Generating a Situation MapThis situation map activity is one way to reveal the mental models that people are using to thing about a situation. To practice using this tool, participants will break into groups. Guided by a facilitator, each group will create a situation map by following the steps outlined below. The facilitator will provide an overview of the subject and purpose for the map, and give each person a bold marker and large sticky notes in three colors.

Situation Map Activity: Revealing Mental and Cultural Models to Find & Describe Common Ground Part I

## Situation: Protecting coastal wetland from erosion

**Step 1: *What are the values of the situation you are working to protect? What is important to you?*** Values can be social or ecological. Examples:

My ability to make a living on the water; protecting sources of clean drinking water; protecting my home from erosion; protecting coastal wetlands from sea level rise.

Each person uses a green sticky to record one value. Place each sticky in the center of the poster paper. The facilitator leads a discussion of whether these values can be combined into categories and asks, “What are we missing?”

**Step 2: *What are the threats or barriers to protecting what we value in this situation of coastal wetland erosion?***

Each person uses a pink sticky to record one threats or barriers. Place each sticky around the outer edge of the paper, surrounding the values. The facilitator leads a discussion of whether these threats/barriers can be combined into categories and asks, “What are we missing?

**Step 3: Individual consideration of the question:** ***What is one way to protect what you value and reduce coastal erosion?***

Each person uses a blue sticky to describe *one* way that coastal erosion can be reduced and what they value about coastal wetlands can be protected. Place each sticky in the space between the threats and values. Each person describes how their idea protects what is valued. If time allows, the facilitator can ask the group to identify additional ways that the values are protected.

**Step 4:** The facilitator will lead a skillful discussion about how members of the group see their work as part of a system affecting the situation they are working to improve.

**Step 5:** Small groups reconvene to debrief the activity. In a real world setting skillful discussion and active listening are used to collect ideas from each group to build a situation map where all ideas are represented.

Analyzing the qualitative data in the situation map to reveal mental models requires you to look for patterns in the way people are thinking about the situation. This analysis is normally done by the planning team or you as an individual facilitator after the meeting. Begin by making a simple list of the responses for each question. Use the situation map generated earlier for your responses.

Situation Map Activity: Revealing Mental and Cultural Models to Find & Describe Common Ground Part II

Protecting coastal wetlands from erosion.

1. How do people value coastal wetlands?
2. What do people think are threats to coastal wetlands?
3. How did people attach blame or responsibility for threats?
4. How do people think about cause of threats and effects on what they value?

Use other side

1. How did people talk about a **path** from the source of a threat to its impact on a value?
2. How did people talk about loss of something they value?
3. What do people think are the ways to protect the values of coastal wetlands?
4. What did you learn about the ways people assign responsibility for solutions?

Team members should complete the analysis questions individually. During a facilitated discussion with the entire team, individual results are discussed to recognize and understand the scope and diversity of mental models being used to think about what is valued, how threats are perceived and how people think progress can be made. This knowledge can be used to design the next Collaborative Learning event. By making mental models visible, these results can facilitate co-creation of knowledge by tapping into the collaborative potential of the group.

Complete resources for the Resilience Dialogues Project of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System are available from <https://www.wellsreserve.org/project/the-resilience-dialogue>