

THE HAMPTON ROADS ADAPTATION FORUM: EVALUATING A MODEL FOR ENGAGEMENT ACROSS SECTORS

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To address the climate adaptation challenge in Hampton Roads, a diverse and densely populated set of independent municipalities, Virginia Sea Grant has partnered with Old Dominion University and the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission to develop and implement the Hampton Roads Sea Level Rise (SLR)/Flooding Adaptation Forum. Quarterly Forum meetings are designed to facilitate information exchange among local municipalities, state, and federal agencies, researchers, private sector partners, and NGOs in order to clarify needs, share lessons learned, and promote broad adoption of innovative adaptation tactics. The Forum was developed to overcome institutional obstacles, limited communication channels, and the lack of established methods that would bring together stakeholders to address increasing flooding in the region. Each Forum meeting draws 60-80 participants with representation from nine of the localities within the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission.

The Forum has met nine times since 2012 with over 274 individuals participating, many attending multiple Forum meetings. As part of the registration process, forum participants are asked questions pertaining to specific Forum topics, which help to frame the discussion and in March 2015, we conducted an attendee's survey, asking questions about how the Forum has impacted adaptation project planning and implementation in their workplace. Thirty-five attendees responded, and subsequent rounds of questionnaire administration are planned. Further, we conducted a network analysis on the attendance lists, combining common neighbor and association algorithms, to identify core participants who may likely communicate and engage with each other the most. Survey data showed Forum participants have benefited by being more knowledgeable when interacting with municipal administrators and elected officials, have redesigned the way they communicate to the public, and have used the tools introduced to enhance their adaptation efforts. Since the Forums started, participants said that they were more likely to talk in their workplace about how SLR and related flooding would impact the region and to develop and lead projects to address the threat, many of the participants attributed at least part of this change to the Hampton Roads Adaptation Forum. Over 83% of respondents said they have made and followed-up on new professional contacts at the Forum. The network analysis identified a core group of engaged participants crossing six municipalities, five private sector companies, three federal agencies, two universities, a regional planning agency, and one environmental NGO. The Forum's adaptation implementation network was well connected to other regional initiatives including the Intergovernmental Planning Pilot Project, a Federal, state, and local government effort to develop a regional approach to SLR preparedness and resilience planning, the Coastal Virginia Community Rating System workgroup, a group of floodplain professionals from both the public and private sector, and the Hampton Roads Planning Commission Sea Level Rise Advisory committee, a special committee of appointed representative of the Hampton Road locality staff that make policy recommendations to the Commission. A nested set of governance networks is emerging in the Hampton Roads region to assess, plan for, and implement adaptation actions.