

# COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

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

## In This Issue

### COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

Communicating with the Underserved

### COMMUNICATOR OF THE MONTH

Beth Thomas  
North Inlet-Winyah Bay  
Research Reserve

### FROM US TO YOU

Outreach Tool Spotlight –  
Coastal County Snapshots  
Upcoming Social Media Campaigns  
Spanish-Language Videos  
Fast Facts – Coral Reefs

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
THE ALMOST RIGHT WORD AND  
THE RIGHT WORD IS . . . THE  
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
THE LIGHTNING BUG AND  
THE LIGHTNING

– Mark Twain



November 2020, Issue 25

## COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

### COMMUNICATING WITH THE UNDERSERVED

One of the challenges facing those working in coastal management is the difficulties that may be encountered when discussing resilience with underserved communities. Existing resilience programs often fall short in their efforts to fully engage those populations.

An underserved population is a group that has been historically—and still often is—systemically excluded from policymaking processes. For these populations, race, religion, language, or socioeconomic status may come into play. I recently conducted a literature search regarding engagement and risk communication strategies for these audiences for NOAA's Water Initiative project. Focus areas from the literature review include low-income populations, recent immigrants, ethnic communities, and rural populations.

In my search, it quickly became apparent that there is nothing easy or cookie cutter about risk communications. Good risk communication takes determination, a strong "stick with it" approach, and the ability to listen—really listen—and implement what you hear. But there are additional challenges with underserved populations, which consequently calls for different approaches. A summary of some of the overarching lessons learned is provided below.

- 1. Invest time getting to know the community.** You need to know everything about the community, and it is not the responsibility of the community to educate you on their history. You have to do the homework! Do a search in the library, look for online resources, or even attend their town-hall meetings to learn about their history, past relationships and approaches, and their values and concerns.
- 2. Engage and reach out to stakeholders.** One example of an underserved population is those who live in isolated, low-lying, or rural areas. That, along with a lack of transportation, childcare, and time off, makes it difficult for them to attend a meeting outside of their trusted zones. For this reason, it's important to go where the community is located and to identify the leaders who can help bring them together.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

**3. Be honest and transparent.** Underserved communities have a history of being disappointed with undelivered promises, so honesty is a key element. When you don't know something, let them know. And if the answer or outcome is not going to be popular, say it anyway. Finding the right messenger (preferably someone from inside the community) can improve effectiveness. Approaching the public without a relationship or a connection can do more harm than good.

**4. Empower the community.** A problem I saw repeatedly in many of the articles I uncovered was the lack of engagement of the underserved population in the decision-making process. Under-representation and segregation have left these people without a voice in local politics. Underserved communities are their own best experts; they know their land and the problems affecting them. Let them be part of the solution. Keep them motivated by celebrating their strengths and contributions to the effort.

**5. Establish trust with a long-term investment.** Lack of trust toward government agencies may be a communication barrier, and this trust won't be easy to achieve. Build it by partnering with local organizations, and by identifying community leaders who are willing to help and unite everyone. When it comes to helping their community, these leaders are typically all in.

**6. Evaluate the results.** Lessons learned are important. Let other people know what has worked and what has not. Future approaches depend on this, so communicate information about your work to your peers!

There are special challenges to be considered when making an outreach or engagement plan. It is important to note that the points made here represent recommendations for taking that first step toward effective community engagement. Each community is different and will behave differently. While some of them will understand the risks and be motivated to take action, some will not. You might have to go the extra mile to connect and spur action.

The title of my report is "Enhanced Engagement and Risk Communication for Underserved Communities: Research Findings and Emerging Best Practices." To obtain a copy, contact Chris Ellis at [Chris.Ellis@noaa.gov](mailto:Chris.Ellis@noaa.gov).

Karla Lopez  
NOAA Educational Partnership  
Program Earth System Sciences  
and Remote Sensing Scholar at the  
University of Texas at El Paso



## COMMUNICATOR OF THE MONTH

Name: Beth Thomas  
Title: Education Coordinator  
Organization: North Inlet-Winyah  
Bay National Estuarine Research  
Reserve, South Carolina  
Contact: [Beth@baruch.sc.edu](mailto:Beth@baruch.sc.edu)



Organizational Structure: We have a small staff of researchers and educators, each with defined roles and specific job tasks, but with some overlapping duties for all of us due to staff size.

Educators assist with research, monitoring, and stewardship activities, and our research staff, manager, and Coastal Training Program coordinator help with educational programming and outreach, as appropriate. Our state partner, the University of South Carolina, has a marine field lab facility with associated research and administrative staff, which is shared with our reserve, so we often work closely together.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

## COMMUNICATOR OF THE MONTH (CONTINUED)

**Outreach Approach:** We have three to four staff members who work on outreach. Two staff members (the stewardship coordinator and training program coordinator) recently completely overhauled our website (with input from all reserve staff). Our stewardship coordinator creates quarterly e-newsletters and maintains an email list serve; our education specialist handles social media and program publicity through printed flyers and online event calendars; and we all submit content, blog posts, photos, and videos for these media formats.

**Job Duties:** Along with our education specialist, I coordinate and conduct the reserve's educational programming from our outreach facility, the Hobcaw Barony Discovery Center, where we offer events for students and the public, such as salt marsh field studies for K through 12 kids, and estuary and coastal ecology programs like kayaking, birding, and biking for adults and families. Currently, we are adjusting to COVID-19 challenges, specifically with in-person activities, and are restructuring many of our events to virtual formats. We are working with teachers to create resources, such as virtual field trips, to continue to engage our K through 12 audiences, despite not being able to see them in person. We are also working on a new volunteer training program (also virtual) for citizen science projects.

**Social Media:** Our education specialist handles social media and has proven to be very adept at it, despite having never been much of a user before. She has been using Facebook to advertise events, and we have seen an increase in program engagement from this effort. One success has been the addition of an online program registration feature on our updated website, and this has been a game-changer for us for managing events.

**Most Fun, Most Challenging:** The setting! You can't beat being by the coast every day. I also love interacting with people (co-workers and the public) and sharing the beauty of the estuary. The most challenging is the paperwork, databases, and reports—I can never concentrate on these when I'd rather be outside!

**Work Mantra:** For most audiences, short and simple is best.

**Vision for the Future:** I would like to continue to expand these educational and outreach efforts; refocusing on a virtual format (because of COVID) has already allowed us to reach a broader geographic target audience with a diversity of topics, presenters, and expertise.

## FROM US TO YOU

### OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT – COASTAL COUNTY SNAPSHOTS

Data on coastal economics and hazards can be difficult to understand, and even harder to explain. Use this tool to select your county of interest, quickly find the info you want to share, and print easy-to-read graphics and charts to bring with you or present in your next virtual meeting. It takes the hard work out of telling the important coastal stories. Find it here: [coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/snapshots.html](https://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/snapshots.html).

### UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

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

- November 15 to 21: Use #GeoWeek for tools and topics related to exploring this planet's geography.

- November 30 to December 4: Use #CoralsWeek to celebrate one of the earth's most precious resources.
- All month: We're using #Thankful to give thanks to all the contributors, partners, and organizations that help us help the coastal management community.

### SPANISH-LANGUAGE VIDEOS

If you're communicating with a Spanish-speaking audience, why not show them you really speak their language? We've got a variety of short videos in Spanish on a range of coastal management topics—from the [coral reef economy](#) to [tsunami safety](#) and [storm surge](#), all created to help you get the message out clearly, accurately, and creatively. View the full video gallery here: [coast.noaa.gov/gallery/videos/index.html](https://coast.noaa.gov/gallery/videos/index.html).

## FAST FACTS – CORAL REEFS



**\$3.4 billion** value every year, benefiting fisheries, tourism, and coastal communities

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/coral-reefs.html](https://coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/coral-reefs.html). If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.

*Coastal Communicators* is published by the NOAA Office for Coastal Management.

To subscribe to this newsletter, visit [coast.noaa.gov/contactform](https://coast.noaa.gov/contactform).

Send questions or suggestions to [coastal.info@noaa.gov](mailto:coastal.info@noaa.gov).

View past issues at [coast.noaa.gov/gallery/newsletter.html](https://coast.noaa.gov/gallery/newsletter.html).

Editor: *Pamela Jacobs* | Communications Director: *Donna McCaskill* | Graphic Designer: *Daniella Fishburne*  
[coast.noaa.gov](https://coast.noaa.gov) | [facebook.com/NOAADigitalCoast](https://facebook.com/NOAADigitalCoast) | [twitter.com/NOAADigitalCoast](https://twitter.com/NOAADigitalCoast) | [instagram.com/NOAADigitalCoast](https://instagram.com/NOAADigitalCoast)

*Improving communication skills, one newsletter at a time.*