

FUTURE OCEAN AND COASTAL INFRASTRUCTURES

AN  FI PROJECT

Achieving Success in Collaborative Research: Insights and Best Practices

A summary report of the
FOCI IWP3 Sustainable Coastal Atlantic Canada Dialogues Sessions
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Introduction

Throughout the dialogue sessions, panelists and other attendees from a wide variety of sectors and research perspectives shared their thoughts and past experiences in collaborative research. These tips are applicable across the FOCl work packages and focus on effective partner engagement, as well as advice for communicating research concepts and results.

Effective Partner Engagement

Early and often communication with partners is essential to create strong alliances and achieve objectives. Outreach in the initial stages allows all parties to reach agreement on the most important concepts and questions being addressed, and the key research relationships involved.

Listen to partners, value and respect them, and incorporate their feedback into your research design. Recognize each other's complementary skills, goals, capacities and perspectives that they bring to the project. Strive to relay practical project information to partners that allows them to recognize the short, medium and long-term benefits of their participation.

Locate existing allies ("sparks") who support the research and can speak to their communities in their own language as brokers. These sparks can be supported to build something for their communities and tell their stories in their own way. Aim for inclusivity in working with partners however recognize that consensus may not always be possible and compromise will be needed.

Be transparent and attentive in following up with partners. At all stages, work to address partner concerns, be transparent as to how their data will be used and be sure that they receive relevant results at the conclusion of the project.

Communicating Research: Concepts and Results

Use clear and plain communication when engaging with partners and the public regarding your research. Avoid jargon and complex representations of data and use theoretical arguments sparingly. Instead, use inspiring, empowering, action-oriented, positive and accessible messaging that is tailored to the particular audience and their needs.

Seek out alternative forums to share your research. Find new spaces to reach more categories of the public. Create unique platforms to share knowledge and strengthen connections (ex. schools, partner events, podcasts and other media). Be experimental and allow your research to fail in small ways in order to make the project stronger. The use of LinkedIn or other online platforms can aid in promoting knowledge mobilization and fostering collaboration, particularly with COVID-19 mobility restrictions. Be sure to plan all public engagement early in the project.

Share early results and engage in genuine consultation with the community. Whenever feasible conduct data analysis in consultation with the community, allowing them to vet the analysis and be on the same page in advance of publishing. If possible, develop mechanisms for enhanced follow-up evaluation of results to ensure the project has long-term positive impact.

Addressing Sustainability Crises

The primary aim of FOCI is to promote sustainable Atlantic Canadian coastal communities. Participants shared insights on the challenges impeding sustainability and potential solutions to overcoming them. Some of the contributions are listed in the below table.

Challenges	Solutions	Related FOCI WP Research Goals
<p>A lack of human and financial capacity in coastal communities to maintain service delivery and plan for future impacts of climate change</p>	<p>Increased investment in regional governance to expand capacity and coordination for service delivery and infrastructure</p> <p>Expanded community needs health assessments</p> <p>Increased investment mechanisms for people to put capital back into their communities and spur local development</p>	<p>WP 5: To build capacity to conduct collaborative and interdisciplinary integrated social and natural science research in support of sustainable fisheries in the face of climate and ecosystem change</p> <p>WP 6: Explore how social perceptions of climate change can support or constrain the innovations in climate governance required to meet mitigation targets and to help communities adapt to new ecological realities</p> <p>WP 7: Further develop, extend, & apply the PLACE model by studying social enterprises in 6 distinct coastal communities across Newfoundland & Labrador</p>
<p>Unequal power relations, an exploitative capitalist economic system and policies that exacerbate inequalities and restrict local access to resources</p>	<p>Allow communities more control over local resources</p> <p>Increase respect of the land and enhance promotion and support for the establishment of community cooperatives</p> <p>Strengthen democracy and devolve more power to the community and regional level</p>	<p>WP 4: Advance Indigenous-led work on building and strengthening First Nations data sovereignty and infrastructures for local aquatic resources and ocean management</p> <p>WP 5: To develop and test an innovative methodology for monitoring generation and distribution of socio-economic benefits</p> <p>WP 9: Support the design of safe and sustainable infrastructures in urban and rural coastal communities in ways that are oriented towards inclusion, social justice and equity</p>

A Good Start: Setting the Foundation for FOCI Collaboration and Communication

The sessions provided a crucial starting point for dialogue among FOCI members. In the uncertainty of COVID-19, it was an especially useful opportunity to build a foundation for future FOCI communication and collaboration. Many participants expressed their project goals, including learning from other FOCI members, achieving effective public engagement, producing useful results for policy action and helping to reform communities relationship with nature. Insights and tips shared should better inform research design for each work package, particularly relating to their knowledge mobilization goals. FOCI members will be encouraged and supported to connect and collaborate with their colleagues in the months and years ahead as the project progresses towards the articulation of impactful policy advice.

FOCI HQP

Early career researchers (HQP) on the FOCI project met prior to the dialogues welcome session and on several additional occasions in late 2020 and early 2021 to promote collaborative projects, share research and foster peer-to-peer support. In February 2021 a survey was conducted to gauge HQP needs, opportunities and challenges, and a special topics learning session series was launched featuring senior FOCI researchers sharing their expertise with HQP.

Event Recap

The three main dialogue sessions were attended by an average of 40 people throughout and were spread over two days. Keeping the sessions short (1-1.5 hours) and providing large gaps of time in between them helped to reduce “zoom fatigue” and avoided disrupting participants entire workday. The “talk show” format with five panelists per session was appropriate to foster a discussion-based dialogical atmosphere. The event could have benefitted from the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives. While the discussion did address the importance of respectful engagement and early involvement with relevant Indigenous actors in each of our WPs, a fuller analysis of sustainability issues in Atlantic Canada should include more Indigenous voices.

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