# What is meaningful engagement? A snippet of the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana's impact on communities and individuals.

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#### Introduction

The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (CRCL) has engaged with people and communities throughout coastal Louisiana since its creation in 1988. Engagement with communities that is meaningful is vital to the large effort to restore and protect Louisiana's coast. Without intentional relationships with individuals and organizations, CRCL's efforts would not nearly be as impactful. CRCL's Oyster Shell Recycling Program (OSRP), one of many programs that provide hands-on interaction with coastal restoration, is a perfect case study to observe these efforts.

The OSRP works with and alongside business owners, indigenous communities, ovster fishers, concerned citizens, students, and more. By reflecting on the definition of meaningful engagement, the various ways in which CRCL's OSRP interacts with community members, and constructive input from a survey, CRCL can strategize and improve new and existing relationships to be better equipped for expansion and success in future endeavors.



#### Methods

The results of this study come from three sources of information: internet research, an online survey, and a webinar on the subject. Internet research was used to build the online survey and inform the results. The online survey was created via Google Forms and sent to over 700 individuals, all of whom have interacted with CRCL. These individuals included business managers or owners, community stakeholders, affiliates (i.e., Future Coastal Leaders), project partners, students, and volunteers. Those contacted were given one week to fill out the Google Form. 40 individuals completed the survey. Lastly, information was gathered from a Restore America's Estuaries' webinar, under the Long Island Sound, Community Impact Fund. Titled "Meaningful Community Engagement", this webinar's content was also used to inform the results.

# **Findings** Meaningful engagement can be defined in various ways:

is an ongoing

two-way partnership

between a company and

its stakeholders wherein

in go od faith by all

parties, is responsive to

concerns/issues raised

and incorporates

feedback received into

decision-making

processes. 2

"



the respectful. dignified and equitable inclusion of individuals with lived experience in a range of processes and nctivities with in an enabling environment where nower is transferred to people; valuing lived experience as a form of expertise and applying it to improve... outcomes. 3

# Meaningful engagement is just friend ship-building!

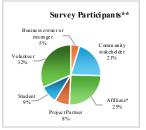
- Move at the speed of trust Respect community wis dom
- Communicate transparently
- Show empathy and humanity Understand power dynamics
- Create equitable environments Welcome feedback
- Honor shared stories
- Be consistent and intentional
- Remember the details
- Value time 4

'To truly put in the effort to build and sustain relationships with communities, <u>you will make mistake</u>s This is particularly true for communities historically abused. ignored, and under-resourced by powerful or monied interests (including non-profit organizations and government entities)"

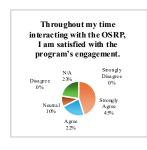
-Zella Taj Kan-Aset Xi

#### Survey Results 5

Ac companied with each pie chart that is outlined in a blue square is the most common and/or significantre sponse to its following question in the survey. The sequestions ask the respondent to explain why they an swered the previous question the way that they did.



\*Survey respondents were asked to "selectallthat apply". \* \* Affiliates include individuals in the Coastal Advisor Committee, Coastal Leadership Institute, Future Coastal Leaders, Board of Directors, and staff. 1



#### Have you had an experience where CRCL engaged meaningfully with you or you community?



Work with tribes ~ Involving students Oyster shell recycling ~ Lecture series ~ Helping "the community connect with the coast" and explaining "the importance of the work" at volunteer events ~ "I believe CRCL successfully bridges and uses all 3 definitions of meaningful en gagement"~

# Have you had an experience where the OSRP engaged meaningfully with you or you community? interacted with th OSRP 30%

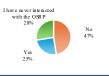
 Oyster shell reef builds ~ Outreach (i.e., social media, tabling, emails) ~ Work with tribes ~ Shell-A-Bration ~ "Hands-on" volunteer events with "context" "cultivates a collaborative 'we're all in this together' environment' ~

#### Do you think CRCL could be doing more to enhance its engagement with communities?



 Expand reach to Southcentral and Southwest Louisiana ~ More diverse forms of outreach ~ "Relate and cater their talks" to each volunteer group ~ Show less bias towards sensitive subjects ~ "can involve communities more in the brainstorming early-stage planning process" -

# Do you think the OSRP could be doing more to enhance its engagement with communities?



 Expand geographically ~ More reef builds More diverse forms of outreach "Advertising and partnerships with all Louisiana restaurants" ~ "could be a great bridge to help rebuild trust between academia/restoration and the fishery community"

#### Are these definitions [the three listed above] lacking in a certain element? If so, please describe what is missing.

"are perhaps to o righteous, idealistic and aspirational for real world application. With a bit of word-smithing they could become aphorisms.

"these definitions incorporate the 'now' well, but not necessarily a long-term community building vision."

"a little bit wordy for average people."

"The word stakeholder is very cold and corporate, many of my students automatically think it means that it is so meone who has a monetary gain from the community.

"Time. All of these things are crucial, but timely and especially early inclusion is exceedingly important.

#### Can you describe the impact that CRCL and/or the OSRP has had on you?

"CRCL's OSRP has given me a positive outlook on coastal restoration and hope for future innovations and collaboration between no nor ofits and in dustry.'

"I was a coastal resident for over 40 years and CRCL has been the most effective organization to address coastal and barrier island protection and restoration, giving hope to local residents that communities can survive and thrive.

"CRCL, I believe, was formed to give the average citizen a place to learn and express their views. That is an enormously important role and one that is not filled by any other state-wide organization."

"CRCL's staff are true partners in this crucial work. There would be serious feelings of abandon ment without CRCI advocacy for hanging onto as much coast as we can for as long as we can These efforts help coastal resident's mental health, help community members think in creative ways about adapting and shaping their own futures."

## Lessons Learned

The shared knowledge from other community-driven professionals and general research on how engagement can be meaningful will be an asset to CRCL and the OSRP's advocacy, education, and restoration efforts. With over 15 questions and 40 individual responses, they have gained valuable criticism and positive feedback on its engagement from this study's survey. The results reflect the intentionality and care behind CRCL and the OSRP's interactions with people and communities and provide constructive input on areas for improvement.

### It is important for CRCL and the OSRP to continually seek feedback and subsequently implement change.

This poster only represents the first stage in communicating the study's data. All survey results and research findings will be presented via a report and presentation to CRCL staff. They will have the opportunity to share with other affiliates that represent the organization (Coastal Advisory Committee, Coastal Leadership Institute, Future Coastal Leaders, and Board of Directors). It will be up to staff to see that this data is used for positive change.

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