

Report of the Community Engagement Committee

DRAFT December 2019¹

1	Introduction	1
2	Meetings	1
3	Potential tools and strategies to improve engagement	2
	3.1 Communication logistics	3
	3.2 Council committees and staffing	3
	3.3 Travel support.....	4
	3.4 Other suggestions.....	4
4	Next Steps	5

1 Introduction

The Community Engagement Committee (committee) was authorized and formed by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in June 2018 to identify and recommend strategies for the Council to provide effective community engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities. The committee was formed after review of a discussion paper requested by the Council in April 2018 that presented an assessment of ideas for improving engagement by rural and Alaska Native communities in the Council process. The discussion paper was requested by the Council after they heard requests to either reconstitute the Council’s Rural Outreach Committee or develop a new ad-hoc committee to consider community engagement strategies.

In June 2018, the Council approved the following charter for the committee:

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council’s Community Engagement Committee is established to identify and recommend strategies for the Council and Council staff to enact processes that provide effective community engagement with rural and Alaska Native Communities. Effective community engagement may involve two-way communication between the Council and communities at additional stages of the Council process or a project and allow for community concerns, information, perspectives, and priorities to be shared clearly with the Council, whether part of an active Council action or not.

Also in June 2018, the Council solicited nominations from rural and tribal representatives and people with the necessary expertise to accomplish the committee’s goals of assisting the Council in developing successful engagement and outreach tools and processes. The committee was selected over the summer and formally appointed in October 2018. The initial committee appointees are listed below:

- Simon Kinneen (Co-chair)
- Theresa Peterson (Co-chair)
- Mellisa Heflin
- Jennifer Hooper
- Robert Keith
- Nicole Kimball
- Marissa Mercurieff
- Tom Panamaroff
- Becca Robbins-Gisclair
- Rob Sanderson

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After August 2019, Ms. Peterson no longer acted as Co-chair, but remains on the committee. At its first meeting in March 2019, the committee approved Terms of Reference (Appendix A) and established a draft schedule of meetings necessary to meet the committee's objectives.

The objective of the committee is to prepare a report that identifies recommendations that the Council can implement to improve engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities. The committee is not intended to carry out engagement on behalf of the Council. Once the report is completed and presented to the Council, the committee's objectives will have been met, and the committee, as envisioned by the Council, will be dissolved.

There are legal, logistical, and cost constraints within which the Council must make decisions regarding adopting community engagement strategies and activities. The Council will consider those constraints when they make their decisions, it is not the intention at this point to apply any constraints to the potential strategies and ideas from the committee.

2 Meetings

This section provides brief summaries of the in-person and teleconference meetings. Details of the suggestions from the committee, discussed at various meetings, will be provided in Section 3. Reports of each meeting are included in Appendix A.

2.1.1 March 2019

The committee held its first meeting on 20 March, 2019 in Anchorage, AK. The purpose of the first meeting was to review the draft Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures, review the purpose and charter of the committee, and develop tentative plans for the committee to meet its objective. The committee identified an approximately one-year timeline for the committee to develop recommendations to the Council, and suggested that the schedule could include four in-person meetings and at least one teleconference. Additional meetings would be considered if necessary. The committee recommended that at least one of the in-person meetings should be scheduled in a rural community, potentially in association with meetings of other rural or tribal organizations. At that first meeting, the committee requested that staff provide a list of communication, outreach, and engagement tools that are currently in use by the Council. The committee felt that a comprehensive list of tools currently in use would better enable them to identify potential gaps or deficiencies in the Council's engagement strategies. The committee also requested that NMFS staff provide information about NMFS' tribal consultation and co-management efforts, and noted that other organizations such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Advisory Councils or other fishery management councils may have unique tools for engagement that the Council should consider.

2.1.2 April 2019

The committee met via teleconference on 29 April, 2019 to review the list of engagement tools and strategies that are currently employed by the Council. The teleconference was an opportunity for the committee to ask questions of the staff about each item. The committee elected to discuss the existing tools and strategies at the next in-person meeting.

2.1.3 June 2019

The committee met on 4 June, 2019 in Sitka, AK. The purpose of the meeting was to review the list of existing engagement tools and strategies employed by the Council, and begin to develop recommendations for the Council. The committee noted that much of the work that the Council and staff currently engage in are focused outreach around specific Council actions, rather than community engagement. The CEC recognized the usefulness and effectiveness of these activities, and agreed that focused outreach should continue, where appropriate. The committee also suggested that strategies and programs

to improve two-way engagement strategies, as the committee is tasked, is important. The committee identified a number of possible tools and strategies for the Council to consider. In the committee meeting report, those are identified as strategies that they wish to discuss further and not as consensus recommendations to the Council. Those ideas are presented in Section 3 **Error! Reference source not found.**

2.1.4 October 2019

The committee met on 1 October, 2019 in Homer, AK. The purpose of the meeting was to continue to review existing Council engagement strategies and develop recommendations for new strategies and tools to improve the Council’s engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities. After the June committee meeting, the Council began to implement some of the improvements that the committee identified. Those improvements were presented to the committee and included development of flyers and other materials designed to introduce the Council to community members that may not be familiar with the Council or its process. The committee was also informed of the evening “Introduction to the Council” session that was held on the evening of 1 October 2019. This session was implemented at the recommendation of the committee and is intended to be available whenever the Council holds a meeting in an Alaskan community outside of Anchorage or Juneau. Council staff also informed the committee that the introductory session was intended to be a learning opportunity and the presentations can be modified, as appropriate, for different communities. The committee was also informed by staff that Council staff, Council agency partners, and Council members will be receiving cultural awareness training in November and December, also as recommended by the committee.

The committee also received a summary of tribal consultation policies and procedures in place at NMFS Alaska Region. Although the responsibility for tribal consultation lies with NMFS and not the Council, the committee was interested in identifying policies and practices that may be utilized to improve the Council’s engagement procedures. Some CEC members regularly request tribal consultations from agencies and have relevant experience with those requests at either the national or regional level. Both the committee and NMFS noted the importance of early notice to fully engage tribes, and some wondered whether the appropriate action to initiate consultation was during the Council process or after Council action when the agency considers regulations or rulemaking. The committee noted that Tribes receive many letters from Federal agencies about issues on which they may wish to request consultation. The volume and complexity of information can sometimes make it difficult to discern what information is relevant for each Tribe. In earlier meetings when tribal consultation was discussed, the committee noted that it is important to understand that although there are likely to be tools and processes that may be useful to the Council, it is well outside of the scope of the committee to address the Agency’s consultation processes.

3 Potential tools and strategies to improve engagement

This section presents the potential tools and strategies discussed by the committee to improve the Council’s engagement with rural and Alaska Native communities. Until the committee has opportunity to review and develop these further, these should not be considered consensus recommendations from the committee. Consensus recommendations will be presented to the Council when the committee presents its final report.

At the first meeting of the committee, the committee decided that they would be able to provide strategies and actions for the Council to consider, so chose not to solicit proposals from the public. They invited and encouraged interested public to attend meetings, talk with committee members, and provide input as much as possible.

Throughout the process, the committee noted that the outreach (information out from the Council to the public) is a good process and should continue. The committee many times expressed that the intention is

to enhance outreach efforts to engagement (two-way transfer of information), where appropriate. As part of this discussion, the committee briefly discussed co-production of knowledge, a relatively new process to develop a body of knowledge that equally considers western “scientific” knowledge and traditional knowledge. Several other Council committees (Ecosystem Committee, Social Sciences Planning Team) have considered co-production of knowledge. The Council is not in a position to develop co-produced knowledge, but those other Council committees have expressed the value of co-produced knowledge, and this committee also encouraged the Council to co-produced knowledge on an equal footing as western knowledge during its decision-making process.

In general, the suggestions generated by the committee fall into three categories: (1) Council communication logistics, (2) Council staffing or committees, and (3) Travel support for rural communities. Suggestions will be presented here as those categories, and not in order that they were discussed by the committee. Order of recommendations within or between categories should not be considered to be a ranking of any sort, and the list of suggestions should not be considered complete. Recommendations from the committee will be presented to the Council when the final report is submitted.

3.1 Communication logistics

Committee members focused on communications from the Council, and ways to allow for communication to the Council. An initial suggestion included using social media, such as Facebook, to disseminate information in villages as social media platforms are in common use. Unfortunately, attempts by Council staff to develop a Council Facebook page were not successful because of the increased security measures recently put in place to prevent fake accounts. Other suggestions that have been adopted by the Council included plain language, less technical descriptions of the agenda items for the Council, distribution of materials to describe the Council process and ways to participate, training by Council members and staff to appreciate barriers to communicating in English for non-English speaking residents, and opportunity for “Tribal reports” similar to cooperative reports that are presented to the Council annually.

The CEC considered methods to reduce the anxiety and logistical difficulties in providing public testimony to the Council. The Council has made it easy to provide written testimony via the online agenda system, but some community members do not have access to the agenda system and still wish to provide oral testimony. The CEC suggested that the Council could consider allowing testimony via phone for some or all agenda items. It was acknowledged that this could create logistic challenges for staff and may increase the length of public testimony sessions but was also seen as a way of facilitating direct engagement by Tribal and rural community members. If telephone testimony is not possible, the CEC suggested other ways that the Council could consider to hear Tribal and rural concerns, including allowing groups of testifiers to use the organizational time limit (6 minutes) rather than the individual limit (3 minutes), allowing a specific time for Tribal and rural concerns during B reports, and opportunities for Council members to meet informally with Tribal and rural participants. The committee also discussed engagement strategies utilized by other entities, including the State of Alaska Boards of Fish and Game, and the Federal Subsistence Board.

3.2 Council committees and staffing

The committee suggested that the Council should consider a standing Tribal and Rural Advisory Committee. The committee noted the ad-hoc status of the CEC and stated that a standing committee could be charged with facilitating the engagement strategies that the CEC recommends to the Council. The standing committee could be an opportunity to hear Tribal and rural concerns for the Council, and for Council initiatives and other business to be communicated to Tribal and rural stakeholders. The standing committee could also serve as an opportunity for Tribal and rural community members to bring issues that are not necessarily on the Council’s agenda to attention. The committee report would present information

to the Council and allow the Council to determine whether the issue is within the Council's purview. The CEC briefly considered how often a standing Tribal and rural advisory committee would meet but determined that those details should be addressed once the committee is established by the Council. There was some concern raised that a standing committee could take Tribal and rural input one step further from direct engagement the Council.

Along with a standing Tribal and Rural Advisory Committee, the CEC suggests that the Council consider having a Tribal liaison on staff. Many Federal agencies have a dedicated Tribal liaison that acts as the first point of contact for many Tribal organizations when working with those agencies. The Tribal liaison would be familiar with the Council's agenda items and would be able to direct Tribal and rural participants to the proper analyst or other staff and help Tribal and rural participants navigate the Council process. It was noted that all Council staff are readily and easily available, but that an additional "Tribal liaison" title would make it clear which staff member representatives should contact.

3.3 Travel support

Committee members and other attendees made it very clear that Council meeting logistics are a major impediment for rural Alaskan participation. The costs associated with air travel to Anchorage or other city in or outside of Alaska, food and lodging, and other associated costs make it very difficult for individuals to attend and can make it prohibitive for representatives of communities or organizations to attend Council meetings in or out of Alaska. Many of the suggestions considered by the committee focused on ways to either reduce direct costs to rural Alaskan attendees, particularly for individual or organizations without financial means to send representatives, or alternatives to attending a Council meeting that still allow participation by rural Alaskan residents.

One alternative suggested to ease the logistic constraints on direct participation is development of "travel scholarships" that could provide funding for Tribes to participate in Council meetings. The intention is to reach Tribes and people who are not already part of the Council process, those that have not been able to participate previously. It was suggested that the travel scholarships could be Federally funded and operated through the Council, or non-Federally funded and operated by regional corporations, CDQ groups, or other non-profit organizations. If non-Federally funded, existing mentorship and training programs (e.g., NSF Partners in Education and Research, AK Sea Grant Young Fishermen) might be expanded to provide opportunities for Tribal and rural communities to participate in the Council process.

The committee also suggested that an important strategy is to introduce Council members to rural Alaska. At several meetings committee members stressed the importance of getting Council members to visit rural or Alaska Native communities at least once per year, outside of the Council's regular meeting schedule, and should consider both hub communities and smaller communities beyond the hubs. The last Council member trip to St. Paul Island was noted as a successful model for Council member visits.

3.4 Other suggestions

Throughout the meetings of the CEC, the committee made suggestions that would not necessarily be considered new strategies or engagement activities, but should be considered during Council business. The CEC made much comment about the outreach activities that the Council currently engaged to provide information to the public. The CEC feels that those efforts have value and should be continued or improved where possible. The CEC noted the successful efforts to use plain, non-technical language to describe the Council agenda for the October 2019 meeting, and encouraged the Council to continue those efforts. The CEC also suggested that linking Council materials to that simplified agenda and identifying the appropriate staff for each agenda item would be useful. The CEC suggested that the "introduction to the Council" training that was offered in October 2019 in Homer was useful and suggested that a short video may be useful for rural and Tribal participants before attending a Council meeting. Some on the CEC suggested that only Alaska Natives would be appropriate to provide cultural training for the Council

and Council staff, and suggested that the CEC could vet contractors for the Council. Some CEC members also suggested that Council staff should provide a summary of oral testimony that is provided during committee meetings. The CEC also discussed the need for metrics to measure the success of community engagement efforts.

4 Next Steps

The CEC will meet in December 2019 in Anchorage, in association with the December council meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to review the suggestions presented in this report and begin to develop a list of recommendations for the Council to consider. Additional suggestions will also likely be developed and considered. The final report will be prepared by staff and reviewed one more time by the committee at a spring meeting that has not yet been scheduled. Committee members suggested that the spring meeting should be held in a rural community. The location of the spring meeting will be discussed and a recommendation from the committee made in December.