



## ODU, MIT Solve and RISE Co-Host Workshop for Local Entrepreneurs Focused on Coastal Resilience Solutions

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Regional entrepreneurs used business solutions to tackle resilience challenges faced by coastal communities during a recent Solveathon held at the Slover Library in Norfolk.

The event was co-hosted by Old Dominion University; Solve, which is an initiative of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) that advances solutions from tech entrepreneurs to global issues; and RISE, a Norfolk-based nonprofit organization dedicated to helping solve the pressing resilience problems facing today's coastal communities.

Resilience is a key topic as communities adapt to rising sea levels, more frequent or stronger natural disasters and economic changes.



Emily Steinhilber, research assistant professor at the Commonwealth Center for Recurrent Flooding Resiliency, serves as facilitator during the Hampton Roads Solveathon

With the help of regional experts from ODU, local government, businesses and nonprofit organizations, the teams at Solveathon reshaped business ideas throughout the day-long event and then presented their retooled versions.

Alexander Dale, senior officer of sustainability at Solve, believes the "cross-sector participation" of the education, industry and nonprofit sectors is essential to cities like Norfolk.

"MIT sits on a flood plain in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and our city-focused resilience efforts are present, but not nearly as robust as the Commonwealth Center for Recurrent Flooding Resiliency at ODU," said Dale. "The center brings the University and outside institutions together with stakeholders every quarter to push, discuss and move things forward. It's really inspiring and something I hope we can work on with other universities and in other areas."

Katerina Oskarsson, chief strategy officer for RISE, sees the relationship with Old Dominion as critical to the organization's success.

"To be a laboratory for resilience, you have to provide a city as a laboratory but also scientific laboratories," Oskarsson said. "The fact that ODU has the Innovation Center, the Virginia Modeling, Analysis & Simulation Center and the depth of faculty makes it a perfect match for RISE."

Oskarsson, who received her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in political science from Old Dominion, now gets to experience her alma mater from a different angle.

"It's a great connection. We have great universities in the region, and each has a different niche," said Oskarsson. "ODU researchers are certainly experts in the hard science behind sea level rise. Even after all my years at ODU, I'm only now discovering the depth and caliber of faculty at the University. It's amazing."

Following the Solveathon, participants can submit business plans to the MIT Solve Coastal Community Challenge and the RISE Coastal Community Resilience Challenge.

MIT Solve Challenge finalists, to be announced in August, will receive \$10,000 and will pitch their ideas at the United Nations' General Assembly in September.

RISE Challenge winners will be awarded a portion of \$1 million from the Resilience Innovation Fund. Finalists will be announced in October.

Old Dominion, which has supported the RISE concept since its inception, will also support the innovators chosen by RISE through integration into ODU's entrepreneurship and innovation programs or by providing mentorship roles.

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