



Overcoming Local Barriers to Implementation and Getting to Shovel Readiness, North Carolina

Podcast Interview Transcript

Diana Pietri: Today I'm speaking with Tancred Miller, the Policy and Planning Section Chief for the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's Division of Coastal Management. The Division of Coastal Management, along with other partners, recently initiated a new program: the Resilient Coastal Communities Program. This program helps coastal communities that are at risk from climate change-related impacts, things like increased coastal storm surge and flooding, by providing funding to engage in a four-part process that includes community resilience planning, project prioritization, engineering and design, and implementation. Tancred, thanks for joining me today!

Tancred Miller: Thanks for having me. Glad to be here.

DP: Great. Well, so let's dive into some of the questions that I have for you. So, you've described this program as being incentive-based for the communities who participate. Can you tell me more about what those incentives are?

TM: Sure. So we designed this program to be a voluntary participation by local governments, and so we thought the best way to do that would be, instead of trying to mandate that they take certain actions, that we provide incentives. Those incentives are in the form of financial as well as technical assistance. In our particular case, we are funding external contractors like planning firms, engineering firms, that have expertise, that can provide those types of technical assistance support to the local governments.

DP: And how has that worked in terms of local communities being excited about participating? Have these incentives really gotten what you were hoping to get out of them?

TM: Our proposal to NFWF was about overcoming barriers at the local level to resilience planning. One of the biggest barriers to resilience planning is just not having the capacity—staff capacity, financial capacity to even apply for funding, much less to implement any projects. So what we've found by providing this particular type of framework is that the local governments are able to simply sign up and participate by using their time, their staff time, their citizens' time, and it's a very low bar for them to make some meaningful gains in their resilience planning.

DP: Got it. Well, that's great! That sounds like a really big advantage for the local communities so it's exciting to hear about that. You know, one thing you've mentioned about the project in previous conversations that you've had with our team is the difficulties in getting the project off the ground and the success of simply having the project in place. So, what made the project so challenging to initiate?

TM: Well, it started with an idea. So we had no funding, we had no staff, we had our own capacity challenges even to get this thing off the ground. Luckily, we were able to garner some support, some good partnerships, both externally and within the state government, to be able to bring some resources together to build this program. We looked and had some great support from other states around the country, both coastal states and non-coastal states who have done similar programs, and they were more than willing to help us build this program for ourselves, so we really appreciate all the support we've had from external partners and internal partners and funders.

DP: Great, yeah, and building on that, you know, I know that partnerships, as you've said, have been really critical to your project approach both as you said in terms of getting it off the ground and in terms of implementation. So what have you done to really make sure these partnerships are successful?

TM: It's relationships. You know, it's relationship building. Partnerships have to be mutually beneficial, so we're doing things on behalf of our partners and they're doing things on our behalf. And I think we're all working towards a common goal, and that is greater coastal resilience. It benefits the state entirely, from the citizens, the national infrastructure, the environmental resources, the economy, etc. It's all tied together, so that really helps the partnerships succeed.

DP: Have you encountered any challenges with the partnerships in trying to make them successful? Any roadblocks to those partnerships?

TM: Well again, it's just capacity. You know, everyone is busy, everybody has their own day jobs, and this is really an add-on: something we all see as an urgent need, but something we don't necessarily have our own internal capacity already built up, so that's a challenge. And we overcome that by just trying to be supportive, understanding that there are different burdens on partners, so you accommodate, and you share the load as much as you can.

DP: Got it. So what advice do you have for other resilience practitioners who might want to undertake similar processes in their localities?

TM: Well, network. You know, just reach out. There are other people that are doing similar things, there are lots of people with great ideas, and there are some meaningful gains and process and progress that's happening on the ground. So reach out to folks, send them an email, make a phone call, and build those networks. It really helps to have a good supportive community—not just locally, but across the region or across the country—that are willing and able to help you get yourself off the ground.

DP: Well, that's great advice for others, thank you for that. You know, I know your project is still ongoing, so what's next in your project? What are the next things you're looking forward to?

TM: Well, everyone's excited. We are just getting started, we are finalizing contracts and the local governments, and our contractors are all raring to go. We are expecting to have, by the end of this calendar year, a lot of planning work done, a lot of projects identified, and then we can move forward to start the engineering and design work, and that's where you start really seeing the tangible results. When things start getting put down on paper, plans being made, and projects are starting to be implemented on the ground, so we're all excited to see this come to fruition.

DP: Great. Well, we're excited to hear more about it and hear about some of the outcomes of your projects. Thanks again so much for joining me today, we really appreciate your time.

TM: Thanks again. Y'all take care.