COASTAL CONNECTIONS

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 5 | A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION FOCUSED ON TOOLS FOR COASTAL RESOURCE MANAGERS | OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2006

COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROFILE

Bill Rohring

Assistant Director, Division of Coastal Zone Management for the U.S. Virgin Islands

Hometown: I'm a military brat, but, before the age of 20, I spent most of my time living in South Dakota or Louisiana.

Education: BA in international relations, University of Minnesota; JD from Tulane Law School

Most fulfilling aspect of your job: Creating programs and projects that benefit the environment and culture of the Virgin Islands over the long term.

Most challenging aspect of your job: Our economy and quality of life in the Virgin Islands is based on a healthy ecosystem, but trying to get people to understand that interconnectedness is sometimes challenging.

One work-related accomplishment that makes you proud: I was one of the people involved in creating the first territorial marine park in the Virgin Islands, the St. Croix East End Marine Park.

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FOCUS

SURVEY SUCCESS

The best social-science surveys require plenty of forethought and planning.

Social-science surveys often lay the groundwork for high-quality coastal management planning. But designing a credible survey that yields useful data can be a complex and challenging task.

No survey tool exists that will work for every population and coastal situation. As a result, coastal resource managers sometimes struggle to choose from a wide variety of survey techniques, not knowing which approaches will glean the most reliable information for their needs.

Chris Ellis, needs assessment coordinator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coastal Services Center, has authored a report that can help managers sift through these multiple considerations and augment their knowledge of survey tactics to increase the likelihood of success.

Hone Your Survey Population

According to Ellis, locating a large number of respondents is less important than finding a representative population, one that will give you the information needed to make effective coastal decisions.

Fear of "undersampling" has led more than one researcher to include unsuitable respondents, skewing responses and diminishing the survey's practical value. "Before knowing how many respondents you need, first figure out who your ideal respondents really are and how many of them exist," says Ellis.

"Let's say you're interested in knowing more about the blue crab fishing industry in Virginia. Instead of sampling a large number of fishermen, it might be more useful for your survey to have a smaller sample targeted only at crabbers in the state," adds Ellis. Search the relevant labor databases to find out how many crabbers are actually plying their trade in Virginia.

Few surveys garner a 100 percent response rate. To estimate your potential nonresponse rate, you might want to examine nonresponse data from existing surveys that are similar. Remember that fatigue sets in with respondents who are solicited time and again to take part in surveys. So, if your target population has been frequently surveyed, this fatigue factor will likely be reflected in your nonresponse rate.

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One personal accomplishment that makes you proud:
Actually, two events in my life were turning points in terms of international and environmental work. I hitchhiked and bicycled solo in Europe for six months, getting to know people who lived in those countries. As an undergraduate, I lived in Senegal for nine months. I worked with a nonprofit there, helping people start farms using techniques less damaging to the environment.

Things you do in your spare time:
I swim and snorkel and also read a lot of science fiction fantasy. I don't watch TV or movies much.

"When I graduated from law school in 1996, I traveled to Washington, D.C., with the aim of working for an international organization. However, funding for those jobs was scarce because of the federal government shutdown then in effect.

"Shortly after I came back to New Orleans, I saw a flyer on a car windshield with the phrase, 'Come to the Virgin Islands for Spring Break.' That was it—I caught a flight to the Virgin Islands and, within a few weeks, I had a job.

"It was very rewarding to be involved in the creation of the St. Croix East End Marine Park in January 2003. Its protection had been recommended for over 40 years. I especially enjoyed assembling a team of commercial fishermen, dive companies, university personnel, federal and local resource managers, and nonprofit organizations that lobbied hard for the official marine park designation."

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Determine Your Best Sampling Approach

When you conduct a survey, choose a sampling technique that will provide the most accurate results for your particular needs.

With **simple random sampling**, every member of an identified population has an equal chance of being selected to the sample. If, for example, your population of interest is commercial fishermen in California, you can obtain a list of all state-issued commercial licenses and select subjects at random to achieve the desired sample size.

With **stratified random sampling** (also known as quota sampling), researchers survey a sample population similar to their population of interest, based on one or more attributes. If, for instance, the community you're studying is two-thirds male and one-third female, you could decide that the survey sample should reflect those gender percentages.

Systematic sampling works best when the total survey population is unknown, as in the case of visitors to a public beach. First, select your desired sample size. Choose a random number, such as three, and proceed to survey every third beach visitor until you reach the desired number of responses.

Ask the Right Questions in the Right Way

Nothing will alienate a respondent more quickly than survey questions that are phrased ambiguously or filled with complicated terminology. "Surveys should pass the 'grandmother test,'" says Tom Fish, a human dimensions specialist with the NOAA Coastal Services Center. "Ask yourself, 'Would my grandmother understand these questions?'"

Aim for neutrality when composing survey questions and statements. If respondents detect your viewpoint, it could compromise their answers and your survey results. In some cases, striking a neutral tone might mean including questions or statements that represent opposing viewpoints on coastal issues.

"Before going out to conduct your survey, ask yourself, 'What is the answer to this question going to tell me?' or, more importantly, 'How can this information be applied?'" says Ellis. "If you do not know the information to either question, reconsider its usefulness."

Asking personal questions about age, income level, religious preference, drug use, or other sensitive topics is often unnecessary, even counterproductive. "Sensitive information can very quickly turn off a respondent. If you're conducting a telephone survey, all they have to do is hang up the phone and you've lost your response," says Ellis.

Sometimes, however, gathering sensitive information is vital to the project's outcome and purpose. In such cases, choosing the right survey approach and structure can go a long way in defusing respondents' reluctance.

In a survey now underway, Bill Rohring, assistant director for the Division of Coastal Zone Management in the U.S. Virgin Islands, is compiling important information, some of it potentially sensitive, on native-born Virgin Islanders. Their responses will later aid him in creating a focused, effective media campaign on environmental awareness.

"We want to go beyond a generic environmental message to a more powerful appeal that truly links Virgin Islanders' quality of life to a

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WHICH SURVEY METHOD WORKS FOR YOU?

Type of Survey	Positives	Negatives
Face-to-Face Interview	Researchers can obtain much detail. Researchers can observe nonverbal communication.	Analyzing results can be cumbersome, time-consuming. Surveys have limited use in generalizing to a greater population.
Telephone Survey	Survey responses are timely. Large numbers of surveys can be completed quickly.	Survey requires high level of interviewer skill. Obtaining representative samples may be difficult. Respondents can end call at will.
Mail-Back Questionnaire	Mail-back surveys are generally less expensive than those by phone. Participants read questions, thereby experiencing greater comprehension.	Low response rates are possible. Survey presents limited opportunities to clarify questions.
Hand-Delivered Questionnaire	Subjects generally respond at higher rates than with mail-back surveys. Researchers have face-to-face interaction with respondents.	Survey presents limited opportunities to clarify questions. Survey requires high level of researcher engagement.
Web Survey	Web gives respondents flexibility with little time investment. Few or no funds or supplies are needed.	Survey requires technical expertise. Respondents may end survey before completing.

healthy environment," says Rohring, who is receiving logistical survey support from Ellis and Elizabeth Ban, marine advisor for the U.S. Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service. "The results of this study will help us understand the sorts of appeals that will have the most powerful effect."

This survey team is presenting the more personal questions in a nonthreatening format. To minimize respondents' reluctance to reveal their ages, the team is "bracketing" the age categories within a 10- to 15-year range.

Questions about religious, family, and community-oriented perspectives on the environment also are presented in a nonthreatening context. On a scale of one to five ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"), participants respond to statements such as "God created the oceans and we should respect them as God's work," and "We need to maintain ocean quality for our children and their children." This written-survey approach, and the range of responses allowed, gives participants a measure of anonymity and flexibility that should reduce dropout rates.

Later, the survey team will hold focus groups to confirm and cross-check the survey data. "The focus groups will allow us to ask questions in more depth and get respondents to tell us why they agree or disagree with particular survey statements," says Ellis.

To obtain a copy of the survey guide, contact Chris.Ellis@noaa.gov.

REEXAMINE ROLLING SURVEYS FOR RELEVANCE, TIMELINESS

If your organization does rolling surveys every few years, think about possible changes in your audience or their concerns before the next survey cycle. That's what the NOAA Coastal Services Center is doing with its triennial needs assessment survey addressed to coastal management professionals.

"Our previous three surveys were sent to our core audience of state coastal zone management programs, Sea Grant programs, national estuarine research reserves, national marine sanctuaries, and Environmental Protection Agency national estuary programs," says Tom Fish, a human dimensions specialist with the Center.

"Recognizing that many other organizations have key roles in coastal management, this time we will also send the survey out to emergency and floodplain managers, land trust programs, and other federal land management units, such as national parks, national wildlife refuges, and national forests."

In the past three years, coastal technology tools have also grown in number and popularity. "It used to be that one or two people in an agency knew how to use geographic information systems [GIS] tools," says Fish. "Now many people are familiar with GIS, and the sophistication of these tools has grown, too. If we find that a large percentage of our survey population is interested in a particular tool, we might decide to offer more guidance, training, or technical assistance in that area."

To learn more about the Center's triennial needs assessment survey, contact Tom.Fish@noaa.gov.

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Coastal Connections is a publication of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal Services Center, produced for the coastal resource management community. Each issue of this free bimonthly newsletter focuses on a tool, information resource, or methodology of interest to the nation's coastal resource managers.

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NOAA/CSC/20616-PUB

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NEWS AND NOTES

Agency Premieres New Web Site

NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) has launched a new Web site. The site features streamlined navigation, a fresh design, an up-to-date "my state" section, and a directory of key OCRM contacts. A new portal, the Shoreline Management Technical Assistance Toolbox, provides coastal resource managers with centralized access to information on shoreline erosion and management, as well as planning and policy tools. You can visit OCRM's Web site by clicking *www.coastalmanagement.noaa.gov.*

Louisiana Sea Grant Wins Award of Excellence

The Louisiana Sea Grant College Program's communications office won a 2006 Award of Publication Excellence (APEX) in the category of "one-of-a-kind crisis and emergency communications" for its Louisiana Hurricane Resources Web site. To learn more, visit the site at *www.laseagrant.org/hurricane/index.htm.*

Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Conference

Restore America's Estuaries is holding its third national conference on coastal and estuarine habitat restoration in New Orleans from December 9 to 13 at the Hilton Riverside Hotel. For more information, visit the conference Web site at *www.estuaries.org/conference/.*

Transitions

Todd Davison, formerly with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) region IV mitigation division, is now leading the NOAA Coastal Services Center's establishment of a Gulf of Mexico Services Center… **Katy O'Connell** has been named manager of the Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve… **Helen M. Wood** has been appointed integration manager for NOAA's Global Earth Observation System of Systems… **Brendan Annett**, the stewardship coordinator for the Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, has taken on additional duties as the reserve's acting manager… **Mac V. Rawson**, former director of Georgia Sea Grant, has moved on… **John Kuriawa** has become Maryland and Virginia's coastal program specialist for the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management.

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