06/12/23 – NAVCA Climate Network – Communicating the Climate Crisis

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Introduction – Emily

We wanted to theme this first session around how we communicate about the climate crisis, to make sure we are on the same page when it comes to talking to each other and to communities. My previous job was in a local organisation that was aiming to engage people in taking climate action, so we spent a lot of time figuring out an approach to take to encourage and inspire people, rather than making them feel helpless or overwhelmed.

Why communicating is important:

- Don't assume everyone knows everything about the climate emergency;
- There is a lot of misinformation and disinformation;
- We can help people make connections between their daily lives and the climate emergency through good communication.

We talk about the role of NAVCA members through the four functions of infrastructure, which we discussed in the first part of the meeting. We can also link this to communicating the climate crisis:

Leadership and advocacy: We should be a leading voice locally on this topic, and advocate for communities that are particularly affected by extreme weather and other impacts of the climate emergency. This means that it is important that how we communicate is very important, as we want to be seen as a voice of authority.

Partnerships and collaborations: Communicating with different groups in different ways is important, because people care about different things. When seeking to work with or bring in a new group, it is important to use language that resonates with them. As mentioned before, we have a role in bringing groups together and this can be done through careful communication.

Capacity building: Capacity building helps to strengthen the local voluntary sector, and we need to make sure communities are not only resilient if there is an environmental crisis, but prepared for them. Communicating well will help groups build capacity, and encouraging more groups to take action will help tackle the climate crisis.

Volunteering: Local green groups may wish to recruit volunteers and may need help with how to communicate well. People may wish to volunteer but may be unaware of what they can do to help.

In this session, we will look at communicating mostly to individuals and local groups, rather than lobbying politicians (that is a different skill!).
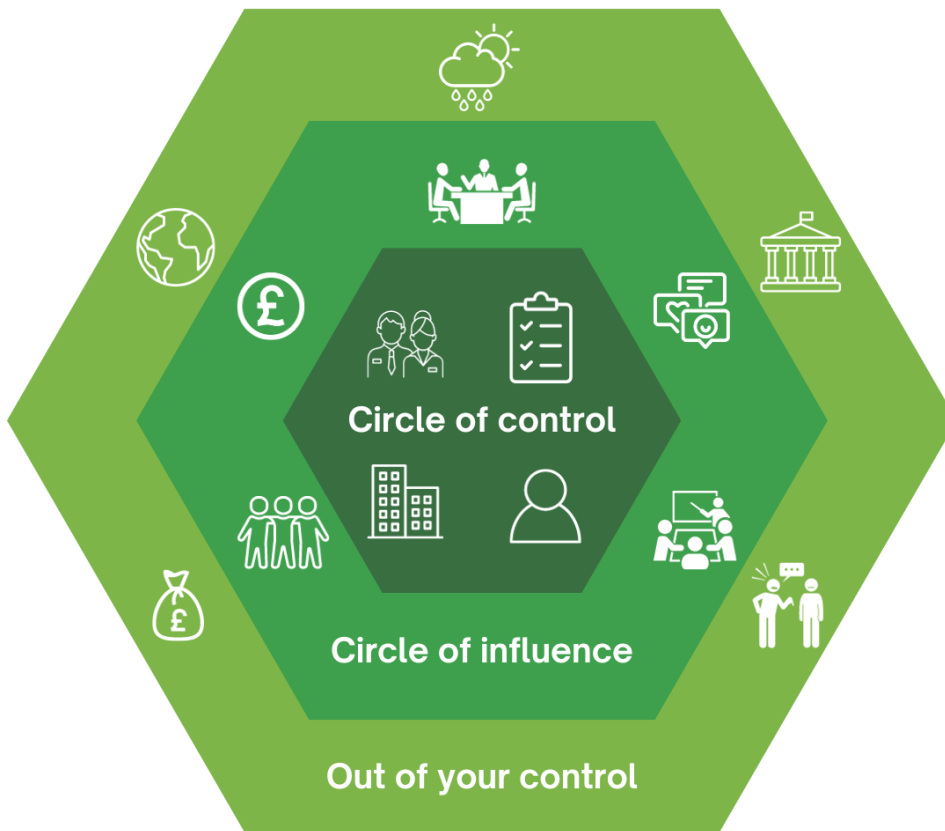
Hope for the Future run training on lobbying politicians: https://www.hftf.org.uk/

Resources that VAST have provided for their local groups – Kez

Though 88% of charities reported being concerned about the climate crisis, a survey carried out by the Charity Finance Group shows that more than eight in 10 charities don't yet have a net zero objective, and just over one in 10 currently report on their carbon emissions.

In areas like Stoke-on-Trent, the climate crisis is often seen as a low priority, overshadowed by high-impact local issues like fuel poverty. However, the objectives of many VCSE organisations - fighting poverty, discrimination, inequality - can't be achieved without climate action. The socially vulnerable groups that charities often work to protect - children, older people, those on lower incomes, people with disabilities, people who are socially isolated, and more - are more likely to be impacted by the effects of climate change.

To help non-environmental organisations take their first steps towards climate action, VAST have put together two guides – the first aimed at individuals, and the second aimed at organisational management – to help organisations take their first 'baby steps'. Tackling climate change can feel like an overwhelming, sometimes hopeless task, which can lead to inaction – we hope that by emphasising the work that organisations are already accidentally doing, and helping them to identify the parts of their work where they can easily make changes, they will feel empowered to start working towards a greener future.

Jargon busting (some basic climate phrases so everyone is on the same page) – Kez

Going Green Together Climate Glossary

Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets

Difference between global warming and climate change

Carbon footprint This is the total amount of greenhouse gases that are released into the atmosphere every year by a person, family, organisation or business. Every carbon footprint is unique and can be reduced through actions relevant to the person/organisation. This could be through choosing to drive or fly less, or through choosing products that are supplied locally for example.

Scope 1-2-3

GHGs – Gases that absorb and trap heat (i.e. infrared radiation) from the Sun in the Earth's atmosphere. Includes the following gases that are covered by the UNFCCC/Kyoto Protocol: carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4), nitrous oxide (N_2O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), sulphur hexafluoride (SF_6) and nitrogen trifluoride (NF_3). These gases are the direct cause of climate change.

Net zero - This refers to a balance between the amount of carbon emitted into the atmosphere and the amount of carbon removed from the atmosphere. Removal of carbon from the atmosphere could happen naturally, through trees and oceans for example, or through man-made processes like Direct Air Capture. Many governments and businesses are now working towards Net Zero through cutting emissions and trying to capture more carbon by planting trees for example. It is important to understand that a balance like Net Zero can only be achieved if emissions are cut.

How to talk to people about the climate (some quick tips) – Emily

[Climate Outreach](https://climateoutreach.org) – in particular, https://climateoutreach.org/reports/britain-talks-climate: They surveyed a wide range of people and placed them on a political scale, it's not about left or right wing but about what people care about and why, where their interests are, what common ground we can find with them. It talks about reaching a wide range of people, but it doesn't demonise particular groups for seeming to care about a certain issue more than others.

- **Meeting people where they're at** – Listen to them and find out what they care about, rather than trying to make people care about the climate crisis from your angle. For example, they might enjoy spending time walking in their local park. Could you help them to consider the impact of pollution or litter on biodiversity, or extreme weather affecting the quality of the park?
- **Connecting to local issues** – Think about what's happening locally and what your community cares about. Is there a way that a local environmental group can connect with a local charity to learn more about each other's work, to learn different perspectives and see where they can take action together?
- **People are selfish** – People want to know what's in it for them – not in a bad way! People have a lot going on, especially now with challenges such as the cost of living crisis, so it can be helpful to let them know why tackling the climate crisis will benefit them specifically e.g. save money, greener spaces locally, better health.
- **Presenting challenges as opportunities** – Be realistic about what is happening, but too much of this can lead to feelings of helplessness and being overwhelmed. One way you could frame it is a big problem = a big opportunity. For example, food and transport are such big parts of everyone's life, but also

areas where we can reduce carbon emissions. Make sure people know that we are in it together and that it doesn't rest on one person's shoulders.

How to talk about what you're doing as an organisation: link to your vision and mission, link it to other areas of your work, relate it to your local community, position yourself as being on a journey along with your community.

Understanding reliable sources and avoiding misinformation – Kez

In 2022, For the first time in its history, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) named the spread of climate misinformation as an obstruction to climate action. A recent report by advocacy group Stop Funding Heat found that climate misinformation—false information that's spread either by mistake or with the intent to mislead—gets viewed up to 1.36 million times every day on Facebook alone.

The five primary techniques used to share misinformation are:

- **False expertise:** Presenting an unqualified person or institution as a source of credible information.
- **Logical fallacies:** Arguments where the conclusions don't logically follow from the premises.
- **Impossible expectations:** Demanding unrealistic standards of proof before acting on the science.
- **Conspiracy theories:** Proposing that a secret plan exists to implement a nefarious scheme, such as hiding a truth.
- **Cherry-picking data:** Carefully selecting data that appear to confirm one position while ignoring other data that contradicts that position.

The app "cranky uncle" will present you with just that – a cranky, climate-change denying "uncle" whose statements will test your ability to identify misinformation and the techniques they're using to trick you, intentionally or unintentionally. [Homepage - Cranky Uncle](#)

5 CHARACTERISTICS OF SCIENCE DENIAL

F — Fake Experts / Magnified Minority

L — Logical Fallacies / Red Herring

I — Impossible Expectations / Misrepresentation

C — Cherry Picking / Jumping to Conclusions

C — Conspiracy Theories / False Dichotomy

If you're looking to share information, make sure to check your sources carefully.

When sharing facts and figures, make sure they come from a reliable source, which is science-based (consistent with the latest scientific consensus) and objective (not biased or influenced by financial or political incentives). Look for peer-reviewed articles, or sources with authority (like the IPCC). If you're reading commentary from an individual's social media account or blog, question their climate expertise – do they have a scientific background?

To fact check, look for the claim you're unsure about on Climate Feedback – A Scientific Reference to Reliable Information on Climate Change

Remember to keep an eye out for greenwashing, too - the practice of making false or exaggerated claims about the environmental benefits of a product, service, or company in order to present a misleading image of sustainability or eco-friendliness. Double check that their actions match up with their advertising – the Net Zero Tracker tool can help you identify which companies are following through on their environmental claims.

Remember that as an infrastructure organisation, you are a "trusted messenger" - your members and local communities trust you to share accurate, well-sourced information, and it's your responsibility to make sure that anything you share is true. If you DO accidentally share information which is incorrect or from an unreliable source, make sure to address the issue – remove the information from any platforms you've shared it on, issue an apology, and provide information from a more reputable source.

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provides the most comprehensive summaries of the latest research on climate science and the impacts of climate change.

- **The UK Royal Society and the US National Academy of Sciences** are fellowships of the world's most eminent scientists. Together they published a joint statement on the science of climate change.
- **The Geological Society** has published a document setting out the evidence for and risks of climate change from a geological perspective.
- **The American Institute of Physics** hosts a detailed history of global warming.
- The United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda.
- **NASA** provides the public with accurate and timely news and information about Earth's changing climate.
- The **Met Office** produces the UK Climate Projections. These are the most up-to-date assessment of how the climate of the UK may change over the 21st century.
- The **UK Climate Risk** website hosts all of the outputs for the Climate Change Risk Assessment Evidence Report, from technical chapters through to the research projects through to summaries of the advice.

Sources:

[How to Spot—and Help Stop—Climate Misinformation (nrdc.org)](#)

[Communicating on Climate Change | United Nations](#)

[Busting myths: a practical guide to countering science denial (theconversation.com)](#)

[Useful resources - Climate Change Committee (theccc.org.uk)](#)

Activity

Present the group with some statements and ask them to make suggestions for how to respond to these, based on what we have talked about today.

"There's no point in doing anything when nobody else is."

- Encourage them to think about the spaces they are in already and where they can make a difference.
- Point out examples of where people have made positive change (preferably locally) and how they can get involved.
- Emphasise how important everyone is, as we all have a climate impact and are all affected by the climate emergency.

"It's all the big companies – nothing I do will make a difference."

- Acknowledge that there is an element of truth to this –many companies are big polluters, and are responsible for more carbon emissions than most of us.
- We can influence system change, especially locally, share some examples.

"There are more important issues to focus on right now."

- Acknowledge their concern, don't dismiss it.
- Connect the issues to the climate crisis.

We also talked about intersectionality, and being aware that marginalised groups will often be most impacted by the impacts of the climate crisis. For example, people in poorer communities in urban, built-up areas of the UK may be impacted more by air pollution. Women are often more impacted (this article from UN Women is helpful in understanding this), and climate justice and racial justice are tightly connected – usually, people who experience racism also experience negative impacts of the climate emergency. Tackling the climate crisis should not be seen in isolation from social issues. This may come up in conversations, and it is important to apply the principle of really listening to the person and their concerns.