

Shared, values-based approach to communications and engagement

Overview

To ensure governments, businesses and the community are emboldened to institute effective and lasting solutions to climate change, there is a need to address these social challenges. Specifically, the most significant barriers to engaging people on the issue are understood to be psychological distance (how concrete or abstract your thoughts are on a topic), literacy (which is low across Australian audiences) and efficacy (someone's ability to feel like they can affect change).

An effective and long-lasting approach to engaging with and getting individuals and other stakeholders on board with climate change solutions is through fostering and encouraging those values that appeal to our collective and basic compassions. While certain individuals might have preconceived notions of how things are, it is always possible to influence their views if the right approach is used.

In 2011, the Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC) came up with a group of values that would be useful in engaging different stakeholders on diverse issues. The Common Cause Foundation advocates the use of frameworks and structures to align messages with intrinsic values to create long-lasting action on environment and social issues.

City specific strategies

Cities have broad responsibilities to deliver on multiple benefits through net zero emissions and carbon neutral strategies. Well aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, cities work on the inter-relationships between many issues and stakeholders. While cities need a clear measurement and data framework to develop net zero emissions and carbon neutral strategies the specific solutions and approaches need to be framed and couched in ways that are accessible and appeal to values to lead to commitment and action.

Using a values-based landscape analysis tool and insights from the community of practice the following examples show how themes and messaging are being received in the Australian context and offer values based approaches for the cities to continue to test.

A low carbon, circular economy

Generation Yes' landscape analysis tool results showed that low carbon living or lifestyles and the new economy are not narratives that are understood or driving mainstream engagement within the Australian context. However, City of Adelaide's experience showed that if the city emphasises a place where people want to live and work and connect, and that economic transition and technology is necessary to create this, the low carbon and new economy narrative will have greater resonance. While circular economy as a concept is not known to many Australians, storytelling through mainstream media for example the War on Waste¹, or at a city level showing the journey on a product is helping individuals and those leading organisations to see a broader context and purpose for their decisions.

Carbon positive buildings and precincts

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/ourfocus/waronwaste/>

Generation Yes' landscape analysis results from the beginning of 2018 showed that the narrative around carbon positive buildings, is not one that is driving mainstream engagement in Australia. This is true also of low carbon and net zero building frames as well. Globally, zero carbon buildings is a narrative driving some engagement, interestingly that engagement is rather dormant, suggesting people who engage with the topic are for it, and expect it to happen without their action or input. This could be due to a belief it is more of an industry or government response rather than through individual action.

A recent Carbon Positive initiative launched by City of Sydney tapped into the personal commitment of leaders in the building industry to show a collective effort. Making visible this collective effort through storytelling, for example the Building Run² project that was delivered in both Melbourne and Sydney, depicted buildings as athletes preparing for and running a race. The building became a character that those who inhabit them could relate to and work to support.

100% renewable energy

Ninety-six percent of Australians want our primary source of energy to come from renewables (58 percent want an energy supply based on renewables supported by storage technologies, 38 per cent prefer renewables supported by fossil fuels) (Climate Institute, 2017, 3). Australians look to South Australia as a visible example of creating a future that is better. However City of Adelaide stakeholder engagement suggests that further effort and framing is needed to assure those people that their colleagues and neighbours feel as strongly as do about this future vision and that it is possible to create right now.

City of Melbourne's recent engagement found that Melburnians interviewed needed more information to understand how the City can be powered by renewable energy located in other locations. Several cities and stakeholder have now embarked on joint procurement projects. This collective effort can be framed as 'power' yet this can dissuade people from engaging when they do not think it is accessible to all.

Generation Yes recently partnered with the social sector to build awareness of the solutions already being implemented across Australia for those unable to individually invest in emissions reduction action. The narrative that affordable energy solutions can enable all Australians to thrive gained significant positive traction with over 80,000 Australian's engaging with the materials and two thirds of those people sharing stories that had 'universal' appeal.

Zero emissions transport

Generation Yes' narrative analysis tool read showed that electric vehicles specifically is a narrative that is growing in engagement in Australia. There is an opportunity to establish a vision for clean, green cities that are pollution free. A barrier to action is both planning and also Vehicles Emission Standards. There is opportunity to build on the growth as much of the content shaping this narrative is from 2017 or earlier.

The current content is effectively engaging people with a positive and active orientation which suggests individuals can see their own role to play on the topic. Combining this with our findings about technology in general, creating content and messages that highlight specific transport solutions and how they play a role in the future society, how individuals use them is recommended to build a broader understanding of the future of transport in Australia.

² <http://www.carbonarts.org/events/building-run-melbourne/>

Health, wellbeing and participation

A consultation led by the Climate and Health Alliance with Generation Yes and health stakeholders revealed there are deep value commitments within the health community to help drive the transition to zero carbon. There is an immediate need to build capacity to contribute to this, and pervasive health promotion, education and capacity building is required. There was also a recognition that communication around the net zero transition could be considered an important mental health strategy.

The findings of the Generation Yes' narrative listening tool on the issues of health and wellbeing showed that the narrative around climate change and health/wellbeing is not widely understood in Australia, but is expected to grow. Globally the narrative around health still requires definition but is a narrative that individuals are engaging with, and is also expected to grow in engagement levels. The narratives have been developed globally by both government and worldwide organisations, as opposed to news outlets. Importantly, narratives that grow in power globally around climate action, have tended to become important within the Australian context.

Reducing risk and preparing for climate impacts

Climate Change and risk is anecdotally, through ClimateWorks Australia's work, building in significance across investment bodies and corporate businesses throughout Australia. Generation Yes' landscape analysis tool also highlights growing engagement around this topic. The latest read in early 2018 showed that individuals feel a level of expectation around the gravity of the risks involved, and that this narrative has largely been informed by global outlets including Harvard Business Review and Think Progress. Establishing the link between preparedness and climate action to reduce the incidence of climate related events (e.g. heat waves) can tap into fear, however if cities combine the solutions with the events this is proven to tap into values of security and enable people to contribute rather than avoid the need to act.

Innovation, knowledge, sharing and transparency

One important learning from Generation Yes' landscape analysis tool is that innovation and technology as a broad concept when applied to climate change can create feelings of fear and apprehension. However, highlighting individual technologies, and showing what specific role they could play in community or society, evokes feelings of hope, expectation and joy. This was the case for narratives around solar power, battery storage and transport solutions within the Australia context. Providing opportunities for innovators to develop new ideas through social enterprises, start-up incubators and academic research and projects taps enables knowledge to be shared and distributed across communities and business, which is universally embraced.