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# WEBINAR: COMMUNICATING WITH LANDOWNERS ABOUT OAK RESILIENCY

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*This webinar is part of the project Increasing Resiliency in Southern New England's Oak Forests, funded by the USDA Forest Service and convened by the Forest Stewards Guild in partnership with collaborating agencies and organizations in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts.*

*Brought to you by: Purnima Chawla, Center for Nonprofit Strategies; Amanda Mahaffey, Forest Stewards Guild; and Christopher Riely, Sweet Birch Consulting, LLC.*

On April 22, 2020 Dr. Purnima Chawla of the Center for Nonprofit Strategies presented an interactive webinar training on Communicating with Landowners about Oak Forest Resiliency. As southern New England's oak forests face pressures from insect defoliation, herbivory, drought, and climate change, foresters and allied professionals need to be able to communicate with landowners in a way that speaks to their concerns and motivations and helps them take concrete stewardship actions.

How can forestry professionals support landowners in taking action? How can we be most effective in our outreach?

To answer these questions, this webinar focused on programming and outreach principles of Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (TELE). TELE is an approach for planning outreach to landowners and is informed by the science of social marketing. The webinar introduced the TELE principles; participants then discussed the application of those principles, generating ideas for landowner outreach to support oak forest resiliency.

## TELE PRINCIPLES

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### 1. BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT LANDOWNERS TO DO

This means also thinking through the steps they'll need to take to accomplish it.

Many of the actions that we would like landowners to take are actually a *series* of actions. "Establish a management plan" probably isn't the first step for someone just beginning to steward their land. "Call a forester" might be a first step. There might even be a more preliminary action to take in order to go about finding a trusted professional.

In other words, part of engaging landowners effectively is identifying what stage people are at in order to help them advance from "novice" to practicing model stewardship behaviors. If we give landowners all the information at once, we tend to overwhelm them. It's often best to give them just the relevant info they need for the appropriate next step.

### 2. TAILOR YOUR PROGRAM FOR A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE

Think about the breadth and depth of your outreach approach. For a given outreach effort, are you out to engage many new landowners, or would a few landowners who are already active in stewardship be more effectively engaged?

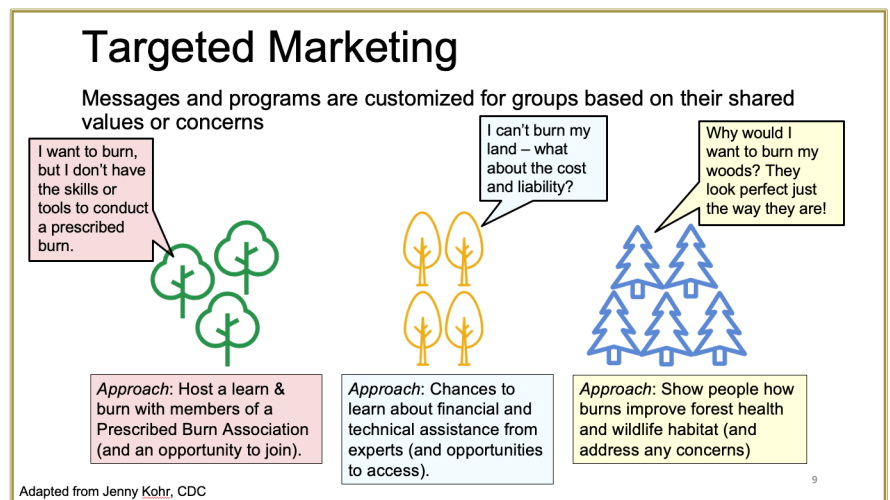
Most of us are able to tailor our message when talking to individual landowners. However, that's not always what's needed. How do you put out effective messaging that will make landowners show up to a course, or a woods tour,

or a webinar? Some people will be more strapped for time or money, will be more or less passionate about stewarding their land, or will be more or less likely to avail themselves of online tools. Providing different programs will help different landowners to engage in different ways.

### *Traditional landowner outreach versus targeted marketing*

A useful exercise is to identify a few different "types" within the landowner audience you work with. Describe each type, as well as the primary motivations and concerns that may factor in to their management decisions.

Based on these types, you can then define main target groups for an outreach effort. By tailoring your approach for these groups, you will likely be able to provide a more effective response to their concerns or barriers to action.



### 3. ADOPT YOUR AUDIENCE'S PERSPECTIVE

Remember, a landowner's mental model of a situation is just as valid as yours. What is easy, important, or obvious to you may not be for them. The action you propose must work within their perspective of the situation.

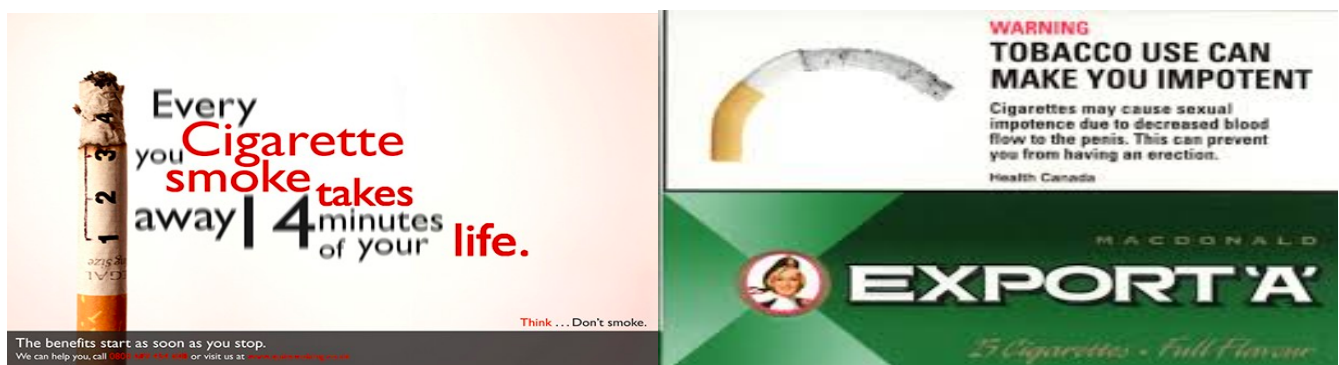
### 4. GIVE LANDOWNERS A COMPELLING REASON TO ACT

Even once you're on the same page, getting someone to agree that something is a good idea isn't necessarily in itself going to get them to do it. There's an enormous gap in between acceptance of an idea and action! How do you bridge this gap?

What compels someone to action? → Emotion.

Once you have an action goal in mind, think about what emotion will drive this action. Then be intentional and direct in how you speak to that emotion in your landowner group. What does your audience care passionately about? What do they fear enough that they're willing to take action? It may be a sense of satisfaction and well-being that most effectively motivates them.

### *Example 1 - Emotional appeal in anti-smoking ads*



Target audience: adolescent boys.

Consider that this is an audience not known to be overly concerned with its own mortality (ad #1). With this in mind, and taking into account what *is* on this audience's mind, ad #2 may be a better alternative.

### *Example II - Riparian buffers*

*In a campaign to get landowners to protect and maintain riparian buffers, different ads target different audience groups based on the emotions most likely to drive them to action.*



Ad #1 Target audience: suburban homeowners



Ad #2 Target audience: farmers

## 5. ORGANIZE RESOURCES TO SUPPORT ACTION

Landowner attention is a precious commodity; capitalize when you have it, and don't squander it. Make sure you're prepared to reduce barriers to taking action, making a friction-free "no-brainer" for your audience. Make sure you're following up and not losing people along the way.

## 6. EVALUATE EARLY AND OFTEN

Track your outreach, assess its outcomes (landowner actions), and look for the impacts (changes on the ground).

## KEY QUESTIONS

The following four questions are ones you should ask yourself before engaging with landowners. Prior to any meeting, make sure you have answers to these questions:

1. What is a doable, meaningful activity for this landowner? What's the appropriate next step?
2. What benefit, threat, or value will motivate him or her the most? What emotion will drive action?
3. What are the main barriers to action, and how can we reduce them?
4. What is the timeline for this person? What kind of follow-up assistance will they need?

Consider these four questions in thinking about the following scenarios:

## SCENARIOS

### NANCY AND JIM

- Older couple, no children.
- Own 80 acres of woodland dominated by oak.
- Enrolled in state current use program, have management plan in place, and have worked with a forester.
- Had been counting on a harvest to support retirement, but gypsy moth has destroyed trees on half of their property.





- Stock market downturn has further upended their retirement plans.
- Feeling anxious and let down.

### Participant Responses to Key Questions

1. Doable, meaningful activity and appropriate next step:
  - ◇ Ask their forester for recommendations and talk to other landowners in similar situations.
  - ◇ Get professional advice on what the financial ramifications would be now, under these new circumstances.
  - ◇ Update the management plan to reflect current circumstances.
  - ◇ Consult with a forester for a timber valuation and then consult with their CPA about claiming a casualty loss on farm taxes.
  - ◇ Consider salvage harvest, but delay the cut as long as possible to let the markets recover.
  - ◇ Conduct a regeneration harvest to establish the next oak forest. Consider their legacy in the forest.
2. Emotional drive
  - ◇ Grief; fear; hope.
  - ◇ Risk of losing more money through inaction.
3. Barriers to action
  - ◇ Lack of a market to support a salvage harvest; high cost of slash treatment to reduce fire hazards.
4. Timeline and follow-up
  - ◇ Immediate; they don't feel like they have time to wait
  - ◇ The consultant should recontact them after a few weeks to help push past any obstacles, including inertia.

### PRIYA AND MATT

- Young couple with two young children.
- Both work, often remotely.
- Have just moved into a home on 20 acres of wooded land near a metro.
- Urbanites and outdoor lovers.
- Want outdoorsy, rural lifestyle for their children, particularly now during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Concerned about tick- and mosquito-borne illnesses in woods.
- Want non-biased info to make woods safe, healthy, and enjoyable.



### Participant Responses to Key Questions

1. Doable, meaningful activity and appropriate next step:
  - ◇ Find a local service forester, perhaps a state forester. Try doing a google search.
  - ◇ Get an initial assessment from the forester to check forest health and in particular look for areas like barberry that might favor tick populations.
  - ◇ Develop a Forest Management Plan.
  - ◇ Establish a trail through the woods and conduct some hazard tree removal/thinning.
  - ◇ Look into joining a forest owners association.
2. Emotional drive
  - ◇ Love, and the desire to get their family into the woods safely
  - ◇ Opportunity for shared family experiences
  - ◇ Concern about forest health, concern about human health

- ◇ Fear insect-borne diseases such as Eastern Equine Encephalitis
- 3. Barriers to action; what can we do?
  - ◇ Lack of knowledge; not knowing where to start or what questions to ask
  - ◇ Limited time to devote to the subject
  - ◇ Fear of making a mistake in their woods
  - ◇ Walk their woods with them and chat; bring in a wildlife specialist to consult too!
  - ◇ Get them in contact with some neighbors that have done work in the woods
- 4. Timeline and follow-up
  - ◇ Now, during the first season on their new property while it's exciting and full of promise.
  - ◇ Consultant should reach out immediately, before the kids' summer sporting events start; follow up with an email or phone call in a few weeks.

For more resources on the Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively, please visit:  
<http://www.engaginglandowners.org>.

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TOOLS FOR  
ENGAGING LANDOWNERS  
EFFECTIVELY