



PROPOSED PROJECT: ROUNDTABLE ON WILDFIRE RESILIENCE IN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITIES

OVERVIEW

2017–2020 HAVE BEEN IMPACTFUL AND DESTRUCTIVE wildfire years in California, with significant wildfires, damage, and fatalities. The Tubbs fire, at that time the most destructive wildfire on record for California, burned almost 37,000 acres, destroyed 5,600 structures with an economic loss of \$1.2B. In 2017, 45 civilians and 2 firefighters lost their lives. While many hoped we had seen the worst fire season for many years, damages in 2017 were exceeded in 2018, when 8,527 wildfires burned an area of 1,893,913 acres, with insurance claims alone exceeding \$12B. There were 95 fatalities in the 2018 wildfire season in California. Already in 2020, over 4 million acres have burned and 31 lives have been lost.

Unfortunately, the worst we have seen in the past several years is unlikely to be the worst we will see in future years. The vulnerability of the electrical grid to wildfire has yet to be fully addressed. Current warming and precipitation trends related to climate change, the long-lasting impacts from drought conditions in the state (and the likelihood of more frequent drought events), and the potential growth of human populations in wildfire-prone areas due to the current housing crisis, will more frequently create the conditions that set up the destructive events in 2017 and 2018 and exceed these events. The ecological, economic, and human costs of these wildfire events are unacceptably high.

Moving forward, we must ask three key questions **1) What is driving wildfire fatalities?** **2) What do wildfire resilient communities look like?** and **3) How do we successfully build those communities?** We propose to design and convene a roundtable on Wildfire Resilience in California Communities. Given the destruction and fatalities involved in the past several fire seasons, we feel it is imperative to create a mechanism where experts from large number of sectors (not just wildfire and emergency services) convene for an in-depth and novel approach to answer these two questions. The key to effectively bringing together scientists and practitioners from diverse sectors is to do so in a careful and deliberately facilitated process that relies on deep theoretical grounding in group dynamics and has a proven track record. The Global Learning Exchange Network (GLEN) approach blends relationship building with dialogue and visualization to support systemic understanding of the problem and breakthrough recommendations.

Lead PIs:

Dr. Tamara Wall, Desert Research Institute;
Dr. Gisela Wendling and Mr. David Sibbet,
Global Learning Exchange Network (GLEN)

Proposed Start Date:

June 1, 2020

Proposed End Date:

May 30, 2022

Total Funding Requested:

\$230,000 for GLEN support and services

Current Leveraged Funding:

\$75,000 (Southwest Climate Adaptation
Science Center, USGS)

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METHODS

This project is oriented around a substantial series of facilitated, in-person meetings across a two-year period to **1)** provide an opportunity for in-depth conversation and exploration to scope this accelerating problem; **2)** time for in-depth information gathering and insight generation across key exploration areas with support from the Southwest Climate Adaptation Science Center and the GLEN; **3)** collectively, develop a systems level view of the problem, and potential solutions; **4)** provide a set of recommendations to enhance wildfire community resilience to state, local, and federal agencies; and **5)** design a process for effectively disseminating these key recommendations.

Fundamental to this project is identifying and engaging with participants who can provide expertise and insight from a large number of sectors. Typically, these sectors are often “siloesd” from each other in ways that create barriers to collaboration, problem identification and resolution. Given the recent wildfire events, wildfire community resilience is a problem that is not tractable by traditional means. Asking a single or even several agencies to solve this problem is unrealistic. To make progress on answering our key questions, we must successfully design a process that creates connections between agencies, sectors, and topical knowledge. In this project we propose to identify individuals who can represent insurance, wildfire, structural fire, emergency managers, municipal planners, housing experts (including low income), real estate developers, tribal communities, scientists, air quality, water purveyors, and infrastructure experts. We expect additional sectors will be identified in initial design stages of the project, as well.

The proposed project takes a novel approach, using visually facilitated dialogue and problem mapping to support roundtable participants to develop and share new understandings and breakthrough thinking. The visual mapping predictably creates common ground and the well-facilitated dialogue a trusting environment among the participants. All of the in-person meetings will be facilitated using GLEN expertise.

TIMELINE

- **0–3 MONTHS:** Process design to clarify approach and invitation process, participant selection and invitation, develop a roundtable charter, create outreach plan/ identify outcomes and impacts.
- **YEAR 1:** Five one-day meetings focused on 1) understanding the issues 2) create subgroups to research specific questions/areas.
- **YEAR 2:** Five one-day meetings to focus on developing recommendations.
- Virtual subcommittee meetings as needed.

DELIVERABLES AND OUTCOMES

1. Visual meeting reports from each in-person meeting.
2. Set of recommendations in a final report from the two-year process.
3. Outreach and engagement plan to disseminate final recommendations.
4. Evaluation of the process as a model for addressing other climate change adaptation issues in California, regionally, and nationally.



Figure 1: Dr. Wendling in 2015 facilitating a multi-sector meeting designing a Central Valley Habitat Exchange

EXPERTISE

Dr. Wall is the deputy director of the Western Regional Climate Center and has extensive experience in working directly with the wildfire management community across the United States and California. **Dr. Wendling** and **Mr. Sibbet** are the founding members of the GLEN and are internationally recognized as leaders in visual facilitation, design thinking, and organizational development.