

Tulane convenes leaders for inaugural Resilient Partnership Catalyst

April 06, 2026 9:00 AM Barri Bronston
bbronst@tulane.edu



Graduate students in Tulane's Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy learned the importance of community partnerships at the recent inaugural Resilient Partnership Catalyst. The event was led by Bradley Dean, a senior fellow with the academy (top row, third from the left).

As natural and manmade disasters grow more frequent and complex, effective partnerships are becoming essential to building resilient communities.

That idea was the driving force behind the inaugural Resilient Partnership Catalyst, a new initiative launched by the Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy (DRLA), a program of the Tulane University School of Social Work.

Held in March at the School of Social Work on Tulane's downtown campus, the catalyst event brought together representatives from government, nonprofit organizations, philanthropy, academia and the private sector. Participants explored how cross-sector collaboration can accelerate solutions to help communities prepare for and recover from disasters.

As part of the three-day gathering, DRLA graduate students teamed up with participating organizations for five weeks to create practical strategies that support decision-making and strengthen resilience efforts.

The event was hosted by DRLA in collaboration with the United Way of Southeast Louisiana Resiliency Center and Resilient US, a nonprofit currently in the planning stages that will connect universities, businesses and community organizations to work together on solutions that strengthen disaster resilience.

"Strengthening resilience requires partnership, and meaningful progress happens when we work across boundaries," DRLA Director Reggie Ferreira, who also serves as executive director of the Consortium for Emergent Disaster Resilience, told attendees. "This is about moving beyond conversation and toward action."

Founded in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, DRLA is now in its 17th year. More than 250 graduates of the program have gone on to work in government agencies, nonprofit organizations, international institutions, academia and the private sector.

The new Resilient Partnership Catalyst was developed by Bradley Dean, a DRLA senior fellow, to create a more immersive way for students and organizations to collaborate.

"Partnerships are fundamental to how organizations operate today," said Dean, founder of Resilient US and former director of flood and resilience policy at the White House. "When disasters happen — or before they happen — no single organization can do the work alone. We have to work across sectors and across organizations to make real progress."

Throughout the day, participants took part in panel discussions, networking sessions and interactive activities designed to foster new collaborations and partnerships.

One panel, "Bridging Resilience Cultures," brought together leaders working in government, philanthropy and nonprofit organizations to discuss how working across

sectors can strengthen resilience efforts. Panelists emphasized the growing need for partnerships as communities face increasingly severe weather and climate-related challenges. Speakers also discussed the importance of engaging local communities and cultural organizations in resilience work.

The event is connected to DRLA's Resilient Partnership Design course, part of Tulane's Master of Science in Disaster Resilience Leadership program. Through the course, both local and national organizations work with graduate students to develop partnership strategies for real-world resilience challenges.

Roisin Low, a graduate student in the program, partnered with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), also known as The Metro, after meeting two of its officials at the event. She and another student are helping WMATA develop a framework for building long-term community partnerships, which play a critical role in resilience by helping people safely evacuate, access essential services and recover more quickly after disruptions.

"The goal is to make this framework replicable and broad enough to use as a tool for building any partnerships," Low said.

Students also partnered with such groups as Green Light New Orleans, Footprint Project, Arcadis, the City of New Orleans Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness Office, Jefferson Parish, Halff Associates and RISE Resilience Innovations.

Several students joined forces with the United Way of Southeast Louisiana Resiliency Center. Michelle Clarke Payne, the nonprofit's chief strategy & resilience officer, said students will work on strategies that strengthen preparedness and recovery across Southeast Louisiana.

"My hope is that this partnership helps us build smarter systems, stronger collaborations and, ultimately, more resilient communities for our region," she said.

"By connecting Tulane's research and student talent with the real-world experts, we have an opportunity to turn ideas from the Catalyst into practical solutions that strengthen preparedness and recovery across Southeast Louisiana."



At the inaugural Resilient Partnership Catalyst, Agnieszka Nance (center) executive director of Tulane's Center for Public Service, participates in a series of cross-sector engagement activities designed to build resilience teams.