UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE
4 UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

Purnima Chawla

4.1 Why Choose an Audience Segment?

One of the main tenets of the Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (TELE) method is to design programs and messages to appeal to a specific audience segment, i.e., a particular type of landowner. Landowners are not monolithic; they have different knowledge levels, needs, resources, attitudes, and values. Focusing your outreach on a specific type of landowner is the key to developing effective programming and messaging.

The logic behind targeting is simple: If you don’t know whom you’re talking to, how will you know what they need and what you should say?

In practice targeting outreach to specific landowner segments improves your effectiveness and efficiency in three ways:

1. **Better Programs.** It allows you to tailor the desired behavior and program support to landowners’ knowledge and readiness levels. For example, knowing whether your landowners are likely to implement a particular management activity themselves or hire vendors is important for determining what kinds of advice and support they’ll need through the process.

2. **Better Messages.** It enables you to develop messages that speak more directly to their needs and preferences, thus making it more likely that your message will get their attention and persuade them.

3. **Better Reach.** You can use more focused channels to reach the landowners whom you really want, so the overall return on your outreach investment is higher. Moreover, when you use targeted channels, people know that you are talking especially to them and understand that your message is relevant for them.

For example, let’s say you want landowners in your area to help you curb a new invasive species by reporting occurrences and taking early action. The first thing you might determine is that people who already have management plans and want to be local conservation leaders are best suited to take this action and to carry your message to their friends and neighbors. You also decide that this group will be willing to attend a presentation to learn more about this topic.

Consider the following taglines for a flier promoting a presentation on this topic:

**Option 1:**

Your woods are under threat. Come learn how to protect them against invasive species.

**Option 2:**

You’ve already got a handle on garlic mustard, but are you on the lookout for this new invader?

An active and knowledgeable conservationist would probably ignore the first flier, assuming that the presentation would be about general information that they already know. But the second would seem more relevant for them. So even if the two types of fliers were displayed in the same location, the second one would be more likely to bring more active conservationists to your presentation. (Conversely, if your goal was to engage hitherto unengaged landowners, the first tagline would have been a better bet.)
You could further increase the impact of your outreach by using selective channels. Identifying local landowners who have management plans is simple enough, but how do you know if they want to be local leaders in conservation? Perhaps local conservation organizations could help you reach area landowners who are able and willing to lead conservation efforts in the community. Through these groups, you might be able to make a targeted presentation to 20 local conservation leaders, all of whom would be able and ready to take the desired action.

Targeting doesn’t have to be perfect for it to work—even small changes can improve the response rates to your messages. Furthermore, these small changes make it more likely that you will be able to attract and engage the people who are ready and able to take actions that will help you achieve your conservation goals.

THE COSTS OF NOT TARGETING
Tailoring programs and messages to a particular audience segment can sometimes be difficult to practice because it appears to exclude landowners who are not part of your target audience. In reality, however, targeting doesn’t mean excluding anyone—it means making a special effort to attract a particular kind of landowner.

Also, consider the alternative. When we don’t tailor our programs to the needs and preferences of a specific audience segment, we usually end up developing materials for an audience that either looks like us or like the landowners whom we talk with most frequently. It is easy to see how this limits the scope of the project to “insiders”—i.e., people who are already informed about and committed to the issue. Targeting specific audiences is, therefore, essential for bringing new people—those who are not already part of the choir—into the program.

Sometimes, we do understand our audience and recognize the differences in their beliefs and attitudes on the issue. But we try to address the needs of all these audiences in one set of materials. The result is a hodgepodge that speaks a little bit to the needs of all audiences, but not strongly enough to drive action for any one of them. Sometimes, these materials send mixed messages, addressing one audience’s needs in one sentence and saying the opposite to another audience in the next.

Consider this postcard text:

**Save the Gopher Tortoise. Grow the hunt.**

Meet with your local forester to find out how you can manage your woods for multiple benefits, including creating habitat for endangered tortoises and making your hunt more productive and enjoyable.

Combining messages about saving the tortoise and improved hunting in a single postcard implies that the recipient cares about an endangered tortoise and wants to hunt other animals. There might be a few such folks out there, but the more likely scenario is that some of the landowners care about saving the gopher tortoise, while others are motivated to maximize hunting on their land. Therefore, developing two different postcards would allow you to make a more compelling argument to each type of landowner.

Choosing a target audience allows you to focus on their goals and values more sharply and, therefore, develop messages that resonate with them and compel action. Working with a specific landowner segment also helps you to tailor desired actions and supports to landowners’ needs, knowledge, and resources.
4 UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

4.2 How to Pick a Target Audience

The main point of picking a target audience for your outreach effort is to identify a group of landowners who will likely have a similar orientation to your program and will, therefore, react similarly to your materials. There are several ways to identify and define this relatively homogeneous group of people.

1. **Geography.** It can make sense to identify your target audience based on geography. Oftentimes, people who live in a particular area have similar demographic characteristics and land use patterns. However, if the landowners in your chosen geography differ on some relevant factors (e.g., farmers and non-farmers), you may need to narrow your landowner audience further.

2. **Orientation to their land.** The Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively (TELE) landowner segmentation serves as a good launching point to thinking about different types of landowners, because these segments are based on how landowners orient to their land and to the benefits of owning woodland. (See Section 4.3: The TELE Landowner Types)

3. **Ability to advance your conservation goals.** Not all landowners’ actions have an equal impact on the landscape. You might decide to target landowners whose actions will have a greater impact, such as those whose lands abut conserved lands or those who have larger parcels.

4. **Likelihood of taking action.** When starting a new program, it often makes sense to choose an audience that is most likely to take the desired action—i.e., the lowest hanging fruit. Perhaps you can identify a group of landowners who are directly affected by the problem you’re addressing. Or perhaps there is a group that is more likely to value the benefits of the desired action. Getting the most likely actors on board first can be good for building momentum and creating a community norm that could persuade others.

5. **Previous activities.** You can choose an audience based on something they have (or have not) done already. Perhaps you want to take folks who already have a management plan to the next level of implementation. Or maybe you want to work with folks you know have not yet created firebreaks around their home.

6. **Ability to act.** If the action you’re requesting is relatively difficult, landowners’ ability to take that action may be a decisive factor. For example, if you know there aren’t enough contractors in the area to remove Japanese barberry, you should choose an audience that has the skills and tools (and time) to remove the invasive plant themselves. Or if the desired action requires a hefty up-front investment, you may need to target landowners who have sufficient disposable income to make that investment.

In many instances, you will need to overlay two or more of the above criteria to get a sufficiently narrowed audience. Depending on the audience characteristics, you can reach members in a targeted way by tailoring your channels and your messages.
4.3 The TELE Landowner Types

Early analyses of NWOS data by the Sustaining Family Forests Initiative (SFFI) showed that how woodland owners orient to the amenities and financial benefits of owning woodland plays an important role in their land use patterns, motivations, and decision-making. Based on this data, and subsequent focus group research, SFFI has identified four types of landowners. People who fall within a particular landowner segment will all tend to have a similar orientation to land ownership and will likely have more similar responses to offers and messages.

The table below describes the four TELE landowner types. Data profiles of the TELE types are also available on the TELE website.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation to Woodland</th>
<th>Want Information About</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Woodland Retreat Owners</strong></td>
<td>Own woodland primarily for its beauty, and conservation and recreational value. Many love nature and animals and appreciate ecological benefits of woods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working the Land</strong></td>
<td>Tend to be pragmatic; value aesthetic and recreational benefits of woodland but also see woods as a financial asset.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supplemental Income</strong></td>
<td>Tend to own land primarily for timber income and investment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uninvolved</strong></td>
<td>Tend not to care about woods; assign low importance to their financial, recreational, and aesthetic benefits. More likely than the other segments to be willing to sell their land and less likely to want to see it stay woodland.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. www.engaginglandowners.org/landowner-data/landowner-segments
### Current Stewardship Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Woodland Retreat Owners</th>
<th>Working the Land</th>
<th>Supplemental Income</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Despite their stewardship orientation, they have some of the lowest rates of active land management behaviors, such as having a management plan, consulting foresters, or using cost-share programs</td>
<td>The most likely segment to participate in a cost-share program (19%) or have a management plan (21%)</td>
<td>Second most likely of all segments to participate in cost-share programs and have management plans (but still small proportions)</td>
<td>Along with Woodland Retreat Owners, least likely to have a management plan or participate in a cost-share program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Main Motivators of Stewardship Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Woodland Retreat Owners</th>
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<th>Supplemental Income</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship ethic</td>
<td>Maximizing ongoing returns from woods without damaging the land ecologically or financially</td>
<td>Want to maximize financial benefit from woodland</td>
<td>Want to reduce taxes and land management hassles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural beauty and wildlife protection</td>
<td>Ethic of respectful and judicious land use</td>
<td>Concerned with long-term health of land (mainly to ensure it stays financially productive)</td>
<td>Want to minimize problems on the land (e.g., vandalism, trespassing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment of woods with family members, e.g., walking, hiking, camping, and fishing</td>
<td>Enjoyment of recreation on land (including hunting); also enjoyment of tending their woods</td>
<td>Want to keep land intact for heirs</td>
<td>Many in holding pattern until they can figure out what to do with the land or pass it on to the next generation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Main Barriers to Good Stewardship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Woodland Retreat Owners</th>
<th>Working the Land</th>
<th>Supplemental Income</th>
<th>Uninvolved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge about what actions to take</td>
<td>Fixed ideas about what is good for woods; feel they know best</td>
<td>Skeptical of most programs that impose restrictions on land use; might try to work around program requirements or do the minimum necessary</td>
<td>Lack interest in improving or managing their woods and/or the knowledge to do so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception that woods manage themselves—many believe minimal human activity and interference is best way to promote woodland health</td>
<td>Mistrust of outside authority and expertise (e.g., fearful of getting swindled by loggers and consultants)</td>
<td>Need to be convinced that stewardship behaviors are cost effective, at least in the long run; altruistic or environmental reasons are a harder sell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many have small parcels of land, making some land management activities less practical or more expensive</td>
<td>Wary of any limitations imposed on them (big barrier to participation in conservation easements or even tax relief or cost-share programs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial constraints</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Main Motivators of Stewardship Actions**

- Stewardship ethic
- Natural beauty and wildlife protection
- Enjoyment of woods with family members, e.g., walking, hiking, camping, and fishing

**Main Barriers to Good Stewardship**

- Lack of knowledge about what actions to take
- Perception that woods manage themselves—many believe minimal human activity and interference is best way to promote woodland health
- Many have small parcels of land, making some land management activities less practical or more expensive
- Financial constraints

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**Woodland Retreat Owners**

- Despite their stewardship orientation, they have some of the lowest rates of active land management behaviors, such as having a management plan, consulting foresters, or using cost-share programs.

**Working the Land**

- The most likely segment to participate in a cost-share program (19%) or have a management plan (21%).
- More likely to have taken active steps to improve wildlife habitat.

**Supplemental Income**

- Second most likely of all segments to participate in cost-share programs and have management plans (but still small proportions).
- Most likely to have worked with a forester, typically for timber sales.

**Uninvolved**

- Along with Woodland Retreat Owners, least likely to have a management plan or participate in a cost-share program.

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How to Reach This Segment</strong>&lt;br&gt;Give them specific, easy, low-cost actions to achieve their objectives (e.g., attracting wildlife)&lt;br&gt;Challenge their belief that woods are best left alone&lt;br&gt;Help them understand the ecological significance of all woods (even small parcels)&lt;br&gt;Appeal to their sense of responsibility and stewardship</td>
<td>Affirm their outdoorsy lifestyle and traditional values&lt;br&gt;Give them information but don’t tell them what to do—accept their independence and cautiousness&lt;br&gt;They actively seek information on land management; most like getting information through word of mouth, relevant publications, and direct mail</td>
<td>Emphasize ways to enhance financial gains or maintain land value for future generations&lt;br&gt;Ready to learn more about land management—especially if it yields immediate or long-term financial benefits&lt;br&gt;Most keyed to the forest industry and “forestry” community, including landowner associations, trade publications, and events</td>
<td>Not an easy target for conservation or woodland management campaigns&lt;br&gt;Messages should identify direct financial benefits, preferably without too much effort on their part&lt;br&gt;May be more receptive to incentives and programs that benefit both farms and woods&lt;br&gt;Can be reached by direct mail and traditional channels used to reach farming community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Demographic and Situational Factors

| Education level is higher than other segments<br>Most live on their woodland | Most live on their woodland | Many do not live on their woodland<br>Have the largest plot sizes | Many do not live on their woodland<br>Tend to be older than other segments<br>Most likely to have a farm (1 in 3)<br>Most likely to sell their woodland |

**TOOLS FOR ENGAGING LANDOWNERS EFFECTIVELY**
4.4 What Is an Audience Profile?

An audience profile is a “picture” of your target audience, developed specifically with a view to identifying features and attributes that you can tap to create your messages.

Audience profiles are grounded in data, but they are not simply a compilation of statistics. Think of a profile as a caricature of your landowner population, similar to a composite sketch developed by an artist based on the impressions of different people. When combined, seemingly disparate, incomplete, and biased bits of information can come together to create a pretty realistic image of the whole.

The more clear and concrete this picture is, the better your chance of identifying key motivators and presenting them in a way that is compelling for your target audience. The audience profile will also give you clues on where and how to reach target audience members—what channels to use, what sources or partners could enhance your credibility, where you should hold meetings and forums, etc.

Because each landowner is different (even within an audience), an audience profile is undoubtedly an overgeneralized picture that emphasizes certain dominant and prevalent attributes. The profile doesn’t have to be 100 percent accurate to be useful. The idea is to combine what you do know about the people you’re trying to influence, so you can understand the target behavior from their perspective—i.e., “get in their heads” for a bit.

Basic audience profiles tend to include information (or educated guesses) that answers the following questions:

- What values and ideas drive landowners’ decisions about their land?
- How do landowners spend their time and how does this affect how (and how much) they interact with their woods?
- What do landowners currently know and think about the desired action?
- What knowledge and capacity do landowners have to implement the desired action?

It is also important to remember that woodland owners are simply people who own woods. Your audience profile will be even richer if it includes information about who your audience members are as people (and not just landowners). For example:

- What are the broad values and attitudes that underpin the culture of this community?
- Who lives in this community (demographic attributes) and how do they spend their time (lifestyle, pastimes, etc.)?
- What gets people’s attention in this community? What do they talk about?
- Who do people listen to? What channels and sources of information are influential in this community?

A profile is a picture of your audience, which you create from multiple sources of information. It is a description, rather than a collection of data. Audience profiles include knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors relevant to the desired action, but go beyond that to understand what matters to audiences, how they are likely to make relevant decisions, and what will get their attention.
4.5 How to Develop an Audience Profile

An audience profile is prepared by compiling and organizing information about your target audience. The more sources of information, the better the profile. Although each source of information will give you only part of the picture, and perhaps a biased one, combining different sources will bring out the patterns and themes that best describe the audience.

Quantitative Research

Survey data is often a good place to start. It provides a skeleton that you can then flesh out with more qualitative and observational data. But be careful: relying on statistical averages can be misleading. For example, if most landowners in your area are either retirees (65 years old or older) or young families in their thirties, then the average age of the landowners in the area might be 45 years. But developing a program targeted at people entering their middle ages is clearly off target in this community.

A good source for survey data is the National Woodland Owner Survey (NWOS), the most comprehensive national survey of landowners. You can access this data via the NWOS website, or you can download easy-to-use data compilations for selected landowner segments from the TELE website. You should also check with your state universities and extension services to see if they have done surveys or other studies on landowners in your area.

Depending on your objectives, legal or organizational records may also be valuable. For example, if your target audience is landowners who hunt, checking public records of hunting licenses will help you pinpoint your target audience members and give you clues about where (i.e., what towns or districts) you're most likely to find them. Or if your target audience is landowners who are already doing some activities on the land, organizational records such as cost-share applications and permits can give you an idea of what actions they have already implemented.

Demographic data is also important, not in and of itself, but in what it tells us about people’s lifestyles, resources, and constraints. For example, knowing income levels in a region tells us the likelihood of families having discretionary income to invest in their woods. Education levels can cue us on the language we should use in our materials. And understanding what age categories landowners fall into gives us some idea of their life stage and accompanying family, parental, and professional commitments.

Collective Brainstorming

You’ll be surprised at how much you already know about landowners in your area. One technique that works well is collective brainstorming with your team. Each of you will have met different landowners and have a slightly different perspective of them. Pull your ideas together, and you’re likely to come up with a pretty accurate profile of the people you want to reach. See the Stick Person Tool on the next page to guide your brainstorming and come up with a rich, useful landowner profile.

When brainstorming, it is important to think about the qualities and attributes of a typical member of your audience. Of course, there are some well-informed and super-motivated landowners who are constantly seeking better ways to improve their woods. These are probably the people you meet most often and those you know best. However, unless your program is specifically targeting these “model owners,” be careful not to let them dominate your understanding of your target audience.

Key Informant Interviews

Talk to people who are familiar with landowners in that area (e.g., service foresters, extension folks, etc.). If you feel that you’re one step removed from your audience members, ask people who interact frequently with them to help flesh out and “ground truth” your profile. Use the questions in the Stick Person Tool to guide those conversations. And, once again, be careful to collect information about the people you want to attract and not those who are already motivated and engaged with the conservation community.

6. https://www.fia.fs.fed.us/nwos/
7. www.engaginglandowners.org/landowner-data
Conversations with Landowners

It’s not difficult to invite a few landowners who fit your target audience for coffee and a chat, or to talk to them informally at a community event. But remember that talking with landowners is most useful when you want to fill gaps in your knowledge or test specific ideas. People are generally not good at giving accurate responses to very broad, open questions (such as “What’s important to you?”). Another useful strategy is to observe audience members “in their natural habitat.” Careful observation can give you important cues about the culture and lifestyle of the communities that you want to target.

Finally, remember that landowners are simply people who own land. As such, they are likely to be fairly similar to other people who live in the same community. Market research surveys and datasets about the community in general can also give you good information about the values and lifestyles of landowners in that area. Also, if you or your colleagues live and work in the same communities, you probably have a pretty good sense of landowners’ broad values, attitudes, and lifestyles.

THE STICK PERSON TOOL AND PAIN/GAIN CHART

Collecting quantitative data or using a TELE profile provides a good framework for identifying the chief characteristics of your target audience. But your team’s knowledge of local landowners who fit these profiles adds the necessary color and texture to bring these audience profiles to life. The Stick Person Tool is a useful aid for collective brainstorming about local landowners who are in your target audience.

Draw the figure below on a board and work with your team to list audience attributes in response to the questions in each of the four areas.

FIGURE 4A: A BLANK STICK PERSON TOOL
**What’s important to them?**
Include core cultural values and ideas that frame your audience’s worldview, as well as values that influence their relationships with their woods.

**What do they do?**
Use this area to list how audience members spend their time, including their work, hobbies, and pastimes. Look especially at behaviors that might be relevant, similar, or contrary to the desired action. For example, if you are asking landowners to come to a community picnic, consider whether they are accustomed to this kind of event and what they might expect of it.

**What do they know and believe about the desired action?**
Note current knowledge levels and attitudes relevant to the desired action. What are they hearing from others? Does it support or work against you? If it works against you, how will you counteract this opposing message?

**What gets their attention?**
Use this area to list channels and sources of information that audience members pay attention to, as well as topics that tend to get their attention.

As someone calls out an attribute, write it down. Don’t worry too much about writing each bit of information in the right area—the goal is simply to list everything you know about your target audience members. Also, don’t worry about getting everything exactly right. If there is some disagreement in your group regarding a particular attribute, just put a question mark next to it.

After you’ve listed everything, collectively evaluate all the information. Then circle the things you all think are most important for designing your outreach messages. These could include key cultural attributes, motivators or barriers. If any of these important attributes were marked as questionable, you will need to do some research before using them in your messaging.

As a final step, go through the audience attributes to identify the main reasons why your audience would or would not take the desired action. A good tool to use for this is the Pain/Gain Chart. Simply draw two columns marked “Pain” and “Gain.” In the Pain column, list all the reasons why audience members wouldn’t take the desired action. In the Gain column, list motives and incentives that would lead them to take the action. (See the sample Stick Person Tool and Pain/Gain Chart on the next page.)

The Stick Person Tool helps you understand your audience and evaluate the desired action in the context of their lives and values. The richer your description of their lives and values, the better your chances of identifying compelling motivators and finding ways to overcome barriers.
UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

FIGURE 4B: SAMPLE STICK PERSON TOOL AND PAIN/GAIN CHART FOR A PROJECT THAT AIMS TO GET WOODLAND RETREAT OWNERS TO ATTEND A WOODS WALK TO LEARN ABOUT FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

What’s important to them?
- Family
- Learning new things
- Care about environment
- Want to be good stewards
- Community values

What do they know and believe about the desired action?
- Cut trees = bad
- Mgmt is ugly
- Don’t know who we are
- Know some plant names
- Know where on their land their favorite birds are

What do they do? How do they spend their time?
- Retired professionals
- Involved in civic orgs.
- Well educated
- Hiking
- Bird Watching
- Travel-cosmopolitan
- Disposable income

What gets their attention?
- New things / technology
- Invasives
- Climate change
- What the neighbors are doing

ACTION: ATTEND WOODS WALK / FIELD DAY ABOUT FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAIN</th>
<th>GAIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time/distance to meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested in forest management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want to listen to government “expert”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want to feel like they don’t know something</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management is ugly/bad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing practices is complicated/scary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn new things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See what other folks do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel like doing something good for the environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a good steward</td>
<td></td>
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</table>