

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT 2.0: WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES FOR COASTAL MANAGEMENT?

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Effective engagement with the coastal management community is a key element of any coastal management program or project. Coastal management practitioners engage with their communities for many reasons, including explaining and building awareness about coastal management issues and concerns and encouraging active support for coastal programs. Stakeholder engagement methods take various forms, ranging from simple dissemination of fact-based information to discursive forums designed to facilitate co-learning and collaborative problem-solving.

Abt Environmental Research (AER) is conducting a study to identify advanced engagement knowledge and techniques (“Engagement 2.0”) that move beyond traditional engagement approaches and are both practical and theoretically sound (i.e., based on social science research). In concert with the NOAA Office for Coastal Management, we are reviewing its current pool of stakeholder engagement practices, conducting a targeted literature search on stakeholder engagement, and holding conversations with a subset of coastal management researchers and practitioners experienced in stakeholder engagement. Based on our research, we will identify a preliminary series of advanced tools, methods, and practices that are viable for effectively engaging the coastal management community.

Stakeholder engagement can be hampered by a numerous challenges, such as participant gaming, engagement fatigue, social capital barriers, logistical burden and expense, and dealing with inherently emotional and controversial variables. Consequently, our important next step will be to validate our preliminary list of Engagement 2.0 stakeholder engagement tools and approaches with Social Coast Forum participants. Forum participants can assess these tools from both sides of stakeholder engagement; as coastal management practitioners who are (1) the subject of engagement approaches (e.g., when attending OCM meetings and receiving training and technical assistance on coastal management issues), and (2) looking for new tools and methods for engaging their own communities. We want to get their input on our preliminary list of Engagement 2.0 tools; which tools would be effective ways to engage you and your own communities? Which ones would have the opposite effect? Which ones are effective when dealing with the challenges described above? What criteria should we use to evaluate the tools? Are there new ideas that we haven’t considered?

AER will use the insights, experiences, and suggestions that emerge from this Tackle-the-Issue discussion to revise and finalize our list of recommended advanced tools and methods for engaging the coastal management community.