

### 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](#),<sup>6</sup> or you can download easy-to-use data compilations for selected landowner segments from the [TELE website](#).<sup>7</sup> 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](http://www.engaginglandowners.org/landowner-data)

## 4 UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

### 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.

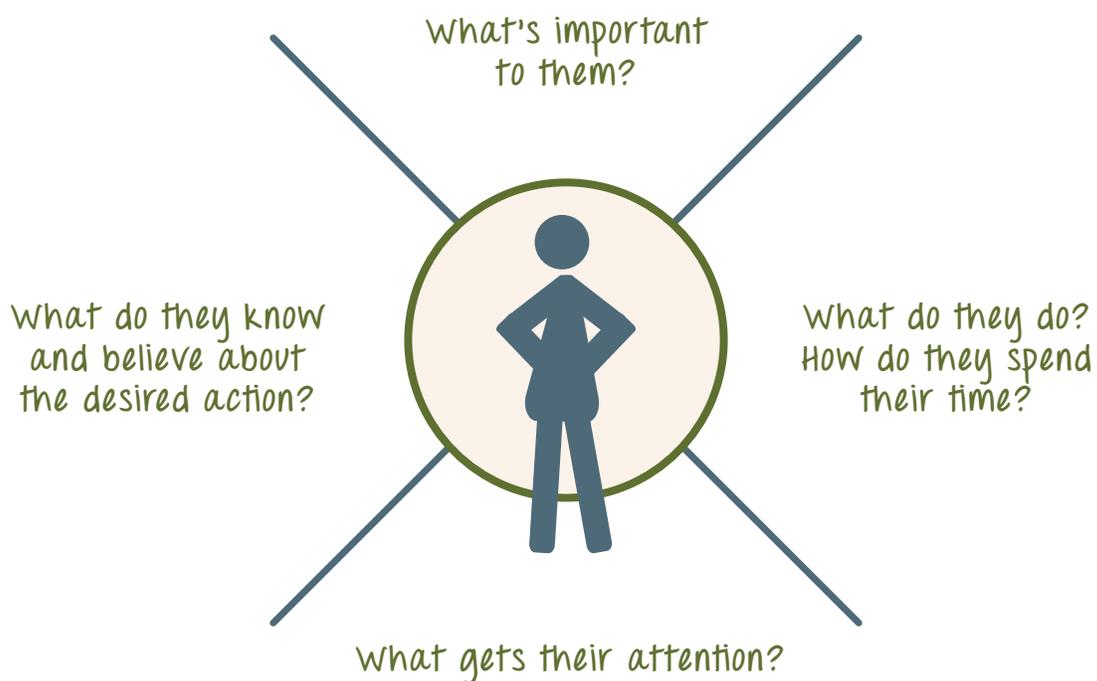
Finally, remember that landowners are simply people who own land. As such, they are likely to be fairly similar to other people who live in the same community. Market research surveys and datasets about the community in general can also give you good information about the values and lifestyles of landowners 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



## 4 UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

### **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.

## 4 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



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

PAIN ▼	GAIN ▲
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time/distance to meeting</li> <li>• Not interested in forest management</li> <li>• Don't want to listen to government "expert"</li> <li>• Don't want to feel like they don't know something</li> <li>• Management is ugly/bad</li> <li>• Implementing practices is complicated/scary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn new things</li> <li>• Wildlife improvement</li> <li>• See what other folks do</li> <li>• Pride</li> <li>• Feel like doing something good for the environment</li> <li>• Contributing to community</li> <li>• Be a good steward</li> </ul>