

Considerations for Social Strategies in Program and Project Planning

Social strategies are those approaches that include people and their actions in a chain of outcomes toward some desired objective.

As project managers, this means we need somebody else to do something beneficial, stop doing something harmful, take some action that is key to the success of a project, or participate in some process.

This guide is intended to help you:

- **identify appropriate strategies and methods for your objectives,**
- **better communicate your intent and objectives to others,**
- **distinguish between different approaches, and,**
- **align tasks to experts with appropriate skill sets.**

Three classes of approaches to influence behaviors and actions provide a convenient starting point to understand the benefits and limitations of each: 1) **Information-based approaches**, including awareness and education. These are effective when a subject is new to a population or when lack of information is an identified barrier to action. Their effectiveness is limited, however, when other barriers to action are present; 2) **Exchange-based approaches**, including incentives, social marketing, and behavioral economics. These approaches have broad application and are effective in identifying and addressing barriers to action that information-based approaches cannot; and 3) **Regulatory approaches**, including enforcement. These approaches are effective where other approaches fail because they coerce action rather than seek voluntary action. They are often at their most effective when used in tandem with other approaches.¹

Behaviors and actions, such as best management practices for water quality or habitat, are in social science terms “innovations” – a new way of doing things. Diffusion of Innovations science explores the way innovations spread across human populations.

Figure 1 shows how different categories of people adopt innovative practices over time. Some people adopt specific practices or innovations early, often based on exposure to new information. Some people need incentives or help

overcoming certain barriers, and therefore take more time. As people begin to adopt the practice and it becomes more common, a “tipping point” is reached and a groundswell of adoption occurs.² Other people exhibit great reluctance to change and may never willingly adopt a new practice.

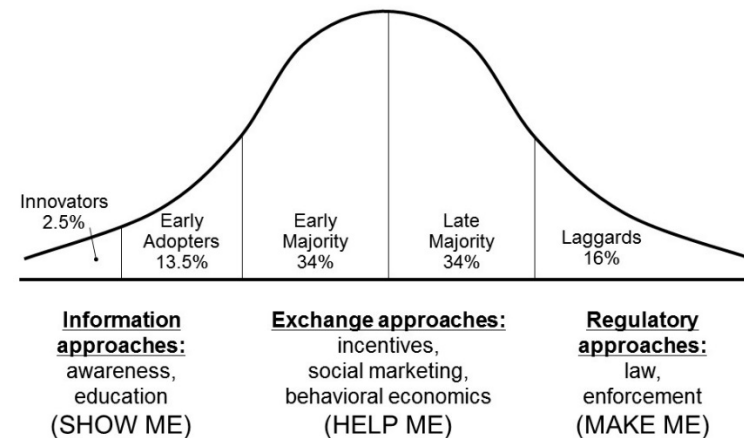


Figure 1 Diffusion of Innovations Adopter Categories and Associated Approaches

Project managers who include public awareness or education approaches in their programs often see initial success with a small segment of the population, but reach a plateau because they failed to address the unique needs of the early and late majority. Project managers who opt exclusively for regulatory approaches sometimes experience public backlash at what is perceived to be a heavy-handed approach.

By adopting a more balanced and comprehensive portfolio of approaches, project managers can more effectively reach the early and late majority (the majority of the population), and can see greater success achieving their natural resource objectives.

Questions? Contact Dave Ward at dward@co.kitsap.wa.us.³

What are you trying to do?

I want someone to ...	See ...
Implement best management practices or other actions	Behavior change, social marketing, technical assistance, incentives, education
Change their behavior	Behavior change, social marketing, technical assistance, incentives, education
Participate in a planning or decision-making process	Involvement, information
Be aware of an issue or problem	Awareness, information
Understand an issue or problem	Education
Support a legislative proposal	Information, social marketing, education
Be a better steward	Social marketing, behavior change, technical assistance, engagement
Volunteer	Engagement, volunteerism, citizen science
Write more effective building permits	Social marketing, technical assistance, education
Support restoration	Involvement, awareness, information, behavior change, education
Enforce laws	Enforcement, education, social marketing, incentives

Search for these keywords in your planning and analysis documents:

Keyword	Interpretation	Recommendation
Awareness Public awareness	Building “public awareness” means providing information to make people aware of an issue. While its intent is to make people aware of an issue, it typically does not inform people to the point that they are able to make an informed decision. Public awareness efforts also do not presume that people can or will act on the provided information.	<p>Manage expectations. Building awareness with small, specific audiences is generally straightforward and achievable. Building broad-scale awareness is expensive and can take many years, with small incremental change over time.</p> <p>Plan for a long-term effort. Many broad-scale public awareness campaigns begin with an initial investment and a lot of enthusiasm by the campaign implementers. Sustaining enthusiasm and funding long enough for a campaign to have an impact is rare and difficult. Many public awareness efforts have died prematurely due to loss of interest and turnover <i>among the implementers</i>.</p> <p>Is “awareness” really your goal? Building public awareness can be a precursor to behavior change efforts, creating a social environment that supports change. Research and program evaluation find, however, that awareness on its own has limited effects when used to influence specific behaviors and actions. If you want people to do something, then “social marketing” may be a better choice.</p>
Behavior change Behaviors Behavioral approaches	<p>“Behavior change” and related terms refer to efforts to get people to do specific, beneficial actions or practices. It also includes efforts to get people to refrain from undesirable actions. <u>It does not</u> refer to wholesale behavioral shifts, changing people’s values or beliefs, or “converting” people to a different cultural or belief system.</p> <p>There are several theories, models, and approaches to behavior change.⁴ “Social marketing”, in particular, stands out because it has a strong social science foundation, it is evidence-based, and it has an established track record achieving change where other methods have failed. (See “Social Marketing” below.)⁵</p> <p>Information and education based approaches can produce change in specific behaviors, but the effect is limited to a narrow portion of the population.</p>	<p>Be specific as to <u>what</u> actions or behaviors you want to change and <u>who</u> you believe can do it. For example, say “we want homeowners along streams to plant trees”, rather than something vague like, “encourage stewardship.”</p> <p>Rely on social marketing or other established methods to identify the barriers, benefits, and motivators for the specific behavior <i>from the perspective of the intended audience</i>. The barriers, motivators, and perceived benefits for different behaviors or practices may differ. Resist the temptation to cluster or lump practices together unless your research finds that they share the same barriers and motivators.</p> <p>Probe proposed recovery action proposals to identify hidden behavior change opportunities. All recovery actions are inherently human actions. For example, incentive programs, Pollution Identification and Correction programs, and getting landowners to say ‘yes’ to shoreline projects all have strong behavior change components, even though they are not typically labelled as such.</p>

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Communications	“Communications”, like “outreach”, is a catch-all word that can have different meanings to different people and in different contexts.	Choose a different word , one that specifically states your intent or the type of activity you have in mind. Regardless which word you choose, specify your objective and who you intend to communicate with (i.e. your audience).
Education Educate	<p>“Education” means to provide knowledge, information, or skills. Some definitions describe “education” as providing sufficient understanding to enable people to reach their own conclusions or make their own decisions.</p> <p>It is often used inaccurately as a catch-all for any manner of public contact, similar to “outreach”. (See “Outreach”)</p> <p>Education is often intended as an approach that will lead to people doing some desired action. On its own, those effects are limited. A good rule of thumb is to anticipate specific action from 7-14% of a population based solely on education and information approaches. Other portions of that same population may need other approaches.</p>	<p>Be specific about what kind of education you intend. Specify <u>who</u> the education is for and <u>what</u> will be taught. For example: instead of saying “provide education” or “educate the public”, say something more specific like “educate people with yards about pesticide risks”. Unless you plan to launch a universal education system, do not refer to educating the “general public”.</p> <p>Distinguish between the formal education system (K-12, colleges, and universities) and other forms of public education.</p> <p>Do not assume that education leads to broad changes in behavior or practices. If your intent is for people to do something, use more specific words like “behavior change”, “practices”, or “social marketing”.</p>
Enforcement	<p>“Enforcement” is a method of producing change in specific practices or behaviors, such as best management practices or undesirable activities. It relies on force or the threat of force to get people to do things. Such coercion is intended to act as a disincentive to undesirable actions. A traffic ticket, for example, is a monetary disincentive to speeding. In contrast, approaches like social marketing and incentives rely on equitable exchange to motivate voluntary action.</p> <p>Enforcement assumes the existence of established rules or regulations that address the intended behavior. It also assumes that people are aware of and understand those rules or regulations. Some new regulations, launched without substantive public involvement and awareness efforts, have encountered substantial backlash. Some cases have even been overturned.</p> <p>Many so-called enforcement programs are actually a mix of education and enforcement.</p>	<p>Consider expressly including an education or social marketing component to any enforcement effort. Many Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination (IDDE) and Pollution Identification and Correction (PIC) type programs, for example, rely heavily on education of violators, leaving actual enforcement proceedings for only the most recalcitrant offenders. Enforcement proceedings can be expensive; a softer approach can often achieve the desired result with lower cost to taxpayers and less angst all-around.</p> <p>Avoid blind-siding people by enforcing regulations unknown to the public. Ensure that regulatory approaches have substantive public involvement in their development and a public awareness component in their execution.</p>
Engagement Public engagement Citizen engagement	<p>“Engagement” is an ambiguous word that can have different meanings to different people and in different contexts. It implies some sort of tangible action on the part of the target audience, but without additional detail the nature of the action is often left unclear.</p>	<p>Be specific about what kind of engagement you intend: <u>who</u> you plan to engage, <u>how</u> you plan to do it, and <u>what</u> you want them to do.</p> <p>“Public involvement” may be a better choice if you are seeking public participation in a project or decision pursuant to NEPA</p>

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		<p>(National Environmental Policy Act) or SEPA (State Environmental Policy Act)</p> <p>“Volunteerism” may be a better choice if you want people to participate in a community activity, such as a tree-planting party.</p> <p>“Citizen science” is a subset of volunteerism, and may be a good choice if you are seeking people to gather data or otherwise participate in science and monitoring activities.</p> <p>“BMPs”, “practices”, or “behaviors” may be a better choice if you want people to do something specific in their homes, yards, or businesses.</p>
Incentive Incentive program	<p>“Incentive” is often intended to mean a financial incentive, but incentives can also be non-financial. The sole purpose of an incentive is to motivate a desired practice or action. As such, it is a behavioral approach (see also “behavior change” or “social marketing”).</p> <p>Incentives are the proverbial carrot; disincentives are the proverbial stick. Disincentives are related behavioral approaches intended to discourage undesirable practices or actions. Like incentives, they can be financial or not, and their sole purpose is to influence behavior. (Also see “enforcement”)</p>	<p>Be specific about what kind of incentive you intend. If the intent is a financial incentive, then say so. Also identify the purpose and recipient of the incentive.</p> <p>Question whether the proposed incentive is based on social research into the specific barrier the incentive is supposed to address. If not (i.e., if the proposed incentive is based on a hunch), then formative research is likely needed before an incentive can be developed with confidence that it will address the problem.</p> <p>Question whether the incentive makes it easier for your target audience to do the desired behavior.</p>
Information Public information	<p>“Public information” refers to transparency in public information and actions. It is also sometimes used synonymously with “public awareness”.</p>	<p>State your intent. If your objective is transparency, then say so. If your intent is strategic (e.g., providing public information to build public awareness of an issue), then see “public awareness” and “education”. If your intent is to engage the public in a planning or decision process, see “involvement”.</p>
Involvement Public involvement Public participation	<p>“Public involvement” is a specific discipline that involves those affected by a project or decision in the decision-making process.⁶ Its methods include public meetings, hearings, open houses, workshops, and other forms of direct involvement with the public. For certain projects and decisions, NEPA and SEPA mandate specific public involvement protocols such as public scoping, prescribed time frames for public review, and analysis of alternative project approaches.</p>	<p>Use “public involvement” or “public participation” when you want to involve the public or stakeholders in a planning or decision-making process, especially when NEPA or SEPA are involved. Plan to engage the services of someone trained in the field such as a Public Involvement Coordinator.</p> <p>Do not use these terms if you mean anything outside of a planning or decision-making process.</p> <p>For all other purposes, choose a different expression that more specifically describes your intent.</p>
Outreach	<p>“Outreach” is an ambiguous word that can have different meanings to different people and in different contexts. It is often erroneously used as a catch-all for any manner of public contact.</p>	<p>Choose a different word, one that specifically states your intent or the type of activity you have in mind. For example: If your intent is to build awareness of an issue, use “public awareness”. If your intent is to make people smarter about an issue or if you are promoting a new practice, use “education”. If your intent is</p>

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		<p>for people to do something, use more specific words like “actions”, “behavior change”, or “social marketing”.</p> <p>Be specific about your intent. Specify <u>who</u> you want to reach and <u>what</u> information will be conveyed. For example: instead of saying “conduct outreach”, say something more specific like “engage floodplain residents in community discussions” or “provide project information to nearby shoreline residents”. Unless you plan to launch a universal education system, do not refer to educating the “general public”.</p>
Social marketing	<p>“Social marketing” is a method to produce change in specific practices or behaviors, such as BMPs.⁵ It essentially applies the scientific method to behavior change efforts and relies on research and evaluation to inform approaches. Those approaches may include incentives to motivate action and disincentives to discourage action.</p> <p>Marketing is about exchange; social marketing relies on the perception of equitable exchange to motivate voluntary action. Behavioral economics is related to social marketing in that it explores factors (i.e., nudges) that influence people’s decisions. It often provides useful insights within social marketing approaches.⁷</p> <p>NOTE: Social marketing is NOT social media or social networking. Social marketing is NOT advertising.</p>	<p>When you need a defined group of people to do something specific, social marketing is an appropriate choice. Social marketing is a specific approach that lends itself to a wide variety of applications. Since social marketing is a process rather than a product, the initial appearance of social marketing efforts may vary considerably.</p> <p>Don’t let your preconceived notions get in the way of the process – many successful social marketing efforts include little or no education or public information steps.</p> <p>Specify the desired behavior or action and who you want to do it. Rely on your audience research to tell you what their barriers, motivators, and perceived benefits are for the particular behavior.</p>
Technical assistance	<p>“Technical assistance” is the provision of expert advice, consultation, skills, or other aid to enable people to do some desired action or practice. It is a form of education that addresses specific, identified barriers to a desired action or actions. As such, it is a method of stimulating actions or behavior change and may be part of a social marketing program. It is generally provided at an individual or small group scale, but it may be coordinated regionally.</p>	<p>Specify who will receive the technical assistance and what barrier or barriers it is intended to resolve.</p> <p>Describe how the barrier was identified and how technical assistance was identified as a solution to the barrier.</p> <p>Distinguish whether the technical assistance will be directed toward an end-user (for example, streamside landowners, dairy farmers, Vector truck operators) or an intermediate service provider (for example, municipal permit officials, youth education program staff, and conservation district staff).</p>

Notes:

¹ For a summary of the three-part classification and its variations in the literature, see Rothschild M.L. 1999. Carrots, Sticks, and Promises: A Conceptual Framework for the Management of Public Health and Social Issues Behaviors. *Journal of Marketing* 63:24-37. For a detailed description of the diffusion curve and the adopter categories shown above, see Rogers E.M. 2003. *Diffusion of Innovations* 279-299. New York: The Free Press.

² For an introduction to the tipping point concept, see Gladwell M. 2002. *The Tipping Point*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

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⁴ The vast majority of published theories and models of behavior come from the public health sector. The natural resources and environment sector is a relative newcomer to behavioral approaches and has learned much from its public health predecessors. Note that some models were developed to describe or characterize behavior, while others were developed to inform behavioral interventions. For a selection of theories and models related to behavior, see Farrell M., Blake K., Rimer B.K., and Glanz K. 2005. *Theory at a Glance: A Guide for Health Promotion Practice*. Second Edition. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland. Also see Glanz K., Rimer B.K., and Viswanath K., eds. 2008. *Health Behavior and Health Education: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Fourth Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

⁵ For a brief introduction to social marketing, see Turning Point. *The Manager's Guide to Social Marketing: Using Marketing to Improve Health Outcomes*. Turning Point National Program Office, University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine, Seattle. [Online] Available: http://socialmarketingcollaborative.org/smc/pdf/Managers_guide.pdf. For a more detailed description of the social marketing process, see Lee N. and Kotler P. 2015. *Social Marketing: Changing Behaviors for Good*. Fifth Edition. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

⁶ For more on the role of public participation and public involvement, see the International Association for Public Participation online at <http://www.iap2.org>.

⁷ Note that behavioral economics and social marketing are not mutually exclusive. Most aspects of behavioral economics including exchange, framing of choices, perception of risk, and other cognitive factors that affect decision-making, are useful in a social marketing context. It may be helpful to think of behavioral economics as a field of study attempting to understand the factors behind people's decisions and behaviors, and social marketing as an approach to influence those same behaviors. What is learned by behavioral economists can often be readily applied by social marketers. For an introduction to behavioral economics concepts, see Thaler R.H. and Sunstein C.R. 2008. *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. London: Penguin Books.