

A Pilot Study Introducing How Rural Texas Librarians Can Convene Community Resiliency Collaborations

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Project Overview

Our pilot project incorporated **Communication Studies theories of community collaboration** to adapt the **COPEWELL** (Composite of Post-Event Well-Being) framework to address resiliency planning in **rural Texas communities**. This project positioned Library Directors from two rural Texas libraries as community conveners for resiliency planning.

Through our partnership with Maria Freed of the **Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC)**, **34 libraries** expressed interest in participating in our pilot project. The Pottsboro Library in Pottsboro, TX, and the Lee-Bardwell Public Library in Gladewater, TX, were selected as finalists after our interviews with semi-finalists.

Working with the Library Directors, we utilized **requisite diversity** (Heath & Isbell, 2017) to assemble stakeholders in each community to best represent a variety of interests, identities, and perspectives. This approach led to valuable conversations and insights, and the development of actionable next steps to address core community needs.

Our **data collection process** with both libraries and their stakeholders included:

- Two 90-minute focus groups
- A COPEWELL self-assessment adapted into survey format (20-30 minutes)
- Individual exit interviews with stakeholders and librarians (60-80 minutes)

Our project also developed **best practices and lessons learned** that librarians and researchers can use in adapting the COPEWELL framework and addressing community resiliency in their areas. Across both project sites, we found a need for **increased and improved communication** between the communities and local governments, and that **local stakeholders should collaborate** on grants and create initiatives to implement community resiliency goals.

This poster will highlight site-specific insights and our overall takeaways and recommendations for utilizing our community resiliency collaboration process. Use the link or QR code associated with each section to access our applied reports for further reading.

This project has been made possible through our partnership with **TXST's Translational Health Research Center**. Dr. Eger is a current Faculty Fellow with THRC, and she is pictured with our THRC research assistant team below. We thank our other student team members who helped with one focus group fieldnote: Britney Treviño, Mikayla Amason, Victoria Diaz, Miracle Leveston, Hector Manríquez, Gavin Thomson, and Cassidy Trim.



2023-2024 Eger THRC Team: Rowan Lampert, Dr. Elizabeth K. Eger, Rex Long, Anca Tonciu, Johnny Vasallo, and Allister McNally



Learn more about the **COPEWELL framework**, including its computational model, self-assessment rubrics, and resources for change at <https://bit.ly/COPEWELL> or by scanning the QR code:



Pottsboro

After an initial discussion about their community and the role of the library in meeting local needs, our Pottsboro stakeholders collectively selected the **Community Functioning COPEWELL rubric** to guide our collaboration together. Our focus groups revealed **six resiliency challenges** including: (1) rural transportation, (2) healthcare access, (3), affordable housing, (4) broadband internet access, (5) workforce development, and (6) disaster events and other major disruptions. There were **8 stakeholder participants** in Pottsboro (including the Library Director).

After robust conversations, our stakeholders developed **potential action items** that included: improving communication between residents, local government, and the library; working together to collectively seek and receive future grants to support needed infrastructure, healthcare, workforce, and resiliency needs; and co-creating initiatives and programs led by the library to share plans, ideas, and questions.



Maria Freed (TSLAC), Rex Long, Dr. Elizabeth K. Eger, and Dianne Connery (Pottsboro Library Director)

Read the **full Pottsboro site report** at <https://bit.ly/Pottsboro> or by scanning the QR code:



Gladewater

In Gladewater, our stakeholders' discussion of their community led them to select **COPEWELL's Emergency Management rubric** to guide our collaboration. As stakeholders narrowed their brainstorming to this area, they centered their comments around **four resiliency challenges and experiences**: (1) tensions between past and present, (2) infrastructure improvements, (3) emergency planning and response communication, and (4) reflections on disaster events experienced. There were **7 stakeholder participants** in Gladewater (including the Library Director).

After extensive discussions, stakeholders developed **potential action items** including: diversifying the modes of communication between community members and local government; identifying additional funding to address resiliency needs; planning youth outreach regarding disaster preparation; and formalizing the stakeholder group into an Emergency Management Committee.



Dr. Elizabeth K. Eger and Rex Long present to the Gladewater community

Read the **full Gladewater report** by visiting <https://bit.ly/Gladewater> or scanning the QR code:

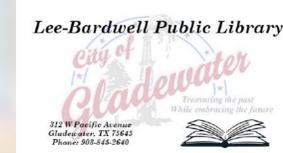


Key Findings & Recommendations

Our Library Directors both found the project useful for **connecting to diverse community leaders and members** and to understand how they could take a leadership role in convening future stakeholder meetings. Each commented that the requisite diversity approach via community collaboration theories led to more reflection on who is and is not included in such local community decision-making, particularly outside of the "regular suspects." Individual interviews with each stakeholder, including the Library Directors, allowed us to identify **overarching considerations** for others looking to implement our community resiliency collaboration process. As researchers, we also reflected on the process of carrying out this project. For others interested in replicating this process, our **recommendations** include:

- Dedicate time and energy to scheduling processes.
- Aim for a manageable participant group (6-8 stakeholders).
- Establish confidentiality and data use plans before beginning.
- Consider hosting three (or more) focus group sessions to allow for more fruitful conversations.
- Be cautious of jumping to quick solutions.
- Recruit a diverse cross-section of the community.
- Embrace diverse meeting formats (e.g., in person and via Zoom).
- Engage all participants as facilitators.
- Encourage and cultivate connections and networking potentials.
- Participate in the process with honesty and willingness to listen.
- Accept that disagreement can be generative.
- Welcome critiques of COPEWELL and the community collaboration process.

Read our **full Pilot Process report** including tips for how to host your own community resiliency collaboration at <https://bit.ly/TXResiliency> or by scanning the QR code:



Closing Reflections from Participants

"Being understaffed and under resourced, as I suspect many small libraries are, we **lack the capacity to do everything we would like to do on our own**. We must collaborate with others if we want to increase our impact. Selecting stakeholders for this project following the collaboration guidelines from the research team made me think about the **diversity of expertise** that would be needed in emergency planning and disaster response." - Dianne Connery, the Pottsboro Library Director

"Since the pilot project ended, **there was a major disaster in our area**. A large storm system moved through and decimated the power grid, causing widespread power outages...Our library opened for those in our community who needed a place to be during the day; we were able to feed them a meal with the help of other city personnel and through donations, and people were able to charge their devices. I would not have had much of this information or assistance if it had not been for **the relationships and knowledge gained during this pilot project**." - Brandy Winn, the Lee-Bardwell Public Library Director

"This was the first time in a very long time, I felt like I was at a meeting that wasn't wasting my time. **And that we were actually productive**...It's rare when you have this focused, kind of concise, wanting to move forward together...I didn't even know we had a new [city leader]...so, I emailed her right after the first session... **I loved hearing some of the things that she said in these focus groups**, that I was able to then take back to my board and be like, "Wow! We have someone who wants to get stuff done for this small community...Yesterday, we just voted her to join my Board of Directors." - Charley, nonprofit stakeholder leader in Pottsboro, TX

