

# KNOW YOUR AUDIENCES

## AND THEIR NEEDS

### CHAPTER FOUR



Photos courtesy Tree Musketeers

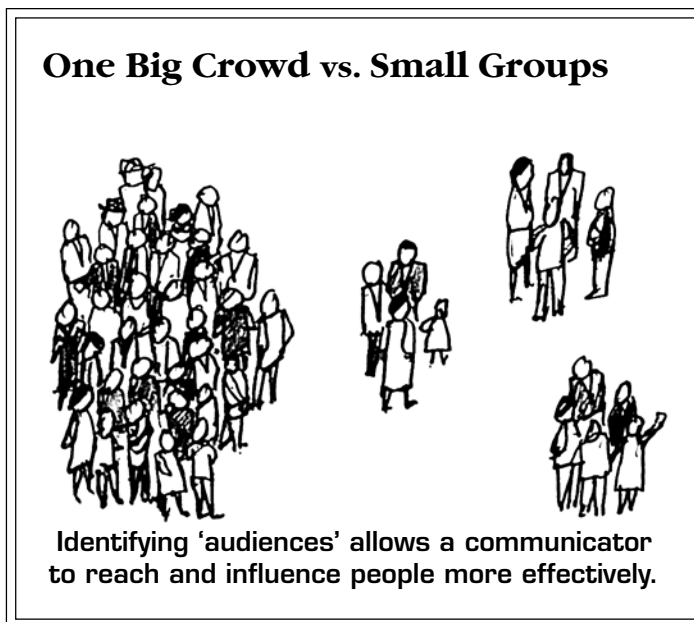
**Tree Musketeers of El Segundo, California, teach that any program or project has a better chance of succeeding if audiences are first identified.**

**W**hen a youth group accepts the challenge from Tree Musketeers of El Segundo, California, to help in the nationwide campaign to plant one million tree groves, the young people quickly learn about multiple audiences. The group is instructed in the Tree Musketeers Campaign Guide to consider who will be involved in the project. For example, the landowner is the first contact, whether a school board, park board, municipality or private owner. Then there are the experts whose help or equipment will be needed – possibly the local nursery, arborists or tree board. Next, what about possible sponsors – service clubs, businesses or other possibilities? And, of course, there is the audience to invite to the ceremonial planting – the media representatives, honored guests, speakers and others. Finally, how will tree maintenance be organized to make sure there is a group responsible for watering in the dry months? Planning something as ‘simple’ as the act of planting a tree – or grove of trees – is a good lesson in identifying audiences and learning about their needs and their reactions to your plans.

There is a book for students in the field of marketing that is appropriately titled *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. In it, Al Ries and Jack Trout wrote:

*In the communication jungle out there, the only hope to score big is to be selective, to concentrate on narrow targets, to practice segmentation.*

This is surely the key to effective communication. In turn, communication is the key to collaboration and the kind of community action that can lead to sustainable urban forestry. You may be seeking new partnerships, trying to build public support for a project, or simply trying to educate people who own trees. Whatever the purpose, you will have a much greater chance of success by breaking down that big, amorphous mass we call “the public” into smaller, clearly-defined groups we can call “audiences.”



## How to Identify Audiences and Know Their Needs

Marketing professionals have elaborate tools for identifying similarities of sub-groups within the general public. They do this through surveys and the use of sophisticated statistical analyses. Their clients – usually someone with a product to sell or a political candidate to elect – can then zero in on the specific groups in different ways rather than using the same pitch or delivery method with all. The benefits of this approach are that you can:

- get a better understanding of what specific audiences like or dislike, know or don't know,

support or oppose, etc. You can simply get to know them better.

- select the best communication channels to reach these individual groups, i.e. a specific newspaper, meetings of organized groups, newsletters, etc. This allows for a targeted approach to communication as opposed to a hit or miss method. It saves money and is more effective.
- tailor your message to the specific audience. 'One size fits all' just doesn't cut it when you are trying to win support through communicating with people.
- time your campaign. Not everyone should be contacted at once if you are trying to win support. There are key people and groups who should know about your campaign before others. This will eliminate barriers that are sometimes created by not informing the right people first. Listing your audiences will help you prioritize your contacts.
- avoid offending groups by overlooking them. A thorough list of audiences will help you include all who may have an interest.

In urban forestry, the need to identify audiences is no less great than it is when selling a product or running for office, but we rarely have the funds for market research. However, the same results can often be achieved by starting with a little brainstorming. As a leadership council or a group as a whole, discuss the issue or challenge (neighborhood tree planting, Arbor Day ceremony, land acquisition, etc.) and simply make a list of all the potential stakeholder groups. Remember, this means people on both sides of an issue, not just those who support it.

The idea here is not to create the longest possible list, but the most useful list. Who can you attempt to work with? Who needs to be won over? Who is likely to be supportive or helpful? These are your target audiences.

Knowing the needs of your audiences or where they stand on an issue or how willing they may be to be a collaborator is then a matter of “listening.” Listening is probably the most overlooked and most powerful communication tool available. Again, it does not take expensive polls to hear what people have to say. It takes a little effort to identify the leaders or key

players within any target audience and to talk with them. Following this information gathering, discuss what you find out and develop a strategy for follow-up.

## Targeting Information

After target audiences are determined and you know enough about them to plan your communication, the challenge becomes how to best reach all members of the audience. Cost enters into this decision, but just as important is the question: Of the many methods of communication available, which should we use? Circumstances vary too widely to make blanket suggestions, but here is checklist that may help. The “channels” of communication are arranged from the “warm” methods (more personal and reaching smaller numbers per effort) to the less personal methods that reach larger numbers at one time.

**Face to face.** Important when persuasion is essential, immediate feedback and discussion is needed, or you are proposing new ideas to leaders. An important advantage is that questions can be promptly answered. This also remains the best approach to teaching workshops.

**Phone.** For busy people, this may be a better avenue than face to face for many purposes and with almost the same advantages.

**Field trips.** This may be a visit to a park that needs

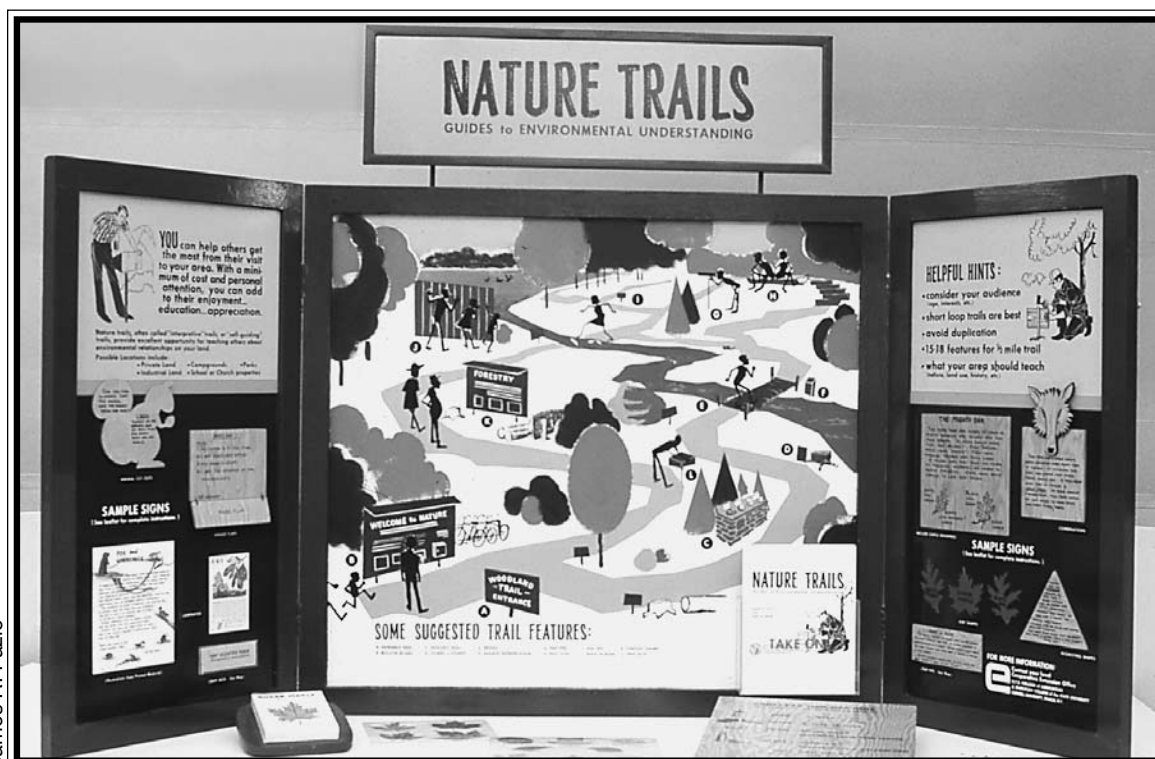
help, or a walk through a neighborhood to plan tree planting or hazard reduction. It allows small group discussion, builds rapport and friendships, and can aid understanding through actually viewing the situation.

**Letters.** Still a “personal” approach, but with the potential of distributing information to a larger number of people. To be effective, the recipient’s name should be on the letter, if possible, rather than a “Dear Sir” salutation. Hand-written envelopes and use of stamps rather than postage meters are known to help get the attention of recipients.

**E-mail.** If you have e-mail addresses, this is a fast and inexpensive way to reach selected individuals or groups. It is rarely a good ‘first contact,’ but for follow-up information and keeping in touch long-term it is hard to beat.

**Web sites.** Almost a requirement for any organization today. Information for the highly-motivated can be provided here and updated regularly. The use of links or placing your material on the sites of others extends the use of this method. However, it is generally a poor way to reach new audiences at the local level.

**Newsletters.** Tapping into existing newsletters is often an excellent way to deliver your information to a specific target audience. Ask members of target audiences which newsletters they receive.



*Portable exhibits can be placed in locations matched to target audiences. Any exhibit should have four levels of messages: (1) Title or other attention-getter, (2) Message headings that include the main points so that even someone hurrying past will receive at least some information, (3) The main information, and (4) Take-home literature, a video, a contact name or other source of detailed information.*

**Brochures.** Often over-used and abused (design-wise!), the brochure is still a cost-effective way of providing information to large numbers of people. Seek skilled help in the design stage and know ahead of time how you will get the brochure to your target audiences.

**Door bangers.** This is a variation on the brochure and is extremely effective if homeowners are a target audience. Utilities and other tree workers routinely use this method to alert that tree work will be done. It can also be used to deliver messages about tree care or to recruit volunteers.

**Exhibits.** Portable exhibits can be set up for short periods of time in banks and other businesses, or used at schools, fairs, and special events.

**Newspapers.** Local papers offer a good opportunity for reaching some audiences. Foreign language papers are published in many cities, offering a good way to reach audiences that are often overlooked through the use of more traditional communication methods. More on this in Chapters 5 and 8.

**Radio.** Radio programs reach very specific listening audiences by virtue of the kind of music, news or programs they air. Any station can provide detailed information about its audience and how ages, gender or other listener characteristics change by time of day. This offers a good way to reach target audiences with PSAs (public service announcements), news items, or by being a guest on some programs.

**Television.** The same advantages as radio but more difficult to get your message on the air. Still, in communities with local broadcasting, it is worth a visit to the station manager to discuss possibilities.

## Working With Local Elected Leaders

There is no more powerful ally than someone holding elected office or otherwise in a position of key leadership. It pays to get to know these people and gain their trust and respect. But how?

A first step is simply making their acquaintance. Do this socially or whenever the occasion presents itself, but don't make this first meeting the time that you ask for help! Next, provide information in a follow-up mailing or meeting. A small amount of general information is usually welcome.



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Few elected officials have tree expertise as part of their background, so basics about sustainable urban forestry and specific practices can help them as they face their learning curve as a public servant. Putting the information in an attractive, labeled file folder or notebook will help keep it from getting lost or routed to the trash bin. Finally, keep key people informed regularly about your activities and especially about anything upcoming. Make sure they are first to know if it affects their constituents in any way.

Perhaps the best way to learn about working with local elected officials is to hear about this directly from someone in that position. Here is a summary of comments by Jane Bender, a member of the Santa Rosa, California, city council. Ms. Bender was in the unique position of having been a co-director of Sonoma County ReLeaf, a tree planting and stewardship organization, prior to her election to city council. Here is a summary adapted from her observations that were first published in *California Trees*:

1. **Concentrate your pitch for trees on local issues.** Global warming is certainly an issue, but local problems are more pressing in the eyes of city officials. Try to tie your goals for trees into issues that officials are wrestling with. For example, traffic calming (getting motorists to slow down on city streets) is a problem in Santa Rosa. Solutions from re-stripping streets to adding parking and bike lanes were being discussed. Tree-lined parkways are also known to help, so there was a natural tie-in between trees and the traffic issue.
2. **Help find solutions for maintenance.** If we are going to be successful in getting tree-lined city streets, we have to come up with maintenance solutions. Labor costs are a huge part of a city budget and public safety



is the number one concern. The demand for police and fire protection must be accommodated, so other departments are often called upon to cut back on their needs.

3. **Energy and water are pressing issues for cities.** Think of ways to incorporate energy and water issues into your programs. Cities are looking for ways to become more energy self-sufficient, so show how trees are a great way to reduce air conditioning loads. Similarly, water supply is a major issue. Work with your local water department to show how little water a tree uses as compared to lawns.

4. **Don't be a purist.** It's easy to be adamant about trees and the environment when we work in the ivory tower of a tree group. Cities have to deal with a lot more than the environment, however. My other council members and I have to make compromises every week – often things that I don't totally agree with. There is a place for ideology, but in my opinion, it's not at the city council level. We need people who will work with differing points of view. If, as a tree group, you have the reputation of being reasonable, you'll get a lot more support from a council. And remember, you need a majority to get that support. So it may be the two members of the council who don't show an interest in the environment that you need to work with.

**Tip:** In smaller communities, try to include a city council member on your tree board, perhaps in an ex officio capacity. This is sometimes written into the ordinance under the section on membership. This arrangement provides a liaison between the tree board and the council and helps build understanding and support.

## Working With Service Providers

In the world of trees, some of the most important audiences are the professionals who work with trees as part of their business. All represent potential collaborators. Examples of service providers include:

- Tree care companies
- Utilities
- Nurseries
- Christmas tree growers
- Consulting arborists



Photo courtesy PSC of New Mexico

*Public Service Company of New Mexico employees participate in Planting Hope - Neighbor Helping Neighbor to help reforestation efforts after the devastating Cerro Grande fire of 2000.*

- Professional organizations such as local chapters of the International Society of Arboriculture, Society of American Foresters and others.

Don't contact these kindred spirits only when seeking donations. While financial support is certainly one of the benefits that can be provided by these organizations (See Chapter 9), your relationship should go much further. Cultivate true friendships with the men and women who work as service providers. Invite them to your functions and to be on your boards. Include them in your newsletter mailings and in ceremonies such as Arbor Day.

Importantly, find out what issues are important to these audiences and find ways to assist on issues of mutual concern. For example:

- work with legitimate arborists to publicize the adverse effects of topping, or the risk of hiring tree workers who are uninsured, unlicensed or not certified.
- help traditional foresters educate urban populations about forest management and the role of lumber and pulpwood in our society.
- promote the use of real Christmas trees by helping growers show the environmental and economic advantages over artificial trees.
- cooperate with utilities in their campaigns to protect buried cables, make energized lines safe, and plant the right trees near power lines.

In any case, to have your cause served by others, you must not only recognize others as audiences, but as

audiences that have needs and causes of their own. Both communication and collaboration are two-way

streets. As said by the sage of Concord, Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The only way to have a friend is to be one."

## *How Many Ways Can You Say 'Thank You?'*

**M**ost people like recognition, and to an elected official it is essential for survival. When working with leaders and service providers, look for ways to acknowledge your gratitude for the cooperation and assistance you receive. Of course, don't overlook a written 'thank you' note following every speech or supportive action (including a vote in your favor). But also seek ways to have good deeds made known throughout your community. This may include:

- Arranging for media coverage, or sending a photo to the newspaper showing the cooperators assisting in a tree planting or being honored by your group.
- Nominate outstanding cooperators for awards. Organizations such as the International Society of Arboriculture, American Forests, and The

National Arbor Day Foundation have award programs worth looking into.

- Present your own award, such as a plaque or certificate. And, of course, have photographers on hand. Make sure a news release is issued and distributed to all media in your area.
- Dedicate a tree to helpful individuals, or purchase commemorative-type bricks, tiles, etc. in their honor.
- Send holiday greetings (not gifts, as they may be illegal or perceived as bribes).
- Laud individuals in your organization's newsletter or other media. For helpful individuals at colleges, service providers and private companies, a letter to the person's supervisor is always appreciated. It can be as simple as a copy of your 'thank you' letter.



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