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Sherry DiBarri
Old Dominion University

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ODU to lead Coastal Virginia Consortium

January 15, 2021

By Sherry DiBari

GO Virginia has awarded Old Dominion University's Emily Steinhilber, Carol Considine and Mujde Erten-Unal a \$500,000 grant to develop the Coastal Virginia Consortium, a multi-stakeholder collaboration designed to engage and educate businesses about coastal flooding risks related to sea-level rise and the associated economic impacts.

"In the area of climate resilience, ODU plays a role as, not only the nonpartisan broker of expertise, but also as a member of the community," said Steinhilber, ODU's assistant director of coastal resilience research. "We all live and work here, as do all of our students when they are on campus. We have a real vested interest in making this work for the community."

"We are really the lynchpin in this resilience ecosystem."

The grant is part of a \$2.9 million award as a result of a partnership between [Virginia Sea Grant](#), Old Dominion University and [RISE](#).

The Coastal Resilience and Adaption Economy initiative aims to advance Virginia's coastal communities' capacity to adapt to climate change while creating jobs, bolstering local economies and positioning Virginia as a global leader.

"ODU is pleased to partner with Virginia Sea Grant and RISE on this GO Virginia grant, which builds upon recommendations from the Intergovernmental Pilot Project and the Commonwealth Center for Recurrent Flooding," said Morris Foster, vice president of research. "ODU's Institute for Coastal Adaptation and Resilience Resiliency is a natural convener for this resilience business consortium, which will strengthen and grow existing resilience and innovation ecosystems positioning coastal Virginia as a national leader in this field."

Considine, assistant dean of the Batten College of Engineering and Technology, said the consortium will build on past collaborations among the Office of Research, Batten College of Engineering and Technology and Hampton University. Past projects have included the Coastal Community Design



Photograph courtesy of Virginia Sea Grant

Collaborative and the [Hampton Roads Inter-governmental Pilot Project](#), which ran from 2014 to 2016.

Steinhilber, Considine and Erten-Unal, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering, will use the two-year grant to provide educational workshops for coastal Virginia businesses on flooding risks, regional economic impacts and business continuity planning, to engage industry for development of specific solutions and actionable strategies related to the economic sector that will build resilience in coastal Virginia, and to create a resource web portal.

"What we really hope to do through the consortium is put those tools in more people's hands in a way that they understand," Steinhilber said. "For the business community, we really want to make sure that they have a broader understanding of the breadth and depth of the resiliency ecosystem in coastal Virginia."

Part of the grant includes the establishment of working groups on local best practices, infrastructure, investment opportunities, talent gaps and resources.

"What we are doing is convening the working groups to involve industry," Considine said. "It's really about us bringing players to the table that aren't at the table."

"It is a great opportunity for industry to get a better understanding of what the problems are and help implement solutions that will make the Hampton Roads region more economically robust."

"We know that the private sector's role is essential in building community resilience," Steinhilber added. "By developing a professional consortium to facilitate education, outreach and training, the Batten College of Engineering and Institute for Coastal Resilience and Adaptation at ODU can use its convening power and expertise to strengthen and expand the resilience and innovation ecosystems in Coastal Virginia."

GO Virginia is a state-funded initiative administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development that aims to strengthen and diversify Virginia's economy and foster creation of higher-wage jobs in strategic industries.