



HERE + NOW + US

A public-private-community project to test and promote community engagement on climate change risks

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY:

Climate change has been called “the slow-moving catastrophe”. One of the key barriers to action on climate change is that the risk may not seem immediate and urgent.

Yet, periodic flooding is already “the new normal” in Marin County: Southern Marin experienced an extreme King Tide flooding event in December of 2014 that disrupted transportation arteries, including US Hwy 101, trapping many communities for over 24 hours, and damaging infrastructure.

Storms and flooding are rarely linked to climate change. This leaves many people without a context for understanding the impacts of climate change already taking place around them. The result is indifference, inaction and even fatalism: there are those who are informed but believe that there is nothing that they can do. This presents an extraordinary challenge to public engagement, adaptation planning, and behavior change.

A solution to both inaction and fatalism is to localize the impacts, make them relevant, and create the opportunity for the public to understand and express how these impacts affect what they value. Research has shown that personal experiences are key in the early stages of environmental education. It is also critical to present options, alternatives and ways to become engaged so that people can take an active role with a sense that their efforts can make a difference. Local stakeholders must be involved in assessing risks in order to devise effective solutions. A successful community engagement process should include municipal and county decision makers, business leaders, community members and technical experts.

Climate Access, in partnership with the County of Marin and San Francisco-based Owlized, is piloting a cutting-edge engagement project along the shore of San Francisco Bay in Southern Marin. This 12 week project employs a high tech device that allows people to visualize the immediate local effects of sea level rise as well as possible adaptation strategies, and invites them to “join the conversation” locally.

The goal of the project is to test the effectiveness of this tool in engaging the community in planning for climate change risk adaptation. A facilitated community conversation will be held at the Mill Valley Community Center in September.

PROJECT DETAILS:

The Here-Now-Us Project will install two interactive digital viewfinders along the shoreline of Mill Valley on a high-traffic multi-use path. The “OWL” viewfinder is modeled after the classic coin-operated binoculars commonly found at scenic viewpoints but has been modernized with a virtual reality environment housed inside. This allows people to see the potential impacts and responses to sea level rise in the location where they are standing, rendered in realistic, high-definition, 3 dimensional computer-generated images and, because it is interactive, people can respond to what they see by leaving an audio record.

The viewfinders will show two near-term scenarios of sea level rise, and two possible adaptation responses. The interactive OWL is programmed to ask visitors to share their thoughts by answering questions and leaving an audio recording of their responses. They will also be directed to visit the “Here-Now-Us” website where they can further engage on the issue. The goal is to motivate people to engage with their community as the County and shoreline cities begin a climate action Vulnerability Assessment. This dialogue on the impacts of climate change, mitigation strategies and adaptation responses will also form part of a research project, led by Stanford research fellow Dr. Susanne Moser, which will gain insights into how to make sea level rise and related flooding events relevant to citizens, as well as best practices for motivating risk response actions. It is expected that, if successful, this pilot project could be expanded and deployed to other locations and climate change contexts.

The OWLs will be located on the Mill Valley-Sausalito-Multi-Use Path, adjacent to Tamalpais High School, beginning May 20, 2015, with a media launch event planned for May 21, 2015. They will be in place for 12 weeks. It is estimated that the OWL installation will be seen by 15,000 people over the 12-week project period. There will be a facilitated community workshop following the installation period in September.

PROJECT FUNDING:

Climate Access and the County of Marin secured funding from FEMA with a significant grant of \$150,000. Additional funding has been provided by the County of Marin, Autodesk, Inc., and Marin Clean Energy. This project will have very high visibility, with national as well as local Bay Area media already expressing interest.

PROJECT PARTNERS:

Climate Access
County of Marin
Owlized
FEMA
Autodesk

PROJECT ADVISORS:

Dr. Susanne Moser
Bay Conservation and Development Commission
San Francisco Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
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