

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION: COMMUNICATING ABOUT LOCAL CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS AND SCENARIOS FOR THE TAMPA BAY REGION

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In a report recently published by the World Bank, Tampa Bay was identified as one of the ten coastal metropolitan areas most vulnerable to sea level rise and subsequent flooding. Regional measurements show that the region is already experiencing sea level rise and there is broad scientific consensus that this trend will continue on into the next century. In order to assess how key stakeholders and local residents view climate change risk and vulnerability in the Tampa Bay region UF IFAS Extension, Florida Sea Grant, and University of South Florida Department of Anthropology faculty collaboratively developed “Climate; Change the Conversation” community engagement programs. In total, four workshops were attended by 130 participants between 2013 and 2015. The public events are informed by findings from an National Science Foundation-funded study at USF, an interdisciplinary project that integrated global and regional climate science, local population demographics, and input from policy makers, planners, and scientists to develop visual climate change scenarios about potential impacts on linked social and ecological systems in Tampa Bay. The programs consisted of a climate science overview, a video proposing three possible climate futures for the Tampa Bay region, and five interactive listening stations; sea level rise, transportation and infrastructure, water resources, food systems, and natural resources. Eighty-nine percent of those surveyed after the program indicated they are very concerned about climate change in the Tampa Bay Region (n=93). Of those surveyed, 91% (43 of 47) pledged to modify actions based on knowledge gain. The “Climate; Change the Conversation” workshops have been well received by participants and results support the program’s objectives. The team plans to conduct additional workshops reaching out to a more diverse, targeted audience including homeowners associations and faith-based organizations. The discussion will focus on lessons learned from the workshops about translating climate science from global or regional scales to local scales, communicating with decision makers, and gathering data about perceptions of climate change. We will discuss the university/extension partnerships that may be applicable to similar efforts taking place in the state of Florida and beyond.