

CONVERGE COVID-19 Working Groups for Public Health and Social Sciences Research

Research Agenda-Setting Paper

This paper was written to help advance convergence-oriented research in the hazards and disaster field. It highlights areas where additional research could contribute new knowledge to the response to and recovery from the pandemic and other disasters yet to come. Questions about the research topics and ethical and methodological issues highlighted here should be directed to the authors who contributed to this paper.

Working Group Name:

Gateway Communities and the Impacts of COVID-19

Working Group Description:

Gateway communities are particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19 and related impacts. As a result, many of these communities are taking proactive and innovative actions to respond to the outbreak. This Working Group is designed to assist gateway communities in responding to and recovering from COVID-19 while studying their vulnerabilities and determining what can be learned from their experiences to enhance community resilience.

Priority Research Topics and Specific Research Questions:

Gateway communities throughout the U.S. are facing a number of unprecedented challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has become apparent that small communities near national parks and other scenic natural amenities lack the appropriate medical supplies, staff, and resources to test for and treat a large-scale infectious disease. These communities also often lack the information, data, staffing, and planning mechanisms needed to proactively respond to a rapidly developing human health and economic crisis. Unfortunately, due to their reliance on tourism and the transient nature of their populations, many of these towns and cities are getting hit particularly hard by COVID-19 or are at risk of major outbreaks. With the decline in tourism, they are also some of the hardest hit economically, with some communities already seeing devastating impacts on local employees and businesses.

This Working Group has identified the below research topics and associated research questions to help drive academic attention to gateway communities, particularly regarding questions and concerns related to COVID-19 and its impacts and potential implications for these places. Many of these questions are interrelated and can be studied in tandem.

Priority Research Topics	Potential Research Questions
1. Gateway Community Vulnerability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Research Question 1</u>: What root causes and sources of vulnerability is COVID-19 illuminating in gateway communities?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 2</u>: Which, if any of these, are unique to gateway communities? How and why? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: Do these vulnerabilities help distinguish gateway communities from other rural communities? How so? • <u>Research Question 4</u>: How can these sources of vulnerability be effectively addressed?
2. Gateway Community Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: What are sources of resilience in gateway communities? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: What can we learn from the experiences of gateway communities grappling with COVID-19 to enhance the resilience of gateway communities (and other types of rural and non-rural communities)? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: What does resilience mean to gateway communities and what do they want/need to be resilient to? • <u>Research Question 4</u>: What are metrics that can be used to measure resilience in gateway communities? • <u>Research Question 5</u>: What, if anything, are gateway communities doing to prepare for and increase their resilience to future waves of COVID-19 and other natural hazards and major shocks?
3. Gateway Community Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: What does community well-being mean for gateway communities? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: What are metrics that can be used to measure the well-being of gateway communities? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: What factors (growth, economic diversification, equity, etc.) affect the well-being of gateway communities? • <u>Research Question 4</u>: How has COVID-19 affected the well-being of gateway communities?
4. Effectiveness of Different COVID-19 Response Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: How do different COVID-19 responses in gateway communities play out against public health, economic, and community well-being metrics in the short-term? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How do different COVID-19 responses in gateway communities play out against public health, economic, and community well-being metrics in the long-term? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: What can be learned by comparing how different COVID-19 responses play out over time across gateway communities, particularly regarding resilience-building measures and disaster response?
5. Amenity Migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: How does COVID-19 affect amenity migration to gateway regions? How does that compare to amenity migration to other rural areas? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: If amenity migration increases, how does this impact gateway communities and other rural areas, such as in terms of overall well-being, resilience, equity, economic diversity, housing prices, and other key concerns? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: What tools and resources can assist gateway communities and other rural regions in preparing for and managing “urban flight” and amenity migration, should they occur?

6. Regional Coordination and Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: To what extent do relationships and systems of coordination affect gateway regions and gateway communities' responses to COVID-19? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How can the social and organizational connections established through past hazards be leveraged to respond to future hazard events? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: How does COVID-19 affect regional relationships and coordination in gateway regions?
7. Cross-Region and International Comparisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: How do COVID-19 experiences, impacts, and responses compare across regions of the U.S.? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How do COVID-19 experiences, impacts, and responses compare between the gateway communities in the U.S. and in other countries? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: What can be learned in terms of gateway community vulnerability, resilience, and well-being through these cross-site comparisons?
8. Visitation and Visitor Use Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: Public land management agencies throughout the U.S. are experimenting with visitor use management approaches to cope with COVID-19. How, if at all, do these approaches displace visitors throughout gateway regions? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How do these approaches affect the acceptability of different visitor use management strategies, such as timed entry systems? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: How do these approaches affect gateway communities and local and regional economies?
9. Impacts on Outdoor Recreation and Natural Amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: To what extent does COVID-19 increase demand for and use of outdoor recreation amenities in and around gateway communities in the short and long-term? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: What are the implications of this for gateway communities and surrounding natural amenities?
10. Impacts on Tourism and Perceptions of Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Research Question 1</u>: How does COVID-19 impact tourism to gateway regions in the short-term? • <u>Research Question 2</u>: How does COVID-19 impact tourism to gateway regions in the long-term? • <u>Research Question 3</u>: How does COVID-19 impact gateway communities' perspectives on tourism? • <u>Research Question 4</u>: What are the desired conditions for gateway communities regarding tourism?

Ethical Considerations:

This Working Group has identified a number of ethical considerations related to research in and around gateway communities:

- Rural development experts believe that COVID-19 is going to greatly expedite amenity migration out of cities into rural areas, particularly to the rural West. In light of this, we feel there is significant urgency to studying vulnerability, resilience, well-being, and related concerns in gateway communities, (particularly western gateway communities, which are likely to be hotspots for this

urban flight) and to develop tools and resources to help these small communities prepare for and manage the growth and development pressures they are likely to face.

- While we want to draw academic attention to gateway communities, caution needs to be taken, lest we unintentionally drive additional growth and development pressures to these places.
- Indigenous perspectives need to be better acknowledged, included, and addressed in decision-making in gateway communities, as well as in research on gateway communities.

Methodological Considerations:

Some methodological considerations identified by this Working Group were:

- There is a significant opportunity to implement comparative longitudinal studies that facilitate the analysis of commonalities and diversities between gateway communities in many different regions, states, and countries.
- Gateway communities are often characterized as “small towns with big city problems.” As such, they have the potential to be excellent laboratories for innovative planning and public policy interventions that larger cities can learn from.
- Numerous “natural experiments” are underway in gateway communities and the public lands near them. We have a unique and valuable opportunity to study how COVID-19 responses in gateway communities play out and what can be learned about that for increasing community resilience and well-being. We also can learn much about visitor use management strategies by studying the experiments underway in state and national parks, protected areas, and gateway regions more broadly.
- Many of the things that influence the development, economies, and pressures on gateway communities are outside of the control of decision-makers in gateway communities themselves. The role of outside players—whether state or national government, public land managers, the tourism industry, the outdoor industry, or others—needs to be kept in mind.

Other Frameworks, Considerations for Collaboration, and/or Resources:

This Working Group is connected to a number of efforts and organizations that can assist with this research, disseminate findings, and help translate research into practical application. These include:

- This Working Group was convened by the [Gateway and Natural Amenity Region \(GNAR\) Initiative](#), which supports research, education, and capacity building aimed at understanding and addressing planning, natural resources management, and public policy concerns in gateway and natural amenity regions throughout the West.
- The GNAR Initiative hosts the [GNAR Network](#), a peer-to-peer learning network for gateway communities and regions around the West. The GNAR Network is actively engaging and supporting gateway communities in responding to COVID-19 and related concerns, while simultaneously collecting data on their experiences, challenges, opportunities, and needs.
- The GNAR Initiative is housed in the [Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism \(IORT\)](#) at Utah State University, which provides research, outreach, and partnership building to address challenges related to outdoor recreation and tourism.
- The [Western Rural Development Center](#) is a partner in the GNAR Initiative. The center has contacts in the 13 Western states, which will help with data collection and sharing results.
- Many Working Group members are part of Utah State University Extension and can leverage Extension resources and partnerships to assist with this work.

Working Group partners can provide the following sources of data, tools, and other resources to assist with this research:

- Tools to measure varied types of resilience in communities and regions
- A theoretical framework for studying community resilience
- Well-being measures/indicators and well-being survey data for Western communities
- Data from a survey of Western municipal and county leaders regarding COVID-19 impacts and responses and the questionnaire used for this study
- Methodologies for measuring visitation via social media posts and related data sets from national parks in the U.S.
- Visitor use management frameworks that can potentially be adapted to assist gateway communities in managing visitation.

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