# A Roadmap to Small Group Discussions on Sea-Level Rise and Coastal Flooding

We designed this short guide to provide community groups in Anne Arundel County with a road map for facilitating group discussions on sea-level rise and coastal flooding. Additional materials, available at www.FutureCoast.info, include an "Issue Book" with science, impacts and policy information, an accompanying "Participant Guide," and online map viewer with information on projected flooding and inundation impacts by street address through 2100 based on varying rates of sea-level rise.

We suggest six steps in conducting a 1 ½-hour discussion with a small group of approximately 20 individuals or less. These can be easily modified to accommodate different group sizes or session durations.

**Required materials and supplies:** (1) Computer; (2) Internet connection to access www.FutureCoast.info; (3) LCD projector; and (4) *(optional)* chart paper or white board and markers for tracking the discussion.

## Step 1: Setting up the discussion

1. Arrange participants in a circle for the discussion.

2. Ask for volunteers -- or "conversation guides" -- to help lead the discussion. Ensure that they are strategically placed to facilitate discussions with small sub-groups of five or six individuals.

3. Tell participants what the expectations are for maintaining a respectful, civil conversation:

   *Everyone is encouraged to participate.*
   *No one or two individuals dominate the discussion.*
   *The discussion focuses on the approaches.*
   *All the major choices or positions on the issue are considered.*
   *An atmosphere for discussion and analysis of the alternatives is maintained.*
   *We listen to each other.*

4. Provide participants with an brief overview of the session's components

## Step 2: Sea-level rise science and impacts (30 minutes)

The first part of the session addresses the science and impacts of sea-level rise. Conversation guides should begin by posing the questions below, and should be cognizant of the group's time limitations.

1. Have you experienced flooding in any areas of the county?

2. Which areas of the county do you think are most at risk from coastal flooding and sea-level rise, if any?

3. How would you describe the risk?

4. When should communities begin to make decisions – if any – about what to do?

### Step 3: Overview of sea-level rise online maps and scenarios (15 minutes)

Bring the sea-level rise map viewer up online, and project it onto a screen or wall for everyone in the group to see. Ask participants if they would like to search for their own street addresses, or specific locations within the county. Alter sea-level rise scenarios and years to see what changes, and look for summaries of estimated impacts at the level of individual properties, neighborhoods, and the county as a whole.

*Suggested search locations: Gibson Island, MD; Annapolis, MD; Shady Side, MD; Deale, MD; May, MD; Jug Bay, MD.*

### Step 4: Expert video (15 minutes)

Select and watch two or more video segments available on www.FutureCoast.info that match your group's interests.

### Step 5: Discussion of long-term strategies for built communities (30 minutes)

In this portion of the discussion, the objective should be to understand potential policy strategies and explore as a group questions of what do we value?, What would be the consequences?, Where are there tensions or sources of conflict? And where is there common ground? Talk about specific geographical areas that have meaning for your participants, and how these strategies might influence those places and people.

1. Should certain types of areas be higher priority for public funding and resources to protect them against coastal flooding and sea-level rise impacts?

2. What factors should be taken into consideration in deciding those priorities?

3. Are different strategies of protection more appropriate for certain types of areas within the county?

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**Four potential strategies for communities**

Strategy #1: Retreat – or move – inland over time, restricting new building in areas likely to flood, and moving or abandoning existing structures

Strategy #2. Maintain and restore natural areas such as wetlands as buffers against coastal flooding

Strategy #3: Design and retrofit buildings to be more flood resilient

Strategy #4: Build walls and other structural barriers along the shore to hold back coastal waters

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**Step 6: Conclusion and next steps for the group**

In wrapping up the session, talk with participants about where there was common ground in their discussions, and what could be next steps for the group to address dimensions of the problem that particularly affect them.

*Let us know how it went!*

We would like to hear from you about your experiences: what works, and what doesn't. Email us at coast@gmu.edu.