

**ENHANCING OUTREACH AND EDUCATION BY
STRATEGIC INTEGRATION OF MULTIPLE COMMUNICATION MEDIA**

THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON CARBON SEQUESTRATION

May 5, 2004 Hilton Alexandria Mark Center Alexandria, Virginia

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The *goal* of the outreach component of the Southwest Regional Partnership for Carbon Sequestration is to *identify current public opinion and knowledge, and enable the public to more effectively evaluate costs and benefits* associated with carbon sequestration.

We have subdivided that goal into the following *objectives*:

- (1) identify and respond to constituent needs, fears, and desires;
- (2) inform constituents about carbon sequestration strategies;
- (3) involve constituents in a joint discovery of opportunities associated with carbon sequestration;
- (4) enable constituents to negotiate opportunities for mutual benefit among the diverse parties with an interest in carbon sequestration.

Our constituents constitute multiple audiences, all of which have different motivations for their responses to carbon sequestration. These audiences include (1) private industry, (2) environmental groups, (3) the general public, and (4) governments. We have not designated nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as a distinct category, because we have found that the motivational base of NGOs representing private industry (for example coal) is quite different from the motivational base of NGOs representing environmental groups (for example the Sierra Club). These multiple audiences come to the table with vastly different knowledge levels and skills, and they care about carbon sequestration for different reasons. We are attempting to design an outreach program that responds directly to them.

COMMUNICATION

We define communication not as a psychological task of putting two minds together, but as a political challenge of establishing conditions under which mutual recognition of self-conscious individuals is possible (Peters). This shifts the crux of communication from fidelity to responsibility. Rather than using communication primarily for the purpose of sharing absolute truth with our constituents, we focus on how our words and deeds play before another. This seems an essential move given the scientific and technological uncertainties involved with carbon sequestration itself, and the inherent uncertainties associated with attempts to forecast the future of anything (including, but not limited to climate change).

Dissemination and dialogue are the fundamental communication strategies employed to achieve our objectives. By dissemination, we refer to the transmission, or broadcasting of information. This information is available to everyone, without prejudice. The risk associated with dissemination is that information may fall into the wrong hands, or that people might interpret it differently than we would like them to. If we really want broad public involvement, we have to be willing to take that risk. Dialogue, on the other hand, refers to personal interaction and direct connection among people. To engage in dialogue with someone requires that we spend considerable effort getting to know that person. The advantages are that we can design information to specifically respond to that person's needs, and we are able to learn from that person. The disadvantage is that we reach only a very small audience through this mode.

The communication techniques we have identified are formal presentations, learning activities, and process training. Formal presentations allow us to share information about infrastructure requirements, different technical possibilities, and opportunities for both specific industries and location-based communities to become involved. The learning activities focus on mediated modeling, which enables participants to share their learning with each other. The process training is designed to help participants become more effective communicators.

The tools, or media, through which we are implementing these techniques include a web page, an information packet, town hall meetings, and mediated modeling workshops. The web page provides an opportunity to disseminate information about our partnership activities, the regional partnership program, carbon sequestration, and its relationship to global climate change. It allows us to disseminate information to a broad range of potential constituents, even reaching those who have never heard of carbon sequestration. Secondly, it generates possibilities for dialogue with audiences we might fail to identify. For the benefit of anyone who chooses to initiate a dialogue, the web site provides information on how to contact the partnership. The information packet fulfills similar functions, but, because it is print based, both its spatial and temporal boundaries are more rigid. We will take advantage of the relative stability of this platform to disseminate information that focuses on operational possibilities suggested by scientific and technical research. Our target audience for this medium is industry. The 2 media are most effective when used together. For example, the information packet will direct readers to specific parts of the database, which can be accessed through the web page. Although people do not have to possess the information packet to access these data, the interpretive information in the information packet will make the data much more useful.

Our third communication medium is a variant on the town hall meeting. We plan to conduct meetings in several sites throughout the area covered by the Southwest Partnership. These meetings will incorporate both face-to-face and electronic interaction. Meetings will be electronically facilitated through a central source, which will ensure consistency among all informational presentations. Each meeting, on the other hand, will encourage participants to introduce perspectives unique to their communities as they engage each other in embodied interaction. Participants will have an opportunity to interact with other members of their community (in the same physical setting), at the same time they interact (electronically) with participants from other communities throughout the region. This medium should facilitate both information dissemination and group dialogue.

Our fourth communication medium is the mediated modeling workshop. Mediating modeling is designed to facilitate additional group learning (Vennix). This venue for face-to-face interaction provides opportunities for embodied relationship building, open discussion, and information sharing. Thus, although dialogue is the primary strategy here, some dissemination also occurs. Using this tool, we will involve the participants in active learning exercises to identify key issues, concerns, and interrelationships within the system. Participants will work together to develop a conceptual model, and then reframe as a quantitative model. This will involve translating the conceptual model into a series of mathematical equations that collectively form the quantitative model. Ultimately, the model will evolve into a communication interface between scientists and decision makers as constituents develop a sense of joint ownership, thus making the modeling process more important than the model itself (Peterson, Kenimer, and Grant).

CONCLUSION

The outreach system built through integrating these 4 media will facilitate a substantive interaction between all constituents, enabling them to more effectively evaluate costs and benefits associated with alternative carbon sequestration strategies, both as an economically viable technology and as a useful component in a national greenhouse gas reduction portfolio.

REFERENCES

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