



# **THE RESILIENCE WE WANT**

**A GUIDE TO MAKING YOUR COMMUNITY SPACE  
INTO A HUB FOR LOCAL RESILIENCE & MUTUAL AID**

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# THE RESILIENCE WE WANT

## IS A GUIDE TO MAKING ANY SPACE INTO A HUB FOR RESILIENCE & MUTUAL AID.

We created this guide as a companion to [“The Response,”](#) Shareable’s documentary film about people restoring power after a disaster in Puerto Rico.

This guide introduces the vision and model of a “resilience hub” – a space where people can take more pride in their neighborhood, learn new skills together, provide for basic needs, prepare for disruptions, and build a more inclusive and joyful community.

After seeing our friends restoring power and building resilience in Puerto Rico, we began searching for more stories. Tom Llewellyn, producer of *The Response*, got inspired by Susan Silber and workshops promoting the [Northern California Resilience Network](#). And in the summer of 2019, Shareable partnered with Danny Spitzberg, a sociologist based in Oakland, to turn this inspiration into a practical form. Danny interviewed, brought together, and learned from dozens of people organizing with spaces around the world, from Oakland, California to Kathmandu, Nepal, as well as disaster response strategists, local government officials, and community leaders. Danny wrote and prototyped two versions of the guide. Erica Ruth Dixon, a communications strategist based in San Francisco, created a look and feel. And dozens of participants provided feedback on how it might be useful for their community space.

It is mainly for people with access to spaces they love, such as:

- Independent spaces – social clubs, art studios, and urban farms
- Public facilities – libraries, schools, athletic clubs, and civic centers
- Religious centers – places of worship, meeting houses, and more
- Small businesses – cafes, bookshops, and all kinds of storefronts

To help you and your neighbors make your space into a hub for resilience and mutual aid, the guide includes

- ➔ Six key strategies for co-creating a vision and plan for your space
- ➔ Six case studies of people are building resilience hubs in different ways
- ➔ Instructions on how to co-host your first and second gatherings
- ➔ A checklist to get started with your neighbors.

But first, it starts with a story.

# THE RESPONSE IN PUERTO RICO

Judith Rodríguez woke up on September 20th, 2017 to the sound of her kitchen door flying off in Hurricane Maria.

Her dishes survived—and so did she—but damage and power outages across Puerto Rico made cooking impossible for Judith. Days later, she heard of a group of volunteers serving meals from a community kitchen in her city of Caguas. Judith went to donate her unused dishes and told volunteers, “I’m in a hurry, because I fell and have a hurt back.” To her surprise, they replied “We’ll help you with that.”

“That’s when I discovered the amazing experience of acupuncture,” said Judith.

## **Why was this group of volunteers prepared to help their neighbors?**

The people cooking in Caguas were volunteers with [Centros de Apoyo Mutuo](#) (Mutual Aid Centers), an effort that emerged months before the hurricane, during student protests against budget cuts.

Out of necessity, and with joy, low-income students proposed a new vision for education, shut down campuses with walkouts and assemblies, and cooked for their communities. Giovanni Roberto helped organize the Mutual Aid Center, building on Comedores Sociales (Social Diners) he’s co-hosted since 2013 for fellow low-income students. In the weeks following Hurricane Maria, Giovanni and others expanded a community space in Caguas to serve meals for up to 600 people every day, and the idea spread.

“We want Puerto Rico to be different—to transform values, the way people relate, the way we trust each other,” said Giovanni. “We see this space as a way of organizing people to gain in those values, to gain that experience. In our long term vision we want Puerto Rico full of Mutual Aid Centers.”

## **RESILIENCE BEFORE DISASTER**

### **How might we benefit from having more resilient communities before disasters happen?**

As our friends in Puerto Rico showed us, resilience comes from the social cohesion that forms when communities organize in response to real needs.

But in starting this guide, we found a blindspot: most of the dialogue on resilience talks about it in terms of disasters and what-if scenarios, instead of present situations.

“People assume resilience is about maintaining general ‘goodness,’” says Aaron Titus, author of [How to Prepare for Everything](#). Even done well, this means managing disasters in terms of disruptions to cooking, communications, transportation, and so on – which may never happen.

“Disasters give us urgent problems to solve, and we’re comfortable with that,” said Willow Brugh, a former community response strategist with [Geeks Without Bounds](#) and [FEMA’s Field Innovation Team](#). “But resilience is about realizing that there are more important problems we can choose to solve. Talking about disasters is boring, compared to resilience!”

One problem we can choose to solve is displacement. Rising rents and hurricanes both cause displacement, only hurricanes move faster and leave more damage. Disaster preparedness does little to prevent slower, less visible causes of displacement, especially for vulnerable and low-income neighbors. But creating a vision for resilience means building the neighborhood we want, before any disaster.

## **WHERE DOES RESILIENCE COME FROM?**

### **In a crisis, neighbors are almost always the first responders.**

Within 72 hours after a natural disaster, most government agencies are able to restore basic services like power and water. However, after Hurricane Maria, federal authorities were slow to act. In fact, in some parts of the island, soldiers came and seized water, fuel, and essential goods. Almost two years later, the island is still without power in some places. And

on July 23rd, 2019, after reports of the governor's corrupt administration, people called a general strike and 500,000 marched in San Juan, leading to his resignation.

**We expect government to provide public services, but this is not always easy or possible.**

For years, Puerto Rico has been negatively impacted by foreign debt in everything from education and health care to energy and infrastructure. Hurricane Maria showed just how deep the problems were. But even in cities that are stable and self-sufficient, government agencies respond to disasters with top-down, military-style operations.

Several factors make it easy for neighbors to act more effectively, compared to government agencies:

1. Faster responses – neighbors are more motivated to act immediately and to follow through
2. Better coordination – neighbors have more up-to-date understanding of each others needs
3. Deeper trust – neighbors who may be strangers can bond and build more collectively

**Neighbors made life better in Puerto Rico through mutual aid and community spaces.**

After struggling with damage, power outages, and food shortages, neighbors organized around community kitchens and clinics. At the Mutual Aid Center in Caguas, Judith Rodríguez got acupuncture treatment and healed her back. Across the island, these spaces helped people see their own power more than ever.

In her [white paper](#) on resilience hubs, Kristen Baja of the [Urban Sustainability Directors Network](#) describes how community spaces can meet basic needs. Baja organized with Baltimore residents to “leverage established, trusted, and community-managed facilities” for services and resource distribution during emergencies. And in order to be responsive, adaptive, and equitable, Baja says resilience hubs “are intended to be supported by local government and other partners... instead of being led by local government.”

Resilience is about the pride, social cohesion, and vision that emerges through community organizing. If we tap into what makes us proud of our neighborhood, we can get local government to follow our leadership

## CREATING A HUB FOR LOCAL RESILIENCE

Neighborhoods come together and stay together in community spaces. This is similar to how guests in our homes tend to gather and socialize in the kitchen. Making a space into a hub for local resilience helps us take pride in our neighborhoods, and make them better, too.

A hub is any place where people meet and coordinate activity. For example, a food hub is a facility that helps local aggregation, production, storage, distribution, and marketing of food and agriculture products with farms, restaurants, and more. Similarly, community spaces like the Mutual Aid Centers in Puerto Rico help build resilience and mutual aid among neighbors.

**Almost any space can be made into a resilience hub!**

### PURPOSES

Taking these ideas together, we define a “resilience hub” in terms of three purposes:

- ➔ Disaster preparedness and response
- ➔ Local sustainability and permaculture
- ➔ Community engagement and inclusion

### PRACTICES

Across the many community spaces around the world, a few common patterns include:

- ➔ Providing sanctuary and other basic needs
- ➔ Hosting and supporting community activities
- ➔ Creating opportunities for collective work that lasts

**The following pages have strategies and stories of what this looks like.**

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

**This guide outlines six strategies to make any space into a hub for local resilience.**

What you get:

- ➔ This guide helps you find pride in your neighborhood!
- ➔ It also helps you co-create a vision for resilience, embrace different points of view, identify assets that your space can share, and take action together.

What you need:

- ➔ Neighbors - 2 or more neighbors, the more the merrier!
- ➔ Space - a place you can eat, drink, and talk for 2-3 hours.
- ➔ Film - "The Response: How Puerto Ricans are Restoring Power to the People."
- ➔ Equipment - a projector and screen, or a video player and monitor.
- ➔ Guides - a copy of this guide for every three guests and markers or Sharpies.
- ➔ Dinner - food and drink for everyone, or a potluck!

Get started:

- Host a movie night and dinner with your neighbors**

*Names of co-hosts:* \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, & \_\_\_\_\_

*Date/ Time/ Location:* \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

- Watch the film**
- After the film, discuss "What speaks to you, and why?" and note common interests. Then ask, "Who wants to see what we can do together?" If three or more people express interest, form small groups to talk through the six strategies.
- Have dinner and drinks**
- After dinner, share the checklist (see last page) and ask "Who feels like we can take this further?" If 3 or more people commit, chances are you will go further together!

Go further:

- Share an asset with your neighborhood**
- Use the checklist to co-create your vision for resilience and share your space.
- Host another gathering**

*Names of co-hosts:* \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, & \_\_\_\_\_

*Date/ Time/ Location:* \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

- Review the checklist and see what everyone accomplished.
- Continue hosting gatherings**
- Focus on making a proposal to neighbors, local government, or other sources of support.
- Reach out to Shareable with your story, and we'll feature it on our website!

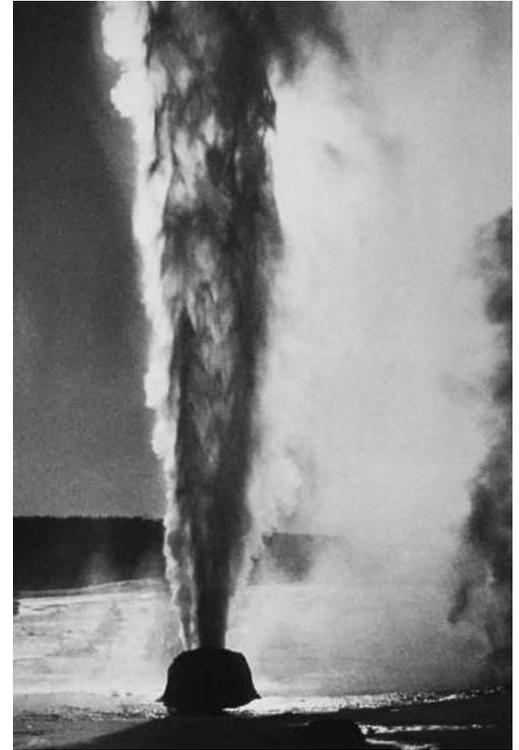
# I. FINDING INSPIRATION



## SEEING WHO IS ORGANIZING IN OUR COMMUNITY

Making a space into a hub for community resilience is challenging, but we don't need to start from scratch. Instead, we can learn from inspiring stories of ongoing organizing. Stories of struggle often get overlooked, but they can help us see our past and imagine a better future. Some of the most inspiring, visionary, and capable organizers are women, indigenous, and people of color.

*We can almost always find local organizers seeking something we want, too.*



## A STORY

Volunteers across Puerto Rico were ready for Hurricane Maria, as earlier organizing among low-income students created the capacity to cook for communities on strike. "We were able to discuss the idea [of a mutual aid center] with other activists who were already doing things," said Giovanni Roberto. "And through that discussion we came up with the idea of creating more spaces to support organizing in different places." Community organizers had been running educational arts workshops across the island. By adding vital services like cooking, acupuncture, and therapy, they began to open new mutual aid centers.

## START THE CONVERSATION

### Get started:

- Who is organizing around a basic need in your neighborhood?
- How does their story make you feel?

### Go further:

- What do you want to learn from them? How can you reach out?

# 2. SEEING THE MAGIC

## CULTIVATING A SHARED EXPERIENCE

In the folktale “stone soup,” a woman passing through a village claims that her magic stone can make a whole soup. She puts it in a pot and cleverly convinces others to add potatoes, onions, carrots, and more. Soon enough, the villagers have soup for everyone—and renewed trust in one another, too.

*Resilience is more than survival: it is about neighborhood pride, social cohesion, and always growing.*



## A STORY

In 2016, six years after the Athens City Plaza Hotel closed its doors in the wake of Greece’s financial crisis, the hotel welcomed new guests: 400 people fleeing war in the Middle East, parts of Africa, Afghanistan, and Syria. The Solidarity Initiative for Political and Economic Refugees organized the [Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza](#) and its huge kitchen, where the now-residents feed everyone. “We can cook our favorite foods,” said Reema, a mother of three. “A taste of home helps with missing it so much.” By cooking together, Reema and others are also trading recipes, learning new languages, and bonding over their shared experience.

## START THE CONVERSATION

### Get started:

- Name a basic need you wish was more freely available in your community.
- What are two ways your space can be used to help provide for that need?

### Go further:

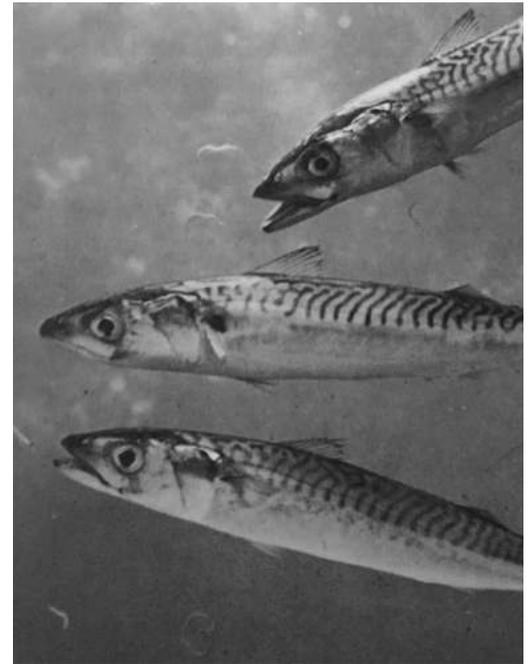
- After addressing that basic need, what do you think might become easier or possible?

# 3. COMBINING OUR ABILITIES

## BRINGING WHAT WE CAN TO THE TABLE

Nobody knows everything, but together we know a lot. Some of us are experienced teachers, some of us are eager learners, and many of us are both. When it comes to building a resilience hub with our neighbors, learning our day-to-day needs helps make life better now as well as in the event of an emergency.

*By combining our unique abilities, we can overcome greater challenges and grow.*



## A STORY

In New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, a voodoo priest ordained in Haiti named Sallie Ann Glassman met with neighbors every Sunday to make sense of what to do. One day she said, “We ought to make a healing center!” Her husband, a real estate developer, replied, “Oh, that sounds like a lot of work.” She persisted: “So what!?” Sallie’s optimism helped the [New Orleans Healing Center](#) every step of the way to it’s opening in 2011. While its food co-op, music venue, and 27 other businesses surfaced conflicts of gentrification and noise complaints, the effort united black, working class and white, well-off neighbors. By embracing changes and struggles, the neighborhood continues to heal and grow economically, spiritually, and in many more ways.

## START THE CONVERSATION

### Get started:

- Describe the last time you faced a group conflict. What was the shared need?
- How did you work through it together? How did you grow?

### Go further:

- What did you learn about your group’s abilities?

# 4. LEARNING HOW TO HELP

## STARTING WITH SKILLS WE ALREADY HAVE

In a disaster, the first thing we do is turn to our family and loved ones—not our checklists. A hub for resilience can help neighbors, but only if they have a relationship with it. And like in any relationship, mutual trust takes time and effort. A few foundational organizing skills include canvassing (building bonds with neighbors), asset mapping (taking stock of resources), and risk assessment (identifying possible vulnerabilities).

*Organizing skills give a community the capacity to build a vision that actually works.*



### A STORY

During Superstorm Sandy, the most deadly and costly hurricane of 2012, Occupy organizers in New York coordinated 60,000 volunteers in a rapid and lifesaving response. Their work was so effective, government officials sought their guidance during and after the storm. But Occupy member and [Sahana Foundation](#) president Devin Balkind told us, “we only made the news because our work was secular; faith-based communities do effective disaster response every day.” Still, Balkind says that self-organizing is key. “I tell officials that self-organizing patterns always emerges in disruptions, and they work. Organizing mutual aid shifts citizens from consumers to providers of basic necessities.”

## START THE CONVERSATION

### Get started:

- What services, resources, or experiences do you think your local community expects from your space?
- What was the best example of meeting those expectations?

### Go further:

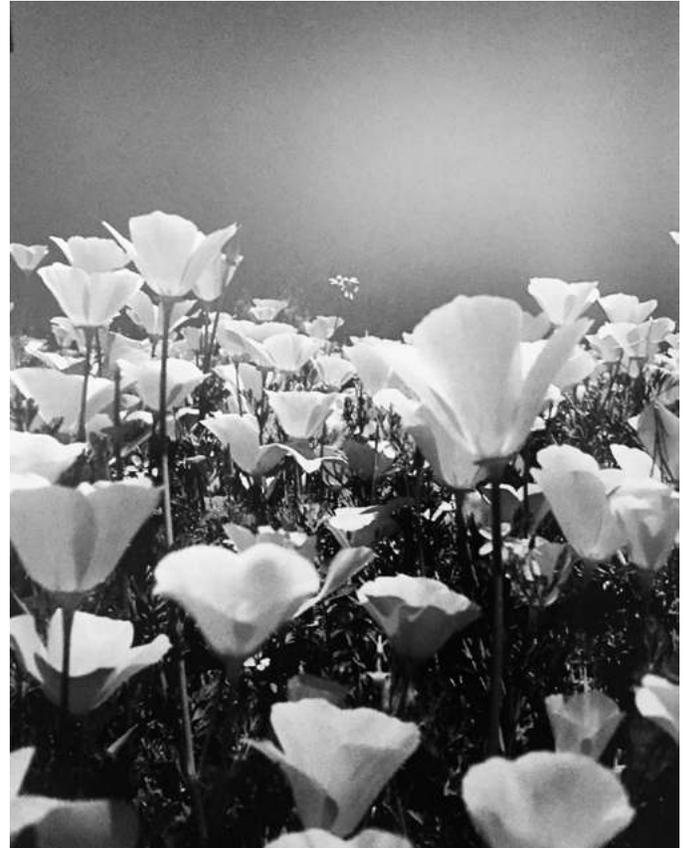
- To learn more, which of the three key skills could you use as a starting point (canvassing, asset mapping, or risk assessment)?

# 5. INVESTING IN ASSETS

## MAKING A SPACE MORE VALUABLE

In many cultures, people tend to gather in the kitchen. Gathering together is a form of investing. A hub for resilience goes further, by sharing our assets. Our spaces have a lot to offer! Imagine equipment like a sound system or heavy duty sewing machine, space for meeting or cooking or celebrating, or even solar panels, water cisterns, and electric vehicles.

*The more we put into a space, the more we value it—and the more we have to share.*



## START THE CONVERSATION

### Get started:

- Describe an asset in your space and how you currently share it.
- What are three ways you can make that asset more shareable?

### Go further:

- What is one more asset you could share, create, or acquire to support long-lasting work?

## A STORY

In 2017, to prevent gentrification and displacement, a collective in East Oakland's Fruitvale district called [Liberated 23rd Avenue](#) bought the building in which they were individually renting. The groups include Peacock Rebellion, a poetry nonprofit for queer and trans people of color; [Liberating Ourselves Locally](#), a maker space; [Shaolin Life](#), a martial arts studio; [The Bikery](#), a storefront for urban health nonprofit Cycles of Change; and [Sustaining Ourselves Locally \(SOL\)](#), a community garden. "Our condition is fragile here," said Leo Orleans, a farmer with SOL. "But now that our space is safe from the market, our youth, elders, and 'yelders' like me can commit to work that lasts."

# 6. WORKING IN CYCLES

## BUILDING RESILIENCE THAT LASTS

When cooking, planning and timing can make or break a meal. What ingredients need to get washed, chopped, or steamed, and when? Did we need to soak something overnight? In making a hub for resilience, patience makes room for the voices and vision that might get left out.

*Working slow (and fast) helps connect our day-to-day work to our bigger vision.*



### A STORY

A few months after an earthquake hit Nepal in 2015, organizers in Kathmandu used 16 shipping containers to make a space for hope and renewal: the [Nepal Communitere Resource Center and Innovation Hub](#).

“Over 50 partner organizations use our 3D printers and get engineering help. Things fall apart if we’re not listening carefully to our community,” said coordinator Bahar Kumar. “We build trust and relationships slowly, so that we have the capacity to act fast when necessary.” She adds that “working in cycles and seasons makes it easy to be experimental and playful.”

## START THE CONVERSATION

### Get started:

- Reflect on your responses to the six strategies so far. What feels most alive?
- Imagine someone asks you about your vision for local resilience. What would you tell them?

### Go further:

- To bring this vision to life, name two actions that you can take in the next month.

# CHECKLIST

Use this list of tasks to take your collaboration further after watching the film, hosting your first gathering, and after exploring the six strategies for resilience.

## Apply the six strategies to your space

- FIND INSPIRATION** - reach out to local organizers and learn from their story

Person responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

- SEE THE MAGIC** - propose something enjoyable to offer along with the asset

Person responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

- INVEST IN ASSETS** - find a group who has a use for an asset in your space

Person responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

- COMBINE ABILITIES** - identify any risks involved in sharing that asset

Person responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

- LEARN TO HELP** - propose a few working agreements for your group

Person responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

- WORK IN CYCLES** - invite neighbors, friends, or coworkers to the next gathering

Person responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

As you pick tasks to take on, consider ways to make them easier and more enjoyable:

- ➔ *Do you want or need a buddy to do a task together?*
- ➔ *Can you complete a task in your free time, or as part of your day-to-day duties?*
- ➔ *What existing capacity can you use to help organize the work? (For example, does your group already have a shared calendar, email list, or other means of coordinating activities?)*

**NOTES** - anything else that needs to be said or done?

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