

The Adaptive Mind Project

Understanding and Building the Capacity to Deal with Constant, Traumatic and Transformative Change



Core Team

Susanne Moser, Ph.D. (PI)
Susanne Moser Research & Consulting, Antioch University New England & UMass-Amherst

James Arnott (co-PI)
Aspen Global Change Institute & University of Michigan

Kristen Goodrich (co-PI)
Tijuana River NERR & University of California, Irvine

Carol Berzonsky, Ph.D.
Antioch University New England

Theopia Jackson, Ph.D.
Saybrook University

Margaret Krebs
Leopold Leadership Program

Elizabeth Rohring
National Sea Grant Program

Kristen Baja
Urban Sustainability Directors Network

Victoria Benson
Movement Strategy Center

Steve Adams
Institute for Sustainable Communities

Our Vision

Climate adaptation professionals, resilience planners and community leaders everywhere who work on the frontlines of climate change have the psychological skills, capacities, and peer and institutional support to effectively and compassionately face the challenges of a rapidly, continually, sometimes traumatically and profoundly changing world. With this project we aim to begin to build the psycho-social support infrastructure to take care of those who take care of us.

Why This Project? Why Now?

- Emerging work on health impacts of climate change points to the growing risk of mental health challenges;
- Growing stress and burn-out is being experienced by adaptation practitioners, but human resources departments have not caught up with these needs;
- Grief, anxiety, fear, anger and hopelessness related to climate change are also increasingly affecting the communities adaptation professionals serve, but leaders are unprepared for these challenges; and
- There has been a distinct shift in mood over the past two years, surfacing an urgent need to build psycho-social support for those working on the frontlines of climate

What is an “Adaptive Mind”?

A set of propensities, leadership skills and capacities that allow an individual – embedded in social networks and institutions – to respond with agility, creativity, resolve and resilience to:

- Constant change, including surprises, rapid shifts, pervasive uncertainty and not knowing;
- Anticipatory, vicarious and/or direct traumatic experiences and change; and
- Challenges associated with deep, systemic and transformative change.

Expected Project Outcomes

- Improved understanding of what constitutes the “adaptive mind”;
- Greater capacities among “climate first responders” to cope with and lead in the face of climate change;
- Networked cohorts of people with adaptive mind capacities, offering mutual support to each other and bringing more effective help to their communities; and
- A greater acceptance that adaptive mind skills are central to a well-trained adaptation professional community.

**Target
Audiences &
Network
Partners:**



INSTITUTE FOR
Sustainable
Communities

urban sustainability
directors network



NACRP
National Association of
Climate Resilience Planners

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
ADAPTATION PROFESSIONALS



NATIONAL
ESTUARINE
RESEARCH
RESERVE
SYSTEM

Developing this Project: The Work Done to Date

- Initial literature review pointing to the breadth and diversity of relevant knowledge across many fields;
- (Ongoing) baseline survey of partner networks to assess the scope and nature of the challenge and needs;
- Relationship and team building;
- (Ongoing) outreach to potential partner organizations, funders, supporters and other interested audiences, which has played a critical role in shaping the core components of the project; and
- Fundraising.

Core Project Components: An Integrated Strategy

Landscape Assessment

- Fully integrated literature review across many disciplines and fields speaking to aspects of the adaptive mind;
- Practitioner baseline survey to ascertain current status, challenges and needs;
- In-depth interviews with project participants to deeply understand the psycho-social support needs of adaptation practitioners; and
- Opportunistic assessments of needs and challenges of adaptation professionals in the course of outreach.

Knowledge Integration

- Expert workshop to assess the state of knowledge on adaptive mind aspects and characteristics, including what aspects are trainable;
- Integration of existing scientific understanding with practitioner landscape assessment;
- Pre-and post-training assessments to evaluate needs and effectiveness; and
- Sharing results via peer-reviewed publications, presentations and other means.

Peer & Institutional Support

- Collaboration with existing networks of adaptation professionals, resilience planners and community leaders;
- Development and support of peer communities to continue to support adaptive mind practices and provide psycho-social support; and
- Engagement of employers, agencies and professional societies to foster awareness of and ascertain commitments to provide psycho-social support needs of adaptation professionals.

Training Development & Pilots

- Design and development of training workshops for adaptation professionals to build adaptive mind skills;
- Delivery of multiple training workshops;
- Post-training evaluation and adjustments;
- Compilation of adaptive mind-related resources, practices, made freely available on a dedicated website;
- Post-training follow-up and support of trainees and peer support groups; and
- Post-training interviews to ascertain lasting impacts of trainings and support.

Demand for this Project

Ongoing invitations to present on the topic and project

20 letters of support and commitment

Inquiries to expand the project internationally, to rural and agricultural communities, to youth, and to Polar and Pacific regions

Enthusiastic survey respondents

“Our community needs more efforts like this that truly get to the heart (pun intended) of what it is like being a climate professional in this day and age.”

– Project participant

**To learn more about this project, please contact the Principal Investigator:
Dr. Susanne Moser // promundi@susannemoser.com**