

Beyond Inspiration: The CARE Roadmap for Audience Conservation Engagement

A Conservation Psychology Webinar

Question & Answer Summary

1. What about using environmental (heritage) interpretation to promote conservation?

Environmental/heritage interpretation, done properly, is fantastic at promoting caring and understanding, which is the underpinning of a conservation ethic and if well-entrenched, does influence behavior. However, single interpretive experience is very unlikely to change a person's behavior unless techniques that are known to directly influence behavior are also included. These include positive, empowering messaging promoting a very specific desirable action (for example celebrate with bubbles instead of balloons); communicating/depicting that action as the social norm; and making sure that action is easy to take. There are other techniques in that category (e.g. durable public pledges, cause-related incentives; recognition), and which ones you should use in a particular case depend on the situation. Sam Ham, in *Interpretation: Making a Difference On Purpose*, includes all of those behavior-influencing techniques as part of interpretation, to be used when the goal is to change the audience's actions. Others consider them social marketing techniques that have been integrated into interpretation. Whatever you call them, the key is to understand that when the goal is to promote action or a change in behavior, there's a particular set of tools that come into play, and the things one does to increase caring about nature or the environment and understanding of conservation issues are not sufficient to move people to take action.

2. How do we deep dive into finding and identifying barriers. Is data collection coming from surveys? If so, do you have any recommendations on survey development?

There are a variety of ways to identify barriers, and the best approach will depend on the circumstances. Survey research is one tool. You could also hold focus group sessions or conduct a simple preliminary pilot and then interview participants. It's often useful to combine a variety of techniques. Identification of barriers (and also of motivating techniques) is a form of social science research or audience research, so if you don't have the expertise in-house and don't have access to staff training you could hire a contractor who does social science research (they may be listed under audience research, visitor studies or program evaluation), approach a local university, or work with partners that have those skills on staff. There are also books and web resources, but it isn't my specialty so I can't offer specific recommendations for resources.



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3. Do you have tips for teachers who want to take this roadmap back to their schools to implement a conservation focused project?

It's difficult to answer this excellent question without knowing more about the intent. It depends on whether you're looking for suggestions to help a teacher to convince administrators to allow the project to be done, tips for getting other teachers interested, tips for making it feasible for the students, or something else. A few things that are universal. It's essential to integrate curriculum-aligned activities in the project -- but that's something educators are experts at, so I'll assume that's not the question. Conservation projects offer a wealth of opportunities for rich student engagement in a range of disciplines, from STEM to language and the arts. And it should be done in a way that is positive and empowering - not alarming - and of course, nonpartisan/nonpolitical. The key is to figure out what the motivators and barriers will be for whomever the audience is. If the goal is to get administrators or other teachers on board, you could start with a conversation, and get their input on what would make them feel comfortable or even excited about a conservation project. Since there are so many variables, you might want to start by finding out if conservation organizations or cultural institutions in the area (e.g. zoos, botanical gardens, nature centers) already have such programs for school groups, training for educators, or curriculum materials.

4. How did you identify the specific barriers influencing these particular actions, or evaluate which were most significant? (survey? focus group? other research?)

The Cincinnati Zoo started by contacting other organizations that had done gardening initiatives (e.g. organic gardening, pollinator gardens, nativescaping, milkweed for monarchs), and learned a lot about the elements of a successful campaign from those organizations' experiences. The idea of providing a "Zoo Approved" certification for suitable plants and promoting sellers of those plants on the Zoo's website came from conversations with area nurseries, and addressed the barrier of growers and sellers not wanting to lose revenues by stocking plants that the public wasn't interested in. From earlier education programs about pollinators the Zoo learned that not everyone wants lots of insects in their garden (a barrier), so for the Plant for Pollinators campaign they created messaging and experiences designed to cultivate appreciation, empathy and even affection for insects. Area educators helped them identify and address barriers and motivators for schools. Those are just a few examples. San Diego Zoo Global started with a postcard-signing campaign for their pilot because other organizations had done similar campaigns with positive results and their findings provided the groundwork. During the campaign, through exit surveys and observations of participation rates in different circumstances they learned what worked best. For example, people were more willing to sign physical cards than an iPad-based app, and card-signing stations offered at the end of an experience (the Bus Tour or Tram Tour) attracted a higher percentage of guests than standalone stations.



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5. Thank you-- great presentation! I'm curious about how to approach audiences that are very diverse in motivations, barriers, etc. Trying to reach everyone simultaneously can be too advanced for some, and too simplistic for others. Any suggestions for individualizing/targeting programs in this type of situation?

Visitors to your site are self-selected, so you know a few things about them: they appreciate the experiences you offer, and a lot of them care about/value wildlife and nature. You also know that they come for enjoyment and learning. That's a pretty solid starting point, and you'll be in good shape if you keep it fun and make it empowering -- generate optimism/hope, use social norming language, and make the messaging easy to remember and the actions easy to do. For some actions you may need to do research into motivators and barriers, and if you do, you can in the process identify differences in different audience segments. When you do programs that require pre-registration you can imbed a few questions in the registration that provide insights into the audiences' interests and plan accordingly. That same kind of questioning can be incorporated into post-visit surveys to differentiate your audiences' responses to guest experiences after the fact, and that information can be useful for planning and refining guest experiences. In a case where the audience is very specific, for example encouraging hunters to use non-lead ammunition, or fishers to recycle used fishing line, it's especially important to conduct research and do pilot studies, and I would also recommend involving someone who represents the target audience, who can help establish that essential learning relationship with the audience in order to determine how to align your goals, messaging and methods with their values, culture and interests.

6. How long do you suggest you stick with a campaign to assure it is successful and sticks?

That depends on the campaign. The duration is whatever is needed to advance the conservation goal. If the goal is to get guests to take a one-time action on site, like send a message to a legislator through a kiosk or postcard, the duration may be the time it takes to gather enough comments to convince a legislator that the public supports a particular policy or initiative. You may want to conduct a campaign in conjunction with an event, like Earth Day/Party for the Planet, in which case it can be just a weekend, or in conjunction with a temporary exhibit like Washed Ashore, in which case it might continue for a few months. If you're trying to achieve something bigger, like raise public awareness of the problem of unsustainably-sourced palm oil and get the food industry to commit to using only certified palm oil, you may want to keep a campaign going for years. Cincinnati Zoo does not have an end date in mind for Planting for Pollinators -- the more pollinator-friendly gardens, the better. Similarly, if you're trying to change public opinion about something and cultivate a new social norm, like making bubbles the preference for celebrations instead of balloons, you'll want to keep it going and work to expand the audience as much as possible, and do research along the way to measure impact on knowledge, attitudes and behavior.



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7. Can you recommend best books/resources on where to find out more about conservation psychology? Thank you for great presentation!

Conservation Psychology: Understanding and promoting human care for nature, by Susan Clayton and Gene Myers, 2nd Edition, John Wiley and Sons, 2015

Free-Choice Learning and the Environment, John Falk, Joe Heimlich and Susan Foutz editors, AltaMira Press, 2009

Community-Based Social Marketing website: www.cbsm.com. In addition to a wealth of case studies and a free downloadable primer, *Fostering Sustainable Behavior*, they publicize other webinars and trainings. I saw this one posted today, for example: https://cbsm.com/forum_posts/33758-free-webinar-april-12th-can-we-change-the-world-through-behavior-change

[Influencing Conservation Action: What Research Says About Environmental Literacy, Behavior, and Conservation Results | NAAEE](#)

The Ocean Project website: theoceanproject.org. (See especially sections on Opinion Research and Initiatives).

Zoos Victoria (see especially the section on campaigns in their conservation master plan: https://www.zoo.org.au/media/2183/48636_zoos-vic-wcs-master-plan-128pp_final.pdf). Zoos Victoria

