

## **ACT New Orleans: Landscape Scan Briefing and Initiative Orientation**

### **Orientation Summary**

On January 24, 2025, the Gulf Research Program (GRP) of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine held a virtual event to introduce its Adaptive Capacities for Transformation (ACT) Initiative. This event brought together a variety of participants from local nonprofits, foundations, academic institutions, and government agencies. It served as a discussion forum for the findings of a recent landscape scan that mapped ongoing health and resilience efforts in disaster-affected communities throughout Greater New Orleans, LA, and as an orientation to its follow-on work: the ACT Initiative.

The GRP's goal was to have participants gain a deeper understanding of three major questions:

- (1) What do the landscape scan findings mean to participants and their work?
- (2) What do the landscape scan findings mean to the GRP and its work?
- (3) What could the landscape scan findings mean for everyone (participants and GRP) going forward in a collaboration via the ACT Initiative?

Participants came with a shared interest in learning more about ACT, connecting with others, tackling similar issues, and identifying new opportunities for working together. GRP staff opened the session by emphasizing these goals, expressing their hope that the ACT Initiative would evolve into a collaborative framework capable of advancing health and resilience outcomes.

A key component of the event was the presentation of a landscape scan conducted in Greater New Orleans by consultants at the Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI). On behalf of LPHI, Mr. Andrew Romaner defined Greater New Orleans as the area inclusive of Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Charles, and St. Tammany Parishes. The landscape scan identified 18 organizations throughout these parishes focused on climate, health, and equity, painting a detailed picture of both the strengths and challenges shaping the community's health and resilience landscape. Mr. Romaner noted that many organizations in the area demonstrated a high number of partnerships and a desire to continue to build new partnerships. However, he also pointed to challenges, chief among them being that the organizations working in this space are unable to completely address many of the issues facing Greater New Orleans, which include education, energy (with an emphasis on the energy transition), health, housing, and transportation among others.

Based on these results, Mr. Romaner provided three recommendations for the GRP: facilitate a convening of these organizations, support the energy transition in Louisiana, and

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establish a facility for expanding the program design and evaluation capacity of community-based organizations.

These findings led to a discussion among participants on the accuracy and meaningfulness of the findings identified through the landscape scan. One participant from a local nonprofit agreed with a reoccurring theme in the findings, commenting that, “finding ways to bridge more holistic connections should be a shared goal.” Others provided helpful feedback, offering that more background information on the broader political context in Greater New Orleans and why a larger convening of these groups has not yet occurred would add greater meaning to the results. Another participant suggested that more information on the differences in needs and resources between rural and urban communities in Greater New Orleans would be helpful.

To provide a scientific foundation for this work, the GRP introduced group concept mapping as the primary methodology through which ACT will gather input and organize collective priorities. Dr. Scott Rosas from Concept Systems, Inc. Provided an orientation to this methodology and piloted a focus prompt: “What does your community need to deal with the effects of multiple disasters?”

Feedback from participants included the following comments on prompt phrasing:

- Using “deal with”: This is a broad term, and it would be helpful to clarify which stage of the disaster cycle participants should focus on “dealing with”.
- Using accessible language: Participants recommended using more accessible language to ensure the prompt and future communications could be clearly understood by individuals from a range of backgrounds.

In preparation for the next phase of the ACT Initiative, the event concluded with a stakeholder mapping exercise. The purpose of this exercise was to gather participants’ perspectives on which stakeholder groups should be considered for future consultation. Using a matrix, participants assessed each stakeholder group’s potential interest in engaging with health-, resilience-, and/or disaster-related issues and their influence within the community (both on a high versus low scale). This exercise helped identify stakeholders whose positioning may inform or affect future engagement efforts under the ACT Initiative.