

Box 3: What a Mature Adaptation Field Would Look Like

Purpose. The ultimate goal of a well-developed adaptation field is to create the nationwide capacity to effectively and equitably close the resilience gap. The field is singularly focused on working toward a world in which that gap is closed for all. It understands its mission as preventing, minimizing, and alleviating climate change threats to human well-being and to the natural and built systems on which humans depend. It also works to create new opportunities by addressing the causes and consequences of climate change in ways that solve related social, environmental, and economic problems.

People. The mature adaptation field is a powerful, widely recognized, confident, respected, and integrated area of work accomplished by people who share a common identity (Figure 8). Individuals, communities, organizations, businesses, and government agencies within the field have taken full ownership of the complementary strategy of climate mitigation and adaptation, implemented in ways that build social cohesion and equity, to achieve the transformational changes required to keep communities safe and thriving. With ready access to a wide range of relevant expertise, deeply interconnected field actors share goals and collaborate. Individuals and institutions within the field have adopted a culture and practice of adaptive thinking and acting in a world of constant and potentially disruptive change. Extensive networks actively and deliberately share knowledge and resources. Social capital, inclusivity, and a collaborative spirit—within and between networks—support actors’ informal and formal work together.

Practice. The field uses 21st-century communications platforms and tools to convey the urgency of climate action to media, the public, policymakers, and other professionals, and to identify and widely share adaptation stories and lessons learned. Field actors are also skilled in the oldest, most engaging form of communication—dialogue—to advance mutual understanding and, where possible, consensus around the challenges of transformative change. Effective, co-creative science–practice partnerships are the norm, allowing for ongoing exchange between knowledge generation and application. Both scientists and practitioners work closely to distill (and periodically update) core principles and tenets of adaptation knowledge and approaches. They produce, test, and assess an ongoing stream of innovations in a professional culture that always thinks “ten years ahead,” staying focused on long-term transformative goals. Exemplary models and best practices of how to adapt effectively and equitably are available, widely known, and backed up with robust evidence.



Figure 8: A mature adaptation field is a powerful, widely recognized, confident, respected, and deeply integrated area of work accomplished by people who share a common identity. Source: WE ACT for Environmental Justice

Rigorous professional standards and certification are established on the basis of consistent guiding principles that skilled professionals apply to diverse, unique, and complex contexts. Widely accessible professional trainings enable newcomers to the field to rapidly gain proficiency in core concepts, technical and social issues, and the ethical principles that guide the field’s work. Key competencies needed to build resilience are ubiquitous and drive toward transformation. Ongoing tracking of progress and well-established feedback mechanisms support rapid learning, cross-fertilization, and the maturation of the field’s practice. They also enable rapid response to current and emerging threats and critical needs. The field routinely

facilitates social networking, trust building, and collaboration at scale. Field actors everywhere are skilled in approaching adaptation challenges through systems, integrative, holistic, and out-of-the-box thinking while embracing deep uncertainty and risk-taking. They help communities envision desirable futures, and empower them through awareness raising, education, community-driven actions, coalition building, and changed processes and structures.

Pillars. Philanthropic and government funders and private investors are fully committed to funding field building and resilience building until the resilience gap is closed. Funding is not only available after disasters, but is sustained, coordinated, and available for proactive, preventive measures. Funders help to grow resources commensurate with the threat, build funding coalitions and inspire new financial instruments and systems to support transformative interventions. The economic case for adaptation is well established.

Policymakers at federal, regional, state, and local levels fully embrace the need for mitigation and adaptation, enacting strong resilience legislation and removing legal and institutional barriers to adaptation. Policy interventions are coordinated with funding instruments and approaches, supporting and requiring the implementation of stringent mitigation efforts and complementary adaptation practice with concerted attention to social cohesion and equity. Policies that support the adoption of best practices and climate-sensitive standards for buildings, infrastructure, and other systems are applied, evaluated, and regularly updated to move communities toward greater resilience in the face of climate disruptions.