

Communications Primer Step 2: Determine Your Audience



With limited resources and time, you've got to focus on reaching the people who can actually change things – your target audience (not the “general public”).

In some instances, your target audience may be obvious and predetermined – for example, to prevent algae blooms on residential lakes, you'll need to reach shoreline homeowners.

But often, as is the case when shaping most public policy, you'll need to make a strategic decision about who to target. Should you target decision-

makers directly, or influence them via voters or key constituents (e.g. business owners, media figures, civic leaders, etc)? If you're targeting voters or key constituents, who is most likely to be sympathetic to your cause, readily motivated to act, most influential or easiest to reach? These are rarely questions with easy answers; many well-funded communications campaigns conduct public opinion research to identify receptive audiences – a luxury few grassroots organizations can afford. One strategy to overcome this barrier is to make assumptions based on existing research. See the **Great Lakes Target Audiences** box below.

When brainstorming potential target audiences, keep one question front and center: “How will reaching this audience help us achieve our goals?”

Great Lakes Target Audiences

In 2002, Biodiversity Project hired a national public opinion research firm to gain a better understanding of the public's connection to the Great Lakes. From the data, Biodiversity Project identified three target audiences with high potential for becoming “Great Lakes constituents” – individuals ready to protect the Lakes at the community and regional level.

“Responsible Citizens Who Vote”

These are the people who are actively engaged in their community, are involved in civic organizations (Rotary, PTA, neighborhood association, etc.), and vote frequently – even in smaller elections. They are likely to be sympathetic to Great Lakes issues, but need to know more about how these issues connect to their own lives and why they should care.

“Great Lakes Lifestylers”

These people visit the Lakes on a regular basis for fishing, boating, camping and swimming. They already care deeply about the Lakes and have a strong sense of personal responsibility, but have little sense of their personal impact on the Lakes and how their daily actions connect to the system as a whole. They don't necessarily know a lot about emerging Great Lakes issues, and may be less engaged in community affairs than other audiences.

- Niche recreational users (hunters, anglers, sailors, boaters, etc.);
- Lake homeowners and “cottagers”;
- Recreational users (those who visit Great Lakes beaches, parks, etc).

“Quality of Lifers”

This group is very similar to the popularly defined “Cultural Creatives.” They're concerned about health issues, and in maintaining a high quality of life. They include moms (and dads) who are concerned about the health of their families, and citizens who are active in

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Generously supported by:

Great Lakes National Program Office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Matching Funds from:

The Joyce Foundation
Great Lakes Aquatic Habitat Network & Fund
The Mott Foundation

local community issues and engaged in community service. They are careful consumers, and tend to be educated, professional and middle- to upper-class.

Source: *Protecting the Great Lakes: Responsibility to Awareness to Action* by Belden, Russonello & Stewart.

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