What is a "whole of community" approach to planning for adaptation?

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The Citizen Engagement Working Group (CEWG) was formed in late 2014 to complement the Hampton Roads Sea Level Rise Preparedness and Resilience Intergovernmental Planning Pilot Project's Whole of Government approach with the perspective of the Whole of Community; that is, anyone in the Hampton Roads region who was not, or did not represent a municipal, state, regional or federal agency or branch of the Department of Defense. The working group chairs sought to complement the steering committee and other working groups by including a wide variety of non–governmental stakeholders from throughout the Hampton Roads region, including individuals and representatives of community, business, civic and social organizations and non– governmental institutional stakeholders. All participants were volunteers. The group was co–chaired by an academic outreach professional and a private business owner who chaired a non–profit center for civic engagement.

To test methodologies for participation by residents in the planning process, a research team from Old Dominion University used the engagement support methodology, the Action–Oriented Stakeholder Engagement for a Resilient Tomorrow (ASERT) framework, to facilitate discussion of, knowledge about, and action to adapt to flooding and SLR. The foundation of this engagement framework is the presentation of relevant and accessible information, dialog and two–way communication, and deliberative and participative mechanisms. ASERT incorporates several key principles: (1) an inclusive process that engages stakeholders across multiple social dimensions and across the sectoral spectrum; (2) a strong emphasis on surfacing local context and knowledge; (3) integrated engagement where social and cultural factors are integral to the process of engagement; and (4) explicit consideration of change mechanisms, such as structured conversations, deliberative dialogue, and participatory mechanisms (Coles & Buckle 2004, Cutter et al. 2008, Vogel et al. 2007).

The ASERT framework was applied to the neighborhoods surrounding Navy Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek in the cities of Virginia Beach and Norfolk as part of a larger Hampton Roads Sea Level Rise Preparedness and Resilience Intergovernmental Planning Pilot Project. The neighborhoods represent a mixed income area with homeowners and renters, and both military and non–military families. Participants in focus groups used participatory mapping (WeTable technology) to identify community assets and flooding problems in the neighborhoods. Deliberative discussion drew out local knowledge, perceptions about SLR and resilience, preferred adaptation mechanisms, and barriers to adaptation. The use of polling technology provided participants a summary activity that prioritized the issues that emerge from the discussion. Findings from this testbed study will be presented to the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission and the cities of Norfolk and Virginia Beach for use in their planning processes.