

TOURISM BUSINESS RESILIENCE WORKSHOPS AND ONLINE SELF- ASSESSMENT PROJECT

2017-2018



COMMONWEALTH CENTER FOR
RECURRENT FLOODING RESILIENCY

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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Tourism Business Resilience Workshops and Online Self-Assessment Project is an extension of the Tourism Business Resilience for Coastal Virginia Assessment Project conducted in 2016-2017 for the Commonwealth Center for Recurrent Flooding Resiliency (CCRFR).¹

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The assessment found that many franchisees and independent small businesses were not as prepared for, or resilient to, coastal hazards and flooding as some of the large brand-name hotels. As a result, CCRFR identified the need to extend the opportunity to access resilience resources to all tourism and service industry businesses in Hampton Roads. The Tourism Business Resilience Workshops and Online Self-Assessment Project was intended to meet this need by conducting Tourism Business Resilience workshops and developing an online resource to support business resilience self-assessment. Three workshops were planned in Norfolk, Virginia Beach and Williamsburg. To provide business owners and managers with broader access to a wider range of resources, this project developed the online Coastal Virginia Tourism Business Resilience Self-Assessment to support business owners and managers in conducting a self-assessment of their organization's resilience and providing access to resources for building resilience.²

The project was primarily supported by the CCRFR, but additional sponsorship was obtained from area businesses and tourism organizations, indicating that there is significant interest in the Hampton Roads community for such workshops. These sponsors included the Coastal Virginia Tourism Alliance, an organization of all of the convention and visitors' bureaus in Hampton Roads and the Eastern Shore; the Greater Williamsburg Chamber and Tourism Alliance (GWCTA)³, the City of Williamsburg; Williamsburg Economic Development; and Williamsburg Fairfield Inn and Suites; Gold Key|PHR and the Ramada Virginia Beach Oceanfront; and The Miles Agency. The faculty team, all members of the Old Dominion University Resilience Collaborative, strongly believed in using their research to enhance resilience in the community and worked above the time allocated by funding. Additionally, Virginia Sea Grant supported Dr. Covi's work on the project.

1. The Tourism Business Resilience for Coastal Virginia Assessment Project also included an assessment of resilience of the Virginia Beach Oceanfront Tourism. More details about the project and the project's final report are available at <https://www.floodingresiliency.org/tourism/>

2. The Coastal Virginia Tourism Business Resilience Self-Assessment was developed in 2016-17 as part of the Tourism Business Resilience for Coastal Virginia Assessment Project. The report detailing the self-assessment is available at <https://www.floodingresiliency.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Self-Assessment-Final-draft-1.pdf>

3. GWCTA staff coordinated the workshop venue, provided food, issued invitations and managed registration, and provided guest speaker accommodations.

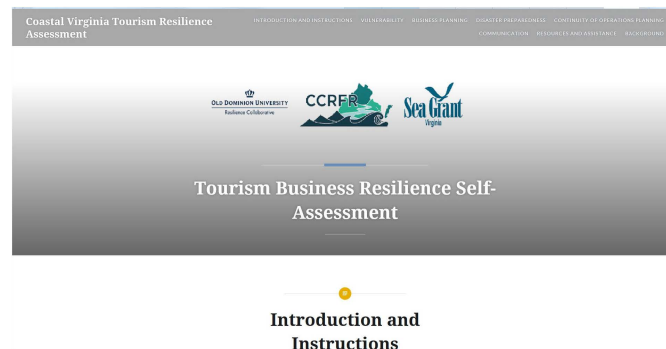
COASTAL VIRGINIA TOURISM BUSINESS RESILIENCE SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Coastal Virginia Tourism Business Resilience Self-Assessment was developed as part of the CCRFR Tourism Business Resilience for Coastal Virginia Assessment Project.

Completing the self-assessment and reviewing supplemental materials assists tourism and service industry businesses in building resilience.

This self-assessment provides a simple and inexpensive way for tourism businesses to determine if they are prepared for, and able to maintain operations, during and after coastal hazards, natural disasters, and extreme events. Completing the self-assessment and reviewing supplemental materials assists tourism and service industry businesses in building resilience.⁴

To encourage wider usage, the self-assessment was converted into an online tool. The online tool can be accessed at: bit.ly/Tourism_Resilience. The online tool was officially launched during the Tourism Business Resilience Workshop in Virginia Beach. Since February 2018, the online tool has been accessed 55 times. In addition to the online tool, the self-assessment was also created in a fillable PDF format. This PDF is available at bit.ly/Tourism_SelfAssessment.



4. More details about development of the self-assessment is provide in the Tourism Business Resilience for Coastal Virginia Assessment Project report available at <https://www.floodingresiliency.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CCRFR-BrandedReport-Tourism-Report-FINAL.pdf>. The self-assessment is included as Appendix C of this project report.

WORKSHOP PLANNING AND MARKETING

The workshops were scheduled for February 12 (Norfolk), February 26 (Virginia Beach), and February 28 (Williamsburg). Save-the-Date announcements were sent in late December and invitations were sent out beginning in January. The announcements and invitations were disseminated individually to a variety of community partners with a request to share with their members.

Those organizations were: the Virginia Tourism Corporation, Coastal Virginia Tourism Alliance, Virginia Beach Hotel Association (VBHA), Virginia Beach Restaurant Association (VBRA), Virginia Restaurant Lodging and Travel Association (VRLTA), GWCTA, Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Beach ViBe district, Norfolk NEON District, Downtown Norfolk Council, Ghent Business Association, Portsmouth Olde Town Business Association, Virginian Pilot Inside Business, The Williamsburg Yorktown Daily (WYDaily.com) and The Southside Daily, the Virginia Beach Resort Advisory Commission (RAC), and VisitNorfolk. A press release about the workshops was sent to local media outlets. Dr. Usher made in-person announcements and distributed flyers at a Virginia Beach RAC meeting, a VBHA meeting and a NEON district meeting.

Due to a low number of advanced registrations for the Norfolk location, the workshop was canceled and interested parties were redirected to the other two workshops.

Twenty-nine people registered for the Virginia Beach workshop and approximately 17 people attended. Most participants were from destination management organizations, accommodations, attractions, with one person representing the restaurant sector. Nineteen individuals registered for the Williamsburg workshop and approximately 15-17 people attended. The majority of participants were from local government organizations and businesses in different sectors (not in the targeted sectors: hotels, restaurants, retail, attractions, or tours).



The flyer is titled "Tourism Business Resilience Workshop" in a teal box. It features logos for Old Dominion University, CCRFR, William & Mary Law School, Virginia Coastal Policy Center, Sea Grant Virginia, Coastal Virginia, Gold Key PHR, The Niles Agency, Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Tourism Alliance, and Williamsburg Economic Development. The text describes the workshop's purpose: to help tourism business owners and managers assess vulnerability and increase resilience. It lists three dates and locations: February 12 in Norfolk at the Ted Constant Center, February 26 in Virginia Beach at the Ramada Oceanfront, and February 28 at the Williamsburg Community Building. Registration is free, and a link to the website is provided.

Tourism Business Resilience Workshop

Is your Tourism Business prepared for the increasing threat of flooding and severe weather?

This workshop will assist business owners and managers in assessing vulnerability and provide tools to increase resilience.

FREE Registration
Workshop is from 9 am-2pm, lunch included.

February 12 in Norfolk at the Ted Constant Center
Registration at bit.ly/nortourism

February 26 in Virginia Beach at the Ramada Oceanfront
Registration at bit.ly/vbtourism

February 28 at the Williamsburg Community Building
www.floodingresiliency.org/tourism-business-resilience-workshops/ for more information



DESCRIPTION OF WORKSHOPS

Both the Virginia Beach and Williamsburg workshops began at 9am and ended at 2pm. The workshops included presentations about sea level rise and its implications, interactive audience response system or “clickers” activity, hands-on working sessions, and guest keynote presentations. Breakfast and lunch were provided and allowed for additional networking and discussion opportunities.

Once participants had completed the self-assessment, they were prompted to consider areas where they found their business or organization to be lacking in the resilience assessment.

The Tourism Business Resilience Workshop in Virginia Beach began with a presentation by Dr. Covi and Dr. Usher that explained sea level rise and flood risks for Hampton Roads, the implications for tourism businesses specifically, and the meaning of resilience. This presentation was followed by an audience response system or “clickers” activity to assess workshop participants’ risk perception and preparedness. During this activity, Dr. Yusuf asked participants to select responses matching their vulnerability, preparedness, continuity and communications, and the results were immediately shown to participants so they could compare their responses to other workshop participants. The results were also discussed in the context of key findings of the Virginia Beach Oceanfront tourism assessment conducted in 2016-17.

After a short break, participants were given printed copies of the Coastal Virginia Tourism Business Resilience Self-Assessment. Participants were asked to work through the self-assessment for their business or organization. Participants discussed the self-assessment with one another as they filled it out. Once participants had completed the self-assessment, they were prompted to consider areas where they found their business or organization to be lacking in the resilience assessment.

Once participants determined the areas they needed to address, they were directed to pick and choose from selected worksheets and additional resources that were made available for participants to consult and take with them. During the workshop, facilitators also showed participants the self-assessment online tool, provided the web address for the online tool, and encouraged participants to visit the online tool to access many of the worksheets and resources.

In the Tourism Business Resilience Workshop held in Williamsburg, the keynote speakers presented first and the hands-on activities were conducted towards the end of the workshop. The flood risk and tourism resilience presentation was tailored for Williamsburg by using local flood maps and focusing the tourism implications more on power outages from hurricanes and road closures due to snow storms, and impacts from natural hazards with which participants could relate. Selected worksheets and resources were organized into stations according to the different topics of the self-assessment (preparedness, continuity, communications, etc.) and participants were directed to go to the topic station for which they thought their business needed the most help.

Case studies from the Virginia Beach Oceanfront tourism resilience assessment, Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy were provided at each of the stations to give participants examples and reference materials. During a hands-on activity, workshop facilitators asked participants at each station to come up with some specific actions a business owner could take to improve their preparedness, continuity, or other resilience dimension at that station.

Both workshops included presentations by keynote speakers Jim and Annemarie Dickerson. The Dickersons have owned and managed the Francis Scott Key Family Resort in Ocean City Maryland for over 25 years. Annemarie is past president of the Ocean City Hotel Motel Restaurant Association and past chair of Worcester County Tourism. She is a member of the Ocean City Tourism Advisory Board and the Maryland Economic Development Commission. Jim is also the owner and managing director of Island Water World,

a 3rd generation family marine retail business headquartered on the Caribbean island of St Maarten with a 60 slip marina and 7 stores serving St. Maarten, Grenada, St. Lucia and Curacao.

In their keynote presentation, the Dickersons described the ways in which their business in St. Maarten had been affected by Hurricane Irma in September 2017 and their process of recovery. They discussed lessons they had learned throughout the event, as well as changes they had made to their business plan for their property in Maryland in case a major storm ever hit the resort.

Elizabeth Andrews and Angela King, from the William & Mary Law School Virginia Coastal Policy Center, provided support during both workshops. Ms. Andrews made a brief statement about the importance of policy in increasing tourism industry resilience and asked participants for policy recommendations.





WORKSHOP EVALUATIONS

At the conclusion of each workshop, participants were asked to complete an evaluation survey. Twenty three workshop participants filled out evaluation surveys for the workshop. In terms of the types of businesses that participants owned or managed, 6 participants managed accommodations, 1 managed an attraction, 1 was a tour operator or provider and the rest were “other.” Some examples of “other” included: a restoration company, local government, destination management organizations, and an environmental organization.

When asked about their planning before the workshop, 13 participants had a preparedness plan for large and small disasters for their business, 6 had a plan for small scale disasters and 4 had no preparedness plan. Four participants said they had a written continuity plan prepared with a professional such as an insurance agent. Nine had some kind of continuity plan, 3 had an unwritten continuity plan and 6 did not have a plan.

When asked what they planned to do after the workshop, all participants said they were “likely” or “very likely” to create a preparedness plan and a business continuity plan. However this did not include 7 participants who stated they already had preparedness plans and 6 who stated they already had business continuity plans.

When asked how they would rate their knowledge of the vulnerability of tourism businesses to coastal hazards after the workshop, 1 participant said her/his knowledge was “less than before,” 2 said “same as before,” 13 said “more than before,” and 7 said “much more than before.”

As far as their knowledge of the characteristics of a resilient tourism business, 1 person said her/his knowledge was “same as before,” 12 said it was “more than before,” and 10 said it was “much more than before.”

All participants said that the material presented in the workshop was easy to understand. When asked how likely they were to use the materials provided to plan for their business, 1 participant answered “somewhat likely,” 8 answered “likely” and 13 answered “very likely”. Twenty-two participants answered they were “likely” or “very likely” to reference the online self-assessment to plan for their business’ resilience.

The following table summarizes participants' responses to questions about the usefulness of workshop activities (1=Not at all useful and 5=Very Useful):

Item	N	Mean
Presentation about vulnerability and resilience	22	4.55
Filling out the self-assessment	22	4.27
Discussing self-assessment with peers	22	4.27
Identifying relevant resilience activities after completing the self-assessment	22	4.18
Working with peers on resilience activities based on results of the self-assessment	20	4.25
Lunch guest speaker(s)	20	4.70

The following table summarizes participants' responses to questions about the overall workshop (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree):

Item	N	Mean
Educational and informative	23	4.74
Highly interactive and engaging	23	4.57
Appropriate length of time	23	4.39
Interesting guest speaker(s)	23	4.74
Provided opportunities for networking with my peers	23	4.48
Provided useful materials for improving the resilience of my business	22	4.55

When asked what they liked most about the workshop, participants said they liked the keynote presentation, the handouts, discussion and networking with other participants, and the useful information. One participant stated they were excited to share the information with business owners. Several participants suggested making the workshop shorter, and several participants wanted to see specific examples of the different types of plans. Another participant suggested bringing the workshop to all of the local chambers of commerce in Hampton Roads.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The workshops were moderately successful. There was substantial local support for the workshops, especially from the GWCTA. The in-kind and monetary donations from local businesses made it possible to offer two workshops. Workshop participants seemed to benefit from the information provided and the activities.

The majority of participants felt the workshop had increased their knowledge about vulnerability and resilience.

The majority of participants felt the workshop had increased their knowledge about vulnerability and resilience. The majority of participants felt the workshop had increased their knowledge about vulnerability and resilience. They also planned to use the materials for future planning, and they found the materials and activities very useful. However, attendance was lower than initially hoped, and participants were mainly representing local tourism organizations as opposed to business owners and managers. The biggest challenge faced by the project team was marketing the workshops and encouraging participation. Beyond encouraging participation, it is even more difficult to directly engage with owners and managers even though the workshops were planned during the relatively quiet time of year for the tourism industry.

While many local organizations helped disseminate information about the workshops, there were others who did not respond or were never reached. The duration of the workshop (half a day or approximately 4 hours) appeared to be a substantial constraint for many business owners and managers, and a likely reason for low attendance. To ease time constraints, the workshops were held in February when many tourism businesses are not serving tourists.

Lack of attendance also may suggest that business owners have more immediate priorities than attending a half-day workshop to learn about improving preparedness and continuity for a severe weather event that may or may not occur.

Shortening the duration of the workshops may have lowered the quality of information delivered to participants. While parts of the workshop could be shortened, inviting the guest speakers added more time and was one of the most successful and informative aspects of the workshop. Some of the activities in Williamsburg appeared to confuse participants who did not own or manage a business. While the handouts and case studies were provided in order to assist participants in completing the activities, other participants seemed overwhelmed by the amount of materials. Several of the handouts could be filled out during the workshop but others were meant as takeaways, and the project team could have waited to provide those at the end.

The online self-assessment tool will likely be of great use to the tourism and service industry business community as long as members know about it. The project team is working with CCRFR to disseminate information about the Coastal Virginia Tourism Business Resilience Self-Assessment online tool to local organizations. Dr. Usher and Dr. Covi shared the tool with attendees at the Virginia Green Travel Alliance Conference. They also presented it to the Virginia Beach Vision Sea Level Rise Task Force. The VBHA has agreed to send the link out. Dr. Usher has presented it at a RAC GREEN Committee meeting, a Ghent Business Association meeting, and a NEON district meeting. The link has been shared with the Virginia Tourism Corporation, GWCTA, VRLTA, Downtown Norfolk Council, CVTA, the Peninsula Chamber of Commerce and local emergency managers. Follow-up needs to be done with many of these organizations to ensure that the link is posted or sent out so organization members can access it easily. Emergency managers also could send out the link when they send out hurricane watches and warnings to tourism organizations. Virginia Beach Office of Emergency Management already sends out preparedness information and the self-assessment could be sent out with this information.

The City of Norfolk's Emergency Manager has listed the self-assessment as one of the resources on the Business Partnership Program page (see <https://www.norfolk.gov/index.aspx?NID=4171>). Cards have been printed that have the web address for the self-assessment online tool and a QR code linking to the online tool, and all participants and the CCRFR office have copies of cards to continue to distribute. These cards can be handed out at events or meetings to increase awareness of the self-assessment online tool.

PLANNED OUTREACH MOVING FORWARD

The Tourism Business Resilience Assessment and Workshops, which took place between July 2016 and February 2018, were the CCRFR's initial foray into building flooding resilience within the business community to support localities.

The workshop turnout and cancellation of the first scheduled workshop show the difficulty of reaching the small business community. However, continued outreach is essential. The workshops were designed to target a sector essential to the region's economy and also particularly vulnerable to flooding or other coastal hazards. However, many of the lessons learned are applicable to other businesses outside of the tourism industry. Further, targeting the tourism sector may have confused some businesses who serve both locals and tourists. The Phase 1 assessment, workshops, and subsequent outreach showed that many businesses still lack vital knowledge with regards to business resilience and would benefit greatly from these materials. Moving forward outreach should continue to the tourism sector, and should be expanded and customized for other sectors within the broader business community in Hampton Roads.





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