillars of Support were already inadequate then, suggesting that the gap between need and support may have widened.

