

Involving Granite Staters in New Hampshire's Energy & Climate Solutions: A Case for Strategic Communications

Executive Summary

This document is intended to summarize the concept of a strategic communications plan that has been developed by Clean Air-Cool Planet, in conjunction with the EESE Board's Education & Outreach subcommittee.

The 2009 NH Climate Action Plan calls for the development and implementation of "a comprehensive climate change outreach and education program that elevates the awareness, knowledge and skill in the state in order to support action at all levels and in all sectors" to transform how we use energy in the state. Within this context and independently as a body, the Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Energy (EESE) Board in its work plan committed to helping to coordinate and advance "an integrated, comprehensive public education campaign on energy efficiency and renewable energy" that "include[s] a robust single 'portal' as the go-to place for consumers and decision makers to access information on incentives" and programs related to EE and SE.

The development of one communications plan is intended to develop a unifying vision and communications framework that supports the achievement of the broad and complementary organizational goals of leading agencies and groups and organizations that are interested in reducing fossil fuel consumption, improving land use patterns, reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and other related energy goals.

Properly executed, the communications plan will help build awareness, influence behaviors, and fulfill energy and climate goals of the 2009 NH Climate Action Plan. Execution of the plan requires coordinated communication strategies and activities that increase awareness as well as those that support action.

The plan needs to acknowledge short and long-term goals of any groups or individuals interested in seeing New Hampshire lead the way in an energy transformation. The plan must be participative (it does not belong to one organization) and audience-driven. It will be dynamic (never "completed," but instead updated and flexible over time). Public relations and marketing both have roles in a good public relations plan,¹ and the mix of strategies and tactics must be feasible and realistic.

Operationally, a plan should be in place to quickly exploit existing communications channels (1-way, 2-way) and *programs*, to improve the quality of communication service

¹ Public relations is the management function that establishes mutually beneficial relationships between and organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends. Mutual lines of communication, understanding, and cooperation exist between an organization and its publics. Marketing is the management function that identifies peoples' needs and wants, and offers products and services to satisfy those demands, and causes transactions between the providers and consumers.

and to improve the consistency of message to New Hampshire audiences. The plan may incorporate (and enhance) existing effective marketing and public relations activities now in place among various members of groups such as the EESE Board, NHARPC, E&CC and leaders from other key networks (including the Natural Resources Sector).

Strategically, the plan will be continuous, but measureable along the way and will increase the basic volume of demand for energy related services, solutions, tools and funding. It will lead to better resource allocation among the participants and will be flexible enough to invite expansion or diversification. The plan will address duplication as well as gaps in current outreach and education in order to strengthen the effectiveness of existing and future outreach and education efforts to maximize action by consumers.

Leadership in the Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Energy (EESE) Board, the New Hampshire Association of Regional Planning Commissions (NHARPC), NH state agencies, the Energy and Climate Collaborative (E&CC) will help identify a core group of people to take part in a full day facilitated session focused on developing the communications plan. A draft plan will emerge from this day-long session. Participants will be called upon after the session to fill information gaps (i.e., content) before a plan is presented to the same group for acceptance.

The elements of a communications plan, each addressed and examined during a day-long facilitated session, are:

1. Agreement on the concept and organizational goals
2. Audience and opinion leader identification
3. Desired objectives for each audience (intermediate, ultimate)
4. Research
5. Strategies to attain objectives
6. Existing communications channels
7. Implementation
8. Budget
9. Evaluation (formative, summative)

A communications plan needs to be data-driven - and this demands research. Initially a situation analysis will document the internal factors and the external factors related to energy related activities and communications in New Hampshire.

In addition to the situation analysis, we suggest that various forms of informal and qualitative research, which will more than adequately identify problem situations and opportunities, be conducted to support the planning process. Examples of informal research include personal contacts/leadership interviews; focus groups; community forums; call in telephone lines. The scheduling of research activities (in advance of, mid-stream or subsequent to our planning activities) can be discussed. Financial resources are needed to conduct the research.

1. Budget for the planning phase: \$35,000 - \$55,000 depending upon the level of qualitative research

Although it is premature to identify actual components (strategies/tactics) of the coordinated communications campaign, it is possible to foresee some critical needs. We anticipate key elements might include slogan and branding; components to promote awareness; identification of existing communications channels and partners willing to allow their use (everything from bill stuffers to newsletters to social media to websites to membership meetings); coordination of key internal and external triggering events and 2-way communications in support of (and in tandem with) the 1-way promotion; social media planning and strategy; a NH energy portal guiding all sectors to resources, information and solutions.

Implementation depends on resources. Budget for the campaign phase: TO BE DETERMINED. The money spent on implementation must support agreed-upon objectives for key audiences and support the goals of participating organization.

In order to move forward, members of the EESE board and E&CC will be asked to:

1. Review and adopt the concept
2. Assign members to a joint committee to refine the concept
3. Commit to preparing for and participating in the planning phase
4. Assist with identifying available financial support for the planning phase
5. Commit to assist with implementing the plan once developed