



# A Framework for Convergence Research in the Hazards and Disaster Field – NHERI CONVERGE

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## A Framework for Convergence Research in the Hazards and Disaster Field: The Natural Hazards Engineering Research Infrastructure CONVERGE Facility

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The goal of this article is twofold: to clarify the tenets of convergence research and to motivate such research in the hazards and disaster field. Here, convergence research is defined as an approach to knowledge production and action that involves diverse teams working together in novel ways – transcending disciplinary and organizational boundaries – to address vexing social, economic, environmental, and technical challenges in an effort to reduce disaster losses and promote collective well-being. The increasing frequency and intensity of disasters coupled with the growth of the field suggests an urgent need for a more coherent approach to help guide what we study, who we study, how we conduct studies, and who is involved in the research process itself. This article is written through the lens of the activities of the National Science Foundation-supported CONVERGE facility, which was established in 2018 as the first social science-led component of the Natural Hazards Engineering Research Infrastructure (NHERI). Convergence principles and the Science of Team Science undergird the work of CONVERGE, which brings together networks of researchers from geotechnical engineering, the social sciences, structural engineering, resilience systems, operations and systems engineering, sustainable material management, and interdisciplinary science and engineering. CONVERGE supports and advances research that is conceptually integrative, and this article describes a convergence framework that includes the following elements: (1) identifying researchers; (2) educating and training researchers; (3) setting a convergence research agenda that is problem-focused and solutions-based; (4) connecting researchers and coordinating functionally and demographically diverse research teams; and (5) supporting and funding convergence research, data collection, data sharing, and solutions implementation.

**Keywords:** convergence research, natural hazards, disasters, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, training, Science of Team Science, research coordination networks



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ABOUT RESEARCH NETWORKS RESOURCES DATA COMMUNICATIONS CONTACT

PREPARING TO CONDUCT EXTREME EVENTS RESEARCH

IRB AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

SOCIAL SCIENCE METHODS AND APPROACHES

TRAINING, MENTORING, AND BUILDING TEAMS

COLLECTING DATA AND CONDUCTING FIELDWORK

DATA MANAGEMENT AND DATA USE

DATA ANALYSIS AND DATA PUBLICATION

SHARING AND COMMUNICATING RESULTS

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EXTREME EVENTS RESEARCH CHECK SHEETS SERIES

APPROACHES TO SAMPLING

This check sheet summarizes some of the most commonly used sampling methods in social science hazards and disaster research. This list draws upon work by Shwartz (2008) and an analysis of Slack Response Reports published by the National Hazards Center.

- CONVENIENCE SAMPLING** involves respondents who are readily or easily accessible to participate in research due to proximity and/or availability. While convenience sampling may be the only feasible way to recruit study participants—especially immediately after a disaster—the data gathered is unlikely to represent the population as a whole.
  - Example: Schwab and Fisher (2012) used snowball sampling to identify and describe community-gathering places for residents and aid workers in less communities following Hurricane Harvey.
- TOTAL POPULATION (OR CENSUS) SAMPLING** involves research where the entire available population is included in the study. Total population sampling can be difficult, time-consuming, and costly when the population is large; however, when groups are of manageable size, this represents an effective way to learn from everyone in the sampling universe.
  - Example: Sim, Hsieh, Su, and Cui (2019) used total population sampling in a small village in China to study interpersonal communication and risk perception.
- REPRESENTATIVE (OR PROBABILITY) SAMPLING** attempts to draw a sample with characteristics reflective of the population under study, lending confidence to the generalizability of findings. This is most commonly achieved through random sampling, or selecting a subset of the population through methods by which all members have an equal probability of being chosen for participation. The following four types of random sampling are commonly used in survey research.
  - In simple random sampling, participants are selected in such a way that each member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen. A lottery system is an example of simple random sampling.
    - Example: Bortone, Bates, Lee, Chen, Allen, Poppo, and Adams (2018) used simple random sampling to assess connections between social capital and disaster preparedness among Mexican Americans.
- PURPOSIVE (OR PURPOSEFUL) SAMPLING** recruits specific participants based on their knowledge of, or experience with, a given event, topic, and/or phenomenon. Research using purposive sampling may or may not be generalizable to the population under consideration, depending on the study design and context. This approach to sampling can be especially useful, however, when there is no available or complete list of potential respondents and/or when specific knowledge or expertise is required.
  - Example: Shwartz (2008) interviewed 16 frontline responders after Hurricane Sandy to gather information specifically about the media's coverage of post-disaster events.
- SNOWBALL SAMPLING** involves identifying an initial set of respondents, then drawing upon their contacts and connections to recruit future participants. Snowball sampling may be useful in contexts where respondents meeting specific criteria are difficult to locate, entirely dispersed, and/or hold highly specialized knowledge.

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This Training Module focuses on culturally competent research and offers guidance on how hazards and disaster researchers can build cultural competence.

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This Training Module focuses on mental health outcomes associated with disasters, with a particular emphasis on risk factors over time that make certain populations vulnerable to poor disaster mental health outcomes.

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COVID-19 QUICK RESPONSE RESEARCH

COVID-19 RAMP AWARDS

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# Paper Overview

Offer background and approach for bringing *convergence research* to the field of hazards and disasters.

Motivate such possibilities in our field.

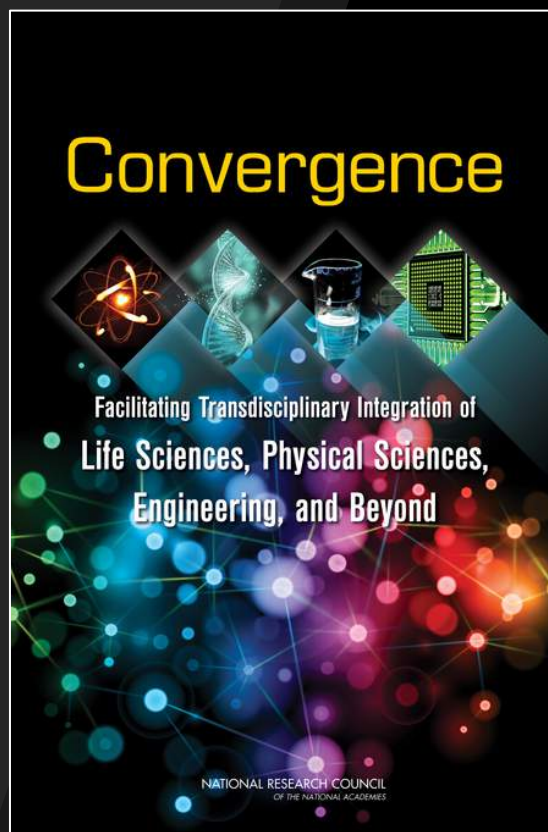
# Convergence

Convergence behavior – or “*the mass movement of people, messages, and supplies toward a disaster struck area*” – has long been of interest to hazards and disaster researchers.



# Convergence

This paper, however, focuses on more recent process-oriented and research-based definitions of convergence.



*Convergere:*  
*con-* = together +  
*vergere* = to incline.

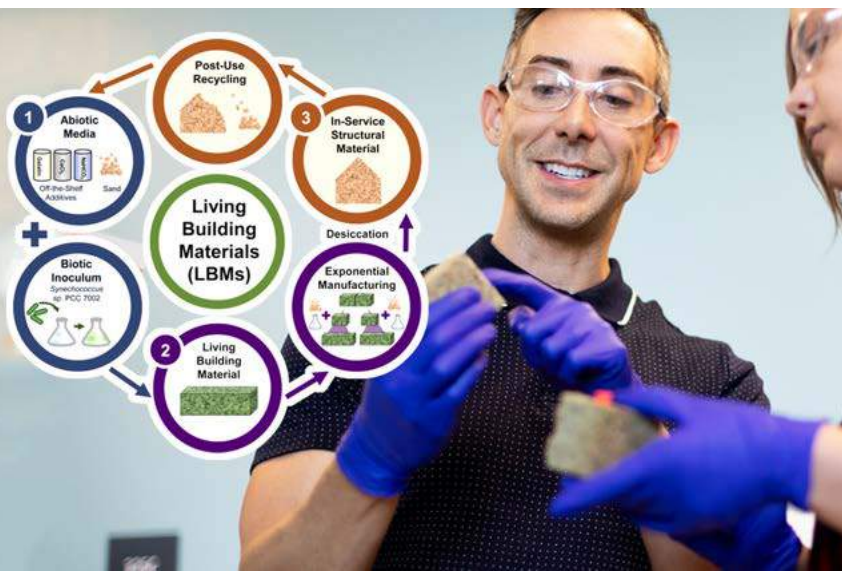
# What is convergence?

## (1) Research driven by a specific and compelling problem

Convergence research is generally inspired by the need to address a specific challenge or opportunity, whether it arises from deep scientific questions or pressing societal needs (NSF, 2019, p.1).

## (2) Research that involves deep integration across disciplines

As experts from different disciplines pursue common research challenges, their knowledge, theories, methods, data, research communities, and languages become increasingly intermingled or integrated. New frameworks, paradigms, or even disciplines can form sustained interactions across multiple communities (NSF, 2019, p.1).



# The Convergence “Revolution”: Gaps and Barriers

- (1) “...social sciences and humanities are under-tapped resources for convergence efforts” (NRC, 2014, p. 14). *(Yet, many of the grand challenges of pressing concern are at their core moral, ethical, social, political, and economic problems.)*
- (2) “Problem-driven” and “solutions-oriented” approaches can be highly fraught.





# The Convergence “Revolution”: Gaps and Barriers

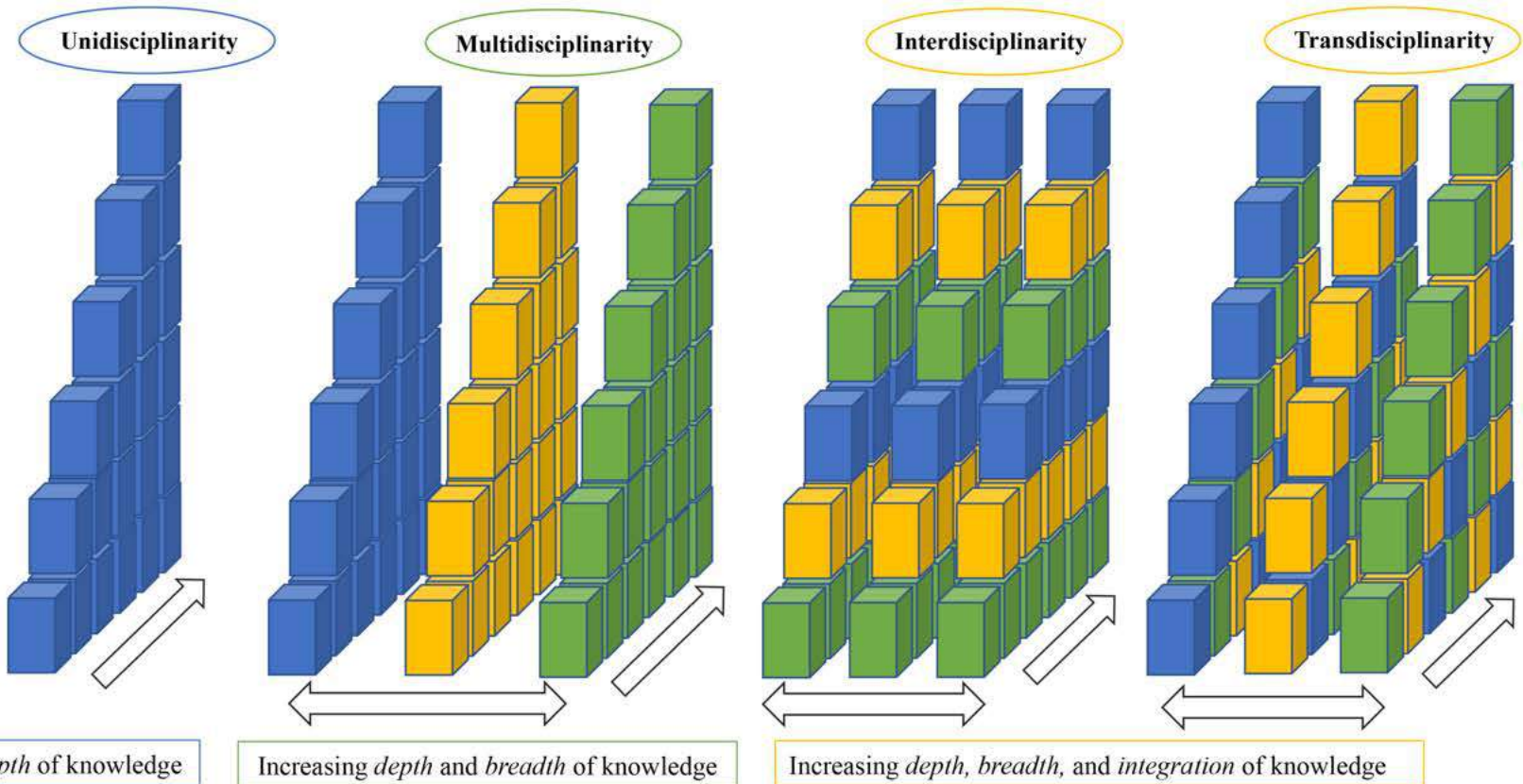
- (1) “...social sciences and humanities are under-tapped resources for convergence efforts” (NRC, 2014, p. 14). *(Yet, many of the grand challenges of pressing concern are at their core moral, ethical, social, political, and economic problems.)*
- (2) “Problem-driven” and “solutions-oriented” approaches can be highly fraught.
- (3) Structural and institutional barriers that threaten convergence research (e.g., shortage of researchers, inadequate funding, problems with organizational cultures, faculty development and promotion issues, etc.).
- (4) Lack of training, support, and incentives for encouraging the functional and demographic diversity that convergence requires.
- (5) How do you actually “do” convergence research? *(Science of Team Science (SciTS))*

# Important to Acknowledge: “Convergent-Like” Approaches in the Hazards and Disaster Field

- “the remarkable reduction in earthquake fatalities in nations such as Japan, Chile, and the United States is the result of ‘convergent-like’ research partnerships between geologists, seismologists, earthquake engineers, architects, social scientists, and public officials...” (McNutt, 2017, p. 2-3).
- Why “convergent-like” rather than true “convergence”? (2 reasons)



**“Convergent-Like”** – Most research in the field remains uni-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary in nature.  
*(Of course, plenty of important exceptions!)*



**“Convergent-Like”** – The field remains heavily (although certainly not entirely) in the **“problem-diagnosis”** stage. This is vital, but to move toward “true convergence” we need to consistently couple problem identification with potential **solutions**.



**The Hazards  
and Disaster  
Field is Well  
Poised to  
Advance the  
“Convergence  
Revolution.”**

**A definition for convergence for  
hazards and disaster research:**

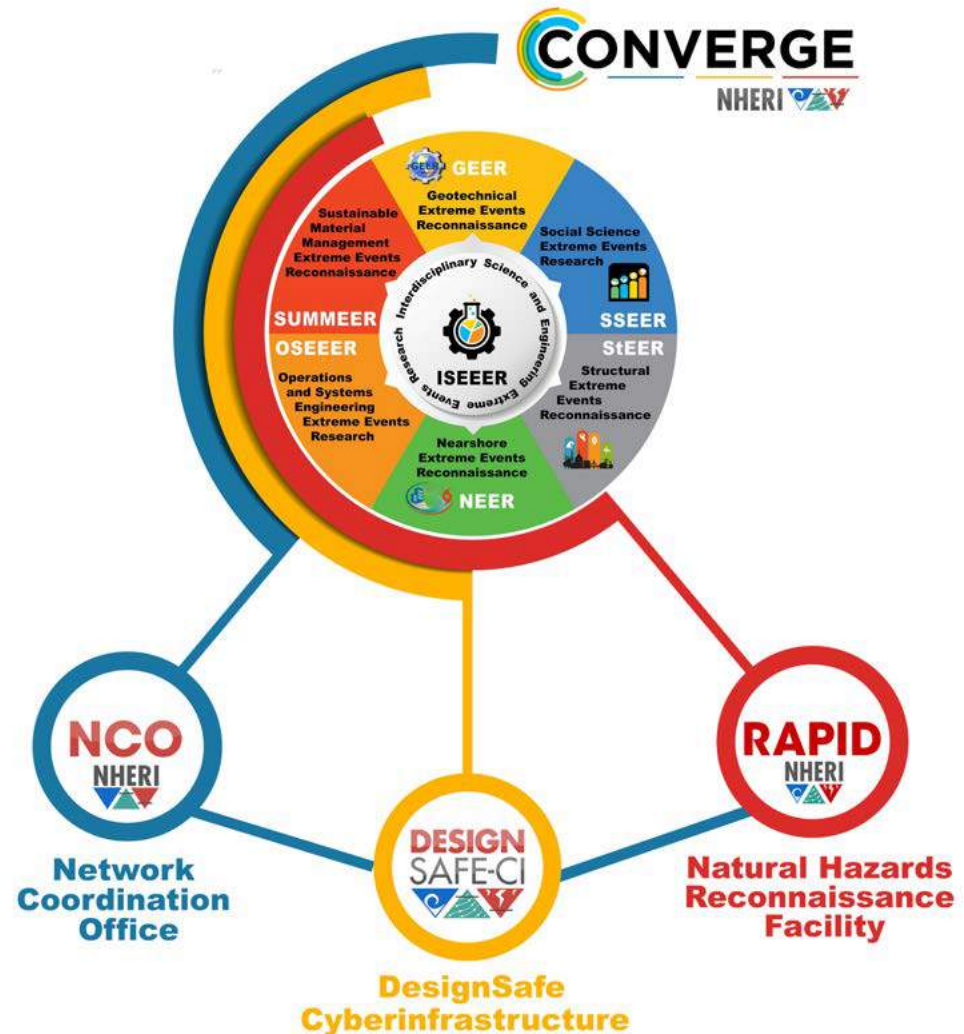
“An approach to knowledge production and action that involves diverse teams working together in novel ways – transcending disciplinary and organizational boundaries – to address vexing social, economic, environmental, and technical challenges in an effort to reduce disaster losses and promote collective well-being” (Peek, Tobin, Adams, Wu, and Mathews, 2020, p. 2).

# A Framework and Support for Ethical, Rigorous, and Coordinated Convergence Research



# Communicate, Coordinate, Collect and Share Data

Convergence requires deep disciplinary integration. Yet the challenge of connecting researchers across disciplinary divides and coordinating research teams is difficult and one that has long been of concern for those interested in participating in and supporting interdisciplinary research (Wilson et al., 2015) ... The nature of disaster research – which often involves the collection of perishable data and necessitates rapid team formation and deployment - does not always allow for the kind of systematic, measured approach that is required if an area of scholarly inquiry is to make substantial theoretical and conceptual advancements (Tierney, 2007).





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[converge.colorado.edu/signup](https://converge.colorado.edu/signup)



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