

SAGEWEST Communicators Workshop

2021 BREAKOUT SESSIONS: SUMMARY

Structure: To enable smaller group interactions, organizers used the ‘Breakout Rooms’ feature of Zoom. The 66 registrants were preassigned into groups of 7-9 participants, to maximize interaction with a diverse array of entities (in regards to geography and employer). A total of 3 breakout sessions were scheduled.

- Day 1 (8 groups): Two 15-minute sessions, the first following two professional development/informational sessions and the second after the final presentation of the day. Participants in these groups remained the same on Day 1, to allow continued discussions.
- Day 2 (7 groups): One 20-min breakout session with a new composition of members. Each group had a preassigned leader who facilitated conversations. Predetermined questions were provided but participants encouraged to take discussion in other directions, if they chose.

High level take-aways (highlights) are captured on pages 1-2. More in-depth compilation of comments and ideas shared during breakouts are captured on pages 3-8 (deeper dive).

I. HIGHLIGHTS

Day 1: Breakout Group #1 – Network Analyses & Polling (more info: page 3-4)

- Be more aware of how currently connected and what relationships we should pursue ... potential for partnerships/engagement/message amplification
- Lots of useful info in the polls – graphics help relay info internally/externally ([media kit](#)).
- Striking changes in public perceptions of climate change, fire, loss of habitat, pollution, loss of family farms/ranches. Fire as a gateway to climate engagement?
- Hard yet important to balance the encouragement of public lands visitation while understanding overuse leads to degradation, overcrowding/enjoyment, and potential COVID issues - especially in the era of population growth and new recreators.
- *Communication opportunity around recreation!* Seeing what people’s pain points are can better inform that balance and how as communicators we frame our messaging.
- Highlighted how we need to strategically be selecting, cultivating and engaging specific audiences. Products developed always depend on your target audience.
- Important to weave messages around more diversity within the 350 species (beyond grouse). “Everything is connected by sagebrush. Bison, mule deer, etc. all need those sagebrush corridors and we can use them to show how we’re all linked.”

Day 1: Breakout Group #2 – Assessing Communications (more info: pages 4-6)

Overarching:

- *You don’t need to hire a consultant!* There is so much we each can do to develop efficient communications strategies, and variety of assessment tools.
- Not a lot of time to do this kind of work. Think about the target audience and tweak assessments, and build in the time to evaluate (at the minimum, informal reflection).

- Be open to reaching new audiences (get out of your echo chamber) and focus assessment if those new directions are effective.
- Doing more thorough assessments needs buy-in at the organization leadership level to support for the value of evaluation. Building evaluation into project planning from the start. And have a champion to see the assessment through from beginning to end. Acknowledge that there will be many impacts that are hard to quantify.

We all want to info to improve our efforts - even if just a small “nugget”:

- Social influencer strategies may be a great way to convey information on the sagebrush ecosystem and species to better amplify education to new audiences. Who would be a great influencer for sagebrush country?
- Recent Backcountry Hunter & Anglers comms evaluations found that email is much more effective than social media for CTAs. Comparing the two showed 20-30 times more engagement with email vs the same calls/asks being posted on social.
- Pull and connection to visual. Social - short snippet videos headline to draw people to in. Make a 30-second “teaser” trailer for shorter attention spans or in advance official release, even for short videos – these get good engagement.
- Social - 2 emojis attract more viewers!
- Lots of good discussion re: A/B testing (scroll to pages 5-6)

Day 2: Breakout Group #3 – Engaging Diverse Audiences (more info: pages 6-8)

- Building Diverse Relationships:
 - Taking more time, building relationships before communicating.
 - Relationships require building trust and understanding what drives each partner to engage. Prioritize relationships over quick one-time communications.
 - Not going into relationships with an ask of “How can YOU help US?” but taking genuine interest – putting in time can have lasting effects.
 - Showing up to do the work and do the learning - not ask to be taught, but integrating work into these communities.
 - Thinking about what do people have in common – can bring people together as a starting point (i.e. NV Wildlife Federation doing wild game tasting event).
 - Be cognizant of not asking too much of diverse communities (limited capacity), instead grow breadth of connections
 - Western science is not the only respected form of knowledge.
 - Are diverse voices being given platforms they deserve? Appropriate formats used?
- Storytelling:
 - Listen to communities, let them tell their stories, then amplify their voices.
 - Variety is the spice of life! - need to diversify audiences, storytellers, as well as the platforms used (webinars, podcasts, etc.).
 - Need/desire to work toward focusing on kids/younger generation, cultivating the next generation of stewards (know it to love it, experience the country)
- What Leadership Should Know:
 - Pushing using diverse images in communications, but is it genuine (not “token”)?
 - Our organization isn’t diverse and need to enact change within ourselves before our communications can reflect this.
 - Need time to do due diligence to realize quality communications. It needs to be a top-down, whole-organization effort. Shift company culture.
- Challenges are time, capacity, money, and expertise as well as leadership hesitancy

II. DEEPER DIVER ... for those craving more details

Day 1: Breakout Group #1 – Polling & Network Analyses (DEEP DIVE!)

The first breakout session occurred post:

- Panel discussion on pandemic impacts to communications,
- Patrick Bixler's presentation on sagebrush network analyses, and
- Lori Weigel's presentation on the 2021 Conservation in the West polling results.

Network Analyses

- Will now looking into own org's databases and think about how they are subdivided
- Be more aware of how currently connected and what relationships we should pursue ... potential for partnerships/engagement/message amplification
- Generally create "media toolkit," which are sent out and then move on to next task but now wants to poke around to see how these partners are actually using these, check out others' social media pages (per network analyses) to see how it's being received.
- Can help in finding solutions to help minimize invasives, mitigate wildfire and serve all constituencies and engage them outside of computers/digital connections.
- Brought back about how to better share/who you're sharing with; how your network is growing. Share and gain info and access to bigger networks – where a few strategic partners can help go far and wide.
- Noticing an increase in contacts w/ folks between virtual and in person meetings.
- Thinking more about how to reach out to other organization comms staff to help hit their existing newsletters and other partner agencies.

Polling-Related

- Quite a few noted that they hadn't known about this survey before.
- Shared internally with colleagues but gets lost in email. Need to make more easily digestible vs. just sharing the link. Should have shared specific polling result graphics.
- Will take back to leadership to show geographic differences/similarities in on specific issues of importance. Will help facilitate conversations.
- Informative, helps target future communications around issues people that broad range of care about (shared values).
- People enjoy wildlife and clean water - weave that into messaging on issues
- Helps support/focus our messaging that wildlife are meaningful in their lives and we are communicating in a good way
- Helps see that our audience is in line with the rest of the state
- Help reach audiences on what they care about – thinking about what product to use to reach a particular audience (start with the audience!).
- Wants to create a product around the poll
- Uptick in responses around climate and wildlife corridors was eye opening.
- From agricultural perspective, polling results provide linkages to messaging about sustainable ranching and farming and conservation.
- *Recreation/Crowding:*
 - Understanding pain points can better inform balance of use vs. degradation etc
 - elevates concern about increased impacts on wildlife/landscape/experiences,
 - stories to emphasize responsible use (Leave No Trace), being good "shrubsteppers"

- flagged need for more funds for infrastructure to reduce impacts
- BLM Fire partnering with [Recreate Responsibly](#) to educate public on wildfire risks
- balancing urban vs. rural values and uses.
- lift a tidbit/quote for press releases etc. Pandemic has gotten people out more!
- flagged that we may want to focus more on recreation, helps me re-strategize
- need to make our lands more inclusive and welcoming
- on research end, it helps to know that people are interested in recreation and now have resource to share with others. We can also build on it and go deeper.
- *Wildfire:*
 - Interesting to see concern/interest re: fire, do more fire comms in sagebrush country
 - Communication opportunities exist moving forward in explaining difference between forest and rangeland fires, unique challenges
 - Striking things, 2011-2021, what had increased. Climate change, loss of habitat, pollution, loss of family farms/ranches. Fire has become a uniform concern. Fire is a gateway to climate engagement. In sage, 2 vectors on fire, climate and cheatgrass.
- Can incorporate into discussions in tribal community as some data overlaps. Can use it to demonstrate support in conservation in regards to different species, for example support in effort to shift from ag to land restoration (for buffalo).
- Can use overlapping important issues (water, wildlife corridors, recreation) to elevate the reason for sagebrush conservation. Same with using compelling imagery on these issues as part of storytelling/outreach.
- Reintroduction of buffalo, as a keystone species, has been a paradigm shift in thinking about ecological integrity of sagebrush country. For buffalo/bison to exist on a viable scale, we need to increase the number on the landscape that are purely for conservation (not meat/ag etc.) – have been doing comms/outreach related to this.
- Caution: it is easy to shape polls to give you the answer you are looking for. Polling expertise is an issue as polling increases as a tactic.
- Motivates the use of polls again as an internal tool to better understand/serve members
- Elevate differences between states – could that motivate behavior changes (or participation in conservation activities) through competition?
- Would be useful to have more specific message polling or platform usage to provide communications guidance

Day 1: Breakout Group #2– Assessing Communications (DEEP DIVE!)

The second breakout session occurred post Ashley Dayer's presentation on assessing communication efforts

Reactions/Next Steps:

- You DO NOT need to hire a consultant to do comms evaluation. There is so much we each can do to develop efficient communications strategies and use assessment tools.
- Recognize the value but concern over capacity and time constraints based on the approach presented by Ashley, as well as buy-in from leadership/management
- Going to share this info with leadership for support in doing this kind of work. Noted the value of having a champion for the assessment component of the project.
- Liked idea of focusing on purpose - *what* you're doing and *who* you're trying to reach. Good reminder to look back and determine if actually taking the course we should (what/who) and if we're being effective (evaluation component to comms strategies).

- Important to think about *why* we share what we're sharing. What is the benefit and goal for sharing a particular piece of information?
- Presentation made me realize it is valuable to put effort into communication strategy even when it is super local (intentional planning and assessing).
- The value of "measurable goals" – albeit can be hard to identify
- Noted how tempting it is to jump to the tools rather than plan critically.
- Importance of evaluations:
 - Agency has evaluations somewhat on a project basis. This was effective and now flagged that should implement more consistently.
 - Will consider doing surveys to all innovative grazing projects before start and 3 years in. Use to gauge understanding and what did/did not work
 - Flagged need to do a better job gaining info from social as accounts grow.
 - Felt there was a lot of great info here - proving there is a lot to do above and beyond surveying (i.e. tracking media mentions and social media tools) ... would like to add in new audits of current comms efforts/campaigns.
 - Served as a good reminder to check in, hit pause and reevaluate needs. Less to build their voice and to use info to pull up partners/transition to partners as the lead.
 - Evaluate outcomes around events and social media pushes
- Talking about broader issues could be something we focus on more. Doing more to gauge attitudes about sagebrush-related issues.
- Agency tends to go for surveys and measurement around nebulous goals of "awareness" and "support" - this gave some insight into how to plan for more actionable steps or input.
- Flagged the value of face-to-face conversations and strong relationships that allow fast, frank feedback. More qualitative, but also more immediate and actionable.

Tips/Nuggets on Effective Communications:

- A participant heard about a study that found using 2 emojis' increases open-rate! (here's a [link to what might be that research](#)) Can emojis tell a narrative on their own, even from an unlikely source?



- Recent evaluations have shown email much more effective than social media for Backcountry Hunters & Anglers. Comparison in the two showed 20-30x more engagement with email call to action vs the same calls/asks on social.
- Pictures of sage-grouse and flowers always draw more attention for an ag NGO.
- Response to emails (open rates etc) and calls to action provide some idea of impact.
- A/B testing discussions
 - Wild UT project did this with email subject lines
 - Need at least 400 in sample size to do that.

- Audubon Rockies did quick & dirty A/B testing using Facebook ads to answer the question: “Do people in urban and rural areas respond differently to cheatgrass messaging focused on wildlife vs. the economy?”
 - o *Set-up*: Digital ad “A” focused on wildlife, ad “B” focused on the economy. Both had same video and a link to [cheatgrass informational webpage](#).
 - o Wildlife-focused ads were slightly more cost-effective at generating 15-sec views for both audiences, but both audiences were more likely to click on the link in economy-focused ads.
 - o Slightly more cost-effective to generate 15-sec views among urban viewers, but rural viewers were significantly more likely to click.
 - o *Take-Away*: No evidence that urban and rural viewers respond differently to cheatgrass messaging focused on wildlife vs. the economy. The results indicate that, for both audiences, it is more cost-effective to focus on wildlife when trying to inform people, and on the economy when trying to inspire action.
- Social influencer strategies may be a great way to convey information on the ecosystem and species to better amplify education

Continuing Communication Challenges:

- How to get people to care about this ecosystem?
- Hard to measure if successful or not.
- Reaching the right audiences/impact assessment
 - Are we resonating with targeted groups/sending the right messages?
 - What are the obstacles to reaching specific audiences?
 - Note of caution: Do homework upfront about who the audience is. Assumptions might not be right. As an example, we initially went after wrong demographic ... once figured out who the right audience is, now having a hard time identifying the best channels to reach them.
 - Be prepared to tweak messaging as you work thru a campaign.
- Change over time is hard to gauge and foresee, as well as determine cause of change
- Unsure what tools are most effective for evaluation
- Knowing how to push for evaluation without being “annoying” to partners
- As a fed, struggle with inability to use surveys. Don’t know how to figure out how to track how many people did I reach, especially w hard copy materials.

Day 2: Breakout Group #3 – Engaging Diverse Audiences (DEEP DIVE!)

The third breakout session occurred post panel discussion on podcasting and Jason Baldes/Eastern Shoshone & Amy Dominguez/HECHO presentation on engaging more diverse audiences in communications

Some “Aha!” moments:

- Communication cannot come at the cost of relationship building.
- Circle thinking. Avoid linear thinking, of focusing on a specific wildlife species. Think holistically, how to culturally shape communications.
- Giving communications to a group - amplifying voice of marginalized groups.
- Carefully think about what do people have in common and build that into relationship cultivation. Spend time being genuine.

- Don't need to start from scratch, but can amplify these communities' messages and programs.
- "I learned what to consider, but also what I'm not considering [but should be]."
- Building relationships can be as simple as reaching out and inviting them personally to participate in our events – to approach with a genuine interest towards them as a person, to being purposefully inclusive.
- A strong reminder for the need to thoughtfully craft stories that have the voices you want to hear from, not just falling back into comfort zone. Taking the time to do it right and telling your bosses that you need the time.
- Not going into relationships with an ask of "How can YOU help US?"
- Meet these community leaders at their own public gathering/cultural celebrations

Building Diverse Relationships:

- Relationships require building trust and understanding what drives each partner to engage. Prioritize relationships over quick one-time communications.
- Showing up to do the work and do the learning - not ask to be taught, but integrating work into these communities.
- Thinking about what do people have in common – can bring people together as a starting point (i.e. NV Wildlife Federation doing wild game tasting event).
- Be cognizant of not asking too much of diverse communities (limited capacity), instead grow breadth of connections
- Sagebrush country, in comparison to other parts of the U.S., has generally low diversity. Some western cities do have more diversity but not necessarily strong connections to sagebrush. Challenge is working in areas of generally low diversity and figuring out how to access new communities in a respectful manner.
- Frustrated that tribal consultation gets buried and forgotten.
- Engage with those within the communities who are doing the grassroots level work.
- Go via the academic approach. Look for students that are interested in doing research that is culturally grounded. There's opportunities with students who don't really know where they want to go.

Storytelling:

- Words matter! Some terminology isn't well received and there may not be uniform agreement. Take time to understand.
- Make sure we have well-crafted messages for diverse audiences. This includes thinking about the tools and platforms used (podcasts, webinars, etc.).
- Listen to communities, let them tell their stories – let them lead communications, then amplify their voices.
- Tell story in broader sense and broader benefits, less singularly focused.
- Can diversify audiences we're reaching by better understanding what platforms they use ... though note that this can be hard to determine.
- Need/desire to work toward focusing on kids and the younger generation to cultivate awareness and next generation of conservationists.
- Experiencing sagebrush country is powerful – providing opportunities to engage in these landscapes with diverse communities
- Communication product ideas/resources?
 - Battling the cowboy myth. Undoing the anglocentric history of the West.

- Resource: connecting translation of science to www.idahogem3.org/spanish-translation-scientia
- Example of success?
 - Podcasts have been a useful format for getting information out by OR Dept of Fish & Wildlife ([Beaver State podcast](#))
 - BLM OR did a story that connected Hispanic culture to Buckaroo culture ([read it here](#)), was well received.

What Leadership Should Know:

- Pushing using diverse images in communications, but is it genuine (not “token”)?
- Potential partners look at the composition of our agency/organization, that plays a role in determining if we’re genuine.
- Our organization isn’t diverse and need to enact change within ourselves before our communications can reflect this.
 - Participants reported varying levels of effort by their employers to hire more diverse workforces
 - Some employers have committees created specifically to address equity and diversity needs. One participant is in such a committee and is given 8 hrs/month to work on diversity issues (self-directed).
- Workforce training needed to create systems that support BIPOC voices and inclusion.
- Empowering staff to build the relationships with diverse audiences/influencers needs to be a priority identified/supported by leadership.
 - One participant noted that even just 2 days/month to spend on relationship building would provide return value in communications.
 - Need time to do due diligence to realize quality communications.
- Support for diversity needs to be a top-down, whole-organization effort
- Requires a shift in company culture (no tolerance for intolerance, be proactive).
- Valuable to have material translated into Spanish, want support to create mutually beneficial relationship with someone to do this.

Efforts to Elevate Diversity Trainings/Understanding

- Social justice, in some areas, treated as a partisan issue. Where effort to improve outcomes and provide trainings perceived as “wasteful”, even when occurring in traditional neutral settings like academia.
- How are people dealing with the set-back and opportunities?
 - Learned to avoid bringing attention to efforts (for fear of negative consequences), to keep working on it, and be able to show positive impacts.’
 - Open discussions has helped. Single individuals (even those outside leadership or established committees) can help drive these forward.
 - Being positive. Success, even in small steps, helps. Times are changing.
 - Being humble. Helps to approach this with an understanding that we are going to be wrong sometimes and appreciate that we can learn from it.
 - One participant is building it into their strategic plan for genuine change. Goal to have diversity reflected in the board and staff (internally) as well as considered in their external programs/areas of focus (externally) ... held accountable.