

Strategies for Environmental Communications



Recommendations from
Biodiversity Project

Who we are . . .

- Biodiversity Project advocates for restoration and protection of the environment by designing and implementing innovative communications strategies that build and motivate a broad constituency to protect biodiversity.
- In short, we want to motivate people to take action to protect our environmental resources.
- We have conducted three major public opinion studies on the Great Lakes and Great Lakes restoration.
- We developed the Great Lakes Forever campaign, the Great Lakes Town Hall website and the Healing Our Waters communication campaign strategy and materials.

Today's Presentation

- Values-based messaging and strategic communications
- Great Lakes public opinion research in the U.S.
- How we can help groups working on AOCs



Why Do We Need Strategic Communications?

- Fight Continues - Threats to our Great Lakes environment continue;
- Don't Have Public Will - We need to *build* our constituency and we need to motivate *action* if we are to succeed;
- Limited Resources - A coordinated strategy based on your goals and audience ensure the best use of limited resources.

What is Values-Based Communications?

- Based on target audience's values
- Uses appropriate language
 - Not jargony, invokes desired values / concerns
- Makes an emotional appeal
- Answers "Why should I care?"
- Informed by public opinion research

Understanding Your Audience is Critical

- The environmental community has relied primarily on scientific messages;
- Humans often act more from emotion than from rational thought
 - Many of the important decisions we make in life are based on emotions, including relationships, career choices, and where we choose to live);
- Emotional responses often stay with us longer than intellectual ones;

What are values?

- **Ideals**
 - Such as responsibility, respect for God, love of beauty.
- **Attitude filters.**
 - Help us make assessments on information that comes our way,
- **But not concerns.**
 - Current or chronic worries. Such as our health, loss of habitat, jobs, money, etc. Not the same as things we *believe*.



Primary American Values

- Responsibility to care for one's family
- Responsibility to care for oneself
- Personal liberty
- Work
- Spirituality
- Honesty/integrity
- Fairness/equality
- These clash and conflict all the time. Abortion debate pits spirituality against personal liberty. Responsibility to care for one's family on both sides!

Environmental Values

- When asked for “most important personal reason to care about the environment”
 - Responsibility to future generations
 - Nature is god’s creation
 - Desire for family to enjoy healthy environment
- Polled MUCH higher than protecting nature for nature’s sake

Biodiversity Project Great Lakes Public Opinion Research

What have we learned:

- Strong sense of pride and personal responsibility for protecting the lakes.
 - Great Lakes frame region's sense of place and perceived quality of life.
 - Great Lakes are a treasure that we use, and therefore need to protect.
- Lack of awareness about the threats to the lakes (especially polluted run-off and shoreline development).
- Lack of basic ecosystem fundamentals (especially related to groundwater and habitat protection).
- Not aware of personal actions/solutions.

Communications and AOC's

Create a Communications Strategy

- Identify your audience
- Figure out what you want them to know and do
- Think about where they get their information
- Think about who they trust (mayor, newspaper, neighbor, environmentalist)
- Create a message based on the research

Great Lakes Research and the AOCs

What to take away from the research:

- Use your audiences sense of pride and place to motivate them to take action
- Tell them the Great Lakes are in trouble! It is obvious to you, but many still do not understand.
- Remember, your audience doesn't know much about the ecology of the lakes, but learning more won't make them act.

Looking for more
information or a partner?

Contact Biodiversity Project

