HOW TO ENGAGE THE PUBLIC IN CLIMATE ADAPTATION:
A Research-Based Framing and Communications Guide

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COMMUNICATING CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND PREPARATION

Literature Review and Polling Summary

• Reviewed more than 85 articles from scholarly journals and trade publications from 2007-present

• Analyzed findings from more than 70 polls from 2007-present
Related Fields of Social Science

- Behavioral science
- Communications
- Development studies
- Behavioral Economics
- Environmental studies
- Political science
- Psychology
TREND 1: Adaptation Comes Home

- Adaptation versus mitigation debate is largely over.
- The emphasis is no longer solely on adaptation in developing countries.
- The field of adaptation research is starting to grow.
TREND 2: The Mitigation-Adaptation Intersection

- Mitigation and adaptation as joint climate response strategies.
- Greater integration is needed.
- Understanding of adaptation can lead to heightened interest in mitigation.
**TREND 3:**
**Linking Extreme Weather to Climate**

- Americans are making the connection between extreme weather events and climate.

- Direct impacts do not have to be experienced or extreme to motivate concern.
TREND 4: Addressing Uncertainty

- Successful risk communication depends on recognizing uncertainty.

- “Insurance” frame resonates with public to prepare and protect communities.
TREND 5: Vulnerability, Justice and Resilience

- “Equitable adaptation” as a response to justice issues.
- Resilience: ability for systems to cope with climate impacts.
- Protecting local resources, such as public health and water, is seen as vital.
RECOMMENDATION 1: Use a Preparation Frame

- “Preparation” or preparing for climate impacts/extreme weather events have traction.
- Preparation sounds proactive, hopeful and can bridge to “climate disruption” over time.
- People may not accept global warming, but will still take steps to prepare.
82% of Americans say that people and organizations should prepare for impacts rather than deal with damage after it occurs. (Gfk 2013)

There is strong bi-partisan support for taking steps to protect against a wide range of global impacts. (Climate Nexus 2012)

The term “preparedness” is significantly more motivating than the language of “adaptation.” (ecoAmerica 2012)

85% of voters favor “preparedness” as the preferred approach to address climate impacts. (ecoAmerica 2012)
RECOMMENDATION 2: Caution in conveying impacts
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local impacts  realistic hope
RECOMMENDATION 3: Build from extreme weather to action

- Link storms to larger trends and climate disruption
- Highlight record setting events, frequency and severity
- Tie to solutions and benefits
RECOMMENDATION 4: Connect impacts with people

- Make it about people not polar bears
- Address equity and justice issues
- Climate change as a moral obligation
RECOMMENDATION 5: Tap values

- Safe, prosperous communities
- Prevention pays
- Readiness
- Better future
- Health and well-being
RECOMMENDATION 6: Convey solutions

- Build a sense of hope
- Highlight climate preparation successes
- Position climate adaptation leaders as champions
- Set concrete milestones
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