



ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

Tackling weeds with values and frames



Weeds, feral animals, pollution, and waste. How can we engage our communities about these complex topics? Often the challenge lies not with a lack of knowledge or even a lack of rules and regulations; it is in finding a way to communicate with people that motivates, engages and inspires action. Recent research on the role of values and frames reveals that effective and useful communication can be achieved by activating intrinsic values and engaging appropriate frames. This is good news for biodiversity managers who have struggled to gain community support on a range of challenging issues.

Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) held a capacity building workshop on ways to engage and activate the community on weed management. Some would say this is a far less appealing task than koala conservation, for example, yet it is a vitally important biodiversity management issue. The group heard about the latest research in this field as well as practical ways to apply this knowledge from Helen Christensen, Institute for Public Policy and Governance UTS, and Eleanor Glenn, Common Cause Australia.

How to design a community engagement process

Effective engagement encompasses a thorough design, planning and management sequence. In the design phase, it is essential to understand the project or issue context, scope out the project and understand the stakeholders involved and what influences them. Different strategies come into play depending on the existing level of interest in the topic and desired impact of the



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engagement, relevant to the issue. Creative strategies that actively increase community understanding and engagement are required for high impact/low interest issues like weed management. Planning for this level of engagement requires the commitment of secure leadership, knowing the sequence and methods to

apply, the resources required and the identification of relationships to build. The management phase encompasses identifying, monitoring and responding to change, plus evaluation, debrief, review and learning, which ultimately informs the next planning phase.

Biodiversity managers have had a tough time engaging the public on the “unglamorous” issues like weed invasion. Designing & delivering a well-planned engagement strategy that fosters community interest & support will bring the best long-term results.

An understanding of how values and frames can be applied to motivate change is an invaluable tool in community engagement.



Using values and frames to motivate change

Values are guiding principles we all share but tend to prioritise differently. Intrinsic values (love, creativity, unity with nature) are inherently rewarding to pursue and cluster into the broader value segments of universalism, benevolence and self-direction. **Intrinsic values are those held without reference to others and can be associated with greater environmental and social stewardship.** Extrinsic values such as wealth, success and social status are based on external validation and

Frames in practice

Frames are cognitive associations our brain has made over time through lived experience.

1. Framing is a choice. Any issue can be framed from multiple perspectives engaging a variety of different values.
2. Choose frames that activate intrinsic values & which help stakeholders reason about the issue from your perspective.
3. Avoid frames that activate extrinsic values or which lead your stakeholders to reason about the issue from your opponents' perspective.



rewards and fall into the broader value segments of power and achievement.

Most people tend to be intrinsically-motivated but assume others are extrinsically-motivated. This is known as the perception gap, and it can reduce the effectiveness and even willingness to develop public education campaigns on tough issues. In fact values work like muscles: the more you use them the more they are strengthened. Activating a particular value can influence how someone subsequently thinks and acts. This is known as **values priming**

Values in practice

1. The way you engage with people activates different values.
2. Aim to activate people's intrinsic values as these are associated with higher levels of pro-social & pro-environmental behaviours.
3. Aim to avoid activating people's extrinsic values: these tend to suppress pro-social and pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours.

and has two main effects: the **spillover effect** –activating one value also activates similar or associated values– and the **see saw effect**–activating

Values that motivate your community – People share a common set of values even if they prioritise these differently. Using language that evokes the intrinsic values represented in the universalism, benevolence and self-direction categories is most effective to engage the community on biodiversity issues like weed management.

 **UNIVERSALISM INTRINSIC**
UNDERSTANDING, APPRECIATION, TOLERANCE & PROTECTION FOR THE WELFARE OF ALL PEOPLE AND FOR NATURE.

 **BENEVOLENCE INTRINSIC**
PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE WELFARE OF PEOPLE WITH WHOM ONE IS IN FREQUENT PERSONAL CONTACT.

 **SELF-DIRECTION INTRINSIC**
INDEPENDENT THOUGHT & ACTION: CHOOSING, CREATING, EXPLORING.

 **STIMULATION EXTRINSIC**
EXCITEMENT, NOVELTY & CHALLENGE IN LIFE.

 **SECURITY EXTRINSIC**
SAFETY, HARMONY & STABILITY OF SOCIETY, OF RELATIONSHIPS & OF SELF.

 **TRADITION EXTRINSIC**
RESPECT, COMMITMENT ACCEPTANCE OF CUSTOMS & IDEAS THAT TRADITIONAL CULTURE OR RELIGION PROVIDE THE SELF.

 **CONFORMITY EXTRINSIC**
RESTRAINT OF ACTIONS, INCLINATIONS & IMPULSES LIKELY TO UPSET OR HARM OTHERS & VIOLATE SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS OR NORMS.

 **POWER EXTRINSIC**
SOCIAL STATUS & PRESTIGE, CONTROL OR DOMINANCE OVER PEOPLE & RESOURCES.

 **ACHIEVEMENT EXTRINSIC**
PERSONAL SUCCESS THROUGH DEMONSTRATING COMPETENCE ACCORDING TO SOCIAL STANDARDS.

 **HEDONISM EXTRINSIC**
PLEASURE & SENSUOUS GRATIFICATION FOR ONSELF.

Applying values and frames on weed control

To inspire community support, use language that activates intrinsic values.

✗ 'controlling weeds is hard work'	✓ 'we all benefit from healthy, diverse bushland'
✗ 'communities need to invest resources into weed control'	✓ 'native plants and animals thrive in healthy bushland'
✗ 'weeds cost the community millions of dollars each year'	✓ 'responsible communities care for bushland habitats'
✗ 'weeds are intractable'	✓ 'enhancing the environment benefits the whole community'
✗ 'let's attack weeds'	✓ 'caring for bushland near you is a great way to connect with nature and your community'

one value weakens opposing values. Context, particularly location, can also have an important role in determining which values guide our attitudes and behaviours at any one moment.

Frames are cognitive associations our brain has made over time through lived experience. We automatically filter any new experiences and ideas through our existing frames. Experiencing the same information through different frames can lead people to reach radically different conclusions because different frames activate different values. Most people can and do toggle through different frames to understand an issue but good communication programs 'own the frame' and convey the message in a manner that will inspire commitment and action. For example, weed

management can be communicated either through an intrinsic frame ('healthy native habitats nurture a vast range of native plants and animals') or an extrinsic one ('weeds cost the community millions of dollars each year'). Research shows appeals to intrinsic values are much more effective at engaging the community.

For further information

Designing community engagement processes

www.helenchristensen.com.au/resources

Applying values and frames to motivate change

www.commoncause.org.au

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