

DEFINING SINGLE BEHAVIORS – Leading to an environmental practice

Hints for defining each single behavior

1. Define the environmental problem and the overall objective of the communication or outreach program. Refer to these ideas as you develop your list of single behaviors that will lead to the preferred environmental practice.
2. Identify target audiences. *Primary* audiences are people who perform the behavior. *Secondary* audiences are people who influence the primary audience.
3. Express ideal behaviors *as*:
 - a) what the primary audience should do, not what should be done for them
 - b) specific behaviors (begin with an action verb)
 - c) single, observable events
 - d) one behavior per statement

Sample environmental practice: managing household waste

Identify ideal behaviors. For example, *ideal behaviors for managing waste might include:*

- a) separate recyclable containers, paper, hazardous materials, and organic materials from other trash
- b) store each type of material in separate containers
- c) put out appropriate materials on the correct pick-up day
- d) compost organic garbage and take hazardous materials to the appropriate collection site

Developing the education strategy

1. Compare “doers” and “non-doers.”
What specific factors make one adopt a practice and the other not?
2. Identify skills and performance deficits.
Do people refrain from a practice because they don’t know how to do it or because of other factors, such as access to appropriate technology or lack of awareness of positive consequences?
3. Address skills deficit.
Develop strategies which provide skill information or teach necessary skills.
4. Address performance deficit.
Identify strategies that reduce barriers and increase positive consequences.
5. Conduct quantitative research.
Study results of education program with a sample of the target audience. Determine applicability of study sample to larger audience. Fine tune recommendations.
6. Conduct behavior trials.

PUTTING YOUR EDUCATION STRATEGY INTO PRACTICE – Sample techniques

Using commitment to promote behavior

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Waste reduction | • ask household, when delivering a compost unit, to place a sticker on the side of their recycling container indicating that they compost |
| Energy conservation | • invite homeowners to participate in a home assessment; conclude by asking when they expect to complete activities such as weather-stripping |
| Water conservation | • ask households to sign a pledge committing themselves to watering their lawn on odd or even days based on their house number |

Using prompts to promote behavior

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Waste reduction | • signs at the entrances to supermarkets remind shoppers to bring reusable shopping bags |
| Energy conservation | • signs encourage drivers to turn off engines while parked in locations where drivers frequently wait (schools, train stations) |
| Water conservation | • ask homeowner for permission to place a tag on the outside water faucet encouraging watering on odd or even days |

Using norms to promote behavior

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Waste reduction | • ask supermarket shoppers to wear a button that shows their support for buying products that are recyclable or have recycled content |
| Energy conservation | • in stores, attach decals to energy-efficient products indicating how many people believe it is important to purchase environmentally friendly products |
| Water conservation | • to encourage odd/even watering, ask householders to place a sign on their front lawn that asks “Are You Odd or Even?” |

Remove barriers to behavior

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Waste reduction | • it is difficult to identify products that are recyclable or have recycled content. Solution: provide prompts that make identification easier. |
| Energy conservation | • homeowners lack the skill to install energy-efficient devices. Solution: use home assessment opportunities to instruct homeowners. |
| Water conservation | • it is too expensive to install a low-flow toilet. Solution: allow the cost of the toilet and installation to be paid for from savings in the water bill. |

EDUCATING ABOUT BEHAVIOR AND THE ENVIRONMENT WORKSHEET was developed by Elaine Andrews, University of Wisconsin Extension. June 2006

Adapted from *Starting With Behavior*, Elizabeth Mills Booth, 1996; *Promoting a Sustainable Future*, Doug McKenzie-Mohr, 1995; *Understanding and Influencing Behaviors: A Guide*, Bruce Byers, 2000