This guide is meant to serve as a resource for advocates who would like to learn more about how to effectively communicate about climate change. Please note, this is a working document. This guide contains 8 tips on climate change communication, a section on engaging conservatives, and some additional resources/graphics. For tips 2-8, please keep in mind that how you implement them will depend on your audience, and all the tips might not apply. This document is interactive in nature, with sources linked in-text.

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Tips

[Note: Many of these tips were informed by this webinar, an overview of which is given in Graphic A]

1. Know Your Audience

"The last thing we should be trying to do is instill new values in people. That’s why it’s so important to listen to people, engage with them and walk a mile in their shoes." - Katharine Hayhoe, Texas Tech University

- Use empathy and research to imagine the kind of story that will best work for your audience. Speak to their values.
- There are “6 Americas” when it comes to public conceptions of climate change. To learn more about each segment and how to best communicate with each of them, go here:

![Image of 6 Americas chart]

2. Utilize a Trusted Messenger

- Make sure to pick a trusted messenger who understands the audience and who the audience can identify with. For example, Dr. Katharine Hayhoe speaks to Christian groups about CC as she herself is an evangelical Christian. [Follow link to learn more about she communicates with these groups.]
- Other trusted messengers may include:
  - NASA - 73% of Americans “trust science agencies like NASA for information about climate change”
  - Primary care doctors (49% of Americans trust); Family/friends (41% of Americans trust) [Source]
  - Religious leaders for faith communities (for example, Pope Francis, especially for Catholics)
- Having a social leader disseminate information or facilitating group conversations can magnify impact
- Highlight pro-environmental behaviors and norms among groups, especially among those your audience may look up to
3. Building Relationships is Key

- Genuine human connection and trust are at the core of inviting someone to consider a truth that is new to them.
- For example, former Republican Congressman Bob Inglis’ “change of heart” on climate change was especially influenced by a conversation he had with climate scientist Donald Manahan after a presentation Manahan gave on CC. They connected over a discussion of caring for their aging parents, and Inglis realized Manahan was someone he could trust, and therefore that he could trust what Manahan was telling him about climate change. [Full story here]

4. Focus on Key Messages

- One adage in communications is “simple messages, repeated often”
- To assist with concise writing (often good for the lay public), focus on using active voice and simple (not compound) sentences. (Compound sentences have two or more independent clauses, typically joined by a conjunction.)
  - For example “The health and well-being of our loved ones is impacted by climate change, and many of us can use this insight as motivation for acting on climate change.” -> “Climate change impacts our loved ones’ health and well-being. When we take action on climate change, we are fighting to keep our loved ones safe.”
- **Climate activists** are more likely than non-activists to have the characteristics listed below. If you can build buy-in on the first four beliefs, you can likely increase climate change activism.
  - Believe global warming is happening and human-caused;
  - Perceive global warming as a serious threat;
  - Believe that global warming is solvable;
  - Believe that their own and our collective actions can make a difference;
  - Serve as opinion leaders within their own social networks.
- **Communicating scientific consensus** and getting people to believe in it can do the following:
  - Act as a “gateway” belief to seeing climate change as happening, worrisome, and primarily human-caused.
    - One study found that the most effective way to communicate this was in the form of a pie chart (which was also branded with the American Association for the Advancement of Science’s (AAAS) logo.
    - Additionally, “inoculation” messages warning that some groups may try to dissuade people from believing that scientific consensus on CC exists can help reduce the negative effects of misinformation on belief in such consensus.
5. Make the Issue Local/Personal

- Humans are wired to think about the here and now, so present climate change that way – explain the linkages between climate change and imminent risks and issues people are already experiencing
  - Using lenses of health, economics/jobs, loss of valued places, and security, among others, is a way to move CC discussion from being cold and abstract to being more relatable
  - Be very mindful of your audience – Some people may get very overwhelmed/frightened by this information and deny CC as a result of their discomfort. Consider using these lenses to hook people emotionally and build their desire to learn more, and then pivot the conversation to what they can do to help them move out of despair and gain a sense of control.
    - Use these lenses to show how, when people fight climate change, they are fighting for what they have a right to, to improve their lives, and for those they love and care about.
- Good source on this: YouTube talk “Why I No Longer Care About Climate Change”
- Additional sources: 1, 2

6. Consider Alternative Communication Frameworks

- Numbers/logic/science alone do not work for everyone
  - Science can feel impersonal and abstract to people
  - For climate deniers (often conservatives), presenting additional scientific information can lead to increased polarization because it challenges their beliefs, and it may make them oppose climate change measures even more.
  - Choose which facts will be meaningful to your audience and make sure they are understandable to them, such as by using analogies
- Doom and gloom scenarios (communicating that this is a planetary emergency) works for less than 15% of the population [webinar]
- For fairly skeptical audiences, may want to focus on CC impacts over causes, perhaps avoiding certain terms (see more about this in Graphic C (p. 7) below)
- Consider framing the issue as a moral and/or spiritual one to resonate with those not previously engaged; make connection between how addressing climate change speaks to moral and/or spiritual tenets. An example of the efficacy of Pope Francis doing this can be found here.
- Consider using stories and art to convey your message (more info in tip 7)

7. The Power of Stories & Art

“No one ever made a decision because of a number. They need a story,” explains Dan Kahneman, who won the 2002 Nobel Prize in economics

“Numbers numb, stories sell” – Ed Maibach, director of George Mason’s Center for Climate Change Communication [These quotes originally found here]
• Use images and stories to make climate change real – Tip 5 speaks to this as well
  o Create a narrative
    ▪ Even if using numbers, tell the larger story behind those facts; speak to human values
    ▪ If talking about scientists, make sure to show their humanity and the humanity behind science
    ▪ Consider showcasing the experiences of individuals or groups that will speak to your audience
      • For those skeptical about CC, you can choose a member of their referent group who perhaps changed their mind about CC, and/or highlight how groups they resonate with are being impacted – a strong combination is when a member of their referent social group is impacted by climate change, switches to believing in it and seeing it as a problem, and begins taking action
  o This all serves to humanize the issue, deepens empathy, and increases memorability and motivation to respond
  o Consider balance of communicating impacts and ability to do something about them
• Art can help people feel empowered about CC, here is a resource that describes workshops (and how to host/conduct them) and art that artists and non-artists can do to communicate about CC
• Performance art can help make climate change impacts “vivid and accessible” [Zaval et al.] for people
• Good resource if want more examples of art related to CC, contains names of artists and descriptions of their work
• Go here to access style guides with info on creating CC communication, including color, font, photo, and logo ideas.

8. Discuss Positives, Solutions, & Benefits

  “Climate denialists get away with that narrative because we have not provided a compelling vision of the world that we want to live in and how we get there. People are hungry for that.” [Source]

  • If humans feel too overwhelmed by climate change, their ability to take action will be impaired, and they may even deny the issue exists.
    o Emphasize that there are things people can do about climate change, and give examples of actions that are feasible for your audience and align with their values. Consider discussing what the positive impact would look like of many people taking these actions.
    o Having your audience help create the solutions increases likelihood that they will be accepted and implemented.
  • Discuss how fighting climate change not only helps avoid adverse consequences, but is also a chance to build the kind of future we want; talk about how to get there.
  • There are various guidelines on how to do this, here are some:
    o 3 positives for every 1 negative message
• May even want to lead with a positive message; others have suggested to start with something that is serious/communicates the problem, then immediately pivot to a positive/mentioning how taking action can help
  • The U.N. Climate Summit Film is an excellent example of positive framing
  • Those who view themselves as having environmental self-efficacy, or being able to bring about positive environmental change, have greater motivation to act on climate solutions.
  • Here is a great list of actions people can take on climate change (4 broad categories – learning more and staying informed, reducing carbon emissions, becoming a citizen climate scientist, and taking political action).
  • Discussing resilience can help mitigate potential feelings of powerlessness; here are two sources [1, 2] with information on resilience.

Engaging Conservatives

• Appeal to conservative values:
  o The free market
    ▪ Transparency and competitiveness
    ▪ Elimination of subsidies, such as for oil, and monopolies, such as those held by utility companies, which would help make other options, like solar, more competitive
  o Energy independence/freedom/choice
  o Security concerns with having a centralized distribution system, which solar could help address
  o Appeal to group norms
    ▪ 72% of Republicans support increasing the use of clean energy
  o Being pro-consumer versus being anti-fossil fuel
  o Note: Many of the values referenced here even speak to members of the Tea Party
• Potential solutions to discuss include:
  o Discuss policy in terms of economic benefits versus climate change legislation – promoting good things versus stopping bad things
  o Clean/renewable energy (especially solar)
  o Benefits for future generations
  o Job creation
  o Tax reform
• Former Congressman Bob Inglis started a website and movement dedicated to engaging conservatives on climate change and garnering support for climate change solutions that align with conservative values.

[Sources used: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5]
Additional Resources/Graphics

[Graphic A] Overview of climate change communication steps; informed much of this
document, from CRED/ecoAmerica Connecting on Climate Guide Webinar; full guide here
Guide Overview

I. The Basics: Putting People First
   1. Put yourself in your audience's shoes
   2. Channel the power of groups

II. Crafting Your Message: Solutions, Impacts, Framing, and Imagery
    3. Emphasize solutions and benefits
    4. Bring climate impacts close to home
    5. Connect climate change to issues that matter to your audience

III. Overcoming Barriers: Science, Skepticism, and Uncertainty
     6. Use images and stories to make climate real
     7. Make climate science meaningful
     8. Acknowledge uncertainty, but show what you know
     9. Approach skepticism carefully

IV. Taking It to the Next Level: Creating the Conditions for Change
    10. Make behavior change easy

Center for Research on Environmental Decisions
Earth Institute | Columbia University
Words and phrases to use when discussing climate change; comes from a really excellent report that details the most effective ways to talk to Americans about climate change. They
segment the population into 3 groups: base, opposition, and persuadables. The following graphic comes from p. 10 of the report:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MORE EFFECTIVE...</th>
<th>LESS EFFECTIVE...</th>
<th>BECAUSE...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Damage to the climate</td>
<td>Climate change, climate crisis, climate risk, global warming</td>
<td>While base favors “climate change,” it feels politicized to others. “Damage” implies elective causation, where “risk” and “crisis” do not. “Damage” can be prevented, protected against.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create healthy and safe communities, protect our families’ and children’s health</td>
<td>Stop/mitigate/slow down climate change</td>
<td>Focusing on positive outcomes and personal benefits motivates voters. Eliminating the undesirable effects of climate change does not. Americans want solutions and a positive future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local/locally made clean energy, home-grown energy, clean energy, made right at home</td>
<td>Renewable energy, green energy, domestic energy</td>
<td>“Local” folds income generation, empowerment and local job creation into the climate agenda without direct assertion. Home-grown privileges wind and solar. “Clean” introduces health, and positions oil, coal, and gas as “dirty.” Domestic energy brings natural gas, fracking and domestic oil to mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better for families, our children, and future generations</td>
<td>Better for us, better for you</td>
<td>Future generations and families profiles thinking beyond self, builds inclusivity (not everyone has children), and activates collective agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good for [city or state], good for people</td>
<td>Good for the economy</td>
<td>National “economy” is too broad and abstract for voters; they are more activated on local communities and personal wellbeing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saves money and creates jobs</td>
<td>Creates jobs (on its own)</td>
<td>Job creation is not counterweight to present money worries. People are more cost sensitive than they are job sensitive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty fuels, out-of-date fuels, outdated fuels</td>
<td>Dirty energy, fossil fuel energy</td>
<td>“Energy” is a positive term; reserve it for good sources. Pair “dirty” with “fuel” to tie to oil, coal, and gas that need to be burned (health concerns). References to old vs. new work well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use, used dirty fuels</td>
<td>Rely on fossil fuels, relied on dirty energy</td>
<td>“Rely” implies blame on the audience for today’s problems, and makes them defensive versus open to solutions. “Use” is a more diffuse term, and empowers choice - to use clean energy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We need to create rules to curb pollution and to impose fines on businesses that pollute</td>
<td>Government taking steps to curb pollution</td>
<td>“Government” activates national control, which people find less effective. “Rules” and “fines” are tangible and thus seem more plausible. Creating rules empowers people to make change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-cost, reliable wind and solar power are here now, American innovation, America has done it before and can do it again</td>
<td>America is leading, America is the best country on earth</td>
<td>Assertions of primacy ring false. Reminders of past American-made innovations make new ones seem plausible, particularly when cited. These concepts invoke widely held values of hard work and ingenuity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>