

## SUCSESSES AND BEST PRACTICES FROM THE GULF OF MEXICO CLIMATE OUTREACH COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

*Marian Hanisko, The Baldwin Group at NOAA Office for Coastal Management  
Melissa Daigle, Louisiana Sea Grant*

The Gulf of Mexico Climate Outreach Community of Practice (CoP) emerged in 2010 as a network of outreach, extension, and education professionals and local community officials from Gulf states working together to understand current climate science in the region, discuss best practices for coastal community adaptation to climate impacts, and share lessons learned related to climate communication. The Gulf CoP has attracted over 300 members from diverse organizations, and members utilize different mechanisms for engagement including webinars, work groups, social media, and an annual in-person meeting.

A formative evaluation of the CoP conducted in 2012 revealed that participants consider the annual meeting as the “best” activity for networking and sharing climate information. The benefits of the annual meeting range from learning about climate science to comparing notes on community activities and discussion of new ideas (Eastern Research Group, 2012). One of the CoP’s most recent success stories emerged from the 2014 annual meeting where the City of Orange Beach shared their experiences with the FEMA High Water Mark Initiative.

Noting Orange Beach’s success with the program, Mississippi communities decided to follow their lead. In August 2015, ten communities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast participated in the Mississippi High Water Mark Initiative and unveiled signage to remind the public of the impacts of record flood events such as Camille and Katrina. Another success story is from Delcambre, Louisiana. The community received a small grant from the Gulf Sea Grant programs to address climate vulnerabilities. A community representative participated in the 2014 annual meeting and shared the steps the Port has taken to move the city towards greater flood resilience through future involvement in the Community Rating System and evaluating the potential for building a harbor of refuge for commercial fishing vessels in the event of tropical activity.

Leadership, coordination, funding, meeting the needs of diverse members, keeping members engaged, and staying on top of the most relevant climate science are all challenges the CoP is working to overcome. A best practice used to address many of these challenges includes regularly surveying CoP members to better understand their climate information needs. These data are used to inform annual meeting agendas, work group activities, and webinar topics. In 2012, the CoP also initiated the Spirit of Community Award as a way to celebrate and recognize the hard work of communities and individuals who are taking steps to address climate. This best practice helps incentivize CoP members to continue their work. Additional examples of success and best practices from the CoP’s six years in operation will be shared during the presentation.