



MAKING WAVES: SEA LEVEL RISE ENGAGEMENT IN THE CITY OF WESTPORT

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Positionality Statement

Our team is made up of two white women and two mixed-race women who have all had the privilege of living and attaining higher education in the United States. These identities and experiences have shaped how we approach this project, and we acknowledge that our epistemological assumptions and inherent biases influence the outcomes of any work we produce. We are committed to questioning these assumptions and combating our biases through intentional conversations about race, gender, immigration status, and more, as well as through the careful development of research questions and methodologies.

The team's identities do not and cannot possibly represent the full experiences of Westport residents. Tessa and MJ are from different areas of Washington state, Alison is from Minnesota, and Elana is from Nevada. None of us claim to represent the views and needs of the Westport and South Beach communities. We attempted to center Westport residents' experiences throughout this report and did our best to fully listen to their input and suggestions throughout the engagement process. We understand that as four graduate students living and studying in Seattle, we entered Westport as outsiders, and we did our best to respect the community, their experiences, and the wealth of knowledge that comes from living on the coast.

In addition, we approached this project as consultants who are not employed by the City of Westport or the Cascadia Coastline and Peoples Hazards Research Hub. We present this report and our recommendations with the hope that equity will be centered in the use of any of our materials.

Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	2
<i>Positionality Statement</i>	3
<i>Glossary</i>	6
<i>Executive Summary</i>	7
<i>Chapter 1: Rising Tides</i>	11
<i>Chapter 2: Research Methods – A Community-Based Approach</i>	15
2.1 Literature Review	15
2.2 Stakeholder Mapping.....	16
2.3 Representative Focus Group	17
2.4 Informal Interviews	19
2.5 Informal Document Analysis, School Visit, and City Council Presentation	20
2.6 Research Method Limitations.....	21
<i>Chapter 3: Reviewing the Literature –Public Engagement, Westport, and Sea Level Rise</i>	24
3.1 Best Practices in Stakeholder and Public Engagement	25
3.2 Westport-Specific Sea Level Rise Projections and Data.....	29
3.3 Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Communication	33
<i>Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings – Insights from the Community</i>	36
4.1 Current City Outreach	37
4.2 Preferred City Outreach	37
4.3 Westport Beliefs, Values, and Identity.....	38
4.4 Valuable or Need to Know Information about Sea Level Rise	38
4.5 Outreach Opportunities	39
4.6 Challenges or Barriers to Engagement	39
4.7 Westport City Council Presentation	40
4.8 Ocosta Junior-Senior High School Visit.....	42
<i>Chapter 5: Incorporating Community Feedback</i>	43
5.1 The Engagement Toolkit.....	43
5.2 Educational Materials – Callout Map	46

5.3 Educational Materials – Flyer	48
5.4 Educational Materials – Sign	50
5.5 City Website Landing Page	52
Chapter 6: Recommendations for Sea Level Rise Engagement in Westport.....	53
6.1 Utilize the Toolkit	53
6.2 Formalize the Stakeholder Planning Team	54
6.3 Begin a Youth Coalition.....	55
6.4 Adopt and Expand Proposed Educational Materials	55
6.5 Establish Contacts within the Latinx Community.....	56
6.6 Build Capacity Using Funds from the Ecology Grant	57
6.7 Further Limitations and Considerations	57
Chapter 7: Continuing the Conversation	60
References.....	63
Appendices.....	66
Appendix 1: Focus group discussion questions	66
Appendix 2: Summary of focus group discussion 1: deductive codes, key quotes, number of mentions, and code mentions relative to total coded comments.	67
Appendix 3: Westport Community Engagement Toolkit.....	69
Appendix 4: Educational Material – Callout Map	80
Appendix 5: Educational Material – Flyer/Poster.....	81
Appendix 6: Educational Material – Sign	82
About the TEAM.....	83

Glossary

Climate change

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. These shifts may be natural, but since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels (like coal, oil, and gas), which produce heat-trapping gases (United Nations n.d.).

Hispanic

This term is used when referring to census categories to stay consistent with the U.S. Census terminology for ethnicity. Outside of demographic discussions, we use the term Latinx to include a larger group not limited to Spanish speakers.

Latinx

A person of Latin American origin or descent, used as a gender-neutral alternative to Latino or Latina. The term Latinx is not accepted by all groups, partially because the 'X' does not fit traditional Spanish grammar, and because of its primary use in academia but not everyday life. We understand and acknowledge these tensions, but we chose to use the term to indicate the broader community we were trying to reach through this project.

Sea Level Rise (SLR)

The average increase in the water level of Earth's oceans due to climate change.

Stakeholder(s)

Any individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organization. We acknowledge that this term is deeply rooted in colonial practices and may not be the preferred term of all groups and communities. We did not find a better term that is as universally understood and thus continued to use the term for the purposes of this project.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Westport is a town of approximately 2,000 people on the Washington coast. As a low-lying coastal community, Westport is both reliant on the sea for its fishing and tourist economies and vulnerable to the impacts of sea level rise (SLR). Yet recent community resilience surveys indicate that SLR is not a salient issue for Westport residents. Underestimating the compounding risks of storm surges, flooding, and other seawater penetration hazards, residents may not understand or support the City of Westport's efforts to adapt to rising seas.

This report was written at the request of the City of Westport to help the City both increase public knowledge about SLR and, in doing so, increase public buy-in to SLR planning and adaptation efforts. This project was commissioned through the Evans School Student Consulting Lab and the Cascadia Coastline and Peoples Hazards Research Hub. The project sought to engage with diverse stakeholders in the Westport community to identify outreach methods that maximize public knowledge and participation around SLR. In addition to this report, the project had four main deliverables to Westport: formation of a **stakeholder planning team**, development of a **community engagement toolkit**, production of **sea level rise educational materials**, and **public presentation** of the developed materials.

Research Methods

Our team sought to inform how the City of Westport can inclusively engage its community to plan and prepare for SLR. First, we reviewed the literature surrounding community engagement, climate and science communication, and Westport-specific climate change projections. We then conducted a stakeholder analysis and used snowball sampling to determine the makeup of a representative focus group, i.e., a stakeholder planning team. The feedback from this team, gathered over two hour-long moderated discussions, formed the backbone of the SLR engagement toolkit and educational materials that we developed. We continued to iterate on these materials using feedback gathered during a Westport school visit and a public Westport City Council presentation, as well as consultations with SLR and communications experts.

Key Findings

Community members identified several challenges the City of Westport faces in conducting public engagement around SLR, including a lack of local, uniform information distribution channels and difficulty holding public attention. However, we found significant enthusiasm and ideas for new forms of City outreach, with an ideal approach recommending a blend of physical and digital methods tailored to Westport's community.

Toolkit and Outreach Materials

Our SLR engagement toolkit and outreach materials went through several iterations based on rounds of community and expert feedback presented in a variety of venues. Drawing upon our literature review and initial focus group discussion, we created an engagement toolkit, as well as initial drafts of four material deliverables: a callout map, a flyer, an outdoor sign, and a web landing page to be hosted on the City of Westport’s website. We then revised these drafts several times after our second focus group discussion, consultations with SLR and communications experts, and an in-person visit to Ocosta Junior-Senior High School and Westport City Council. Key revisions included more legends and labels, simplifying language, and emphasizing what the audience can do in the face of threats from SLR. The engagement toolkit summarizes engagement best practices and ideas for public outreach in Westport specifically. The figure below shows a sample of our final materials.



Recommendations and Limitations

Based on our focus group discussions, school visit, Westport City Council presentation, and expert consultations, our recommendations for the City of Westport to increase SLR engagement are as follows:

- Utilize the engagement toolkit
- Formalize the stakeholder planning team
- Begin a youth coalition
- Adopt and expand proposed educational materials
- Establish contacts within the Latinx community
- Build capacity using funds from the Ecology grant

Our work is intended to jumpstart the engagement process as Westport looks to conduct public outreach around SLR as widely and inclusively as possible. Our hope is that the audiences and methods we identified and the engagement toolkit and educational materials we developed will make the City's SLR engagement easier, faster, more informative, and more equitable. A figure illustrating the connections between our research questions and final recommendations can be found on the next page.

At the same time, we acknowledge several key limitations we faced while conducting our work. In addition to being constrained by the six-month window of our project, we approached the Westport community as outsiders. We attempted to learn about the community at the same time we were learning how to communicate with them, and we cannot claim to have gotten everything right. One particular shortcoming was that we were unable to recruit a member of Westport's Latinx community to our stakeholder planning team, leaving that key perspective unrepresented. We also, at times, struggled to accurately portray projected SLR information given its deep connection to other climate change and ecological issues, and to frame it in a way that connected with Westport audiences. These limitations, the limitations specific to our research methods, and our attempts to mitigate them are discussed throughout this report.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS



RECOMMENDATIONS

Best practices in engagement

How does Westport currently reach out to community members?

How do best practices in community engagement apply to Westport?



Establish contacts within the Latinx community



Formalize the stakeholder planning team



Begin a Youth Coalition

Knowledge needed for SLR planning

What information about SLR is most valuable to Westporters?

What individual and community actions has Westport considered to protect its assets?



Utilize the engagement toolkit



Adopt and expand proposed educational materials



Build capacity using funds from the Ecology grant

* Design of recommendation graphic inspired by "Improving Washington Shellfish Aquaculture Permitting Efficiency," a capstone project by Kate Brouns, Adam Saul, Eric Scott, and James Trocmé, 2022.

Chapter 1: Rising Tides

As climate change progresses, one of the many hazards that communities must now prepare for is the inexorable rise of the sea. Climate change contributes to sea level rise (SLR) in two main ways: by melting ice sheets and glaciers and by warming sea water so that it expands (NASA 2023). SLR compounds the severity of storms and floods by raising ambient water levels, which increases risks to infrastructure and human life during extreme weather events. Outside of extreme events, some SLR hazards include shoreline erosion, saltwater intrusion into local aquifers, and damage to public and private property, in some instances even displacing entire communities (Boyd 2019). As state and local governments design and implement SLR resilience and adaptation measures, they must also develop strategies to increase community engagement around this issue. Providing empirical information to the public has been shown to increase climate change acceptance and community buy-in to SLR adaptation (Velautham, Ranney, and Brow 2019).

Outside of necessary SLR adaptation measures, it is also important for coastal cities to engage communities in order to reduce the risk of inequitable outcomes. Increasing participation and encouraging co-creation of solutions with community members, especially those who are historically marginalized, will support more just and effective public processes (see section 3.3, Equity and Inclusivity in Science Communication).

The City of Westport is a small coastal community perched on the outer edge of Washington State's southwest Pacific coastline, and its low-lying elevation makes it particularly vulnerable to the impacts of SLR. Westport, along with other southwestern Washington coastal towns, relies on the sea as a source of cultural and economic vitality. The region is home to an ecosystem that supports a vibrant commercial and recreational fishing industry, natural beauty and tourism, and cranberry and timber production, all of which are subject to coastal climate and weather conditions (William D. Ruckelshaus Center 2017)

Although these communities often weather storms and floods, a recent survey conducted by the University of Washington indicates that Westport residents rarely discuss disaster preparedness with fellow community members (Westport Community Resilience Survey 2020). The slow and incremental nature of SLR tends to be even less salient than disaster events. Recent polling in U.S. coastal states shows that SLR is rarely - though increasingly - covered by the media, and that the issue is generally seen as a low priority compared to other climate change impacts, even among residents of coastal cities (Akerlof, Covi, and Rohring 2017). Thus, Westport community members may not understand or support the City's SLR adaptation

efforts such as changes to zoning, building codes, infrastructure investments, and other strategies. Community members may also be prone to underestimate the increasing risk and severity of storm surges, flooding, and other sea-water penetration hazards to their homes and families.

The Cascadia Coastline and Peoples Hazards Research Hub (Cascadia CoPes Hub) is a team of researchers funded by the National Science Foundation to increase knowledge in coastal communities about natural hazards and climate change risks. In partnership with the City of Westport, the Cascadia CoPes Hub commissioned this project to assist the City with creating and implementing an engagement strategy to educate and involve residents in the hazards of SLR to their community, including potential impacts to the City's most at-risk assets.

Research Questions

While the City of Westport has made significant progress in climate resilience and hazard planning, it has not yet developed a comprehensive community engagement strategy. Our project attempted to engage with diverse stakeholders in the Westport community to identify outreach methods and communication styles that maximize public knowledge and participation around SLR. Through our research we sought to answer the question:

How can the City of Westport inclusively engage its community to plan and prepare for sea level rise and the risks it poses to Westport?

To anchor our research and guide the selection of research methods, we divided this broad question into two categories and accompanying sub-questions:

1. Best practices in stakeholder and public engagement.
 - ❖ *How does Westport currently reach out to community members?*
 - ❖ *How do best practices in community engagement apply to Westport?*
2. Knowledge needed to make decisions about climate change and sea level rise planning.
 - ❖ *What information about SLR is most valuable to Westporters?*
 - ❖ *What individual and community actions has Westport considered to protect its assets?*
 - ❖ *What opportunities are there to educate and promote action in planning for sea level rise in Westport?*

Client Objectives

The City of Westport has developed a Comprehensive Plan as well as a Climate Risks Prioritization Toolkit to guide its efforts to adapt to SLR. However, the City recognizes an unmet

need for broad community engagement to increase SLR awareness, knowledge, interest, and participation, and to create buy-in for adaptation measures.

To this end, the City of Westport received a Shoreline Master Program (SMP) grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology, with the goal that “representative stakeholders and the community at large will be more informed about sea level rise science and risks.” The grant lays out a broad scope of project objectives toward this goal, including increasing staff knowledge and capacity to conduct SLR hazards planning, educating stakeholders to assist in future planning recommendations, and creating planning guidance documents. These objectives seek to inform future SLR planning efforts and build upon work previously developed in the Westport Climate Risks Prioritization Toolkit, which identified and prioritized climate risks to Westport community assets.

Our team reviewed the SMP grant alongside the City of Westport and decided to focus on specific objectives from the grant based on time, capacity, and resource constraints. Using our research question in conjunction with key deliverables outlined by the grant, the Cascadia CoPes Hub and the City approved the following goals for our project:

- Form a **stakeholder planning team** from diverse community groups, organizations, and interests to provide stakeholder expertise and make recommendations for community engagement and planning around sea level rise.
- In partnership with the stakeholder planning team, develop a **community engagement toolkit** informed by contemporary resources on stakeholder identification and engagement.
- Produce simple **sea level rise educational materials** that are relevant and accessible to the community.
- Use this information to educate the broader community at a **public presentation**, and use the presentation to understand stakeholder concerns, answer stakeholder questions, and incorporate feedback into the final products.

Report Structure

This report is divided into seven total chapters. The following is a summary of each subsequent chapter’s contents:

Chapter 2: Research Methods – A Community-Based Approach details our strategy for answering our research questions, including literature review methods, stakeholder mapping, sampling, and stakeholder interviews.

Chapter 3: Reviewing the Literature – Public Engagement, Westport, and Sea Level Rise

describes the landscape of current knowledge around community engagement practice, Westport-specific SLR data, and climate resilience and hazards education.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings – Insights from the Community compiles the information gained from our research, identifying themes and key observations from stakeholders.

Chapter 5: Incorporating Community Feedback details how we developed and refined our SLR educational materials and engagement toolkit based on community feedback.

Chapter 6: Recommendations for Sea Level Rise Engagement in Westport identifies next steps for Westport to continue strengthening community engagement and SLR education.

Chapter 7: Continuing the Conversation serves as the conclusion of the report, summarizing our approach, key findings, and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Research Methods – A Community-Based Approach

We focused our research on answering the question: *How can the City of Westport inclusively engage its community to plan and prepare for sea level rise and the risks it poses to Westport?* To investigate this question, we first conducted an in-depth literature review of best practices for community engagement and effective climate change communication and collected information on Westport’s unique climate risks, geography, economy, demographics, and attitudes. Second, we used stakeholder mapping and snowball sampling to identify key community members and groups. Third, we assembled a representative focus group to inform our development of the engagement toolkit and sea level rise educational materials. In the research context, we refer to this group as a focus group, but in terms of project deliverables, we call this group the stakeholder planning team. The two are one and the same. We augmented this effort by conducting informal interviews with engagement practitioners. Finally, we presented our work at both the Ocosta Junior-Senior High School and Westport City Council to solicit and incorporate feedback from community members on the developed materials. This chapter details how we used each of these research methods, the reasoning behind them, and the limitations associated with these methods.

2.1 Literature Review

We first sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of best practices in community engagement and climate risk communication. From insights drawn at that broad level, we narrowed in to apply these concepts to Westport specifically.

In approaching our literature review, we first developed a project concept map to organize key areas of research to explore, eventually deciding on four subtopics: community engagement, climate change and science communication, Westport community characteristics, and Westport-specific sea level rise projections. We assigned one of these topics to each of our four team members to maximize the breadth and efficiency of our literature review process. Chapter 3 details the results of our literature review organized by these sub-topics.

Grey literature such as surveys and reports also proved invaluable to inform the context of our research. To help map existing engagement strategies onto Westport’s unique characteristics, we reviewed stakeholder engagement plans involving SLR for similar coastal communities. We examined reports specific to Westport’s economy and work completed by graduate students working with the City to help hypothesize what SLR information would be valuable to

Westporters. We also analyzed Westport’s completed Climate Resilience Prioritization Toolkit for key information on the severity and likelihood of various risks associated with SLR. Identifying at-risk community assets would provide a valuable starting point for approaching local stakeholders on community values and decision points involving SLR.

While the literature review was necessary for developing a base of knowledge on community engagement, climate change communication, and risks facing Westport, it could not provide insight into engagement tactics specifically tailored to this community. Our client at the City of Westport indicated that the City’s community engagement practice was currently limited to distributing information via the city website and infrequent public participation in Westport City Council meetings. Thus, to get a sense of how to best engage Westporters, and whom to engage with, we embarked on an exploratory stakeholder analysis.

2.2 Stakeholder Mapping

Our stakeholder analysis began with a mapping process. We first identified relevant stakeholders based on geography, economic and non-economic stakes, socio-cultural stakes, ethical or moral concerns, legal or professional obligations, and potential political or logistical support as outlined by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Resilience Metrics. We then mapped stakeholders for the City of Westport using a power-interest grid (Dobel and Day 2005). This practice assists in determining which stakeholders must be taken into account, and which stakeholders must be elevated in order to enhance their power relative to their interest in the issue at hand. We identified groups that were not currently represented in Westport’s typical decision-making process, and then used snowball sampling, starting with contacts known by the City of Westport and the Cascadia CoPes Hub, to identify individual members of these groups. We chose the snowball sampling method because of the small size of the Westport community and the exploratory nature of our research. While there are limitations of this approach, as described in section 2.6, it enabled us to recruit a willing advisory group in a very short time frame. After identifying a diverse group of individuals representing all quadrants of the stakeholder map (see Figure 1 below), we invited them to participate in a representative focus group to co-design the engagement materials alongside our team. We emphasized targeting stakeholders lower on the power-influence scale. In doing so, we hoped to elevate rarely-heard voices to more inclusively involve Westport’s community, in line with the IAP2’s spectrum of public engagement (“IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation” n.d.)

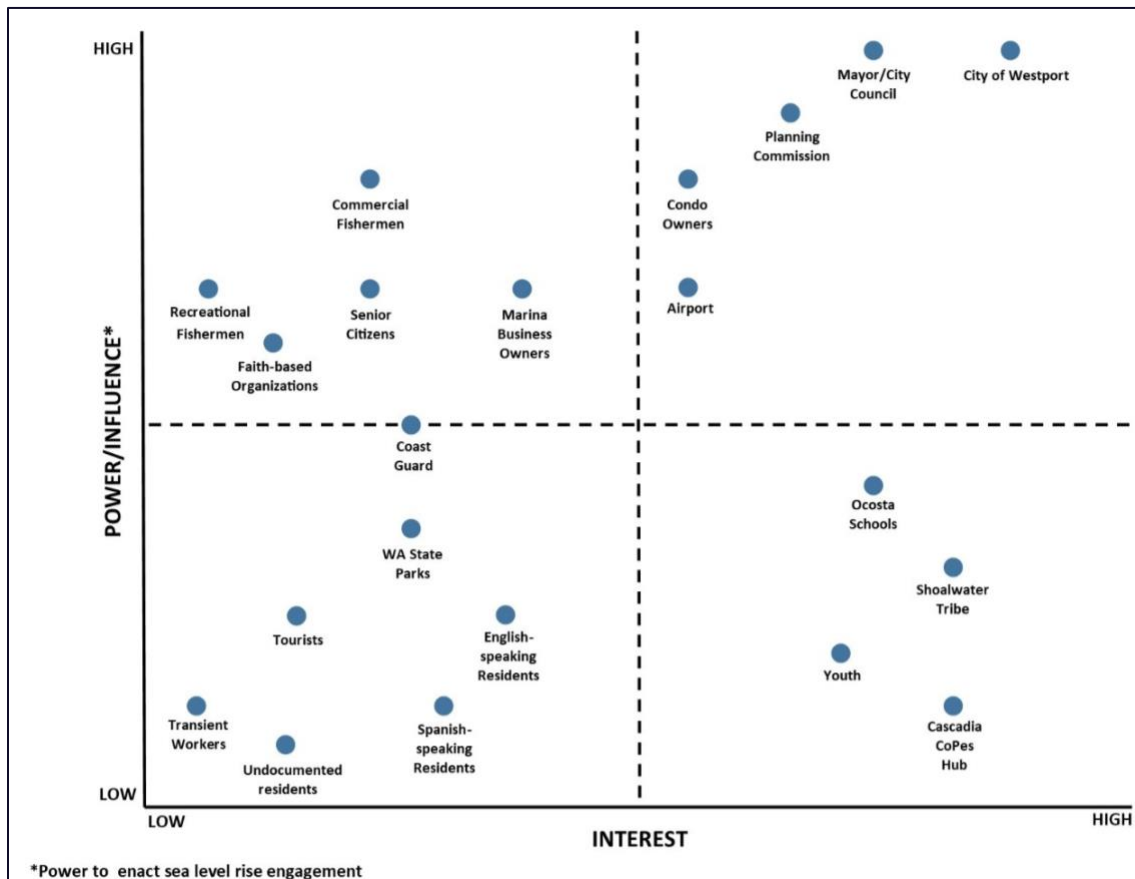


Figure 1: Stakeholder map of major community groups in Westport based on relative interest in and power over engagement in sea level rise planning. After identifying these groups, we reached out to individual group members for their involvement in our project.

2.3 Representative Focus Group

Focus group discussions comprised the main phase of our research. We targeted these discussions to answer our research sub-questions, reiterated here:

- ❖ How does Westport currently reach out to community members?
- ❖ How do best practices in community engagement apply to Westport?
- ❖ What information about SLR is most valuable to Westporters?
- ❖ What individual and community actions has Westport considered to protect its assets?
- ❖ What opportunities are there to educate and promote action in planning for sea level rise in Westport?

Focus Group Recruitment

We chose to recruit a representative focus group of Westport stakeholders to help us generate engagement strategies and provide feedback. As previously mentioned, a variety of research on SLR has already taken place in Westport. Our project aimed to channel this existing community energy and expertise into a collaborative effort to create SLR communications that focus on what Westport already cares about, leveraging assets the community has already identified.

A focus group research approach was a natural extension of our aims and research questions. A focus group setting enhances qualitative information-gathering, allowing for capturing stories or experiences surrounding an issue, documenting perception of the need, and gathering ideas regarding potential solutions (Krueger and Casey 2015). Given the group setting, participants were more likely to respond in their capacities as community members rather than individuals, aiding us in developing a SLR engagement strategy that applies to Westport as a whole. Finally, a focus group enabled us to connect with people and gain in-depth data without the time and logistical constraints of individual interviews.

Focus Group Sessions

In total, we conducted two focus group meetings via Zoom video conferencing, one in early March and one in mid-April, with the same stakeholders present at both. We based our focus group strategy on methods outlined in *Focus Group Interviewing* from Krueger and Casey's *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*. Both meetings began with introductions, a reminder of our project's background and purpose, ground rules, and an explanation of the discussion agenda. The moderator then posed to the group open-ended questions based on the discussion guides we developed (see Appendix 1), moving from broader to more focused questions, with occasional follow-up questions from the moderator and other team members to gain further insight. Each group meeting was recorded with permission, included live captions, had a team member taking notes, and lasted for approximately one hour.

The objective of the first discussion was to develop community engagement strategies for Westport concerning SLR and related impacts to community assets. The objective of the second discussion was to garner feedback on a draft engagement toolkit and draft SLR educational materials we created using insights from the first discussion. We then used qualitative coding to glean insights from the first discussion by pulling out key themes based on discussion transcripts and notes. Those same themes were used as guideposts for the development of our outreach materials and to create a discussion topic outline for our second meeting with the focus group.

Qualitative Coding

We used discussions with informal interviewees (see section 2.4), findings from our literature review, and our research questions to generate a coding scheme with which to analyze the transcript of our first focus group discussion. These sources led us to develop a series of six deductive codes to categorize the key themes of the discussion:

1. Current City Outreach
2. Preferred City Outreach
3. Westport Beliefs, Values, and Identity
4. Valuable or Need to Know Information about Sea Level Rise
5. Outreach Opportunities
6. Challenges or Barriers to Engagement

Each of the above codes and its meaning were discussed and approved as a group with the understanding that we could generate new codes, thereby adopting a hybrid inductive-deductive approach, if the discussion warranted. Once the transcript was obtained via Zoom, each of our four team members coded it separately. We then reconvened to compare our work and ensure coding consistency. When a discrepancy arose, we discussed it as a group until we came to a unanimous agreement, thereby improving our coding reliability. We did not determine it necessary to generate new inductive codes beyond our initial six deductive codes.

We chose to code only the first focus group discussion transcript, as the purpose of the first discussion was substantively different from that of the second discussion. The first focus group discussion was meant to help us generate content for our engagement toolkit and SLR educational materials. Qualitatively coding this discussion was useful in helping us to characterize, organize, and weigh key themes for their translation into our project deliverables. As the second discussion was meant to gather feedback and further iterate and refine these deliverables, we did not qualitatively code transcripts of this session. The second focus group consisted of presenting our draft SLR educational materials and gathering feedback on the content, visual appeal, and usefulness to the community. The feedback we received was extremely helpful in refining these materials before bringing them to our public presentations in Westport.

2.4 Informal Interviews

To augment the information gained from our focus group, we also spoke with local practitioners in community engagement. Insights gained from these conversations were intended to enhance our practical understanding of public engagement in the local context.

While we were not able to identify Westport-specific engagement practitioners, we were able to speak with two professionals working regionally with similar stakeholder groups and purposes.

Firstly, we spoke with Josh Blockstein, a Spanish-fluent master’s student working on engagement projects with Latinx communities in coastal Oregon. Our conversation with Josh revealed common barriers to Latinx engagement in communities of the Pacific Northwest coast and offered strategies to overcome them, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Challenges & strategies for Latinx engagement

Latinx engagement challenges	Strategies to overcome barriers
Communication and networking tend to be very relational and tight knit.	Snowball sampling through schools, churches, and places of work can be effective ways to reach community members.
Communities may be unwilling to involve themselves in government.	Frame engagement as an opportunity to share the community’s expertise and be clear with what is being asked.
This group tends to be time and resource constrained.	Offer meetings on weekends or outside of work hours and offer refreshment and childcare whenever possible.

We also spoke with Jackson Blalock, a Community Engagement Specialist of Washington Sea Grant working with southern coastal Washington residents. Jackson offered strategies for engaging rural southern Washington communities and for guiding our focus group in a productive discussion. For example, he recommended an asset- and vulnerability-based approach to community conversations about SLR and focusing on actionable SLR impacts rather than a connection to climate change, which can be a politically fraught discussion. His insights directly fed into our focus group discussion questions listed in Appendix 1.

2.5 Informal Document Analysis, School Visit, and City Council Presentation

From February to April, we used lessons from our literature review and focus group discussions to draft two key deliverables for the City of Westport: a public engagement toolkit and educational materials to inform the public about SLR. Our final research element was testing the educational materials with the public to conduct an informal document analysis.

Stakeholders frequently mentioned the Ocosta schools as key engagement points for the community, so we visited the Junior-Senior High School during two eighth-grade science classes on April 24th, 2023. We first gave a short presentation to provide background on public engagement and SLR, then engaged students at three different stations to gather their feedback on our educational materials. Students were given the following questions to answer about the materials before presenting their insights back to the rest of the class:

- What was one thing you learned from the material?
- What was one thing you found confusing?
- What is one thing you would change about the material?

Later the same day, we gave a longer presentation on public engagement, SLR and our educational materials to the Westport City Council. The meeting was open to the public, and we garnered community feedback on both public engagement in Westport and our SLR educational materials.

These in-person events were designed to increase community participation in our project, spread awareness of SLR, and set the stage for future engagement efforts by the City. We compiled and analyzed notes from both the school and Westport City Council community feedback events and used these insights to make final revisions to our engagement toolkit and educational materials. This constituted the final step in our research process.

2.6 Research Method Limitations

Due to time constraints, the information we were able to gather for this project was limited to findings from our literature review, stakeholder mapping, focus group interactions, supplementary informal interviews, and public feedback gathered at the school and Westport City Council presentations. Ideally, more interviews, focus group interactions, and opportunities for community feedback would have greatly improved this work. There are also limitations associated with each of our research methods, which we will explore in detail below.

Literature Review Limitations

Our literature review consisted of broader case studies, government engagement toolkits, Washington State climate change and SLR projections, and academic resources on stakeholder engagement. Due to the nature of the available resources, we had to continuously apply broader applications of engagement strategies to the specific localized setting of Westport. While we drew on literature that emphasized broad community engagement, as well as engagement in diverse and/or smaller communities, every locality is unique, so there may have

been Westport-specific nuances that were overlooked simply because there is scarce literature on the subject.

SLR and climate change projections for the Pacific Northwest coast are less widely studied than in other areas of the world such as Oceania or the southeastern United States. This could mean that the data is incomplete, in need of further replication, or less urgent than other areas with more drastic SLR. Additionally, there are inherent limitations that accompany any type of climate change data/modeling due to uncertainties around factors such as emissions scenarios, natural hazard occurrences, and other unknown influencing conditions.

Stakeholder Mapping Limitations

As external partners to the City, our team had to rely on limited interactions with locals, literature about the City, and good faith assumptions to conduct our stakeholder mapping. While the map was primarily used to guide our initial outreach efforts for forming a stakeholder focus group, it's possible that we misplaced some of the stakeholder groups on the map, not fully representing the actual interest and influence levels of the community. It is also possible that there are groups that were unnecessary to include or groups we failed to include who would have provided valuable contributions to our project. The map also is a static tool that attempts to place dynamic groups of people in a fixed position of interest and influence. These stakeholder groups are subject to change their overall positionality relative to SLR at any point in time, so our variation of the map represents only a fixed point in time based on the information we had readily available to us.

Focus Group Limitations

Focus groups are inherently limiting in that they may not represent the entire population of interest (Krueger and Casey 2015). We recruited our focus group members over the course of a few weeks after identifying key stakeholders in the mapping process. Working within the constraints of a short timeframe surely impacted who was able to participate and contribute to the focus group. For example, we had difficulty connecting with a Spanish-speaking Latinx member of the community to include in our focus group. It's possible that with more time and more on-the-ground interactions we could have secured a relationship with someone who was willing to participate. Additionally, the focus group was formed using snowball sampling. This method potentially limited the recruited stakeholders to those who were either already informed and/or engaged in SLR. Participation in the focus group was also voluntary and non-compensated, embedding a form of selection bias in one of our primary outreach methods. Finally, we conducted our stakeholder focus group remotely via the Zoom application. Focus groups are most effective when the moderator's questions can flow naturally into a group discussion. The remote setting and digital medium may have interfered with participants'

willingness or ability to respond to questions and generate the most productive discussions. In addition, it may have prevented the moderator and note-takers from reading body language cues during responses.

Qualitative Coding Limitations

The transcript of our first focus group discussion was obtained through a Zoom feature, which was unable to perfectly capture the words and vocal reactions of our participants. To try to address this limitation, we supplemented the transcript with notes and prescribed observational roles to those team members not moderating the discussion. A limitation of the coding itself is our individual biases in interpreting and labeling the meaning of our participants' comments. Again, we attempted to mitigate this by discussing and agreeing upon mutually exclusive codes for all coded comments; however, it is possible that all four of us misinterpreted a comment or labeled one imperfectly. A final limitation is that, given the nature of qualitative data, our coding scheme imprecisely captured the information sought by our research questions.

Public Presentation Limitations

Our Ocosta School and Westport City Council presentations on April 24th, 2023 were the first times we directly involved the greater community, beyond the stakeholder focus group, in our work. The school engagement was limited to eighth-grade science class students, a limitation due to teacher availability. For the Westport City Council presentation, there were options for Westport community members to participate in the event either in-person or virtually via Zoom in an effort to increase accessibility to the event, but a weekday evening is often not the most favorable time for community participation. Family obligations, work obligations, and social activities could have hindered the number of people able to attend our meeting. Additionally, advertising for the SLR presentation at Westport City Council was limited to a utility billing advertisement, the City Hall's signboard, and the city website. We may have secured more public participation with other outlets, such as social media announcements or a mail campaign, but lacked those capabilities due to time, funding, and technological constraints.

Chapter 3: Reviewing the Literature – Public Engagement, Westport, and Sea Level Rise

The City of Westport is a small municipality with limited capacity and resources to conduct public engagement. The City is pursuing a progressive climate resilience strategy, including sea level rise adaptation, but currently lacks a public engagement strategy for including community stakeholders in the planning and implementation process. Given these conditions, we divided our research into two main categories: stakeholder and public engagement, and climate change communication and data. Table 2 below presents the main research categories and sub-questions that guided our review.

Table 2: Research questions and sub-questions

Research Question	Research Categories	Sub-questions
How can the City of Westport inclusively engage its community to plan and prepare for sea level rise and the risks it poses to Westport?	Best practices in stakeholder and public engagement	How does Westport currently reach out to community members?
		How do best practices in community engagement apply to Westport?
	Knowledge needed to make decisions about climate change and sea level rise planning	What information about sea level rise is most valuable to Westporters?
		What individual and community actions has Westport considered to protect its assets?
		What opportunities are there to educate and promote action in planning for sea level rise in Westport?

To answer our research questions, we conducted a broad review of academic literature and best practices surrounding community engagement in general, and community engagement specifically undertaken from a local government perspective. The topic of engagement is widely

studied, and many toolkits and guidelines exist for establishing best practices for engagement, especially as they relate to the public sector. Since our topic involves communicating complex science to stakeholders and community members, we also reviewed literature on climate change communication and, in particular, SLR communication. The following literature review was conducted through a multitude of strategies, primarily by using academic journals, talking to academics currently working on projects on the Pacific Northwest coast, and reviewing existing scientific documents on Westport provided by our client.

3.1 Best Practices in Stakeholder and Public Engagement

Our project engages both individual stakeholders representing organizations and the general Westport community. Therefore, we researched both stakeholder and community engagement to better understand both types of engagement.



Figure 2: The Five Stages of Stakeholder Engagement (Environment 2017)

Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging with stakeholders is often the first step in community engagement. In some cases, stakeholders may be the only people decision-makers seek to engage. Gathering stakeholders that represent various organizations, interests, and identity groups can allow for participatory decision-making without having to ask a large group of people to weigh in. A key deliverable in our project was creating a stakeholder planning team, so we dove into best practices for performing stakeholder engagement.

We approached stakeholder engagement planning with the general framework outlined by the United Nations Environment Programme’s AccountAbility Practitioner’s Handbook on Stakeholder Engagement (Environment 2017) due to its credibility and detailed stages for conducting stakeholder engagement. The handbook first recommends strategic thinking about engagement, starting with stakeholder mapping, setting objectives for engagement, identifying issues, and prioritizing stakeholders related to those issues. The handbook also emphasizes the circular nature of effective stakeholder engagement, illustrated in Figure 2.

Stakeholder analysis is also a key part of engagement planning. Stakeholder mapping can help to build human and institutional relationships that sustain organizational competence and convert intent into effective strategic action (Dobel and Day 2005). According to Bryson, a power-interest grid (i.e., a visualization of stakeholder mapping) can help determine “which players’ interests and power bases *must* be taken into account in order to address the problem or issue at hand” as well as “coalitions to be encouraged or discouraged, what behavior should be fostered and whose ‘buy in’ should be sought or who should be ‘co-opted’” (Bryson 2004).

A significant part of the stakeholder mapping process involves identifying stakeholders from various groups to ensure accurate representation of the community. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed a stakeholder forum toolkit detailing how to decide who should participate in a stakeholder planning committee (OLEM US EPA 2016). After the identification of stakeholders to participate in a forum, this toolkit outlines what materials to prepare, how to develop an agenda, and other logistics of hosting a forum. Stakeholder engagement is one strategy for getting input on a government organization’s decision, and public engagement is the larger umbrella under which stakeholder engagement lies.

Public Engagement

Community engagement is simply the process of working with groups of people who will be affected by an organization’s position. Equitable engagement takes public involvement further. The core purpose of equitable engagement is to increase participation from historically marginalized groups to make organizations truly representative of the people they work for. As this can be a challenging task, many toolkits exist for how to better engage with the public and reach groups that are often not heard from. Existing toolkits map out the steps for engaging community members from pre-engagement strategies to events to post-engagement reflection (Barisky 2015). One of the most essential parts of the literature on engagement best practices is the spectrum of community engagement, illustrated in Table 3 below. This spectrum is included in some form in nearly every existing engagement toolkit and prompts the user to decide which level of engagement is conducive to meeting their project goals. This tool is essential in

determining what is to be accomplished from the engagement before moving forward with actual engagement plans.

Table 3: Spectrum of Public Participation (IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation)



	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

After deciding where an engagement project lies on the spectrum, the next step is to decide which activities are the best fit to achieve the desired level of engagement. For example, if a group simply wants to keep the public informed, which falls on the far left of the spectrum, they may choose to only put information on a website or social media. However, as you move right on the spectrum of engagement, more work is required to ensure input and collaboration from the public. Many groups will opt for the left side of the spectrum to reduce workload and claim to have executed adequate community engagement. However, this is often not enough

to ensure equitable engagement. Engagement is expected for many political and organizational decisions, but when the public seeks engagement, it is often driven by a desire for the “Involve” or “Collaborate” columns on the spectrum, rather than just being informed. Equitable engagement emphasizes co-creation and community-led decision making, defined by Sound Transit as “the collaborative development of new value (concepts, solutions, products and services) together with subject matter experts and community stakeholders working together as peers” (Sound Transit 2022).

Sound Transit defines co-creation as “a form of collaborative innovation where ideas are shared and improved together through all stages of a process, from ideation to vetting to implementation” (Sound Transit 2022). Co-creation involves a small but representative group of stakeholders, allowing meaningful community engagement. On the left side of the engagement spectrum, it is possible to involve hundreds of community members. As you move towards the right, it becomes increasingly difficult to include as many people as possible, necessitating a representative stakeholder group if engagement serves to collaborate with and empower groups impacted by a change.

In equitable engagement, it is necessary to also consider the barriers to participation, in order to encourage community members of various backgrounds and positions to engage. Engagement activities can be designed to encourage maximum and diverse participation. The Community Planning Toolkit outlines possible barriers and design issues to consider, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Barriers and Design Issues to Consider in Engagement (Community Places 2014)

Potential Barriers to Consider	Design Issues to Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The capacity and ability of different stakeholders to participate • Hard to reach groups such as young people, older people, minority groups or socially excluded groups • Levels of community infrastructure • Contested or divided communities • Rural isolation • Gaps in information • Literacy and numeracy levels and dominance of oral culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Techniques and engagement methods • Need for independent facilitation • Location and accessibility of venues • Number and type of engagement events • Transport requirements • Childcare needs • Format and content of communication materials • Use of interpreters and signers • Need for outreach activities

After considering the potential barriers and design issues, the most suitable engagement activity can be chosen. With more opportunities to engage in a remote setting now available,

the options for engagement activities have broadened. Virtual meetings and activities can also decrease barriers to participation because participants do not have to physically travel to engage. However, different issues can arise from virtual meetings as opposed to in-person meetings or activities. The virtual atmosphere provides more opportunities to disengage, such as turning one's camera off in a meeting. If participants do not feel accountable to the larger group or process, remote settings can discourage participation. As a result, voices that are present and participating actively may be prioritized, which could increase negative impacts from power imbalances. Pros and cons exist for every engagement event, and they need to be weighed to determine the best option for any given project.

3.2 Westport-Specific Sea Level Rise Projections and Data

Much of the Westport-specific SLR data and projections have come from studies conducted by several groups at the University of Washington, including but not limited to the Climate Impacts Group (Climate Impacts Group 2018, I. M. Miller et al. 2018), the Department of Urban Design and Planning (Lukins 2022), and the School of Environmental and Marine Affairs (Dohrn 2019). Other sources of data and projections include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) (NOAA Office for Coastal Management 2023). Consultations with climate scientists Ian Miller of Washington Sea Grant and Guillaume Mauger of the Climate Impacts Group also provided valuable insight into SLR data and projections for the region. Dohrn suggests that Westport's unique position as an integrated hub for tsunami preparedness work, climate adaptation, and community planning has given them an advantage to SLR preparedness efforts (Dohrn 2019).

In 2021, Westport worked with the New England Environmental Finance Center to develop a robust climate resilience prioritization toolkit that outlined both the climate hazards the community is facing, and the community assets that will be subjected to different impacts over time (New England Environmental Finance Center, 2022). The toolkit first follows steps to classify Westport's risks and vulnerabilities and then prioritizes assets. These findings were then synthesized into a final set of adaptation options broken up by priority area. These options informed various components of the City's latest Comprehensive Plan and can be used for future city planning in areas such as zoning, relocating critical infrastructure, and community engagement.



Figure 3: Westport community members engage in “appreciative inquiry,” mapping community assets and outlining community values (Dohrn 2019)

While modeling serves as a mere best-guess tool for projecting SLR scenarios in the region, the current available data take into account various greenhouse gas concentration scenarios—called “Representative Concentration Pathways” (RCPs)—to see how the severity of impacts might change under different emissions conditions. Under the best-case scenario, Representative Concentration Pathway 4.5 (RCP 4.5), the world would likely see more than 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming due to moderate-to-high concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (CoastAdapt 2016).

Westport rests at an elevation of approximately 23 feet above sea level. Projections conducted by the UW Climate Impacts Group suggest that there is more than a 50% chance that SLR in Westport will meet or exceed one foot by the year 2100 under RCP 4.5, and more than a 50% chance that SLR in Westport will meet or exceed 0.4 feet (or nearly five inches) by 2050 under best-case emissions scenarios (Climate Impacts Group 2018). Under NOAA projections, a foot of SLR would cause much of the east side of Westport to be completely inundated during high-tide events (NOAA Office for Coastal Management 2023).

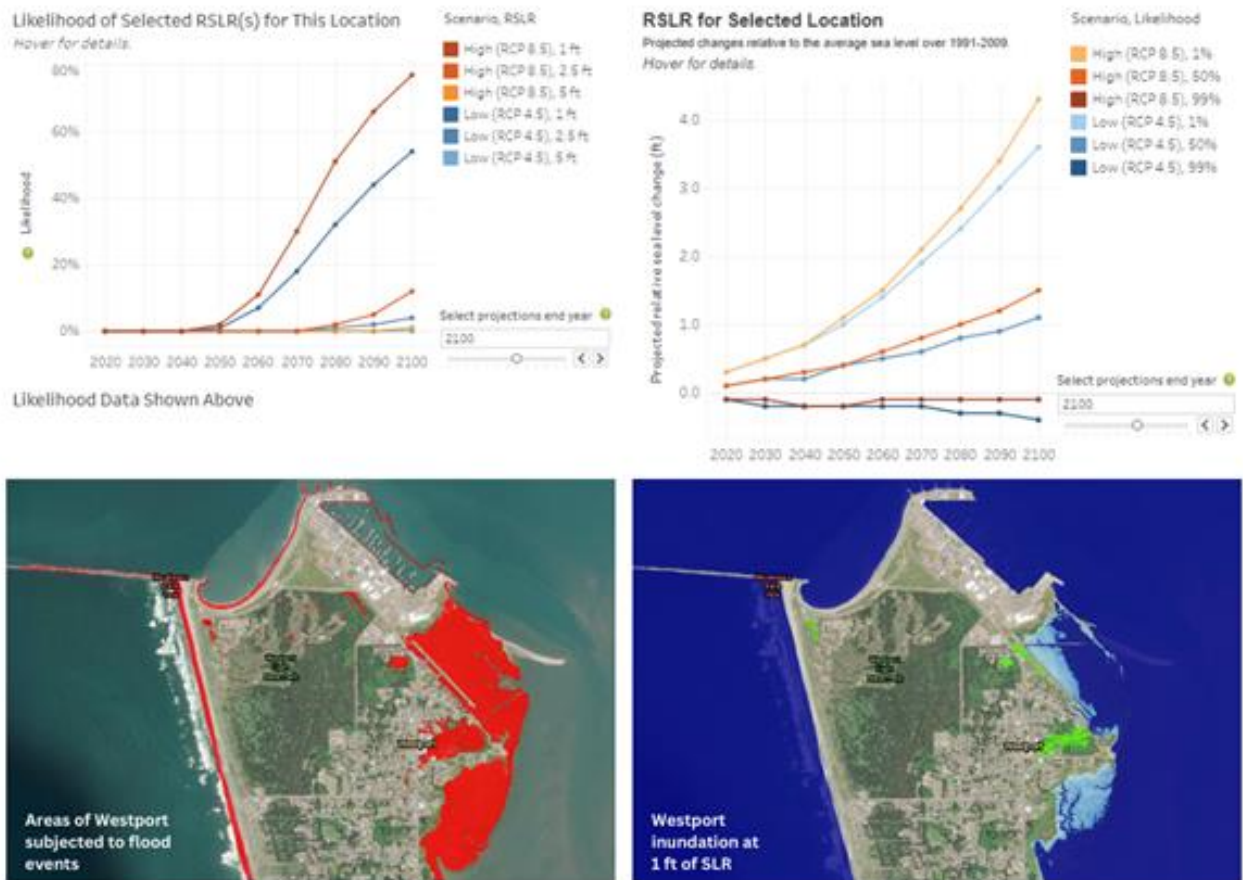


Figure 4: SLR projection data and images for Westport (Climate Impacts Group 2018; NOAA Office for Coastal Management 2023)

The literature also consistently highlights the concerning coupling of SLR with king tides and other high-water events because of the increasing likelihood of damage to shoreline, infrastructure, habitat, and other crucial assets (Hart 2023). King tide events coincide with full moons and result in higher-than-normal high tides. Coupled with even a few inches of SLR, king tide events have the potential to cause large-scale flooding, further compounding the vulnerabilities coastal communities face (OW US EPA 2014).



Figure 5: Images of flooding caused during Westport’s historic 2020 king tides (Wheeler 2022)

In addition to SLR research and modeling, projects such as the William D. Ruckelshaus Center’s Washington State Coast Resilience Assessment have focused on Westport to identify current attitudes about SLR as well as best practices and next steps to encourage coastal resilience (William D. Ruckelshaus Center 2017). Interview participants in the Coast Resilience Assessment’s final report highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses of current efforts in the Westport area. Strengths include: a history of community self-reliance and disaster experience; active and effective SLR-focused local initiatives; trusted local leadership; and strong place-based knowledge, relationships, and cultures. These strengths informed the Ruckelshaus report’s recommendations and key leveraging actions, some of which inspire further key takeaways and Westport applications for our project, as seen in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Key takeaways from the literature review and applications to Westport

Key takeaway	Westport application
Use local rather than regional or global information and projections	Use Westport-specific research that has already been completed
Use simple, non-technical language	Use short, everyday words and simple sentences to convey key messages
Use simple maps, visuals, and images rather than graphs or charts	Prioritize using maps, visuals, and images of Westport; avoid graphs or simplify them
Focus on actions the audience can take rather than uncertainty or fear	Focus on actions Westport has already identified to protect assets residents already care about
Collaborate with trusted local leaders and messengers	Leverage existing networks of SLR knowledge and leadership in Westport to generate, shape, and refine key messages

3.3 Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Communication

A broad conclusion from the literature is that climate change communication and SLR communication involve related yet unique research contexts, best practices, and applied techniques. Within both areas of communication are insights from fields such as science communication, risk and natural hazards communication, psychology, behavioral economics, and more. In its article on communicating SLR, the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science notes that because coastal communities experience SLR most often as flooding or shoreline erosion—phenomena that are more easily attributed to local forces than the much broader “climate change”—the two are “often framed differently” (Akerlof, Covi, and Rohring 2017). Consequently, Akerlof, Covi, and Rohring note SLR communication can find more success when it avoids some of the politicization that has plagued discussions of climate change. For example, it can draw in messengers other than scientists, such as architects, infrastructure engineers, business owners, and developers. These messengers typically focus on the “risks, vulnerabilities, and responses” related to SLR rather than link SLR to climate change and may use phrasing such as “recurrent flooding” to avoid association with the more controversial topic (Akerlof, Covi, and Rohring 2017). The tendency of these messengers to focus on the impacts of SLR rather than its links to climate change also shaped our outreach and messaging strategies in Westport.

Much of the SLR communication literature we reviewed focused more specifically on evaluating strategies deployed in local contexts to raise awareness, increase education, and change behavior. Broadly, research suggests that “providing participants with scientifically

representative information about sea level rise and its risks, including current and projected economic aspects of oceanic rise, generally yield[s] acceptance increases in sea level rise and global warming” (Velautham, Ranney, and Brow 2019). More localized strategies include different types of visualizations (see Figure 6 below), SLR viewers (such as NOAA’s), and mapping, often including a participatory element (Sheppard et al. 2011; White, Kingston, and Barker 2010). Studies have also documented insights from audience research, including audience generation of engagement strategies and reaction to some of the engagement strategies listed above (DeLorme, Stephens, and Hagen 2018; Covi and Kain 2016; and Richards and Jacobson 2022, among others). Covi and Kain’s 2016 paper reports on conducting a document analysis with local audiences in coastal North Carolina. Some audience members reacted to and interpreted a regionally coded SLR brochure, while others evaluated a locally coded SLR brochure. The paper provides several key insights into generating communication materials that are echoed elsewhere in the literature and summarized in Table 5 above: that audiences tend to be more interested in localized information; use simple language and simple maps, visuals, and images rather than potentially confusing charts and graphs; and, when possible, emphasize audience agency, focusing on actions people can take rather than themes of uncertainty, fear, or fatalism.



Figure 6: Visualizing four different climate change scenarios and adaptations in British Columbia, Canada (Sheppard et al. 2011)

Westport, as a small, coastal community vulnerable to the effects of SLR, has attracted efforts to research and visualize these impacts, involving both external and internal stakeholders. This existing body of work means the City of Westport has a range of tools at its disposal for presenting localized, relevant information to the public. Key takeaways from the literature are translated into potential Westport-specific actions in Table 5 (see section 3.2) and will be explored more in-depth in Chapters 4 and 5.

Equity and Inclusivity in Science Communication

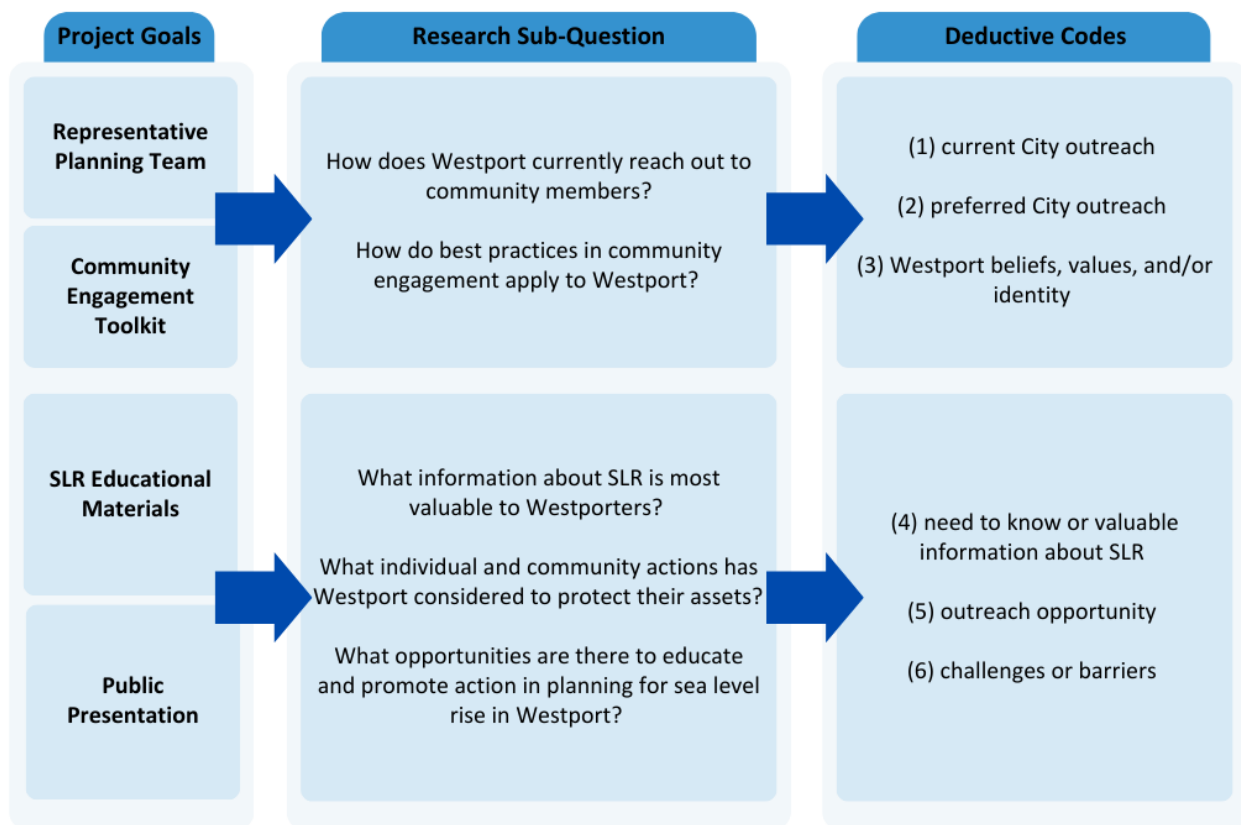
Canfield et al note that “we live in an era of abundant scientific information, yet access to information and to opportunities for substantive public engagement with the processes and outcomes of science are still inequitably distributed” (Canfield et al. 2020). They argue that much science communication that happens today operates within “science communicators’ cultural and epistemological tunnel vision,” tending to benefit only a very narrowly defined audience—that is, an audience who is “affluent, college-educated, [and] non-disabled” (Canfield et al. 2020).

Inclusive science communication (ISC), in contrast, is communication that meets a range of equity-based criteria, including: 1) recognizing historical oppression and inequities and the way they continue to shape scientific work and dialogue; 2) centering marginalized people and communities; 3) incorporating respect and value for the ideas and knowledge of the diverse public, rather than assuming they approach scientific material from a place of deficit; 4) maintaining relevance across a variety of learning and engagement settings, whether formal or informal (Canfield et al. 2020). Given the context and demographics of Westport and its surrounding areas, we sought to align our work with the principles of ISC and informal science learning. This meant that we used Westport’s assets, strengths, and knowledge as the community understands them to shape our research questions, methods, and project deliverables. It also meant that we recognized inclusive approaches such as lay expertise and public participation as crucial to yield the communication benefits Canfield et al. list, including improved science learning and an increased sense of science identity and buy-in for underrepresented communities (Canfield et al. 2020).

Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings – Insights from the Community

This chapter summarizes and analyzes the findings from our focus group discussion and our public presentations in Westport using our deductive coding system. Table 6 below demonstrates the logical flow between our four project goals, their accompanying research sub-questions, and the deductive codes we used to help parse the answers to those questions.

Table 6: Alignment of project goals, research sub-questions, and deductive codes



This chapter, from sections 4.1 to 4.6, will detail the results of our first focus group session, organized by our deductive codes as they flow from our research sub-questions above. Then, sections 4.7 and 4.8 will discuss the results from our public presentations at the school and Westport City Council.

4.1 Current City Outreach

Current city outreach made up 3% of coded responses from the focus group discussion. Participants mentioned the City website as the main source of information about local projects besides word of mouth. The City does not currently have any supplemental outlets such as a social media account or local newspaper.

Occasionally, the City may send information via its utility billing, which is released every two months. Thus, using this medium requires about 60 days' notification or planning in advance by the City. The lack of media outlets and large lead time for print advertisement constitute a challenge for fostering community engagement, as will be discussed further in Section 4.6.

"[We have an] old government model where people are expected to come to the government to get information."

Westport City Councilmember

4.2 Preferred City Outreach

Preferred city outreach methods made up about 15% of coded responses from the focus group discussion. Participants generally agreed that social media and word of mouth were major sources of information on a daily basis and that the City should take advantage of these avenues. The trust and relationships between Westport community members is a major community asset (as mentioned in Section 4.3) and supports the logic that social media and word of mouth are powerful communication channels in the community.

Participants also agreed that, with regard to SLR, visuals are a powerful tool and that on-site signs would catch the eye and could provide information about potential hazards in the area. Participants cited school ballot measure placards, City crab feed banners, tsunami zone signs from other cities, and grocery store posters as effective examples of signs used in the past to inform the public, which would be helpful if co-opted for SLR communication.

4.3 Westport Beliefs, Values, and Identity

*“There’s so much we could be.
There’s so much potential.”*

Westport Real Estate Agent

Comments and responses related to Westport beliefs, values, and identity made up 18.75% of responses in the focus group discussion. Participants discussed their community values of the fishing industry, resilience, and the relationships and deep connections that Westport residents have with one another. Westporters are deeply rooted in tradition, and this came through clearly in the focus group discussion. As a small town, many people in

Westport have families that have lived there for generations and feel deeply rooted in the physical environment and the people who inhabit it. They are resilient and believe that they will overcome any issues (environmental or otherwise) that impact Westport.

4.4 Valuable or Need to Know Information about Sea Level Rise

Valuable or Need to Know Information about SLR comprised 14.06% of total coded responses. Although SLR is the focal point of this project, the initial focus group meeting was centered around general outreach and engagement questions, so it makes sense that this category represented a slightly smaller proportion of coded responses than other categories.

Additionally, questions related specifically to SLR were intended to guide the development of educational materials to be reviewed at our subsequent focus group meeting and were thus asked toward the end of our meeting. This could help to explain why this category of responses didn’t yield a higher percentage of total coded responses.

“I bought a house out of town on a hill because of everything. I mean, legit, I commute to work now even though I grew up out here because of [the risks].”

Washington State Parks staff

Many responses in this category highlighted shared preferences for visual data, projection data, and place-based data that Westporters could tangibly relate to. Participants expressed interest in time-based and comparative data (i.e., data that demonstrates how conditions in Westport will change over time alongside different SLR scenarios). There were also broader comments about the necessity for SLR data to be digestible for a wide audience and interactive in some way, and to avoid centering worst case scenario information in our educational materials.

4.5 Outreach Opportunities

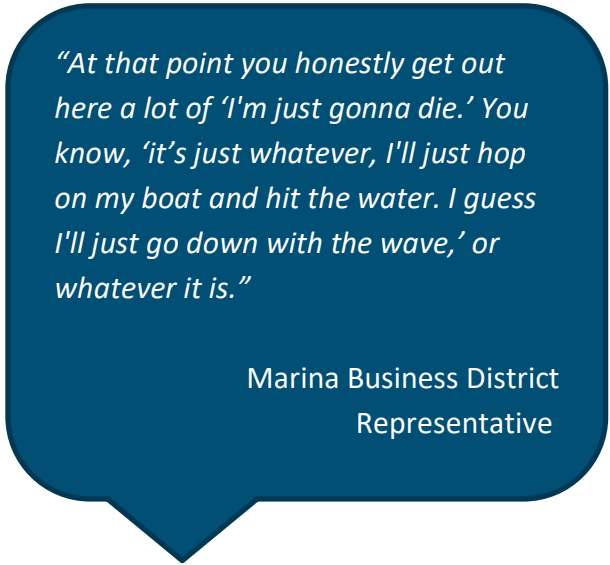
Outreach opportunities represented the second largest percentage of participant responses, with 20.31% of total coded responses. Many of the participant responses related to outreach opportunities identified different potential mediums of reaching the community. This included methods that have never been used, such as an interactive game about SLR, methods that are infrequently used, such as radio advertisements, and methods that are regularly relied upon, such as using the schools as channels for information in the community.

Multiple participants also mentioned the importance for new methods of outreach to relay currently available scientific data and projection scenarios, perhaps in the form of accessible visuals. There seemed to be a slight preference for new forms of outreach to be done in the form of physical mediums, such as various types of signage and postings in communal spaces, while also acknowledging that brochures are no longer a relevant method of receiving information. This sentiment aligns with previous observations about Westport's tendency toward tradition while also illuminating new spaces for outreach to be conducted in. Additionally, there was a brief conversation about calling upon larger agencies such as the Department of Ecology to issue guidance on what the most important pieces of information are around SLR, indicating a potential and need for more collaboration.

4.6 Challenges or Barriers to Engagement

Challenges or barriers to engagement made up the largest percentage of responses in our focus group, with 28.13% of coded responses. This was not surprising, as challenges and difficulties tend to be easier to brainstorm than positive actions and experiences. Participants flagged a few key barriers to engagement for Westporters that are relevant in many small towns, including:

- Lack of access to social media platforms with local information
- Physical flyers may not be of interest and are difficult to distribute
- Lack of education on the urgency of SLR and other climate-related risks
- Overload of information being given to residents
- General attitude of not caring and acceptance of “going down with the city”



“At that point you honestly get out here a lot of ‘I’m just gonna die.’ You know, ‘it’s just whatever, I’ll just hop on my boat and hit the water. I guess I’ll just go down with the wave,’ or whatever it is.”

Marina Business District
Representative

These barriers relate to both engagement and SLR information specifically, but the general theme was difficulty communicating effectively with the public. Without ample social media channels or a local newspaper, there is no centralized information source, causing people to receive information primarily by word of mouth.

Analysis Limitations

Prior to conducting the final analysis presented in this section, the six coded categories were decided upon because they represented some of the overarching themes of the discussion. However, it is possible that relevant categories were omitted or missed, leaving the possibility of skewed response coding. Analyses of the focus group responses were conducted individually first, followed by a comparative group discussion to distinguish how the participant responses would ultimately be categorized using the deductive coding scheme. Embedded in this method is an additional layer of subjectivity that limits our overall analysis of participant responses.

Analysis Summary

Majority of coded comments in the focus group discussion (28.13%) highlighted challenges or barriers to effective communication and outreach around SLR in Westport, matching expectations from our initial, informal interviews and research. Discussions of the status quo in City outreach (3.13% of coded comments) emphasized the lack of local media presence in Westport and the City's historically passive approach to communication. However, the second-largest category of coded comments was outreach opportunities (20.31%). Participant comments suggested many opportunities for outreach that leverage approaches especially suited to their community (18.75% of coded comments related to Westport beliefs, values, and/or identity). Participants had many thoughts about how they would prefer to be reached by the City (15.63% of coded comments) and what information about SLR would be valuable for them to know (14.06% of coded comments). Emerging from participant comments were recommendations for a blend of media approaches (social media, physical flyers, signage) and styles of information (images, visualizations, scientific and/or educational information).

All findings from analyzing the transcript of this discussion are summarized in Appendix 2.

4.7 Westport City Council Presentation

Our presentation at the Westport City Council meeting elicited several comments, questions, and discussions from the attending community and council members. Overall, these community contributions fell under two of the coded themes: valuable or need to know information about SLR, and outreach opportunities.

Valuable or Need to Know Information about SLR

Participants in the council meeting expressed interest in more precise and historical information about SLR science in Westport. Our approach to the materials was to focus on accessibility rather than depth, but meeting attendees felt that more information was needed.

Some examples of requested information were:

- More practical information, such as: when will the road between Westport and Aberdeen be washed away? Can I get to the grocery store?
- How much sea level rise has actually occurred within the last few decades?
- What does sea level rise look like with different tides, erosion, and shifting sand deposits?

Participants expressed interest in on-beach measurement tools that could show real-time changes in sea level. They were also interested in possible mitigation tactics, such as wave-breaking rock developments that have already been implemented near some waterfront condos to combat erosion.

While some of these requests were beyond our ability to provide with limited time and resources, they highlight the community's interest in practical applications, and reinforce some of the interests brought forward by the stakeholder planning team.

Outreach Opportunities

The other main theme from the Westport City Council presentation feedback was ideas for further outreach on the topic of SLR. Community members suggested having more in-depth SLR information available at the public library for those who were interested in learning more. Several participants suggested using the school to disseminate information to the broader community through students and parents, which repeats sentiments expressed during the focus group meetings. Participants also mentioned making more information available on the City website, as well as broadening beyond the internet to reach community members without access. A councilmember suggested using the marina's prominent Fresh Catch sign to display SLR information.

As a whole, this feedback repeated many themes that were present in the focus group meetings. It is also consistent with engagement best practices to use a broad range of information vehicles to reach members of the community of different socio-economic backgrounds, races and ethnicities, literacy and education levels, and with different learning preferences and styles.

4.8 Ocosta Junior-Senior High School Visit

We solicited feedback from the eighth-grade science students by showing them poster-sized versions of our educational materials, giving them questions to answer, and having them report their findings to the rest of the class. The notes we gathered from the students were primarily recommendations to clarify the information provided and to improve visual design. Students were generally a little more difficult to engage, did not request more in-depth information, nor did they show the same concern for practicality as their older community members.

Additionally, we attempted to keep the focus and interest of the students by incentivizing participation with pens – any student that answered a question received an Evans School pen, which turned out to be a highly effective incentive.

Chapter 5: Incorporating Community Feedback

The draft educational materials presented in this chapter of the report were created in an iterative process, using ideas and feedback from the stakeholder planning team. This chapter provides images of the final materials, as well as an overview of how feedback from the stakeholder planning team and the Westport City Council presentation contributed to the development and revision of each of the materials and the engagement toolkit.

While most of the comments we received were insightful and useful, inevitably a few were contradictory, impractical, or infeasible. We used our best judgement to incorporate as much community feedback as possible without making the materials busy, confusing, or inconsistent.

5.1 The Engagement Toolkit

The engagement toolkit was informed by academic literature on engagement, feedback from engagement experts, feedback from the stakeholder planning team, and feedback gathered during our Westport City Council presentation. It was intended to be brief, concise, and useful to a busy and potentially under-resourced city administrator.

The toolkit begins with instructions and a brief project background, then provides a summary of broadly accepted best-practices in community engagement. The first few pages of the toolkit (see Figure 7) were informed primarily by academic literature on best practices for engagement such as the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Engagement, sample toolkits from other coastal cities such as the City of Vancouver, Canada, and advice from engagement experts. Then, the toolkit provides Westport- and SLR-specific engagement protocol and steps for reaching local marginalized populations (Figure 8). These pages of the toolkit were developed in line with feedback we received from community members. For example, we used “Feedback from Westport” to translate strategies for effective engagement to the Westport context. We also highlighted specific places around the town that stakeholders noted as being high-traffic areas and included overarching recommendations for providing supplementary outreach resources based on the barriers we encountered throughout the course of this project. The full toolkit can be found in Appendix 3.

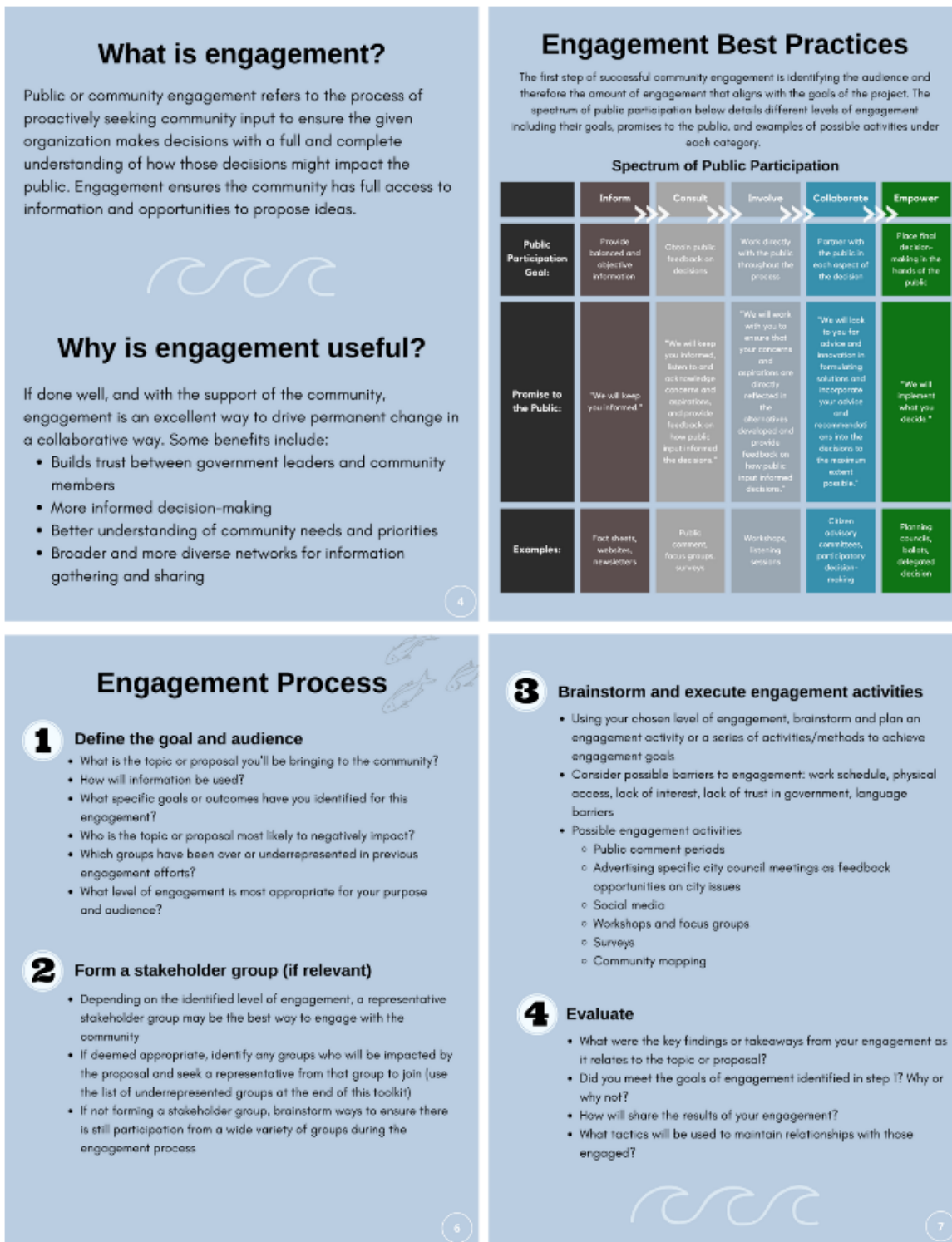


Figure 7: Pages 4-7 of the final engagement toolkit that were developed based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Engagement.

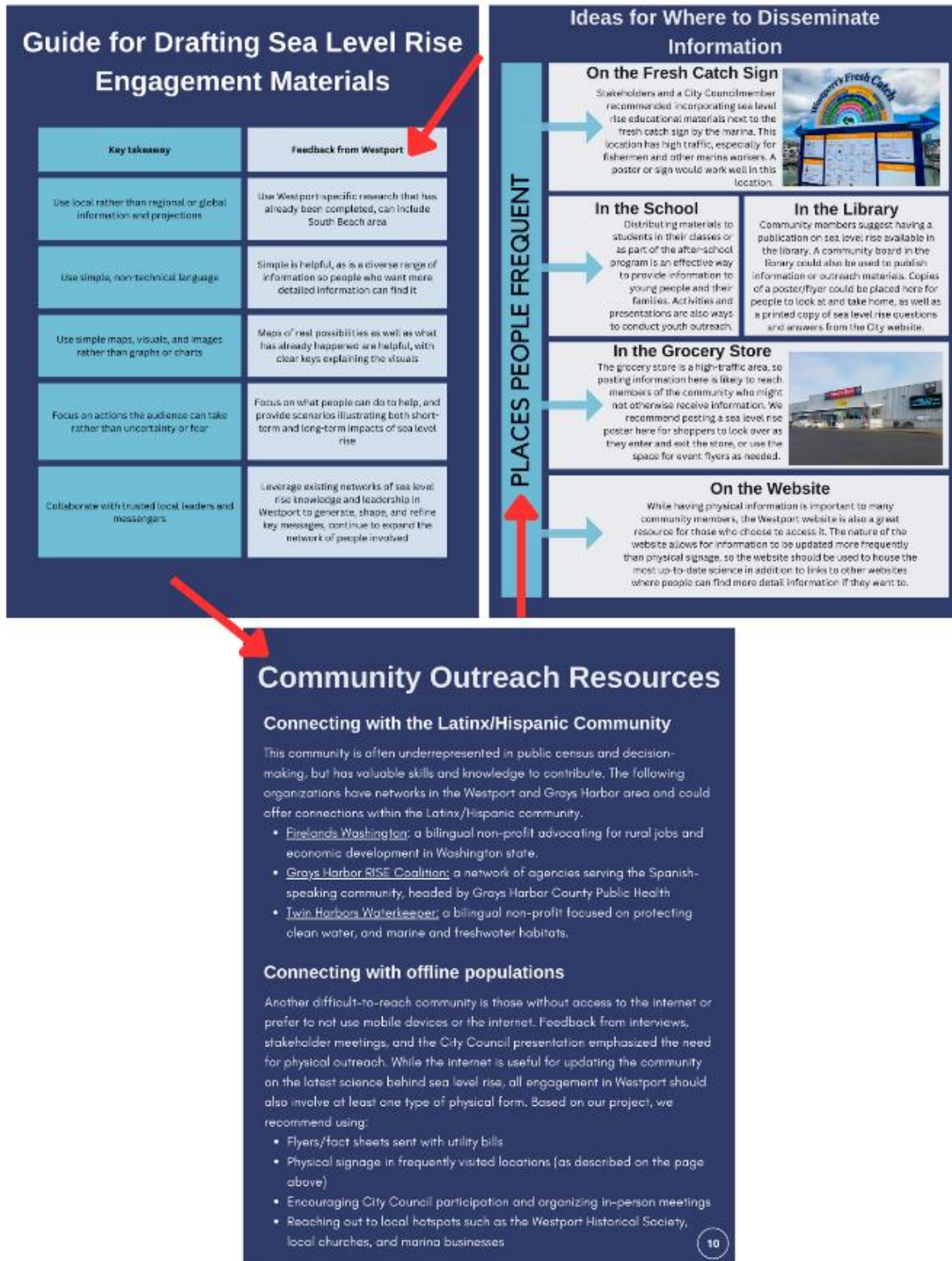


Figure 8: Pages 8-10 of the final engagement toolkit. Red arrows indicate changes or additions made based on feedback from community members during a focus group meeting and/or city council presentation.

5.2 Educational Materials – Callout Map

The stakeholder planning team, as well as advice from engagement experts, informed us of our decision to create a succinct visual map that illustrates projected time-series flooding in Westport (Figure 9, next page). This method is also supported by climate communication literature, for example Covi and Kain’s 2016 study affirming the efficacy of localized information conveyed via simple visuals (Covi and Kain 2016). Both members of the stakeholder planning team and the sea level rise and engagement experts we consulted recommended including real images of flooding in the town so that members of the public could more tangibly relate to it. Thus, we developed this map and intended for it to feature in other materials, or as a standalone summary graphic.

The initial draft of this product attempted to include suggestions from the first stakeholder planning team meeting. Then, our second meeting yielded several new recommendations for alterations. These included image labels, further simplified messaging (e.g., “bad floods” instead of “100-year floods”), shading of projected flood areas to more clearly connect the flooding messaging to sea level rise, and a “What can I do about it?” addition.

The final callout map is also attached in Appendix 4 of this report.



Figure 9: Initial draft of the outreach map (top), and final draft of the outreach map (bottom). Red arrows indicate changes made based on feedback from a focus group meeting and/or city council presentation.

5.3 Educational Materials – Flyer

Our client and the stakeholder planning team both expressed an interest in a material that could be made available to community members as a brief snapshot or “one-pager” on sea level rise. We developed the flyer (Figure 10, next page) with the vision of it being posted in communal spaces or found at City Hall as an informational handout.

When developing the initial draft of the outreach flyer, we tried to provide a broad summary of sea level rise, emphasize simple data, and highlight some potential decision-making areas that might be impacted by sea level rise. When reviewing it with our stakeholder planning team, we received feedback that the data map was unclear and needed additional explanation, and that the potential impacts could be expanded. To address these concerns, we made the map larger, included a brief description of what the map was showing, added additional potential impact areas, and adjusted the color scheme for ease of printing and reading.

Climate resilience engagement practitioner Jackson Blalock stressed to us the importance of connecting risk information to actions people can take. Actionable steps can divert the reader away from despair or gloom and translate the knowledge of risk into more productive risk preparatory behavior. A desire for actionable steps was echoed by members of the stakeholder planning team. Based on this feedback, we made sure to include a “What can I do about it?” section on each of the outreach materials.

The final flyer is also attached in Appendix 5 of this report.

SEA LEVEL RISE

in Westport

Sea level rise is an increase in ocean water levels over long periods of time. Many people believe this is not a big issue because the rise progresses slowly. However, even small increases in sea level can increase flooding, storm surges and erosion.

Average Daily High Tide Inundation Due to Sea Level Rise in South Beach, WA

SEA LEVEL RISE IN WESTPORT BASED ON POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

DECISION-MAKING: WHEN SHOULD I CONSIDER SEA LEVEL RISE?

- SEEKING A BUILDING PERMIT
- BUYING A HOUSE OR PROPERTY
- PREPARING FOR A NATURAL DISASTER

Scan here for sea level rise Q & A

Initial draft

SEA LEVEL RISE

in Westport

Sea level rise is an increase in ocean water levels over time. It can be hard to notice, but even small increases in sea level can cause damage by increasing flooding, storm surges, and erosion.

POTENTIAL HIGH TIDES IN WESTPORT BY 2150

Final draft

THIS MAP SHOWS HOW MUCH OF WESTPORT WOULD BE UNDERWATER BASED ON DIFFERENT SCIENTIFIC PREDICTIONS.

THIS MAP DOES NOT SHOW WEST BEACH EROSION WHICH WILL ALSO CAUSE LOSS OF LAND.

BY 2150:

- 90% CHANCE 1 FT RISE
- 50% CHANCE 3 FT RISE
- 10% CHANCE 5 FT RISE

HOW COULD SEA LEVEL RISE IMPACT YOU?

- THREAT TO DRINKING WATER
- SEEKING BUILDING PERMITS
- LESS SEAFOOD AVAILABLE
- BUYING A HOME OR PROPERTY
- DAMAGE TO ROADS

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

- ADVOCATE FOR SEA LEVEL RISE PREPARATION IN LOCAL COASTAL PLANNING EFFORTS.
- ADAPT YOUR HOME OR PROJECT TO HIGHER FUTURE WATER LEVELS.
- TALK WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS ABOUT HIGHER FUTURE WATER LEVELS.

WHAT TO KNOW WHEN YOU SCAN THIS:

Figure 10: Initial draft of the outreach flyer (top), and final draft of the outreach flyer (bottom). Red arrows indicate changes made based on feedback from a focus group meeting and/or city council presentation.

5.4 Educational Materials – Sign

In the first focus group session we held with our stakeholder planning team, there was great interest in a physical sign or a permanent outdoor installation, and we took this into account when deciding what types of materials we would create. The sign was intended to impart the most information and underwent many iterations to reach its final form.

Reviewers of the first draft found the presence of two maps confusing, especially since one referenced flooding rather than SLR, so we chose to draw attention to a single SLR map on the sign instead (Figure 11, next page). We also needed to adjust the descriptions to be more concise and easier to read. One stakeholder planning team member suggested including a generational impact component to help connect viewers to the consequences of SLR for loved ones, and consensus quickly formed around that. Therefore, we decided to include an image of real people who could represent a grandparent and grandchild. Research shows that images of real people are more likely to engage the brain and impart learning or impressions (Branthwaite 2002). Stakeholders also expressed interest in an internet link whereby viewers could seek further information about SLR. Therefore, we included a QR code that links to the City's SLR landing page on each of our educational materials.

The final sign is also attached in Appendix 6 of this report.

SEA LEVEL RISE IN WESTPORT

Initial draft

WHAT IS SEA LEVEL RISE?

Sea level rise is an increase in the world's oceans over time as a result of global warming. As ice sheets and glaciers melt and as warmer sea waters expand, the sea level increases. Over time, instances of flooding, storm surges, and erosion are more likely to occur.



WHY IS WESTPORT VULNERABLE TO SEA LEVEL RISE?

Westport sits approximately 23 feet above sea level and is surround by water on three sides. The impacts of sea level rise on Westport could be significant. Rising sea levels can affect tourism and fishing industries, as well as the town's roads, bridges, and buildings.

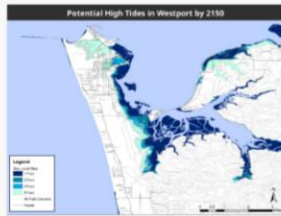


WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE TO PREPARE?

The town of Westport has taken steps to prepare for sea level rise. For example, the town has a hazard mitigation plan that includes strategies for adapting to rising sea levels. The town has also worked with the Army Corps of Engineers to improve its shoreline protection and reduce stormwater runoff.

WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY?

There is more than a 50% chance that sea level rise in Westport will meet or exceed one foot by 2100 and more than a 50% chance that sea level rise in Westport will meet or exceed 0.4 feet (or nearly five inches) by 2050.



SEA LEVEL RISE & 100-YEAR FLOOD EVENTS



SEA LEVEL RISE IN WESTPORT

Final draft

WHAT IS SEA LEVEL RISE?

Sea level rise is an increase in the world's oceans over time as a result of climate change. As ice sheets and glaciers melt and as warmer sea waters expand, the sea level increases. Over time, instances of flooding, storm surges, and erosion are more likely to occur.



WHY IS WESTPORT VULNERABLE TO SEA LEVEL RISE?

As a coastal city, Westport is surrounded by water on three sides. The impacts of sea level rise on Westport could be significant. Rising sea levels can affect tourism and fishing industries, as well as the town's roads, bridges, and buildings.

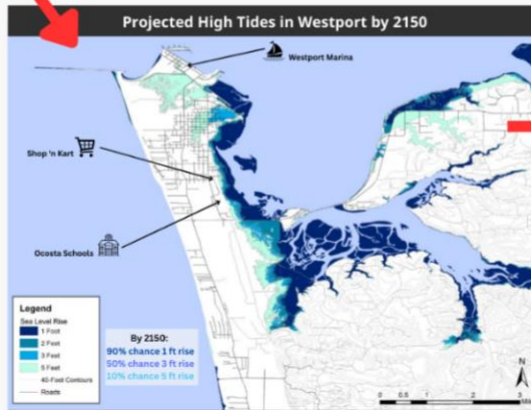


PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Westport has taken steps to prepare for sea level rise. The Westport Hazard Mitigation Plan includes strategies for adapting to rising sea levels. The town has also worked with many partners to map assets and identify risks, and created a Climate Prioritization Toolkit. In the future, the City would like to improve its shoreline protection, as well as with the Department of Ecology to get more planning guidance.

WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY?

There is more than a 50% chance that sea level rise in Westport will meet or exceed one foot by 2100 and more than a 50% chance that sea level rise in Westport will meet or exceed 0.4 feet (or nearly five inches) by 2050.



2150 IS NOT THAT FAR AWAY...



...IT'S ONLY A FEW GENERATIONS FROM NOW!

A child born in Westport in 2020 will likely see a foot of sea level rise in their lifetime, possibly impacting where they can live, their food and drinking water, and how often they see severe flooding.



WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

- Advocate for sea level rise preparation in local coastal planning efforts.
- Adapt your home or project to higher future water levels.
- Talk with your neighbors about higher future water levels.

SOURCE: LOCALIZING HAZARD MITIGATION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WESTPORTS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON URBDP 2018

Figure 11: Initial draft of outreach sign (top), and final draft of outreach sign (bottom). Red arrows indicate changes made based on feedback from a focus group meeting and/or city council presentation.

5.5 City Website Landing Page

The stakeholder planning team frequently mentioned using the City website to offer the public further information about SLR. Based on this feedback, we first developed an informational webpage mimicking Sea Grant’s Washington Coastal Network [“About Sea Level Rise” information page](#) in a question-and-answer format (Washington Coastal Hazards Resilience Network 2020). However, upon review the City decided it would be more effective to create a simple landing page with a link to the Sea Grant’s page, and other local marine resources, with the assumption that the linked pages will be continually updated with recent SLR science. Linking to external sites also allows the City of Westport to prioritize updating the City landing page with Westport-specific guidance and announcements.

The final landing page included a brief description of SLR, a GIF showing sea level rise, a list of Westport’s most at-risk assets, and links to further information resources. These resources included Washington’s Coastal Network, the Grays Harbor County Marine Resources Committee, Climate Central’s Coastal Risk Screening Tool, and a copy of the Westport Climate Resilience Prioritization Toolkit of 2022. The City of Westport may update this list of resources as SLR science and online tools continue to develop.

Chapter 6: Recommendations for Sea Level Rise Engagement in Westport

Ultimately, our goal for this project is to help the City of Westport reach out to and engage with residents on the topic of sea level rise. Increasing resident knowledge of and engagement with SLR will improve public buy-in and participation on this issue. Improved public buy-in and participation will, in turn, make it easier for the City to plan future development and infrastructure with rising seas in mind.

In line with the City's SMP grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology, our team convened a group of key stakeholders from Westport to discuss the current state of City outreach, how it could be improved, and what residents need to know about SLR. We synthesized lessons from these discussions with key findings from academic literature, practitioner reports, and informal conversations with climate science and communication experts. In addition to helping us develop resources to aid City outreach, our research indicates several further opportunities for increasing Westport community engagement around SLR.

6.1 Utilize the Toolkit

One of our main deliverables to the City of Westport was the SLR engagement toolkit. The toolkit was designed with several goals in mind: 1) increase the frequency of Westport's engagement with the broader community on climate change-related topics and specifically SLR; 2) make it easier for the City to both reach and hold the attention of their diverse community on the topic of SLR; 3) help the City develop and deploy SLR educational materials that are attractive, relevant, and informative for community members. We chose content for the toolkit based on what will be the most useful to the City in the hopes that it is used frequently. Further, the toolkit's content is not only literature-informed, but also informed by Westport stakeholders themselves. We developed the toolkit using the key themes and insights derived from our focus group findings (see Chapter 4). Our full toolkit is attached in Appendix 3.

Therefore, we recommend using this toolkit as a starting point in planning community engagement around SLR, drafting further educational materials, or deploying the educational materials we developed as a part of this project.

6.2 Formalize the Stakeholder Planning Team

In drafting the deliverables for this project, we met with our stakeholder planning team twice to gather input and feedback, as described in chapters 3 and 4. The development of the group allowed for voices not traditionally represented in Westport-related discussions to participate and provide feedback on engagement and SLR education. We found that many groups and stakeholders were willing to participate. This eagerness to participate and value added from widening the stakeholder net leads us to recommend formalizing a stakeholder planning team in one of the following ways:

1. Create a new permanent SLR engagement board that has three-year long terms and quarterly meetings.
 - a. Membership should be based on applications and outreach should be conducted to certain organizations to encourage diverse representation.
 - b. All participants should receive a small stipend (about \$25 per meeting) to lessen the barriers to participation.
2. Formalize the current stakeholder planning team compiled by our group and ask members to opt-in to meeting quarterly for the foreseeable future to advise the City of Westport on all climate-related engagement issues.
 - a. Each organization and interest group represented would have the ability to turn over membership to another member of their organization if they leave or have another reason to step down.
 - b. Yearly evaluation of the group would be required by the City to ensure the organizations represented in the group are a good reflection of the Westport community as a whole, and new organizations should be added if gaps exist.

Although some stakeholders are willing to participate, the time required and potential lost earnings pose a barrier to many, especially Latinx members of the community. The following incentives would help to mitigate the burden imposed by participation:

1. Scheduling meetings on the weekends or after working hours.
2. Offering refreshment and childcare during meetings.
3. Offer a stipend for each meeting attended.

We found the information and insight gathered from the stakeholder planning team to be invaluable. Establishing a formal mechanism for gathering this feedback will allow the City to ensure effective communication on SLR and other climate issues. It will also reduce the likelihood of only a few residents and stakeholders being consulted without considering other voices.

6.3 Begin a Youth Coalition

Working in partnership with the school district to establish a youth coalition for community hazard preparedness and education would lay the groundwork for the next generation of Westporters capable of planning for and responding to SLR impacts. Since many young people in the community are already involved in activities around community transformations and tsunami preparedness, formalizing the activities under the umbrella of a coalition would promote more continuous, intentional work on matters such as SLR. There are numerous models of youth coalitions that can be explored when developing the coalition, including UN1FY, the youth task force for the Water and Climate Coalition, and, for a more regional example, the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps. These groups of students and young people are not only leaders in their communities for outreach and preparedness, but they also learn skills that they can take into their adult lives and into their stewardship of the community for years to come.

Young people will inherit our changing Earth and communities. Considering that the school already serves as an informational hub in the community, establishing a youth coalition for action and education is a sensible next step in the larger scheme of SLR, education, and outreach for Westport.

6.4 Adopt and Expand Proposed Educational Materials

Like our community engagement toolkit, our educational materials adopt the best practices in SLR communication that we uncovered in our research. More importantly, they reflect what our focus group stakeholders asked for in terms of educational content, maps, graphics, and images. While our materials are currently formatted as an outdoor sign, map, fact sheet, and web landing page, they also include example maps, graphics, and images that the City can continue to repurpose in simple and cost-effective ways. For these reasons, we recommend Westport use these materials or similar ones when conducting future SLR outreach and education in the community. Full-sized versions of the outreach materials can be found in Appendices 4-5 and referenced in the previous chapter.

Further, we recommend that the City prioritize physical signage when it comes to implementing these educational materials. One of our primary findings from both our focus group discussions and public comment during our Westport City Council presentation was that—especially given the older skew of Westport’s population and a potential lack of access to media such as websites—physical, rather than digital, materials can be crucial tools in distributing information. Physical materials such as signs also have the advantage of being targeted to

locations people already go. While our project explored the idea of new physical signs in prominent locations such as the Westport Viewing Tower, information could also be appended to existing signs, such as the Fresh Catch sign in the town’s marina district. SLR communications, maps, and images can be posted at key community places such as the grocery store and the Ocosta Junior-Senior High School as well as more specialized locations such as real estate offices, the library, and City Hall. While students provided feedback on our educational materials during our school visit, we discussed the idea of developing a more regular, permanent interactive school activity to engage kids on SLR. One community member, during the public comment period, even suggested holding a copy of our finished report at the library. Though the City may need to seek permission from some of these entities to post materials there, we don’t foresee this as being a significant barrier, especially given the benefits of putting information physically in front of people in locations they already go.

All of this being said, Westport’s City website should not be overlooked as a source for SLR information, especially as it is the easiest to keep up to date as the science and projections around SLR continue to develop. In this vein, we recommend keeping SLR information on the City website—using our web landing page as a launching pad—up to date as much as City staff time and capacity allows. Our web landing page includes links to external resources for more in-depth perusal of SLR science. This feature reduces the burden on City staff to maintain a sophisticated webpage with a full range of up-to-date climate and oceanographic projections.

6.5 Establish Contacts within the Latinx Community

While we were able to identify a few regionally active Latinx organizations and reach out to local members, we were unable to recruit a Latinx community member to serve on our stakeholder planning team. We discuss this limitation in more detail in section 6.7.

Due to this limitation, we highly recommend that the City continue outreach to engage this important minority group in future planning efforts. The engagement toolkit we developed contains contact information for locally active Latinx community organizations. We recommend starting with Firelands Washington, a bilingual non-profit advocating for rural jobs and economic development in Washington state. This group has active members in the Westport community and expressed interest in this project, although they were ultimately unable to attend the stakeholder planning team focus group sessions. However, a member may be willing to serve as a liaison to the Latinx community in future engagement efforts. Regionally active Spanish-speaking organizations include Twin Harbors Waterkeepers and the Grays Harbor RISE coalition, both of which would be helpful in disseminating information to and possibly recruiting from the Latinx community through their media channels.

6.6 Build Capacity Using Funds from the Ecology Grant

Finally, we recommend that the City of Westport use our work as a foundation to continue to fulfill the terms of its grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology. Our four project deliverables—forming a stakeholder planning team, developing a community engagement toolkit, producing simple SLR educational materials, and gathering feedback on these materials from the community at a public presentation—were aligned with objectives of the Ecology grant. Therefore, grant funds can be used to build out the work that we began. Specific tasks Westport could pursue in line with the grant are as follows:

- Formalize the stakeholder planning team as recommended above.
- Use the engagement toolkit and educational materials to educate more City staff about SLR and related planning issues.
- Translate educational materials into Spanish to communicate with diverse audiences more inclusively.
- Reproduce educational materials in the size, scale, or medium needed to reach more people, for example, through Ocosta Schools.
- Consider avenues such as text messaging or app development to distribute these materials to residents. For example, NOAA’s Sea Level Rise viewer allows users to input their address and see the potential impacts of sea level rise on their homes.
- Test the educational materials, evaluate them, and make improvements as needed, and provide this analysis in summary and final reports as planned in the grant.
- Use the engagement toolkit, educational materials, and findings from the summary and final reports to inform the Hazards Code and Policy Guidance document required in the grant.

The City could also leverage other funding sources and partnerships to further build messaging capacity. For example, upon presenting about our project to the Grays Harbor Marine Resources Committee (see Chapter 7 for more details), the Committee expressed interest in funding permanent SLR educational materials and circulating our report and materials within their networks. This and other partnerships and/or collaborations could help to stretch Westport’s resources further and reach more people about SLR.

6.7 Further Limitations and Considerations

Westport’s Latinx Community

Although US census data shows fewer than 10% of Westport community members identify as Hispanic, this is likely an undercount, as those who identify as Latinx tend to be undercounted

in US census data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Our informal conversations with members of the community also hinted that there may be a larger Latinx population in nearby communities served by the City of Westport, many of them employed in the service and agricultural industry. Our outreach efforts identified several Latinx community organizations active in the greater Grays Harbor region, but we were unable to locate a Latinx community member residing in Westport who was willing to serve on the stakeholder planning team. As engagement practitioners warned us, the Latinx community is typically burdened by time and resource constraints or may be unwilling to engage with the government for fear of immigration enforcement. These barriers are likely to pose a challenge for Westport's engagement efforts going into the future. However, securing the participation of this group would provide Westport with valuable and diverse perspectives and community knowledge, and the effort should still be made despite the challenges.

Communication

Though our team has spent the last five months getting to know Westport and the surrounding community, we recognize that keeping people tuned into and active around issues such as SLR is an ongoing challenge. We wish to raise two particular points which may inspire further thought and discussion going forward:

First, the fact that SLR is so closely related to and interwoven with other factors—among them coastal erosion and flooding, beach drift, tidal cycles, and storm events—makes it difficult to talk about in isolation. Throughout the course of our project, we tried to take the approach of discussing *only* SLR in our engagement toolkit and educational materials as much as possible. We imagined isolating the topic in this way would make it both simpler for us to communicate and for our audiences to understand. However, it is no longer clear to us that this is the case. In our focus group discussions and during our school visit and Westport City Council presentation, community members repeatedly asked for more detailed scientific information specifically related to the intersection of SLR, king tides, coastal erosion, and more. Further, community knowledge around these issues, even if not always couched in scientific language, was deeper than we assumed. In hindsight, this is not surprising, given that many in the area have lived lives shaped by the ever-shifting coastal landscape, with communal memory stretching back generations. In light of all of this, we encourage anyone conducting outreach and engagement on SLR in the future to consider presenting it in more, if not all, of its complexity.

Secondly, many of those in attendance at our Westport City Council presentation seemed previously unaware of the Department of Ecology grant Westport had received. Upon learning of it, they expressed significant interest in both the terms of the grant and how the City planned to use the money. While we welcomed discussion of the grant as it related to our work, we

recommend that the City publicizes received grants more widely in the future. Creating strategies to talk to the public about grants, their purpose, and action plans for fulfilling them will help to increase transparency and, hopefully, public goodwill around this process. In addition, the prospect of stewarding grant funding may attract interested members of the community to membership on a future stakeholder planning team, which we recommended establishing previously.

Decision-making Language

Some of the strongest guidance we received when developing our engagement toolkit and educational materials was to ask Westport community members which decisions in their daily lives would ideally be informed by knowledge about SLR. However, when we prompted our stakeholder planning team with this question over two discussions, it seemed to cause some confusion and/or require more explanation. Points of decision that the group did raise mostly involved those concerning property, such as buying a house or protecting a place of business. We envisioned more decision points coming from these stakeholder planning team meetings but were not able to get any ideas beyond these property discussions. Reflecting on these experiences, we believe part of the confusion around this concept stemmed from our project intending to both help the City of Westport gain public buy-in on SLR planning decisions and inform the broader community about SLR and how it impacts City infrastructure. In reality, the City and the broader public face two different sets of possible decisions that SLR may impact, and it was confusing to people which decisions we were talking about. We attempted to incorporate this clearer understanding into the final versions of our engagement toolkit and educational materials, tailoring information about decision-making and what can be done about SLR to the materials' intended audiences. Accordingly, we replaced a "decision points" page in the engagement toolkit with community-suggested ideas for where to place engagement materials, while to the educational materials we added community-targeted "What can I do about it?" boxes. These boxes are intended to be visually and substantially distinct from general information about SLR's potential impacts on City infrastructure, residential homes, and businesses.

During the public comment period of our Westport City Council presentation, some community members raised concerns about day-to-day activities that SLR could impact, such as driving down roads liable to flood or reaching the grocery store for food. This type of daily decision is one that we would have liked to explore further in our materials, and one that we encourage the City to dive deeper into when planning future engagement. We encourage trying different phrasing and prompting, including incorporating other topics that intersect with sea level rise as discussed above (coastal erosion, storm events, etc.), when trying to spark broader thinking about the impacts of SLR.

Chapter 7: Continuing the Conversation

Throughout this project, our team connected with several members of the Westport community who are significantly engaged on sea level rise and related issues. They invited us to present summaries of our work at two additional venues: a meeting of the Grays Harbor Marine Resources Committee, and the Cascadia CoPes Hub Team 3 meeting. We delivered information tailored to each of these venues: to the Marine Resources Committee, information about public engagement around sea level rise; and to the CoPes Hub, an overview of our engagement in Westport and key findings. Overall, we take these invitations as further evidence that this conversation is ripe for continued development in Westport and surrounding areas.

As determined by our research, there are several ways the City of Westport may proceed with sea level rise engagement. To provide our recommendations, we first analyzed community and stakeholder engagement best practices from current literature, SLR science communication techniques, and Westport-area sea level rise risks, data, and previous projects.

Our review of community engagement literature and best practices in science communication laid the groundwork for the development of the Westport engagement toolkit and SLR educational materials. With this baseline developed, we sought feedback from the local community to hone our understanding of Westport's specific needs.

During stakeholder focus group meetings and public events, Westport community members placed strong emphasis on shared identity and values, such as belief in the community's ability to overcome hardship to achieve success, as well as the strong relationships and bonds that make the community resilient. They also identified preferences for City outreach and SLR communication such as word of mouth, social media, and on-site maps and signs. They emphasized the importance of practical information with tangible effects on the City of Westport, backed up by scientific studies, including what to expect from SLR over the near and long term. Finally, they spoke at length about the challenges to engaging the broader Westport community, such as lack of education or access to internet, disinterest in information coming from the government, and an inundation of risks related to the ocean, leading to apathy and an expectation to "go down with the city."

This information from community members corroborated common themes in our literature review. Based on our findings from these sources, we recommend that Westport **utilize the City of Westport Engagement Toolkit**, which combines best practices from the literature with the needs and preferences identified by members of the Westport community for engagement around SLR. Furthermore, we recommend **formalizing the stakeholder planning team** for climate-related planning going forward. Many community groups that we spoke to were eager to participate and could constitute significant value-added for community engagement in the future. However, we also found that the time requirement posed a significant barrier to many who were otherwise willing to participate. Therefore, membership on the stakeholder planning team may be incentivized by providing refreshments and/or childcare, a participation stipend, and meeting times outside of working hours.

About 10% of Westport residents identify as Hispanic according to US census data, making this a significant minority group for the City to engage. However, our outreach efforts were not able to recruit a Latinx community member to serve on the stakeholder planning team. Therefore, the City should continue the effort to **establish contacts within the Latinx community** to serve on a future stakeholder planning team and act as a liaison to rest of the community. Implementing the incentive measures described above will be crucial for engaging Westport's Latinx community, which many studies show tend to be highly burdened by time and resource constraints.

We also recommend that the City of Westport **adopt and expand the educational materials** to reach more members of the Westport community about SLR. Like the toolkit, these materials reflect best practices in science communication and the feedback of Westport community members. Westporters expressed a preference for physical signs, with follow-up information available on the website. Our graphics and accompanying information provide a good starting point for these materials, which should be subject to change over time as stakeholder needs and climatic conditions continue to evolve.

To strengthen and diversify the City's outreach efforts, we suggest starting a **youth coalition** for community hazard preparedness. Many Westporters cited the Ocosta school as a community pillar and opportune outreach mechanism, and this resource could be further utilized to lay the groundwork for the next generation capable of planning for and adapting to SLR and other climate impacts.

Finally, we recommend that the City continues to **build capacity using funds from the Ecology grant**. Our work was limited by a six-month time frame, severely limiting the extent of our community outreach capabilities. Combining our recommended solutions to continue the

engagement effort will help the City complete the terms of the grant, as well as strengthen the City's relationship with community members and contribute to a more informed and climate-resilient Westport.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Focus group discussion questions

Public Engagement Questions:

1. Whiteboard Brainstorming Exercise: How would you describe good public engagement between a city and its residents?
2. How would you describe the City of Westport's public engagement currently?
3. What is one thing the City could do to engage people in the city even more?
4. What motivates you and your neighbors in Westport? What do you and your friends, neighbors, and colleagues in Westport care about most?; What makes your community strong?
5. How do you and others in Westport get your information? What modes (social media, printed news, TV, word of mouth, etc.) do you use most and prefer?
6. What types of public/private collaborations or networks have been useful avenues for information in the past?

Sea Level Rise Questions:

8. Whiteboard Brainstorming Exercise: What do you see as the most important risks of SLR and coastal flooding to Westport and surrounding communities?
9. What types of information might help you navigate these risks?
10. What decisions do you face in your life or work that might be affected by SLR and coastal flooding? [prompt only if needed] Ex: seeking a building permit, buying a home, etc.?

Follow-up questions:

- How, if at all, do you think SLR and coastal flooding in Westport affect or will affect you or others in Westport, now or in the future?
- Do any other ideas come to mind about how SLR and coastal flooding might affect your life and community life in Westport, if at all?
- What are your thoughts about dealing with SLR in Westport?
- What do you want to do about it and what do you *not* want to do about it?

Wrap Up Question:

Considering the decisions we've discussed, what would be the best way of sharing SLR and coastal flooding information that might be useful for those decisions? (Brochures, games, on-site signs with map/graphics?)

Appendix 2: Summary of focus group discussion 1: deductive codes, key quotes, number of mentions, and code mentions relative to total coded comments.

Deductive code	Key quote(s)	Number of mentions	Percentage of coded comments
Westport beliefs, values, and/or identity	<p><i>I'd say we're still a little old-fashioned.</i></p> <p><i>There's so much we could be. There's so much potential.</i></p> <p><i>People are more connected. There is that bond that most people have.</i></p> <p><i>Quality of life [is] high.</i></p>	12	18.75%
Current City outreach	<p><i>[We have an] old government model where people were expected to come to the government to get information.</i></p> <p><i>We lack a local media presence.</i></p>	2	3.13%
Preferred City outreach	<p><i>Maybe flyer outreach or mailers...sending out notices to the people within a certain radius.</i></p> <p><i>There's word of mouth, also asking them to spread the news.</i></p> <p><i>Start with social media and the internet.</i></p> <p><i>I think the onsite signs and maps and graphics are key.</i></p>	10	15.63%
Need to know and/or valuable SLR info	<p><i>Something to match the abstract concept of however many inches or feet to, what's that actually going to look like in my physical environment?</i></p> <p><i>Finding ways to have near term, midterm, and long term impacts to the community—what it might</i></p>	9	14.06%

	<p><i>look like in 5 years, but in 10 years and 20 years, to gain some credibility with the community.</i></p> <p><i>Maintaining that interest in that connection to your everyday.</i></p>		
Outreach opportunity	<p><i>The school in general is a good resource to get information out.</i></p> <p><i>A game is brilliant...that could be really useful.</i></p> <p><i>You could do some QR codes that lead to different education.</i></p>	13	20.31%
Challenges or barriers	<p><i>Not everybody has access [to social media].</i></p> <p><i>A lot of people don't understand what sea level rise means.</i></p> <p><i>The topics like these are getting tuned out for a lot of people. And so we have to find new ways for them to engage, be interested.</i></p>	18	28.13%
TOTAL		64	100%

CITY OF WESTPORT ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT



Toolkit Structure

Page 3 - Project background

Page 4 - Engagement best practices and strategies

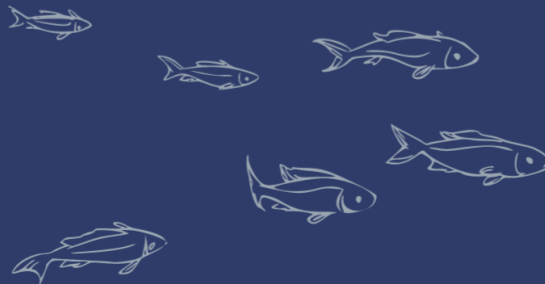
Page 8 - Guide for drafting and disseminating materials

Page 10 - Reaching underrepresented groups

Page 11 - References

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit was designed with sea level rise public outreach in mind, but is intended to be applicable to all types of engagement efforts that the City might take on. Refer to this guide when brainstorming how to reach out to communities about sea level rise, when editing outreach materials, or when planning an engagement event for the community on any topic. We hope this toolkit will prove useful in various scenarios.



Project Background

This toolkit was created by Tessa Harvey, Elana Tracy, Alison Lorenz, and MaryJordan Braley as a part of a project with the City of Westport and the Cascadia Coastline and Peoples Hazards Research Hub (Cascadia CoPes Hub). The Westport Climate Resilience Engagement Project was intended as a starting point to increase public knowledge and engagement about sea level rise in the Westport area, and serve as a potential model for further outreach efforts on other topics. The project included creating a planning team representing the community, developing a public engagement strategy, and developing educational materials on sea level rise.

The project included the following objectives:

- Form a representative planning team from diverse community groups, organizations, and interests to provide stakeholder expertise and make recommendations for community engagement and planning around sea level rise.
- In partnership with the representative planning team, develop a community engagement toolkit informed by contemporary resources on stakeholder identification and engagement (the toolkit you are currently reading)
- Produce sea level rise educational materials that are relevant and accessible to the community.
- Test these materials with members of the community at a public meeting, and incorporate feedback into final deliverables.



What is engagement?

Public or community engagement refers to the process of proactively seeking community input to ensure the given organization makes decisions with a full and complete understanding of how those decisions might impact the public. Engagement ensures the community has full access to information and opportunities to propose ideas.



Why is engagement useful?

If done well, and with the support of the community, engagement is an excellent way to drive permanent change in a collaborative way. Some benefits include:

- Builds trust between government leaders and community members
- More informed decision-making
- Better understanding of community needs and priorities
- Broader and more diverse networks for information gathering and sharing

Engagement Best Practices

The first step of successful community engagement is identifying the audience and therefore the amount of engagement that aligns with the goals of the project. The spectrum of public participation below details different levels of engagement including their goals, promises to the public, and examples of possible activities under each category.

Spectrum of Public Participation

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal:	Provide balanced and objective information	Obtain public feedback on decisions	Work directly with the public throughout the process	Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision	Place final decision-making in the hands of the public
Promise to the Public:	"We will keep you informed."	"We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input informed the decisions."	"We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input informed decisions."	"We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible."	"We will implement what you decide."
Examples:	Fact sheets, websites, newsletters	Public comment, focus groups, surveys	Workshops, listening sessions	Citizen advisory committees, participatory decision-making	Planning councils, ballots, delegated decision

Engagement Process



1

Define the goal and audience

- What is the topic or proposal you'll be bringing to the community?
- How will information be used?
- What specific goals or outcomes have you identified for this engagement?
- Who is the topic or proposal most likely to negatively impact?
- Which groups have been over or underrepresented in previous engagement efforts?
- What level of engagement is most appropriate for your purpose and audience?

2

Form a stakeholder group (if relevant)

- Depending on the identified level of engagement, a representative stakeholder group may be the best way to engage with the community
- If deemed appropriate, identify any groups who will be impacted by the proposal and seek a representative from that group to join (use the list of underrepresented groups at the end of this toolkit)
- If not forming a stakeholder group, brainstorm ways to ensure there is still participation from a wide variety of groups during the engagement process

3

Brainstorm and execute engagement activities

- Using your chosen level of engagement, brainstorm and plan an engagement activity or a series of activities/methods to achieve engagement goals
- Consider possible barriers to engagement: work schedule, physical access, lack of interest, lack of trust in government, language barriers
- Possible engagement activities
 - Public comment periods
 - Advertising specific city council meetings as feedback opportunities on city issues
 - Social media
 - Workshops and focus groups
 - Surveys
 - Community mapping

4

Evaluate

- What were the key findings or takeaways from your engagement as it relates to the topic or proposal?
- Did you meet the goals of engagement identified in step 1? Why or why not?
- How will share the results of your engagement?
- What tactics will be used to maintain relationships with those engaged?



Guide for Drafting Sea Level Rise Engagement Materials

Key takeaway	Feedback from Westport
Use local rather than regional or global information and projections	Use Westport-specific research that has already been completed, can include South Beach area
Use simple, non-technical language	Simple is helpful, as is a diverse range of information so people who want more detailed information can find it
Use simple maps, visuals, and images rather than graphs or charts	Maps of real possibilities as well as what has already happened are helpful, with clear keys explaining the visuals
Focus on actions the audience can take rather than uncertainty or fear	Focus on what people can do to help, and provide scenarios illustrating both short-term and long-term impacts of sea level rise
Collaborate with trusted local leaders and messengers	Leverage existing networks of sea level rise knowledge and leadership in Westport to generate, shape, and refine key messages, continue to expand the network of people involved

Ideas for Where to Disseminate Information

PLACES PEOPLE FREQUENT

On the Fresh Catch Sign

Stakeholders and a City Councilmember recommended incorporating sea level rise educational materials next to the fresh catch sign by the marina. This location has high traffic, especially for fishermen and other marina workers. A poster or sign would work well in this location.



In the School

Distributing materials to students in their classes or as part of the after-school program is an effective way to provide information to young people and their families. Activities and presentations are also ways to conduct youth outreach.

In the Library

Community members suggest having a publication on sea level rise available in the library. A community board in the library could also be used to publish information or outreach materials. Copies of a poster/flyer could be placed here for people to look at and take home, as well as a printed copy of sea level rise questions and answers from the City website.

In the Grocery Store

The grocery store is a high-traffic area, so posting information here is likely to reach members of the community who might not otherwise receive information. We recommend posting a sea level rise poster here for shoppers to look over as they enter and exit the store, or use the space for event flyers as needed.



On the Website

While having physical information is important to many community members, the Westport website is also a great resource for those who choose to access it. The nature of the website allows for information to be updated more frequently than physical signage, so the website should be used to house the most up-to-date science in addition to links to other websites where people can find more detail information if they want to.

Community Outreach Resources

Connecting with the Latinx/Hispanic Community

This community is often underrepresented in public census and decision-making, but has valuable skills and knowledge to contribute. The following organizations have networks in the Westport and Grays Harbor area and could offer connections within the Latinx/Hispanic community.

- Firelands Washington: a bilingual non-profit advocating for rural jobs and economic development in Washington state.
- Grays Harbor RISE Coalition: a network of agencies serving the Spanish-speaking community, headed by Grays Harbor County Public Health
- Twin Harbors Waterkeeper: a bilingual non-profit focused on protecting clean water, and marine and freshwater habitats.

Connecting with offline populations

Another difficult-to-reach community is those without access to the internet or prefer to not use mobile devices or the internet. Feedback from interviews, stakeholder meetings, and the City Council presentation emphasized the need for physical outreach. While the internet is useful for updating the community on the latest science behind sea level rise, all engagement in Westport should also involve at least one type of physical form. Based on our project, we recommend using:

- Flyers/fact sheets sent with utility bills
- Physical signage in frequently visited locations (as described on the page above)
- Encouraging City Council participation and organizing in-person meetings
- Reaching out to local hotspots such as the Westport Historical Society, local churches, and marina businesses

References

This toolkit was created with the input of Westport community members via two stakeholder focus group meetings, two school classroom visits, and a public City Council presentation.

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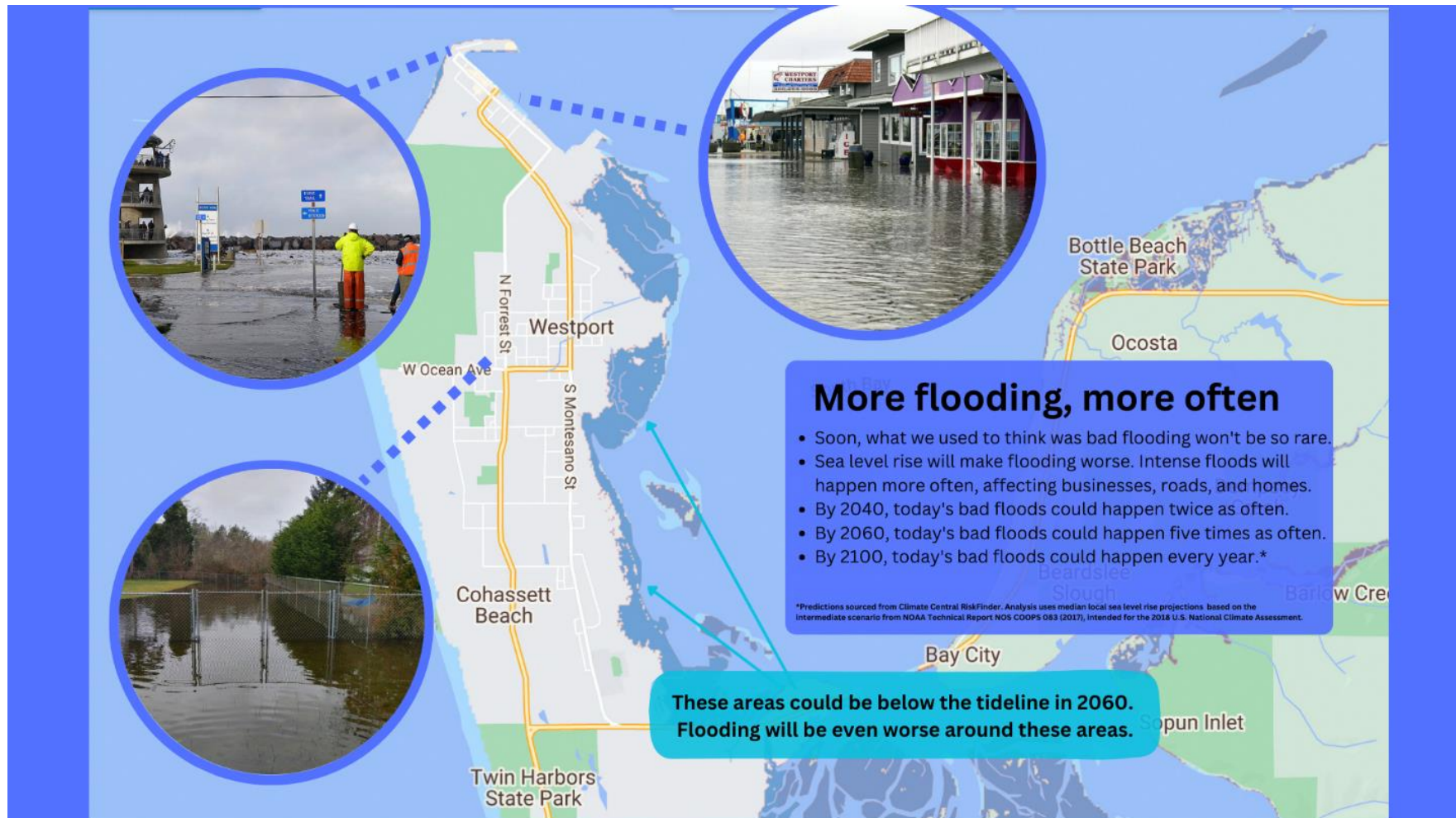
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Appendix 4: Educational Material – Callout Map

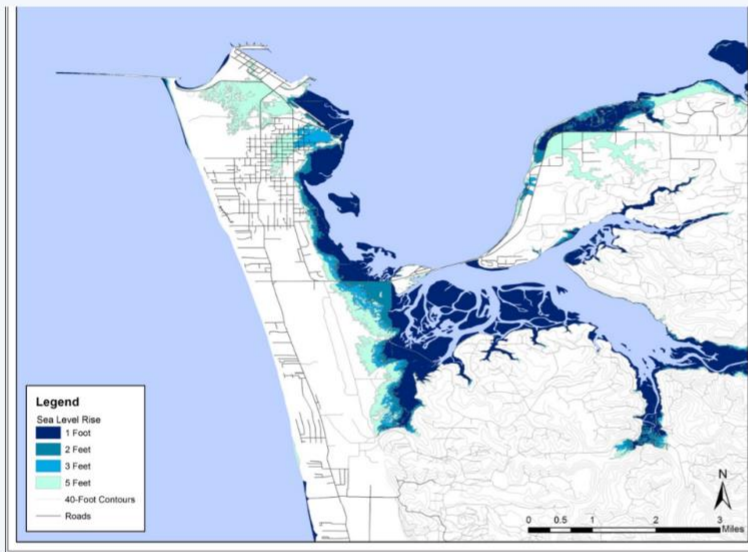


SEA LEVEL RISE

in Westport

Sea level rise is an increase in ocean water levels over time. It can be hard to notice, but even small increases in sea level can cause damage by increasing flooding, storm surges, and erosion.

POTENTIAL HIGH TIDES IN WESTPORT BY 2150



THIS MAP SHOWS HOW MUCH OF WESTPORT WOULD BE UNDERWATER BASED ON DIFFERENT SCIENTIFIC PREDICTIONS.

THIS MAP DOES NOT SHOW WEST BEACH EROSION WHICH WILL ALSO CAUSE LOSS OF LAND.

BY 2150:

90% CHANCE 1 FT RISE
50% CHANCE 3 FT RISE
10% CHANCE 5 FT RISE

SOURCE: LOCALIZING HAZARD MITIGATION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WESTPORTS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON URBDP 2018

HOW COULD SEA LEVEL RISE IMPACT YOU?

THREAT TO DRINKING WATER

SEEKING BUILDING PERMITS

LESS SEAFOOD AVAILABLE

BUYING A HOME OR PROPERTY

DAMAGE TO ROADS

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

ADVOCATE FOR SEA LEVEL RISE PREPARATION IN LOCAL COASTAL PLANNING EFFORTS

ADAPT YOUR HOME OR PROJECT TO HIGHER FUTURE WATER LEVELS

TALK WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS ABOUT HIGHER FUTURE WATER LEVELS

WANT TO KNOW MORE? SCAN HERE!



Appendix 6: Educational Material – Sign

SEA LEVEL RISE IN WESTPORT



WHAT IS SEA LEVEL RISE?

Sea level rise is an increase in the world's oceans over time as a result of climate change. As ice sheets and glaciers melt and as warmer sea waters expand, the sea level increases. Over time, instances of flooding, storm surges, and erosion are more likely to occur.



WHY IS WESTPORT VULNERABLE TO SEA LEVEL RISE?

As a coastal city, Westport is surrounded by water on three sides. The impacts of sea level rise on Westport could be significant. Rising sea levels can affect tourism and fishing industries, as well as the town's roads, bridges, and buildings.



PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Westport has taken steps to prepare for sea level rise. The Westport Hazard Mitigation Plan includes strategies for adapting to rising sea levels. The town has also worked with many partners to map assets and identify risks, and created a Climate Prioritization Toolkit. In the future, the City would like to improve its shoreline protection, as well as with the Department of Ecology to get more planning guidance.

WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY?

There is more than a 50% chance that sea level rise in Westport will meet or exceed one foot by 2100 and more than a 50% chance that sea level rise in Westport will meet or exceed 0.4 feet (or nearly five inches) by 2050.

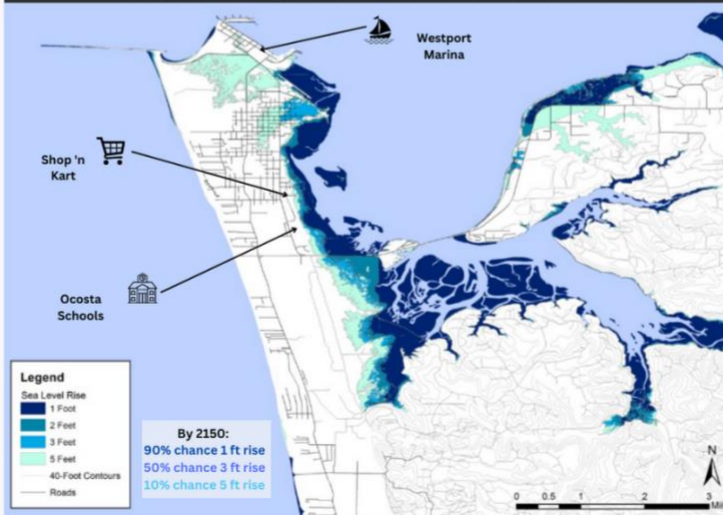
WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

- Advocate for sea level rise preparation in local coastal planning efforts.
- Adapt your home or project to higher future water levels.
- Talk with your neighbors about higher future water levels.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? SCAN HERE!



Projected High Tides in Westport by 2150



SOURCE: LOCALIZING HAZARD MITIGATION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WESTPORTS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON URBDP 2018

2150 IS NOT THAT FAR AWAY...



...IT'S ONLY A FEW GENERATIONS FROM NOW!

A child born in Westport in 2020 will likely see a foot of sea level rise in their lifetime, possibly impacting where they can live, their food and drinking water, and how often they see severe flooding.

About the TEAM



(From left: Elana, Tessa, MJ, and Alison, taken at the top of the Westport Viewing Tower)

Tessa Harvey is originally from Bellevue, Washington and grew up visiting the Washington coast. She lived in Salem, Oregon for five years, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Politics from Willamette University, and then worked for two state agencies while applying for graduate school. During her time at the Evans School, she worked as a congressional intern and more recently as an equitable engagement intern for Sound Transit.

Elana Tracy is from Las Vegas, Nevada, but has lived in Washington since 2017. She graduated from Pacific Lutheran University with a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies and Global Studies before moving on to graduate school at the Evans School. She interned with Seattle Housing Authority as a member of their sustainability team for more than a year during her time at the Evans School.

Alison Lorenz is from St. Paul, Minnesota and moved to Seattle in 2021. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English from Carleton College in 2018, after which she worked as an editor and writer. During her time at the Evans School, she served as a communications intern for the Seattle Department of Transportation and the assistant program manager of the University of Washington's Livable City Year program.

MJ Braley is from Omak, Washington. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Biology and her commission as an Army officer from Gonzaga University in 2014. After completing her active-duty term in the Logistics branch, MJ was a Habitat for Humanity office manager before joining the Evans School. Most recently, she was an Environmental Defense Fund Climate Corps Fellow and worked with the City of Orlando on clean energy and climate justice projects.