

## **Building Resilience in Rural Communities**

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This project will tackle issues of rural sustainability and resilience through a guiding research question: How can we build community resilience by enhancing policy response capacity in rural areas? Sub-questions include: How is sustainability related to rural resilience? How can we create a model for sustainability that captures the whole community? In what ways does community engagement build capacity for policy response?

There is an urgent need to develop capacity for policy response that capitalizes on the coupled human-natural systems in rural communities which interact and reinforce each other. Resilience in rural communities can be supported through policies that give residents “local control” of structures and processes allowing them to maintain healthy, vibrant, and self-sustaining local economies. These kinds of policies are typically best crafted with participatory and deliberative processes that directly engage community members, recognize the complexity of problems in rural areas, and make use of that complexity to craft effective policy interventions. Typically, these kinds of community-based participatory processes are structured by local organizations and leaders who understand the culture and vulnerabilities of that community. Since the 1970s, however, local political party organizations have been in a state of decline as traditional grassroots and volunteer-driven electoral strategies have been replaced by media-driven and mass audience-based persuasion tactics. This decline has led to a deterioration of local party organizations in rural communities to the point of functional non-existence. The absence of local parties has particularly dire implications in rural communities where there are typically few or no other local organizational structures present to absorb communities’ vulnerabilities and channel community actions toward policy interventions. While this project does not aim to build new organizations, it will equip local residents in Harmon and Tillman Counties with some of the tools needed to begin to build local organizational capacities that push for policy change to build long-term resilience in these communities.