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# Unanswered Questions from U.S. EPA State and Local Climate & Energy Webcast: The Role of Communication in Ensuring Sustained Behavior Change

December 11, 2013

*Questions in bold were asked during the webcast.*

## Questions for Liz Schlegal and Cara Pike

1. *Can you provide examples of some innovative or creative climate change outreach campaigns that have used particularly effective messages and frames?*

Liz Schlegal: This newsletter, however, has a great story about some different engagement strategies: <http://www.thegoodmancenter.com/resources/newsletters/>

## Questions for Liz Schlegal (Institute for Sustainable Communities)

1. *Do you have any other strategies you could share for using group /social pressure to encourage people to change their behavior? For instance carpooling rather than driving alone? Also, do you find people are more likely to change their behavior if there is a fee involved? For instance, would more people use a green fleet vehicle/bike if they pay for it and are paying into the system or will that actually decrease participation?*

I think really the way we look at that is about changing social norms and there needs to be that tension that Cara referenced. Shaming doesn't work long term. It does actually work short term so you can always take that into account. But it does make things a little challenging for people. On the community-based social marketing Web site, there are lots of examples that you can find and I can tweet some out if you look at the Institute for Sustainable Communities Twitter feed. I'll put some out there this afternoon of examples that are known in terms of changing social norms to change behavior. "Walk to School" has been one that has been very effective in communities. Anything you can do as financial incentives, even if they are small, tends to get people attention (both penalizing the behavior you do not want and rewarding the behavior you do). Money often talks.

2. *Can you speak on effective ways to track behaviors? How does communication fit in to behavior change? As a driver? Trigger? Motivator?*

Ideally, when you are tracking behaviors you are building a program with ways for people to track/ share their own behavior—because that is reinforcing. So if you are asking them to bike and not drive, you want to make the reporting—via the web, or via stickers or badges or what-have-you—part of the program upfront. There is a reinforcement loop that happens—maybe you've seen it on things like Facebook with apps like "MapMyRide" or "MapMyRun"—people post what they are doing, and their friends say, "Hey, great job!" It doesn't necessarily get the friend onto the bike right away, but it does offer positive feedback to the person who is doing something different. And that's all using communication tools—you can really use them in so

many ways—announcing the names of people who have engaged and what their success has been (all permission-based of course). But people, when they emotionally buy in, often come to appreciate public visibility.

There is a solar business here in Vermont, SunCommon, which does this very well—they do home tours, one-year-later check-ups, informational house parties—to get people comfortable with the idea of going solar for electricity. The people who were the “early adopters” become known throughout their community as solar leaders—and the folks at SunCommon announce how each town is doing. So there are a lot of references to “everybody’s doing it” that get the message across, making this normal behavior and not “different.”

3. *In addition to Community Based Social Marketing, are there others, especially universities, doing research around the effectiveness of particular strategies and interventions?*

Yale’s Climate Change Communications Project has some great resources about how to talk about this: <http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/>

Berkeley Lab is invaluable; they have very useful articles, resources and presentations—both from the academic and field-tested end of things, e.g., <http://newscenter.lbl.gov/feature-stories/2013/01/29/the-human-side-of-the-energy-equation/>

While I don’t have a comprehensive list of universities and who is doing what, there is a *lot* happening out there. Some of it is topic specific (how to get people to move to renewables, or recycle more, or drive less) and some is more broadly about communications, behavior change, human decision-making etc. It’s actually a fascinating time to be studying human behavior.

Partnering with universities is really useful—they can “ride along” on your project, provide resources, especially in the data gathering and evaluation end, and help you make sense of what’s happening with your audience and what you are seeing. I highly recommend it!

4. *Your strategies seemed to be focused on changing the behaviors of individuals. Problems like climate change are much bigger than individuals, our infrastructure, culture, politics, economy are all set up to consume fossil fuels. Until we change the big picture causes, individual behavior will likely be of limited effectiveness. Any thoughts on how to get at the bigger picture causes?*

Primarily, we need to change the behavior of human individuals. Humans collectively organize into institutions, and they too need behavior change, as you point out. It happens in a number of ways—by breaking down barriers to action; by providing citizen pressure for action; and by providing decision-makers with the data they need to make decisions. At ISC, we are working with a number of cities and regions, because they are sometimes able to move a little more swiftly than many national governments on taking action; we work with local leaders to help

them understand the institutional barriers to action, and understand how to build the case for local change.

As we look over the past 30 years on climate, it's clear that big institutions will need to catch up with the citizens on the forefront. We know that people are capable of pushing their institutions, governments, cultures, and communities to make positive change happen. It's important for those of us focused on addressing the climate challenges to highlight the many positive things that are happening around the world—there are many communities taking action, and we can't reach a positive tipping point if people are not aware of what's possible.

It may be that adaptation—dealing with what's actually happening in terms of extreme weather and increased risks to life and infrastructure—will drive change faster than we have heretofore seen. We are certainly seeing that in some areas of the US and in the world. When people realize that their infrastructure will not be resilient to climate impacts, it does change how they feel about focusing on low-carbon alternatives. All of a sudden, mitigation and GHG reduction becomes less abstract and more personal. Great question!

#### Questions for Cara Pike (The Resource Innovation Group)

1. *Would you be able to clarify some strategies on how to express facts? The participant understands that knowledge does not equal behavior change, but also that people need to understand what's going on...*

Yes. And I do think it's both. And you really need to think about how to embed your facts in the story. One model that I think is very helpful is the role of public narrative in social change which is the model from Marshall Ganz at Harvard. And it's basically where you are creating a narrative that includes who you are and what your background is with the sort of urgent issue that you want to put forth to people and also the challenge, choice, and opportunities. So it's operationalizing that framework.

It is a different way of communicating; it is more of a values-based way. It can feel awkward. But what I found is that the more you try it on, the more it becomes very, very comfortable. So an example of actually applying that is, we were advising the Oregon Global Warming Commission on the rollout of their road map for implementing the climate plans to meet the carbon reduction goals. And the presentation that was being put together was very technical and science-based (what the projections were for climate and what not).

But we coached the commissioner to embed that in a story of who he was and why he had decided to chair the commission. And when he looked at the data, and at what it make him feel as a citizen of Oregon and as a grandfather and a father and what not, and that ended up working quite well. I think the other thing, though, is that stories and narrative is a lot about it an exchange. It's not just coming up with message points. A lot of what I've heard that's working all across the country is when public outreach sessions are designed to still have sort of the expert presentation kicking things off set within a narrative structure.

But where it's really a dialogue-based exchange and where as quickly as possible you're trying to break the conversation down into exchanges with stakeholders or community members amongst themselves because having a discussion with a sort of peer or fellow resident is a very different conversation than challenging an expert.

So that's another technique that a lot of people are using. There are a lot of resources around deliberative dialogue that you can find online on ways to do this. And there is some really interesting research done by World Resources Institute and Union of Concerned Scientists using this kind of peer-to-peer dialogue model for engaging citizens in conversations about sea level rise. That worked extremely well because it was more story- and dialogue-based and it got people around the arguing about the science. Hopefully that will help to look at (Marshall Ganz) public narrative work. Some of that is available on our Web site. Some of these deliberative dialogue models are also being used in community outreach.

The WWF Earth Hour City Challenge and ICLEI's Resilient America are both good examples of applying a climate preparation frame focused on responding to impacts and emphasizing solutions. There is a UN Foundation research report available on Climate Access that highlights some of the artistic/cultural campaigns going on around the world. Sing for the Climate particularly stands out.

2. *What motivates people to want to change their behavior and how does communication play a role in tapping into this motivation?*

People are typically motivated to change when they feel a discomfort that comes from a growing gap between their values and the situation they find themselves in. This is often created by a negative disruption (i.e. an extreme weather event, health crisis, etc.) and how people respond is greatly dependent on their values, worldviews and identities with peer influence playing a huge role in influencing behavior change. Communication plays a role in motivating behavior by tapping people's values and shaping identities.

3. *During the panel discussion, you mention an analysis of 670 climate outreach campaigns. Can you provide a copy of this study or information on how we can access it?*

You can access the UN Foundation report referenced above at <http://www.climateaccess.org/resource/global-climate-change-global-online-media-analysis-united-nations-foundation>. Membership is required to access the report but it is free and government staff qualify for membership.

4. *Can you please give an example of using values, identities and world views to change behavior?*

Efforts to reduce household energy use provide a good example of using values to influence behavior. Companies such as OPower have tested approaches, such as comparing a household's energy use to others in the neighborhood as a way to motivate change because people care more

if they are not acting alone and there are social norms/pressures to uphold. Car sharing companies tap into social norms and values emerging around living car-free, streamlining your life, and being conscientious.

5. *Examples you have talked about: higher efficient furnace, solar panels, an electric vehicles - are options that are really not going to change anything when it comes to climate change and likely will cause other problems to crop up. The real solution to our problems are to end a growth based economy, and to power down - we need to stop using the amount of energy that we currently do. Focusing on the non-solutions "green" energy, etc. distracts people form the big causes and tells people our current way of life is okay, we just need to be greener. Any thoughts on this?*

I think many people are waking up to the fact that our current consumer-based lifestyles are unsustainable, and ultimately unfulfilling as well. I recently led six focus groups on climate solutions and there is an appetite for alternatives, including using less consumption, however, many cannot see a clear path to those alternatives being realized. That is where the role of individual behavior change is important and can lead to support for policy and systemic change because switching to electric vehicles or installing solar power can build a sense of efficacy - that making a shift is possible and within the purview of ordinary citizens to influence.

6. *The biggest hurdle I see are not Koch brothers, but environmental groups. Jealousy, ego greediness for money and notoriety, power hunger among and between local environmental groups that I see are the biggest hurdle to behavior change. Any suggestions?*

There is a lot of room for improvement around the way environmental groups communicate and coordinate their outreach efforts. That is part of what we are addressing through [www.climateaccess.org](http://www.climateaccess.org) so one suggestion is to join the conversation we are having in the network about this very issue. At the same time, over the past few years there has been an increase in coordination among environmental organizations, and more effort being placed on improving collective outreach capacity so I think that is a hopeful sign and something that the current era of network based communication allows for.

#### Questions for Kate Lilja (Salt Lake City)

1. *Were you able to measure what direct effect your project had on reducing PM2.5 emissions and if so how were you able to document that the reductions were actually due to your outreach and not due to other factors? In other words, were you able to decouple results from other programs?*

That's a question that we get a lot and all of the initiatives and agencies in the Salt Lake Valley continue to get that question. When we go to our Department of Air Quality to have that conversation, they always explain to us how complex our air shot is and how it's just not possible to quantify an effort like the Clear the Air Challenge with direct PM 2.5 reductions. And actually the Clear the Air Challenge generally runs in the summer when ozone is a problem for us.

So, we have had those conversations and we've had very long expert explanations as to why we can't make a direct correlation. Anecdotally, we are right on the hairline edge of compliance for ozone now. And our air quality continues to improve. And really when we've looked at the Utah Traffic counts and seen a significant decrease in traffic on our poor air quality days, we have to chuck it up to all of our combined efforts and what we're doing. We think that's an important part of that conversation: it's not just one person's effort that's reducing our pollution and changing our habits. We'd love to find some way to assess how much of it is a result of our communications efforts but we haven't yet been able to answer that question.

2. *What makes incentives, awards, and competitions effective tools for motivating behavior changes and providing recognition for changes made?*

Incentives are an effective strategy outlined in the Community-Based Social Marketing theory. More information is available at [www.cbsm.com](http://www.cbsm.com).

3. *Was there a 'mastermind' of the Clear the Air program? Also, where did the funding for the entire program come from?*

The Clear the Air Challenge was a collaborative effort, drawing on the experience and knowledge from our stakeholder group (the Air Quality Partners Team). We also worked with a very experienced external contractor on some aspects of program design and outreach.

First year funding was exclusively from Utah DOT. Years 2-4 were funded through the Climate Showcase Communities Grant with matching hours and funds from some community partners and local businesses.

4. *Do Salt Lake City and/or northern Utah have required yearly emissions tests for vehicles?*

Yes, that program is run by the Salt Lake County Health Department.

5. *How many staff does the Clean the Air campaign employ? And, how do you scale this down to smaller cities and still find success?*

One full time staff with another part time, seasonal intern.

6. *What kinds of resources were required (budget, number of staff, technical capacity, etc.)? What was the cost of your outreach and then the cost/mile in reduced driving?*

Our three-year grant was for \$358,000. This supported a full-time staff person and all aspects of program design, promotion, website development, collateral materials, advertising (limited) and analysis. Over the course of the program, we reduced over 11,000 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

7. *How did you promote and track views of your videos?*

We promoted our videos through our social media accounts and an electronic newsletter. We also utilized our stakeholders to help spread the word and drive traffic to the videos (via email).

8. *How did you decide to put your resources and time toward this particular campaign? Was it determined to be the most efficient way to reduce GHG emissions?*

Air quality was the primary focus of the Air Quality Partners Team (the group behind the initiative). Over 50% of the air pollution in the Salt Lake Valley comes from motor vehicles.