Communicating and Engaging around Climate Change

Judy Anderson, Community Consultants
judy@community-consultants.com

- Identifying the tools to make the change you want.
- Matching your strategy and communication format to the outcomes you desire.
- Nonprofit brand, voice
- Stories of Change, Walkabout Messaging/Marketing

**Climate Readiness Scale**

- Not very ready
- Somewhat ready
- We are ready
- We are taking community action
- This is core to our conservation work

- Need to discuss how people feel about it, what change they are seeing and how it affects their lives.
- Match the format of your communication to the outcomes you desire.
- Provide science-based evidence, and tailor messages and barometers towards action.
- Communicate effectively.

**Community Consultants**

- We are discussing climate change impacts and mitigation options with board and staff.
- We are reaching out to organizations and businesses committed to climate action.
- We are working to leverage local projects and programs to reduce energy consumption.
- We are envisioning how to create a sustainable, low-carbon community. We are developing new partnerships, encouraging community action.

**Question:** How many of you are familiar with this publication?

- 2017 survey work
- Tips for communicating

Another source: SASSY MAPS: Yale Climate Communications with updated survey work

Tyler will be talking about this more in webinar #2

**How to Talk about Climate Change**

**Most of us think of ourselves as thinking creatures that feel, but we are actually feeling creatures that think.**

Neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor

Sea Change Strategies
Microcontent refers to the short but powerful pieces of writing you find in headlines, subject lines, captions, tweets, pre-text for social media, etc.

Storytelling refers to narratives about the impact you are making. It includes descriptive details, emotions, a story framework and is written with a purpose (to connect the reader to a key idea or challenge, with an associated solution). Donor-centered storytelling helps the reader understand the difference they are making.

Donor-centered/reader-centered writing includes newsletter, e-news, social media, outreach materials, appeals, and thank yous. It’s a way of framing the topic so as to make the reader/donor the catalyst of change. The nonprofit leads from behind and works to engage and connect the broader community. It often becomes part of the nonprofit’s brand.

Conversion writing is persuasive writing that motivates the reader to immediate action, including clicking, donating, joining, sending letters of support, sharing, registering, etc.

News writing is straightforward, factual, writing. Often involves a short story or two to illustrate the key point of the story. It focuses on what is considered newsworthy (time relevant). Can depict a story of change.
Poll: What writing style/tools are you using the most to convey climate change messages?

In addition to format, frequency, and topics...
Who is the right messenger to break through and build trust and compassion?

As philosopher Thomas Carlyle famously once said, while speech is silver, silence is gold.

Carlyle wrote in Sartor Resartus in 1836, "Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together."

Carlyle argued that too much speech, and by extension the noise of information overload, can suppress focused, productive thought.
Who are you trying to connect with?
What outcome do you want?

- What is the right message?
- Who is the right messenger?
- What do you want people to Feel, Do and/or Remember?
- How can you be welcoming and inclusive?
- How do you want people to be part of the solution?

The other 80 percent are skimming. They're looking briefly at your "skimming level," comprising:

- Photos and illustrations
- Headlines and decks
- Pull quotes / Jump-out Quotes
- Captions
- Bullet lists

https://trust.guidestar.org/blog/most-people-skim-few-read-deep
A donor said to me on the phone just today:

“It feels like you are really talking to me, instead of just about your organization, and I and others I know are feeling more interested and engaged with what you’re doing.”

—Ann Cole, E.D., Mendocino Land Trust
SUMMARY:
What’s your approach?

• What’s the point?
• What do you want the reader to Feel, Do, and/or Remember?
• What one or two things they could share with others?
• Who is the catalyst for change?
Summary in a Nutshell:
Strategy for Communicating to Create Change. Bring your community on this journey with you...

**BONDING**
over concerns and values that we genuinely share

**CONNECTING**
the dots between those values and how climate change affects us and things we already care about

**INSPIRING**
each other with positive, practical solutions we can engage in that are compatible with our values

— Katharine Hayhoe, Climate Scientist, Evangelical Christian, 2020

What’s one idea you could put into action?
Questions?

• Jeremy will be following up in a couple of days with a recording and “handouts” from today’s session.
• One of those resources will be a checklist that you can use to evaluate your climate outreach.

Next Steps
Next Webinar: 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 12.

• Tyler Kidder of the Onion Foundation will lead off on the important of social-emotional communication and lessons from the Maine Climate Table.

• We then plan to have a handful of land trusts critique one of their own climate outreach piece for the full group, based upon the tips and discussion we have had in these two webinars (what hit the mark, areas for improvement, and why).

• Catherine, Judy and Tyler may also provide tips.

• Please let Jeremy know if you’d be willing to share your piece during next week’s session or have questions: jgabrielson@mcht.org.

Homework for you before next week:

• Look back through your files for one fairly recent communication piece that touches on climate change. It could be a newsletter or newspaper article, Facebook post, news bulletin, a piece from your website, or even a donor letter.

• Be prepared to talk about it (what works, what could be improved, and why).