

## RES/CON Blog Post

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Beginning my internship at Greater New Orleans, Inc., I knew little to nothing on the field of economic development and resiliency. It all seemed like a different world to me; in my earliest research, which involved looking up different conferences and recording the specifics in a spreadsheet, I was finding that people used big words to describe big ideas—and none of it seemed tangible to me. For example, some of the topics and key tracks at various conferences included ‘Conflicts and Synergies: Adaptation, Resilience and Multi-Hazard Mitigation’ and ‘Understanding Risk in Infrastructural Ecology.’ Once I understood what resiliency really was, I saw the importance of it in relation to my own life. Resiliency dictates how we respond to disasters and crises; there’s an aspect of resiliency in everything from education to technology to architecture and beyond. In researching different conferences, speaking with members of the Greater New Orleans, Inc. staff, and attempting to better understand the resilience industry, I’ve learned what I’d like to see at a conference about resiliency.

RES/CON is a resiliency and disaster management conference held in New Orleans, LA every March. What used to be known as the International Disaster Conference and Expo, this 3-day event brings together everyone from policymakers to first responders and many more. Greater New Orleans, Inc. produces the conference, which is why the focus of my internship here was on RES/CON. Having done the research, I have a few recommendations for what I’d like to see at the next RES/CON.

The ability to network with those in your field as well as getting great takeaways from speakers and learning new technical skills all strike me as important aspects of a successful conference. As someone who loves the news, having sessions based around current events happening in the world would certainly peak my interest. I believe there’s a way to relate current events back to almost anything, but especially with resiliency. For example, I’d love to see a presentation on the Flint Water Crisis and what role resiliency is playing by the time RES/CON rolls around. Climate change is an important topic that I’d love for RES/CON to explore. A session on what a sustainable environment looks like would be interesting; pollution, waste, and sources of energy all seem to be part of a problem that we haven’t yet been able to fix.

Especially growing up in the Gulf South region, a session on disaster preparedness is of key importance to me. Also, understanding resilience as it relates to our education system, poverty, and crime rates would be a great way to humanize what it means to be resilient in your own community. As a student myself, I’d love to see RES/CON engage students in some way. Sessions that are specifically targeted to students are one way to grasp their attention. This could require having students think critically about what’s happening on their college campus and how resiliency factors into that. I think that if you tie everything back to something that resonates with you, it makes the conference all the more effective and gives presenters an opportunity to drive their point home. Other opportunities to engage students include offering discounted registration rates and student volunteer opportunities, as well as partnering with local universities to make it easier for a group of students to attend.

Hosting special events for a particular group of people, such as women, is something that RES/CON has done in the past and that I would encourage them to continue to do in the future. RES/CON also did a 'Locals Day' last year, which consisted of a discussion on resiliency in the region. I think that specificity and the ability to personalize a conference is really what can set one conference apart from another. By drawing on those differences, conferences like RES/CON can bring people from all over the world together because of its host city, New Orleans, and because of the example the city has been when it comes to resiliency. For one, New Orleans recently commemorated 10 years since Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf South region. The recovery of the city has been a tremendous example of the role resiliency plays in the wake of a natural disaster. Just a few years post-Katrina, the same region was subject to a different type of disaster—the BP Oil Spill. Its leadership in costal restoration can be looked at by other regions as a success. The development of the nation's first urban water plan to the creation of thousands of jobs has made the region a prime example of resiliency.

All in all, there are hundreds of different directions that a conference like RES/CON could take. By keeping the key tracks and topics clear and specific, attendees will be able to learn a lot and get better takeaways than they would otherwise. Huge amounts of information and choice when it comes to selecting a session to attend leads to attendees feeling overwhelmed and like they missed out on something. Having clear and decisive topics will help attendees have a better experience and keep them coming back year after year.