# Lincoln County Social Resilience Project

## Executive Summary

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**Project Team:**

**Kristen Grant**, Maine Sea Grant and University of Maine Extension

**Elizabeth Hertz**, Blue Sky Planning Solutions

**Eileen Sylvan Johnson**, Bowdoin College

**Gabe McPhail**, Resilient Communities

**Emily Rabbe**, Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission

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## Executive Summary

### Overview

* The Social Resilience Project focuses on understanding the resilience and capacity of five sectors (business, conservation, emergency management, municipal, and social services) to help vulnerable community members prepare for, respond to, and recover from extreme storm events in Lincoln County.
* This project builds on an earlier [Social Resilience Project](https://wellsreserve.org/project/social-resilience-project) (SRP) in eight communities in Southern Midcoast Maine –Harpswell, Brunswick, West Bath, Bath, Phippsburg, Georgetown, Arrowsic, and Woolwich. In this earlier project, the SRP Project Team held focus groups with representatives from the conservation, emergency management, municipal, and social services sectors. The project culminated in a scenario planning exercise to facilitate cross-sector discussions on preparing for, responding to and recovering from extreme storm events. The final report for the Southern Midcoast Social Resilience Project and general information about the Social Resilience Project is available through [Maine Sea Grant](https://seagrant.umaine.edu/focus-areas/resilient-communities-and-economies/the-social-resilience-project/).
* Both the Lincoln County Social Resilience Project and the Southern Midcoast Social Resilience Project focus on supporting the needs of community members who experience heightened social vulnerability[[1]](#footnote-1) to the impact of extreme storm events.
* The Lincoln County SRP Project Team conducted **five focus groups and seven interviews** between May and June, 2024, engaging a total of 37 participants across the business, conservation, emergency management, municipal, and social services sectors, to ensure that perspectives from each sector were well represented. The goal of the focus groups was to develop a baseline understanding of how each sector had prepared for and/or responded to the storms during the winter of 2023–2024.
* In August 2024, the SRP Project Team conducted **14 community member interviews at two events**—one focused on seniors and the other on families with children—to explore the impact of storms on these groups. Both of these groups are identified as experiencing heightened social vulnerability through the US Center for Disease Control (CDC) and in the [Maine Social Vulnerability Index of the Maine Coastal Risk Explorer.](https://maps.coastalresilience.org/maine/)
* In November 2024, in collaboration with the Lincoln County SRP Advisory Committee, the Project Team hosted a **community dinner,** *Neighbors Helping Neighbors: Sharing Stories. Preparing for Winter Storms,* to engage directly with residents. The event included 67 participants: 25 community members, representatives from 10 service provider organizations, and 13 individual service providers. Eleven of Lincoln County’s 15 communities were represented at the dinner. Following the community dinner, the Project Team summarized the key topics that were heard in the focus groups, interviews and at the community dinner and shared these with community leaders in advance of a workshop for community leaders.
* In December 2024, in collaboration with the Lincoln County SRP Advisory Committee, the Project Team hosted a **workshop for community leaders,** *Learning from last year’s storms: Coordinating actions we can take to prepare,* to convene community leaders across the five sectors. The event included 42 participants: 8 representing emergency management; 2 representing business; 8 representing municipalities; 7 representing natural resources/conservation; 9 representing social services; and 1 representing youth. To launch the community leaders’ workshop, the summary of key topics from the focus groups, interviews and at the community dinner was reviewed. Next the participants engaged in table conversations with representatives of each sector at each table to identify priorities and next steps to address selected priorities. More details on this process are described below, under *What we learned from the Community Leaders Workshop*.

### What we learned from Focus Groups, Interviews, and Community Dinner Conversations

Below is a list of critical concerns, opportunities and challenges shared in the focus groups, interviews and at the community dinner. This summary highlights the perspectives of community members who experience heightened vulnerability to the impacts of storms. Detailed responses to specific questions are provided in the full Lincoln County Social Resilience Project report (available at [Maine Sea Grant](https://seagrant.umaine.edu/focus-areas/communities-and-economies/the-social-resilience-project/lincoln-county-social-resilience-project/)).

1. Power outages are a critical challenge.

* Extended power outages disrupt essential functions like heating, cooking, water access, and medical device use, particularly for older residents and those with health issues.
* Backup systems such as generators and wood stoves are vital but not available to many households and/or don’t provide sufficient power/heat to meet household needs.

1. Food insecurity can be exacerbated by extreme storm events.

* Frequent outages result in food spoilage, with low-income and fixed-income households struggling to replace perishable items.
* Limited transportation and blocked roads further hinder access to food pantries and grocery stores.
* Stigma associated with accessing food pantries contributes to community members’ reluctance to use these resources, either after a storm event or when experiencing food insecurity more broadly.

1. Communication gaps can limit the ability to prepare for and recover from storms.

* Power and internet outages hinder information access, leaving vulnerable community members reliant on neighbors and landlines.
* Lack of centralized communication systems results in inconsistent dissemination of storm-related updates[[2]](#footnote-2).

1. Community members face challenges accessing support resources.

* Inaccessible roads limit access to food, supplies, and warming shelters.
* Community members frequently report receiving needed support from neighbors and social service agencies.
* Volunteer capacity exists but is not utilized effectively because community members could use more guidance on how to connect with volunteer organizations, and sector representatives described the need for coordinating volunteer efforts.
* Concerns about leaving pets behind influence residents’ willingness to use warming shelters.

1. Extreme storms impact physical and mental health and safety.

* Power outages and blocked roads prevent access to needed emergency services and information, threatening community members’ physical and mental health and safety in the short and long term.

1. Economic and educational disruptions have short and long-term impacts.

* The occurrence of multiple storm events over a short time resulted in the vulnerability of community members who have not generally been at risk in the past.
* School and business closures affect family income, childcare options, food security, and children’s education.
* Damage to physical infrastructure and power loss have compounding impacts on businesses and residents.

1. Physical infrastructure damage requires long-term economic recovery.

* Significant damage to roads and working waterfront infrastructure prompted efforts to access disaster recovery programs, which are often limited in scope and not always timely.
* Efforts to restore infrastructure before the start of tourist and fishing seasons required shorter-term fixes than would otherwise have been implemented.

1. Isolation of community members heightens vulnerabilities.

* Blocked roads and limited access to warming shelters isolated residents, particularly those with mobility challenges, increasing their risk levels.
* Lack of familiarity with local resources specifically and Maine’s climate generally, may have resulted in seasonal residents and New Mainers experiencing isolation and increased impacts of storms.

1. Community support networks and cross-sector collaborations are essential.

* Neighbors play a crucial role in sharing resources, food, and providing welfare checks, demonstrating the importance of strong local connections.
* Proactive planning, better access to resources, and enhanced cross-sector collaboration are vital for addressing the multifaceted impacts of storms.

### What we learned from the Community Leaders’ Workshop

#### Prioritizing Impacts

The Community Leaders’ Workshop engaged representatives from each of the five sectors in table discussions. Building upon what we had learned from the focus groups, interviews and community dinner conversations, leaders were asked to prioritize the key impacts of the winter 2023–2024 storm events. We have included the list of all the impacts identified by focus groups, interviews and at the community dinner in the table on pages 9–12 below.

After facilitated discussion at each table, participants prioritized the key impacts by ranking from 9 (most critical) to 1 (least critical). Next the votes from all of the tables were tallied. The list below identifies the prioritization of these impacts, as ranked by the entire group of participating leaders (the overall numeric rankings are included in parentheses). Participants noted that many of the impacts were connected.

* (244) - Power Outages
* (239) - Communication Gaps
* (187) - Physical and Mental Health and Safety
* (183) - Challenges with Accessing Resources
* (173) - Food Insecurity
* (169) - Community Support Networks and Cross-Sector Collaborations
* (158) - Isolated Community Members
* (124) - Physical Infrastructure Damage/ Long-Term Economic Recovery
* (88) - Economic and Educational Disruptions

#### Identifying Strategies to Address Impacts

In the second half of the workshop, each table was assigned a specific impact (i.e. power outages) to discuss and develop strategies and actions that addressed this impact. These strategies and actions include things like improving communication networks, education and outreach on storm preparedness, developing volunteer networks, for example. A full summary of the developed action items is available in the full Lincoln County Social Resilience Project report (available at [Maine Sea Grant](https://seagrant.umaine.edu/focus-areas/communities-and-economies/the-social-resilience-project/lincoln-county-social-resilience-project/)).

#### Identifying Next Steps

In a follow-up survey, participants in the Community Leaders’ Workshop were asked to determine if the identified strategies and actions should be taken in the short or long term. Several action items were identified as key to take in both the short term and long term.

### Actions identified by community leaders to take in both the short and long term

* **Diversify Communications**. Develop a communication system that includes a diverse range of tools and approaches.
* **Storm Preparedness Education**. Increase education on storm preparedness to community members during non-emergencies highlighting existing resources and provide storm preparation guides in advance of storms as needed.
* **Volunteer Networks**. Develop and expand volunteer networks and training resources for storm preparedness and immediate recovery.

### Actions to take in the short term

* **Neighbor-to-Neighbor Programs**. Expand neighbor-to-neighbor/support networks and local/neighborhood emergency planning.
* **Wellness Checks**. Know and support our communities by identifying vulnerable community members and expanding opt-in for wellness checks.

### Actions to take in the long term

* **Long term recovery planning**. Develop strategies for longer term recovery needs such identifying grant opportunities or expanding the pool of local contractors.
* **Regional Resources Inventory**. Inventory local support resources available at different stages (preparation, response, recovery) and make this inventory readily available to residents and organizations.
* **Storm Preparedness Education**. Increase education on storm preparedness to community members during non-emergencies highlighting existing resources and provide storm preparation guides in advance of storms as needed
* **Volunteer Networks**. Develop and expand volunteer networks and training resources for storm preparedness and immediate recovery.

### Other Findings from the Follow Up Survey

The community leaders’ responses to the follow up survey also provided other important findings that may be helpful in moving Lincoln County toward increased social resilience.

#### Increased Perception of Involvement in Addressing Emergencies

After participating in the workshop, there was a significant (15 percentage points) increase in the number of community leaders who indicated that their organization could be very involved in preparing for, responding to, or recovering from emergencies. This suggests that engaging with leaders from other sectors helped participants to clarify how services provided by their organizations could be valuable during emergencies.

#### Increased Perception of Involvement in Addressing Social Impacts Associated with Storm Events.

While there was very little change in how community leaders viewed their organization's involvement in addressing physical damage from storms, their views on involvement with social impacts changed dramatically. Before the workshop, 19% of leaders indicated that their organizations could be involved to very involved with addressing social impacts, and after the workshop that number increased to 41%. This suggests that engaging with leaders from other sectors helped leaders to increase their understanding of the social impacts that result from emergencies, and also to clarify how the services provided by their organizations could help to address these impacts.

#### Leaders Identification of the Groups Most Vulnerable to Storm Events

The groups below were ranked as most vulnerable by community leaders in the follow up survey.

Low-income households

Individuals 65 or over and living alone

Individuals experiencing housing insecurity

Individuals experiencing food insecurity

Individuals 65 or over

Households below poverty

Households without a vehicle

Individuals who are uninsured/underinsured

Households with one or more members with a disability

#### Leaders Identification of New Partnerships

In the follow up survey, the organizations below were most commonly identified as new partners by community leaders. This suggests that community leaders are receptive to collaboration generally and with these organizations in particular.

Lincoln County Emergency Management Agency (EMA)

Central Lincoln County YMCA

Maine Coastal Program

Central Maine Power (CMP)

Healthy Lincoln County

Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)/American Red Cross

Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission (LCRPC)

#### Key Takeaways from the Workshop

At the conclusion of the follow up survey, leaders were asked to identify a key takeaway they gained from participating in the workshop. Participants emphasized the importance of **continued collaboration across sectors** and across scales (from local to state) in order to craft approaches to meet the needs of the region’s most vulnerable residents. Leaders also identified the importance of **communication and learning about other resources** and the need for **planning and preparedness**. Below are several quotes from leaders on these themes:

Collaboration, Networks, Partnerships

“There are so many aspects of social resilience in place that I didn't know about and collaboration is key!!”

Communication, Awareness of Resources

“Gathering groups together and making people aware of who and what is out there makes a huge impact.”

Planning, Preparedness

“Work should occur outside of storm events so we're better prepared/coordinated when a storm or other event occurs.”

## Summary of Impacts, Themes, Gaps, Resources, and Opportunities

The table below summarizes what we learned from the focus groups, interviews, and community dinner conversations conducted as part of the Lincoln County Social Resilience Project. The table was shared with community leaders in advance of the Learning from last year’s storms: Coordinating actions we can take to prepare workshop:

**IMPACT**: Primary impacts of the 2023 - 2024 winter storms as reported by community members and community service providers.

**KEY THEME**: Specific ways community members were affected by the identified impacts, with a focus on those at heightened risk.

**IDENTIFIED GAPS**: Areas where community members and service providers noted the absence of resources needed to address the identified impacts.

**EXISTING RESOURCES:** Resources identified by community members and service providers as available and potentially useful in addressing the identified impacts.

**POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES**: Actions suggested by community members and service providers to address the identified impacts.

| **IMPACT** | **KEY THEME** | **IDENTIFIED GAPS** | **EXISTING RESOURCES** | **POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Power Outages | Extended power outages disrupt essential functions like heating, cooking, water access, and medical device use, particularly for older residents and those with health issues. | Limited access to functioning generators  Difficulties repairing/replacing backup systems  Limited heating options for older homes | Generators  Wood stoves  Neighbors assisting with backup systems | Expand generator lending programs  Enhance funding for wood stove installation and maintenance |
| 1. Food Insecurity | Frequent outages result in food spoilage, with low-income and fixed-income households struggling to replace perishable items. | Difficulty replacing spoiled food  Limited access to food pantries during storms  Stigma in accessing food resources | Food pantries; Community refrigerators  Sharing tables (e.g., Healthy Lincoln County) | Increase community food-sharing programs  Support local food production to reduce dependency on supply chains |
| 1. Communication Gaps | Power and internet outages hinder information access, leaving vulnerable community members reliant on neighbors and landlines. | Inconsistent information sharing due to lack of centralized communication system  Power outages disrupt communication  Residents without cell phones or internet face challenges accessing updates | Local Facebook pages  Code Red opt-in alerts  CMP updates  Local/family networks | Create centralized communication systems  Develop opt-in communication systems for updates and preparedness  Improve outreach about existing communication pathways  Provide real-time updates on storm impacts and resources  Create neighborhood-based support teams |
| 1. Challenges with Accessing Resources | Inaccessible roads limit access to food, supplies and warming shelters. | Inaccessible private roads due to flood/wood debris  Limited transportation to food, supplies, and warming shelters | Mutual aid agreements for clearing roads  Neighbors helping neighbors  Warming shelters  Services provided by social service agencies | Develop emergency transportation solutions  Extend plowing services to private roads  Develop volunteer network to help with road and driveway clearing |
| 1. Physical and Mental Health and Safety | Power outages and blocked roads prevent access to needed emergency services and information, threatening community members’ physical and mental health and safety in the short and long term. | Low shelter utilization due to pets and safety concerns  Lack of support for medical devices during power outages  Mental health impacts caused by traumatic events | Emergency shelters  Assistance from neighbors  Regional mental health services | Offer pet-friendly shelters  Provide proactive prescription and medical device support  Develop town-based lists of residents using medical devices that require power |
| 1. Economic and Educational Disruptions | Occurrence of multiple storm events in short time periods resulted in the vulnerability of community members who have not generally been at risk in the past. | Loss of income and childcare due to work and school closures  Food insecurity and education disruptions for children  Impacts to communities and businesses due to prolonged infrastructure damage and power loss | Regional aid for road clearing | Restructure, simplify access to disaster aid  Develop localized financial assistance initiatives |
| 1. Physical Infrastructure Damage/ Long-Term Economic Recovery | Significant damage to roads and working waterfront infrastructure prompted efforts to access disaster recovery programs, which are often limited in scope and not always timely | Insufficient skilled workers for storm recovery  Delays in repairs due to labor shortages  Limited access to disaster recovery programs | Local contractors and repair services  Networks and resources that towns can mobilize to repair damage  Private businesses that are able to assist residents in the short term | Expand trade skill education (e.g., carpentry)  Increase availability of contractors |
| 1. Isolated Community Members | Blocked roads and limited access to warming shelters isolated residents, particularly those with mobility challenges, increasing their risk levels. | Lack of organized volunteer networks  Reduced connections due to political differences  Lack of familiarity and connections for seasonal residents and New Mainers | Neighbors sharing food and resources  Volunteer efforts | Establish formal volunteer programs for wellness checks and recovery  Facilitate resource-sharing systems |
| 1. Community Support Networks and Cross-Sector Collaborations | Neighbors play a crucial role in sharing resources, food, and providing welfare checks, demonstrating the importance of strong local connections.  Proactive planning, better access to resources, and enhanced cross-sector collaboration are vital for addressing the multifaceted impacts of storms. | Coordination challenges between municipalities  Differences in town capacities for storm response | Mutual aid agreements  Cross-sector collaboration (e.g., emergency management and social services) | Foster partnerships for resource sharing (e.g., grant writing)  Build resilient infrastructure  Expand and enhance volunteer networks for storm recovery and response |

1. **Social Vulnerability** relates to the circumstances of a person or community that affect their capacity to anticipate, confront, repair, and recover from the effects of a disaster. [Learn more here.](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1N_CvrQPNlz7ysUm_jhdXCwDWZURLp9w2/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=104019552046121071100&rtpof=true&sd=true) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Storm related updates” can mean communications when preparing for a storm event, during the storm, and/or recovery resources post-storm. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)