

# COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

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IT IS PERFECTLY OKAY TO  
WRITE GARBAGE—AS LONG  
AS YOU EDIT BRILLIANTLY.

– C. J. Cherryh

April 2021, Issue 30



## COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

### BREAK THE ICE—VIRTUALLY!

Remember the days of in-person meetings? You'd arrive—possibly not knowing anyone, or maybe only one or two people—and then the facilitator would kick things off with an icebreaker. You probably felt a little hokey, but at the same time, that icebreaker likely made it easier for each participant to offer an opinion or answer a question later on. (Research proves this is true for most people!)

While we continue to live in a virtual world, that doesn't mean we can't offer a similar meeting experience. We just need *virtual* icebreakers!

#### Start Simple

Icebreakers can be as basic as asking everyone to answer a question, all the way up to complex activities that reveal team dynamics. Most likely, you'll want to start simple: "Tell us your name, where you're from, and what the weather is like where you are." Generate a list of questions to prompt everyone's participation. One of my favorites is asking, "What is beautiful right now?"

#### Make It Relevant

If you can, find a connection to the topic of the meeting or relate it to the time of the year. Ask about your favorite Halloween candy or costume around October 31, not March 1. You can use this as a chance to learn about meeting expectations by asking, "What are you hoping to get out of this meeting?"

#### Incorporate Gratitude

Expressing thanks and appreciation improves our mental health and can strengthen the social relationships of the group. An icebreaker question that asks for thoughts of gratitude can get the meeting off on the right note and may provide long-lasting positive impacts. Asking, "What are you grateful for right now?" might bring nice surprises.

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### Make It Fun

We could all use a laugh or a smile these days. Ask folks to share the most surprising thing they've seen on a call. Establish a theme and have folks all wear hats or choose a virtual background. Or ask people to send in a photo of their favorite pair of shoes, and during introductions, ask for an explanation.

### Give It Time

Even more so than during in-person meetings, you need a little extra time for the “special” virtual nuances—the extra time it takes for people to come off mute, the need to balance the “I don't want to talk over someone else” hesitations, etc. You can save some time by calling on people instead of letting them self-select. But if you are going to call on people for the icebreaker, always tell them this in advance. Most people don't like surprises. Establishing a pattern is often a good way to go,

such as calling on participants alphabetically. But mix it up a little. There is no reason Vickie or Will should always go last. Sometimes start from the bottom of the alphabet, or the middle.

The virtual world might not be an ideal setting for a meeting, but follow these guidelines and you'll start things off with the right click.

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# COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

**Featured product:** Icebreaker Activities

**Source:** NOAA's Office for Coastal Management

**What it is:** Tried and true methods for getting meeting participants comfortable and engaged.

**Pick a coin.** Participants find a coin and read the date. They then talk about a memory related to that date. (Can be personal, work-related, something in the news, anything).

**This or that.** This one probably needs to be done in person. You ask a series of questions that make people choose sides. After each question, have participants stand on one side of the room with the group they identify with, moving as often as necessary to be with the appropriate group. Or sprinkle these questions throughout the meeting when you feel people need a break and would be energized by moving around. Some examples include

- When you put your shoes and socks on, do you put on both socks and then the shoes, or do you go sock, shoe, sock, shoe?
- Do you prefer the mountains or the sea?
- Volkswagen or Lincoln Continental?
- Coffee or tea?
- Milk or dark chocolate?

There are no right or wrong answers. But these are things people tend to do the same way each time, without any particular reason. It's fun to see how some norms aren't particularly "normal" after all.

**Tell a roving story.** The facilitator or meeting leader starts a story, then hands the story off to the next person. Each person can contribute no more than one sentence. Examples of a starter story would be, "It was a dark and stormy night," or "Sally really didn't want to write that report."



**Questions to ask** give participants a chance to tell a little story. Most people take two minutes or less.

- What's your version of a perfect day?
- If you could live in any sitcom, which one would it be? (Ask if they can sing the theme song, too!)
- What was in your high school locker?
- If you had your own talk show, who would your first three guests be?
- It's the movie of your life—who will play you?
- What is the scariest thing you've ever done for fun?
- If you could instantly become an expert in something, what would it be?
- If you could eliminate one thing from your daily routine, what would it be and why?
- What is your favorite children's story?
- What is the best gift anyone has ever given you?

## FROM US TO YOU

### OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT – NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE HANDOUT

So you're trying to share as much information on green infrastructure as possible in the most user-friendly, organized way—wouldn't it be great if there was a handy list of resources on the subject? Turns out there is! Use this handout to share links to videos, trainings, tools, and literature that will give your audience all they need to get started learning about—and then implementing—natural infrastructure. Find it here: [coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/natural-infrastructure.pdf](https://coast.noaa.gov/data/digitalcoast/pdf/natural-infrastructure.pdf).

### UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#), and tag along with these campaigns:

- April 12 to 16: Use [#Caribbean](#) to see and share the best of this beautiful region.

- April 22: Use [#EarthDay](#) to celebrate the incredible oceans and coasts that call this planet home.
- All month: Use [#GreenInfrastructure](#) and [#NaturalInfrastructure](#) to highlight stories and best practices.

### IT'S PHOTO CONTEST TIME

Submit your photos to be included in our annual coastal management photo contest: [coast.noaa.gov/about/photo-contest](https://coast.noaa.gov/about/photo-contest).

### RESEARCH RESERVE IMPACT STORIES

As we celebrate Earth Day, it's a great opportunity to also celebrate the nation's research reserves, and all they do to protect our planet's precious resources. Why not use our database of impact stories to show your audience these myriad achievements through tales of science and stewardship in action? Find all research reserve stories here: [coast.noaa.gov/states/stories/?prog-filter=National%20Estuarine%20Research%20Reserves](https://coast.noaa.gov/states/stories/?prog-filter=National%20Estuarine%20Research%20Reserves).

## FAST FACTS – NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE



### Natural Infrastructure



Wetlands and reefs  
and mangroves...oh my!



Billions in savings (\$23 billion/year),  
services (water quality and storm protection),  
and value (37% higher property value).

This is one of the many graphics and facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at [coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/natural-infrastructure.html](https://coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/natural-infrastructure.html). If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.

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