Puget Sound Partnership
Communicator Network Survey Results

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Puget Sound Communicators Network

Survey Results

Background: The Puget Sound Partnership (“Partnership”) was formed by Governor Chris Gregoire in late 2005. She asked this public-private group to develop a 15-year plan to clean and protect Puget Sound, including its strong links to human health and the economy. Please see http://www.pugetsoundpartnership.org for details regarding the Partnership.

As part of the Public Involvement and Communication Strategy, the Partnership is exploring the feasibility of establishing a 12-county Educators and Communicators Network that will be an integral part of delivering a comprehensive communications and education campaign regarding Puget Sound.

The Puget Sound Communicators Survey is part of the initial scoping process and is synopsized below. A Puget Sound Educators survey and meeting were completed earlier in August 2006 as part of this strategy.

Methodology: 43 people from organizations that provide communications and outreach to Puget Sound citizens responded to the survey during August 2006. The online survey included 18 questions divided into the following categories:

**Organizational Profile**
- Contact information
- Time spent on Puget Sound environmental issues
- Subject matter focus
- Types of Communication tools and their reach/effectiveness

**Communication needs in Puget Sound**
- Communication objectives
- Barriers to achieving objectives
- What would improve communication?

**Interest in participating in a Puget Sound Partnership education and Outreach network**

I. **Organizational Attributes**

33 percent of the respondents were non-profit organizations, 21 percent county, 15 percent state and the remainder land trusts, trade associations and community groups.
II. Nature of Communication Work

Only 20 percent of the respondents spend all their time communicating about Puget Sound issues specifically. The largest percentage of respondents (48 percent) spend only a quarter of their time on Puget Sound issues in particular which underscores the need for easy to access Puget Sound-specific talking points, collateral and other tools.

Subject Matter Focus: The overwhelming majority of respondents focus on water quality, followed by habitat protection and habitat restoration (88 and 71 percent, respectively), nutrients and pathogens (67 percent), and toxic contamination and stormwater (54 percent each). This complements the Cocker Fennessy research which indicates Puget Sound residents are most concerned with water quality. Over 10,000 rivers and streams flow into Puget Sound, a fact that can help to reinforce the link between river water quality and Puget Sound health.
**Communication Tools:** A wide array of communication tools are used to message regarding Puget Sound. The top five were: (1) media outreach (79 percent); (2) organizational website postings; (3) print or html newsletters; (4) e-mail alerts and other pushed e-mail; and (5) direct mail. Relative to these tools, very little time or effort is spent on public service announcements (PSAs), radio and video programming.

**Objectives of Organization and its Communication:** The respondents rated building awareness, achieving long-term behavioral change and illustrating the connections between natural resources, human health and the economy are very important. These findings segue with the educator’s survey assessment and meeting which revealed a strong interest in social marketing and a more contextual, people-in-the-picture approach to messaging and education. Other communications objectives rated as very important were: (1) funding; (2) incentives; (3) identifying and rectifying gaps in research; (4) endangered species work and (5) conservation.

**Reach and Impact:** The largest audience is reached, not surprisingly, through **media**. 47 percent of the respondents reported reaching over 100,000 persons or more through this tool. Interestingly, PSAs and radio provide the next greatest reach compared to media, yet they are used sparingly. When asked whether the organization’s *indirect impact* was successful through media or outside organization’s sites and referrals, 36 percent responded they were successful, although 28 percent could not gauge their effectiveness.
III. Barriers

A barriers to “communications success” question was used because a barriers and drivers analysis has been very successful in social marketing in removing barriers to desired states of behavior or change. The results below illustrate the following top-rated barriers: (1) funding; (2) lack of staff to implement programs; (3) underfunded programs with mandates; (4) lack of coordination among organizations working on similar issues; (5) lack of research and/or funding for research; (6) discomfort by scientists, engineers or managers with simplified cause and effect arguments; and (7) lack of interest in the community.

A full 25 percent of the respondents indicated that **lack of interest in the community** was a barrier. This underscores the need to use relevant, vivid and enabling messages that illustrate the connections between Puget Sound as a natural resource and its inextricable links with human health, community and our regional economy. One respondent added another notable barrier:

“A lack of a consistent, focused message on problem, solution, action, reporting for Puget Sound, especially positive and horror stories, lack of effectively staffed communications positions in organizations.”
Greatest needs facing communication specialists working within organizations already working to protect Puget Sound are based on organizational, fiscal and tool availability and included: (1) mission-driven cooperative messaging; (2) funding targeted for messaging; (3) creating consistency between organizational “environmental” messages and business messages; (4) agreeing on common themes and sticking with them (emphasis added); (5) technology literacy; (6) the need to develop clear and compelling messages that raise public awareness and target specific behavior changes needed to decrease harmful impacts; (7) lack of support from local government agencies to proactively address stormwater (ed: note that a smaller percentage of respondents work on stormwater issues) and (8) training for researchers to “prepare suitable materials for the general public.” This latter comment supports better integration of communication expertise and training within natural resource agencies and other organizations.

IV. Capacity Building for a Communications Network

What is needed to build, support and maintain a communications network that will help the Partnership achieve a healthy Puget Sound community by 2020?

The responses to this survey question closely follow the educators survey and meeting results, and fall roughly into the following categories:

1. **Overarching political, policy and legal support**: Clear, consistent and coordinated public mandates in which existing laws are enforced and funded

2. **Funding**: Funding must be robust, continual, dedicated and coordinated between organizations and regionally

3. **Network Capacity**: Need for regular meetings, centralized access to tools and messages

4. **Partnerships**: Greater focus on private business partnerships. This is a recurrent theme among all survey and meeting respondents, with a continual emphasis on real estate, development, shoreline and tourism interests. Interest was also expressed in taking opportunities to use large-scale community events and underwater videography to bring the issues alive

5. **The Sustainability Context**: Support for illustrating the linkages and consequences between Puget Sound as a natural resource and our economy and health

Other tools or approaches that would help strengthen communication on Puget Sound issues includes funding, coordination for communicators, available collateral and materials advertising, social marketing research and training, and complementing existing business needs.
V. Interest in long-term effort to help the Puget Sound Partnership

A majority of the respondents are interested in coordinating to support a long-term Partnership effort and are most interested in: (1) receiving regular updates from the Partnership; (2) access to free or low-cost communications and education materials; and (3) training and coordination. 31 percent of the respondents did indicate they would be willing to provide professional communication leadership in the effort and 29 percent said they would carry out the Partnership’s messages in the course of their organization’s work.
In closing, one comment merits full recitation here and reflects the need for a much deeper, radical change in our values, world views and approach:

“I understand that it’s been discussed at the public forums that this issue is beyond social marketing on a grand scale. In order for the Puget Sound (and our community) to be healthy, we must change the way we live and the way we think about our relationship to the Puget Sound. "Band-aid" social marketing campaigns that promote simple tasks to accomplish will not solve our large-scale problems. Strong support from our federal, state and local governments, in addition to support from corporations, small businesses, NGOs and community members will be required to make real, long-term change. Fundamentally, this means a paradigm shift in our view of people and our relationship with the land by developing a stronger land and people ethic. We need a change in the way we live, a move away from "business as usual" to be more mindful about the products we purchase and consume, how much we consume and what we drive. However, I believe this isn't enough.

We also need to change our society's method of how we communicate with each other. We need to strengthen relationships across the board (politically, professionally, and personally), and move back to a world where honesty, integrity, dialogue and relationship are core values that drive new etiquettes (sic). We must develop these relationships to build a local, sustainable community (economically and environmentally) where mega-corporations are not able to control how our communities want to live. We have a lot to work on that's bigger than a simple "band-aid" social marketing or outreach approach.

Without taking these ideas seriously, and without outwardly expressing these ideas in an honest (but hopeful) manner, any effort to protect the Puget Sound in the long-run
will be a failure. Our outreach needs to penetrate these core ideas, but we need to do it in a way that's based on vision, a better future and stronger communities. Fear will not last long-term. We must focus our outreach on the vision, not the tools. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. didn't say "I have a plan." He talked about a dream where the world could be a better place to live for everyone. We must do the same if we are going to be effective. Yes, there was a plan, but the plan isn't what inspired people. Unless we can show that changing the way we live is going to be easier, better and make us happier and healthier, our efforts will not be accepted by the general public. As a result, I believe this communications network must buy into these ideas before a major outreach effort continues. An honest dialogue with all members of the network having the ability to express these fundamental problems initially, and then working through dialogue to find outreach solutions will keep our messages honest, consistent over time, and will likely have significantly more buy-in from the general public.”