

Watershed Protection through
Community-Based Social Marketing
Literature Review Summary for HRNERR/ NEIWPC
Social Science in the Hudson River Watershed
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I. Choosing a behavior change framework:

Human impacts in watersheds run the gamut from long-term institutional practices (such as highway design principles) to cultural habits (such as long showers by teenage girls) to isolated, unregulated acts (such as a developer's choice to drain a small wetland without seeking permission). They are diverse and subtle. What is more, the exact same behavior, carried out by different people, may have completely different motivational roots. When considering behavior change strategies – especially in the company of natural scientists who may seek a consistent logic to their approaches – it is understandable to seek a unified approach that can “fit all.” That preference may be advertising, local law, personal persuasion, community organizing, or leading by example. But, in the cases above, none of these single strategies, would work by itself.

However, there is a unified system, in growing use for natural resource protection, that could address each of the watershed impacts noted above: community-based social marketing. Community-based social marketing is a synthesis of principles and practices, arising from social psychology and related disciplines, that achieve voluntary behavior change using tools of outreach, communication, motivation and support. CBSM arose from reviews of the theoretical and applied social research literatures, primarily by McKenzie-Mohr and Smith,

with a specific focus on the needs for guiding individuals along paths of voluntary behavior change by removing socially constructed barriers and maximizing social incentives. Constructed on a strong theoretical and empirical framework that allows for integration with many other frameworks and methods, community-based social marketing is a flexible practice that designs and combines specific strategies to fit each local context, guided by an understanding of a community's unique character.

To clarify two similar but distinct concepts, social marketing is the use of marketing principles to achieve social objectives aimed at benefits to the target audience and the community as a whole. For example, an advertising campaign to encourage water conservation or discourage teen smoking, in an entire metropolitan media market, might use social marketing in the form of messages on the dangers of tobacco and the health benefits of quitting. However, *community-based* social marketing is a distinct variation, working interactively with communities and often supplementing pure marketing with broader insights and methods from social psychology. A community-based approach to smoking cessation could work in depth with individuals through support groups, sports programs, No Smoke Days in workplaces with lunchtime educational events, local media success stories and health tips, and perhaps a "smoke free" decal on the cash registers of stores that have stopped carrying tobacco products. The content that is communicated may be quite similar, but the methods can be more diverse, demographically customized, and interactive.

Community-based social marketing (CBSM) helps people to make voluntary behavior changes, and sustain those changes over time.

Also, importantly, it helps groups to change in a relatively concerted fashion. This is an essential strength of the method because it reduces the backsliding that can befall individuals who have changed their patterns of behavior, when their new behaviors run counter to the expectations of their peer groups.

CBSM has been framed and documented, primarily, by a cadre of academic social psychologists who have functioned as participant-observers in social movements including those for environmental stewardship and arms control, and have sought to combine rigorous empirical observation with a stance of social responsibility as psychologists.

The flexible suite of tools, packaged as CBSM, is effective in response to the complex and fluid nature of human motivation, allowing for interventions that “meet people where they are.” Some key principles of motivation that are generally affirmed in contemporary psychology include:

Meeting basic needs. Best known in the language of Abraham Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs,” people are motivated to ensure survival, comfort, belonging, self-esteem and actualization.

Achieving congruence with moral and attitudinal frameworks.

According to most frameworks in cognitive and developmental psychology, infants begin in “me-first” mode; they grow to acknowledge others’ rights to self-interest; with further evolution along a continuum, they learn to follow rules; internalize principles;

and make situation-appropriate decisions based on values. In a given group, there may be people at every stage.

Reflecting personal and cultural meanings. Research in peak performance and crisis management shows that individuals can transcend their own needs and levels of development in situations of high personal meaning, as illustrated by the widespread heroism in New York City during the 9/11 terrorist attacks. People can also resist change for highly personal reasons that are separate from generally understandable self-interest.

Achieving consistency with group norms. As anyone knows who has tried to forego overeating at a high-pressure Thanksgiving dinner, the models and expectations of a peer group can overwhelm even strong individual concern and commitment.

Community based social marketing works by securing people's attention and recognition through targeted communications that harmonize with their perceived needs, developmental stage, and world view; and then supporting the desired behaviors by rearranging the physical, social, and economic context to remove barriers, enhance motivation, and focus choice. Effective CBSM requires careful needs assessment and understanding of a given context, as well as awareness of individuals' tolerance for change and needs for self-determination. Respect and empathy are essential in the practice of community-based social marketing or any other behavior change strategy.

II. Principles of community based social marketing

Commitment. Asking people for personal commitments, even modest ones, affects their sense of themselves and of possibility, as illustrated by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's (NYSERDA's) current clean energy campaign, "Change a Light – Save the World." As well as focusing on simple, clear behaviors, commitments can invoke transcendent human values, as shown by the Garrison Institute's Hudson River Principles for living and leadership in a context of high ecological awareness, which were disseminated regionally in 2007.

Feedback. Feedback is quantifiable and/or emotionally significant messages evaluating performance to date – a thermometer in the village square that tracks United Way donations, or a letter of commendation to the town that has maintained the cleanest water supply.

Removal of external barriers. Addressing policy, logistical or economic barriers to a specific action – for example, prohibitions on greywater recycling in a local building code.

Incentives – direct benefits for the desired behavior; e.g. for households, rebates for installation of water-efficient appliances; for developers, accelerated permitting for watershed-sensitive site design.

Prompts. Specific action reminders located at a point of choice – "Conserve water" decals on faucets and showerheads, or "buy local" logos on produce from the Hudson River Watershed.

Models – Whether they take the form of a demonstration xeriscaping project on the local college campus or a group of local athletes whose green living is showcased on television, models are tangible examples of the desired behavior.

Norms – A powerful CBSM approach is orchestrating social experiences in which the desired behavior is the norm, e.g. zero-waste conferences, “eat local” marketing events, or behavior change support groups such as The Low Carbon Diet: A Thirty-Day Program to Lose 5,000 Pounds by David Gershon. In conjunction with personal commitments, informal social support relationships can be created to encourage resource-efficient behavior in families, schools, houses of worship or workplaces (e.g. “green teams”).

III. Best practice example: Water-Efficient Durham

McKenzie-Mohr maintains a database of cases, resources, and supporting literature on CBSM organized by topic. Water-Efficient Durham, a sustained water-efficiency initiative, conducted in a sprawling suburban area, is selected here for detailed review because it incorporates many methods and principles of CBSM and because it shows the opportunities for piloting, evaluation, and continuous adaptation in optimizing these approaches. In response to an ongoing 2.4% population growth and 6% rise in water consumption in a population of 531,000 near Toronto (with 62% of water consumption in the residential sector), a CBSM campaign was launched by the water utility. Its foundation was personal communication by students hired for the summer, in outreach initiatives that were piloted and honed

with a multi-year commitment. Two of the major campaigns are described below:

Water Fixture Replacement Program replaced 7,200 toilets over 2 years (supported by building code for new construction) – cut water use 26% / household and saved \$77 in billing. Incentives included cost-sharing, scheduling by the city; accompanying showerheads, aerators, rain barrels and sprinkler timers. Followup program in Uxbridge community, where surveys showed perception that the toilets were overpriced and did not work well; toilets were given away with only installation paid; 23% of fixtures were replaced, saving the community \$350,000 and delaying sewage treatment plant expansion.

Summer Peak Consumption Reduction: outreach by students gainfully employed for the summer, with photo identification, t-shirts and hats w/ project logo; engaged in informative conversation including the information that lawns only need 1" of water per week, distributed brochures and focused on building trust. 6 repeat visits per household. Watering behavior was compared (by student observers on bicycles) among visitation area, an area that received mail information, an area served by Master Gardener educators and a control area; the student visits were by far the most successful, reducing watering by 26%. The program expanded in successive years and incorporated written commitments from 88% of households, distribution of sprinkler timers and hose-nozzle reminder tags, as well as improved efficiencies such as monitoring results through the metering system and palm pilot documentation by the students. Coverage continually expanded, and cost per household dropped to

\$24. Similar methods were used to educate gardening households on water-efficiency, with encouragement to visit the model garden.

IV. Communication in CBSM

In reaching individuals, and scaling up to communities, communication strategy is a major dimension of effective community based social marketing which should be explored in a great deal more detail by the Social Science effort for the Hudson. Both language and imagery can inspire and engage people, or they can alienate, depending on their fit with the demographic and psychographic context of a community. A campaign to reduce the litter of cigarette butts, on a dock near a riverfront bar, may not effectively appeal to idealism, but it might tap humor, as shown by the poster campaign:

“Please do not drop your cigarette butts here. The fish come up at night and smoke them, and we are trying to get them to quit.”

McKenzie-Mohr and Smith recommend that CBSM campaigns:

- Use captivating information
- Begin with knowledge of the audience
- Use credible sources
- Frame the message (consider tacit assumptions and implications that will be recognized by your audience, not just the surface statement);
- Carefully consider threatening messages;
- Choose carefully when to communicate one-way and when to engage in dialogue
- Make messages easy to remember
- Recommend personal or community goals
- Offer feedback
- Emphasize personal contact.

V. Developing a campaign

A campaign brings tools and processes of community based social marketing into coherent use with a designated population. Designing an effective, responsible campaign involves understanding the population – including the community’s demographics and psychographics, and the promising points of access – and then designing the tools and processes in response. To understand a community’s relationship to the desired behavior changes, McKenzie-Mohr and Smith¹ recommend a 7 – step survey process of: clarifying your information needs; listing items to be measured; draft survey; pilot survey with at least 10 people; select a sample; conduct the survey and analyze the data.

Fundamental strategy. While a campaign may have many elements, elegant and effective CBSM strategies are often built around a single basic premise. For example, a successful Great Lakes restoration initiative partnered with Anheuser-Busch to supply local bars and restaurants with 20,000 signature beer coasters with well executed natural images and an invitation to participate in the restoration project, based on the hypothesis that beer drinkers had a significant empathy with the outdoors and needed mainly to be invited and supported in acting on their sentiments. Community responses to global climate change have increasingly been developed through the mediating structure of a World Café event – held between presentation of the “inconvenient truth” of the situation, and a call to action. The large-group dialogue of the Cafe provides an opportunity to assimilate the situation and explore personal dimensions of possible responses.

¹ Fostering Sustainable Behavior p. 152.

The basic premise, in this case, is that a threat of this magnitude is so large as to overwhelm ordinary pattern recognition capabilities, giving rise to denial, unless the awareness is systematically assimilated with an opportunity to respond emotionally as well as instrumentally.

Outreach priorities A key dimension of campaign design is identifying contact points for engaging a community. The marketing framework of social diffusion theory is helpful in its identification of population segments: the innovators (who originate change); early adopters (who need very little persuasion or models); an early majority (who rely on success models but then are open to change); a late majority (who require not only success models but widespread new norms); and “laggards” who may never change their behavior but can sabotage a change effort if their concerns are not consciously addressed. In a CBSM campaign, social diffusion principles suggest targeting early adopters and creating mechanisms to involve them as models and educators for an early majority. Scalability comes from working with populations in these broad segments. Scalability may also be achieved through distributed leadership – for example:

- “train the trainers” models;
- multi-stakeholder, multi-institutional partnerships with broadly shared leadership responsibility;
- broad information sharing to allow participants to take initiatives and self-organize;
- through modeling, communication, and structural choices, create a culture of shared leadership.

VI. Assessing and building community receptivity

No campaign will succeed where a community is inflexible.

Community adaptiveness and resilience are highly relevant to community-based social marketing, but are rarely integrated into standard manuals on the practice. A recommended counterpoint to this discussion of CBSM is the literature of “organizational learning” (Senge et al, Brown and Isaacs), focusing on the conditions that make institutions and communities capable of large-scale, lasting change. From the perspective of organizational learning, key conditions for creating organizations (or communities) that can learn new behaviors and cultures include:

- Personal mastery (of relevant skills, and a degree of maturity overall);
- Shared mental models to provide a common frame of reference and allow for effective communication in a common context;
- Capacity for systems thinking (to understand issues and be capable of creative solutions).

The principles of the learning organization are very much applicable to communities, and to their environmental behaviors. Social innovations like streamside cleanups and community-supported agriculture have spread substantially through community-based social marketing approaches, but their spread can be anticipated to be smoother in communities with attributes of learning organizations.

While the theory of the learning organization helps to identify conditions of receptivity overall, no community is homogeneous in its awareness of watershed issues and its willingness to respond with effective stewardship. Therefore, social diffusion theory is useful as a marketing framework based on subdividing populations according to

their receptivity to a given innovation, and targeting subgroups that can each in turn become models for the next. Typically, these are defined as innovators, early adopters, an early majority, the late majority and laggards (or, more respectfully, tradition-keepers) who may never adopt the new behavior. These population segments, and their natural opinion leaders, may be identified by a combination of survey and interview research, and participant observation. It should not be assumed that populations will be consistent, either over time or across issues, with respect to their receptiveness to innovative behavior such as advanced watershed stewardship. Therefore all hypotheses about the mechanisms of diffusion for these new ideas should be piloted before application to a substantial population.

Not only watershed advocates, but seemingly remote groups like business networks, can take effective local environmental leadership using CBSM, as shown by the work of Sustainable Connections in Bellingham, WA. Documented in a separate DVD, the 500-member group has grown by word of mouth and the benefits of peer to peer support for local businesses to operate more successfully and sustainably. Sustainable Connections' use of prompts (a "Buy local-buy fresh – be local" logo), incentives (discount coupons), social support (peer to peer business education), norms (Eat Local Weeks and Green Home Tours), and other dimensions of CBSM is distinctive because the community of teachers and the community of learners are virtually the same. Using the attraction of benefits that fit with the needs and values of local businesses and their customers, Sustainable Connections has built a true learning community that expands and improves its performance using CBSM, and experiences the benefits.

As these examples show, the framework of Community-Based Social Marketing shows impacts, cost-effectiveness, and a coherent approach to social intervention to achieve voluntary behavior change in watershed protection. It is complex – in keeping with human behavior, motivation and culture. But effective practice can be achieved without mastering every detail or option, by understanding the tools of CBSM in light of everyday human experience and aiming to create learning opportunities for others that we might find useful ourselves.

VII. Selected Resources

Abassi, Daniel (2006). Americans and Climate Change: Closing the Gap Between Science and Action. Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

The Biodiversity Project www.biodiversityproject.org has conducted nearly a dozen major studies of public opinion since 1996, on biological diversity, sprawl, open space, and overall environmental values and offers extensive resources on message framing, language choices, and campaign design.

Brown, Juanita and David Isaacs (2005). The World Café: Shaping the Future Through Conversations that Matter. San Francisco: Berrett-Kohler.

Canadian Centre for Pollution Prevention and Cullbridge Marketing Communications (2004). "The Impact of By-Laws and Public Education Programs on Reducing the Cosmetic/ Non-Essential, Residential Use of Pesticides: A Best Practices Review."

Daloz, Laurent; Cheryl Keen; James Keen and Sharon Daloz Parks (1996). Common Fire: Lives of Commitment in a Complex World. Boston: Beacon Press. A psychosocial study of high-performing adults' engagement with social and environmental issues, recommended as a counterpoint to social marketing with a focus on the sensibilities of those being "marketed to."

Dalton, Shawn. Social Assessment: Tools and Techniques for Coastal Managers, a Training in the Human Ecosystem Framework.

www.shawndalton.com/hefgui/her_t.html.

Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. (2003). Getting in Step: A Guide for Conducting Watershed Outreach. Washington, DC: EPA Office of Water. Online at

www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/outreach/documents.

Farrior, Marion (2005). Breakthrough Strategies for Engaging the Public: Emerging Trends in Communications and Social Science.

Madison, WI: The Biodiversity Project. Available for free download on www.thebiodiversityproject.org.

Gladwell, Malcolm (2002) The Tipping Point. Boston: Back Bay Books. Analysis of social networks, and typologies of actors within them, as sources of influence for rapid uptake of social innovations.

Kleiner, Art et al (1994). The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook. NY: Doubleday Currency. Compendium of articles and models on applied organizational learning for consultants and others interested in systemic social interventions.

Kofman, Fred and Peter Senge. (1998) "Communities of Commitment: The Heart of Learning Organizations." Special Report. NY: American Management Association International. Field-based review of the "state of the art" of creating learning organizations – high-performance organizations capable of assimilating and acting on new knowledge, enhancing receptiveness to CBSM or any outreach.

Kotler, Philip and Nancy Lee (2006). Marketing in the Public Sector: A Roadmap for Improved Performance. Wharton School Publishing.

Lakoff, George (2007). Thinking Points. NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. An integrated discussion of language, meaning-making and communications strategy within a theory of cognitive framing.

McKenzie-Mohr, Doug and William Smith (1999) Fostering Sustainable Behavior. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers. A widely-used summary, framing literature review and user's manual for Community-Based Social Marketing.

Prusak, Lawrence and Don Cohen (2000) In Good Company. Boston: Harvard Business School Press. Serious qualitative study of the role of social networks in peak performance of organizations, focusing on business but equally applicable in watershed protection or other community outreach efforts.

Rogers, Everett (1995). Diffusion of Innovations. NY: Free Press. Classic framework for understanding communities in terms of receptivity to innovations.

Senge, Peter (1994). The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization. NY: Doubleday Currency.