

Transforming Libraries into Community Resilience Hubs: A Pilot Project in New York's Long Island Region

1. Overview/Abstract

The overarching objective of this project is to develop a transformation framework for utilizing libraries as resilience hubs to create sustainable, scalable, and transferable positive impacts on community-identified priorities, particularly the needs of underserved communities. This OVPR project will reveal the gaps between community needs and available services at Long Island libraries that serve socio-economically diverse populations and operate in areas with varying population densities and socio-demographic characteristics. The OVPR findings will be the stepping stone for a subsequent NSF-HDBE proposal that will identify investment priorities in library services that will lead to the highest return in terms of building capacity for libraries to act as community resilience hubs.

Climate change is making extreme events more frequent and more intense [6]. From hurricanes to heat waves, local communities are experiencing more and more hazard events that overwhelm individual and local capacity to adapt and react effectively. Dealing with the localized effects of disasters at the neighborhood and local community scale will be an increasingly important function of local governments in the coming years and decades. Even relatively minor hazard events can prove dangerous or fatal to vulnerable residents and can cause serious disruption to local economies. Many communities already possess a potentially important resource that will allow them to build pre-disaster resilience and effectuate more rapid and equitable recovery when a hazard event does strike: local public libraries. Libraries have been identified as an important component of local resilience infrastructure [11]. In recent years, the American Library Association (ALA) has created a Resilient Communities initiative, and the non-profit organization Communities Responding to Extreme Weather (CREW) has expanded beyond their initial faith-based efforts to organize more than 50 libraries in the US as Climate Resilience Hubs. But despite this interest, there has been no methodical analysis of how to most efficiently and effectively develop resilience hubs using library resources or assess how prepared local libraries are to serve as resilience hubs.

This one-year study will conduct foundational work necessary to implement a comprehensive study of libraries' potential as local resilience hubs, a proposal for which will be submitted to the NSF's Human, Disasters and Built Environment (HDBE) program in 2023. Using resources from the OVPR seed grant, we will conduct a triangulated data collection effort that will help refine and structure the hypotheses and methodology for this larger study. Using OVPR resources we will, 1) develop a resource inventory and typology of libraries on Long Island based on geography, socio-demographics and other factors, 2) create a pilot survey and interview protocols and test these instruments on librarians and library users on Long Island, with the goal of attaining 50 completed surveys of library users and conducting 10 in-depth interviews with librarians on Zoom or in person, 3) utilizing the outputs from the previous tasks, create a draft resilience framework for local libraries, as well as a series of testable hypotheses for the national study. Additionally, because this seed grant will fund a pilot study on Long Island, we will also use the momentum created by the study to convene a meeting of Long Island libraries at the conclusion of the pilot study to share preliminary findings and strategize the creation of a Long Island library resilience working group.