



Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program Semi-Annual Success Story ("Section C")

Assessing Community Resilience through the RAFT

THE PROBLEM:

Building resilience to climate change impacts in Coastal Virginia requires a strong commitment and partnership between all levels of government, academia, businesses, citizen organizations and individuals. But the actions of local governments are particularly critical because so many community resilience-building initiatives need to occur at the local level. Although localities may recognize the importance of the issue, undertaking or even identifying needed actions can be a challenge. This is especially true in more rural areas with greater staffing and resource limitations. In many cases simply getting various departments, which are already busy with daily duties, to collaborate on resilience planning initiatives can be difficult.

THE FIX:

Feedback from Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program partners identified this challenge as a priority for the Program to address through its coastal resilience initiatives. Beginning in 2008, Virginia CZM-supported projects at several coastal planning district commissions started to tackle the issue through various regional efforts. But stakeholders identified the need for a more standardized method for assessing local resilience in order to provide a common benchmark and to allow localities to compare their status with other coastal communities. The Virginia CZM Program is trying to advance this concept by supporting the use of a community resilience assessment initiative called the RAFT.

The RAFT (Resiliency and Adaptation Feasibility Tool) was developed by an interdisciplinary collaborative led by a core team from the University of Virginia Institute for Engagement & Negotiation, the Virginia Coastal Policy Center at William & Mary Law School, and the Old Dominion University/Virginia Sea Grant Climate Adaptation and Resilience Program. Initially funded through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Federation, the tool uses a scorecard that is completed by graduate student assessors from the core team and reviewed by core team faculty and locality staff. The tool was not designed for local self-assessments, but rather for independent, objective evaluations. The scorecard provides a means for localities to define and measure their environmental, economic and social resilience. After the scorecard is completed, the core team meets with local representatives to support their development of a resilience action checklist that identifies one-year actions to improve local resilience.

Evaluation Topics from the RAFT Scorecard



All photos by Aileen Devlin, Virginia Sea Grant.

POLICY, LEADERSHIP, AND COLLABORATION

LOCALITY LEADERSHIP AND PLANNING FOR RESILIENCE
LOCALITY LEADERSHIP AND RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY
LOCAL COLLABORATION WITH STATE AGENCIES AND REGIONAL PDC
ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT
THE NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM (NFIP) COMMUNITY RATING SYSTEM

RISK ASSESSMENT AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

FLOOD EXPOSURE AND VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT
RISK ASSESSMENT FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS
BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC RISK ASSESSMENT
HAZARD MITIGATION
RESIDENT EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, HEALTH, AND WELL-BEING

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN RESILIENCE PLANNING
PROVIDING COASTAL RESILIENCE INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC
RESIDENT LEADERSHIP AND VOLUNTEER NETWORKS FOR COASTAL RESILIENCE
RESILIENT SYSTEMS TO PROVIDE FOOD, HEALTH, AND MEDICINE
PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH FOR SOCIAL EQUITY IN COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

PLANNING FOR RESILIENCE

BUDGET, FUNDING, AND STATE & FEDERAL ASSISTANCE
COASTAL RESILIENCY IN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
LAND USE ORDINANCES
INCENTIVES FOR COASTAL RESILIENCE
NATURAL RESOURCE PRESERVATION

INFRASTRUCTURE RESILIENCE

STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE
CRITICAL TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE
WATER SUPPLY AND WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT SERVICES
NATURAL AND NATURE-BASED FEATURES

THE IMPACT:

The tool was piloted in the Town of Cape Charles, the City of Portsmouth and Gloucester County. The Virginia CZM Program then helped advance use of the RAFT by providing resources to follow up with the pilot localities, refine the scorecard, develop a RAFT website, and expand use of the tool for a regional assessment of seven Eastern Shore localities. Scorecards were developed for the counties of Accomack and Northampton, and towns of Onancock, Saxis, Tangier, Chincoteague and Wachapreague based on online research, document review, phone consultations with relevant stakeholders, and an in-depth review of the scores with each locality. Presentations were then made to local elected officials. A regional Resilience Action Workshop was held for localities to develop individual one-year resilience action checklists and also to identify actions that would be meaningful for the entire region. After the checklists were finalized and implementation teams established in each locality, the RAFT core team initiated monthly calls with the localities to provide support for moving action items forward.

Feedback from localities that have been assessed through the RAFT process so far has been very positive. According to Tanya Denckla Cobb from the Institute for Engagement & Negotiation, "The biggest surprise is the high level of gratitude voiced by localities for our focused approach and consistent support through the year. Each locality has its own challenges and priorities, but a common need that The RAFT addresses is connecting localities with the resources they need to make real progress on environmental, economic, and social resilience. They're so grateful for our individual attention and support, and to know that they're now connected into a broader network of local, regional and state support for years to come." Based on this response, the Virginia CZM Program is providing additional support for an evaluation of localities on the Northern Neck during the FY 19 grant year (October, 2019

– September, 2020), and is proposing to support an evaluation of Middle Peninsula localities during FY 20 (October, 2020 – September, 2021).

By helping coastal localities better assess their ability to deal with increased flooding and the other challenges of climate change, the Virginia CZM Program is hoping to identify the key steps necessary to build community resilience. The priorities that localities identify through the RAFT will be critical not only for local actions, but also for state and federal resilience efforts.

MORE INFORMATION:

The RAFT website provides information on the project’s goals, history, funders, and advisors. Tabs for each of the RAFT communities include detailed information on the pilot, Eastern Shore and Northern Neck localities. A “Resources” tab, leads to other RAFT products and materials including research and policy papers, communication products, locality scorecards and checklists, as well as risk maps produced during various stages of The RAFT. The website will be updated with new resources as they are developed. <https://raft.iem.virginia.edu/>

PARTNERS:

The Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program works with its network of agency and locality partners to identify coastal hazards priorities and to provide funding for these projects. In addition to the university partners that make up the RAFT team, the eight regional planning district commissions provide a key link between the Virginia CZM Program and its local government partners in addressing coastal resilience issues.

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