

This webinar provided an overview of the Strategic Communications Plan for the [Coastal Texas study](#) – USACE’s largest Civil Works study ever undertaken. In just under six years, the project delivery team produced a \$29 billion recommended plan that promises to deliver a resilient Texas coast using a combination of ecosystem restoration and coastal storm risk management features that function as a system to reduce the risk of coastal storm damages to natural and man-made infrastructure and to restore degraded coastal ecosystems.



Presenter Dr. Kelly Burks-Copes, a Project Manager in the Galveston District, provided an overview of the Coastal Texas study’s strategic communications products including how the team reached communities locked-down during the Covid crisis, the team’s innovative strategic communications, and their deployment of a combination of virtual technologies to engage the public and assure transparency across the local, regional, and national landscape. Dr. Burks-Copes also discussed the tools and techniques utilized to conduct public outreach during the study phase and future planned outreach in the next phases of the project.

For additional information on the Coastal Texas study, visit:

- [Coastal Texas StoryMap](#)
- [Coastal Texas Facebook page](#)
- [Coastal Study Website](#)

This summary of the Question / Answer session of the webinar is not a transcription; questions and responses have been edited and reordered for clarity.

Public Engagement Strategy

Did the Public Involvement Specialist Cadre or the Collaboration and Public Participation Center of Expertise (CPCX) assist with the public engagement strategy?

The study team did not initially work with the Public Involvement Specialist Cadre or the CPCX to assist with the public engagement strategy, but they were involved as the study and public engagement process evolved. The public engagement strategy was developed – and executed – hand in hand with the non-federal partner. For example, the non-federal partner established [community work groups](#) and the non-federal partner’s work in kind and cost-share contributions funded the development of outreach materials, including renderings.

Which audiences did the public engagement strategy target? What process did the study team use to select those audiences?

There were a number of audiences targeted for a variety of reasons. For the community work groups, the team sought to involve relevant communities by approaching elected officials in the targeted community and requesting nominations for groups.

Coastal Texas Study Strategic Communications Plan Q&A Session

To address specific local issues and concerns, the study team set up and hosted approximately 25 community meetings. These meetings held along the 18-mile project loop helped start conversations to help achieve community alignment and answer questions. Through these meetings, the team was able to connect with residents of the City of Galveston, a local hospital near the coast, and an industrial complex to discuss the entities plans, which included a pumpstation to address sunny day floods, road elevations, floodproofing measures for structures, and the opening of a new cruise ship terminal, and achieve alignment with the USACE recommended plan to allow the systems to work together.

The study team also communicated and consulted with stakeholders in the environmental community. These stakeholders included the Audubon Society, the state Fish & Wildlife Department, the Texas State Parks, and the Galveston Bay Foundation. This engagement led to clear communication about the measures in the recommended plan.

The team is continuing engagement with these stakeholder groups by maintaining a database of contacts to allow communication via newsflashes and other announcements.

How did the team target and engage with rural or disadvantaged communities during and outside of virtual meetings?

Because the Coastal Texas Study is an urban project, there was limited engagement with rural communities. However, there were vulnerable communities within the project boarders that the study team worked to engage. Because vulnerable communities often do not have internet access, the team developed several handouts to reach these audiences, including brochures and factsheets. The brochures were translated into several languages, including Spanish, Vietnamese, and Portuguese to maximize accessibility.

The timing of virtual engagement sessions was also adjusted to maximize attendance. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the study team found that evening in-person engagement sessions beginning after 5:30 p.m. were the most well attended. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, attendance at later meetings declined, so the study team shifted these virtual engagement sessions to lunch time during the week and to weekends, which saw increases in attendance. With in-person engagement returning, the team anticipates a continued hybrid engagement environment with in-person evening engagement sessions and continued mid-day week and weekend virtual engagement sessions.

How much of the study budget was dedicated to communications planning? How much was specifically used for public engagement?

Approximately 3% of the total study expenses went to communications and engagement – which of course is a large number for a large study. The study's 3x3 (3 year/\$3M study cost) exemption package did take into account the level of expenses/engagement that was needed for this project, so there was leadership buy-in for this level of expenditure. The team is also leveraging its experiences and the templates/models of specific products developed by the team for other studies and projects, such as the ArcGIS StoryMap.

Communication Resources & Tools

How does the Coastal Texas StoryMap comply with Section 508 compliance requirements?

To comply with Section 508 accessibility requirements, the study team added audio captions to most of the videos used in the StoryMap. The team also took other steps to help those with visual and hearing

impairments. In addition, the informational handouts about the project were translated into multiple languages and USACE brought in interpreters to the public engagement meetings to assist with communication and improve public understanding.

How were infographics and renderings used to better tell the story during engagement? How were these products produced?

The non-federal partner contracted a vendor to generate all non-map and modeling graphics for public engagement. The maps and models were developed by the USACE GIS team to use in the StoryMap. The ArcGIS StoryMap modules (“widgets”) were designed to be adaptable and translatable from study to study, meaning they can be used again by other projects. The study team decided to use widgets for the mapping and modeling graphics to allow for more innovative and interactive displays which helped presenters to better communicate the information during the public engagement process.

Who developed the StoryMap and how much did it cost?

The StoryMap was developed by Galveston District’s GIS team with costs being shared by the non-federal partner, the Texas General Land Office. The communication tools developed for the study overall cost 3% of the \$20 million project, or \$600,000 total. These innovative tools were designed in such a way that they can be reused by future studies – which should help to reduce costs. Teams can reach out to the Galveston GIS team for training on the tools that were developed.

Are there in house graphics teams at USACE available to develop project specific graphics?

The Coastal Texas team used an outside contractor to develop the illustrations and project renderings, but some District ACE-IT offices do have graphic arts capabilities.

Is there a StoryMap that shows the full benefit categories for the study? If not, what cost and benefit categories were used? Did the study only address National Economic Development and National Economic Restoration, or did it also quantify benefits in the Other Social Effects and Regional Economic Development accounts?

While the final feasibility report did discuss all four benefit categories, the project’s [Economic Analysis StoryMap](#) focused on explaining how USACE considers costs and benefits, the expected benefits of the project, and how they were calculated. An assessment of the four accounts is covered in more detail in the technical appendix of the final report.