



# *Developing & Empowering a National Resilience Agenda in 2021*

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*Academy Election 2020 Project  
Working Group:  
Build Resilient Communities*





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## **ABOUT THE ELECTION 2020 PROJECT**

The Academy formed a series of Working Groups of its Fellows to address [Grand Challenges in Public Administration](#). These Groups were charged with producing one or more papers to advise the Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) on the key near-time actions that should be taken to begin addressing Grand Challenges. This is a paper of the [Build Resilient Communities](#) Working Group. It includes these Fellows' recommendations to identify paths to community resilience.

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# ***DEVELOPING & EMPOWERING A NATIONAL RESILIENCE AGENDA IN 2021***

***A REPORT OF AN ACADEMY WORKING GROUP***

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
ELECTION 2020 WORKING GROUP:  
BUILD RESILIENT COMMUNITIES**

## **Working Group Members**

Ellen Glover, Chair  
William Greg Burel  
Amy Donahue  
Kay Goss  
Stephen A. Hamill  
Pat Martel

## THE CHALLENGE

In November 2019, the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) announced 12 [Grand Challenges in Public Administration](#). One of these Grand Challenges is [Build Resilient Communities](#). Across the nation, America needs resilient communities with the capacity to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations. Such communities can bounce back from disruptions while providing a high quality of life for all residents. Resilient communities must be able to address preparedness, mitigation, and response for the whole panoply of potential and actual stresses facing communities.

The threats to our nation are multiple – climate change and its resulting impacts in serious weather-related natural disasters, our reliance on telecommunications and the Internet that is threatened by cyber criminals and state actors, and the continued threats in future or continued pandemics. The time is now to identify the paths to resilience, which will allow us to withstand these threats.

The need for resilient communities has been greatly highlighted by the current COVID-19 pandemic. The gaps in resilience and the disconnects between the various governmental layers and organizations are laid bare in a crisis of national impact. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly stressed the relationships between the federal, state, and local governments and highlighted existing gaps in trust and understanding. A patchwork of state and local lockdowns, testing and critical medical acquisition has proven to be a poor substitute for a collaborative federal, state and local approach to a national crisis that knows no state and local boundaries.

At the same time, there are examples of governments working together to solve the very serious, complex, and multi-faceted issues. The challenge is to identify and strengthen what is working while at the same time identify and repair the breakdown in the federal, state and local intergovernmental partnership.

In recent years, often in the absence of Federal leadership and support, we have seen increasing state and local skepticism that the federal government is a reliable intergovernmental partner and the related rise of the independent state, local and public-private partnership initiatives to

address the most urgent threats to community resilience. No path should be undertaken without a full understanding of the work that has been done, and the inclusion of key stakeholders in any new programs and initiatives.

Restoring the trust and partnership among the levels and agencies of government for building resilient communities is a critical challenge. In this paper, the Academy's Election 2020 Working Group on Resilient Communities proposes a path forward to build and repair these relationships.

## **TOWARD A NATIONAL RESILIENCE AGENDA**

Resilience as an essential dimension of societal continuity is not a new idea. Universities, nonprofits, think tanks, and government agencies have conducted myriad projects and studies over many years to understand resilience. A credible body of research now points toward how communities can successfully anticipate, withstand, and recover from calamity. Despite this body of knowledge, and growing threats to security, continuity, and health, our nation has not taken the steps needed. Consequently, the nation needs a more comprehensive approach to operationalize this knowledge and empower communities to take advantage of what theory and practice show can be helpful.

Motivated by this imperative, a national resilience agenda has been under active discussion and development for at least a decade, and there is now robust doctrine available. For example, the National Research Council and the National Academies' Committee on Increasing National Resilience to Hazards and Disasters published [Disaster Resilience: A National Imperative](#) in 2012. FEMA followed up with its [Interagency Concept for Community Resilience Indicators and National-Level Measures](#) in 2016 and its [National Mitigation Investment Strategy in 2019](#). The Government Accountability Office published a [Disaster Resilience Framework: Principles for Analyzing Federal Efforts to Facilitate and Promote Resilience to Natural Disasters](#) in 2019. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine published [Building and Measuring Community Resilience: Actions for Communities and the Gulf Research Program](#) in 2019. In 2015, the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense published the [National Blueprint on Biodefense](#) and in 2018

the White House published the [National Biodefense Strategy](#). NIST has established a National Cybersecurity Center of Excellence which regularly publishes on the rapidly changing topic of cyber security and defense.

It is imperative that we move forward from these policy foundations and strategies, not reinvent them. Doing so successfully requires four things:

1. We must understand essential truths about the nature of resilience and what it takes to create it;
2. We must incorporate the on-going work of State and Local government, organizations, and academia;
3. We must organize, manage, and resource our national-level efforts accordingly; and
4. We must build critical capacity.

Fortunately, there are many existing initiatives at all levels of government, in the private and nonprofit sectors, and in academia upon which to build. An important element of trust-building is recognition of the value of these initiatives and the inclusion of key players. In this section, the Working Group includes a non-exhaustive list of existing organizations and initiatives to be built upon by the Administration (whether reelected or newly elected) in 2021.

## **Existing Federal Initiatives**

### *Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)*

To a large extent, the current national resilience agenda has been promulgated by FEMA, which a few years ago added an Associate Administrator and reoriented itself more explicitly around resilience. This position supports FEMA's long-standing mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery programs. FEMA has articulated a sound nationally-oriented resilience concept and general strategy. This is an important foundation for national action, but it has yet to generate substantial action, meaningful investment, or demonstrable outcomes.

In response to COVID-19, FEMA received \$45 billion to support states and localities with medical responses and the purchase of protective equipment. This appropriation also funded shelter and food services and enhanced sanitation at airport security checkpoints.

### *U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)*

The *Agriculture Resilience Act*, introduced to the house in February 2020, would increase research, improve soil health, protect existing farmland, support pasture-based livestock systems, boost investments in on-farm energy initiatives, and reduce food waste.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, USDA received \$9.5 billion through the CARES Act to provide financial support to farmers and ranchers impacted by the pandemic. The act also replenished the Commodity Credit Corporation, the funding mechanism for agricultural programs dealing with income support, natural resources conservation, and disaster assistance.

### *Department of Commerce (DOC)*

DOC established the Opportunity Zones initiative from the 2017 *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act*. This program provides tax incentives for socially-impactful investments to support locally-driven economic development strategies in distressed communities. Since the program's inception, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) has invested \$347 million in 239 projects around the U.S. to support these zones.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DOC allocated \$1.5 billion of CARES Act funding to a variety of programs including those planning the economic recovery, preparing technical assistance strategies to address economic dislocations, and preparing or updating resiliency plans to respond to future pandemics.

## *Department of Energy (DOE)*

In May of 2019, DOE began an \$8 million investment led by its Cybersecurity for Energy Delivery System program to enhance the reliability and resiliency of the nation's energy infrastructure against both manmade and natural threats.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DOE received \$30.9 billion from the CARES Act for flexible funding directly to states, local school districts, and institutions of higher education to facilitate the transition to an online learning environment and to mitigate the damages to institutions and students in urgent need of support.

## *Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)*

HHS supports community resilience through programs geared toward health epidemics, extreme weather conditions and natural disasters, and unaffordable housing.

In 2017, HHS began the *Combating the Opioid and Drug Overdose Crisis* program, which includes continuing the State Opioid Response program, expanding access to treatment in health centers, and establishing the Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Program.

In 2019, HHS enacted the *Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America* initiative, which plans to give better access to treatment, prevention, and recovery services through several efforts including grants to key jurisdictions, expansion of access to preventative medication, an HHS global-domestic HIV meeting, and a further community outreach.

HHS continues to prepare and respond to natural disasters through several programs including a regional preparedness program, which improves local, state, and regional medical responses to a large-scale incident; a pandemic exercise, which includes intergovernmental and intersectoral collaboration; and the deployment of responders, medical equipment and supplies, and recovery specialists to emergencies.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, HHS provided \$150 billion to hospitals and healthcare providers. HHS distributed \$50 billion

to general fee-for-service Medicare providers and the remaining funds to targeted providers in particularly impacted communities.

### *Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)*

HUD's *Strategic Goal I: Advance Economic Opportunity*, part of its FY 2018-2022 Strategic Framework, mitigates damages from economic dislocations, extreme weather conditions and natural disasters, and unaffordable housing. HUD plans to accomplish this goal through several efforts including supporting fair, sustainable homeownership and financial viability, reducing homelessness, enhancing rental assistance, supporting effectiveness and accountability in long-term disaster recovery, and bolstering growth in opportunity zones.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, HUD distributed \$3 billion from the CARES Act to communities and non-profits to support the homeless, citizens with compromised immune systems, and Tribal communities. In a second wave of funding, HUD allocated \$685 million to support low-income citizens living in public housing.

### *Department of Transportation (DOT)*

DOT adopted the *Resilient and Sustainable Transportation Systems Steering Committee Action Plan*, led by AASHTO, to promote resilient transportation systems and support states' quality of life and economic vitality.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DOT allocated \$25 billion from the CARES Act to support urban and rural public transportation capital, operating, and general expenditures.

### *Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)*

Per the 2018 *America's Water Infrastructure Act*, the EPA requires completed risk and resilience assessments and emergency response plans from community water systems serving more than 3,300 people. EPA did not receive funding from the CARES Act in support of community resilience.

## **Non-Federal Initiatives**

### *National Governors Association (NGA)*

NGA has established the Center for Best Practices comprised of teams and divisions focused on the following resilience issues:

- Economic Opportunity--Economic & Workforce Development, Employment, Human Services;
- Education--Early Childhood, K-12 and Postsecondary Education;
- Energy, Infrastructure & Environment--Transportation, Water, Electric Grids & Broadband;
- Health--Delivery & Reform, Quality, Workforce, Public Health, Drug Abuse & Maternal & Child Health
- Homeland Security & Public Safety--Cybersecurity, Public Health Preparedness, Corrections Reform
- Link: <https://www.nga.org/bestpractices/divisions/>

### *National Association of Counties (NACo)*

NACo has taken the broadest possible approach to resilient communities including the following initiatives:

- Disasters--Adaptation & Recovery from Economic & Natural Disasters;
- Workforce--Retooling Workforce after Plant & Business Closure;
- Recovery & Prevention--Fires, Flooding & Storms Related to Climate Change;
- Public Health--Public Health Focus in Managing Disasters
- Social Impact--Mitigating Impact of Economic & Natural Disasters on Economically Disadvantaged;
- Alternate Energy--Clean Energy Alternatives to Fossil Fuels;
- New Economy--Job Training for Emerging Workforces
- Link: <https://www.naco.org/topics/resiliency>

## *National League of Cities (NLC)*

NLC through its Center for City Solutions, Sustainable Cities Institute and general sustainability has the following resilience initiatives and areas of focus:

- Climate Change--Adapting to Natural Hazards-Flood, Fire, Storms;
- Applied Sustainability Research--State/Regional Collaboration, Translating Large City Success to Medium and Small Cities;
- FEMA Challenge--Rebuilding an Overwhelmed FEMA System to Meet the Increasing Number & Size of Natural Disasters;
- Urban Sprawl--Relieving Environmental & Economic Stress on Aging Infrastructure;
- Infrastructure Approach--Reimagining Federal Funding from New to Repair, Maintenance & Operation of Old Infrastructure;
- Link: <https://www.nlc.org/program-initiative/sustainability>

## *U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM)*

USCM through its Alliance for a Sustainable Future in a joint effort with the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES) has the following resilience initiatives:

- Climate Change--Resilient Communities Focus is on Climate Change Mitigation;
- Legislation--Effort to Provide Federal Infrastructure & Energy Block Grant for Climate Change Mitigation;
- Federal Resources--Lack of Federal Resources to Address Drinking Water & Wastewater Mitigation;
- Rising Sea Levels--Extended Days of Flooding Threatening Everglades, Drinking Water and Causing Wastewater Overflows;
  - ✓ American Flood Coalition [www.floodcoalition.org](http://www.floodcoalition.org)
- Integrated EPA Planning--Compliance with EPA Unfunded Mandates;
- Rebuilding for Resiliency--Green & Gray Infrastructure to Mitigate Flooding
  - ✓ Mayors' Institute for Design [www.micd.org](http://www.micd.org)

- Link: <https://www.usmayors.org/programs/alliance-for-a-sustainable-future/>

## WHAT SHOULD BE DONE: AN AGENDA FOR 2021

The Administration in 2021 (whether reelected or newly elected) should take a number of specific actions to ensure that the nation has the capacity to build resilient communities throughout the land.

### **Recommendation One: Develop a Comprehensive Resilience Strategy**

To pursue resilience successfully, we must first understand the threats we face and their implications. Specifically, we call for the implementation of a strategy that includes and addresses the following key considerations:

1. **The nation faces myriad serious threats.** The most significant threats are in the areas of natural disasters and climate change with its wide-ranging effects (including intensified storm activity, flooding, wildfires, heatwaves, and drought), public health (including global pandemics, emerging infectious diseases, high threat pathogens, lack of access to care, and vaccine hesitancy), and cyber (including both malicious threats and unintentional weaknesses in our information systems, including data, applications, processes, and hardware). These threats have unpredictable and long-term impacts on economies, ecosystems, the environment, agriculture and food, transportation, housing, and utilities. These threats are exacerbated by the state of our national infrastructure (roads, bridges, water and sewer systems) and our health system (hospitals and public health agencies), as well as challenges with the affordability of housing.
2. **Resilience requires long-term commitment from all participants.** A fundamental dilemma of our policymaking and governance processes is that our very short-term perspective is ill-suited to long-duration agendas. We tend to live in the moment, focusing on the problems immediately apparent before us and seeking immediate solutions. Politically, we have a strong desire to realize success quickly, making it difficult to commit to an agenda

that must span decades. This leaves us vulnerable to problems that emerge slowly and solutions that take a long time to develop.

3. **Resilience requires ongoing investment by the public sector (at all levels of government) and the private sector.** A lesson of COVID-19 is that devastating calamity will strike, but the complex nature of our society and the threats we face make it impossible to predict what will happen when it does. Causes and effects are not proximate in time and are not linearly related. There are so many variables in play, and they are so interdependent, that we do not know how things will evolve. In the many cases where crises appear to have been averted, we mistakenly believe we are safe, and we are likely to presume we are more capable and less vulnerable to risk than we really are. As a result, the public and private sectors underinvest in resilience, deepening our vulnerability to risk.
4. **Resilience must be considered from a global perspective.** With increasing interdependence, threats propagate broadly, and solutions require collaboration across borders. Given the fragility of global supply chains, it is difficult to bring adequate and appropriate resources to respond quickly and effectively to crises. Resilience requires a focus on global continuity of operations and national continuity of government. COVID-19 and climate change provide instructive examples that we are globally inter-dependent.
5. **Resilience must become a societal characteristic.** Resilience practitioners and theorists have generally approached resilience within particular domains, oriented around specific disciplines or functions. This overlooks the inherently holistic nature of resilience. Resilience is created at the intersections of efforts like sound environmental programs, sustainability initiatives, a vibrant economy, and robust economic development initiatives. It also has a great deal to do with infrastructure writ large—from transportation to utilities to cyber to health—because infrastructure is what ties people and communities together. To build resilience therefore requires a comprehensive view that considers the whole picture of what makes communities survive and thrive when calamity strikes. We are built on stove pipes and functional boxes; we need a new paradigm.

## **Recommendation 2: Establish a National Resilience Director and National Resilience Office**

To achieve resilience across the nation, the resilience agenda must be funded and operationalized—to move from a high-level concept to a comprehensive, detailed, meaningful, actionable blueprint for how to rebuild appropriately in the wake of a disaster. The links from theory to action must be made, so that when a community is affected, we know how to deal with everything from the electric grid, to transportation, to housing, to the economy, and beyond. FEMA is an important partner in this agenda, and has a substantial mission focused on helping and supporting states, tribes, territories, locals and communities prepare for disasters and saving lives and property when disaster strikes.

A national-level coordinating office that has the stature and authority to lead the national resilience agenda is needed to give concerted attention to solutions that will limit the impact of threats, enhance national ability to provide national security and domestic strength, and ability to bounce back after being faced with major hazards of all kinds, enabling rapid and intelligent recovery. These challenges require dedicated leadership that cuts across all federal agencies, capabilities, and disciplines, that focuses on long-term programs, that builds enduring relationships with communities, that breaks down policy silos, and that fosters intergovernmental collaboration and cross-sector partnerships. We should, therefore, elevate resilience above existing cabinet agencies to create a new interdisciplinary interagency effort.

Effective practices for this effort may be drawn upon a variety of other interagency and intergovernmental efforts, including the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness to create an intergovernmental and intersectoral partnership to address this issue; the Director of National Intelligence to coordinate across the intelligence agencies and functions; and the Joint Commands in the Department of Defense, established to increase unify across the services.

Drawing upon relevant effective practices from these examples and other models for accomplishing interagency and intergovernmental goals, this new entity should:

- Operate in a joint way to facilitate decisions and commitments across the federal government;
- Work continually as an integral part of the life of communities across the nation;
- Engage top practitioners and academics to bring evidence to bear;
- Build strong partnerships with states, local governments, nonprofits, and the corporate and business community;
- Operate in a collaborative manner within both the spirit and the letter of established authorities;
- Recognize that states and local governments have already accomplished a lot and build upon this success by generating a national forum for shared learning effective state and local initiatives already underway.

To move forward, a resilience directorate should be established and staffed in the White House, at either the Domestic Policy Council or the National Security Council, and a Director of National Resilience appointed.

### **Recommendation 3: Increase Critical Capacity Across the Nation**

A new federal effort and organization must focus on how to build critical capacity. Although the concept of resilience is broadly accepted, it has been hard to get traction on it. Since resilience is fundamentally operationalized at the community level, a central challenge to creating widespread resilience is figuring out how to mobilize and support states and local governments. The federal government should ensure that its strategies and actions rest on three core levers:

1. **Resources are central.** It is very expensive to do what is really needed, especially given how expansively the resilience agenda is cast. Everyone wants to know who is going to pay, and incentives to invest in resilience are limited. Solving this puzzle requires more creativity. At the federal level, funders should embed resilience requirements in their programs across the spectrum of grant sources and uses, including tying funding to resilience-based outcomes. The HUD CDBG-MIT program and the FEMA BRIC program could be models for consideration in this regard. Such an

approach can incentivize resilience more powerfully than pursuing requirements through standards and compliance, which get debated endlessly without producing results. Creativity at the state level can also make resources more available. For example, one proposed approach would have states direct resources toward resilience efforts by creating special districts—analogue to school districts or fire districts—that collect local taxes and can also receive state and federal funds. To engage private investment, the Opportunity Zones program in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA, formally the Act to provide for reconciliation pursuant to titles II and V of the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2018, Pub.L.115–97) can be leveraged. Innovations like this are already being developed and initiated by organizations like [Global Resilience Institute at Northeastern University](#).

2. **Education is a capacity multiplier.** We already have vigorous professional education programs around traditional disciplines relevant to resilience (such as engineering, public health, and law enforcement). New interdisciplinary programs in areas like environmental sustainability are gaining strength. We could extend this educational agenda to create a multi-disciplinary resilience education program that would develop a new generation of researchers, teach public administrators about resilience, and teach policymakers how to be proactive in policy and program design. This approach can be operationalized as new stand-alone programs and also imported into existing undergraduate and professional graduate programs. Some universities are already experimenting with these sorts of programs.
3. **Infrastructure is the foundation upon which resilience rests.** There is near universal agreement that the nation’s infrastructure is crumbling, insecure, and inadequate for contemporary needs. Even absent a resilience imperative, this would need to be addressed. Though the level of investment required is enormous—some argue a program of the scope, scale, and commitment of Roosevelt’s New Deal is required—infrastructure is one area of bipartisan agreement even in our extremely polarized political environment, and affords an opportunity for progress. Any level of investment should be grounded in a new orientation: we should not automatically repair or rebuild what we had, but should build new

infrastructure and systems that are explicitly designed for the conditions we expect to face a half century hence.

## **CONCLUSION**

Ultimately, for America to be resilient in addressing the growing risks we face, the nation cannot continue its current approach. We must instead orient ourselves toward whole communities, operate in a broadly collaborative way across levels of government and sectors of the economy, explicitly incentivize action, increase our knowledge, and invest more. If we do not, we will face severe social and economic disruption and great loss.

Becoming resilient will require a collaborative effort across all levels of government and economic sectors that builds on the work done to date. We cannot emphasize enough that collaboration is key to building the trust that is the foundation of any successful national resilience agenda.

## *Working Group and Staff*

### *Ellen Glover, Chair*

Former Executive Vice President and Group Leader, ICF. Former Vice President and General Manager, Dynamics Research Corporation; President, Impact Innovations Group. Positions with Advanced Technology Systems: President and Chief Operating Officer; Director of Operations; Program Manager; Program Manager. Former Senior Consultant, International Business Services; Computer Specialist, U.S. Department of Energy; Intern, Presidential Management Intern Program.

### *William Greg Burel*

Former Director, Division of Strategic National Stockpile, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Chief Management Officer, National Center for Public Health Informatics; Director, Administration and Resource Planning, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Homeland Security; Senior Disaster Logistics Official, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Homeland Security; Co-Director, Solutions Development Center, General Services Administration; Regional Facilities Systems Analyst, Internal Revenue Service.

### *Amy Donahue*

Professor of Public Policy, University of Connecticut Vice Provost for Academic Operations and Professor of Public Policy, University of Connecticut; Former Department Head, Department of Public Policy, University of Connecticut; Visiting Associate Professor and Founding Director, Stephenson Disaster Management Institute, E.J. Ourso College of Business, Louisiana State University; Senior Homeland Security Advisor, National Aeronautics and Space Administration; 911 Center Manager/Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician; Captain, U.S. Army, 6th Infantry Division, Fort Wainwright, Alaska.

*Kay Goss*

CEO and President, World Disaster Management LLC Senior Associate for the Learning Team for Emergency Management and Homeland Security, Booz Allen Hamilton, 2011-2012; Senior Principal and Senior Advisor for Emergency Management and Continuity Programs, SRA International, 2007-2011; Senior Advisor for Emergency Management, Homeland Security, and Business Security, EDS, 2001-2007; Associate FEMA Director in charge of National Preparedness, Training, Higher Education, and Exercises, (Presidential Appointee, Confirmed Unanimously by US Senate, 1993-2001; Senior Assistant to the Governor for Intergovernmental Relations, Little Rock, AR, 1982-1993; Chief Deputy State Auditor, 1981-1982; Research Director, Arkansas State Constitutional Convention, State Capitol, 1979-1980; Project Director, Association of Arkansas Counties, 1979-1980; Project Director, Educational Finance Study Commission, Arkansas Legislature, 1977-1979.

*Stephen A. Hamill*

CEO and Founder, Public Purchasing Exchange Principal and Founder, Shared Leadership Group, LLC; CEO and Founder, HB Capital Resources, Ltd.; Attorney, Hamill Law Offices; Assistant County Administrator, Alameda County, CA

*Pat Martel*

West Coast Regional Director, International City/County Management Association Former President, International City/County Management Association; City Manager, City of Daly City, CA; Assistant City Manager, City of Daly City, CA; Redevelopment Project Manager, City of Hayward, CA; General Manager Public Utilities Commission, City/County of San Francisco, CA; Assistant City Manager, City of South San Francisco, CA; Executive Assistant to the City Manager, City of Inglewood, CA; Staff Assistant, House Rules Committee.

## **Staff**

### *Joseph P. Mitchell, III*

Director of Strategic Initiatives and International Programs, National Academy of Public Administration; Member, National Science Foundation Business and Operations Advisory Committee; Associate Director, Office of Shared Services and Performance Improvement, General Services Administration; Director of Academy Programs, National Academy of Public Administration; Project Director, Senior Analyst, and Research Associate, National Academy of Public Administration.

### *James Higgins*

Research Associate for Grand Challenges in Public Administration, National Academy of Public Administration; Researcher, Cohen Group; Extern, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

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