

Elevating Conservation Education within Your Agency

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In 2008, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries added education to its mission statement, although it had been in the agency's legislative mandate for decades. By pulling the education and information staff from several divisions and placing them together under the Director, we have been able to better assist the agency and to bring our own programs to the attention of staff. There is still a long way to go but VA is moving forward. It is not where the education session is located in the agency, but that agencies see education as mission critical. As strategic plans are updated and mission statements revised, education needs to be at the table.

It is the mission of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to

- manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth;
- to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia;
- to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing;
- and to provide **educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitat, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.**

Elevating Conservation Education Within Your Agency

The Secrets of Success

Barb Gigar

First, let's talk about what constitutes successful programs. Are you looking for more money? Freedom to do what you want? Recognition of your efforts? More participants? Successful programs should be effective – provide real results (outcomes) for the greatest portion of the target population as possible (context). Successful conservation education programs help create stewards of the natural resources. Successful programs (operating at the state or national level) must facilitate efforts, rather than trying to do it themselves – there are many partners with mutual interests and common objectives working at the local level. Of course, that means our role switches to that of support staff, coach, and facilitator - rather than programmer.

Successful programs are built and sustained by following best practices:

- Educational efforts must help accomplish the mission of your organization/agency – be relevant!
- Educational efforts do not happen in a vacuum – know who/what affects your efforts and take that into account as you develop/implement them. This includes internal (e.g., staff buy-in) and external factors (e.g. formal education constraints).
- Effectiveness is key – often we fail to see the “business” side of the equation, which can make program susceptible in hard economic times. Do your efforts produce tangible results? Do you reach your target audience or a tiny fraction of it? Evaluate: Feel-good stories are great until someone wants to cut the program. Empower: Others *can* do what you do. Focus on helping them be the best they can be.

The Iowa Aquatic Education Program uses a three-pronged approach to facilitate education and outreach efforts targeted to increasing participation in fishing (and other outdoor activities) and stewardship of Iowa's aquatic resources:

- Resource Materials – information, teaching materials, equipment, etc.
- Capacity Building – training, research (educational trends, human dimensions, new technologies, etc), support via mini-grants,
- Partnerships – seeking out partners with common goals/objectives and providing resources, helping them to build capacity (mini grants, equipment, training)

The “Secrets” of “Success”

Barb Gigar
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Define Success...

- Funding?
- Freedom?
- Recognition?
- Participation?
- Stewardship?
- Effective....

Know Who You Work For

- Know the mission of the agency/organization and your part in that
- Be integral to accomplishing the mission

Know Who/What Affects Results

- Know who/what affects your results
- Facilitate change where possible to improve your chances of success
- Know when it's bigger than your program and develop strategic partnerships

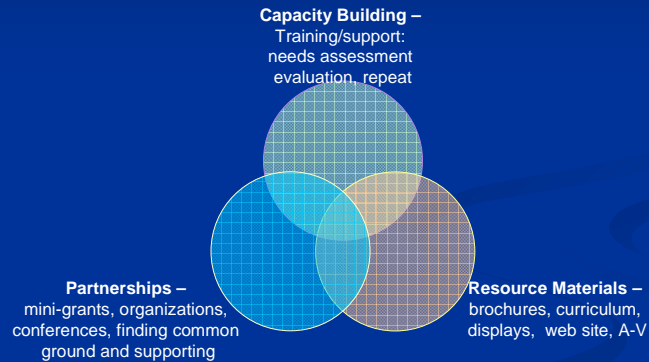
Results vs Efforts

- Education is a Management Tool
- Demonstrate Results – Outcomes
- Emphasize Effectiveness
 - Coordinated
 - Comprehensive
 - Prioritized
 - Contextual

Communicate

- Target Groups
- Target Partners
- Internal Personnel – Target

Three-pronged approach focuses on partnerships, resources, increasing capacity



Angling/Participation

- Fish Iowa! Games
 - Since 2006 – 84 schools; 19,000+ participants
- Mini-grants
 - For extended efforts
 - Partnerships key
 - 1,300+ participants in 2007
- Urban Fishing
 - Work directly with park & recreation
 - Integrate fishing into programming
 - Developing models for best approaches
 - 3,100+ participants in 2008
- Angler's Legacy
 - Participants mentored 250 novices in 2008

Stewardship Education

- Project WILD Aquatic (w/ PW and PLT)
 - Training: Pre-professionals, In-service
 - Just convened a session with college professors to integrate materials
 - Advanced trainings (Newest is on-line)
 - Over 15,000 educators trained (30-40 workshops/year); est. 150,000 participants/yr.
- Support Activities
 - Iowa-specific resource materials (print, web, CD, blog)
 - Demo. Models: Stream tables (23) & EnviroScape (50+)
 - Correlations to learning standards, other programs
 - Integration Mini-Grants
 - 15 Schools – 1,112 students participated in the integrated units (2006-2008)