Reduced urban resilience causes communities to be vulnerable to disaster events and high levels of displacement. Weakened resilience is the result of insufficient disaster risk reduction strategies, poor emergency preparedness, lack of adequate building codes, and high levels of poverty (Esnard, 77). Historically, cities have not learned from past disaster events nor have they adequately planned for anticipated disasters. The recovery process is learned anew after each event. Planning for expected disasters based on a city’s history alleviates the impact and reduces the recovery timeline. Planning efforts should range from city-wide strategies to local policy. Presently, the disaster-relief housing response is the same across the nation. The response for Miami mimics that of Manhattan though there are clear differences. These nuances should be accounted for to allow the housing response to be permanent, durable and desirable for occupants. These housing characteristics are ones that FEMA and similar response agencies strive for, but cost, timelines and deployment options make them hard to achieve.
INCREMENTAL is an alternative model for disaster-relief housing as existing strategies struggle to adapt to a variety of localized conditions. This is a prefabricated and panelized housing model that is quickly deployed, compact for urban environments and can be assembled by local contractors. Disaster survivors may remain on their properties, near schools and businesses and connected to their existing social networks. Each of these contribute to community resilience. The INCREMENTAL prototype explored in this proposal provides disaster-relief housing for New York City residents by working within New York City’s building code, energy guidelines and specific vulnerabilities to grow a more resilient city.


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Jennifer Smith is an adjunct instructor for the Environmental Design program at Auburn University. Before teaching at Auburn she attained a Master of Architecture with a concentration in City Design at North Carolina State University. Her recent academic work focused on the systemic issue of disaster-relief housing by proposing a new model to increase community resilience. She has six-years of experience in architecture practice and has worked on international construction projects in rapidly urbanizing and developing economies including: Battambang, Cambodia; Chiang Rai, Thailand; and St. Marc, Haiti. In 2010 she graduated from Auburn University’s School of Architecture and Interior Architecture with Distinction where she won academic awards including the Alpha Rho Chi Award in Leadership & Service. She has experience in design-build and has led a design-build studio in Montana.