

Community engagement in Canada's eastern Arctic

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Since 2011, the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC) has carried out an active marine geological research program offshore Baffin Island, Nunavut. The research has been focused on understanding the offshore geological framework of the region and assessing marine geological hazards. As a federal agency, the GSC has a duty to consult and, where appropriate, accommodate when conducting research in regions that fall under Aboriginal or Treaty rights agreements. In the eastern Arctic, research licences are managed by the Nunavut Research Institute with the expectation that research results are presented directly to relevant communities. For the marine geology research in Baffin Bay, the GSC conducts annual community engagement tours to present research results, discuss new research activities, receive feedback on those activities, and adjust research plans based on that feedback.

As might be expected with work in Canada's Arctic, the researchers face significant logistical challenges in coordinating this type of stakeholder engagement, including but not limited to: (a) weather, (b) availability of accommodations, (c) availability of key stakeholder groups, (d) a language barrier that necessitates the arrangement of oral and written translation services, and e) raising awareness of public meetings. Perhaps the most important challenge is gauging the success of the engagement. Despite these challenges, the experience has been highly rewarding for the researchers. The opportunity to communicate with communities and receive immediate feedback from stakeholders is vital to the success of the marine geological program.