

Hear Every Voice

Case Study: Building Coast-Smart Communities



Participatory process focused on building awareness and consensus around climate adaptation in Maryland

Annapolis, Maryland

Maryland Department of Natural Resources Chesapeake and Coastal Program, Consensus Building Institute, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (funder), MIT-USGS Science Impact Collaborative

Context: Acknowledging the need to examine the impacts of climate change and sea level rise in coastal communities, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Chesapeake and Coastal Program collaborated with the Consensus Building Institute and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to conduct an interactive stakeholder event in 2009. The event featured a role-playing exercise called “Building Coast-Smart Communities” that engaged participants in negotiating local action strategies to address climate change. To inform the discussion, the event also provided information about key tools, resources, and incentives that communities can use to respond to climate change. The event was conducted in support of implementing Maryland’s Climate Action Plan (Building Coast-Smart Communities 2011).

“This high-visibility, interactive event engaged 170 diverse stakeholders to discuss and evaluate various adaptive options by negotiating plausible, local-action strategies through a role-play simulation. The innovative negotiation session will assist and promote the real-life decision-making around climate change that is needed in communities along Maryland’s shores” (Building Coast-Smart Communities 2011).

Public Involvement: The participation effort revolved around a six-hour stakeholder workshop intended to bring over 200 diverse stakeholders together. The event featured an introduction to the scenario planning and role- playing exercise, with most of the day focused on small group discussions. The small groups included nine people playing distinct roles, including county commissioner, county planner, real estate development association president, biologist, chamber of commerce president, environmental coalition director, residents association president, farmers association head, and county emergency management director. Each group was also assigned a mediator.

Workshop participants were given a 20-page background document in advance of the workshop that introduced each of the roles, the climate change scenario, and the structure of the stakeholder process. For example, the chamber of commerce president was described in the materials as “a second-generation business owner, the Cheshire County Chamber of Commerce President is very concerned about the claims being raised by environmental groups that his/her dockside seafood restaurant is in grave danger from projected sea level rise and the likely intensity of storms. He/she represents the business interests of the county and winces at the thought of more restrictive regulations being imposed on local businesses that are already being pinched by competition from numerous strip malls that have popped up in the area” (Consensus Building

Project Details

Location

Organizations

Case Summary

Internet

Meeting Activity

Social Media

Institute et al. 2009, 5). Similar descriptions were provided for the other roles. In addition, upon arrival at the meeting, participants received more detailed confidential information about the characteristics that they were supposed to portray in their assigned role, as well as role-specific negotiating strategies, negotiable and non-negotiable points, and a scorecard indicating priority choices.

The scorecard was used as a means of recording and evaluating preferences for specific policies that might be used to address climate change. Under the conditions of the role-playing game, each table was required to reach consensus on a full package of policies among at least eight out of the nine individuals at the table. In advance of the meeting, participants received background information on each of the policy options, a glossary of technical terms, and maps of storm surge and sea level rise. Additional details were provided at the meeting as well (Consensus Building Institute et al. 2009).

Building Coast-Smart Communities website



The website includes a YouTube video that highlights the outcomes of the event held in Annapolis, MD.

Source: <http://maryland.coastsmart.org/>

Internet

Meeting Activity

Social Media

A number of background items were available on the Building Coast-Smart Communities website, including information about the event, links to studies from multiple sources related to climate change impacts and adaptation approaches, general instructions for the role-playing session, and contact information. The website includes a three-minute YouTube video that provides highlights from the workshop, including negotiations in action among the role-playing participants. The website also includes contact information, inviting other Maryland communities to contact the organizers to learn about how they might conduct a similar exercise in their community.

"We're hoping that the activity today will inspire you to want to go back to your communities and engage in a process of collaborative problem solving where the goal is an informed consensus." Quote by Lawrence Susskind, MIT, in introductory comments provided at the meeting captured on YouTube video. (Building Coast-Smart Communities 2009).

Building Coast-Smart Communities. 2009. "Maryland Coastsmart." YouTube video, 3:01, posted by "davidsplumb" June 1, 2009. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_d0ghBvcb5U&feature=player_embedded

Building Coast-Smart Communities. 2011. Retrieved from http://maryland.coastsmart.org/?page_id=114 (5 August 2011).

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References