

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA REGIONAL RESILIENCY COMPACT

***SUMMARY OF FACILITATOR INTERVIEWS
WITH REPRESENTATIVES
OF PARTICIPATING JURISDICTIONS***

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Interviews conducted and
Summary prepared by
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BACKGROUND

In August of 2021, the Consensus Center conducted interviews with representatives of jurisdictions participating in the Southwest Florida Regional Resiliency Compact. The interviews explored respondents' sense of the issues the Compact should address, how the Compact might best organize to do its work, and the challenges it will face.

The purpose of the interviews was to develop a starting point for discussions at the Compact's initial organizational meetings in the fall of 2021. The Consensus Center will facilitate the organizational meetings.

This summary presents some of the themes and conclusions emerging from participants' responses.

THEMES AND CONCLUSIONS

Themes emerging from the interview questions are grouped here into three sets. The first set addresses questions about what the Compact could or should do. The second set addresses issues related to how the Compact could or should organize and operate. The third discusses the challenges facing the Compact.

What the Compact Should Accomplish and Address

Two related interview questions asked about this set of topics:

- *What is your understanding of what the compact should accomplish? What do you hope it will accomplish?*
- *Once the Compact is up and running, it can turn its attention to substantive resiliency issues. Do you have any sense of which issues the compact should focus on first?*

The following three themes draw from participants' answers to both questions.

The Compact offers an opportunity to work together as a region to identify and address regional needs and advocate for state and federal funding.

Most respondents believed that the region is facing resiliency issues that it can better address together, and that the Compact will provide a vehicle for doing so. Some, however, expressed skepticism about the challenges and the ability of compact members to work well together, but nevertheless saw value in cooperating to maximize the likelihood of obtaining state and federal funds.

Water quality, protection from storm surge/flooding (at the shoreline and inland), and education/communication are the resiliency-related issues of most immediate interest to participants.

Water Quality This was by far the most frequently mentioned issue, and mentioned by almost all participants. Respondents who mentioned water quality focused on different aspects of the issue and related it to resiliency in different ways. Some emphasized harmful algal blooms and their

effect on health, the environment and the economy. Others pointed to increasing saltwater intrusion and its effects on drinking water supplies. Still others pointed to the role of stormwater from heavier and more frequent storms on water quality in the region.

Storm Surge and Flooding These were the next most frequently mentioned issues. Most participants believed that residents increasingly have direct experience or knowledge of storm surge and flooding, and may be willing to consider measures to address them.

Education and Communication Many participants mentioned the need for greater understanding of resiliency issues in the region, and believed that the Compact might undertake education and communication about these issues. Some members drew a distinction between education and advocacy for particular measures.

The Compact will have to identify develop and build consensus on activities and projects to address the highest priority issues.

As described above, participants generally were able to identify issues they thought the Compact should address. Most participants, however, were not aware of projects or activities proposed or underway to address them. (The exception to this was the Army Corps of Engineers Collier County Study.) Most participants suggested that identifying what the region should do to address the issues would be one of the principal tasks of the compact.

How the Compact Should Organize to Accomplish Its Work

One of the interview questions asked participants to help identify the organizational issues the Compact will need to address to function effectively:

- *The first two-three meetings of the Compact will be organizational. What organizational issues do you think will need to be addressed during these meetings (roles, decision-making guidelines, frequency of meetings, etc.)? Which of these do you see as most important?*

Three themes emerged from the answers to this question.

Participants have a range of expectations regarding the role and functioning of the governing board

Most participants expected the Board to focus on providing general direction and decision-making. Some participants expected the Board to assume a more active role, establishing and participating in committees to develop specific direction on particular issues, and to identify potential projects.

The degree to which Board members engage in the work of developing specific projects or lines of work has implications for the kind and degree of staff support the Compact will need and the frequency of meetings.

Most participants noted that since member jurisdictions retain the option to participate in Compact activities or not, seeking consensus on activities and projects that enjoy broad support will be important.

Staffing/support will be crucial to establishing the compact and its early success

Most participants assumed that the Water School at FGCU would continue to provide support at least during the start-up phase of the Compact. Some participants suggested other organizations that might also provide support, including the Coast to Heartland National Estuary Program (CHNEP) or the Collaboratory. [Add language clarifying attitudes to contributing resources, whether staffing or funding.]

Some participants suggested the Compact consider seeking funding over the longer term for dedicated staff.

Frequency of meetings should be driven by the work the Board needs to do

Most participants favored less frequent meetings focused on providing guidance and making needed decisions. Many participants also thought the Compact might need to meet more frequently during its start-up phase.

Key Challenges Facing the Compact

Two interview questions related directly to challenges:

- How would you describe your city or county's awareness (staff and residents) of the compact and of resiliency issues in general?
- What do you think will be the biggest challenges to the Compact's ability to function effectively?

Participants identified challenges in response to many of the other questions as well. Collectively, the answers to all of the questions highlighted a range of challenges participants expect the Compact will need to address.

Defining the purpose of the Compact

Many participants noted that for the Compact to sustain interest and participation over time, members must see it as adding value to their own efforts. Defining a purpose and role for the Compact distinct from and supportive of what members are doing on their own will be important for its long-term success.

Defining resiliency

Many participants noted that the concept of resiliency is understood differently by different jurisdictions and individuals. To collaborate effectively, member jurisdictions will need to agree on at least a joint working understanding of resiliency.

Developing leadership within the Compact and in the region

Some members pointed to the need to develop leadership within the Compact, and champions within the broader Southwest Florida community.

Accommodating differences in desire and ability to participate on the part of member jurisdictions

Some participants believed their jurisdictions are ready to undertake collaborative projects and activities as members of the Compact. Other participants suggested their jurisdictions were open to the possibility of benefits from membership in the Compact, but were waiting to see the shape taken by Compact efforts before engaging more affirmatively. Whatever governance procedures are put in place by the Compact should be flexible enough to accommodate the range of perspectives and levels of engagement member jurisdictions bring to the process. [Add language protecting opt out.]

Developing an open and inclusive process

Most participants believed that building support for the work of the Compact would be best achieved by a process that allows the participation of a broad range of stakeholders.

Increasing awareness of resiliency issues among residents, elected officials and local government staff

Almost all participants believed that awareness among residents of the region is low. Participants believed that awareness of these issues among local government elected officials and staff is higher, but varies significantly by jurisdiction and individual.

Many members noted that education and communication to counter misinformation and misunderstandings about resiliency would be important components of any effort to increase awareness.