

Sea Grant prioritizes TRADITIONAL AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE



Richard Buzard

Sea Grant, a federal-university network of 33 programs around the country, took part in a visioning exercise in 2017 to improve how it supports coastal communities and economies. Sea Grant's mission is to help citizens better understand, conserve and utilize America's coastal resources. The

purpose of the exercise was to look closely at 10 priority topic areas and set goals, outcomes and best practices over the next decade.

One such topic is traditional and local knowledge (TLK) and how to maximize its inclusion in Sea Grant's work. The goal is to include indigenous partners and TLK in as much of Sea Grant's research, outreach and extension as possible.

Sea Grant agents attended two workshops with tribal partners to ensure that the vision document truly represents the best practices for working with indigenous communities.

The group learned how traditional knowledge is being used to restore watersheds in Guam, to conserve wetlands used for harvesting wild rice in Minnesota, to educate youth in Juneau, and to map land loss in Louisiana. The 25-page visioning document defines TLK as a worldview of human-environment relations; a living body of knowledge that includes environmental observations and experiences that occur in places and within an indigenous cultural context. As such, TLK is embedded in culture and cannot be separated from the people and places where it is generated.

"To highlight our ideas behind best practices of fully collaborating with indigenous communities, we provide case studies taken from projects across the country. These projects demonstrate how to recognize, understand, value, support and incorporate traditional and local knowledge and indigenous participants into Sea Grant activities. The visioning document

contains our key concepts and takeaways from the workshops,” said Davin Holen, Alaska Sea Grant’s coastal community resilience specialist, who helped lead the effort.

The vision outlined in the document is for TLK to be woven throughout the Sea Grant network, guiding and informing research, outreach and education, and to show respect for the producers and stewards of local knowledge at every level.

Below are the recommendations for the Sea Grant network. The full document is available on the National Sea Grant website.

- Raise the visibility of TLK with intentional programming and communication products.
- Create opportunities for communities to identify and share their research needs, as well as for traditional and local scholars to take an active role in initiating and leading research initiatives within their own communities.
- Create opportunities for exchange between communities, and researchers and policy-makers.
- Support education projects and programs that incorporate TLK.
- Support research that recognizes, values, and incorporates TLK research needs, local knowledge partners, and relevant environmental justice issues, by incorporating these priorities in Sea Grant requests for proposals.
- Develop and fund fellowships to support local knowledge holders in professional development, and better incorporate TLK into Sea Grant and NOAA projects and programs.
- Invest in recruitment and retention of local knowledge holders as Sea Grant staff (see Diversity and Inclusion visioning plan for potential crossover goals and action items).
- Create a TLK program officer or liaison within the National Sea Grant Office.

For over 50 years, the National Sea Grant College Program has supported coastal and Great Lakes communities through research, extension and education.

