

Refining The RAFT for Broader Implementation

Virginia Coastal Policy Center

William & Mary Law School

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Summary

The RAFT Project Team, which includes the Institute for Engagement & Negotiation at the University of Virginia (IEN), the Virginia Coastal Policy Center at William & Mary Law School (VCPC), and Old Dominion University/Virginia Sea Grant Resilience Program, collaborated with the Northern Neck Planning District Commission (NNPDC) to implement a third round of The RAFT with eight localities in the Northern Neck.

The localities were identified by the PDC as those that are most vulnerable to coastal flooding and could most benefit from a resilience assessment. Following its work on Virginia's Eastern Shore, The RAFT Project Team has developed a regional approach that enables neighboring localities to learn from each other and, if desired, to work together on actions that would provide mutual benefit.

Product 1: Assessment of Northern Neck Localities

RAFT Assessment

The Project Team used The RAFT Scorecard to assess each locality's resilience, using a combination of online documents and phone call consultations with locality staff. After scoring each locality individually, the Project Team presented to each locality the assessment results, including the locality's strengths and opportunities, as well as an Opportunities List of policies and programmatic changes that could increase locality resilience.

The FY 2020 RAFT Northern Neck localities included Northumberland County, Lancaster County, Westmoreland County, Richmond County, Kilmarnock, White Stone, Warsaw, and Colonial Beach.

As part of this regional landscape scale approach, the Project Team worked closely with the NNPDC in designing online Resilience Action Workshops for each locality, rather than one regional in-person workshop, due to the pandemic. The NNPDC assisted with identifying a diversity of stakeholders representing different government agencies, local nonprofits, and community groups to be invited to the workshops, agendas, and processes. Following the workshops and creation of the locality-specific Resilience Action Checklists, the Project Team provided general implementation support through hosting monthly calls with each locality Implementation Team (IT). NNPDC staff participated in all of the monthly IT meetings, providing helpful recommendations, and connections to other members of the communities.

The RAFT Project Team has found that working simultaneously with a number of localities in a region enables the localities to learn from each other's checklists and enables the Project Team to identify shared needs that can be brought to the attention of state agencies and regional organizations. The Project Team has learned that one of the core functions of Project Team assistance to localities in implementing their Resilience Action Checklists is to help develop new networks of information and communication across silos, both within the locality and between localities and their regional nonprofits and businesses, in order to increase resilience to flooding and coastal hazards.

Spring 2020 – The RAFT Scoring of Northern Neck Localities

- The RAFT Scorecards, Opportunity Lists, and Checklists
<https://raft.ien.virginia.edu/raft-scorecards-opportunity-lists-checklists>

Related Links

- The RAFT Scorecard
<https://raft.ien.virginia.edu/raft-scorecard>

Summer 2020 – Resilience Action Workshops

Due to the pandemic, The RAFT Project Team, in consultation with the NNPDC, reformulated the community workshop component of The RAFT. Rather than holding the traditional full-day, in-person, regional workshop, The RAFT Project Team created informational video recordings for locality representatives (posted on The RAFT website); organized and facilitated three sector-specific focus group calls to identify resilience priorities specific to social services, emergency management, and law enforcement; and organized and facilitated locality-specific virtual workshops to develop Resilience Action Checklists for the eight localities.

IEN and VCPC initiated phase three of The RAFT -- implementation -- with seven localities in August 2020 and commenced holding monthly calls with each locality's implementation team. ODU/VASG is supporting specific implementation projects (e.g., developing communications checklists and assessing business resilience). Due to the pandemic and limited resources, Northumberland County staff were not able to participate in a workshop in August 2020. The RAFT Project Team continues to communicate with them via the NNPDC, however, on planning a workshop with members of the community to develop a Resilience Action Checklist. For the Resilience Action Workshops, the RAFT Team invited dozens of unique participants representing 13 state agencies, 8 local governments, the NNPDC, 46 non-profit organizations, 5 academic institutions, 40 local departments, boards, or other official government entities, and 17 private businesses. Many of these participated in the workshop and RAFT Implementation Teams.

The RAFT Products:

- Scorecard results for each locality;
- Scorecard comparisons/ graphs showing all locality results together in a comparative manner; and Opportunity Lists drawn from the Scorecard findings for each locality.
- The one-year Resilience Action Checklists for each locality.
- A list of lessons learned from working with these localities, to continue to improve The RAFT process.

Listed below, workshop materials and locality Resilience Action Checklists are available online:

<https://raft.ien.virginia.edu/2019-2020-northern-neck>

Product 2: Assistance to RAFT Alumni Localities

The RAFT Project Team has received inquiries for continued assistance in different forms from localities that it has worked with in the past. Some of this work involved connecting localities to resources, experts, or conducting work relevant to the Project Team's areas of expertise.

The RAFT Project Team has continued to provide support and assistance to Eastern Shore RAFT implementation teams. This has included printing and distributing emergency information magnets for six Eastern Shore localities, identifying funding opportunities for resilience projects, and providing assistance with grant proposals. For example, The RAFT Project Team connected the Town of Wachapreague with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and assisted with compiling information for a FEMA funding opportunity. In February 2020, the Virginia Department of Forestry conducted a tree planting with volunteers from Saxis's implementation team. The RAFT Project Team also compiled project designs and cost estimates for living breakwaters to protect Tangier Island from erosion in consultation with regional businesses, scientists, and nonprofits. This information is being used by the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission to pursue funding to implement the projects.

The RAFT Project Team's efforts have also included soliciting feedback from the Eastern Shore localities regarding the identification of (1) any resilience-related projects the communities have completed since the implementation phase of The RAFT, (2) the top resilience-related priorities remaining to be accomplished, and (3) the level of interest to participate in resilience workshops organized by The RAFT Project Team on topics such as resilience communication, addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, and incorporating resilience into their comprehensive plans. And, finally, they have included sharing information about an opportunity to participate in a research study being conducted by Virginia Tech.

The RAFT Products:

- Quarterly check-in via email with E. Shore localities, to identify their progress and how they are continuing to use The RAFT, and determine continued needs for assistance.

Related Link:

- Interview with RAFT Implementation Team alumna, Joy Marino of Onancock, concerning what the RAFT meant to her community and her advice for new RAFT communities (posted on the RAFT website as a resource for Northern Neck localities before their virtual workshops):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69YjAf3FKBM&feature=youtu.be>
- Wachapreague emergency magnet (in cooperation with VDEM):
<https://raft.ienvirginia.edu/system/files/Wachapreague%20Emergency%20Magnet.pdf>

Product 3: Review the RAFT for use as a self-assessment tool

The RAFT Project Team evaluated potential modification of The RAFT Scorecard to enable self-assessment by individual localities. The Team formatted various RAFT documents, including the Scorecard Reports, Opportunity Lists, and Resilience Action Checklists to be Section 508 compliant and posted these items to The RAFT website (<https://raft.ien.virginia.edu/raft-scorecards-opportunity-lists-checklists>). Additionally, The Team met with coastal planning district commissions to explore their interest in and the feasibility of a self-scoring option. Subsequently, in October 2020, Governor Northam released Virginia's first Coastal Resilience Master Planning Framework (CRMPF). As part of the CRMPF, a Technical Advisory Committee was created to, among other things, assist with the compilation of input from Virginia's coastal regions into a prioritized listing of coastal adaptation and protection projects and activities. After a coastal planning district commission representative raised questions about how to develop such prioritized lists, the Governor's Special Assistant for Coastal Adaptation & Protection approached the RAFT Project Team to determine how The RAFT Scorecard could be modified to serve as a self-administered, consistent platform for localities to use in developing prioritized listings of place-based projects for coastal adaptation. As a result, a team of students from VCPC and UVA are going to work with the Governor's Special Assistant during the Spring 2021 semester to modify the Scorecard to be a self-assessment tool.

Publications and RAFT Events

The RAFT Project team hosts and maintains the RAFT website through the University of Virginia IEN. In addition, ODU partners have created communication tools used by several RAFT localities that are also published on the website.

RAFT Events and Publications

- **October 11, 2019** – Presentation at the Hampton Roads Sea Level Rise Flooding Adaptation Forum by Rhiannon Bezore, PhD
<https://sites.wp.odu.edu/HRAadaptationForum/wp-content/uploads/sites/1464/2019/10/The-RAFT-Oct2019.pdf>
- **January 24, 2020** – Presentation by Elizabeth Andrews at Virginia Bar Association Winter Meeting, "Is the Law of Virginia Sufficient to Meet the Threats of Sea Level Rise?" citing the RAFT.
https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.vba.org/resource/resmgr/2020_annual_meeting/written_materials/sea_level_-_final_1.27_.pdf
- **February 5, 2020**—Summit Meeting with RAFT Core Team and Northern Neck PDC Staff
- **Summer- Fall 2020** – Ongoing quarterly check-ins with alumni localities and new RAFT localities