

An aerial photograph of a white research vessel with a black hull, moving through deep blue water. The vessel is leaving a white wake behind it. The vessel has various equipment on deck, including a large white cylindrical tank and several antennas. The water is a deep, clear blue with some ripples and a slight wake from the vessel.

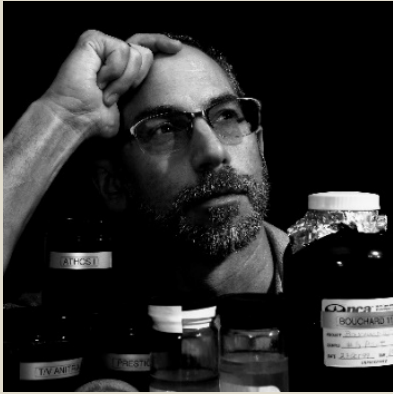
# Learning from the Legacy of Past Oil Spills

Lessons from Alaska and the Gulf Coast

*Presented by Gulf-Alaska Knowledge Exchange Planning Committee Members:*

*ED Levine, Davin Holen, Mây Nguyễn, Frances Ulmer, and Collin Ward*

PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS



**ED Levine**  
NOAA (ret.)  
SS&C, LLC



**Davin Holen**  
University of Alaska Fairbanks



**Mây Nguyễn**  
Kataly Foundation

PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS



**Fran Ulmer**  
Harvard Kennedy School



**Collin Ward**  
Woods Hole  
Oceanographic Institution



**Francis Wiese**  
Consultant

# Background Information

- The Gulf of Alaska and the Southern Gulf Coast have been the sites of the two worst oil spills in U.S. history, **Exxon Valdez (1989)** and **Deepwater Horizon (2010)**.
- These oil spills had detrimental and long-lasting **environmental, economic, and societal impacts** in both regions.
- In recognition of this shared history, the Gulf Research Program (GRP) hosted a workshop series to bring together representatives from both regions to **share experiences, knowledge, strategies, and best practices to help prevent, prepare for, and recover from potential future spills**.

*“Even though these places seem very different in some ways, they are really quite similar.”*

Fran Ulmer  
(former lieutenant governor of Alaska, 2010 bp *deepwater horizon* commission member)

# Gulf-Alaska Knowledge Exchange

- Workshops designed to engage **researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders** were developed by an ad hoc planning committee and held in **Anchorage, AK (October 8-9, 2024)**; **Thibodaux, LA (December 10-11, 2024)**; and **Washington, DC (March 25-26, 2025)**.
- Workshop topics were developed by the planning committee to be relevant and beneficial to stakeholders and community members from both regions, while being consistent with the GRP's mission and purpose.
- While the speakers and specific focus of each workshop varied, the workshops generally addressed topics such as **socio-economic impact, evaluating community response, transformative recovery, and proactive preparedness**.



# Planning Committee Members

- ED Levine (Chair)
- Bernard Goldstein
- Davin Holen
- Mây Thị Nguyễn
- W. Scott Pegau
- Stephen Sempier
- Rashid Sumaila
- Frances Ulmer
- Collin Ward
- Adriana Bejarano\*
- Raven Cunningham\*
- E. Barrett Ristroph\*

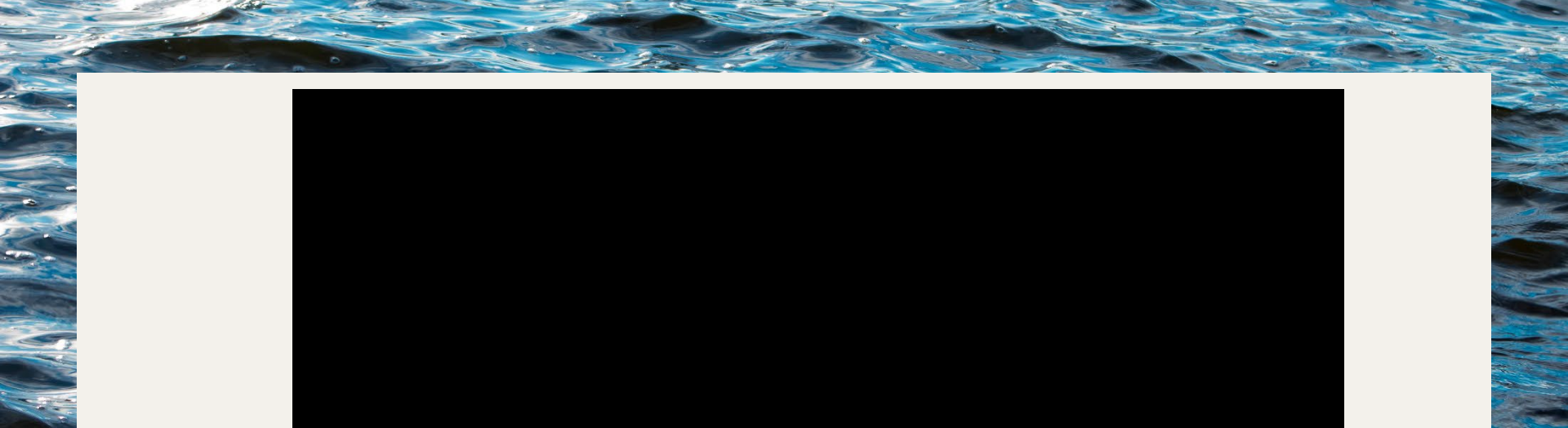
## **NASEM Staff**

- Jennifer Cohen
- Stephanie Houser
- Raúl Flamenco
- Thelma Cox



**Forums like this workshop, are “needed to transfer the knowledge and take all the lessons learned from the past events and carry them into future events.”**

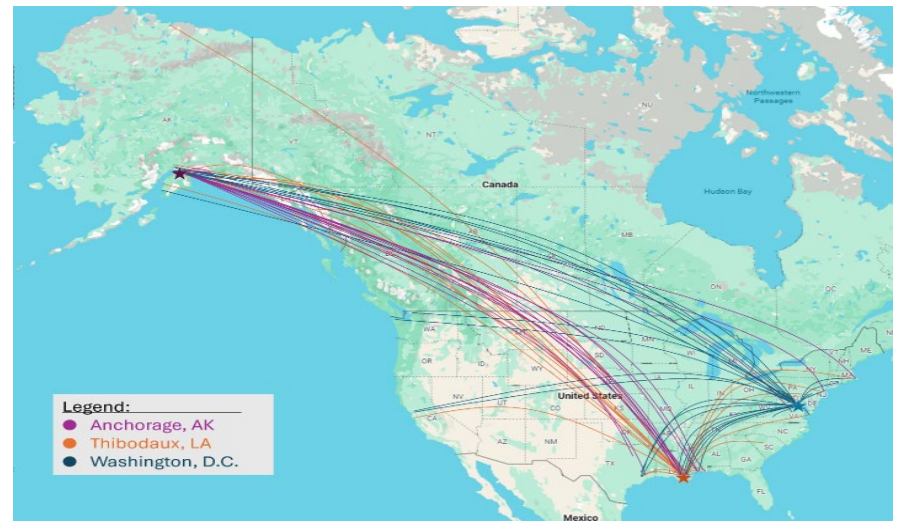
**(Susan Saupe, life-long Alaskan and director of science and research for the Cook Inlet Regional Advisory Council)**



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# Workshop Format

- Attendees and participants gathered from both regions.
- Panel sessions with Q&A highlighted voices from communities, academia, policy-makers, and responders.
- Extended breakout discussions (in-person and virtual) encouraged collaboration and connection.
- Report-out surfaced themes from across discussions.



# Workshop Format, Cont'd

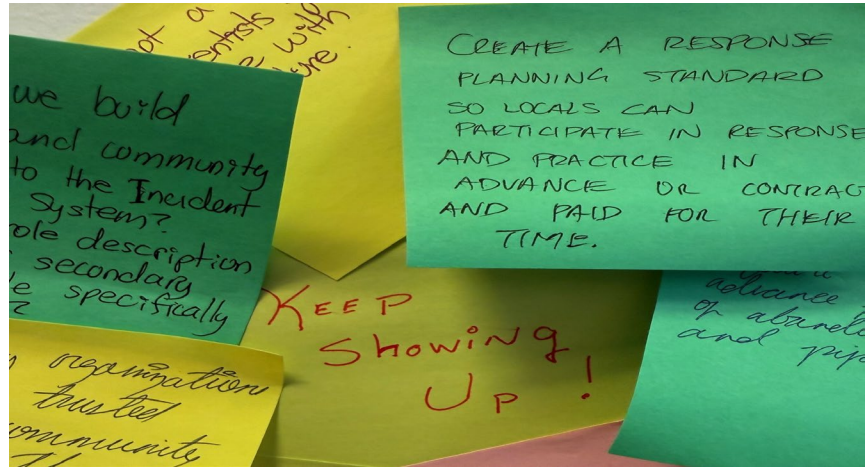
## Interactive World Café Session

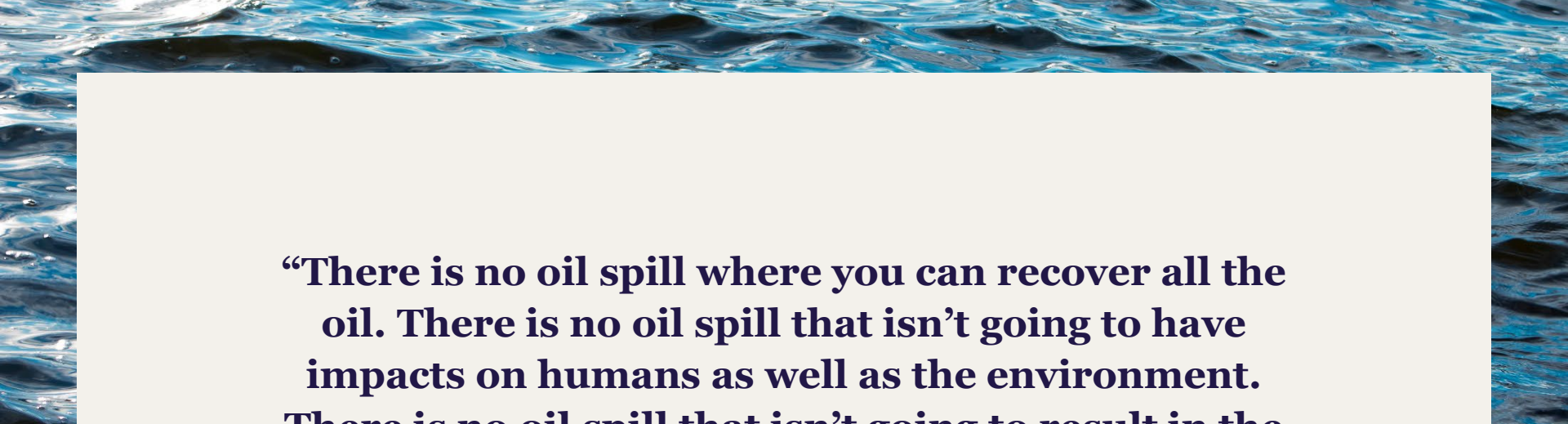
What is the change you want to see?

What are the current barriers?

How can we overcome them?

Round-Robin Breakout Activity – Best practices, lessons learned, and areas of improvement structured along the oil spill timeline





**“There is no oil spill where you can recover all the oil. There is no oil spill that isn’t going to have impacts on humans as well as the environment. There is no oil spill that isn’t going to result in the kind of mental health issues and economic shocks that we’ve been talking about. The only answer is prevention.”**

**(Fran Ulmer**, former lieutenant governor of Alaska, 2010 BP *Deepwater Horizon* commission member, and Planning Committee member)

# Summary Issues from Workshop Participants



# Summary Issues

- Long-term Funding Needs
- Training the Next Generation
- Building Relationships & Trust
- Inclusive Preparedness & Response
- Establishing Transparent Communication
- Human Health Integration
- Cultural Responsiveness & Barriers
- Building a Safety Culture

# Long-term Funding Needs


Participants expressed interest in long-term funding (potentially from reallocation of the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund) for research and planning, especially around prevention, ecosystem monitoring, preparedness, resilience, community health, and communications.



# Training the Next Generation

Investing in training the next generation of oil spill scientists and responders to help minimize institutional knowledge loss.





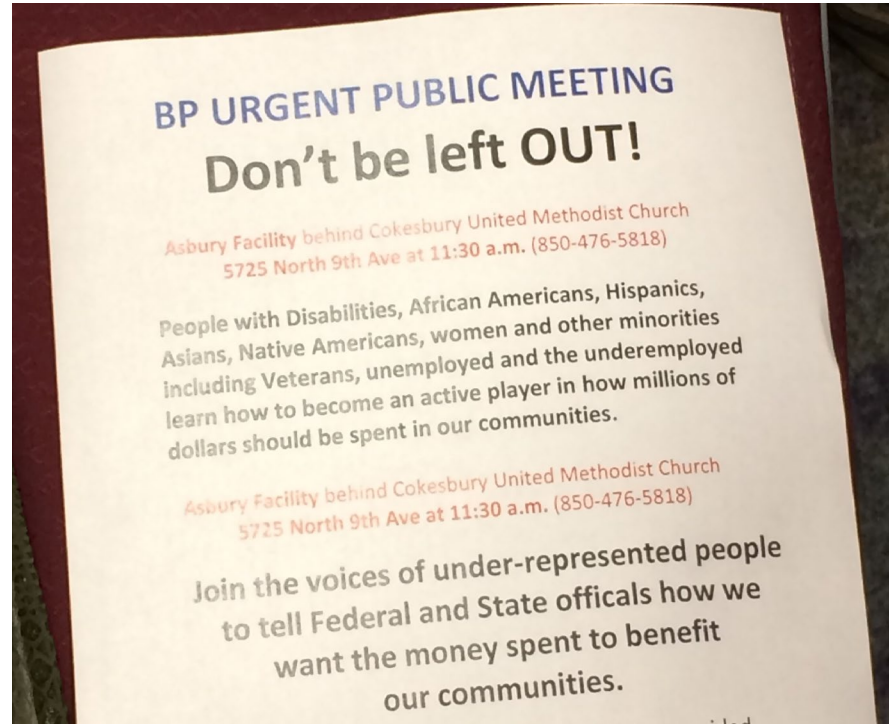
**“...the truth is we’re having recruiting issues in this space...I think just exposing the next generation of spill responders and academic researchers is something we really need to focus on to be ready if and when the next milestone event happens..”**

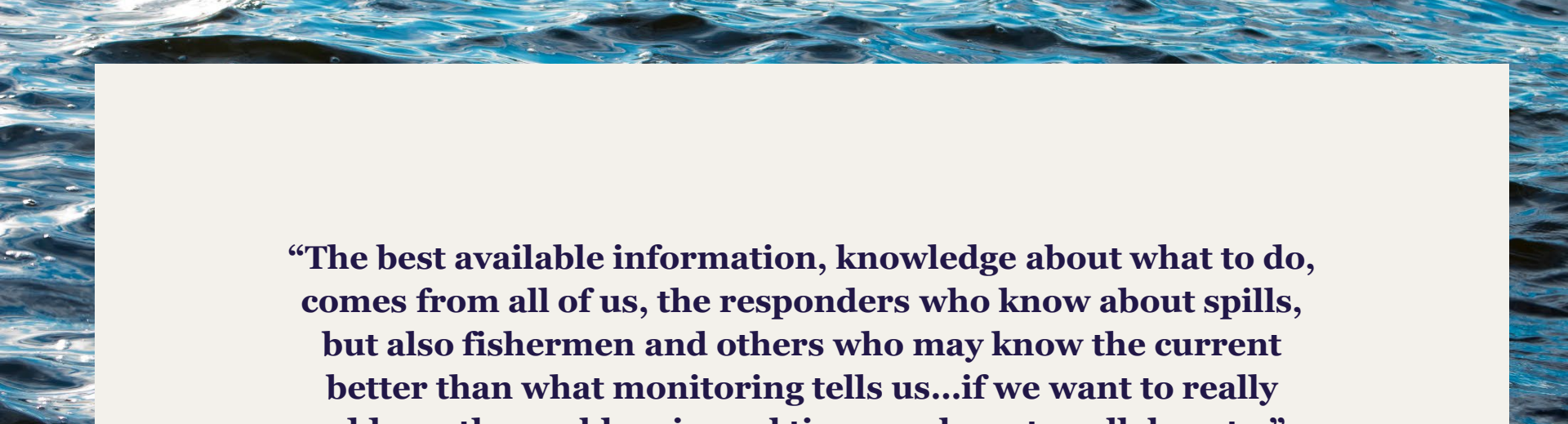
**(Tim Steffek, senior policy advisor at the American Petroleum Institute [API])**

# Building Relationships & Trust

Establishing and maintaining relationships between government representatives, responders, and researchers with local, trusted community leaders to actively engage communities in decision-making before, during, and after a spill.

*[Participatory service learning at community-based organizations and groups.]*





**“The best available information, knowledge about what to do, comes from all of us, the responders who know about spills, but also fishermen and others who may know the current better than what monitoring tells us...if we want to really address the problem in real time, we have to collaborate.”**

**(Ann Hayward Walker, SEA Consulting Group)**

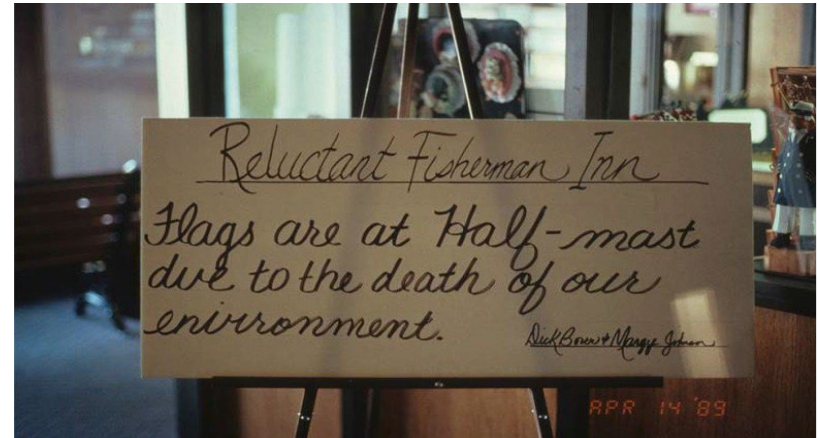
**“The time to make friends is before you need them.”**

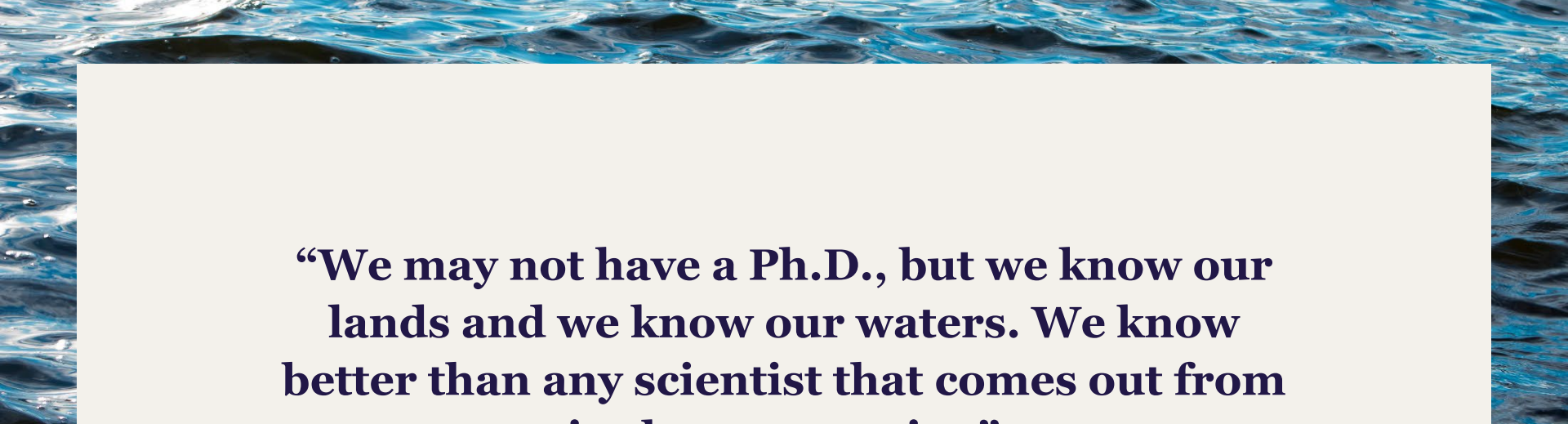
**(Tom Barrett, retired U.S. Coast Guard vice admiral and former president of Alyeska Pipeline Service Company)**

# Community-Centered Planning

Including community engagement and human health concerns as part of the Incident Command System, the National Response System, and the National Contingency Plan.

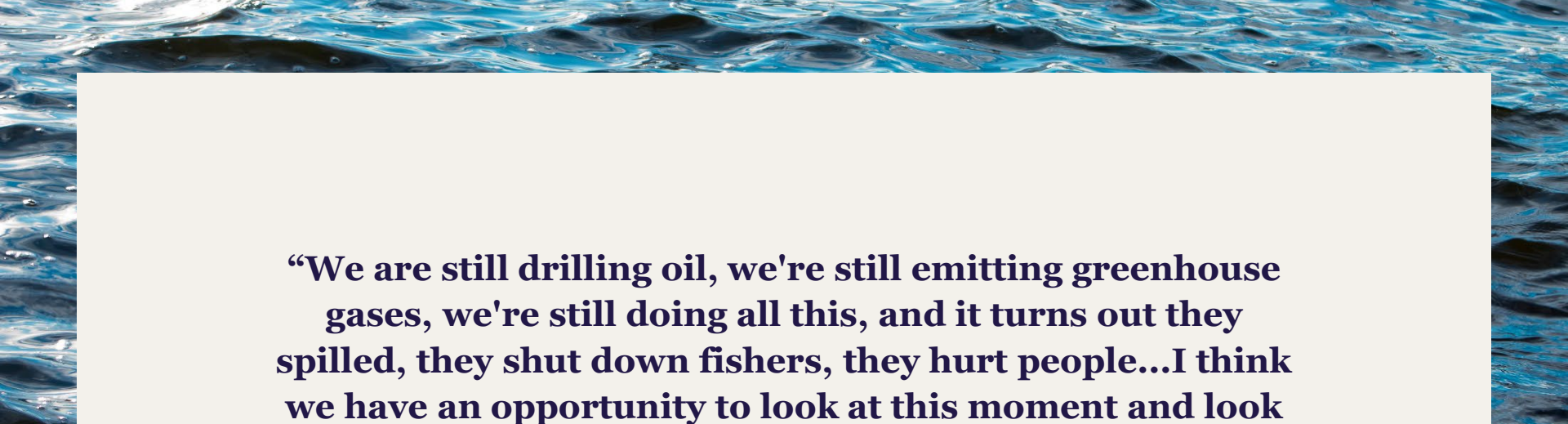
Inclusion of local community members (especially Indigenous groups), state and local agencies, academics, and industry representatives in preparedness, training, and response planning.





**“We may not have a Ph.D., but we know our  
lands and we know our waters. We know  
better than any scientist that comes out from  
in the community.”**

**(Theresa Dardar**, member of the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe and advocate  
for the Southern Gulf ecosystem and Louisiana’s coastal communities)



**“We are still drilling oil, we're still emitting greenhouse gases, we're still doing all this, and it turns out they spilled, they shut down fishers, they hurt people...I think we have an opportunity to look at this moment and look at the work we're doing and see each other as family, not as statistics or numbers of people that we have to reach out to, but as people that we legitimately care about.”**

**(Colette Pichon Battle, founder and co-executive director of Taproot Earth)**

# Community-Centered Planning, Cont'd

Structured mechanisms of local community engagement in the Southern Gulf and elsewhere, similar to the Regional Citizens' Advisory Councils in Alaska.





**“Those with the most to lose from an oil spill  
should have a seat at the table and a voice in  
decisions that impact safety.”**

**(Donna Schantz, executive director of the Prince William Sounds Regional Citizens’  
Advisory Council)**

# Establishing Transparent Communication

Communicating research and response information transparently and accessibly (i.e., language, medium, uncertainty, jargon, etc.) for community members and other interested parties.





**“How do you change and translate science to normal daily terminology to educate our folks and include the researchers?”**

**(Sandy Ha Nguyen, founder of Coastal Communities Consulting, Inc.  
in Southeast Louisiana)**

# Human Health Integration

Incorporation of human health concerns, including acute, chronic, and generational mental health, as well as the additional long-standing stressors experienced while navigating post-spill processes into the oil spill response, recovery, and preparedness processes.





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**“BP worried about wildlife and vegetation,  
but human health was never acknowledged,  
recognized, or talked about.”**

(Brenda Dardar Robichaux, member of the United Houma nation and Louisiana resident)

**“As we think about effective responses and planning for the future  
as it relates to mental and behavioral health, we have to think  
about these layers of intergenerational trauma that has happened  
and how that continues to impact us in our response  
moving forward.”**

(Tap Bui, co-executive director of Sông Community Development Corporation)

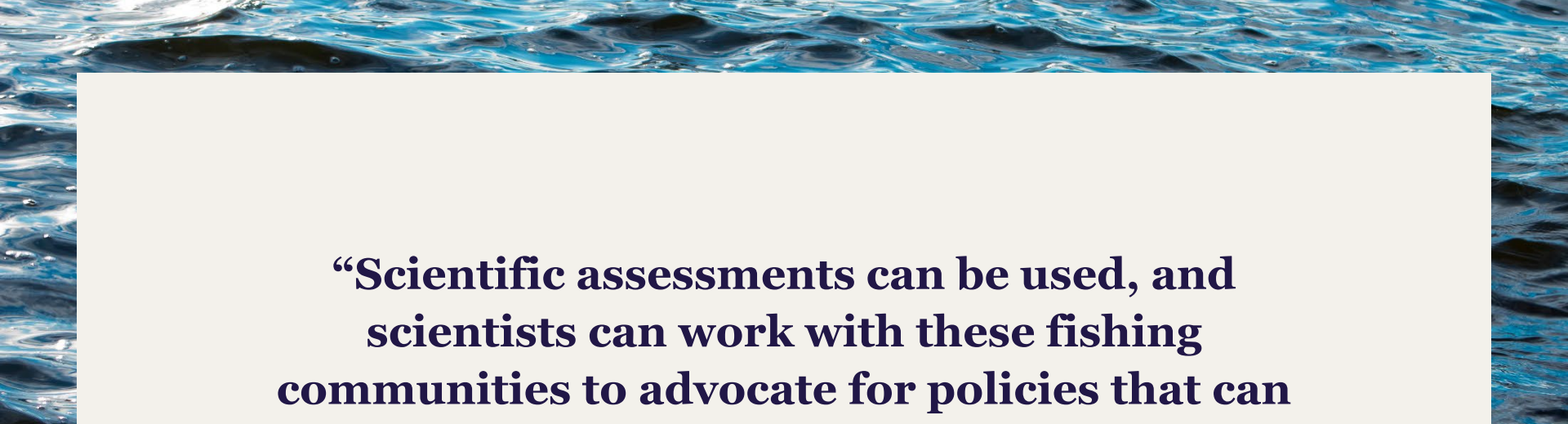
# Cultural Responsiveness & Barriers

Co-creating research objectives with communities and collaborating with other researchers to improve research relevance and efficacy.





## Chugach Regional Resources Commission Subsistence Memorial 2025



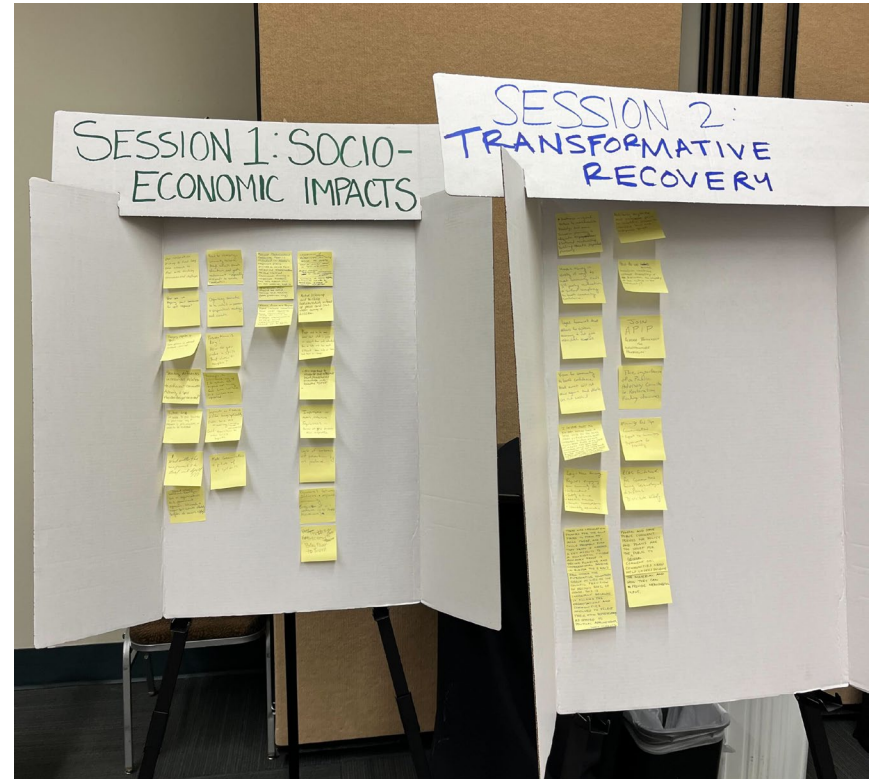
**“Scientific assessments can be used, and scientists can work with these fishing communities to advocate for policies that can actually make a change for them, and to ensure that the sustainable use of marine resources goes into the community.”**

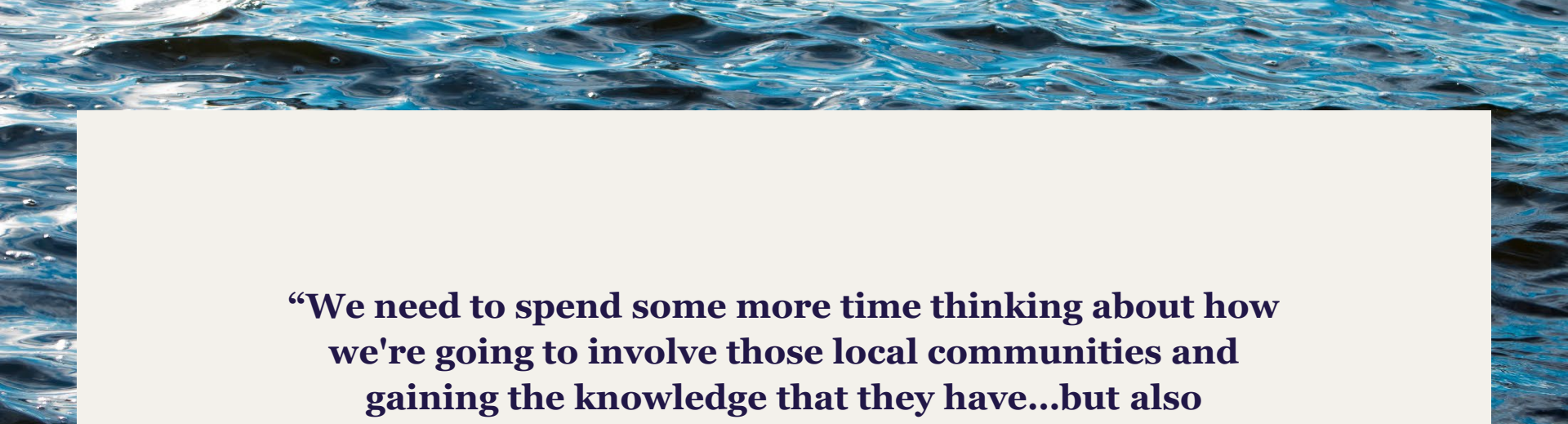
**(Jane Nguyen**, national branch manager and executive director of  
Boat People SOS Gulf Coast)

# Cultural Responsiveness & Barriers, Cont'd

Embedding cultural responsiveness in assessment and compensation practices for better community outcomes.

Overcoming structural barriers to local engagement (e.g., meeting times, locations, compensation, etc.) by allocating funds to community members and organizations.





**“We need to spend some more time thinking about how we're going to involve those local communities and gaining the knowledge that they have...but also indigenous communities.”**

(**Dave Kennedy**, commissioner for the U.S. Arctic Research Commission)

**“Building capacity and capability and having materials and knowledge in the communities is critical.”**

(**Sarah Allen**, toxicologist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA])

# Building a Safety Culture

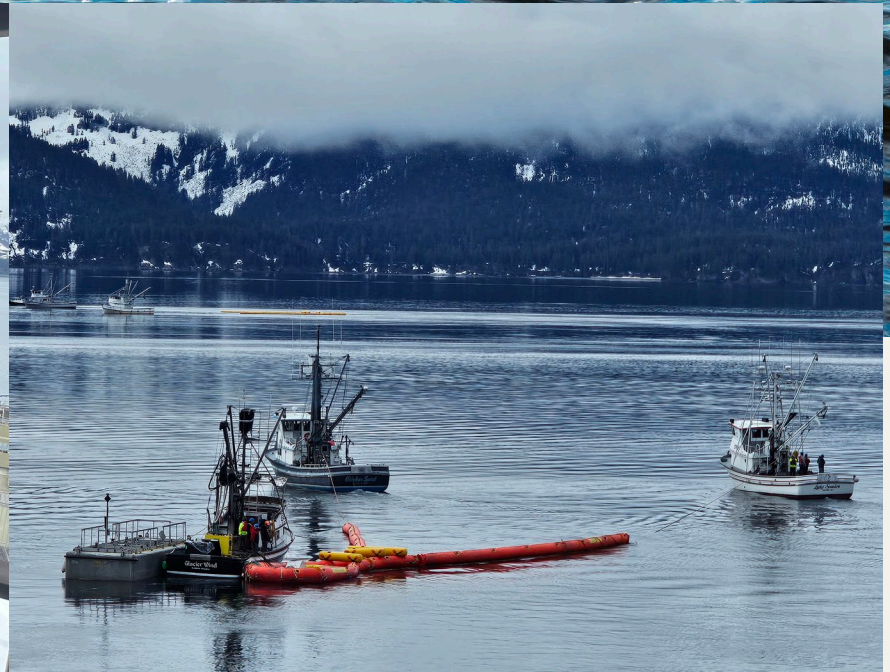
Participants expressed interest in having a company culture in industry that embraces safety to reduce human failure, oversights, and mistakes that could lead to an oil spill.



Exxon Valdez (1989); Photo: Charles E. "Bud" Ehler/NOAA

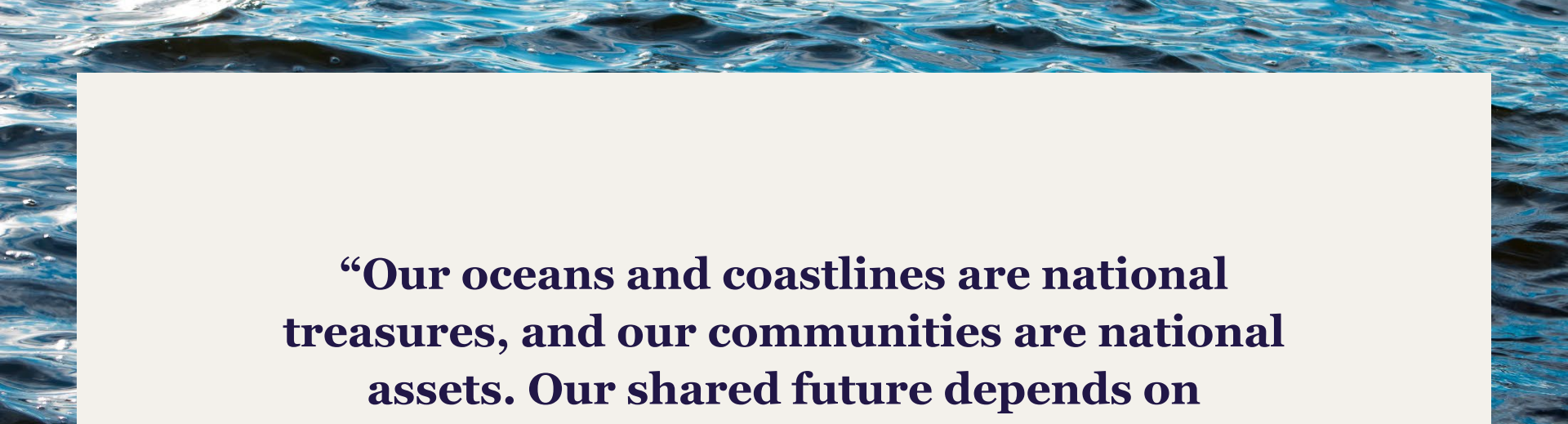


Deepwater Horizon (2010); Photo: NOAA



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**“Our oceans and coastlines are national treasures, and our communities are national assets. Our shared future depends on collective commitment to resilience that’s smarter, more just, and more prepared than ever before.”**

**(Kevin Sligh, former director of the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement [BSEE])**

# Moderated Discussion



# Next Generation Oil Spill Researchers: Community of Practice



# NEXT GENERATION OIL SPILL RESEARCHERS

*Next Generation Oil Spill Researchers* is a community of practice that brings together senior and early career researchers, decision-makers, and community leaders from across the Gulf region.

The goal is to **learn lessons from past spills** and to **look forward** to help **ready a new generation** to study the human, environmental, and economic impacts of a future spill of national significance in the Gulf.



# INTERACTIVE WEBINAR SERIES

This free, interactive webinar series is designed to equip interdisciplinary early-career researchers with greater knowledge on how to conduct rigorous, coordinated, and community-centered research in the wake of an oil spill. Participants will be engaged and encouraged to:

- **Understand** ethical, logistical, and safety considerations for oil spill focused research that commences outside emergency operations;
- **Collaborate** with Gulf-based partners and other experts to promote community-centered research that benefits people and credits local partners;
- **Design and implement** interdisciplinary, community-informed studies; and
- **Share** valuable data and findings with key audiences and partners.

# INTERACTIVE WEBINAR SERIES

Session	Date	Time
<b>Session 1: Next Generation Oil Spill Researchers Kickoff</b>	Thursday, September 17, 2026	1:00 to 2:00 p.m. C.T. / 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. M.T.
<b>Session 2: Studying the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill</b>	Thursday, October 8, 2026	1:00 to 2:30 p.m. C.T. / 12:00 to 1:30 p.m. M.T.
<b>Session 3: Conducting Community-Grounded and Place-Based Research</b>	Thursday, November 12, 2026	1:00 to 2:30 p.m. C.T. / 12:00 to 1:30 p.m. M.T.
<b>Session 4: Reviewing Potential Challenges to Oil Spill Research</b>	Thursday, December 17, 2026	1:00 to 2:30 p.m. C.T. / 12:00 to 1:30 p.m. M.T.
<b>Session 5: Understanding Data Needs and Data Types for Post-Spill Research</b>	Thursday, February 11, 2027	1:00 to 2:30 p.m. C.T. / 12:00 to 1:30 p.m. M.T.
<b>Session 6: Designing and Carrying Out Interdisciplinary Disaster Research</b>	Thursday, March 11, 2027	1:00 to 2:30 p.m. C.T. / 12:00 to 1:30 p.m. M.T.
<b>Session 7: Science Communication in a Spill: Sharing Data and Findings</b>	Thursday, April 8, 2027	1:00 to 2:30 p.m. C.T. / 12:00 to 1:30 p.m. M.T.

# NETWORKING

Our LinkedIn Networking Group is designed to connect researchers and practitioners from a range of organizations, academic disciplines, and places. Join group to:

- **share** your knowledge and experiences;
- **find** mentorship and inspiration;
- **access** deep place-based expertise; and
- **build** lasting partnerships and research collaborations.

The screenshot shows the LinkedIn interface for a group named "Next Generation Oil Spill Researchers". The group is owned by Rachel Adams, PhD, MPH, and was created in October 2025. It is a public group with 4 members. The page features a navigation bar at the top with icons for Home, My Network, Jobs, Messaging, Notifications, and a profile icon. Below the navigation bar, there is a search bar and a group profile card for Rachel Adams. The main content area displays the group name, a cover image of an oil spill cleanup, and a "Set your group up for success" banner with a "Set up automatic approval" button. On the right side, there is an "Analytics" section showing 74 active members, 2 new members (100% increase), 0 posts, and 130 post views. The "Admins" section lists Rachel Adams, PhD.

# RESOURCES

A curated collection of resources provides an accessible way to learn about past research on the human, economic, and environmental impacts of major oil spills. The collection includes:

- an annotated bibliography of research on the Deepwater Horizon's human impacts
- suggested readings and resources to complement the Interactive Webinars
- other notable publications, datasets, tools, websites



# GULF CONGERENCE: PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP

**When:** May 4, 2026, from 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. CT

**What:** This enlightening session will feature emergency responders, industry representatives, researchers, and community leaders. Participants will learn more about what is needed to prepare for another spill of national significance and to explore potential opportunities for the next generation of oil spill research leaders.

**Where:** Mobile Convention Center, Mobile, AL



Questions? Contact:  
hazctr@colorado.edu



# THANK YOU



## Acknowledgements:

*The Next Generation Oil Spill Researchers Community of Practice is funded by the Gulf Research Program at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (Award #SCON-10001452). Opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations produced through this initiative are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Gulf Research Program or Natural Hazards Center.*

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NSF Award #1635593 and #1841338

# Audience Q&A



# Thank you!

## Interested in learning more?

The Proceedings of the Workshop Series, including a full account of the workshop sessions and the discussions that took place, is available to read for free online.



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## Gulf-Alaska Knowledge Exchange

Learning from the Legacy of Past Oil Spills

Convened October 8–9, 2024, December 10–11, 2024,  
and March 25–26, 2025



Proceedings of a Workshop Series