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CLIMATE READY AMERICA®

IMPACT REPORT 2023-2025

an initiative of the **GEOS**
INSTITUTE

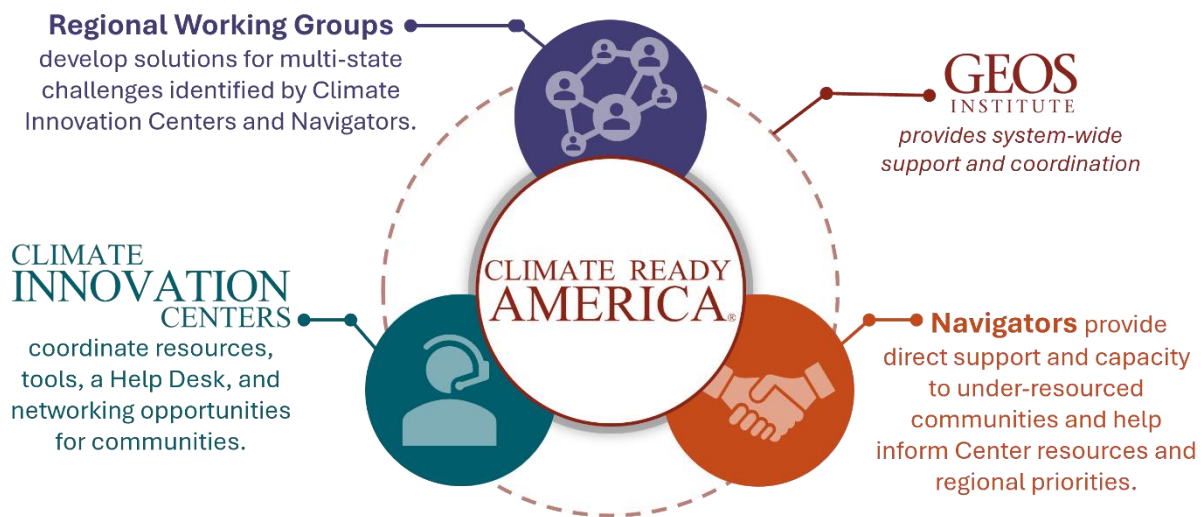
Cover photos (clockwise from top): Georgia Navigators meet with FEMA Administrator in 2024; Meeting at the Creswell, North Carolina wastewater treatment facility in June 2024; Students touring potential climate resilience projects in South Carolina in 2025; Coastal erosion and sea level rise threatens homes in North Carolina (Credit: Nicole Layton). All photos provided by Climate Ready America Navigators and may not be used without written permission.

Overview

Climate Ready America is a nationwide climate service delivery system that helps communities access the support they need to take effective climate action. Designed and supported by the Geos Institute, Climate Ready America is the product of extensive and ongoing collaboration with climate resilience practitioners, local government officials, community groups, federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, and academic institutions.

Geos Institute serves as the backbone organization of Climate Ready America, coordinating strategy, partnerships, and the shared infrastructure that enables communities to plan, fund, and implement climate resilience solutions at scale. We align Climate Innovation Centers, Navigators, and regional partners around a common framework, while providing tools, data systems, and support that reduce duplication and accelerate impact.

Think of us like a head coach - we bring together players with complementary backgrounds and skills, guide their efforts, and help everyone stay focused on the goal. We provide the strategy, tools, and support networks needed for effective climate action.



This impact report covers the first two years of Climate Ready America, starting with the launch of our four-state demonstration project in the southeast in October 2023. We express our deepest gratitude to the Walmart Foundation for their investment, support, and confidence in this model and our partnership.

Independent assessments of the first year by EcoAdapt and the second year by Urban Institute inform this report and illustrate the model's effectiveness.

Climate Innovation Centers

During the first two years of the Southeast demonstration project, the Geos Institute focused on defining and laying the groundwork for the first Climate Innovation Center in Georgia. Climate Innovation Centers are designed to become each state’s primary hub and one-stop-shop for climate services. Led by in-state organizations, Centers will bring together trusted climate services partners and technical experts, along with information, resources, tools, trainings, and a Help Desk to help local leaders take effective climate action. While tailored to the unique needs of each state or territory¹, Climate Innovation Centers will also strengthen learning across regions and help anchor a nationwide climate service delivery system that makes it easier to share solutions, scale what works, and accelerate effective action.



Southeast Region: Georgia Center – First in the Nation

In Georgia, the Georgia Conservancy stood out as a well-respected, long-standing organization with a statewide reach. They agreed to be the Convening Organization for the Georgia Climate Innovation Center and worked collaboratively with the Geos Institute and over 40 climate leaders statewide to form a Leadership Circle and develop a strategic launch plan for the Georgia Climate Innovation Center.

In the first two years, Geos Institute supported the Georgia Conservancy with:



¹ Each Center begins with a Convener Organization, a trusted in-state partner selected by the Geos Institute, that assembles a Leadership Circle of climate leaders in that state to guide and organize the Center’s programs and offerings.

Navigators

During the time covered by this report, Navigators served as the primary on-the-ground support for communities while the first Climate Innovation Center was still under development². Hosted by in-state organizations and supported through training and technical guidance from the Geos Institute, Navigators help local leaders in underserved, at-risk communities identify and take their next steps to cut climate pollution, adapt to climate impacts, and build long-term resilience.

Navigators also meet regularly as a regional peer network - sharing tools, examples, and solutions so communities across state lines can benefit from each other's progress. Their collaborative learning strengthened the overall system during this early phase.

Together, these first Navigators supported 64 jurisdictions across four states, with 5 FTE positions funded during the demonstration period.

Southeast Region: Direct Community Support

With support from the Walmart Foundation, Navigators were deployed across Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina as part of the initial demonstration of Climate Ready America in the southeast. Organizations in each state partnered with the Geos Institute to host the Navigator for their state. During the first two years of deployment, Navigators focused on supporting communities with Community Disaster Resilience Zone (CDRZ) designations³.



In the first two years of deployment, Southeast Navigators across the initial four states:

² In the full Climate Ready America model, Navigators will work in partnership with fully established Climate Innovation Centers. Centers will serve as each state's primary hub for climate services, while Navigators will provide additional, tailored support to communities that need more intensive guidance than a Center can offer on its own.

³ The first round of Community Disaster Resilience Zone (CDRZ) designations occurred in 2023 by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as mandated by the Community Disaster Resilience Zones Act of 2022. As of the time of publication, it remains unclear if FEMA will resume the designation process. The Geos Institute team is working with our project partners to determine an alternate method for identifying communities that would benefit from Navigator services.

- ✓ **Offered support to the jurisdictions that received CDRZ designations.** These are places at high risk for climate hazards that have high social vulnerability as determined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- ✓ **Established trust with community leaders.** Navigators reached out to all jurisdictions that had a CDRZ designation in the first year with 68% becoming actively engaged⁴ in year one and remaining consistently engaged through the second year.
- ✓ **Initiated 226 climate adaptation and/or mitigation⁵ projects (74 in year one and 152 in year two).** Navigators worked closely with local communities, listening carefully to understand their resilience needs, find resources, and access technical support, climate tools, and necessary funding.
- ✓ **Collaborated to bring in over \$7M in funding and pro bono support,** including eight Resilient Coastal Communities Program grants totaling \$1.37M in North Carolina to support coastal resilience goals in eight communities.
- ✓ **Trained local government leaders in seven counties across South Carolina,** educating over 130 staff and officials on climate resilience issues and solutions.

The impact of Navigators expands beyond the direct support they provide communities. In addition to the outcomes above, support from the Climate Ready America system enabled Navigators and their host organizations to:

Break down silos within and between local governments

Navigators foster collaboration across departments and jurisdictions, ensuring that resilience projects are integrated across multiple sectors of local government.

For example, in North Carolina, Navigators are collaborating with engineers who specialize in stormwater management, groundwater, coastal and riverine flooding to better understand compound flooding and incorporate future climate conditions. Designing and modeling projects based on current conditions and historical data creates an incomplete understanding of the vulnerability of communities based upon the life span and long-term functionality of engineered solutions. Overall, this collaboration will lead to stronger, more realistic data, improved project scoping, and more effective planning for the communities they serve.

⁴ “Actively engaged” means local leaders in the jurisdiction are partnering with and/or working collaboratively with their Navigator.

⁵ Adaptation refers to actions that help a community adjust to or prepare for the impacts of climate change. Mitigation refers to actions that a community takes to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

And the South Carolina Navigator, in collaboration with the SC Office of Resilience, co-developed and delivered more than 11 “Resilience 101” trainings for local governments, reaching over 130 staff members, elected officials, and appointed officials. The Navigator also engaged more than 280 government staff and officials in formal resilience conversations across departments, jurisdictions, sectors, and between communities.

Expand and strengthen their organization’s capacity

By leveraging assistance from the Geos Institute and the Climate Ready America system, Navigator host organizations are able to support more local climate resilience efforts.

For example, in North Carolina, the state government supported the Navigator program by funding an additional position and dedicates other team members within the State Resilience Office to provide technical guidance and program support. The Navigators have also been invited to advise cross-departmental working groups to offer discipline-specific insights that improve understanding of programs, policies, and funding mechanisms and enhance decision making.

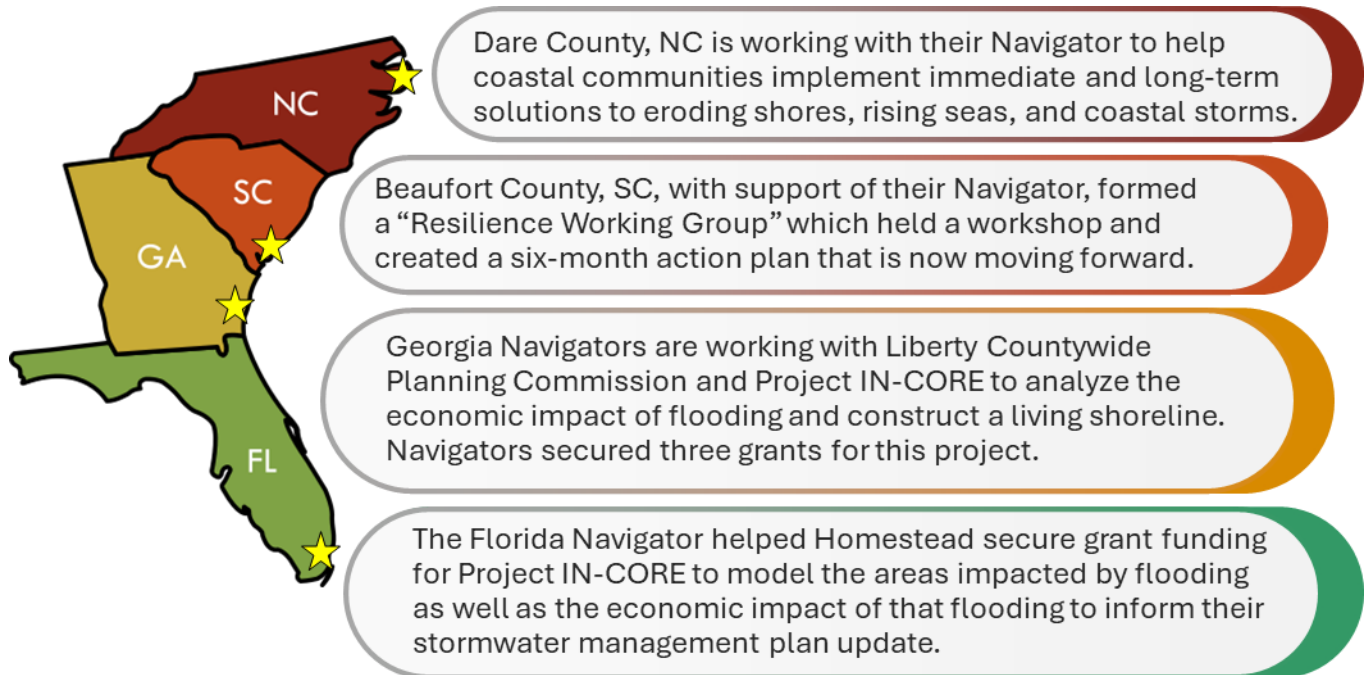
In South Carolina, Furman University engaged its Navigator as a bridge between faculty research, students, and community needs. This partnership has generated applied research on extreme heat and helped tailor academic work to the specific challenges South Carolina communities are facing. It has also provided hands-on experience for several Shi fellows and Furman students.

Lean on each other for support and collaboration

Through regular meetings and annual in-person gatherings, Southeast Navigators built a strong peer network that helped them troubleshoot challenges, share solutions, and accelerate local progress. They routinely exchanged tools, materials, and practical examples so no one had to start from scratch. This collaborative culture strengthened the entire network, reducing duplication so communities could benefit from the collective expertise of the Navigators across the region.

For example, when a Navigator developed an educational webinar, the materials were added to a shared resource folder so others could adapt and reuse them. Model ordinances created or discovered for one jurisdiction became part of a growing library available to all. Funding research was also shared—when one Navigator identified potential sources for a resilience hub, those opportunities were passed along to others working on similar projects.

State Highlights



Regional Working Groups

Leveraging region-wide expertise is a core strength of the Climate Ready America system. In the Southeast demonstration project, we tested several approaches and ultimately established Regional Working Groups as our model for identifying and addressing cross-state challenges and improving the flow of information from local communities to funders, service providers, and resource developers. In the first two years, Regional Working Groups included Navigators, regional organizations, and national experts who brought specialized knowledge of the issues being addressed. As the system evolves, these groups will also include representatives from the communities most directly affected by the challenges, ensuring that solutions are co-created with local leaders who understand on-the-ground needs and impacts.

These first working groups were formed through a two-step process: regional service providers identified ten “must-solve” issues for the region, and Navigators independently named three issues whose solutions would be transformative for their communities. Two topics overlapped and became Working Groups; a third Working Group formed around one of the topics identified by regional service providers. The remaining seven topics were not pursued during the period covered by this report due to timing and capacity constraints but may be addressed in the future. Insights and products from these working groups continue

to be shared through the Navigator network and will be further disseminated through Climate Innovation Centers as they launch.

Southeast Region Working Groups

Five-Factor Compound Flooding

This working group is closing a critical knowledge gap affecting communities already experiencing severe flooding decades ahead of scientific predictions due to several different types of flooding happening concurrently. By addressing the combined impacts of five interacting flood drivers, the group is advancing modeling that does not yet exist anywhere in the U.S. or globally.

Key outcomes to date include:

- ✓ **Identification of a nationally significant gap** in current scientific models that only account for three factors, leaving communities unprepared for the real-world complexity they face
- ✓ **Navigators connected to national and international expertise**, including the Practitioner Exchange for Effective Response to Sea Level Rise (PEERS) Network and researchers at the Cooperative Institute for Research to Operations in Hydrology (CIROH) developing new methods to couple multiple modeling tools
- ✓ **Direct and immediate improvements to modeling data** to help North Carolina communities through new regional partnerships with experts from Alabama and Louisiana
- ✓ **A longer-term potential research collaboration** between North Carolina experts and the CIROH team to build a new coupling approach to achieve five-factor modeling

This modeling effort could become one of the most innovative technical contributions of Climate Ready America to date, with potential benefits for flood prone communities across the Southeast and beyond.

Working Group Members: Geos Institute (working group lead), Project IN-CORE, North Carolina Navigators, PEERS International Network, MS-AL Sea Grant

Community-Led Relocation

This working group is laying the groundwork for a nationally scalable model for community-led relocation, addressing one of the most difficult climate challenges facing frontline communities. By bringing together experts in communications, finance, community

engagement, trauma, and climate science, the group is advancing a truly holistic approach to avoid the unnecessary harm experienced in past relocation efforts.

Key outcomes to date include:

- ✓ **A cutting-edge engagement framework** to help Navigators initiate and maintain these difficult conversations with communities
- ✓ **Options identified for situations where buyouts are not appropriate**, available, or desired
- ✓ **Trauma-aware training for Navigators** to recognize and support people who have suffered repeat trauma that is impacting forward momentum

Together, these elements form the backbone of a new best-practice framework that will help communities relocate safely, voluntarily, and with dignity.

Working Group Members: Geos Institute (working group lead), Project IN-CORE, Climate Access, Climigration, North Carolina Navigators, SWCA Environmental Consultants

Advisory Round Table: Self-Help Credit Union, Habitat for Humanity, International Association of Structural Movers, Cape Fear Community Land Trust, Coastal Dynamics Design Lab, Grounded Solutions Network, ScalingUpEMDR, InnSure

Barriers to Best Practice in Floodplain Management and Nature-Based Solutions

This working group is driving regional solutions to longstanding political and economic barriers that prevent communities from adopting resilient floodplain management and nature-based solutions. Their work strengthens the ability of Navigators and local governments to implement approaches that reduce flood risk and protect ecosystems.

Key outcomes to date include:

- ✓ **A refined analytical framework** that helps communities understand and evaluate barriers consistently across states
- ✓ **A case-study synthesis** that reveals common leverage points for policy, funding, and local action
- ✓ **Progress toward a practical, action-focused toolkit** that will enable communities to adopt best practices more quickly and with greater confidence

Working Group Members: Southeast Sustainability Directors Network (working group lead), Resilient Cities Catalyst, Project IN-CORE, Florida Atlantic University

Direct Technical Assistance

Climate Ready America is designed to facilitate effective and rapid delivery of direct technical assistance to the communities that need it the most. During the first two years, Geos Institute secured funding to support on-the-ground projects and developed partnerships with service providers, while Navigators identified specific community needs and connected local leaders with appropriate service providers.

Southeast Region: Community-Driven Projects

In the first two years, with the help of the Navigators, the following service providers delivered specialized support directly to communities to help them meet critical needs:



Project IN-CORE – Provides advanced disaster modeling that incorporates economic and social impacts to support effective planning.



Resilient Cities Catalyst – Facilitates cross-sector workshops that help communities quickly develop actionable resilience plans.

I show



Alloy Fundraising – Offers grant prospecting, grant writing, and training to build local capacity for successful proposals.



Climate Access – Delivers climate communications guidance and community engagement strategies.



The Resiliency Company – Develops innovative infrastructure financing solutions to fill gaps left by reduced federal funding.

Over the first two years, with the support of the Walmart Foundation, Geos Institute invested **\$548,650 in 34 projects across the Southeast region**, all provided at no cost to participating communities. Navigators worked closely with local leaders to identify priority projects and connect them to the appropriate service provider.



Technical Assistance Highlights

Resilient Cities Catalyst helped Beaufort County, South Carolina make rapid, coordinated progress on climate resilience. The Regional Resilience Accelerator Workshop aimed to foster collaboration among resilience practitioners in the Beaufort region. By bringing together 64 individuals from 30 organizations to share their experiences and challenges regarding advancing resilience to various shocks and stresses, the workshop inspired new partnerships and approaches to achieving goals and identified areas for improvement. Throughout the workshop, participants could learn from one another, elevate their own initiatives, and collectively map a path forward. Moreover, the workshop built momentum for the formation of a Regional Resilience Working Group which will serve as a mechanism to ensure the critical work that builds greater resilience is not only prioritized but is accelerated.

Project IN-CORE helped Chatham County, Georgia strengthen its resilience planning with advanced, community specific modeling. In the first year, Project IN-CORE developed a socioeconomic, compound flooding model that estimated potential flood damage and population displacement across the county’s seven CDRZ zones. County staff vetted the model, comparing its results to real flooding impacts from Hurricane Helene and Tropical Storm Debbie, to confirm its accuracy and value.

In year two, Chatham County presented the model publicly at the 2025 Hurricane Conference, demonstrating how it can guide local decision making. Project IN-CORE also

trained county GIS staff to update and maintain the model independently, building long term local capacity. The model has already supported a successful proposal for additional funding to support a countywide Resilience Strategy.

System Leadership and Coordination

Climate Ready America is a nationwide collaboration that brings diverse partners together through a unified framework, powered by the Geos Institute's leadership and coordination. The Geos Institute provides training, ongoing support, technology, data collection, human systems support, and funding to all aspects of Climate Ready America, ensuring the system functions well as a learning system and continually integrates lessons learned.



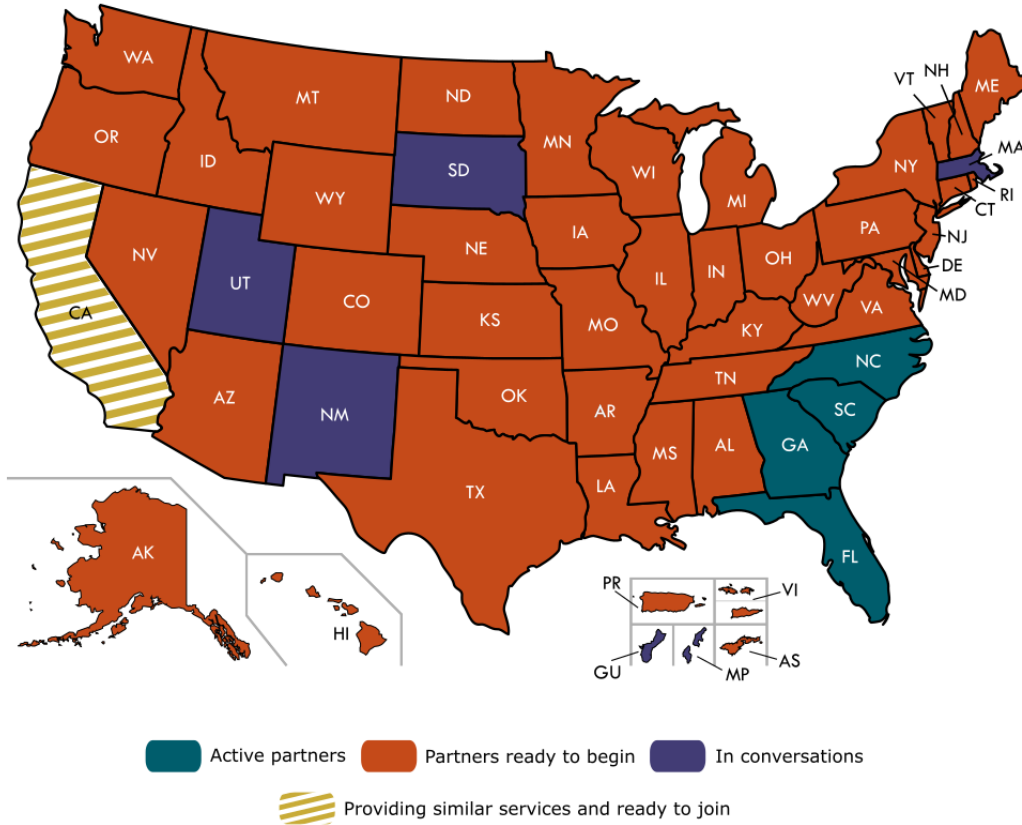
In the first two years of demonstrating the Climate Ready America model, Geos Institute:

Expanded National Partnerships and Guided System Strategy

- ✓ **Confirmed partnerships with 62 Navigator Host and Climate Innovation Center Convening Organizations** in 46 States and 3 territories, all of whom are ready to begin once funding is secured
- ✓ **Created a business plan** to support nationwide expansion that does not rely on funding from the federal government
- ✓ **Regularly convened the National Strategy Team** to guide development of the system
- ✓ **Convened Climate Ready America advisors** to elicit feedback on system level decisions
- ✓ **Developed a Communications Strategy** to raise the profile of Climate Ready America

Climate Ready America Partners

as of November 2025



Supported State Partners and Trained Navigators

- ✓ **Secured over \$3.3 million** to support the demonstration project in the southeast region, distributing 70% of the funding to Climate Ready America partners
- ✓ **Trained all Navigators** and provided ongoing support by convening biweekly network meetings and two in-person workshops
- ✓ **Supported the Leadership Circle in Georgia** as they conducted a climate services gap analysis and developed a strategic launch plan for the first Climate Innovation Center in the nation



Coordinated Technical Assistance and Resource Delivery

- ✓ **Identified and funded a team of expert technical assistance providers**, organizations with strong track records, innovative programs, and diverse approaches to provide direct climate services to Navigator-supported communities⁶.
- ✓ **Initiated and coordinated the first three Regional Working Groups**, directly leading two and providing coordination and logistical support to the third

Built System Infrastructure, Tools, and Evaluation Processes

- ✓ **Led the user research effort** to design Climate Innovation Center web portals
- ✓ **Developed a data collection and evaluation system** to understand the real-world impact of the Climate Ready America model and to help continually improve the system

Climate Ready America National Strategy Team

As a nationwide collaboration of diverse organizations, Climate Ready America benefits greatly from the guidance of a group of nationally respected leaders who help the Geos Institute set the strategic vision for the system as a whole. The following climate leaders served on the National Strategy Team over the past two years:

- **Nikki Cooley**, Co-Manager of Tribal Climate Change Program, Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals
- **Nancy Gilliam**, Model Forest Policy Program
- **Lara Hansen**, Chief Scientist & Executive Director, EcoAdapt
- **Micah Hahn**, Assoc. Prof. of Environmental Health, Inst. for Circumpolar Health Studies at the Univ. of Alaska-Anchorage and Geos Institute Board Member
- **Meredith Herr**, Deputy Director, Climate Access
- **Linda Langston**, Geos Institute Board Member, and former President of the National Association of Counties
- **Glynis Lough**, Director, Science for Climate Action Network, and Director of PEERS at the Aspen Global Change Institute
- **Atyia Martin**, Black Resilience Network and All Aces
- **Matt Posner**, The Resiliency Company

⁶ In this context, it should also be noted that the Navigators themselves have a great deal of technical expertise that they provide directly to the communities, as well as providing hundreds of referrals to other sources of technical expertise, much of it secured pro bono.

- **Andrew Rumbach**, Urban Institute
- **Lola Schoenrich**, Vice President, Great Plains Institute
- **Andrea Webster**, Resilience Policy Advisor, State Resilience Office, North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality and Geos Institute Board Member

Get Involved

To learn more about how you can contribute to building Climate Ready America and help communities across the country address the climate crisis, visit our [Contact Us page](#).