



**Flood and Sea Level Rise Action Plan: Outreach and Engagement Recommendations**  
**A working document of good practices from the Environmental Finance Center**

**Introduction**

This document was developed in conjunction with the general Flood and Sea Level Rise (SLR) Action Plan Framework. When a community begins their Flood and SLR Action Plan process, developing an outreach and engagement plan should be one of their first steps. The recommendations and suggested process below can guide development of a detailed plan to follow. The resulting process can be summarized in Section 2.d.iv. (Community outreach and engagement process) and the detailed plan can be attached as an appendix to the final Flood and SLR Action Plan. The framework that this document accompanies indicates corresponding points throughout the plan development process where community input should be obtained (*e.g.*, identifying flood impacts, ranking assets impacted by flooding, prioritizing projects, programs, and strategies to reduce flood risks, and prioritizing budget and financing scenarios).

An inclusive community engagement process will strengthen Flood and Sea Level Rise (SLR) Action Plans and improve the prospects of successful implementation of strategies and of equitable outcomes (where everyone has access to the benefits of programs and investments).<sup>1</sup> Good community engagement helps build a broad base of community support for implementation of a plan. As noted in the 2012 Berlin, Maryland stormwater (SW) financing study, “typically, a feasibility study that does not take into account significant input from the community will have little chance of success in gaining support from the city council.” In addition, it is important to make sure that this engagement is inclusive of individuals or groups who may be more vulnerable to the impacts of flooding, whether that vulnerability is due to geographic or socioeconomic factors. Providing vulnerable groups with the opportunity to fully participate in planning and decision-making processes means that the resulting plan is more likely to address the needs of those at greatest risk from flooding and SLR.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) lists benefits of stakeholder involvement in their 2010 coastal adaptation planning guide, and notes that multiple opportunities for stakeholder engagement exist throughout the planning process: “As the plan takes shape, ask for stakeholder input on the vulnerability assessment (stakeholders may have knowledge about past events and exposure and have opinions about which community assets should be protected), brief them on the vulnerability assessment findings and invite comment,

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<sup>1</sup> The Georgetown Climate Center defines equity as “an approach based in fairness designed to ensure that everyone has access to the same opportunities and resources” in their Equitable Adaptation Legal & Policy Toolkit. <https://www.georgetownclimate.org/adaptation/toolkits/equitable-adaptation-toolkit/introduction.html>

involve them in goal setting and action selection, get their feedback on the final plan, and engage them in implementation and monitoring activities, as appropriate.” Outreach and engagement efforts should also be adaptive, expanding target audiences and modifying outreach methods as needed and as more information is gathered during the planning process.

### **Broad recommendations and best practices for inclusive community engagement**

A body of guidance exists on how and why to engage the public in a planning process. The Environmental Finance Center has built on that guidance with their own experience to develop these broad questions to answer and principles to adopt when designing a community engagement process.

1. Why? What is the point of engaging community members in the planning process?  
Determine goals and objectives of outreach and engagement activities in relation to plan development and implementation. Note there is a difference between learning objectives, which aim to inform the community via communications and education, versus objectives related to inclusion, equity, and participatory decision-making. It is important to have clear objectives for what you are hoping to achieve by engaging stakeholders, because they are often very busy with competing priorities--clearly articulating the “ask” can help increase attendance. Also, consider how stakeholder feedback and participation will be used in the process and let them know, too. Example objectives of community engagement may include:
  - a. Increase knowledge of current and future flood and SLR impacts, including physical, social, and economic
  - b. Learn about solutions that residents and businesses can implement themselves
  - c. Gain understanding about the range of solutions, their limitations, and the costs/benefits (note that some solutions may negatively impact some people)
  - d. Foster ownership of the plan, especially the range of proposed strategies and solutions
  - e. Build support for strategies/projects and for the funding/financing mechanisms needed to implement them
2. Who? Identify stakeholders, especially trusted leaders, community service and faith-based organizations, and “influencers.” Gather information on and identify underserved and/or socially vulnerable populations in the community--for example, elderly, disabled, low-income, people with limited English language proficiency, or Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Color (BIPOC). Prioritize inclusivity when designing outreach and engagement activities. Identify populations or sectors that are often left out of planning or decision-making opportunities, as well as those that will be most impacted by flooding/SLR, and develop specific provisions to engage them throughout the plan development and implementation process. As pointed out in Herb and Auermuller (2020), “stakeholders and research alike point to the need to proactively reach out to socially vulnerable and underrepresented populations to effectively engage them as part of climate resilience planning and not expect them to participate in traditional stakeholder

engagement processes.” They explain that “new processes will be needed to ensure the participation of socially vulnerable populations including convenient meeting times and locations, cultural competency, family support services, home visits, partnerships with trusted local sources, and compensation.”

- a. Devise strategies to recruit and enable the participation of socially vulnerable and underserved populations (this is especially important given Covid-related challenges) - this can include providing child care, food at meetings, transportation, incentives/giveaways, etc.
  - b. Prepare to offer translation/interpretation services or disability accommodations at meetings and in outreach materials, and provide multiple forms of communication and interaction to reach people with various learning preferences.
3. How? Figure out the methods and timeline, making sure that methods make sense for the different stakeholders identified under number 2 (“Who?”) above, and that methods fit with the desired objectives identified under number 1 (“Why?”) above. The NOAA guide points out that “there is no “one size fits all” solution for stakeholder participation. You will need to review and choose those methods and techniques that are most likely to result in effective and efficient stakeholder participation in your state.” Involve stakeholders in decision-making, too: “residents themselves [should] inform community decision-making regarding resilience-related planning and decision-making, [because] residents know best what actions will be most effective in their own community” (Herb and Auermuller 2020).

### **Community outreach and engagement approaches**

The EFC has identified three different types of outreach and engagement that are appropriate to this process, and has noted them in the Flood and SLR Action Plan Framework, this outline, and the accompanying Community Engagement Process diagram (Appendix C). They are roughly defined as:

- Communication/education - Town provides information to community;
- Input - community provides data and information to Town; and,
- Engagement - multi-directional, involving the community in discussions, prioritization, decision-making.

See also the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) “Continuum of Community Engagement” from their 2017 *Guide to Equitable Community-Driven Climate Preparedness* for a more detailed treatment of the types and purposes of community engagement (Appendix B).

## **Overview of potential outreach and engagement process**

Successful public outreach relies on stakeholders from the community coming together from a variety of sectors to provide valuable insight on community-specific goals, priorities, concerns, and norms.

Where: Town of \_\_\_\_\_ Beach, Maryland

When: April 2021 to \_\_\_\_\_

Project Outreach Partners: Town of \_\_\_\_\_, University of Maryland Extension - Sea Grant Extension Program, UMD Environmental Finance Center, Consultant(s)

Desired Output/Goal: An outreach and engagement plan that educates the community about current and future stormwater and coastal flooding issues and that engages them in Flood and SLR Action Plan development and decision-making (e.g., identifying flood impacts, ranking assets impacted by flooding, prioritizing projects, programs, and strategies to reduce flood risks, and prioritizing budget and financing scenarios).

Why: \_\_\_\_\_ *Pull from answer to 1. above* \_\_\_\_\_

Audience: Citizens, businesses, elected officials

The general process:

### **Step 1:** Establish an ad-hoc community flood and SLR working group

- Municipal staff should pull together a list of 10-15 additional individuals representing residents/concerned citizens, the business community, faith-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and environmental groups. Pull from existing committees where possible, such as environment, tree, economic development, walkability, etc. (go beyond environment-related committees). In particular, leverage Towns' Green Teams to help develop and implement the outreach and engagement plan.
  - North Beach has the Stormwater and Flood Mitigation Advisory Committee (SFMAC); is there anyone to add?
  - Chesapeake Beach will need to do this - suggest Green Team, walkable communities committee, others?
- Town/working group should prepare background information, including a summary of outreach activities completed to date for this or similar topics, noting things that have or haven't worked (e.g. When did they last go through a community engagement/outreach process, and how did they do it? What would they change?). List typical outreach channels and activities and also consider how information is disseminated during emergencies.
  - North Beach Draft Flood Mitigation Plan (FMP): one meeting with 17 residents
  - Chesapeake Beach 2020 Comprehensive Plan update: What have they already tried, and what is planned? What would they have done in a non-pandemic situation?
- Once the list is finalized, Town or Outreach Partner should email the working group with background information and ask about the types of activities and materials that the working group will want the external Outreach Partners to help with.

**Step 2:** Craft an outreach and engagement plan with estimated timeline and roles/responsibilities

- Gather information on the Town’s demographics, including socially vulnerable populations.<sup>2</sup> This information can help identify different target audiences for outreach and engagement efforts and can also be used in the actual plan. Additional information on how to define and find data on socially vulnerable populations are listed in the Resources and Tools section below.
- Develop messaging that will resonate with your audiences and attract participants; adjust as necessary during the course of the project.
  - Tie messaging to community priorities (e.g., folks are concerned about flooding, their grandchildren, cost of living, jobs, etc.). You may need more than one message. In the messaging, cover what will be discussed at meetings/in the plan, how it connects to their priorities, how their participation is important, how their feedback will be used, and a thank you or “don’t miss out” wrap up. You may wish to hold focus groups to develop and hone messages.
- Determine specific outreach strategies, including how and who to engage.
  - Provide engagement opportunities for all neighborhoods, sectors, and segments of the population. Be sure to include renters and property managers as well as part-time residents and vacation property owners.
- Create a month-by-month itemized list of outreach and engagement activities (suggestions are listed under “Potential methods of outreach and engagement”). The general progression of outreach and engagement activities, with their linkages to different stages of the planning process, is laid out in the Community Engagement Process diagram (Appendix C). The example “Stormwater Action Planning Exercise” (Appendix D) can help the working group think through many of the details that need to be addressed.
- If an external Outreach Partner or a subset of the working group was responsible for drafting the outreach and engagement plan/timeline, send it to the larger working group for their review.

**Step 3:** Develop outreach materials

- Examples of different outreach materials include: stormwater and SLR fact sheets, stormwater and SLR 101, promotional fliers, surveys, and press releases, all updated as needed to continue to inform and engage the community as the plan progresses. A standardized presentation and/or series of questions can be developed to use in meetings.

**Step 4:** Conduct activities included in outreach and engagement plan/timeline

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<sup>2</sup> The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) describes social vulnerability as “as the susceptibility of social groups to the adverse impacts of natural hazards, including disproportionate death, injury, loss, or disruption of livelihood. Social vulnerability considers the social, economic, demographic, and housing characteristics of a community that influence its ability to prepare for, respond to, cope with, recover from, and adapt to environmental hazards.”

[https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_national-risk-index\\_primer.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_national-risk-index_primer.pdf)

- Various types of outreach and engagement should take place throughout the project, including multiple contacts with community members as new information is developed in different stages of the planning process.

Potential methods of outreach and engagement:

- Public meetings, open houses
- Charrettes, workshops
- Press releases and press coverage
- Notices/announcements (email, text, letters, flyers, door hangers, bulletin boards, inserts with utility bills or tax notices, etc.)
- Schools, libraries, local pubs, beach/boardwalk, post office, grocery store
- NextDoor
- Social media
- Presentations to groups, committees, etc.
- Events (stand-alone and table at other events)
- Consider making a short video to post on social media and/or show before public meetings. Possibly interview “elders” who have lived there for decades to have them talk about the changes they’ve experienced. Spotlight recognizable locations under water, etc.
  - EFC has experience developing videos for MOST and can provide tips if needed.
- Contests (e.g. Berlin held a stormwater photo contest; could do this via social media)
- Art and other creative methods (e.g. storm drain stenciling/art contests, installations about future SLR levels, etc)
  - [HighWaterLine](#) - creative, science-based community engagement (Florida - Delray Beach & Miami, Philadelphia, New York City, Bristol); they also produced a [Guide to Creative Community Engagement](#) that includes suggested timelines for a HighWaterLine project, and have given the concept a Creative Commons license for others to use and adapt as desired.
  - [Tidy Street Project](#) - a project in Brighton, England to visually depict local, real-time energy usage
  - [Illuminate rising sea levels](#)
  - “[Lines](#)”
- Surveys, polls, comment submissions
  - EFC has done paper and online surveys before; we can provide a couple of examples or in Phase 2 we could help create one for these purposes.
- Citizen science/data collection -- this serves as both an engagement mechanism and a way to gather more data.
  - The recommended tool to use and promote is MyCoast: <https://mycoast.org/md>. There are MyCoast MD outreach materials available from DNR (can insert Towns’ logos). Calvert County is also going to begin using MyCoast.
  - Also, North Beach has the [Access North Beach](#) app/website.
  - Map exercise
    - Provide large printed maps at events and meetings, and have people label problem areas (e.g. with numbered stickers, comment cards, etc.).

- EFC has done this before and one of our student assistants turned the comments into a GIS layer.
- Possibly create a digital map tool or use a Google map for people to mark locations if an additional input method is needed.
- Alternately or in addition to paper maps, perhaps provide a tablet at meetings/events for people to submit reports to MyCoast.
- Focus groups or similar smaller meetings with community members, neighborhoods, sectors, etc. (especially for people/areas that may experience disproportionate impacts)
- Sea level rise scenario visualization exercises (e.g. 3D simulations, augmented reality/virtual reality, art installations, etc.)

Some of these suggestions may not be useful or relevant, while some issues may need further investigation. One challenge that has been identified is engaging landlords, property managers, and absentee homeowners (especially owners of vacation rentals), so this will receive more attention going into Phase 2.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Resources and tools**

*Note:* EFC has templates of outreach calendars, meeting agendas, and action planning exercises if needed. Sea Grant/Extension also has materials that can be used (and adjusted/updated if necessary). Let us know what you need when the committees/working groups sit down to lay out a more detailed plan. These other resources below are extremely helpful, albeit more general.

#### Basics of public outreach, education, and engagement:

California Institute for Local Government: [Public Engagement Toolkit](#)

Includes resources and case studies related to inclusive public engagement. Topics include immigrant engagement, partnering with community-based organizations, and engaging clergy/congregations.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): [National Menu of Best Management Practices \(BMPs\) for Stormwater-Public Education](#)

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). 2010. Adapting to Climate Change: A Planning Guide for State Coastal Managers. NOAA Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management. <https://coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/adaptationguide.pdf>

Sustainable Maryland: [Leadership Training - Visualizing Data Presentation](#)

Wills, Kendra. [Techniques for citizen participation in the comprehensive planning process](#). Michigan State University Extension. November 15, 2012.

#### Guidance on making planning processes equitable, identifying vulnerable populations, etc.:

Georgetown Climate Center: [Equitable Adaptation Legal & Policy Toolkit](#)

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): National Risk Index Primer (December 2020). [https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_national-risk-index\\_primer.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_national-risk-index_primer.pdf)

Herb, J. and L. Auermuller. May 31, 2020. [A Seat at the Table: Integrating the Needs and Challenges of Underrepresented and Socially Vulnerable Populations into Coastal Hazards Planning in New Jersey](#). Prepared for the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. Related training ([Whole-Community Coastal Climate Resilience Planning](#)) and [Fact sheets/checklists](#) on Integrating Vulnerable Populations into Resilience Planning.

[USDN Guide to Equitable Community-Driven Climate Preparedness](#) (May 2017)



Detailed guidebook which includes a section on an equitable planning framework, which suggested strategies and corresponding case studies and resources for stages from initiation to visioning and development to monitoring and review.

Guidance on making meetings and events accessible:

[Holding Inclusive Events: A Guide to Accessible Event Planning](#) from the Autistic Self Advocacy Network

[Planning Accessible Meetings and Events](#) from the Disability & Philanthropy Forum

[Planning Accessible Meetings and Events](#) from the University of Buffalo

Tips on virtual meeting management and engagement:

*Forthcoming from EFC*

## Appendix B

From the [USDN Guide to Equitable Community-Driven Climate Preparedness](#) (May 2017; p.25)

### CONTINUUM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is often depicted as a continuum increasing in the level of engagement and partnership from left to right, as shown in the figure below. Within any given planning process, various strategies for community engagement may be employed at different points in time.

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	SHARED LEADERSHIP	COMMUNITY-DRIVEN
Local government initiates an effort, coordinates with departments, and uses a variety of channels to inform the community to take action	Local government gathers information from the community to inform local government-led interventions	Local government engages community members to shape government priorities and plans	Community and local government share in decision-making to co-create solutions together	Community initiates and directs strategy and action with participation and technical assistance from local government
CHARACTERISTICS OF ENGAGEMENT				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primarily one-way channel of communication</li> <li>One interaction</li> <li>Term-limited to project</li> <li>Addresses immediate need of local government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primarily one-way channel of communication</li> <li>One to multiple interactions</li> <li>Short to medium-term</li> <li>Shapes and informs local government programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two-way channel of communication</li> <li>Multiple interactions</li> <li>Medium- to long-term</li> <li>Advancement of solutions to complex problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two-way channel of communication</li> <li>Multiple interactions</li> <li>Medium- to long-term</li> <li>Advancement of solutions to complex problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two-way channel of communication</li> <li>Multiple interactions</li> <li>Medium to long-term</li> <li>Advancement of solutions to complex problems</li> </ul>
STRATEGIES				
Media releases, brochures, pamphlets, outreach to population groups, translated information, new and social media	Focus groups, interviews, community surveys, public hearings, public comment periods	Forums, advisory boards, stakeholder involvement, coalitions, policy development and advocacy, including legislative briefings, and testimony, workshops, community-wide events	Co-led community meetings, advisory boards, coalitions, and partnerships, policy development and advocacy, including legislative briefings and testimony	Community-led planning efforts, community-hosted forums, collaborative partnerships, coalitions, policy development and advocacy including legislative briefings and testimony

*Adapted from King County, Washington and IAP2*

A community-driven equitable climate preparedness planning process involves collaboration and shared decision-making between local government staff and the community with the aim of co-creating an equitable climate preparedness plan. In terms of the levels of engagement continuum depicted above, this approach most aligns with shared leadership and community-driven, where there is an emphasis on a shared decision-making and co-ownership over the development of the plan.

## Appendix C

Community Engagement Process diagram (also available in spreadsheet format)

		Pre-launch	First few months	Next few months	etc.		Finalization	Post-planning
<b>General</b>		Regular communications from Town to community - ongoing						
<b>3. Challenges</b>	Current flooding locations	Community input						
	Current flooding impacts	Community input						
	SLR projections			Education				
	Projected SLR impacts			Education				
				Community engagement and input				
<b>4. Solutions and strategies</b>	Solutions and strategies				Education			
					Community engagement and input			
<b>5. Budget and funding scenarios</b>	Budget and funding scenarios					Community engagement and input		
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	Implementation and evaluation						Communication and education - ongoing	
							Community engagement and input - ongoing	

## Appendix D

### Stormwater Action Planning Exercise example

## Wheaton Hills Civic Association Stormwater Action Planning Exercise

**Team:** Name (email); name (email), etc.

### 1- Outreach Materials (hardcopy and electronic)

- RainScape literature (RainScape brochure; contractor listing; others?)
- Pet Waste literature (hardcopy - # of copies?)
- Tree Montgomery literature (hardcopy - # of copies?)
- Storm Drain Labeling
- Others??
- Need Spanish language materials?

### 2- Communications & Outreach Channels

- Website (who manages?)
- Email alerts (who manages? Frequency?)
- Social Media (what platforms? Who manages?)
- Newsletter (hardcopy or online? Who manages? Frequency?)
- Community list serv (who manages?)
- Events (Board meetings; annual meetings; special events? Who manages?)
- Bulletin boards, buildings?
- Other channels??

### 3- Map Exercise

- Highlight existing stormwater infrastructure, streams, major roads, hotspots
- Indicate problem areas (ie., eroding streambanks, localized flooding)

#### A- Infrastructure Issues:

- Indicate problems w/ existing infrastructure (ex., clogged storm drains; illicit discharges)
- Indicate where new infrastructure might address problems (ex., new rain garden)

#### B- Policy Issues:

- Indicate policy issues that need modifying (ex., more regular street sweeping)
- Indicate policy issues that are currently unaddressed (ex., no enforcement of policies)

### 5- Summarize/Prioritize Top Five Issues

**6- Goals? Regular communications; 5% of homeowners interact with County programs in the following year; 2-3 County projects/policies are implemented within one year**

### 7- Walk/Drive Assessment

[Amanda?]