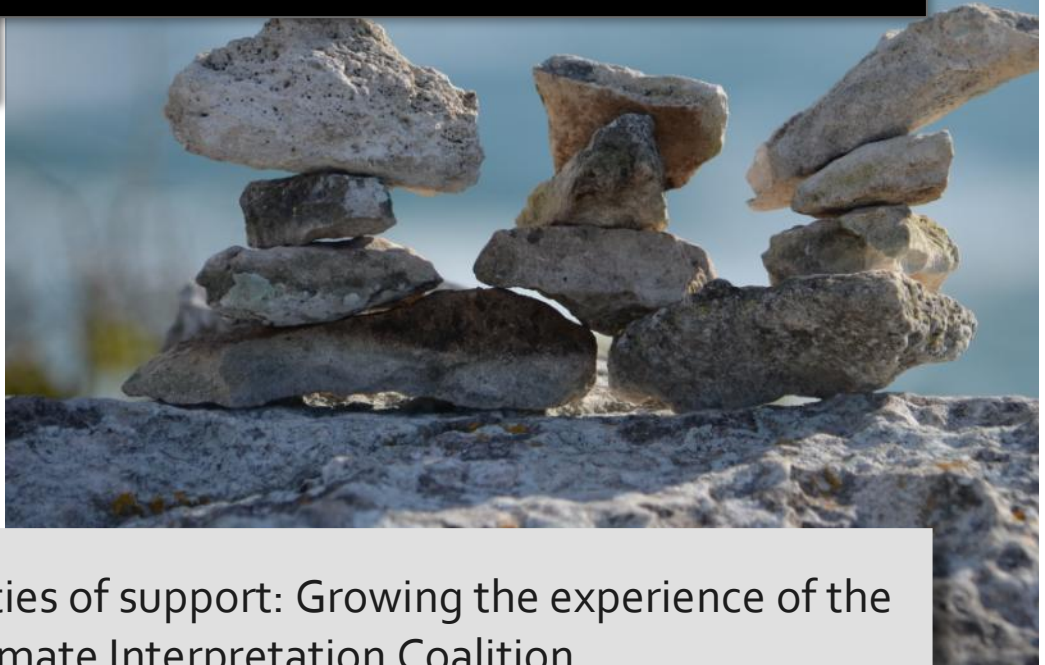


Communicating Climate Change and the Ocean

2013

Final Report



Building communities of support: Growing the experience of the Climate Interpretation Coalition

Evaluation and Report

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The Climate Interpretation Coalition is maturing beyond a set of discrete institutions to become a collective voice for communicating climate change and the ocean. As the three-year funded NOAA program and the empowerment evaluation end, the question of how to build ongoing communities of support arises.

The findings are based upon an interview-based exploration of individuals who participated in the 2012 Baltimore summit and who represent a broad spectrum of engagement (highly engaged with creating the coalition through to limited engagement in a single summit). The interviews were nested within the report about the original empowerment evaluation (please refer to the 2009–2012 report entitled, *An empowerment evaluation of a national coalition of aquariums*).

This report strives to ensure the continued vibrancy of the aquariums and Climate Interpretation Coalition and inform the development of a new NOAA-funded initiative, Building Ocean Awareness Together (BOAT), which is committed to the effective interpretation of challenging ocean issues.



Key Finding 1:

Participants want this community to continue indefinitely.

"I would like for this community to last forever, even if somehow everybody gets behind climate change and we see changes on a legislative level, and a community level, and a personal level. Even then, I would love for us to continue to talk. Whether it's about the next interpretive challenge or the next thing that we need to communicate for the betterment of the earth. We are in a position to do good and I hope that it never stops. Because we can always continue to try to create a more compassionate and empathetic world. I think that's what we're doing by taking up the challenge of communicating climate change."

*Lori Perkins
Aquarium of the Pacific*

The strength of this community is the high commitment participants have to each other, and to the issue of climate change. Thanks to the synergy of well-timed climate-change grants many of these individuals know each other on a first name, personal basis. They express a deep sense of obligation to one another.

Participants value having been invited, a sense of being chosen. Grant funding that supports people's participation in face-to-face gatherings is noteworthy within the zoo and aquarium industry where funds for professional development are often difficult to find. The result is a palpable commitment to enact an important mission. This, combined with their experience making things happen in a somewhat precarious funding environment, means they have moved forward with communicating climate change even during years when funding has not been specifically available to do so at their institutions.

Participants credit their involvement to the personal attention and support they experienced through the Monterey and Baltimore summits, the National Network for Ocean and Climate Change Interpretation (NNOCCI) study circles, the new BOAT project, a variety of smaller grants, and the empowerment evaluation email check-ins and annual interviews.

Recommendation: Continue to reinforce this community's social norms of personalized attention, building relationships, and a commitment to communicating challenging ocean issues.

Key Finding 2:

Coalition members are well placed to expand their influence through other communities.

"I've worked really hard with the grants that we've done, to develop this community around the coalition, and around Climate Interpreter. So I have become a member of all the other communities that I can find. I'm part of the LinkedIn climate community and the Union of Concerned Scientists community. I'm part of a couple of different Facebook communities. I feel like we're all the same community but the challenge is that we don't all share the same resources very well. I am excited by the potential of the new BOAT grant to change that. We're from a lot of different organizations. We know we need to collaborate because some of us are completely dependent on grant funding. But there is a deeper feeling that we have to get our act together if we, as a human species, are going to survive what we have done to the planet."

*Sarah-Mae Nelson
Monterey Bay Aquarium*

Listening to coalition members speak is a lot like listening to code. NOAA, AZA, NPS, NMS, BOAT, NNOCCI, AGU, NMEA, NSF, NASA—each acronym represents a connection to a larger network or initiative that shares an interest in communicating climate change. As the network grows, it expands its national visibility, attracting an ever widening range of potential collaborators.

Billy Spitzer of the New England Aquarium shares a recent story of a woman congratulating him following a talk he gave at the American Geophysical Union's annual conference. "I think the work you're doing is incredible and I'm so happy to be a part of it," she said. She had not been directly involved in any of the coalition's grants yet she felt as if she belonged. "That's beginning to happen more and more," Billy explains. "There's a growing sense that there's a group of people in this aquarium, zoo, museum world who are interested in this issue who are doing this kind of work who are beginning to find each other and work together. And, others are attracted to that."

Recommendation: Intentionally build on the personal connections coalition members have with other communities to expand the reach of the coalition.

Key Finding 3:

Face-to-face gatherings are vital but specialized summits are no longer needed.

"Our professional organizations provide ready-made infrastructure and a lot of coalition members do show up at AZA annual conferences. The knowledge we have is evolving rapidly, the solutions available to us are evolving rapidly, and our sophistication in communicating to our audiences is evolving rapidly. If we don't have a way to exchange what we're learning on a regular basis, then our audiences are going to move beyond us and beyond this issue."

*Jim Covell
Monterey Bay Aquarium*

"The question I've been wrestling with for AZA's Conservation Education Committee is how to bring the really wonderful tools that have been developed through the coalition to the rest of the zoo and aquarium community?"

*Carrie Chen
Aquarium of the Bay*

The 2008 Monterey summit sparked the birth of a movement. The 2012 Baltimore summit inspired a new generation and highlighted a myriad of solutions-based approaches to communicating climate change and the ocean. Rather than creating another specialized summit, coalition members would prefer to see resources devoted to daylong climate change workshops, substantial panels and half-day round tables at national meetings of professional associations such as the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the National Association for Interpretation (NAI).

Coalition members envision these as resource sharing events where the broad membership could see updates and participate in workshops from NNOCCI, Earth-to-Sky, BOAT and other initiatives.

So much is happening in so many arenas, there is a widespread call to get best practices out and adopted, measured and evaluated and fine-tuned as widely as possible in the zoo and aquarium community. This is a welcome prospect for people in the position of Doug McCoy at the Louisville Zoo. "Where do I gain the support I need to communicate climate change? Most of it is internal as far as I'm concerned. I am the only one here, quite honestly, with a science background."

Recommendation: Host climate change gatherings in association with annual AZA and/or NAI conferences.



Key Finding 4:

Focus on the “ask.”

“To keep the network vibrant we have to keep doing timely, important things together.”

*Nancy Hotchkiss
National Aquarium of Baltimore*

“What is the thing that we want our guests to do? We always say we need to be concrete and come up with a social marketing response. If you want to prevent AIDS, you encourage the use of condoms. But if you want to mitigate climate change, you change out your light bulbs, you program the thermostat, and a hundred ticks later you're still going down the list... We need to come up with a mechanism that allows us to feel comfortable with giving an array of choices.”

*John Garner
Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium*

Many within the coalition feel proud of the collective voice they are creating around climate change interpretation. As Jennifer Metzler-Fiorino of the North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher says, “In my entire career, I've never had this kind of interaction with others. So I think that we are speaking from a collective voice.” Ashley Elliot of Aquarium of the Bay agrees: “A lot of people around different institutions are speaking about climate change in the same way. I think it's starting to feel like a strong, connected voice.”

Yet the question of what exactly that collective voice should be asking people to do, and how to get them to do it was a hot topic of conversation at the Baltimore summit. For Debbi Stone of the Florida Aquarium, part of the answer is action. “If you get people to go out and do a beach cleanup, even if it's something basic, it gets people a lot more interested and they take more sense of ownership. It's the opposite of how we've always done it, teaching them why they should care and then expecting them to take the initiative to go do something.

Recommendation: Frame and communicate a common “ask” across the broader coalition.



Key Finding 5:

Founding coalition members seek to create a collective voice and policy-level impacts.

"If I were to identify an elephant, I would say it is a policy-level campaign to change our national energy policy, or policies about our carbon footprint. We're still afraid to talk about that. We're still afraid to leverage any of our political capitol in that area."

*Jim Covell
Monterey Bay Aquarium*

Few inroads have been made with respect to policy influence. "We're not very far in terms of becoming a coordinated body that advocates for change," says Aaron Pope of the California Academy of Sciences. "I don't think we're at the point where we're really leveraging the collective impact that we could be having if we all joined together and said, "these are the buttons we're trying to hit, this is what we're trying to accomplish in the area of climate change in oceans."

Nancy Hotchkiss of the National Aquarium in Baltimore agrees. "I'm not seeing a collective voice driving political will or pushing AZA." But she is also not convinced that creating a collective voice is the most effective change mechanism. "It may not make as much of a difference as a really strong regional or one-two punch from a few institutions that have worked very hard," she says.

Coalition members at Southern California aquariums provide a case in point. "The same people that were involved in communicating climate change are now working together on marine protected areas," says Tara Treiber of Santa Monica Pier Aquarium. "We're able to support each other on both initiatives."

As personal and institutional engagement with climate change deepens, and the potential power of the collective voice of this community becomes ever more apparent, the desire to influence climate change policy grows. A number of members are committed to strengthening their voice in climate change policy and are actively seeking funding to do so.

Recommendation: Support a small group of coalition members to pilot a collective effort to influence ocean climate-change policy.

Key Finding 6:

Coalition members are emerging as regional leaders within the various new projects.

"There's got to be a keeper of the community, somebody who keeps everybody going. I think that moving forward it is important to have a go-to person or a go-to agency for the community."

Ashley Elliot
Aquarium of the Bay

What makes the community last beyond the grant cycle? What makes the community stay together beyond when resources change? It really is that sense of personal dedication."

Sarah-Mae Nelson
Monterey Bay Aquarium

The coalition has accomplished tremendous advances thanks to the generous leadership of the Principal Investigators on the NOAA grant: Nancy Hotchkiss, Cynthia Vernon, and Billy Spitzer. Coalition members are appreciative of them and the broader community they helped create. There is a widespread pride that the community is growing and flourishing. They do not differentiate between the community that formed under the initial NOAA grant that focused upon communicating climate change and the ocean, with the ongoing growth emerging through the new BOAT and NNOCCI projects.

A number of visions are emerging in response to the question of how best to ensure the sustainability of this expanding community beyond specific grant cycles. AZA offers valuable infrastructure and many of the current coalition members are also AZA members. Yet they are eager to remain nimble and leading edge. They do not wish to become absorbed by AZA.

There is no consensus among members as to whether the community should continue to grow as a coalition or evolve into a consortium with its own governance. Strongest support rests with the idea of building upon the leadership structures being developed through the NNOCCI and BOAT projects. The intention is to diffuse leadership across regional hubs. Coalition members feel this idea has merit citing the interwoven relationships that exist between these three projects, and the fact that over the next five years the two new projects will engage more than 150 organizations to expand climate change interpretation work on a national level.

Recommendation: Treat coalition leadership as an open question to be revisited as the regional leadership structures of the BOAT and NNOCCI projects unfold.



Key Finding 7:

The empowerment evaluation was a positive force in coalition formation and engagement.

"I think that the evaluation and follow up is brilliant. It's an important way to ensure accountability by asking, in a very nice way, what's going on, what's your progress been, what's your frustration like. Having that level of evaluation, and the accountability that comes with that is something that other projects could really benefit from.

*Jim Covell
Monterey Bay Aquarium*

The Climate Interpretation Coalition has been remarkably successful. This vibrant and expanding community of committed people and organizations continues to exert its influence through hundreds of individual pledges, institutional initiatives and multi-institutional grants and projects. There is a palpable sense that the social and political context for addressing climate change is shifting and coalition members are energized and eager to be a significant force in addressing climate change and a broader range of challenging ocean issues.

The empowerment evaluation conducted throughout the life of this grant provided coalition members with personalized support that proved to be a valuable component in building the confidence of early adopters to communicate climate change. As the coalition matured, the empowerment evaluation helped participants learn what each other was doing, and thus facilitated peer-to-peer learning and multi-institutional collaborations. The evaluation provided guidance on the structure and themes of the Baltimore summit, ensuring that the gathering was tailored to the specific needs of its participants. In the final stage of the grant, the evaluation invited coalition members to envision how they would continue to function beyond the life of the grant.

Recommendation: Consider the use of empowerment and other participatory-based evaluation formats as a means to track, facilitate and advance coalition-based innovations.



2013 and beyond

"Am I talking about healthy harbor issues? Am I talking about climate change? Am I talking about ocean acidification? Ultimately, I'm asking them to do the exact same behaviors: Live more sustainably and reduce carbon."

*Nancy Hotchkiss
National Aquarium in Baltimore*

"In the end, we're trying to use climate change as a gateway issue for building capacity to deal with a whole range of environmental and science issues that have really strong social and policy implications. I don't see this as a single-issue coalition. I think we happened to pick the right issue at the right time, but, ultimately, it's about more than just climate."

*Billy Spitzer
New England Aquarium*

The coalition is in a strong position to continue and expand its mission to communicate climate change and the ocean. It has a highly motivated, well-trained and influential membership; a plethora of professionally developed resources; and significant new grants to spread its influence and the diversity of its membership across the USA and beyond.

With the addition of the new BOAT project, the coalition is positioned to take on a broader range of ocean issues. This holds great promise as coalition members are often placed in the position of trying to marry their commitment to communicate climate change with other institutional priorities concerning marine protected areas, endangered species, ocean pollution, over-fishing and other issues. The confidence and experience gained as a result of their emergence as a coalition to communicate climate change bodes well for their ability to educate others about ocean issues regardless of their complexity or levels of controversy.

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