

Executive Summary: Developing a Needs Assessment Framework for Marine Resources Committees in Washington State

Introduction

In 1998, the Northwest Straits Citizens Advisory Commission, convened by U.S. Senator Patty Murray and U.S. Representative Jack Metcalf, delivered a report warning about the deterioration of the Northwest Straits' marine ecosystem. They recommended "establishing a network of local, county-based Marine Resources Committees" (MRC) to protect and conserve the Northwest Straits' resources. Since then, seven MRCs were established in the Northwest Straits region – each representing a distinct geographic county – with the mission to advise their respective counties on marine resource issues by identifying local marine protection priorities, implementing science-driven projects that benefit marine resources, and engaging the local communities to enhance governance of the local marine environment.

This project developed a needs assessment framework to support MRCs in collecting community perspectives on local marine resources needs. Conducting these needs assessments at a county level will help MRCs to identify needs in the community that may otherwise not have been identified, helping provide additional guidance to leadership as to which projects should receive funding, in addition to strengthening relationships between the individual MRCs and their community leaders and members.

The Snohomish County MRC was used as a pilot to test the effectiveness of the framework. This report provides feedback and recommendations from the pilot study on how to improve and use the framework for future needs assessments for all seven MRCs.

Research Methods

Throughout the current project, the UW Team responded to the following research question (RQ): *How can MRCs assess their local communities' concerns and priorities related to the marine environment and its resources?*

To answer the RQ, the UW Team conducted a literature review, executed a pilot study with the Snohomish County MRC, analyzed interview results from the pilot study, and put forth a series of recommendations for conducting future needs assessments. The pilot study consisted of developing an interview guide, providing qualitative training to MRC staff and volunteers, conducting 11 interviews with marine experts in Snohomish County, and analyzing interview data through a detailed qualitative analysis process. The interviews focused on gathering information from participants about their knowledge of the marine environment and MRC, marine challenges and changes, solutions and communication methods to identify challenges and changes, and relevant stakeholders.

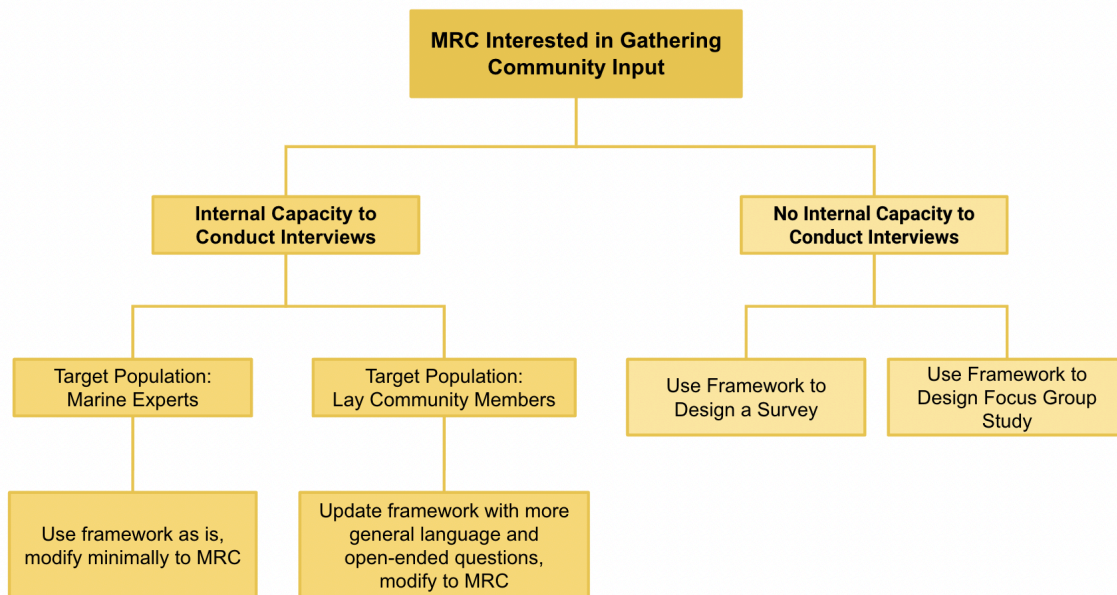
Key Findings

The pilot study was used to determine the validity and usefulness of the interview framework, as well as the processes to construct and utilize the framework, developed by the UW Team. Key findings from this process include:

- The interview guide is best suited for interviewing marine experts, rather than those with limited knowledge of the marine ecosystem.
- A larger and more diverse sample can provide a more comprehensive look at local communities' marine priorities and concerns, which would require adjusting the framework.
- Within the pilot study, many interviewees highlighted the Snohomish County MRC's potential to do more outreach, implement different communication strategies, and collaborate with other stakeholders on the issues mentioned.
- Interviews yielded important responses on participants' priorities and concerns regarding Snohomish County's marine environment. For example, the most salient theme in current pressing issues is stormwater, while many mentioned partnerships as being critical when thinking about solutions.

Recommendations

Using insights from the Snohomish County MRC pilot study, the UW Team developed the following flowchart to guide recommendations and action items for both the Snohomish County MRC and six other MRCs interested in gathering community input. The flowchart depicts when the interview framework should be used to conduct a needs assessment and how the interview framework should be used to guide the needs assessment.



For a more detailed overview of the recommendations, see [Chapter 5](#) of the present document.

One Pager: An Overview of Interview Framework Guidelines

For those MRCs that have the capacity to conduct one-on-one interviews, as determined by the options depicted in the flowchart, this one pager serves to provide a brief overview with information on frequently asked questions (FAQs), as well as a holistic view of the needs assessment process.

The below information provides answers to questions about why MRCs should utilize an interview framework and what the process should entail.



Figure 1. Answers to FAQs about the interview framework

The below sequence of steps scopes the overall process of using an interview framework as a needs assessment tool to gather community input. MRCs can expect to follow this series of steps.



Figure 2. Recommended Interview Framework Steps