

Thurston-Mason Counties E3 Leadership Summit June 1, 2007

Results of Session 4: Bridging the Gap Non-formal Education: Youth & Families

The Youth & Families 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 five Youth & Families groups participating in this session.

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

Most of the groups wanted to modify the Meta Goal. They made the following suggestions:

- Change the wording of the goal & rationale to suggest a change in what people *value*: People should have not only the ability to live in a sustainable manner, but should value such a lifestyle and its benefits.
- Change the wording of the last sentence in the rationale: “*Learning opportunities* should provide tools to citizens to live healthful, prosperous, sustainable lives, no matter their age or position.”
- Add “enjoy/appreciate.”
- Change the word “prosperous” to “meaningful.”
- Rather than think in terms of “accessing” opportunities, environmental education should be fully integrated into everyday life, including earth/environment-centered values and spirituality.
- The goal should include providing people with the tools to translate information into action, or “make meaningful changes.” People need the tools, skills, and resources to apply the knowledge they receive from environmental education.

Observations and concerns:

- The goals need to be attainable.
- Living in a sustainable manner may not be possible if the population continues to increase.

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

There was more discussion than outright agreement or disagreement with the goal, although some participants did agree that environmental education should ideally be extended to everyone. Some of the participants were unclear about the last sentence of the rationale—in

particular, the reference to “the limited service areas of utility providers.” They simply did not know what this meant. Some participants thought the goal should emphasize *quality* environmental education, easy access, *comprehensive* opportunities, and the link between continuous education and sustainable living.

Observations and concerns:

- Perhaps there is a better label than “environmental education”—it would be better if the phrasing were jargon-free.
- Delete the phrase “beyond the limited service areas of utility providers.”
- It is difficult to see the mechanism that will make this work. Utility companies cannot go beyond payment boundaries to extend EE outreach programs. Often, these boundaries end right outside of urban areas. Outreach programs cannot even go to schools that lay outside of the payment boundaries.
- Economics play a role in this.
- Other factors may contribute to limitations on access in rural areas. There may be less interest and support because there are fewer noticeable environmental impacts.

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

Most of the participants seemed to agree with the goal of reaching a broader audience. Many of them questioned the use of the term “green,” arguing that it is ill defined and that many people don’t know what it is, let alone whether they qualify. The term may also mean different things to different audiences, and so lead to confusion.

Observations and concerns:

- Language is critical to the way people perceive and react to environmental issues and education, and to the goals expressed here. Good marketing and cultural sensitivity are needed to reach all audiences.

Suggestions:

- Simplify the goal and define the terms.
- Consider using phrases like “environmentally literate” or “environmentally oriented” instead of “green.”
- In the rationale, change “everyone” to “each person” to make this more personal.
- Change the goal to: “Reach a broader audience, including members of the public who *have no knowledge of what ‘green’ is.*”
- Change the goal to: “Reach a broader, *multi-generational* audience....”
- Identify specific audiences and cater messages to them. Hire a marketing firm to help formulate strategies for reaching disinterested audiences.

- Capture a larger audience by collaborating with existing providers outside the traditional environmental education community. For example: health care providers, libraries, reading programs, sports, faith-based organizations, museums, etc. Invite local providers to environmental education programs; create cooperative partnerships (help each other with funding for activities).
- Environmental economics—and money saving practices in particular—might be a good way to interest people in sustainable practices. Many people will be engaged if they can see “what’s in it for them.” For example, interest landowners in stopping property damage.
- Develop a list of community events and other outreach opportunities, and commit to having a presence at such events. For example, send guest speakers to service organizations such as Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis.
- Find exciting ways to entice the public to meetings and EE activities. Plan fun activities to get children and adults involved, and include EE in already existing community events, such as circuses and county fairs. Create holiday activities for families and children, such as a “haunted hike” at Halloween, with skits, magic shows, lessons about plants and animals.
- Reach out to home school parents.
- Create/facilitate interactions between children and nature. For example, a park ranger might bring a baby duck to a school, and the children learn the basics about what it needs to survive. These lessons can then be related to other aspects of nature.
- Build environmental education into reading programs.
- Build communication avenues throughout the community, connecting those who are more active and involved with neighbors and friends who are less aware. Use students and interns in Ameri-corps to extend communication.
- Have Corrections participate in rehabilitation projects, building community gardens, maintaining and building interpretive centers, maintaining trails, restoring native plants, etc.
- Hold native plant workshops at senior centers.

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

While most of the participants appeared to recognize the need for such efforts, a number of them wanted to eliminate the word “integrate” and substitute terms like “coordinate” and “collaborate.” They thought integrate sounded like one large entity was envisioned; the participants thought there was greater value in coordinating efforts and forming partnerships, but maintaining the diverse, individual identities of the providers.

Observations and concerns:

- The terms “environmental” and “environmentalist” have negative connotations for many people, particularly in rural areas and business communities. A great deal of effort should be given to changing this image among these audiences. Language/terminology matters.
- Identify the providers. –How can this be effectively implemented in the non-formal education sector? Pursuing this goal will be like herding cats.
- What are the funding options and how do or will these options impact environmental programming and messages?

Suggestions:

- A common language and package of messages would be useful, and would facilitate clear communication with the audience(s).
- Create a strategic plan among providers, defining both scope and sequence of activities, to make it easier for agencies to work with and learn from one another.
- Create a central coordinator (as a funded position); a web-based clearinghouse would also be useful.
- Provide a source of education for the ‘educators;’ train the trainers to make sure environmental messages are clear and concise.
- Develop a list of community events and other outreach opportunities, and commit to having a presence at such events. For example, send guest speakers to service organizations such as Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis.

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.

Aside from suggested modifications to the wording, most of the discussion focused on the difficulties involved in building such support. Some participants agreed with the theory, but most were more inclined to point out the challenges.

Observations and concerns:

- Environmental education must compete with a lot of other demands on people’s time and resources.
- It is necessary to overcome the negative image “environmental” education/environmentalism has among many sectors of society.
- A core value must be instilled in the individual, organizations, and corporations that nature is worth protecting and restoring.
- People not only have to care, they have to speak out and actively support their beliefs.
- Are there communities/countries/cities that can be presented as role models?

- Developing an effective continuum of education should be a goal all on its own.

Suggestions:

- Add “long-term,” “ongoing,” or “consistent” to modify the word “access.” For example: “Build support for EE so that the public recognizes the value of taking part in EE activities and providers have *on-going* access to adequate resources.”
- Change the last sentence of the rationale to include the word “environmental” before education: “Organizations that recognize the benefit of *environmental* education...”
- Create networking so providers can share information about funding sources, and lend one another assistance in securing funding for projects, internships, etc.
- Rather than serving intensive programs, dedicate time and funding more broadly to reach more people.

New Goals

- Increase awareness and make it easier for people to locate environmental education activities in the community.
 - Create a central coordinator and web-based clearinghouse.
 - Explore different media to communicate opportunities: local newspapers, magazine inserts, skywriters, public t.v. channels, festivals and community events, strategically-placed flyers.
 - Develop a social marketing plan for the regional context. Seek out other collaborators and partners.

Additional Suggestions:

- Work with legislation/ policy makers to legislate funding or secure funding through the initiative process.
- Require corporations to include environmental protection as a corporate value.
- Provide incentives to businesses/individuals to engage in sustainable behavior (e.g. save money or avoid penalties by adopting sustainable behaviors).
- Provide an opportunity for the children and adults to express themselves. We are in the habit of ‘information in,’ but it’s important to listen to what they see, think, and feel.

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