

Call for Participation in a Discussion Group on
Cultivating Resilience for Lawyers and Law Students During Crisis and Disaster

Due date: October 3, 2025

Introduction

This is a Call for Participation in Discussion Group on *Cultivating Resilience for Lawyers and Law Students During Crisis and Disaster* to be held during the in-person AALS Annual Meeting from January 6-9, 2026, in New Orleans. Discussion groups allow a small group of faculty to engage in a sustained conversation about a topic of interest. This discussion group's participants are expected to write and share a short abstract (3 pages, double-spaced) to begin their participation in the discussion. The rest of the session will feature a lively and engaging discussion among the small group of participants. The participants in this discussion group will be the individuals identified in the original proposal submitted to the Program Committee, plus additional individuals selected from this "call for participation".

There will be limited audience seating for those not selected in advance to be discussion participants.

Description

Lawyers often must rise to serve and respond to crises and disasters in their communities and must do so with competence, integrity, and courage in moments of acute stress and disruption. As public citizens, civic leaders, and advocates, lawyers have expertise, skills, insights, and capacities that are essential to sound preparation, emergency response, organizing, long-term advocacy, and policy reform. All of this can exact a toll on lawyers in practice or frighten lawyers from getting involved when urgent needs arise. These crises may arise from political and governmental disruptions, policy or infrastructure failures, mass violence, natural disasters or the like.

Many lawyers who practice in the field of disaster law are experienced in community building and crisis lawyering that incorporate resilience strategies. Lawyers, law schools, and bar associations have increasing need and opportunity to respond and serve, often even while they are affected themselves. In recent years, the panelists have worked with their communities to build resilience while responding to crises. Since major natural disasters are growing more common and more destructive, law schools and the legal profession should integrate crisis and disaster planning into their education models.

This discussion group will explore resilience as an integral practice and virtue for disaster lawyers and how other areas of law may utilize these strategies in their other crisis contexts. We will define and distinguish emergencies, crises and disasters, to explore vulnerabilities and strategies for lawyers responding to these events. The discussion will

focus on the role of lawyers, law schools and the profession to prepare legal first responders to address community needs and the responsibility of law schools to develop resilience as a core value necessary for future lawyers and community advocates.

Through the lens of natural disaster response and practice, the conversation will explore ideas to develop resilience and capacity among schools, students, and lawyers. This will set the stage for considering other crises and disasters that confront law schools and lawyers; how they may build resilient systems and practices to serve communities with excellence and care, quickly and confidently. These ideas may include creating law school consortia and shared resources; designing pro bono or clinic programs that are immediately deployable; teaching students and lawyers how to process acute problems quickly; integrating mental health and related insights to promote sustainable work in traumatizing situations; and cultivating creativity, adaptability, and courage in unstable and rapidly-evolving situations. We will specifically discuss strategies, tactics, and responses when government programs become unreliable, and individual states and communities may bear greater responsibilities for response strategy, policy advocacy and multi-state mutual aid agreements.

Throughout, the discussion will consider ‘disaster fatigue’ and the stresses on long term recovery work as lawyers help to build and sustain joyful and resilient communities.

Call for Abstracts

The Annual Meeting Program Committee invites faculty and administrators who would like to join this Discussion Group to submit a three-page abstract that addresses areas of law that intersect with disaster law, such as but not limited to, climate change, administrative law, property, insurance, poverty, health care, or disability; speakers from bar associations who have responded to disasters. Please submit by October 3, 2025. Current organizers and confirmed discussion participants include:

- Christine E. Cerniglia, Director of Clinical and Experiential Education, Stetson College of Law
- JoNel Newman, Professor of Law, Associate Dean for Experiential Learning, University of Miami School of Law
- Jeffrey R. Baker, Clinical Professor, Associate Dean of Experiential Learning, University of Alabama School of Law
- Luz E. Herrera, Professor, Texas A&M University School of Law
- Davida Finger, Loyola New Orleans College of Law

Space in this Discussion Group is limited; the Committee, along with the faculty organizer

who proposed this discussion, will select the remaining discussion participants from the abstracts submitted. At the AALS Annual Meeting in January, selected participants will make a one-two minute presentation during the Discussion Group. The remaining time will be devoted to a moderated, roundtable group discussion. The organizers of the Discussion Group are currently seeking publication opportunities in appropriate journals.

Each submission for this Discussion Group should include:

- The title of the submitted presentation/paper;
- The name, school and email of the applying participant;
- A three-page, double-spaced abstract that addresses disaster response and aligns with the discussion description related to current trends and legal issues related to disaster preparedness, resilience and response.
- The curriculum vitae of the applying participant.
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In reviewing the submitted abstracts, the discussion group organizer and selection committee will consider the following:

- The fit and overall quality of the abstract for the Discussion Group;
- The diversity that the applying participant may bring in terms of a variety of factors including viewpoint diversity, institutional affiliation, and status (tenure-track, non-tenure track, tenured); and if applicable.
- The applying participant's willingness to publish his or her paper along with other Discussion Group papers.

Abstracts are due by **October 3, 2025** and should be submitted using the online submission form <https://aalsweb.wufoo.com/forms/pc0l1ac030993p/>

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