

Leveraging partnerships with boundary-spanning organizations in community engagement

Susan Park, Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation

Jennifer Sweeney Tookes, Georgia Southern University

Simona L. Perry, c.a.s.e. Consulting Services LLC

Jon K. Miller, Stevens Institute of Technology

Jill Gambill, University of Georgia Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant

Idea in a nutshell

Community engagement and broadening participation are integral components of the NSF Coastlines and People (CoPe) program. It is important to recognize that existing, federally-funded, place-based organizations have established relationships and are trusted partners in coastal communities. These organizations can serve to link CoPe researchers with coastal communities to foster two-way dialogue in identification of community partners, co-development of research ideas, execution of research, and dissemination and application of results.

Some examples of boundary-spanning organizations include NOAA National Sea Grant College Program, NOAA National Estuarine Research Reserves System (NERRS), EPA National Estuary Program (NEP), and NOAA Coastal Zone Management Program (CZM). While the programs may engage different stakeholders, they all serve to bridge the gap between researchers and local communities. These programs have expertise in research, monitoring, conservation, outreach, education, extension, policy, and management.

Specific, differentiated recommendation

NSF should encourage CoPe PIs to include boundary-spanning organizations as integral partners from the outset, including in the development of project ideas. These organizations can help to identify research topics with potentially transformational impacts and local community partners who may help in the co-generation of proposal ideas. Through engaging with these local communities, more diverse representation, including under-represented groups will have the opportunity to become involved in science related to Coasts and People. Boundary-spanning organizations also allow for longer-term engagement and continuity since these organizations have served for decades, and are anticipated to continue to serve, as publicly trusted sources of technical outreach and expertise, clearinghouses of scientific data, and education.

Impact or value

NSF leverages existing resources and expertise in community engagement.

Communities get to work with trusted partners, rather than trying to build new relationships. Boundary-spanning organizations may broaden participation as they often reach underserved populations in their communities. Communities will benefit by having a more direct link to the research that impact their quality of life.

Reasoning or supporting evidence

The listed programs share decades of experience with community engagement and have been dealing with coasts and people since their inception. The National Sea Grant College Program was established in 1966, CZM and NERRS in 1972, and NEP in 1987. Long-term community involvement ensures that stakeholders most affected by decisions have input in them.

Sea Grant: <https://seagrant.noaa.gov/>

NERRS: <https://coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/>

CZM: <https://coast.noaa.gov/czm/>

NEP: <https://www.epa.gov/nep>