

Communication 'Traps' in Ocean and Climate Change Communications

Framing research often yields counter-intuitive results, finding that seemingly sensible communication strategies don't always have the intended effect. Below, a few often-used communication strategies that FrameWorks Institute has found to have a counter-productive effect on public understanding of the science of climate and ocean change.

The 'Crisis' Trap	Presenting environmental issues as a crisis may garner temporary attention, but the public quickly develops 'compassion fatigue,' concluding that this is yet another dire social problem about which nothing can be done. Avoid this trap by starting communications with tested Values such as <i>Responsible Management</i> to frame why the issue matters and what is at stake, and maintain a reasonable, explanatory Tone throughout.
The 'Do One Thing' Trap	Highlighting the environmentally-friendly changes that visitors can make in their daily lives draws attention away from the community and regional strategies that experts say are critical to addressing the root causes of climate change. Avoid this trap by substituting individual-level actions with their community-level counterparts: instead of encouraging visitors to ride bikes rather than driving, mention a local bike-sharing initiative and tell the story of community involvement that led to it.
The 'Invisible Process' Trap	Failing to explain the causes and effects of climate and ocean change results in a lack of public understanding and thwarts solutions. Avoid this trap by using the Explanatory Metaphor <i>Heat Trapping Blanket</i> to quickly teach the basic mechanism of climate change.
The 'Incidents and Accidents' Trap	Using highly publicized weather events or environmental catastrophes to communicate about climate change reinforces little-picture thinking about the environment and these episodic events are quickly relegated to "yesterday's news." Instead of emphasizing the details of a catastrophe, focus on teaching the broad fundamental principles of climate change illustrated by the event.
The 'Cute Critters' Trap	Relying on visitors' emotional connection to charismatic animals as a way to get visitors to care about climate change impacts can limit the conversation, obscuring a focus on the interconnected nature of ecosystems and the process by which human actions affect them. Avoid this trap by using Explanatory Chains that demonstrate interdependence and by appealing to the value of <i>Protection</i> : Show how humans affect ecosystems and remind the public of our duty to safeguard habitats for future generations.