

Working together to adapt to a changing climate: flood and coast

Key learning from an evidence review on community engagement on climate adaptation

What is this project about?

The project aims to:

- Learn more about the distinctive engagement challenges communities and places face in the context of climate change. Such as:
 - increased levels of flood/coastal erosion risk
 - limited or contentious options for risk reduction
- Develop approaches to engagement that are responsive to these challenges, that can inform future Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) practices.

What does the project involve?

- **Evidence review** – Which includes:
 - learning from within risk management authorities (RMAs)
 - insights from academic literature
 - examples of innovative work from other places and people
- **Action research** - Co-developing, testing and evaluating approaches to engagement in 2 places/communities.
- **Practitioner engagement** – Setting up processes to enable reflection and learning within the selected communities.

Evidence for new FCERM Strategy

The project is providing evidence for the Strategy's aim to create 'climate resilient places', specifically addressing:

Strategic objective 1.2: Between now and 2050 risk management authorities will help places plan and adapt to flooding and coastal change across a range of climate futures.

This includes:

- Identifying frontrunner places to develop adaptive approaches with local partners
- Developing a national framework to identify steps needed to take an adaptive approach



Draft National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England



Vision: a nation ready for, and resilient to, flooding and coastal change – today, tomorrow and to the year 2100.

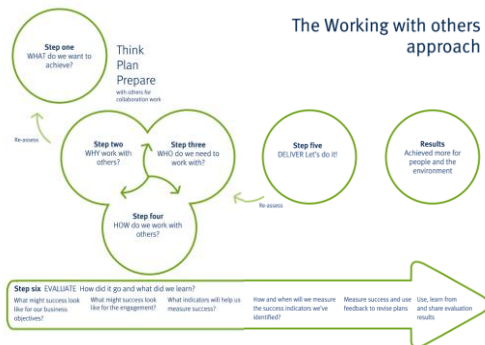
Source: <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/fcrm/fcrm-national-strategy-info>



Review of existing expertise in risk management authorities

60+ reports, case studies and policy documents from the Environment Agency (EA), Natural Resources Wales, Defra and other RMAs were reviewed to identify lessons from past FCERM engagement.

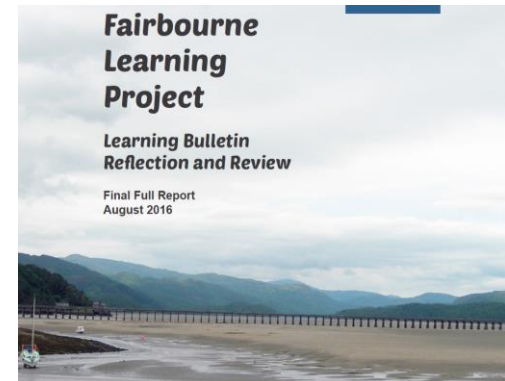
Principles of good engagement are clearly outlined. But some challenges in engagement practice seem to persist, suggesting that evidence is not always feeding into policy and practice. This is particularly problematic in 'tricky' engagement contexts where options for future protection are limited.



Engagement steps in the EA's 'working with others' approach
Source: Environment Agency's Working with Others guide



Previous EA research on community engagement
Source: <http://evidence.environment-agency.gov.uk/FCERM>

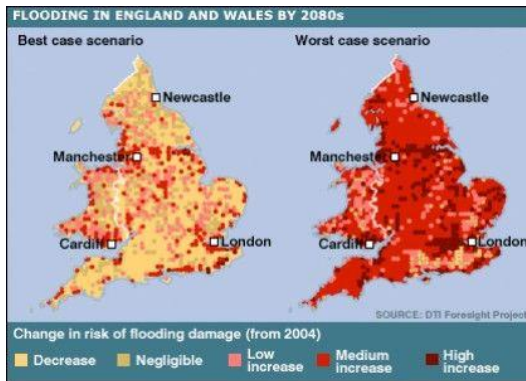


A multi-agency project is working with communities in Fairbourne, Wales on flood & coastal adaptation
Source: Welsh Government/JBA Consulting

Understanding challenges in adaptation processes

We undertook an extensive literature review (250+ publications) to build a fuller picture of the issues affecting engagement practice in areas where there are difficult adaptation choices.

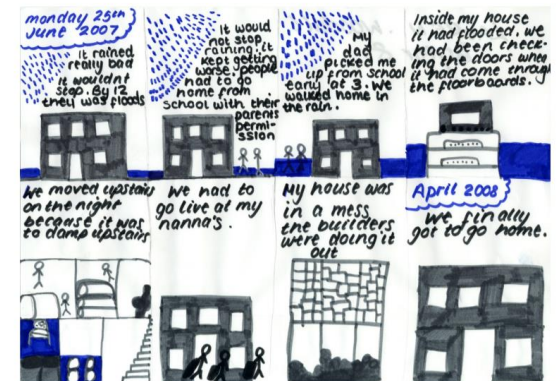
The following slides summarise some key themes and raise some questions that emerged from this review.



A 2080s flood risk map – does this help promote 'readiness'?
Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3648391.stm#map>



Protest against management of moors for grouse shooting, Hebden Bridge. Local conflicts can affect collaboration.
Source: <http://www.hebdenbridge.co.uk/news/2014/045.html>



A child's storyboard of their experiences during the floods in Hull. Emotions & memories impact engagement. Source: <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/lec/sites/cswm/hullchildrensfloodproject>

Challenge #1: 'Readiness'

'Readiness' is the knowledge, skills and capacities that are needed to enable collaborative FCERM decision-making, it was a key theme in the evidence review. Research suggests that:

- Many communities and agencies are not yet prepared to engage in complex planning processes for FCERM, especially where climate change is a contributing factor.
- 'Readiness' has different dimensions: understanding the potential risks and impacts of climate change; being able to recognise and manage emotional responses to change; or capacity to engage in deliberations over complex future choices.
- Engagement processes need to include an assessment of 'readiness' before critical decision-making processes are initiated. This includes assessing the readiness of the RMAs and engagement professionals themselves.
- To build readiness within a community or across agencies, well-planned and inclusive processes to build shared understandings of local risks and adaptation needs can help identify realistic options for mitigation or adaptation.

Challenge #2: Framing information

Whilst engagement with information is a necessary part of building 'readiness', it is rarely neutral or objective. An analysis of the ways in which issues, options and people are 'framed' in FCERM language, policy and practice is helpful to engagement work and decision making.

- The ways in which information is presented tends to reflect the interests or assumptions of those producing it. Information is received and interpreted differently by individuals and stakeholder groups, in ways that are shaped by prior knowledge, ways of thinking, values and emotions.
- The language used by agencies to talk about flooding and coastal erosion can affect community responses. It may be helpful to reframe agency-centric descriptions to reflect locally relevant issues.
- Specific words/terms may mean different things to different stakeholders, creating potential for misunderstanding and disagreement and making collaborative decision making more difficult.
- Framing affects not just perceptions of relevant knowledge, but also how agencies, stakeholders and communities see and relate to each other.
- In the context of this project, it is important to ask what different people mean when talking about climate change, adaptation, engagement and success.

Challenge #3: Climate change, emotions & mental health

Climate change predictions are genuinely worrying. Understandably, many of us avoid or suppress them. What would it mean to take the emotional and mental health challenges of engaging with climate change seriously in engagement processes?

- Fears and anxieties about climate change shape people's engagement with adaptation planning, and/or their reluctance to engage. Reflections from experienced practitioners in this field suggests it is helpful to explicitly acknowledge these emotions.
- There is a common – and often justified – sense of a mismatch between the scale of the problem and the perceived lack of urgency/seriousness in tackling it, including by government. This can generate complacency, anger and a sense of helplessness.
- Collaboration as a communal response has the potential to positively affect mental health, build community resilience, and mitigate people's sense of not having a voice.
- Climate change impacts are likely to further exacerbate patterns of injustice and marginalisation. To be inclusive and fair, engagement processes should explicitly acknowledge and seek to tackle this, even when it might generate difficult emotions.

Challenge #4: Place attachment, culture & identity

People's emotional connections to the places in which they live and work can have a big impact on whether and how they engage in thinking about the future of those places. This poses challenges and opportunities for adaptation processes.

- People's emotions – positive, negative or mixed – about the places in which they live or work shape their willingness to take part in adaptation planning, their relationships with other local residents and/or organisations, their local knowledge and their responses to professionals or facilitators coming in from 'outside'.
- Engagement practices and adaptation planning needs to be sensitive to the meanings and emotions associated with particular places – not as problems to be overcome, but as indicators of what matters and resources that can be drawn on.
- Communities with strong place attachment and uncertain futures face particularly difficult challenges. In such settings, there might be a need for 'place detachment'. It is important to reflect on how this might be facilitated or negotiated responsibly and sensitively.

Challenge #5: Power & politics

For social and political scientists, it is clear that engagement and adaptation processes are inherently and inescapably political and open to contention across several dimensions. For RMAs, this can be harder to accept and examine – naming the ways in which these processes are political and contested is itself controversial.

- Some kinds of knowledge are seen as valuable and legitimate in engagement processes around adaptation, while others are marginalised. It is important to notice and reflect on the effects of this dynamic.
- Power and politics also inform what questions are asked in these processes, and what is and is not open to negotiation.
- Questions over who has the authority to make decisions, at what level decisions should be taken, and where responsibility lies are all contested – often for legitimate reasons.
- Naming and examining these power dynamics, and exploring these questions together, is not easy, but it might help to avoid or transform some common conflict dynamics.

Engagement challenges – questions to consider

1. How do we assess and build 'readiness' for collaborative decision making on future climate impacts - within a community, among stakeholders, among experts and engagement professionals?
2. How can we change our language to frame issues in a way that is understandable and meaningful to others (i.e. stakeholders and communities)?
3. How could the emotional and mental health dimensions of climate change adaptation be explicitly factored into engagement processes?
4. What might place-sensitive engagement look like in practice?
5. Is it possible to address power imbalances and create a genuinely collaborative approach to adaptation planning?

Appropriate practices: Ideas and examples

This part of the report describes interesting approaches to engagement in tricky situations, focussing on practices that might be useful in complex adaptation scenarios.



Exploring coastal change and place attachment through photos, Australia
Source: <https://doi.org/10.1002/geo2.28>



Example of local storytelling through film from the 2015 floods in the Calder Valley
Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoEZ2p0g2JU



Digital viewfinders used in California to engage people with visualisations of future scenarios
Source: <https://climateaccess.org/blog/visualizing-climate-solutions>

Practice idea #1: Simulations and role plays

Research and experience suggests that role plays and simulations of realistic scenarios can help participants deepen their understanding of the complexities and trade-offs involved in decision-making, of the perspectives of different groups, and of dynamics of conflict and opportunities for collaboration.

- In places which are facing complex realities and difficult choices, simulations might be a helpful tool to build readiness, to help understand different stakeholder/community perspectives, and comprehension of different adaptation scenarios and choices.
- Simulations based on local scenarios present both benefits and challenges. While context-specific scenarios might work best, there is also potential for learning from simulations generated for similar settings elsewhere.
- Levels of willingness/reluctance to engage in role-plays and simulations is likely to vary among professionals, stakeholders and communities in England and Wales. It is important to take this into account when planning or designing such processes.

Practice idea #2: Visualising change

Making anticipated changes to local landscapes visible can be a powerful tool in encouraging engagement with likely impacts and potential adaptation measures. Visual aids are already commonly used in engagement processes, but our review draws attention to a wide range of possibilities that may be worth exploring.

- While visualisation technologies are becoming increasingly sophisticated, there are clearly costs and trade-offs involved in using enhanced visualisation of future scenarios.
- It is worth thinking carefully about the contexts and audiences for which visualisation might be particularly effective as different audiences may need different types of visualisation.
- The physical settings (e.g. in situ, in public places, in closed settings) in which visual tools are presented and used can affect to their engagement value and how well they are received.
- Visual methods are not stand-alone, they need to be integrated into wider engagement strategies.
- This is a rapidly evolving field of practice. Additional training or professional development might be helpful, including the ethics of using visualisation.

Practice idea #3: Engaging with narratives & stories

Stories are important ways in which individuals and communities make sense of who they are, where they have come from and where they are going. In encouraging meaningful engagement with potentially drastic change, it is worth paying attention to relevant stories (e.g. stories about major flooding or coastal erosion and stories about past experiences with RMAs).

- Incorporating opportunities to share existing place-based stories into wider engagement processes can help to deepen mutual understanding and trust.
- Stories that come across as moralising or patronising are unlikely to be effective. It is important to reflect on what kinds of stories and what ways of telling them work to promote engagement with difficult truths.
- ‘Storying’ climate change impacts and radical change is challenging. Some of these stories may not have happy endings for individuals, places or communities (or for the world at large).
- Communicating decisions via telling the stories of how they were reached could help to humanise RMAs and increase understanding of difficult choices.

Practice idea #4: Tools for conflict analysis

Within FCERM policy and practice there is potential for contention and social conflict. The ability to identify and effectively analyse conflict causes and dynamics could be useful here, and there are a range of tools that can help with this.

- Conflict mapping tools can enhance understanding of different groups, drivers of conflict, and the wider systems in which conflict dynamics occur.
- The usefulness of approaches to conflict depends on context and purpose. It would be helpful to promote understanding of and access to a range of conflict mapping tools to enable practitioners to choose tools that are fit for purpose.
- The effort to understand what is going on in a conflict could in itself be a helpful engagement activity, promoting dialogue between different groups on the dynamics between them and on potential ways forward.

Practice idea #5: Careful attention to process

Attempts to involve professional experts and people with other forms of knowledge in collaborative processes can take many forms. While there is not one right or wrong way, it is important that process design takes account of salient needs, expectations and ethical principles. Good process can make a tangible difference.

- All models of engagement have costs and benefits. It is important to be conscious of what these are in any given context.
- Often, there are trade-offs between the depth and quality of public engagement and the scale of participation. Decisions to limit or expand the number of participants affect process decisions, the kind of engagement that is possible and the perceived legitimacy of different processes.
- There are tensions between process and outcomes too. Often, good process makes a significant difference to how people assess outcomes, both rationally and emotionally.
- It is important to consider both representation (of organised groups/interests) and representativeness (i.e. the extent to which participants mirror wider dynamics in the wider community). Sometimes, these are in tension.
- The models, practices and processes that are used can enhance or hinder the development of local capacities that last beyond a particular engagement process.

Practice ideas – questions to consider

1. In what contexts in England and Wales might role plays/simulations be a helpful tool to build readiness, or to enhance understanding of different perspectives and different adaptation scenarios?
2. What forms of visualisation might help people engage with likely future changes, and/or with options for adaptation?
3. What kinds of stories, and what ways of telling them, might work as ways of promoting engagement with the difficult challenges facing particular places?
4. Could mapping and analysing what is going on in a conflict be a helpful engagement activity, promoting dialogue between different players on the dynamics between them, and on potential ways forward?
5. What trade-offs are there between the depth and quality of public engagement and the scale of participation? Between process and outcomes?

Further information

Evidence review available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-engagement-on-climate-adaptation-to-flood-risk>

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