

PLANNING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE IN RIVERWAY COUNTY

TEACHING NOTE

This is a six-person, non-scorable collaboration simulation focused on issues related to flooding due to coastal storms and sea level rise. It is designed to teach a method for consensus-based planning among a diverse set of stakeholders who represent the community at large.

OVERVIEW

Riverway County sits on the southeastern Atlantic coast and includes a wide range of communities from its rural western edge to its small urban center to its affluent coastline. Five rivers converge into Eastern Bay, where the City of Maurens, the county seat, was incorporated in the late 18th century. The area is known for its natural beauty, rich culture, and diverse population. In recent years the area has been affected by an unusual number of storms, causing flooding throughout the county, and impacting private and public property, transportation, utilities, schools, businesses, and other services. In the wake of these crises, the County Manager has ordered a review and update of the county's Comprehensive Plan and has convened a small, representative group of stakeholders from the community to review seven possible flood management projects and prioritize the top three. If the stakeholders are able to come to an agreement, this demonstration of community consensus will position the county for federal funding. In order to ensure the stakeholders think clearly about the long-term implications of their decisions, the county has commissioned a scientific evaluation of projected changes to precipitation, temperature, and sea level in the county over the next 80 years. The stakeholders are asked to evaluate their options in light of these possible changes.

LEARNING POINTS

1. The extent of impacts from climate change are uncertain, and therefore difficult to plan for. The communities that meet this challenge directly and openly will be in a better position to deal with that uncertainty than those that do not.

In cities and towns all over the world, the impacts of a changing climate are becoming increasingly relevant to the average person (such as more frequent flooding). In real places that are similar to the fictional Riverway County, residents and decisionmakers are struggling to find their way forward. This role play simulation models a community grappling with the reality of changing weather patterns and rising seas through an open, public process. In the scenario, as in real life, if the community can decide on a set of priorities to make themselves more resilient, their community members will feel more

confident and the local governments and other non-government entities will be more likely to receive financial help and other kinds of assistance from other sources.

2. Consensus among a representative group of stakeholders is powerful.

Most policy decisions are made by majority vote among elected representatives; therefore, many people have never witnessed or participated in a public decisionmaking process that requires overwhelming agreement. The simulation provides the opportunity to experience consensus-based decisionmaking, which requires the consideration of *all* stakeholder interests in the development of a solution. It also includes an incentive for consensus (federal money) to reinforce the idea that consensus decisions, when made by a diverse group that is representative of the larger community, are often perceived as stronger because they indicate a broad base of support.

3. Environmental challenges are complex and can be tackled from various angles. Nearly every solution involves trade-offs.

Participants in the simulation have to prioritize their top three projects among seven valuable options. None of the projects have significantly more or less objective merit than the others so participants must argue for the benefits of the ones their character cares about the most. Hearing these different points of view helps participants learn that solving complex problems is not about finding one right answer, but rather determining ways to evaluate many options with benefits and disadvantages.

4. Trusted scientific information about likely impacts from climate change is important when planning for the future.

While the future is uncertain, it is not completely random or entirely unpredictable. Certain human behaviors are likely to produce a unique range of effects on the environment, so local planning efforts should attempt to understand those different futures and account for them.

5. Standing in another's shoes creates empathy that is greatly needed in polarized societies.

One of the most consistent takeaways from people who participate in policy-based role play simulations is that they feel a different sense of empathy, or understanding of other perspectives. It also helps them understand other people's "agendas," or why they advocate for what they do. This can lead to greater tolerance and more productive solution-seeking, versus blaming and defending.

LOGISTICS

- The simulation includes six players in six different roles.
- Each participant should receive the general instructions, the table of scientific climate data and projections, and the map.
- The participants should be divided into small groups of six and each person should be given a role so that each role is represented by at least one person in the group. If

the number of participants does not divide evenly by six, some groups can have two people assigned to the same role. It does not matter which role(s) is(are) doubled up.

- Some things to consider when making role assignments;
 - Assign people to a role that is as different as possible from their day-to-day life. This increases the potential for learning empathy for another point of view.
 - Try to design groups that are diverse in terms of the participants' real-life backgrounds and experiences.
 - When making small groups, try to split up people who are very familiar with each other. If people in a group know each other in real life, their capacity to engage fully in the role can be hampered. Also, one of the benefits of conducting this exercise in a community is that people get to know one another.
 - If you know that a participant has a challenge reading or seeing, try to provide the materials as far in advance as possible to give them time to feel prepared.
- Always send the general instructions in advance, if possible, and encourage everyone to read them. Also, assume most people will not read them, so you should provide time for reading during the group exercise, either way.
- If the roles and groups can be assigned in advance, the individual roles can also be sent in advance, which may save even more time.

Timing expectations

20 minutes	Read the general instructions
10 minutes	Read the instructions that are unique to each role
10 minutes	Verbal instructions to the group
45-60 minutes	Discussion and negotiation in roles
30-45 minutes	Guided debrief

PREPARATION

- 1) Have a sign-in or registration table where participants can be welcomed and given any materials you are providing on the day of the event. If you are providing food and beverage (highly recommended!), set it up in a location that will allow people to get snacks without being much of a distraction to the rest of the group.
- 2) Arrange the room or rooms so groups of six can complete the exercise together
- 3) Provide pens/markers/chalk and a large piece of paper or a flipchart or chalkboard for each table so they can write or draw during their discussion. They can also use this surface to record their final agreement.
- 4) If possible, make "name tents" (pieces of stiff paper folded in half with the name of each role printed on one side) for each role and place them on the table.

STARTING

- 1) Provide each person who signs in at registration with clear instructions on where to

go and what to do first. Often these events have a quiet start because everyone is quietly reading and/or up getting snacks, while the formal welcome and introduction comes later. It can be a little jarring if participants don't expect it.

2) Walk around the room and check in with participants who look confused. Be available to answer questions.

3) When you are ready to start, ask for everyone's attention so they stop reading and focus on the instruction.

4) Review the schedule (45-60 minutes for negotiation, 30-45 minutes debrief)

5) Describe, very briefly, the key points of the story of the role play (you can read the paragraph at the top of these notes).

6) Describe the climate data and projections and emphasize the need to take the changes to the climate into account when discussing their options.

7) Encourage the participants to really embody the role and to stay focused on what their character's key interests are, rather than their own.

8) Review, very briefly, the seven projects they will be considering (you might draw a simple table like the one below at the front of the room as you speak).

INFRASTRUCTURE	COASTAL PROPERTY	NATURAL RESOURCES	PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY
#1 Inland pipes	#3 Coastal resoration study	#5 Harbor dredging	#7 Communications campaign
#2 Maurens improvements	#5 Managed retreat study	#6 Conservation/ heritage lands review	

9) Ask for any questions about the structure of the game.

10) Encourage the Director of Sustainability to kick off the conversation by asking everyone to go around the table and introduce themselves (they can use their own first name and the name of their role).

9) Remind them what time the negotiation will end. Write the end time at the front of the room.

DURING THE NEGOTIATION

1) Walk around inconspicuously and try to decipher whether anyone needs assistance understanding something from their instructions. Do not advise the groups or interfere with their negotiations.

2) Give them a 10-minute warning and encourage them to come to an agreement if they have not yet.

DEBRIEF

The goal of the debrief is to help the participants reflect on the five learning points articulated above and to encourage them to apply anything they learned from the simulation to their real life. First, however, they will want to know how many groups came to consensus, and which projects each group decided to prioritize. Go around the

room as quickly as possible and note the agreements at the front of the room. After gathering this information, transition into questions that will help them reflect on the learning points, such as:

- What was it like to step into the shoes of your role? What did you learn about their perspective that is different from your own? What questions did it raise for you?
- How did you feel, in the role you were playing, about other people in the group and their perspectives?
- How did you use the climate data and projections? What bearing did it have on your decisions making?
- What was valuable about seeking for consensus? How would the results have been different if a simple majority (4 out of 6) would have been okay?
- Is there anyone you can imagine in the fictional county of Riverway who might not feel that their interests are being sufficiently represented by your top three priorities? If so, who and why?
- Name two or three trade-offs you had to make to come to your top three priorities. How did you rationalize those trade-offs?
- What did you learn from this exercise that you did not know before?
- You might ask a question specifically about “Option #8” to see which groups, if any, considered it. And use the discussion to make the point that regular people might come up with new solutions or options if they are at the table.

If the debrief is also an opportunity for the group to discuss how they might apply what they learned in their own community, here are some possible questions:

- Can you imagine a process like this (representative stakeholders, good data/information, consensus-based decisionmaking) working in your community? Why or why not? An alternative question might be, “What would need to happen for a process like this to work in your community?”
- When you think about flooding in your own community, do any of the proposed solutions in the role play simulation resonate as good options for you? How might you go about encouraging your leaders to investigate them?
- What trade-offs are you wrestling with in your own community as you are adapting to a changing climate?
- You might make the point, by referring to the diversity of agreements among the different groups, that *who* is at the table matters. Even when given the same instructions and the same information, different groups come up with different agreements because the people at the table have different sets of values and capacities to argue for their interests.
- What local, state, or federal codes, regulations, policies, plans, or practices need to be reconsidered in order to make your community more resilient?