

Thurston-Mason Counties E3 Leadership Summit June 1, 2007

Results of Session 4: Bridging the Gap Media and Communications

The Media/Communications 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.

Goal 1: Find ways to communicate the challenges of declining Sound health in ways that motivate rather than discourage.

While participants agreed with this goal, there was some concern that it would be difficult to formulate an effective approach along these lines. The chief difficulty seemed to be how to inspire the public to take action. Suggestions included:

- Addressing members of the public more directly (“the Sound needs *your* help” rather than “the Sound needs our help”).
- Making sure messaging conveys urgency.
- Presenting examples of environmental problems that were successfully and impressively solved.
- Using a presentation of bad, attention-getting news as an opportunity to showcase positive responses and related successes.

Additional, specific activities and strategies for meeting the goal included:

- Create a method for tracking household water use for specific activities (such as showers/baths) to raise awareness.
- Elevate social status of those who conserve; have media host a “greener than you” contest.

Goals 2 & 3: Showcase everyday actions that can help the environment. Show people how they can protect or restore disappearing Puget Sound habitat.

Participants focused primarily on goal 2. They agreed with this goal, and made the following suggestions for implementing it:

- Create lists of everyday activities and environmentally-friendly alternatives.

- Work with media to present a “living green” tip every day, highlighting what the “average citizen” can do to make a difference.
- Provide positive role models: For example, provide a financial reward or incentive for “greenest” suburban home.
- Present news stories about the environment that feature positive, beneficial activity.
- For both goals 2 and 3, it was suggested that a presentation of bad, attention-getting news could be used as an opportunity to showcase positive actions or elements.

Goal 4: Show people how they can reduce greenhouse emissions from cars, trucks, boats and other motorized equipment.

While this goal was seen as a good step, some participants thought the results of these efforts would prove too small to produce a positive environmental impact. One suggestion was to award companies for “working cleaner.”

Goal 5: Consider new approaches to media and messaging campaigns that give hope, show by example and attract viewers

Direct responses to this goal were minimal, but it does appear to have influenced some of the suggestions noted above for goals 1, 2, and 3. In addition, participants stressed:

- The importance of the content of what is being communicated (presumably in contrast to the method of communicating).
- The need to demonstrate the importance of small, individual contributions when discussing solutions to larger problems like global warming.
- The need for different media to dedicate space to environmental messaging campaigns.
- The importance of targeting the 9-21 age group.

Goal 6: Conduct a Washington Adult Environmental Literacy Survey every year to gauge the success of and to improve public education campaigns.

Response to this goal appears to have been mixed. While some comments suggest support, other participants were clearly skeptical. Their concerns focused on the difficulty of reaching a broad audience, the large numbers of surveys already being conducted on this issue, and the poor response rate to such a survey

New Goals

When asked to provide new goals, participants suggested the following:

- Create opportunities for people to reduce their individual impacts, large and small.
- Create recognized standards for classifications such as “sustainable” and “organic” and educate the public about these standards.
- Change the way people think about their own relationship to the environment to foster a more holistic point of view and more effective solutions to environmental problems. While accepting that “little steps” are important, the authors of this goal emphasize a need to change fundamentally the way people “treat our environment, occupy a space, move, consume and replenish.” They also stressed the need to educate journalists and other media providers along these lines and extend this message into schools.

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