



Public Lands & Climate 101: Clearing the Air

ACTIVITY SUMMARY

This activity builds off of the content and knowledge established through the Public Lands and Climate 101 Powerpoint presentation and allows your group to practice sharing their new knowledge tactfully. This activity introduces your group to climate change communication strategies by role-playing conversations with community members who have varying climate perspectives. This activity is not intended to perpetuate a “debate” about the reality of climate change. Through this activity, we build:

- Strategies to engage diverse people in meaningful, mindful conversations that prioritize personal connection.
- Deeper understandings of various perspectives about climate change and how to tactfully steer our communication strategies based on our audience.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this activity, your group will be able to:

- Identify communication strategies for these audiences using a flow of communication steps.
- Engage in a climate change conversation with a meaningful strategy, as well as greater confidence and calm.
- Explain the value of solutions that incorporate diverse perspectives.
- Understand the spectrum of perspectives about climate change in our communities and across the country so that we can act in more meaningful, strategic ways.

FACILITATION GUIDELINES

This activity can feel quite personal. It requires strong buy-in and trust for your group to honestly reflect on their own communication skills and blindspots. You can foster a space that encourages open sharing by preparing your own brief anecdotes that prepare you to lead by example.

MODIFICATIONS

Adapt the length of the activity by adjusting the number of role-plays and the number of discussion points that you cover. Consider switching up your facilitation strategies. In some cases, discuss learnings and reflections with the entire group, in other cases, try a brief “pair-share” with a neighbor and move on. Some groups may buy-in more to practicing conversations than others. Consider steering your group towards a discussion of their own climate narratives and approaches to engaging others.



METHODS

Analyzing, Communicating, Discussing, Relating, Framing

SET UP & MATERIALS

Print out copies of **Role-play Prompt Pages**, **Communication Steps Page**, and **Six Americans Climate Change Perspectives Chart** included below. Print enough copies of the Role-Play Prompt Pages and Climate Communication Steps Page for each pair of participants to have a set.

If you choose to incorporate the video & discussion extension, a projector and computer are needed.

ACTIVITY LENGTH

30 minutes to 1 hour

AUDIENCE

16 years+ public audience, small (5-15 people) or medium (16-25 people) group size

CURRICULUM SOURCE CREDIT

This activity is sourced from Project Learning Tree's Climate Change and Forests Curriculum activity "Clearing the Air" and "Have the Talk: Climate Conversations" Activity from Our Climate Our Future with adaptations and additions for the Great Old Broads curriculum focus and audience.

FACILITATING THE ACTIVITY

PART 1: CLIMATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Begin by acknowledging that people have a wide range of knowledge and viewpoints on climate change. While some information we read or hear is based on scientific evidence, other information is based on opinions, beliefs, or misinformation. This misinformation has led to perpetual doubt and confusion around the science of climate change. Although these conversations can prove challenging and require real effort, we can find strategies to connect with others and facilitate meaningful learning. We've all had conversations about climate change go south. Discussions we intended to be persuasive and eye-opening can become downright argumentative, while others can leave us feeling hopeless. We have the power to reinvent and redirect these discussions into productive and invigorating dialogues.



Explain to the group that you all are going to explore communication tools, then practice ways of thoughtfully engaging with people from different perspectives.

Pass out the **Climate Communication Steps** to the group. Introduce the steps as a tool to help you open up a valuable discussion, not rules for your conversation. Introduce each of the steps, ask a volunteer to read the description of that step, and ask another volunteer to offer some example language that they see themselves using.

Step 1: Open - set the tone for the conversation with an invitation that encourages someone to open up.

You are not inviting someone into an academic debate with a winner and a loser. These conversations are intended to spark learning and understanding of another person's perspective. How might someone's tone run this type of conversation off course? Invite your group to offer an example of how they invite someone into a discussion.

Step 2: Ask - Ask open-ended questions to learn about the person's experience and thinking. How well do you know this person, their interests, and their values (these could come in handy!)? Does this person seem disengaged, apathetic, or overwhelmed? Consider just how different each of these discussions might look and be strategic.

Step 3: Reflect - Reflect back what you heard the person say. Reflecting helps someone know they have been heard. This forces you to pause, consider the other person's perspective, and gather your thoughts before responding.

This step does not require you to validate false statements, but it does ask you to acknowledge the concern they are expressing.

Step 4: Tell - Share your experience, example, concern, etc. and keep it brief. This is your opportunity to briefly educate through a carefully chosen "golden nugget" of information.

Ask the group for examples of what they might share. Would they use the same few talking points with every person they talked to? How could you tailor what you are describing to that person? How do you decide what information is most important? Ask your group how the information they choose to share could resonate with this person. For instance, is this person a passionate birder? A healthcare professional? An advocate of social justice? A grandparent? A life-long member of a specific community?



Is there a moral imperative that inspires you? The value of responsibility can build bridges. Consider this phrase: “We have a responsibility to protect and preserve the habitats and ecosystems we depend on from the impacts we have created.”

Navigate denial with the “consensus message:” Researchers found that the phrase “97% of climate scientists have concluded that human-caused global warming is happening” is particularly effective with traditionally dismissive audiences. Consider the follow up, if 97% of doctors told you that your leg was broken, would you continue limping around with business as usual?

Here & Now - Bring the message close to home. Highlight the current and potential impacts of climate change locally to increase a sense of connection with the issue.

Step 5: Ask - Ask what they think about what you’ve said or try other open-ended questions to learn more about them.

This step allows you to deepen, pivot or conclude the conversation. Ask your group for a few examples of open-ended questions that could deepen the conversation further.

Step 6: Close - Close out the conversation in a respectful way, leaving an open invitation to a future conversation. Not every conversation will feel cohesive or effective, but each round of practice can offer lessons, if we are open to hearing them.

PART 2: ROLE-PLAY

Now, put these tools to work! Explain that you have brought along six fictional neighbors that each person will get to be, or get to have a conversation with.

Instruct your group to form pairs and pass out the role cards to each pair. Instruct the group to take turns with one person acting as themselves and the other taking on the role described on their piece of paper. The person acting as “themselves” is the one leading the climate conversation and using the communication steps. Your objective is to have a respectful and meaningful conversation with the person by using the communication strategies. Note that the purpose of these conversations is not to mimic an argument or debate.

Each role-play conversation should last 2 to 3 minutes, offer your group time check reminders and allow the conversations to continue for roughly 10 minutes total. If some groups are done before others, encourage them to discuss how the conversations went, challenges, takeaways while other groups finish.



Lead a discussion about the experience of the role-play, the challenges the group encountered, and the best communication strategies that they heard.

You might ask the following questions: How well were you able to play your role? Did you encounter any solutions or common ground? Was there a step in the conversation that was the most challenging for you? Do you have your own communication strategy that you would like to share?

When discussing the experience of the roleplay, consider exploring the value of engaging with diverse perspectives. Pose this idea to the group. You may offer that because climate adaptation is a complex system, engaging with community members with a wide variety of different lived experiences might reveal aspects that you had not considered, or new variables that need to be acknowledged, perhaps helping a group arrive at a better solution.

PART 3: SIX AMERICANS

Activity wrap up: the “Six Americans” visual introduces your group to the actual spectrum of opinions on climate change among the American public. Since 2013, a team of researchers at Yale University have asked over 13,000 Americans about their opinions on climate change. Show the group “The Six Americans” chart, which represents the range of opinions from most concerned to least as of December, 2018.

Example discussion questions about the Six Americans:

Think back to the fictional neighbors who you spoke with, can you guess where each of these people would fall on this spectrum? Are these percentages different than you had expected? If so, why do you think that your assumptions about the distribution were different from reality?

Because this study has been ongoing since 2013, we can also look at how the distribution has changed over time. The chart titled “**Global Warming’s Six Americans: Five Year Trends**” shows us how opinions have changed over time. The triangles in white in each bar tell us whether that group has grown or shrunk over time. To really bring this exercise home, discuss the distribution of opinions within your own community. (Visit <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us/> and select your state or county to display local trends.)

If your group is interested in learning more about their community’s variety of opinions on climate change, explore these climate opinion maps (Link: <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/>) together.



Ask participants to discuss with the person sitting next to them 2 to 3 takeaways from this activity. Where will you take your learning from here?

Next Steps: This activity may inspire you and your participants to dive deeper into local climate impacts reports and other resources to broaden your quiver of information to share. These conversations provide an excellent leadership opportunity for your broadband to organize and spread this valuable information.

Video & Discussion Extension:

Dr. Katherine Hayhoe's Ted Talk about climate change communication builds well upon this activity and offers further discussion food-for-thought. Dr. Hayhoe is a well-known climate scientist who has spoken extensively on the importance of talking about climate change.

Link: <https://www.aldacommunicationtraining.com/podcast/katherine-hayhoe-talk-climate-change/>

Background:

See the **Climate 101 Talking Points** and the Spring 2020 newsletter for additional talking points and public lands connections. (Link: <https://www.greatoldbroads.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2020-Winter-Spring-Broadsides-web.pdf>)

Background on the Six Americans Figure: Yale and George Mason universities have been conducting opinion polls (Link: <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/americans-are-increasingly-alarmed-about-global-warming/>) with the general public over several years and have identified six different categories of beliefs. The population in each category has changed in significant ways with each new survey. There are people who are alarmed and concerned about the problem, people who are confused or not interested in learning more, and people who doubt climate is changing or are convinced that we should not make any changes.



Climate Communication Steps

- **OPEN**—How you open and set the tone for the conversation with an invitation that encourages someone to open up.
- **ASK**—Ask open-ended questions to learn about the person’s experience and thinking. These are not yes or no questions, but rather questions that invite someone to share. Example: “What about climate change interests or concerns you most?”
- **REFLECT**—Reflect back what you heard the person say. Reflecting helps someone know they have been heard. This forces you to pause, consider the other person’s perspective, and gather your thoughts before responding. Example: “I hear you saying you don’t feel like there is anything you can do about it, so you feel overwhelmed.”
- **TELL**—Ask if you can tell something you’re feeling or are thinking about, then keep it brief. Example: “You know, I went to a talk recently that made me feel a lot more hopeful. Can I tell you a few ideas that I heard?”
- **ASK**—Ask what they think about what you’ve said or try other open-ended questions to learn more about them. Example: “What kind of work do you do? Do you think climate impacts could affect that industry?”
- **CLOSE**—Close out the conversation in a respectful way, which can leave an open invitation to a future conversation. Example: “I appreciate hearing your perspective, even if we don’t agree.” “I am looking forward to doing more research and seeing what else we can learn together”



Climate Perspectives Scenarios

Neighbor Kris:

- You believe that climate change is happening, but that the climate has been changing for a long time and humans have nothing to do with it. Therefore, there is no way for people to affect climate change because they have no control over the climate. This theory about human-influenced climate change is all part of a political agenda and scientists are supporting it to fund their research. We really shouldn't be spending so much effort researching causes and solutions for climate change. We should focus on people's ability to adapt to this new climate, for example, by changing food production strategies or by improving community preparedness and disaster response.

Neighbor Monique:

- You believe that God created a perfect world and doubt that humans can affect it. The theory about human-influenced climate change is all media hype. We really shouldn't be spending so much effort researching causes and solutions for climate change. We should focus on people's well being, for example, by volunteering and giving to charity.



Neighbor Taylor:

- You believe that the science on climate change is not at all clear. The news reports are contradictory. For example, when there is a heat wave, the headlines read “Global Warming Effects Being Felt in the Northwest!” But when we have a colder winter than usual, the headlines change to “Snow in the Northwest? Who Said the Climate is Warming?” You believe there are scientists on both sides of the issue making different conclusions about whether it is happening, the causes, and the effects. Once the science has been settled, and the news media are consistent, you will be receptive to either side. You are just not sure that we should be taking action on climate change when there is so much that is still being debated.

Neighbor Jordan:

- You work for an international company and have traveled to different countries. You believe that the science on climate change is not at all clear. The news reports are contradictory. But you do know that some countries are already doing a lot to adapt to climate changes and other countries are very vulnerable to future disasters. Floods, typhoons, and drought will affect developing countries more severely than they affect the United States. You are confused, but you also care about people around the world. But you aren’t sure what you can do.

**Neighbor Sam:**

- You believe that climate change is happening but you are not sure whether it is due to natural or human causes. You are also unsure whether or not a change to the climate is a bad thing. You do not spend much time thinking about climate change, so it is not a big concern for you. However, you are greatly concerned about other environmental issues such as air pollution in your city and its effects on people's health and the surrounding forests and wildlife. Also, you think natural resource conservation is a good idea to ensure both healthy environments and productive economies for future generations.

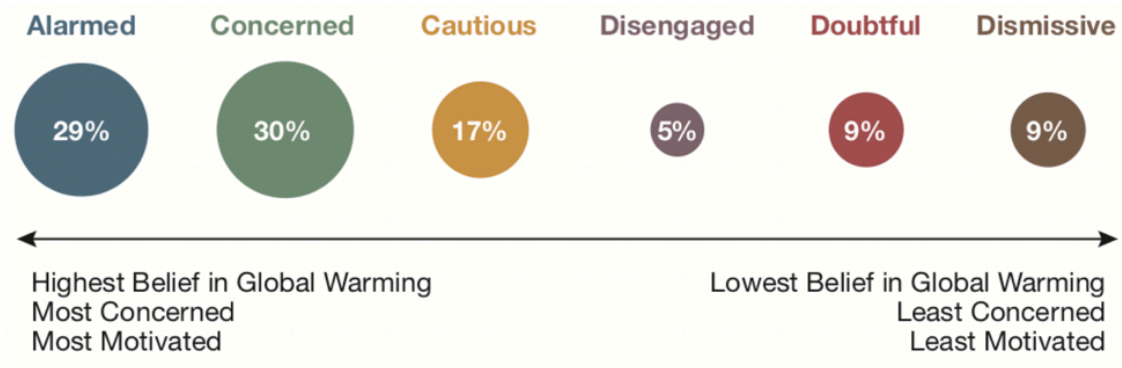
Neighbor Maya:

- You have seen a few documentaries about climate change and find the news about global climate change projections very depressing. You just don't see how you could make a difference in such a huge issue so you tend to ignore it. You know climate change will harm animals in the arctic but you don't see what it has to do with your own community.



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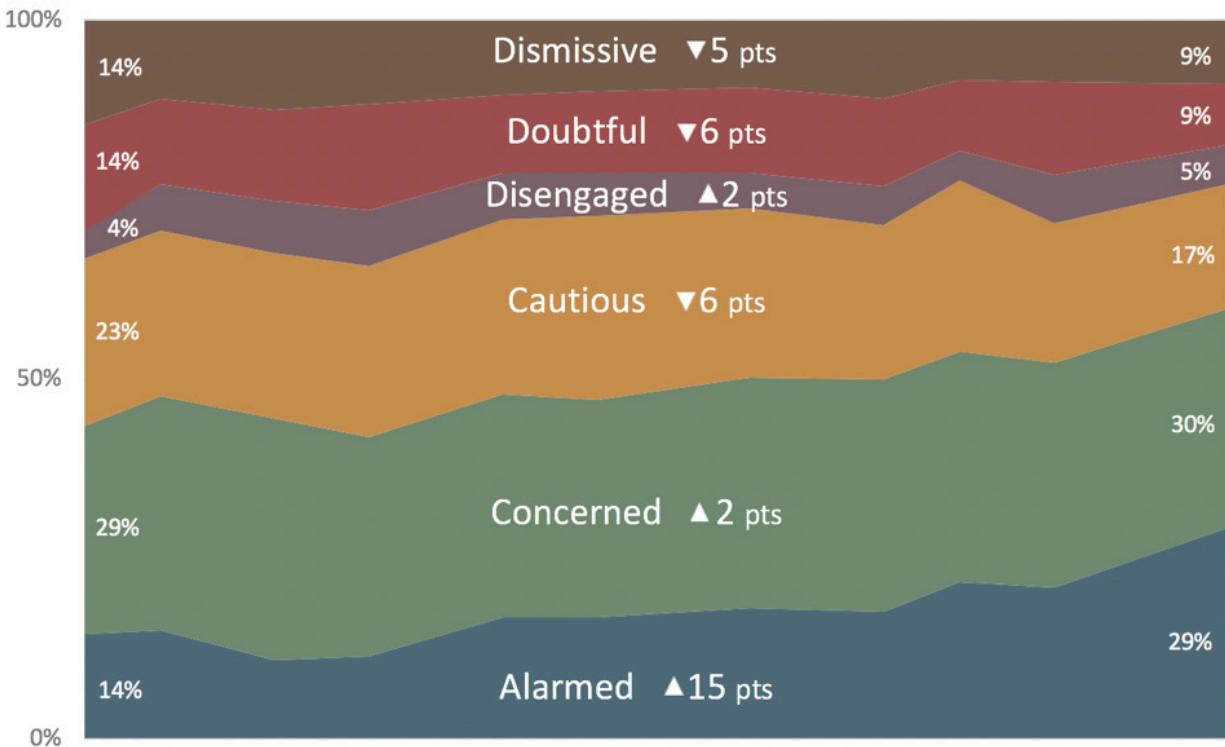
Global Warming's Six Americans



December 2018. Base: 1,114 Americans.



Six Americans: Five-Year Trend



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