

Pacific Strategic Communications Learning Exchange
September 9 - 11, 2014
Maui, Hawai'i



Managers and practitioners from Hawai'i, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, and Yap participate in the Pacific Strategic Communications Learning Exchange. Photo © TNC.

This learning exchange and report were supported by The Nature Conservancy under cooperative agreement award #NA13NOS4820145 from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program, U.S. Department of Commerce. The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of NOAA, the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program, or the U.S. Department of Commerce.



Executive Summary

From September 9-11, 2014, fourteen practitioners from Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands, and Yap participated in a Strategic Communications Learning Exchange in Maui, Hawai'i. The workshop was designed to provide marine conservation professionals with training in strategic communications, facilitation, and media relations, with a focus on the practical application of these skills to a current project. In addition, 42 managers attended a half-day workshop on key components of strategic communications and select communications tools– including social marketing– that can be practically applied to meet their conservation needs.

Background

The Reef Resilience Program works to strengthen and enhance training and capacity building opportunities for coral reef managers to address the impacts of climate change and local stressors to coral reefs. To address this goal, the program organizes multiple learning exchanges each year with the objective of providing intensive in-person trainings to coral reef managers. These on on-the-ground trainings are designed to improve management techniques and address site-specific needs of coral reef managers.

Objectives

From September 9-11, 2014 a three-day Strategic Communications Learning Exchange and a half-day strategic communications workshop were held concurrent with the 32nd U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting to:

- Provide practitioners with training in strategic communications, including working with the media and facilitation skills, with an opportunity for practical application of these skills to a current project.
- Connect practitioners working in the Pacific to share challenges and lessons learned.

Participants

Fifteen marine conservation practitioners participated in the Strategic Communications Learning Exchange, with an additional 27 practitioners participating in the accelerated half-day workshop. See the table below for details on the 11 women and 4 men who participated in the Learning Exchange.

Learning exchange facilitators included:

- Sheila Sarhangi, Hawai'i and Micronesia Program Director, SeaWeb Asia Pacific
- Evelyn Wight, Senior Communications Manager, The Nature Conservancy Hawai'i
- Kristen Maize, Strategic Communications Manager, The Nature Conservancy Hawai'i
- Petra MacGowan, Reef Resilience Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy
- Cherie Wagner, Reef Resilience Program Assistant, The Nature Conservancy

Agenda Overview

Reef Resilience Program staff invited practitioners who would be able to apply strategic communications to their work and share these skills with others in their region. Participant



support – leading up to and during the Learning Exchange – was provided by the Reef Resilience Program Manager, Strategic Communications Manager, and Program Assistant.

Welcome

The learning exchange kicked off with a welcome dinner event to provide an overview of the three-day agenda and introduce participants to one another.

DAY 1: Strategic Communications for Marine Conservation Workshop

Purpose: To help marine conservation professionals approach their outreach work strategically.

Outcomes:

- Participants understand the key components of strategic communications and what it means to be strategic in communication efforts
- Participants understand that there are numerous tools and approaches to tackle conservation issues, and are familiar with some of these options
- Participants consider how this information can be applied to their own projects and/or conservation issues

Field Trip:

Learning exchange participants gained first-hand experience of the Mauka (mountains) to Makai (ocean) concept as they worked side-by-side removing invasive species within the Honokōwai Valley – the site of an ancient agricultural village that dates back to 1200 AD. Maui Cultural Lands – the field trip organizer and stewards of the valley – introduced participants to native plants in the area and their significance in Hawaiian culture, as well as concepts central to Hawaiian culture, such as mālama ‘āina – human responsibility to care for the land.

DAYS 2-3: Strategic Communications Learning Exchange

Days 2-3 of the learning exchange covered strategic communication topics. With assistance from Reef Resilience staff prior to the event, participants came to the learning exchange with an identified issue/project to focus on and apply during the breakout activities. Day two provided a detailed introduction of the Smart Chart process including the following steps:

- Step 1: Setting Goals & Objectives
- Step 2: Identifying the Context for your Issue
- Step 3: Identifying your Target Audience
- Step 3: Make your Messages Come Alive
- Step 4: Messengers and Tactics for Communicating Messages
- Steps 5 & 6: Measurements and Reality Check



Participants learn about issue framing. Photo © TNC.

For each of these strategic communications steps, participants – with one-on-one guidance by facilitators – focused on their specific projects. Day 3 provided training on managing conflict and facilitation; storytelling to convey messages, create personal connections, and achieve objectives; and how to build relationships with the media and prepare/give a successful interview.



Learning Exchange participant practicing skills through mock media interview. Photo © TNC.

Feedback from Participants

“During the learning exchange we worked hand-in-hand with a diverse group of people, which gave us the opportunity to experience unique cultures. With participants from all around the globe, we got to see different perspectives on environmental issues and how their cultures affect environmental management decisions. We also learned how to set clear goals, and how to map out a strategic communications plan to meet those goals. This learning exchange has



helped me mentally prepare for upcoming public meetings/hearings, and has given me the tools to have a strategic response to community opposition.”

“I appreciated every detail that was given to us. It re-enforced my skills in planning and implementing community outreach. Even paying attention to the smallest detail of communication will affect how information is received by individuals or groups. I learned not to generalize messages and how to tailor them to the different audiences, interests, and target groups. I will incorporate these methods and strategic ideas into our AS-EPA anti-littering campaign to Keep American Samoa Beautiful (KASB) program.”

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

Reef Resilience staff deemed the learning exchange successful, highlighting these contributing factors:

The partnership approach for identifying participants worked well

- Exchange objectives were achieved and participant needs were met
- There is a high potential for participants to apply skills learned to their specific project, which was the focus for the learning exchange

Recommendations for future learning exchanges are:

- Plan for more time (half-day) to go through logistics with the planning team the day before the workshop
- Have participants sign up for newsletter and RR Network