

Communication and Outreach Working Group

Breakout Session – National Survey

How to We Better Communicate with an Increasingly Diverse Public?

Problem Statement – Stakeholders opinions about free-roaming equids and their management are not always based in science ; but more so shaped by their beliefs and values. Thus, science alone will not be enough to engage an increasingly diverse public in a meaningful dialogue to develop and implement management options to sustain healthy horses on healthy rangelands. But to begin addressing many of our more difficult problems regarding the management of free-roaming equids, we need to balance science with stakeholder opinions (e.g. how many people will support these actions?). Ignoring the diversity of opinions will only increase the divide.

One strategy used to educate and influence opinion is to share science and ideas through public and social media networks to include radio and television, and now frequently in Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

These communication and outreach strategies create a platform for sharing information that stakeholders can use and share in their discussion and interactions with others.

Today's Action

Based on the preliminary results of the national survey, what are some of the messages that can be developed to share with the public?

Consider identifying up to 3 messages you would like to share with public stakeholders regarding free-roaming equids and their management? For each, work within your group to address the following:

a. What are the beliefs and values that create dissention and distrust for this message?

b. How can we support this belief or value in a way that also supports reported desired management action?

What facts do we have that supports these values?

What mis-information needs to be address?

What are the flaws in logic that are causing what we feel is a problem?

c. Create a message that can be disseminated to foster support of the management action message

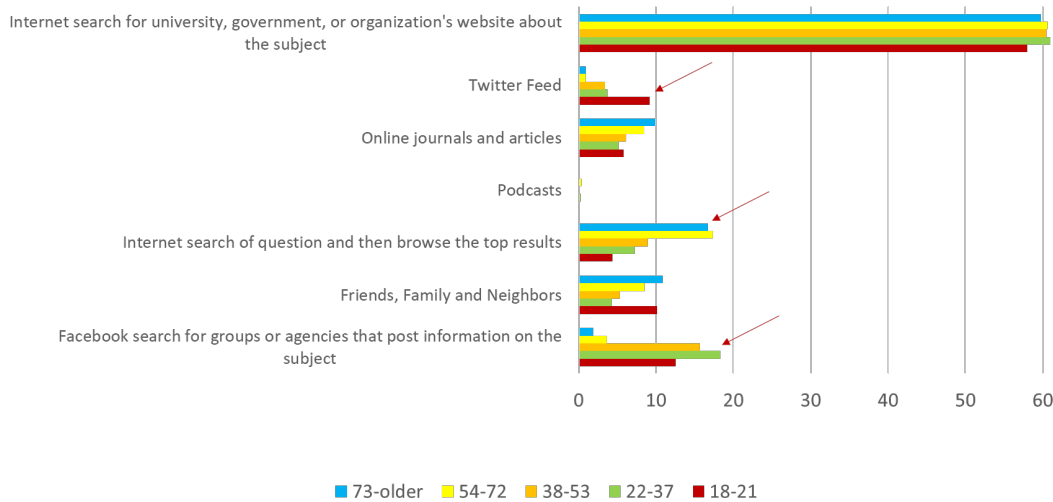
d. What venues could be used to spread this message?

e. Who will produce and send the message?

Expected Outcome – We will draft messaging for a several of the management options public stakeholders identified in the national survey regarding free-roaming equids and their management that balance science with public perceptions.

Some Information that might help with the activity

From the list below please select your primary source for factual information



What Makes Beliefs Strong

When you want to influence public opinion, the first challenge is to assess the strength of the beliefs that are supporting diverse opinions. Strong beliefs emerge from the following four sources:

1. *Repetition.* When people hear or see a belief repeated and reinforced by the selective presentation of facts, they believe it more strongly. The entire concept of advertising is based upon this tendency. For example, when I used to sell against IBM, a common obstacle was the widely-repeated belief that "nobody ever got fired for going with IBM."
2. *Employment.* When people feel that they MUST believe something in order to remain employed, they will cling to that belief in the face of a mountain of contrary facts. As Upton Sinclair famously said: "It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends upon his not understanding it."
3. *Security.* When people feel that their lives and the lives of their families are threatened, they glom onto any belief that makes them either feel more secure in the moment or which promises security in the future. An obvious example here, in my biased opinion, is

how many people feel safer when carrying a gun, despite a mountain of facts to the contrary.

4. *Identity*. The strongest all beliefs are those by which individuals define *who they are*. For example, if a person is raised in a highly religious culture, it's very difficult to change opinions that seem consistent with religion. The person will tend to interpret any attack on the religion (or the opinions based upon it) as a personal attack.

Rather than pushing against the other person's beliefs, and thus creating resistance, you show the other person how their beliefs actually support your viewpoint, rather than the viewpoint that they currently espouse. This is a three-step process:

1. *Validate the beliefs*. The opposite of "pressure creates resistance" is that "acceptance creates flexibility." Showing that you understand the other person's beliefs and accept them as valid (even if you don't 100% agree with them) causes the other person to relax, especially true if they were expecting you to attack them directly.
2. *Weaken the connections*. Lead the other person to see flaws in the logic that connects their belief to the conclusion or opinion that you'd like to change. This is best done through questions rather than statements, because questions lead the other person to hold forth from "center stage," while statements are likely to feel like an attack.
3. *Reconnect the beliefs*. Show how the other person's beliefs--when taken in total--more naturally lead to different conclusions or opinions than the ones they've previously reached. In other words, you never attempt to change the other person's beliefs; you merely show how a different conclusion better reflects those beliefs.