

Engaging Stakeholders to Strengthen Research-Informed *Collaboration for Better Decisions*

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Background

Natural resource and environmental professionals are working in a time of rapid environmental, technological, and social change. Staying effective—and maintaining public trust—means strengthening how we collaborate, communicate science, and involve communities in decision-making. Challenges such as coastal resource management, lagoon and estuarine health, socioeconomic pressures, and the use of emerging technologies are increasingly interconnected and require coordinated partnerships and meaningful public engagement.

Objectives

- Strengthen engagement among agencies, communities, and partner organizations
- Position educators as trusted, research-informed collaborators
- Use technology to improve data sharing, communication, and participation
- Support interdisciplinary collaboration grounded in public service
- Incorporate socioeconomic factors into environmental decision-making

Approach

This work focuses on building relationships, communicating clearly, and using science-based tools to support collaborative planning. Extension and environmental professionals play a key role by:

- Translating complex data into accessible, usable information
- Bringing together community knowledge and scientific expertise
- Facilitating structured decision-making processes
- Supporting implementation through training, outreach, and continued engagement

These strategies are applied across coastal stewardship, water resource management, and resilience planning efforts in Brevard County and similar coastal regions.



Outcomes

- Greater community trust and participation in planning efforts
- Stronger communication among agencies, residents, and partners
- Increased use of technology to support transparency and data sharing
- More effective cross-sector partnerships that support long-term resilience
- More equitable and sustainable decisions that reflect community and economic realities

Implications

Strengthening stakeholder engagement and collaboration allows Extension and environmental professionals to remain effective in complex decision-making environments. Connecting science, policy, and community priorities supports more resilient ecosystems, informed communities, and sustainable outcomes.



EXTENSION'S ROLE IN *Supporting the Indian River Lagoon*

Community Education & Behavior Change

- Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ outreach
- Fertilizer and irrigation best management practices
- Septic system education to reduce nutrient loading

Neighborhood & Volunteer Engagement

- Support for Lagoon Loyal neighborhood initiatives
- Guidance on native plants and stormwater pond maintenance
- Volunteer training in oyster gardening, mangrove planting, and citizen science

Science Translation & Public Outreach

- Workshops and webinars on lagoon science
- Clear, accessible materials on water quality and restoration progress
- Outreach through community events to build lagoon awareness

Collaboration & Facilitation

- Bringing together residents, agencies, and partners
- Facilitating conversations that connect data with lived experience
- Aligning local efforts with countywide restoration priorities

Technology & Innovation Support

- Demonstrations of stormwater technologies
- Training for professionals and homeowners
- Guidance on using data dashboards and interpreting restoration metrics

