

Shirley Laska is Emerita Professor of Sociology at the University of New Orleans where she served 31 of her 34 years of college/university service and specialized in community dynamics and disaster risk reduction. Upon her retirement 10 years ago she co-founded the Lowlander Center with Kristina Peterson and quickly added Alessandra Jerolleman to form the core personnel of the non-profit. Lowlander projects seek to support coastal Louisiana communities ranging from small indigenous and historied communities in rural coastal settings to urban populations also coastal but behind risky levees. The group practices participatory action research (PAR), a means of engagement that is a partnership to support the growth of power and voice for the community members involved in the collaborative projects with Lowlander. These range from:

- creation by four Louisiana-recognized tribes of the First Peoples' Conservation Council with the USDA/NRCS, to

- support of the goals of a native tribe to relocate/re-gather their members and to re-invigorate their community's indigenous culture with the relocation, to

- development by Louisiana's architecture program of the Louisiana Universities Resilient Architecture Collaborative (LURAC) to enhance resilient architecture through exposure of architecture students to extreme weather mitigation construction, to

- examination of ways to reduce risk to extreme weather by extremely vulnerable small businesses in coastal communities.

- Also, currently in development is a Lowlander project to support capacity-building of lower-income residents within the urban setting to achieve self-help risk reduction from extreme weather.