

Thurston-Mason Counties E3 Leadership Summit June 1, 2007

Results of Session 4: Bridging the Gap Non-formal Education: Adult Outreach

The Adult Outreach participants were asked to comment on a series of goals for environmental education in Washington. This summary of their responses reflects both comments generated by participants as a group and comments submitted in writing by individual participants.

There were four Adult Outreach groups participating in this session.

Meta Goal: For everyone to access life-long learning opportunities that foster their ability to live in a sustainable manner

Some of the groups offered very little or no feedback about the Meta Goal. Those that did indicated their support for the general idea, but thought the goal was not entirely adequate as stated.

Observations and concerns:

- The goal does not address the urgency of environmental problems and the immediate need for stewardship that actively benefits the earth. It should include more foundational ideas.
- *All* education should focus on teaching sustainability; sustainability should not be limited to the field of environmental education and informal teaching at home.

Suggestions:

- Emphasize active learning among young children and adults (as opposed to “students in formal settings”).
- Include “socio-economic status” in the rationale: “no matter their age, position, or socio-economic status.”
- Point to the cumulative impact of such lifelong learning on the individual and on the community.

Goal 1: Make EE opportunities readily accessible for all Mason and Thurston County residents.

Some participants explicitly agreed with this goal, but a number of the comments were ambiguous or suggested that some participants were uncertain.

Observations and concerns:

- It was unclear to some participants why utility providers were referenced in the goal's rationale, and some questioned whether services are really more limited in rural than in urban areas.
- The goal leaves out another limitation faced by many seniors and low-income adults: the cost of "being green." Many simply cannot afford it.

Suggestions:

- One participant suggested adding "vacation residents" to those addressed by the goal.
- Use cable t.v. and websites; make sure relevant websites are conveniently linked to each other (e.g. county websites).
- Expand public forums such as town hall meetings and workshops.

Goal 2: Reach a broader audience, including members of the public who do not consider themselves "green."

Most of the participants appeared to agree with this goal. Some qualifiers were added, but a number of the comments are suggestions for identifying and reaching a broader audience.

Observations and concerns:

- While it is important to target those who do not identify themselves as green, we should also continue to address—and increase the level of interest among—those who *do* classify themselves as green.
- It is necessary to identify and understand the audience that is being reached.
- Beware of making it sound like "us vs. them."

Suggestions:

- Use Gore's "Inconvenient Truth" as a model for reaching both students and adult audiences.
- Explore venues: marketplaces, central locations, activity centers.
- Revise the goal so that it includes the following: "*Identify and embrace shared values to reach a broader audience, including members of the public who do not consider themselves 'green.'*"
- Gather information of more general interest.
- Catch the interests of families by developing festivals.
- Use social marketing to design environmental education campaigns. Identify behaviors and ideas that need to change. Develop both economic and non-economic methods to motivate this change.
- Show individuals and families how environmental issues directly affect them.

- Make implementing sustainable behavior convenient. For example, make rain barrels available at local hardware stores.
- Make use of public broadcasting and lobby the popular media/news programs, such as King 5 health link, to present successful examples and models to the public.
- Sponsor a story or film contest; develop small book clubs and other discussion groups.
- Create educational films and similar productions to inform the public about problems, solutions, and successes in Washington State.
- Evaluate and address local economic realities.
- Engage new parents by offering training and providing green “care packages” containing clothing, toys, and organic foods. Create and facilitate parenting groups to support integration of environmental education into childrearing.
- Reach children through popular entertainment such as music and cartoons (refer to democracynow.org).

Goal 3: Better integrate EE programming and messages among providers to optimize appeal and effectiveness.

While a number of participants agreed with this goal, some thought it was unclear as stated and should be rephrased. They said they only understood it after reading the rationale.

Observations and concerns:

- Better, more consistent funding will be needed to achieve this.
- The term “education” is limiting and does not convey the breadth of activity, providers, venues, etc. More than formal educational practices are needed.
- A more strategic, better-networked, more collaborative approach is definitely required.
- As citizens educate themselves about “what groups do what,” it is important for agencies to remain consistent with their missions.
- Consistent staffing is a problem: many educational efforts depend on the passion of a single person. The passion and message can be lost if this person leaves. This may be linked to lack of funding.
- This is made more difficult by those who attend summits and other meetings with a view to promoting themselves.

Suggestions:

- Identify existing programs that already effectively provide this kind of integration. Look to them as illustrations or models.
- Revise the goal to read as follows: “Better integrate EE programming and messages among providers to optimize appeal, effectiveness, clarity, and accessibility.”

- Use social marketing to determine how to design and conduct effective programs. Develop a better understanding of existing barriers and beliefs. Make training and consulting resources available for this activity.
- Develop higher standards of practice for the community, and work to gain acceptance of those standards. Develop a certification system for adult education.

Goal 4: Build support for EE so that the public recognizes the value of taking part in EE activities and providers have access to adequate resources.

Some of the participants agreed, but a number thought the goal should focus ultimately on integration rather than on treating environmental education as something separate. That is, they thought environmental learning should be included in “all that we do.” Some participants considered political support and funding critical to achieving this goal. Two of the groups did not address this goal at all.

New Goals

- Begin education about environmental issues in school (K-12) to build a foundation for continuing environmental education once people leave the K-12 system. (Another participant said something similar, but for “K-20” rather than K-12.)
- Design outreach efforts to have measurable benefits.
- Contract with the media and marketing professionals to gain public awareness of environmental issues and resources. Turn to local companies to cater marketing to local audiences.
- Create a cycle in which funding for environmental education leads to an increased awareness of the value of environmental education, which in turn leads to more, sustained funding for environmental education.
- Integrate environmental education into everything, rather than treating it as a separate sphere.
- Identify commonalities between traditional enemies of EE and highlight shared desires and economic outcomes. Foster continued dialogue with those who do not consider themselves “green;” seek to identify and understand their concerns.
- Be a living example: grow your own food, use alternative transportation, consume less, and share.
- Balance education with enforcement, and apply both consistently. Persistent enforcement is a strong incentive to seek out education.

Additional Suggestions

- Create certification systems and label green products; support “green” stores for household products, clothing, home improvement products.....
- Charge for grocery bags; create a packaging surcharge.
- Develop programs/incentives for local record keeping (bird counts, bloom times, etc.)

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