

## *Network on Building Resilient Regions*

### **Objectives**

In recent decades, momentous shifts in the global economy have threatened national competitiveness and upended established routes of individual success in the United States. At the same time, large flows of people across national borders have transformed our national demographic profile. Much of what we know about these economic and demographic changes is based on national studies. Yet, focusing on the national level alone is not adequate for understanding either the impact of these shifts or the responses to them. The ramifications of such broad-based economic and social changes play out differently in distinct places. Likewise, the response to national challenges is crafted in specific places that have distinct capabilities and traditions. Federal and state policies set the context for local responses but it is through local action that specific responses emerge.

But the formal institutional arrangements of American federalism—the three tiers of local, state, and national government—do not correspond well with the scope of economic, environmental, and demographic challenges. These challenges stretch across local governmental boundaries in diverse and changing patterns. Frustrated with operating within established local jurisdictional lines or simply accepting policy determinations from federal or state governments, practitioners from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors have increasingly sought to achieve their goals through regional action. In the process, they have engaged in a host of new activities, ranging from building new formal institutions to entering into *ad hoc* partnerships on specific projects.

The Foundation's Network on Building Resilient Regions seeks to expand our knowledge base about how regions shape the response to major national economic and demographic challenges. At the same time, it aims to provide new evidence about how regions can cultivate resilience in the face of major economic and social challenges. By comparing how diverse regions have responded to challenges, the Network will show how various elements can work together to help build and sustain regional resilience. Among the factors we examine are physical, natural, economic and social assets, different approaches to governing, key decision-makers, and civic practices

### **Approach**

The network brings together experts in the fields of planning, economics, political science, and sociology as well as practitioners from local government. In planning the Network, they examined the current state of knowledge on regional governance and public policy within metropolitan regions. Based on their findings, they designed a research program that highlights three broad themes:

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*Resilience:* Because regions are subject to economic and demographic shocks over which they have little control, the network focuses on regional resilience. Resilience represents a capacity to address short-term problems in ways that generate long-term success. The network seeks to show how particular features of regional governance—the actors, cultures, policies, and institutions of a region—contribute to resilience. What are the points of intervention, the type of actions, collaborations, policies, or institutions that contribute to regional resilience?

*Governance Strategies:* Although there are no regional governments in the United States, metropolitan regions are in effect governed by rules and politics established at the federal and state levels. In addition, regions have distinct histories, embodied in different formal and informal institutions, political cultures, and expectations. Acknowledging that major institutional changes are difficult to enact, the Network will examine how different governance strategies can contribute to regional resilience. What are the levers that policymakers can use or the barriers that they must remove to promote resilience?

*Challenges:* The Network's analyses will focus on several broad-based national challenges where the regional response is especially significant. These include: how growing regions address conditions such as increased traffic congestion and housing affordability; how regions that have lost manufacturing jobs build on existing strengths and attract new growth; how regions with large influxes of immigrants have responded to increased diversity and population pressures; and how the continued concentration and emerging deconcentration of poverty across metropolitan areas has affected access to opportunity and patterns of service provision. While these challenges appear as defining characteristics of regions, their origins and paths of development are conditioned in large part by global technological and economic shifts and concomitant alterations in the international division of labor.

### **Progress and Plans**

The network has produced a series of working papers that examine key aspects of regional resilience. These include conceptual analyses of resilience, systematic national data mapping regional economic change over time, and case studies of regional challenges and institutional development in specific regions.

Network researchers are now developing a set of studies that will analyze regional resilience from several different perspectives. These include quantitative analyses demonstrating how and why regions matter in responding to national challenges. In addition, researchers will undertake a series of comparative case studies that examine how diverse actors, cultures, and institutions contribute to regional resilience. The cases will compare resilience in regions that are experiencing similar challenges of prolonged economic decline, rapid growth, large scale immigration, and shifting concentrations of poverty. The Network will make its findings available to scholarly audiences and practitioners through working papers, edited and co-authored volumes, and policy briefs.

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