

PrepTalks Discussion Guides provide a framework for community leaders to translate insights from the PrepTalk into community planning and outreach. Community leaders can use the PrepTalks materials at meetings, workshops, and conferences to address critical emergency management topics with whole community partners.

## Jan Peelen – Living with Water: How the Netherlands Prevents Flood Disasters

Jan Peelen is the representative of the Dutch Ministry for Infrastructure and Water Management at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In this role, he advises U.S. entities on the topics of resilience, urban planning and infrastructure, and coordinates all water-related efforts of the Dutch diplomatic network in the U.S.

In his PrepTalk, Peelen explains how the Netherlands addresses historic flooding through prevention and design of protection systems to reduce the risk of flooding and engagement of their citizens.

*The lesson that I want you to take from my talk is about culture; it's about living with water.*

— Jan Peelen

## Partners for the Discussion

We encourage you to bring together those involved in all aspects of disaster preparedness and response and community outreach.

After viewing Peelen's video, use this discussion guide and additional resources to improve relationships, identify best practices and strategies that can be utilized to reduce vulnerabilities associated with flooding and help build resilient community infrastructure.

## Discussion Topics

### Topic 1: How Does Your Community Live with Water?

Peelen explains that understanding how your community uses and views water in everyday life is a useful framework for creating risk mitigation programs.

Although 60 percent of the Netherlands is prone to flooding, the Dutch have learned to live with water.

*Don't fight nature, we actually have to work with nature.*

— Jan Peelen



## Questions for Discussion

- How does your community interact with water? What is the value of water in your community?
  - Infrastructure (irrigation, drinking water, shipping, power generation)
  - Economic (port, tourism, fishing)
  - Recreation (boating, fishing, sailing, swimming, canoeing)
- What are the your community's water-related risks?
  - Riverine flooding
  - Flash floods
  - Storm surge
  - Beach erosion

## Topic 2: Framework for Living with Water

The Dutch identified three core values for the Delta Programme as a framework to manage the uncertainty of climate change and to pair water management with development and design.

### *Flexibility*

- Planning for the uncertainty of long-term climate change requires flexibility
- Your community and the natural landscape, especially the water, will dictate the solutions that you can implement
- Be flexible with authorities and plans to accommodate the environment

### *Sustainability*

- Make investments that are ecological, economic, and have social benefits
- Build project that are multi-purpose – flood prevention and community use

### *Solidarity*

- Flood prevention is a team effort
- Build a common understanding of your community's risk, garner community support for capital investments, and include community members in the project design process
- Share the burden and benefits between the present and the future, and between those at risk and those who profit

In 2012, the Netherlands passed a revised Delta Act (initially passed in 1958), which created the Delta Programme. The main objective of the [Delta Programme](#) is to “provide strategies for protecting the Netherlands against flooding and [to ensure] sufficient freshwater supplies”. The programme operates at both a national and regional level and is updated annually as required by the Act.

Using the flexibility, sustainability, solidarity framework, the Dutch have created effective, economic, multi-use flood prevention projects:

- A coastal defense structure that is also a recreational boulevard – flood prevention that retains tourism and the community’s economic base
- A bypass for the river in times of high discharge – instead of a levee, this approach provides more capacity for the water or “room for the river” and provides a park and water use for the community
- A “sand engine” that uses tides and wind to disperse sand – instead of repeated manual beach nourishment, this method works with nature to keep the coast viable

## Questions for Discussion

Flexibility:

- How can we be more flexible to incorporate uncertainty in planning?
- Do we plan far enough ahead for future conditions?
- How can we make our policies more flexible and adaptive?

Sustainability:

- What is the value you want to create in water-related projects?
- Protection from flooding?
- Beautification/park space?
- Transportation enhancements (bike trails)?
- Opportunity for new real estate?
- Improving fishing grounds?
- What are some creative solutions that might work in your community that move from fighting nature to working with nature?
- How would you make a business case for a larger investment that both protects against flooding and adds value to the community?

## Topic 3: Reimagine Citizen Engagement

Develop solidarity for living with water in your community:

- Provide easy access to clear risk information
- Tell stories about past floods and about how your community can be designed for future conditions
- Develop a process to include residents, businesses, faith-based organizations, and non-profit groups in decision making
- Explain the investments that may be needed for the long-term future of the community, including:
  - Buyout programs – moving residents away from high-risk areas
  - Land Use Plans – ensuring future building doesn't exacerbate flooding losses
  - Building Codes – building smart around water, raised homes and businesses
- Ensure community members feel ownership and become ambassadors of the project.

### Questions for Discussion:

- How does your jurisdiction message water-related risks? For example:
  - Is the message currently “we will protect you,” or is it collaborative (“we will work together to manage this risk”)?
  - How do you explain water-related risk in your community (including all the ways your community lives with water)?
  - How does your community discuss nuisance flooding?
  - Can you make the or 100-year or 500-year flood designation more understandable? Do you have a High Water Mark Initiative?
  - (for coastal communities) Does your community understand storm surge?
- Does your community participate in the Community Rating System (CRS)? Are you working toward improving your rating? Is the community aware of how the CRS affect insurance premiums?
- Involving the community can provide support for major capital investments. What processes can you use to include the public in design decisions?

For the companion Facilitator Slides and Resource List for this PrepTalk, visit:

<https://www.fema.gov/blog/preptalks-jan-peelen-living-water-how-netherlands-prevents-flood-disasters>