

HELPING THE GEORGIA COAST USE INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES FOR STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT THROUGH THE CRS PROGRAM

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Within the National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System is an innovative tool for stakeholder engagement known as the Program for Public Information. A committee is tasked with creating messages directed towards target audiences, raising flood awareness and appropriate actions residents can take when floods happen. The goal of the PPI is to create messages that are local and customized, direct actions that protect people and property. Not every community can accomplish forming a PPI committee, but those who do are creating a model for other communities to emulate.

Each committee includes a floodplain manager, floodplain residents, insurance agents, bankers, realtors and a community public information officer. In areas where it is possible, a multi-jurisdictional committee is an option, adding an additional two members from each participating community. This results in more CRS points for everyone, but the coordination of efforts can be a greater challenge.

Major tasks of the committee include creating an overview of the community, assessing flood risks and gathering historical information. The group then chooses target audiences based on demographics, flood risk, or geographic parameters such as coastal, riverine or barrier island flooding. Specific and directive messages are formulated and outreach events and projects are developed for each target audience. Using the expertise of the floodplain managers and local government participants, ideas generated by the committee are coordinated with activities from other governmental organizations. A document outlining the outreach program is presented to city and county governments for adoption. The program is then monitored and evaluated annually.

A PPI is a large task for a committee. The work generally takes a year or more. Coastal Sea Grant Agents are playing an integral role in facilitating the formation of PPI programs. We are generating interest in the PPI, facilitating the meetings, maintaining momentum throughout the committee process, offering suggestions, participating in outreach events and coordinating interagency efforts. Success in the PPI depends on the choice of committee members, the ability to keep the project moving forward, and seeing the tangible reward in the form of additional CRS points, that can result in a better rating, and money saved by each floodplain resident on their flood insurance. Intangible results include increased resiliency, collaborative partner engagement, cohesive communities and broader outreach capacity.

With the recent catastrophic flooding in South Carolina, the role of a PPI takes on new meaning for residents in the Southeast. Redefining target audiences to include not only the most vulnerable, but also those able to mobilize emergency response, social media groups, and citizen scientists who can upload photographs or contribute to apps that document storm surge, tide boundaries, river levels, and safety spots. Can we convey areas of high ground and safety as part of our public information packages? These pertinent questions will be discussed as we present our work as Georgia Sea Grant agents, helping the Georgia coast use innovative techniques for stakeholder involvement through the CRS program.