



2023

Firebrand Resiliency Collective

DEIA Audit

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Executive Summary

The Firebrand Resiliency Collective (FRC) was born immediately following the devastating Alameda Fire and was founded on the perceived need to assess fire impacts by involving the community at a deeper level to provide a more balanced outcome. Within a week and a half of the fire, FRC had created the organizational mission, vision and values (which have since evolved) and eventually found their lane with two primary programs; the Zone Captains and data mapping “Loss and Recovery Project.”.

FRC desires to build a future where communities affected by natural disasters can rebuild in sustainable, equitable and inclusive ways by centering the recovery and rebuild process in the lived experiences of affected peoples.

FRC has spent the last few years exploring how to best build community partnerships, including how to align with and understand how the federal, state and local governments allocate recovery dollars to help communities rebuild and prevent future disasters.

A [2019 NPR investigation](#) found that across the U.S., “white Americans and those with more wealth often receive more federal dollars after a disaster than do minorities and those with less wealth.

Federal aid isn't necessarily allocated to those who need it most; it's allocated according to cost-benefit calculations meant to minimize taxpayer risk.”

Thanks to a grant from the Pacific Power Foundation, FRC underwent a critical assessment of its programs and organizational policies to ensure the work is truly inclusive and accessible. The purpose of this audit is to learn and build capacity for the organization and improve how FRC works with historically underserved communities.

There is a palpable tension between bureaucratic transparency, data collection and reporting, and the correlation with direct services to affected people.

What FRC is facing is not a unique issue, but it can feel complex and amplified due to the tight-knit nature of the community. The organizational staff, as well as key stakeholders and decision makers in the recovery process, live and work in the affected area.

While FRC’s work has been focused on providing services and assistance to survivors in the affected areas, the organization is considering growing their audience to non-impacted residents to educate about and support preparedness in an effort to prevent overwhelming community loss in future natural disasters, such as wildfires.

This is one of the biggest questions facing the organization – is the community ready to pivot from loss and recovery to readiness? Would this be reflective of the community’s needs? If there are sufficient organizations in Jackson County dedicated to disaster recovery and loss, how can FRC step into a role of pre-disaster mitigation and planning to build a resilient and safe community?

This comprehensive audit included a review of the organization’s programs, DEIA materials, stakeholder interviews, an examination of disaster recovery models for other impacted communities, as well as how to ensure the work reflects the needs of the impacted populations.

The inclusion component of DEIA work is about meeting people where they are for more empowered outcomes.

FRC specifically wished to know how well they reached and served two of the most impacted communities in the fire: the Latino/a/x community and seniors. While the overarching goal is to improve how FRC works with all underserved audiences, the organization was interested in understanding the commonalities of success and failure among folx who’ve historically been omitted from recovery planning. FRC has admittedly struggled to engage deeply with the local Latino/a/x community.

The following pages provide insights and information gathered through primary research (interviews) as well as additional input from FRC staff in follow up conversations. Any information in quotation marks denotes a quote pulled directly from an interview.



While the findings are detailed below, the following highlights big ideas and themes that emerged in the research:



01. Focus on Leadership Training

“FRC needs to take a pause and see themselves for who they are in the middle space for supporting systems change, and that’s where you become an ally.” Several interview respondents spoke to FRC’s opportunity to own their identity and space and focus on providing leadership training and support for Latine leaders instead of trying to provide direct support to the Latino/a/x community.



02. Be Explicit

There is value in being explicit. One interviewee stated, “We’re [FRC] not focusing entirely on heavily marginalized groups because we focus on everybody and whoever calls and whoever walks through the door.” Given that statistically marginalized groups are excluded from disaster recovery, it would behoove Firebrand Resiliency Collective to focus efforts on those impacted communities to ensure any preparedness work is inclusive and reflective of the community at large.



03. Create Critical Feedback Loops

“FRC should do more systematic program evaluation on effectiveness from a client community perspective.” The organization has greatly invested in surveying the impacted community to gather powerful qualitative and quantitative data, which has proved effective in reporting for funders and other community stakeholders. There’s an opportunity to create more and varied critical feedback loops that invite program evaluation from the client community perspective for the sole purpose of improving the outcomes and not for external stakeholder perspectives.



04. Assess Needs Sooner

Needs assessments need to happen sooner in disaster recovery. According to FRC, the survivor community and community partners still disagree about the makeup of the survivor community; an early accurate baseline might have solved for assumptions that are now entrenched. Survivors expressed feeling forgotten by the one year mark, and also expressed challenges in being able to identify what kind of help they needed. "It's also hard to know what you need right away because it's everything. It's hard to pin point except for immediate food and shelter and safety."



This document concludes with recommendations that may inform FRC's ongoing community outreach efforts and organizational strategic planning. The research shows that many communities and institutions across the U.S. are having more public conversations about how to weave in DEIA into disaster recovery, and we hope the findings from this audit can contribute meaningfully to that necessary work.

What is meant by DEIA?

DEIA means looking beyond language and ethnicity as a marker. As defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, disaster equity specifically is, “The provision of community-specific services and resources for disaster survivors that are accessible, and culturally and linguistically tailored to mitigate disparities in health and well-being and support resilience.”

An organizational commitment to DEIA should be built into all policies and be fully integrated into the organizational structure, including how requirements and qualifications are defined.

It means:

- Ensuring there is adequate and abundant training to ensure all individuals associated with the organization have the cross-cultural skills necessary to thoughtfully engage with others in a way that invites dialogue and understanding.
- Training material should identify and remove barriers of inclusion, as well as reject or debate the dominant norms and incorporate ways of valuing differences.



“The provision of community-specific services and resources for disaster survivors that are accessible, and culturally and linguistically tailored to mitigate disparities in health and well-being and support resilience.”

DEFINING TERMS

To ensure there is a shared language, we've outlined the following definitions, borrowing from a number of sources referenced in Appendix B. While many of these definitions do not appear throughout the report, shared terminology is critical to deepening organizational understanding and learning.

Accessibility – the design of products, devices, services, vehicles, or environments so as to be usable and accessible by people with disabilities and/or functional needs.

Allyship — an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group.

Anti-racism — the process or conditions that actively identify and oppose racism.

Diversity — the practice of including the range of communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, perspectives, and beliefs of different people.

Equity — all groups have access to resources and opportunities so that disparities in opportunities and access to resources are removed. It is the consistent, systematic, fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals.

Historically Marginalized Communities – groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political, and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions.



Inclusion — a value and practice of ensuring that people feel they belong. The practice of fostering an environment for people with different identities that are recognized, appreciated, and valued.

Intersectionality — classifications such as gender, race, class and others cannot be examined in isolation of one another; they interact and intersect in lives, society and systems.

Racial Equity — condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares.

Socially Vulnerable Populations – individuals and groups who have access and functional needs, such as, but not limited to, people without vehicles, people with disabilities, older adults, and people with limited English proficiency.

Systemic/Structural Racism — a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group oppression and inequity.

Underrepresented Communities – populations or groups lacking historical or current representation in decision-making or aspects of economic, social, or civic life.

Underserved Communities – populations and geographic communities sharing characteristics that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, or civic life.

White Supremacy — a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and people of color by white peoples and nations for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.





Evaluation Design & Process

The evaluation design included a mixed-methods approach that consisted of primary data collection and secondary analysis. The primary data originated from one-hour virtual interviews with key stakeholders. All interviews were recorded for accuracy, but the findings are reported anonymously to encourage candid conversations. Firebrand identified 14 potential interviewees consisting of FRC staff, board members, community partners, and clients. Firebrand also invited feedback from folx who have been critical of the organization to ensure we were capturing as many perspectives as possible. Six people in total participated in the process.

During the interviews we sought to understand to what extent DEIA has been woven into the organization's programs and policies, as well as how well the programs reached people of color.

The evaluation team also assessed secondary data that FRC provided including partner materials, internal meeting notes, intake documents, and reports.

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of folx who participated in the discovery interviews.

Finally, we collected and assessed geographic and demographic data and compared it against the folks FRC reports as clients and partners, and also conducted an aspirational analysis of community partners engaged in similar work.

As we reviewed the materials, we considered how FRC measures impact and success, how participants truly benefited, what barriers to support may exist, and what changes occurred as a result.

Typically, organizations work from their mission to identify goals which often become a programmatic focus. Ideally, there is a clear relationship between the program and its intended outcomes.



LOCAL COMMUNITY CONTEXT

In order to be able to critically assess programmatic success and opportunities, it's important to understand the history and treatment of Latino/a/x and senior citizens in the community prior to the disaster. As several interviewees attested, inequities always existed, and these were amplified by the disaster.

According to Census Reporter, 14% of Jackson County residents are Hispanic; 13% of total residents live below the poverty line, and of the 96,000 housing units, 68% are owner occupied. Of adults ages 18 and up, nearly 89% speak English at home and 8% speak Spanish. Of the 7% of folk born abroad, 57% are from Latin America, primarily from México, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

Anecdotally, interview respondents described the community as, "Ashland is majority white and lives within miles from Latino communities. None of the signage in Lithia Park is bilingual." It's worth noting that Oregon has deep roots in structural racism.

"There's a lot of racism in the valley. Phoenix wanted to kill bilingual access and having to provide measurable affordable housing."

According to a social media post by Erica Alexia Ledesma, Executive Director of Coalicion Fortaleza, "In an article written by OregonLive [it] states that 3,000 residents were displaced, this does not take into consideration the folks that might have not been accounted for because of the reality that more than one family lives in a mobile home."

According to a presentation by the aforementioned organization to the Urban League of Portland, on September 5, 2022, at least 25% of the fire survivors are believed to be Latino/a/x, and 70% of Latinx/ indigenous folk were homeowners and lost their homes. "The community has not yet recovered and is experiencing a great deal of disparity."

In response, Coalicion Fortaleza is focused on creating the first resident-owned community in Southern Oregon.

According to the findings in the [“Community Priorities of Alameda Wildfire Survivors | Report 2021”](#), housing is a key component to community recovery. When asked, “What are your biggest needs to be able to recover from the Alameda fire?” The top response was affordable housing, with 1 in every 3 responses centering on this need.

“But for Spanish speaking respondents, the need was higher at 41% of responses as compared with 29.2% of English respondents. This points to a need for housing navigation, resources, and support that are centered on the needs of Spanish speaking wildfire survivors.”

According to one interviewee, “Our community had a real deficit of affordable housing before the fire, and most of what burned was affordable housing. A lot of folks were on track to get new manufactured homes, but a lot of the parks are having a hard time rebuilding because insurance didn’t cover things they’re responsible to replace like federal mailboxes.”

Within the senior community, based on a multi-organizational needs assessment with 400 people, the respondents were overwhelmingly white and English speaking. As the report stated, “There are advantages and disadvantages around ethnicity and age,” such as community networks. Latino/a/x disaster survivors tend to have tighter community networks around family, churches, and community organizations that specifically appeal to the Spanish-speaking community, though they may face disadvantages because of documentation status and racist attitudes that often dominate in Southern Oregon.

Seniors who tend to be white have some benefit in their appearance and proficiency in English, but face technological barriers in being able to access information digitally. Many do not even own a computer or a mobile device. Many senior fire survivors were also without a phone as their landline burned in the fire; outreach specialists worked to track them down through family members.

Audit Findings



The audit evaluation results can be used to demonstrate the effectiveness of FRC's programming, identify ways to improve or modify program planning, demonstrate accountability, justify funding, and identify replicable models for other communities facing loss and recovery from a disaster.

OVERALL, FIREBRAND RESILIENCY COLLECTIVE HAS BEEN A STEADFAST ADVOCATE FOR FIRE SURVIVORS AND EFFECTIVE IN BUILDING AND HOLDING SPACE - BOTH PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL - FOR CONVENING, COLLABORATING AND SHARING.

The organization has a demonstrated empowerment model with its Zone Captains Program, which for some represents the heart of the organization. Zone Captains have been instrumental to get folx – especially historically underrepresented communities – a seat at the table.





**Be an ally to
organizations that
already hold trust.**

Families struggling with language issues who were inexperienced with the federal bureaucracy process (such as trying to navigate documents only available in English, or how to source documentation that had likely been lost or damaged) simply couldn't cope with a system that is considered complicated even by English speakers. There is historic distrust among the Latino/a/x community of any organization or system of power with any buy-in from the government.

WITHOUT EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LATINO/A/X COMMUNITY, IT'S HARD TO EXPECT FOLX TO PARTICIPATE, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY'RE UNDER A GREAT DEAL OF STRESS. THERE IS ALSO COMMUNAL CONCERN AROUND DISASTER PROFITEERING AND EXPLOITATION, AS WELL AS REAL HESITANCE AROUND WHITE POWER STRUCTURES.

We're asking people to come out of their existing social structure and adapt to our programs and help us make those programs accessible, which is hard."

"Spanish-speaking residents look at all organizations as the government and think we're sharing information with the feds. A lot don't look for help for that reason. Their [immigration] status is in process and they are afraid. I've been in situations where kids are advising parents not to ask for help for fear of deportation."

"They don't always want the white man's help. Our people are told they don't deserve help, because they're undocumented, or they're going to have to jump through hoops."

There was a stated frustration from some interviewees around feeling like there is gatekeeping around the Latino/a/x community, but rather than holding capacity within the organization to do outreach within the local Latino/a/x community, FRC should focus its efforts on being an ally and partner to organizations who already hold those trusted relationships.

When this audit was conducted, Firebrand Resiliency Collective had only one Spanish-speaking and Latino employee, though organization leadership reports having employed up to three Latino/a/x prior to the audit. It's worth noting that one interviewee did applaud FRC for its efforts to try to employ more Latinos, "unlike others who tokenize."

It's not enough to have Latino/a/x employees who speak the language and understand cultural nuances; all FRC staff should be trained on multicultural outreach to understand how important it is to weave language access into all aspects of organizational programming and outreach efforts.

"A drawback for the Latino population is getting everything in both languages, which we beg for; it's gotten a lot better. Even at the state level. We have done our best to have a bilingual staff member; as soon as they get trained, they get romanced away by another organization. It has been a struggle to keep the bilingual staff."

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"The Latino community is very resourceful; they always have a backup plan. They have to keep working; they don't have another option. Biggest concern I have anywhere is the lack of ability to access; language is the stumbling block. Get to know your community. Find out the demographic. **Don't go in and ask what we need, tell me what you're here to do and what opportunities exist.**"

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One way FRC has demonstrated allyship is by stepping down from leadership roles to ensure survivors and/or BIPOC folx are included in decision-making conversations. FRC can continue to move into this role by continuing to listen, by showing up to partner events and simply listening without having an ask. Instead of asking “how can we help” being clear and explicit about services or connections the organization can offer. Regularly inviting critical feedback and participating in training and ongoing learning is also an important practice to allyship.



**Create a shared
understanding
of your
organization.**

One recurring point of feedback that emerged from the interviews was centered on FRC’s programming; there was a lack of clarity of what the organization does in the disaster recovery ecosystem.

“What do they do? I haven’t seen anything they’ve done. Show me what you’ve done.”

“I introduced a lot of Latine leaders to FRC, but they didn’t fully understand what FRC did or offered.”

Distinguishing between case managers versus support navigators was a recurring point of confusion in many interview dialogues as well. This presents an opportunity for FRC to examine the copy and language it uses to describe the organization in all of its materials – digitally, in printed collateral, and in shared vocabulary in community meetings.

“We help navigate the systems of support and resources. We have 29 zones split among 4-5 people. A support navigator acts as an ear and mouth of advice; they’re in charge of getting to the programs whereas case managers are in charge of getting you into the program”

While the digital mapping and storytelling project “Loss and Recovery Project” is an effective and powerful tool for decision makers, it is not the most accessible nor relevant tool for fire survivors or direct recovery resource providers. The data-rich dashboard has proved useful in highlighting emerging trends and resource gaps in hopes of steering conversations to address questions of equity. This project is certainly a replicable tool for decision makers in other communities.

Survivor-led leadership is critical to long term recovery.


The Zone Captains (ZC) Program is perhaps the most replicable aspect of FRC’s work, as it is an effective model of centering impacted populations in transformative action. The peer-driven network leverages existing trusted contacts and connections and acts as a powerful referral point for fellow survivors. Zone Captains are subject matter experts who can advocate for other survivors in decision-making spaces. According to the audit research, most communities that appeared to be recovering fastest had a Zone Captain.

“They [Zone Captains] meet people at their homes, there are no limitations on the boundaries of the job to get more engagement. They are constantly reaching out to restaurants and supermarkets to see if they have employees affected by the fire, and also get a lot of referral phone calls because of their stance in the community.”

Additionally, the weekly meetup groups supported the social and emotional needs for fire survivors by reducing isolation and providing access to a mental health professional.

Recovery is far more than recuperating a dwelling space, disaster survivors experience grief and trauma and need help navigating the heavy emotions while simultaneously rebuilding their physical worlds.

While not formal therapy groups, the groups are designed to strengthen the participant’s sense of belonging, develop coping skills, and offer resources for post traumatic stress. FRC has years of case studies and anecdotal evidence of the benefits of including trauma-informed support and how that can positively impact a community’s ability to recover.



“Connecting with other fire survivors was critical for my movement out of depression.”

One of the challenges of survivor-led leadership is the risk of re-traumatizing the person. Enlisting the help and guidance from mental health professionals in this model is critical to ensuring the safety of the team as well as the success of the program. These meetups were offered free of charge, but did not happen until more than one year after the event; mental health needs should be accounted for much sooner in disaster recovery.

One ZC in particular came up time and time again in the interviews as an example of how best to approach the work – Cassandra Cornwell, who has been a coordinator for the Zone Captains program since January 2022 and has helped hundreds of people navigate the necessary resources to begin their own journey home.

“Latinos even call to talk about Cassandra and the effort she makes to connect. Zone Captains have the heart and want to help. I hear it from partner organizations and fire affected communities. Cass is very genuine and really does care, and I trust her.”

Models like the Zone Captains Program can also help navigate and fill in the gaps where federal information may be lacking or confusing.

“We never received a list from FEMA to know who was affected, unlike other communities. A lot of people stepped back and waited to make sure people who needed help to make sure they got it first.”

“They [Zone Captains] stay connected with property managers and park owners to know where available housing is for survivors. They go to community resource fairs and reach out to the public that way. There’s also a lot of surveying, though the needs assessments were done too late and not long enough.”

“The hardest group to engage were actually single family homeowners. Resources to ‘build back better’ and more resiliently went unspent, as they had internalized the story that the recovery was only for the neediest survivors. The idea that they were adequately resourced to recover, or that they received an equitable distribution of benefits, is fallacy.”

BE EXPLICIT ABOUT YOUR DEIA EFFORTS.



DEIA initiatives should be present throughout the organization, in its leadership structure and representation, organizational policies, training offered to staff and volunteers, job descriptions, employee recruitment and retention, and in programming activities and services. Essentially, it should be mentioned everywhere.

While Remake Talent had a DEIA statement, there is no explicit DEIA statement on the FRC website. However, inclusion and equity are mentioned throughout the [Vision & Values section](#), but there is merit in explicitly sharing FRC's DEIA statement as well as explaining how the organization weaves DEIA into its work. [La Clinica Health](#) offers a good example of front page placement of their [equity statement](#), and we recommend Firebrand do the same.

DEIA initiatives should be present throughout the organization. Essentially, it should be mentioned everywhere.

Additionally, all organizational materials should be designed to be inclusive for the affected communities; this may mean ensuring all content is available in both English and Spanish, produced by a professional translator. Given the technical barriers many survivors faced, this also includes making information available in analog versions as well. The question shouldn't be what materials should be produced this way, rather there should be an organizational process for ensuring all materials are produced with these considerations. Finally, distribution and outreach tactics are key in actually reaching the impacted communities. Digital efforts should be paired with in-person and analog outreach, and organizations need to be willing to experiment with multiple ways of connecting before giving up.

Training is a cornerstone for advancing DEIA in disaster recovery practice and policy.

The only training FRC staff has ever undergone, related in some way to DEIA, was on a standalone basis and offered by external organizations or recovery partners. There also appears to be little to no follow-up on those trainings, nor has Firebrand specifically invested or engaged in DEIA training within the organization. Follow-up to DEIA trainings ensures that these efforts are sustained in the long term and build a sense of belonging for all employees. These might take the form of service, workshops, professional development etc.

An ongoing investment and commitment to DEIA training is absolutely critical for ensuring all future FRC efforts and models are considerate of all impacted folx, especially those who are historically omitted from such planning.

The grant language for this audit stated, “The funds will be used specifically to incorporate best emerging equity practices in the Zone Captain program by hosting six staff and board training sessions with topics such as implicit bias, equality vs. equity, and earned vs. unearned privilege.” This should be addressed as part of organizational strategic planning.

The [Institute for Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management](#) offers resources and training for organizations like FRC who are seeking to learn about other innovative approaches to DEIA in disaster recovery. It may also be a viable platform to share FRC’s research and community engagement models with other organizations nationally. [Their online courses](#) include training on countering bias in emergency management, systems of oppression as well as cultural competency in disaster, to name a few, all of which may benefit FRC staff, volunteers and the executive board.



Language accuracy is critical for building community trust.

The inability to access timely or accurate information in Spanish during a crisis can exacerbate the fear or anxiety in an already dangerous situation. Over time, as the immediate crisis wanes and folx may be seeking resources for recovery, trust can be ruptured if the information in Spanish is inaccurate or grammatically incorrect. Communities unfortunately experienced many examples of linguistic incompetence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many organizations without a bilingual staff or access to a professional translator are tempted to use machine translation because it may be the fastest way to get information out, but it is often confusing and incorrect, or simply not culturally appropriate.

The senior interviews conducted by FRC were translated using Google Translate, which is advised against for the aforementioned reasons; you need a culturally competent person to translate for the target demographic in a way that is linguistically relevant. If you absolutely must use machine translation for whatever reason, we recommend using Linguee, SpanishDict, or Contexto Reverso – but know nothing compares to working with a trained translator.

The number one mistake organizations make is asking a Spanish speaking staff person to do translation without verifying their level of proficiency or training. Simply because someone speaks Spanish does not mean they are qualified to do translation, and if it isn't in their job description or if they aren't being compensated extra to do it, don't ask.

If the Spanish staff person is trained in the service, be prepared to invest in a resource to provide copy editor and professional review – it's deserving of the same protocol and quality you demand of your English material.

You must understand the demographic makeup of your community to know which cultural dialect to use (not all Spanish is the same) as well as your target audience's education level, technical capacity, and cultural relevance.

"It takes longer when you have to translate it, so it can't be done as quickly, and finding a good translator is not as easy as people think. People have to care about doing that."

Understand the difference as well between transcreation and mere translation.

We noticed a few Spanish documents in the Google Drive audit folder that had been provided by community partners featured poor translation. The "[SOU Senior Alameda Survivor Survey in Spanish](#)" is a good example of this. Not only can research following the disaster feel exploitative, trust can be ruptured if the translation is not checked by a professional. The message it sends to Spanish speaking folks is, "We don't care enough to invest in your needs."

If FRC is committing to share material translated by a partner organization, we strongly suggest having a professional proof their content. It also isn't enough to have materials available in Spanish if there isn't someone at the partner organization, including FRC, to communicate in Spanish. Many of the resources listed in the "[ZC MASTER Resource list English/Spanish Google Sheet](#)" do not offer information on their websites in Spanish. It may also be worthwhile to separate the Spanish resource list from the English one.

Similarly, while we applaud the organization's effort to explicitly attract Spanish speaking Zone Captains, ensure a professional translator reviews all material before sharing it with the public as there are contextual issues with the Spanish versions of the job announcements.

Establish critical feedback loops that include anonymity.

Firebrand Resiliency Collective was repeatedly applauded throughout the interviews for the consistent presence it had in the community through weekly meetups, stakeholder meetings, community listening sessions, and pop-up events.

And while feedback was regularly invited at these gatherings, both virtually and in person, we recommend FRC create anonymous feedback loops to give folx another avenue to provide critical and constructive evaluations. Not everyone is comfortable speaking up in group settings and some folx need time to collect their thoughts. This audit, for example, is an example of a feedback loop utilizing anonymity.

Consider updating the language on the FRC [contact page](#) to explicitly invite feedback; let folx know you always welcome ideas to improve programming or identify gaps. Similarly, ensure staff and volunteers are regularly invited to provide feedback in a way that is most comfortable for them. Finally, it's important to regularly report out how the feedback is in fact informing programming and policy decisions; this communicates that their participation is invaluable and will actually lead to change. Demonstrate your willingness to listen.

For many, advocacy and participation are **privileges**.

It took a while for many survivors to be “visible” and many understandably lacked the emotional bandwidth to join community forums, but when they did, the value of those groups increased.

Officials and community leaders must recognize that disaster recovery is a long-term process – several years at a minimum – and impacted communities need ongoing funding and engagement that provides real value. .

There is a clear discrepancy between how the government tracks recovery versus how partners on the ground measure progress .Shared models for data tracking as well as how to effectively communicate with local and federal agencies can help create more efficient and equitable recovery processes that are reflective of community needs. Community organizations need to understand the politics of the neighborhoods, including the influence of affluence, before disaster strikes.

MODELS FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCY

Firebrand Resiliency Collective is seeking to understand which of its programs and services can be replicated for other communities experiencing disaster recovery, including best practices for what can be measured and how to truly meet the needs of the folx directly impacted by a disaster. Replicability is not just service-based, it can also be about outreach and relationship building, and how best to approach it.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change defines resiliency as,

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“The ability of a system and its component parts to anticipate, absorb, accommodate, or recover from the effects of a hazardous event in a timely and efficient manner, including through ensuring the preservation, restoration, or improvement of its essential basic structures and functions.”

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Folx who participated in the audit interviews defined it as, “the ability to recover quickly due to the importance of having pre-existing relationships and stability prior to an incident. It’s the baseline measurement of the health of the community.”

As Firebrand Resiliency Collective moves into preparedness models and training, it’s important to consider that most folx interviewed for this project expressed that the community and survivors are still deep in the recovery process. But if the long term recovery coalition is well staffed and equipped to continue supporting recovery, this is a great opportunity to position FRC to move towards preparedness.

The reality is most people – including those who’ve already survived disaster – are not as prepared as they should be. Many researchers have studied optimism bias in disaster survivors, which is a pattern where people who survived disaster see themselves less likely to undergo the experience again. While hazards and destructive events are inevitable, the impact to the community is not. Borrowing from FRC’s belief that communities recover at the speed of relationships, FRC is uniquely positioned to help communities to identify their collective strengths, assets, and resources to promote recovery and progress. The goal is to ensure communities can come back stronger and more connected after disaster strikes.

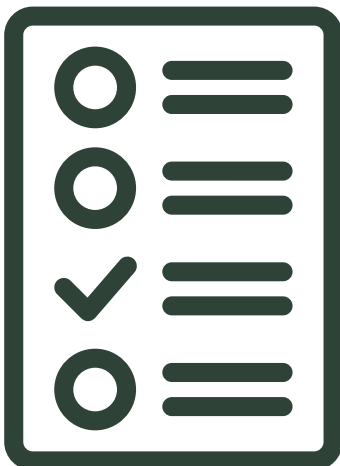
Emergency preparedness needs to be expanded in a way that addresses issues specific to those who are most vulnerable. This includes understanding the community’s primary languages, cultural and historical context of community members, understanding how and where folx get information they trust, and exploring “non-traditional” venues for gathering such as restaurants, hair salons, or houses of worship.

As FRC already knows, relationships and trust take time to build and it requires deep reflection (and feedback) to recognize when it’s appropriate to step into an ally role in lieu of a direct provider.



Inclusive long-term recovery and preparedness should embrace and include the following:

- Long term engagement between communities and government officials is critical to the recovery process. Identify those folx now and understand how development projects work, as well as who the existing stakeholders are in those spaces.
- The most vulnerable must be actively sought out before, during, and after the onset of a disaster. Design a database of neighborhoods, folx willing to volunteer, and partner organizations that can meet the unique needs of the community. Making that information accessible to others who are invested at various levels of preparedness and emergency response efforts, while ensuring privacy and security, can lead to better outcomes for all.
 - Incorporate a map component that could be used to deploy resources to the county's most vulnerable residents first. Understanding the way seniors and Latino/a/x community members process and react to disaster is key to protecting them.
- Ensure there is consistency in survey training as well as data collection, and record all survey interviews while protecting Personally Identifiable Information (PII).



In one instance, an interviewee pointed to the lack of follow-up by one community partner in assessing a survivor's need for housing, "The person would say, 'I'm staying with my sister so I'm fine, then the case would be closed. **It wasn't the right question.** The person doing the survey should have asked, 'Are you planning to stay with your sister? What are you doing next?' You want to give them help without making them feel like you're taking up their time."

- Share canvassing / surveying best practices, such as how to be clear on what services the organization provides versus asking survivors to identify what they need.
- Teach people how to advocate for themselves, including how to identify their needs, ask for resources and know what questions to ask post-disaster. Provide scripts in all languages relevant to your community.
- The Mountain View Estates digital project is an excellent model of data-driven storytelling as a way to clearly explain a community's experience. FRC can develop a "How to Guide" to train other communities on best practices for producing similar work and more importantly, how to apply it to lead to change. The 6-month research and digital storytelling project serves as an effective model to other communities on ways to leverage more public resources to help this oft underserved community.

The U.S. Fire Administration estimates that older adults are more than twice as likely than the general population to die in fires.

While the findings provide an important perspective for the organization's local community, extracting and sharing the details of how the work was performed could be of service to other communities experiencing disaster recovery.

Best practices from this work may include:

- How to partner with a higher education institution and/or research professionals and why this is important to the work
- How to design inclusive survey questions
- How to listen and document narratives, and the importance of including stories along with quantitative data. Story collecting is important and can help move from data, to stories, to action and eventually to programmatic development.
- How to effectively do outreach and ensure a higher rate of participation in the survey, including analog and in-person methods

Conclusion & Recommendations

The mere fact that Firebrand Resiliency Collective was willing to invite critical feedback is a lesson in and of itself to other community organizations invested in creating inclusive resilient communities.

DEIA work is complex, ongoing, and requires flexible and long-term funding.

As FRC already noted in its "FRC_RFA Final Report_11/11/22, "Sustained funding for bilingual and bicultural Zone Captains is necessary to provide job security for an especially vulnerable workforce. We received restricted funding for this midway through the grant period, and thus the bilingual capacity was only partially tracked by this specific grant reporting source."

Be intentional about the funding support you need for the changes you want to see.

To what extent does the organization want to devote resources to design truly inclusive programming?

Invite ongoing critical feedback.

Create more and varied critical feedback loops that invite program evaluation from the client community perspective for the sole purpose of improving the outcomes and not for external stakeholder perspectives.

Identify, map and form relationships with partners who are doing culturally specific work.

Rather than trying to recruit from that community, work with culturally specific nonprofits that are already reflecting and serving the needs of the population.

Understand and own your true strengths.

FRC's strengths lie in navigating systems of power, being an ally to organizations that already hold the community's trust and collaboratively designing preparedness resources to build a resilient community. Wield your power to advocate for broader changes that would benefit those who have been historically left out.

What can residents truly do now to be prepared for future disasters? How can you document best practices for building relationships with key decision makers? How can you design a matrix for identifying potential community leaders, understanding that emergent leadership like Zone Captains doesn't happen at a predictable pace? How can you leave room in the plan one to two years later for that to happen? How can you train other community organizations to hold that door open for others to come into their leadership?



Ongoing education is critical to understanding loss, recovery and preparedness.

“

“Everyone just wants it to be over. Unaffected communities have that mentality; they think it should be over by now. They don’t understand the hurdles. There’s a lack of compassion. The general perception is everyone is back in a house, everyone is taken care of. The fire was mostly in Talent and Phoenix, so folks in Ashland don’t have any connection to survivors.”


This quote is a powerful reminder that Firebrand Resiliency Collective may experience some pushback as the organization moves into preparedness because so many folx – especially those from marginalized communities – are still recovering.

Long term recovery and preparedness can benefit from the support of surrounding communities, especially if they’re willing to hold space, show compassion, and support in a tangible way. How can you educate and invite the public at large to be more invested or care? If survivors are expected to participate, so too should the community at large, but explaining why it’s important is crucial to public perception.



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The common pitfalls listed below double as a sample list of considerations FRC, in partnership with other organizations, can design to share with other communities that are likely to face similar challenges.

- Lack of inclusion of all marginalized groups in disaster planning
- Linguistic barriers in disaster preparedness and response
- Lack of readily available translated/understandable preparedness materials
- Lack of easily accessible translated emergency alerts
- Lack of translated signage and culturally sensitive bilingual/multilingual service providers
- Lack of cultural competence by service providers
- Failure to inform immigrants of their right to disaster aid
- Failure to address fears of deportation/public charge and distrust of government
- Discrimination and racial profiling leading to exclusion of individuals from shelters/aid and inquiries about immigration status
- Unique barriers facing immigrants
- Lack of transportation assistance (especially for migrant workers)
- Unclear process for responding to loss of documents (by USCIS)
- Failure to acknowledge structural inequities and different social structures in diverse, rural communities
- Lack of coordination between different government agencies and tiers in disaster response

No single entity can address all of the challenges and opportunities outlined in this report. Changing and challenging the issues outlined above will require collaboration across sectors, agencies, and organizations to design inclusive and sustainable community resilience initiatives.



At Vancourage, we bring extensive experience as journalists, editors, and community-engagement strategists to the table. But more importantly—we bring a deeply fresh perspective, dang good questions, and an innate knack for the kind of storytelling that adds meaning, makes waves, and moves the needle. Our commitment to putting diverse perspectives at the forefront helps organizations like yours amplify and energize the good work you’re all about.

About the evaluators:

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Vanessa is a born storyteller, bilingual editorial consultant, and Latinx marketer who’s committed her 15+-year career to bringing diverse narratives—and meaningful conversations—along to every newsroom, classroom, and ad-agency boardroom she’s ever been a part of.

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Lydia Huerta is an assistant professor of gender, race, and identity at the University of Nevada, Reno. Huerta specializes in 20th and 21st century cultural studies of the Americas, with an emphasis on the relationship between social media and narratives about the U.S./Mexico border. Other research interests focus on social movements, cultural narratives, and public policies created in the United States and Mexico, which call attention to issues related to undocumented populations, specifically, women and LGBTQ migrants.



Appendix A

Primary Research - Interview Questions

- What is your full name and position/relationship with FRC? How long have you been with the organization?
- What experience have you had with DEIA and when / how do you incorporate it into your work with the organization?
- How do you describe to friends and family what FRC is/does?
- What are some of FRC's accomplishments / what do you brag about?
- What criticisms do people get right about FRC?
- What criticisms do people get wrong about FRC?
- The organization is seeking critical feedback on the effectiveness of FRC's outreach and accessibility within the Latino/a/x community as well as within the senior population. Do you think the work is meeting people where they are and is it reflecting what they truly need?
- What does inclusion or equitable access mean to you?
- How do you define or explain community resilience?
- Where do you hope to see the organization go in the next year?

Appendix B

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