

Engagement & Connection WORKING GROUP- notes

Chair: David Buggs (TX)

Agenda

Call to order, introductions, and review of agenda – David Buggs (TX)

- Round robin intros
- QR code sign-in
- Review and update the agenda

Coffee Talks: Review and Proposal for Every Other Month Conversations - Taniya Bethke (CHASS)

- A way to bring people into the room to have meaningful conversations about engagement and connection space; sensitive topics; brave and vulnerable conversations
- Bring in speakers to talk about specific barriers; panel and themed focused in 2023
- In 2024 we talked more about engaging with these groups and inclusion in action
- We are asking what the needs of the community as the topics are evolving; how can we help meet those needs.
 - Skills
 - Groups
 - Concepts
 - → Translation services
 - → grant funding/ partnership opportunities
 - → digital apps available to help people feel more welcome in the outdoors
 - → have an in-person coffee talk at one of the larger meetings (AFWA Annual Meeting; NA Conference)
 - → have a state agency who has a flourishing relationship with one of these groups and have them talk about how they were able to get there
 - → what holds us back?
 - → have a version of the coffee talk available (recorded) that can be shared with those who were not able to attend
 - → tools with how to engage with legislature
 - → have leaders come forth to talk about value propositions of doing business in this way
 - → engagement with secondary and post-secondary students
 - → revisiting the conservation principles of why we do what we do; making the link
 - → how to give an 'elevator speech' with why we are using the new nomenclature (why we cannot say DEI and what to use now)
 - → retention strategy once you get staff on board
 - → helpful trainings for staff
 - → stakeholder conflict resolutions

AFWA Knowledge Hub concept- Chet Van Dellen (TIMMONS GROUP)

- When you figure out how to solve problems and solutions → a way to share
- Best practices, lessons learned, work worked and what didn't
- Owned and hosted by AFWA and on the AFWA website
- Building capacity through knowledge; organized through themes
- Look at the WHY, HOW, LESSONS, and where to get more INFORMATION.
 - Short and sweet
- Low burden
- Targeted at the director level
- Barrier: a lot of these requests doesn't get disseminated past the directors' email inbox

Human Dimensions Subcommittee update

- Leverage the work of each of our groups
- Looking at how they can support the whole community through social science
- There is a necessity of social science integration; ID and provide effective tools, resources and expertise; increase social science capacity and literacy; build cross jurisdictional connections
- Looking at the people side of conservation; is as or more important that the fish/wildlife side of conservation.
- DISCUSSION: Where can EC working Group efforts intersect with the social science subcommittee; and how can we collaborate?
 - There are many groups where there is virtually no data on how they interact with their state FW agencies → Can we look to collaborate to gather that information?
- 'We help you solve your wicked problems'

Engagement Academy: Past, Present, and Future—Jennifer Newmark, Patty Allen, Taniya Bethke, David Buggs

- Funded by a MSCG; developing skillsets using systems thinking to navigate and improve our current system; change management
- 22-state represented
- Very inspiring and rich conversations
- Each participant brought home a playbook with tools to help them in their state
- DISCUSSION: can we do a training the trainer model?? → a good idea, might be able to create something like that in the future
- The purpose of the Academy is not to indoctrinate anyone, just give tools of how to be inclusive and the value that brings to the agency
- DJ Case is currently evaluating the Academy

Evaluating & Summarizing the Engagement Academy- Matt Harlow & Ashley Smith

- Have had 3 discussions with 13 participants (focus group)
- Preliminary Findings:
 - Networking most valued
 - The coded language was confusing and inconsistent
 - Participants stratified (material wasn't)
 - Leadership, middle management, implementors
 - Leadership: understood organizational change management; comfortable with it

- Middle management understood organizational change management; don't have power to implement
- Implementors: didn't understand organizational change management; wanted best practices, steps, and checklists
- Moving forward:
 - Want a way to stay in touch
 - Want resources to continue learning/growth
- Concepts for Resource Sharing
 - Focus on organization change management
 - As a path to engagement
 - As an outline for the summary
 - Best practices for Leadership Strategy
 - align engagement and operations with purpose, mission, and values
 - clearly communicate the agency's mission and values
 - create a 'values checklist'
 - distribute guidelines of leadership behaviors
 - Include everyone in the Team, on the Team
 - Encourage mentorship
 - Regular team-building activities and workshops
 - Share the engagement vision (inclusive)
 - Communicate clearly
 - Accessible language
 - Multiple platforms
 - Ensure all stakeholders, including external partners are aware of the vision and their role in achieving it
 - Create and account framework

Revisiting the Working Group Name and Charge (Suggested language and actions) - Patty Allen (AFWA), David Buggs (TX)

- Last year we had the initial conversation around the name change. At the time there were 27 states with anti DEI legislation
- Still looked to have a meaningful name that met the needs of our working group
 1. Working Group name change is now Engagement and Connection Working Group
- Need to update our charge that also reflects the new language; to still be inclusive of all those interested in this important work.
- *Current WG Charge:* To inspire, guide and support the conservation community in embracing the richness of diverse cultures, individuals, experiences, and perspectives. This is reflected through proactive actions that enhance diversity in the workplace, create a welcoming culture, and increase our relevance to the broader conservation community by being inclusive and intentional in our actions
- **Updated Draft WG Charge: To inspire, guide, and support the AFWA member organizations in embracing the richness of various lived experiences and perspectives, and supporting those organizations in their efforts to eliminate barriers, develop broad and meaningful relationships, and increase relevancy to the broader conservation community.**
- GOALS incorporated in the Charge:

1. Eliminate barriers
2. Develop broad and meaningful relationships
3. Increase relevancy

ACTIVITY: workshop to list ideas to achieve to achieve the goals (1- eliminate barriers, 2- develop broad and meaningful relationships, 3- increase relevancy)

- Breakout groups
- Patty Allen (AFWA) will make this available to those you signed into the meeting via email after the AFWA Annual Meeting.

Needs and deeds (When It comes to Broadening Engagement, what is going well for your agency or your region and what do you need help with) – David Buggs (TX)

- TPWD- looking at communication and the why we do what we do; talk through the silos we have and how to do better communication internally; making list of partners and seeing who we still need to reach out to
- NOAA Fisheries- created an environmental justice policy; looking at how to implement that strategy in the regions; requested input to see how to best implement and adapt the strategy
- Kansas- Human Dimensions work; had fisheries staff list priorities and the public who have fishing licenses what their priorities are → look to see how its different, the same and how to adjust the agency priorities
- Nebraska- looked at how to make the agency website more accessible to the public; more inclusive language and pictures; alt text throughout the website, etc.
- VA DWR- through partnerships and grants → looked at African American gun owners and how to convert them to hunters; working on a marketing plan to grow that constituency in that area
- FWC- social scientists in the agency did a study with the wildlife viewing audience, esp birders, looked at the novice wildlife viewers and birders to see what their barriers are in participating in those activities; will use this information to improve the website, etc.
- Nevada- Youth hunting and fishing license program; have free license (hunting and fishing) for youth for entire hunting season; max out every year; doing fundraising for it now
- Nebraska- spent 3-4 years on deaf and hard of hearing curriculum for bowhunting; didn't have any curriculum that would meet their needs; worked with other states to develop and are piloting programs now.
 - There are people addressing barriers; but there isn't enough sharing and networking with those solutions
- Minority Outdoor Alliance- connect college students with employers in the fish and wildlife conservation workforce; looking to connect internship opportunities with these students

Adjourn