

National Academies' report highlights Global Environmental Health Sciences' Disaster Management and Resilience Program

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This satellite image was captured on September 1, 2008 from Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite (GOES-12). In the image, Hurricane Gustav was just crossing the Louisiana coast, while Tropical Storm Hanna was spinning near the Turks and Caicos Islands. (Photo by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)

A [new report](#) from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recommends steps U.S. communities can take to better measure their progress in building resilience to disasters. In particular the report also recommends that the National Academies' Gulf Research Program develop a major, coordinated initiative around building or enhancing community resilience across the Gulf of Mexico region.

[Dr. Maureen Lichtveld](#), chair of the Department of Global Environmental Health Sciences (GEHS) at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, was a member of the National Academies' committee on measuring community resilience. The [disaster management program](#), which resides in GEHS, was specifically called out in the report as offering best practices and serving as an asset to the local community.

[Dr. Stephen Murphy](#), assistant professor in GEHS, highlights the department's role in local disaster management and resilience. "Since Hurricane Katrina, Dr. Lichtveld and I have worked hard to establish a robust and consistent relationship with the

New Orleans Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness, the New Orleans Health Department, and other local preparedness agencies. Having served in a leadership role in the city in the years between my MPH and PhD studies, I mentored numerous MPH students from our disaster management program during practicum placements, as Dr. Lichtveld and I established a pipeline of training for our students and expertise for the city - a true win:win situation and an excellent example of giving back to the community in which we are located.”

“Over time, our efforts became a force multiplier for the city,” adds Murphy. “As a result, the city has been able to strengthen many public health preparedness, disaster management, and resilience initiatives. While conducting research for the report, the NAS team recognized and applauded the connection GEHS and the city had made and explicitly listed us in the report as a best practice.”

Since 2006, Tulane’s GEHS disaster management program has positioned three graduates in leadership roles in the New Orleans Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness. The program has also placed nearly 50 students for practicum experiences within that office and the New Orleans Health Department alone and numerous others within Louisiana’s Region 1 Office of Public Health and the New Orleans Emergency Medical Services. To date, over 10 graduates have eventually earned fulltime, highly competitive positions specializing in disaster resilience across the New Orleans area.

The National Academies’ report recommends four main efforts to track and measure community resilience:

- Communities should use community participation and engagement at the outset of their resilience building and measurement efforts.
- Communities should design and measure resilience around multiple dimensions of a community.
- Communities should ensure that the data collected, integrated, or synthesized for community resilience are relatable and usable for decision making.
- Communities should incentivize the measurement of resilience.