Making Waves in Equitable Coastal Resilience:
A National Workshop on Social Equity and Coastal Resilience
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Inclusion in Decision Making of Under-served and Invisible Communities

Summary: Under-served and invisible communities have the characteristic of being historically left out of decision-making processes that affect them. They include rural communities, tribal communities, low-wealth communities, and marginalized communities. While engaging these communities, planners, academics, and government officials need to acknowledge and respect their priorities, needs, and capacity to participate. Researchers must acknowledge that some communities have good reasons to be skeptical of researchers, government officials, and outsiders. These communities may have been over-studied, but not on their own terms or in ways that benefited them. Sustained long-term engagement focused on natural and meaningful benefits to the community contributes to an equitable process.

Issues and Recommendations for Practice

① **Intentional engagement for real benefits to the community**

Applied and engaged research projects should avoid the colonial extractive approach and provide real benefits to the community by addressing their concerns or needs. Researchers need to return results to the community, letting the community know that the work has had an impact. The engagement process must be equitable – if data is only collected from selected groups in the community or if the community lacks trust in the research to provide honest information and data, then the project results are not meaningful. Engagement also requires recognizing communities are not monoliths and should not be treated as such. Researchers need to do the 'pre-work' to learn about the community. Engagement built upon a foundation of relationship building will surface important community issues related to resilience, equity concerns or challenges, and community features that must be considered when engaging. We must acknowledge that this foundational work, while time-consuming, is essential.

Recommendation: Identify how the project can provide real benefits

- Explicitly address the elephant in the room: "We've been involved in something like this before, and nothing happened." Identify the project's benefits for the community and seek community input.
- Consider where the real concerns of the community may intersect with the research. The project may provide benefits in other ways beyond the research.

Recommendation: Establish a foundation of relationship- and trust-building
- Establish incentives that prioritize relationship building as much as other deliverables or research products. Building long-term relationships and trust are as important an outcome as academic products.
- Explicitly call out the need for co-production and two-way processes in funding RFPs.
- Fund the needed relationship-building or reward relationship- and trust-building activities in evaluating projects to be funded.

Recommendation: Approach engagement holistically and focus on accessibility
- Use multiple data collection methods, such as participatory action research, ethnography, and social network mapping.
- Think beyond the traditional public meetings and make the project accessible to community members, stakeholders, and partners. Meet stakeholders where they are or where they feel safe or comfortable.
- Respect the time and expertise of community participants by providing compensation or other benefits.
- Translate project materials into different languages used in the community and, when possible, engage community participants in their primary language.

② **Meaningful metrics for applied research and engagement**
Researchers should work with the community to develop project metrics that are meaningful for both the research and the community. Community members and stakeholders have deep knowledge and expertise in their lived experiences and should be involved in determining the appropriate metrics. These metrics can change over time, depending on what the community defines as needed at a given time and the uses of the metrics. Long-term engagement should be part of the process that gets measured and assessed over time.

Recommendation: Develop and measure meaningful metrics with the community
- Co-produce with the community project metrics that are meaningful, reflecting the needs of the community.
- Include metrics that show the community that resources spent on projects were impactful.

③ **Sustaining inclusion and engagement in the long term**
Long-term inclusion and engagement of the community in applied and engaged projects require a commitment of time and money on behalf of researchers and community partners and members. A focus on capacity building also encourages a long-term focus, such as developing tools and knowledge for communities to advocate for themselves or training community members to continue the efforts beyond the project.

Recommendation: Facilitate long-term inclusion and engagement of applied and engaged projects
- Build a long-term focus on community engagement and the requisite resources into funding and program requirements.
- Consider capacity-building components and build capacity outcomes into the project.
- Prioritize follow-up with the community following project completion, such as showing project results and how the results are used, or regular check-ins with community representatives.

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More information about the workshop:

https://sites.wp.odu.edu/workshop

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