

Community Outreach and Engagement Plan

A Stakeholder Engagement Framework for the Commonwealth's Flood Resilience Master Plans

Prepared by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and the
Commonwealth Director of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Flooding impacts all regions and every local jurisdiction within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Flood events range from extreme, episodic storm events to recurrent, sunny-day inundation. They put people, infrastructure, and the environment in harm's way. Between rising sea levels, land subsidence, and changing precipitation patterns, Virginia has already recorded shifts in the frequency and intensity of floods. Continued changes in climate and environmental conditions are anticipated to significantly accelerate flood risk in the decades to come. We must build resilience to adapt to these changing conditions. The Commonwealth of Virginia has taken decisive action to plan for flood risk and build resilience to the impacts of flooding. The Department of Conservation and Recreation (the Department) is designated by the Code of Virginia with overseeing the development and update of multiple Commonwealth flood resilience master plans at regional and statewide scales, as well as coordinating their implementation and integration.

A crucial component of the flood resilience planning process is the involvement of stakeholders who are affected by flooding, as well as those individuals and groups with responsibilities for taking action to address flood hazards. In other words, planning efforts should engage those stakeholders with an interest in the results of the planning effort, as well as those with influence on plan implementation. The purpose of involving these stakeholders is to allow their experiences, priorities, and actions to shape and influence the information and decisions captured in these plans. While quantitative data collection and analysis is vital for modeling and anticipating flood risk, the qualitative data, perspectives, and priorities captured from these stakeholders also provide important inputs to the planning process. Further, where these stakeholders have responsibilities for plan implementation, it is critical to engage them in the process of developing the goals, strategies, and actions which they ultimately will be responsible for carrying forward into the future.

The Department's Community Outreach and Engagement Plan (COEP) outlines a framework to involve the *"whole community"* in developing its flood resilience master plans.¹ For each flood resilience plan that the Department develops, it will create an outreach and engagement strategy. The strategy will include specific target stakeholders, methods, timelines, and deliverables, each identified using the foundation for outreach and engagement this framework provides.

DCR's Flood Resilience Plans

The Department's flood resilience planning responsibilities are outlined in the Code of Virginia.² The Department's flood resilience mission is to mitigate the impacts of severe and repetitive flooding, in turn minimizing loss of life, property damage, and the negative impacts of flooding on the environment. The flood resilience master plans support the Commonwealth's efforts to accomplish this mission by collecting data on historic and forecasted conditions of flooding, developing risk and vulnerability analyses to understand projected impacts, and identifying and prioritizing strategies for action to reduce vulnerability

¹ The COEP is required by the Code of Virginia. See Appendix A for additional details.

² Most of these duties are captured in §10.1-602. Powers and Duties of the Department.
<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title10.1/chapter6/section10.1-602/>.

and bolster resilience. The Department’s master planning occurs at two different scales – statewide through the Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan (VFPMP), and regional, including through the Coastal Resilience Master Plan (CRMP). Statewide and regional plans differ not only in scale, but also in scope. While the statewide VFPMP focuses on directing state government policy to build flood resilience, the state’s regional plans aim to provide a collaborative format for identifying and prioritizing flood resilience vulnerabilities and priorities for resilience actions that the state will support. As plans are updated on a recurring cycle, the more detailed regional master plans will provide key inputs to inform the statewide VFPMP.

Flood Resilience Plan Integration

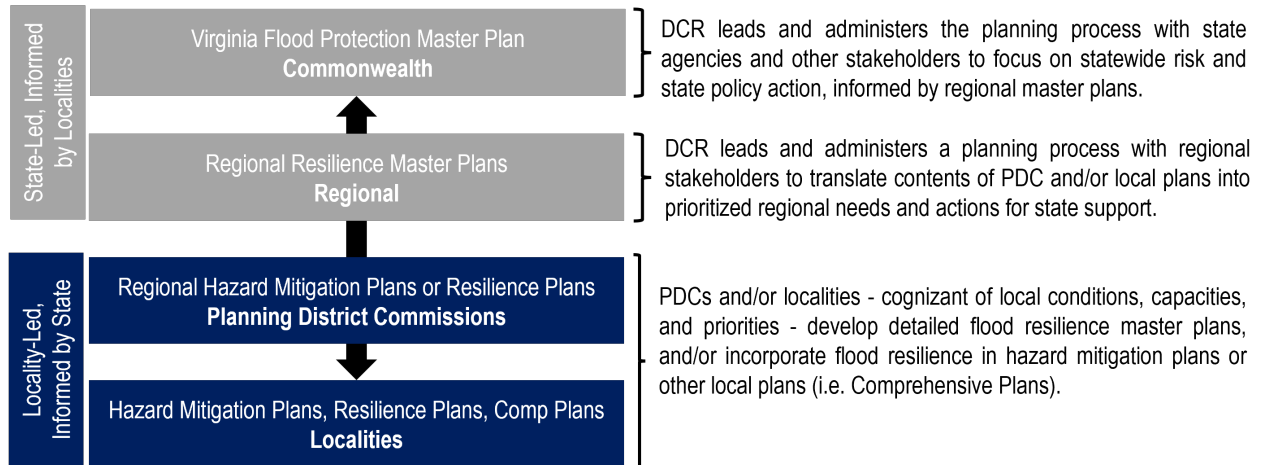


Figure 1. Integrated Planning Approach

Coordinating with Regional and Local Resilience Planning Actors

The state’s flood resilience plans can provide a unifying direction for policy across state agencies to be carried through the Commonwealth’s funding, technical assistance, and other engagement with regional and local actors. Statewide flood resilience planning can also strengthen coordination with federal stakeholders. While the state holds an important role in planning and implementing flood resilience action, other actors – particularly local and regional governments – also play critical roles and carry out essential duties to build flood resilience. Local and regional plans, which guide financing strategies, projects, and policies for their respective governments, are at the frontlines of advancing flood resiliency. Localities and planning district commissions across the state, many with support from the Department’s grant funding, have adopted or are creating their own resilience plans. Each level of plans serves a distinct function and should integrate to reinforce each other, avoiding contradiction and conflict. The Department works to structure the planning processes to support integration of statewide and regional plans alongside local plans developed by municipal governments and planning district commissions (see Figure 1).

Each flood resilience plan should be crafted using engagement processes that gather input from appropriate stakeholders, consistent with the needs, purpose, scale, and limitations of the plan. The Department is committed to developing appropriately scaled and scoped outreach and engagement

processes to support its state-level flood resilience planning. This includes delivering a clear message to the stakeholders we engage about what decisions and information will appear in the plan. The Department will also strive to coordinate with regional and local governments to understand their ongoing plan engagement efforts. Where these ongoing efforts exist, the Department will attempt to work together with these local and regional efforts to coordinate rather than duplicate requests for feedback and share knowledge through two-way feedback. In doing so, the Department aims to avoid overburdening communities with multiple requests for similar information, identify where stakeholders may have been overlooked by existing planning efforts, and maximize the depth and breadth of its engagement efforts.

As a result, the Department anticipates relying on the support of planning district commissions, localities, and non-governmental partners as both key stakeholders and connections to knowledge shared by other stakeholder groups. Therefore, the stakeholder engagement framework provided in this document is designed to also be leveraged by others seeking to work collaboratively with the Department in this integrated approach when conducting outreach and engagement for flood resilience planning.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND GOALS

Guiding Principles for Outreach and Engagement

Whole Community Responsibility

This COEP is guided by a “whole community” approach to flood resilience planning, adapted from the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Whole Community Approach. This approach is based on the idea that building resilience to flood risk is a shared responsibility. Everyone—not just the state government—has a role to play in reducing the risk of flooding to the Commonwealth’s people, property, and environment. Applying this principle requires approaching the outreach and engagement process with the understanding that the engaged entities are not merely informing a plan that will be carried out by others, but indeed providing input on a plan that they themselves will play a role in implementing.

Transparency

Sharing information openly and transparently is foundational to building public trust and maintaining government accountability. Trust is a precondition to establishing effective public engagement in government planning efforts. The information produced from state resilience planning is an asset to be shared with all Virginians who are interested in understanding their flood risk and taking action to build their resilience. Information should be shared in such a way that is readily available to find and use by all interested stakeholders. Public planning processes and whole community implementation outcomes will be improved by ensuring all engaged stakeholders have access to the best available information.

Equity & Opportunity

As we plan for changing conditions, we strive to provide all Virginians with the same opportunities to be safe from the social, economic, and environmental consequences of flooding impacts. While flooding affects many Virginians, it is not felt equally by all. Virginians will continue to experience varying levels of

flood exposure and vulnerability to harm or damage, both of which are tied to socioeconomic, historical, and physical context. To achieve functional resilience across the Commonwealth, we must understand the landscape of flood risk through the combined impacts of flood exposure and vulnerability, including socioeconomic vulnerability. Addressing socioeconomic challenges that will undermine the ability to build flood resilience requires an understanding of where those challenges exist and why. Learning from those familiar with and experiencing these challenges is crucial to making the right decisions for their benefit.

Tailored Approaches

The goals, strategies, and actions in the Commonwealth’s flood resilience plans must serve the needs of all Virginians within each plan’s study area. At the same time, different solutions will work best under different geographic, demographic, and economic conditions. Similarly, engagement methods that are effectively used with one type of stakeholder may fall short in connecting with another. Wherever possible, the Department will embrace outreach and engagement approaches tailored to the needs of different stakeholders of the state. Additionally, when we engage these communities, we will consider the perspectives they bring to the table as valid and valuable to successfully tailor the plans and ensure place-based strategies are appropriate to achieve desired flood resilience outcomes.

“Whole Community” Approach

Recognizing that today’s changing reality of natural hazards is likely to overwhelm government resources and capabilities, FEMA has embraced a “whole community” approach to resilience. Whole community is a philosophy that recognizes disaster preparedness as a shared responsibility. In a whole community effort, the full capacity of private and nonprofit sectors is leveraged alongside governmental partners to enhance our collective resilience. It requires both involving those stakeholders in the development of resilience plans, as well as ensuring that stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities are reflected in the contents of those plans. Governments work together with other stakeholders to collectively understand and assess the needs of their respective communities and determine the best ways to organize and strengthen their assets, capacities, and interests.

FEMA, “A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, Themes, and Pathways for Action,” December 2011, https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/whole_community_dec2011_2.pdf, <https://www.fema.gov/glossary/whole-community>.

Goals and Expected Outcomes

The purpose of the COEP is to establish a framework that the Department will apply to its flood resilience planning processes to achieve meaningful involvement of affected stakeholders in developing the plans. For each flood resilience planning effort, the Department will strive to achieve four goals and expected outcomes that will work together with the guiding principles to provide direction to outreach and engagement methods. Examples of the methods that will be used by the Department to advance each of these goals are described in the next section of this document, “Process and Methods.”

Goal One: Collaborate across existing flood resilience planning efforts and other existing outreach and engagement. Specifically, work to create alignment, maximize impact, and reduce duplication and

confusion between roles and responsibilities at the state, regional, and local levels. Recognize and embrace distinctions between the purpose of each level of governments' plans. At the same time, where relevant, share knowledge and information across planning efforts, particularly with local and regional governments, but also with other organizations involved in creating flood resilience plans. Work through existing relationship networks and communication pathways, rather than creating new ones.

- **Expected Outcome:** Plans and outreach efforts are aligned and integrated with existing federal, state, and local programs to provide additional resources and synergies.

Goal Two: Seek out the participation of affected and vulnerable stakeholders. When identifying stakeholders and conducting outreach to draw them into engagement opportunities, focus not only on those stakeholders which have an influence on the direction of plan implementation, but also those who are affected by the impacts of flooding. Consider both physical and social vulnerability in identifying affected stakeholder groups. Identify appropriate and effective methods to proactively reach these affected stakeholders to inform them of the plans and invite their involvement in plan development.

- **Expected Outcome:** Stakeholders representative of the diverse demographic and geographic communities across Virginia vulnerable to the social and physical impacts of flooding are engaged in planning processes.

Goal Three: Provide access to information and opportunity for participation in the full cycle of decision-making to affected and vulnerable stakeholders. Develop approaches to engagement throughout the planning process which (1) supply stakeholders with information they need to provide meaningful feedback on the plans; and (2) learn from stakeholders' knowledge and experience in ways that can influence decision making.

- **Expected Outcome:** At each step of the planning process, the Department has access to high-quality, usable feedback representing the perspectives of those stakeholders who will be most impacted by the plans.

Goal Four: Incorporate the views and perspectives of these communities into the decisions included in the plans. Analyze and apply the feedback collected through stakeholder engagement to shape the planning products. Transparently communicate with the public about how stakeholder feedback was utilized. From the start of each planning effort, make opportunities for influencing decisions clear to the stakeholders we seek out.

- **Expected Outcome:** Each plan reflects the feedback collected through stakeholder engagement.

PROCESS AND METHODS

Information sharing and proactive engagement of stakeholders will occur throughout the full cycle of the state's plan development to inform decisions made along the way. The strategy to define how this will occur for each plan will be defined as plan creation or plan update processes are scoped in an outreach and engagement strategy.

Developing an Outreach and Engagement Strategy for Each Plan

Before planning begins, a strategy for each plan’s outreach and engagement process should be in place. In general, the Department intends to rely on the support of external consultants, identified through a competitive bidding process, to develop its flood resilience plans. Additionally, the Department intends to continue to rely on external advisors and stakeholders, such as the Coastal Resilience Technical Advisory Committee, to help craft not only the flood resilience plans, but also the processes employed – including outreach and engagement – to create each plan. Throughout the remainder of this section, references to “the Department” imply ongoing coordination and support from these external partners. Together with these partners, the Department will take the following steps to develop its outreach and engagement strategy.

Identify Constraints. Constraints that may impact the type of outreach and engagement conducted may include factors such as: timelines or mandated deadlines for completing the plans, human and financial resources available to dedicate to planning, and the level of existing connections with stakeholders in the planning area. These should be considered from the start to appropriately scope the effort.

Conduct a Stakeholder Analysis. Using methods such as stakeholder interest/influence mapping in collaboration with partners, the Department will identify those organizations and communities known to be stakeholders of the plan. Stakeholders will include anyone who is involved in or affected by the issue of flooding addressed by the resilience plan under development. Though the list of stakeholders may be extensive, the Department will work with its partners to define each stakeholder’s understood level of impact and influence in the context of the plan being developed to aid in prioritizing engagement. During the analysis, the Department may consider factors such as a stakeholder’s level of social and physical vulnerability to flooding, level of governance responsibility for mitigating flooding impacts, access to funding to accomplish flood resilience action, etc. As a result, stakeholder analysis will look differently for each flood resilience plan. For example, when mapping influence during the VFPMP, the Department may consider which stakeholders have an influence on state policy decisions related to flood resilience. In contrast, for the CRMP the Department may consider which stakeholders have an influence on carrying out coastal resilience projects and initiatives.

While this stakeholder analysis will provide a useful starting point for engagement, it is important that the Department remain flexible in expanding and revising the landscape of stakeholders involved as additional groups are identified, and more is known about stakeholders’ interest and influence along the way.

Define Engagement Goals and Associated Methods. Using the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Participation³ as a guide, the Department will apply the results of the stakeholder analysis to define a target level of participation for different stakeholders in developing the plan. Listed from lowest to highest degree of impact on decision making, the levels of engagement that the Department will utilize to develop the plans include inform, consult, involve, and collaborate. Stakeholders with the highest level of interest and influence will be most closely engaged in the planning process through collaborative levels of participation. Stakeholders with lower levels of interest and

³ <https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars>

influence will be informed and consulted on the plans (see Figure 2). Importantly, the level of engagement will vary from group to group. The Department will strive to provide all identified stakeholders with access to information and opportunity for participation, in line with the COEP goals.

A variety of methods may be employed for each level of participation the Department seeks. Additional information on how the Department will craft these methods is detailed below. The Department will work with others to collaborate and coordinate engagement methods whenever possible, avoiding duplication where similar engagement networks and opportunities already exist.

Again, an adaptive management approach is critical. As the Department builds relationships and better understands the interests and roles of different stakeholders in building flood resilience, stakeholders may move from one level of participation to another. The Department and its partners will learn which outreach and engagement methods are most successful with time and should be prepared to adjust course to reach the COEP goals by employing different methods where appropriate.

Align Engagement Methods with Plan Schedules and Decision Points. Finally, in developing the outreach and engagement strategy for each plan, the Department will identify key stages during the planning process to establish touch points for collecting meaningful input. This will drive the schedule for outreach and engagement during the planning process. The Department will strive to balance overall schedule constraints with selected outreach and engagement methods, ensuring that the methods can be effectively conducted within time allocated.

Further, the Department will answer “to what end is engagement occurring?” for each stage. Methods should be intentionally designed to encourage feedback which is relevant and usable at each planning stage. A six-step process for plan development and implementation on a five-year cycle is shown below, including examples of the ways in which engagement may be used to influence planning decisions (see Figure 3).

Identifying Methods for Engagement

As described above, the methods of engagement employed for each planning process will be outlined as the outreach and engagement strategy is developed. While this COEP does not lay out the methods specific to each plan, this section provides information on how the Department intends to create methods that will be suited to achieve each of the four goals of this framework.

Methods for Collaborating with Existing Efforts (Goal One)

Due to the statewide nature of the Department’s flood resilience plans, The Department will focus on creating mutually beneficial relationships with other ongoing local, regional, state, and federal efforts to advance resilience planning. This will include establishing ongoing relationships with organizations and individuals that work in flood resilience planning across the state. Opportunities exist to conduct coordinated outreach and engagement with these actors. The Department will work with its contacts to identify opportunities to leverage prior data collection efforts where they are relevant – such as information on reported challenges with localized flooding – and share contact lists to reach stakeholders known to have an interest and influence in flood resilience. Given the Department’s limited resources and

the vast number of stakeholders across the state, these relationships will help maximize the Department’s reach. In addition to regional and local governance bodies, other non-government actors – particularly non-profit organizations – can provide a useful connection to groups of existing stakeholders.

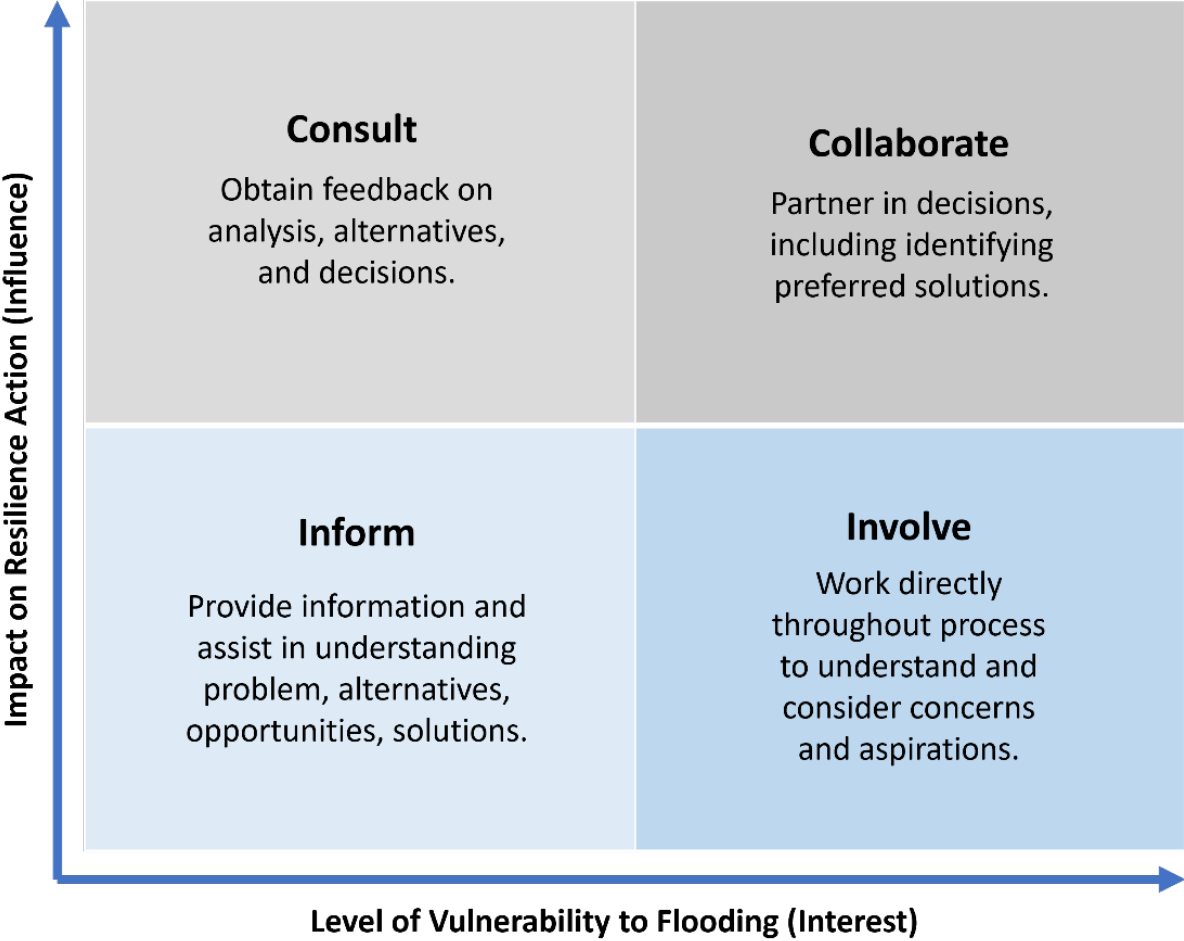


Figure 2. Stakeholder Analysis Framework

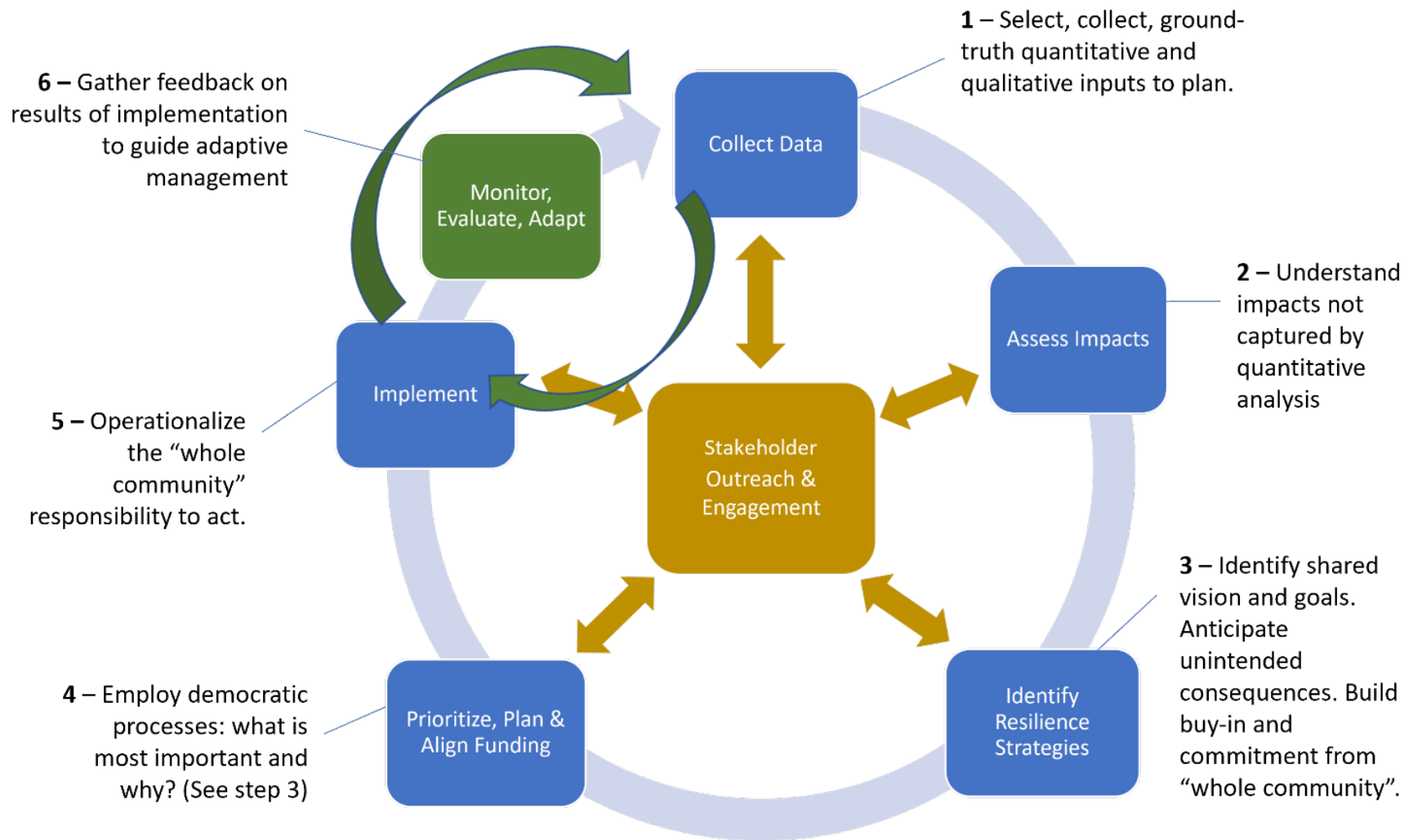


Figure 3. Five-Year Cycle of Flood Resilience Planning and Examples of Engagement Purpose

Methods for Seeking out Participation of Vulnerable Communities (Goal Two)

Stakeholder analysis will provide the first step in seeking out participation in planning. As described in the sections above, this analysis will be a collaborative effort with advisory bodies and consultants. It will draw from both the Department's institutional knowledge as well as documented outreach and engagement efforts from past plans and other engagement processes. Once stakeholders are identified, the Department will ensure that it has a clear summary of both the overall planning effort and the purpose of engagement to communicate to identified stakeholders in a format that is accessible and understandable to target audiences. The Department will work with its partners to identify and establish contact with trusted messengers and community champions of the stakeholder groups. Initial communication will focus on sharing the Department's basic message, and listening to feedback on how the Department can best connect with the group during the plan's development. This provides an opportunity to learn how the Department can reduce barriers to access to increase participation by desired groups.

This type of relationship building often requires multiple meetings. It will rarely neatly align with planning schedules. Understanding that plan development and implementation will be adaptive and iterative, the Department will incorporate continued relationship building into its general outreach efforts that occur independently from plan development. The Department plans to work with partners to build awareness of the challenges of flooding, its efforts to build resilience, and opportunities for knowledge sharing on an ongoing basis through other work streams.

Methods for Creating Access and Opportunity (Goal Three)

As outlined above, methods employed will fall into one of four levels of participation, depending on the stakeholder audience and opportunity for input. Examples of methods that fall into these four levels are shown in the table below (Table 1). While some methods may be used to reach many different types of stakeholders (for example, public comment periods), others may be targeted to the needs of specific stakeholders, in line with the "tailored approaches" guiding principle.

Barriers to access for these outreach and engagement opportunities will differ across stakeholder groups and individuals. The Department will work to reduce barriers to access as it grows its knowledge of the different groups of stakeholders it engages. The Department will consider the following strategies to reduce barriers to access:

- Ensuring that materials provided use plain language understood by most Virginians. As appropriate and resources permitting, translating materials into different languages to reach target populations and publishing materials that meet standards for the blind and visually impaired.
- Selecting information-sharing formats that represent a diverse set of messaging platforms, such as minority- and immigrant-serving networks and publications.
- Providing opportunities to participate both real-time (such as live streamed or in person public meetings) and individually (such as recorded meetings or online comment periods).

- Hosting in-person meetings in locations that are accessible to intended audiences, considering factors such as cultural dynamics, public transportation service, and ADA accessibility.
- Selecting a day of the week and time of day during which intended audiences are likely to have flexible schedules.
- As resources permit, providing an interpreter for the deaf upon request for meetings and including closed caption broadcasting for recorded presentations.
- As resources permit, provide most engaged participants with resources to facilitate their full participation.

Table 1. Examples of Engagement Methods

Level	Examples of Methods
Inform	Websites; Marketing campaigns; Roadshow meetings and open houses.
Consult	Surveys and data calls; Public comment periods; Online webinars with listening sessions; Public meetings; Focus groups.
Involve	Stakeholder workshops.
Collaborate	Steering committees and work groups.

Methods for Incorporating Views and Perspectives into Decisions (Goal Four).

When consulting, involving, and collaborating with stakeholders, the Department will make it clear how the feedback received will be considered in the planning process. Engagement opportunities will be structured to ensure that the inputs received are documented in a format that is legible and organized. The Department will consider opportunities to provide transparent access to raw feedback received. Alongside the feedback itself, the Department will capture information about the stakeholders who provided the feedback to understand where gaps in perspectives may exist. Qualitative data analysis methods such will be designed to review and capture key takeaways from engagement to apply to planning decisions. Summaries of findings from engagement efforts will be produced and included in planning products.

IMPLEMENTATION

Request for Proposals to Conduct Outreach and Engagement

The Department intends to hire consultants through competitive requests for proposals to conduct many activities and processes related to planning outreach and engagement. Once a consultant is hired for the planning effort, the Department will work collaboratively with that consultant and other external advisors to develop and implement an outreach and engagement strategy. Each strategy will be documented and shared to keep stakeholders informed of the overall schedule and information about when and how input will be collected to inform the plan.

Measuring and Tracking Progress

Outreach and engagement in planning is an adaptive and iterative process. To identify opportunities for improvement along the way – including regarding the success of individual engagement activities – the Department will seek formal and informal feedback from participating stakeholders. For example, it will use methods such as post-meeting feedback surveys after workshops, and consulting steering committees and stakeholder advisory groups on progress. The expected outcomes appearing in this COEP framework will serve as the basis for these requests for feedback. Once plans are complete and published, the Department should reflect on these expected outcomes, and work with consultants and external stakeholders to identify successes and shortfalls, documenting key takeaways and lessons learned from the process to inform the Department’s future efforts.

APPENDIX A

Legislative Enactment Clause

The COEP was developed in accordance with [HB516/SB551](#), passed during the 2022 General Assembly Session. Enactment Clause 3 of the bills directs the Department as follows:

The Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (the Department), jointly with the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and in coordination with the Chief Resilience Officer and the Special Assistant to the Governor for Coastal Adaptation and Protection, shall prepare a Community Outreach and Engagement Plan for updates to the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Plan and for development and updates to the Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan (the Plans) no later than December 31, 2022. The outreach and engagement plan shall strive for meaningful involvement by ensuring that

- (i) affected and vulnerable community residents have access and opportunity to participate in the full cycle of the decision-making process about the development of and updates to the Plans, and*
- (ii) decision-makers shall seek out and consider such participation, allowing the views and perspectives of community residents to shape and influence decisions.*

The Department shall seek input to the Community Outreach and Engagement Plan from representatives of Virginia Indian tribes, community-based organizations, the public health sector, nongovernmental organizations, civil rights organizations, communities impacted by recurring flooding, and the Emergency Management Equity Working Group established pursuant to subdivision B 19 of § 44-146.18 of the Code of Virginia.