

COMMUNITIES FIRST IN RESILIENCE PLANNING



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While Hurricane Ida ravished much of New York City with record winds and flooding, it quickly became clear in the images presented in the press and on many social media platforms that, yet again, the brunt of the devastation would be felt by the city's most vulnerable communities. This is nothing new, as we watched our fellow Americans in Louisiana face yet another destructive storm a mere 16 years after Hurricane Katrina. So how has resilience planning and investments in green infrastructure not been prioritized by legislators who claim to care about the city's most vulnerable? And how are these communities being informed and considered as plans and policies develop behind closed doors?

Environmental justice advocates and grassroots organizations in these communities have been beating this drum for decades, and it is high time for their voices to be acknowledged as essential to the conversation. More than that, low-income, immigrant, and communities of color – and the advocates and organizations that fight for them – must be prioritized in comprehensive community outreach and engagement within the planning process to ensure that all perspectives, lives, and voices are being considered. It is not enough to share words of condolences as we watch fellow New Yorkers lose everything, including their lives, in the face of climate change.

We must create opportunities for ALL to participate in resilience planning. This includes providing more funding and resources to environmental justice organizations to support their work, creating climate change community councils, requiring resilience and climate change education in public schools, prioritizing language and varying abilities' access in all resilience and environmental issues outreach, and ensuring that environmental impacts and considerations are publicly discussed and shared in all city infrastructure planning. Though these are certainly not foolproof solutions, the ideas these proposals present share a common thread: they center the voices of those who suffer the most because of climate change. We can no longer wait for the next catastrophic event to act. Planning with and alongside communities that reflect the diversity of the city is real comprehensive resilience planning.

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