

American Samoa Strategic Communications Workshop
March 16 - 18, 2016
Pago Pago, American Samoa



Managers and practitioners from American Samoa resource management agencies participate in the American Samoa Strategic Communications Workshop. Photo © TNC.

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Executive Summary

The Reef Resilience Network held a three-day Strategic Communications Workshop March 16-18, 2016 to help marine conservation and education professionals from 11 agencies in American Samoa approach their communications work strategically. Participants learned key components of strategic communications, and applied these concepts to develop communications plans for climate change preparation projects in American Samoa. Based on participants' needs, training was also provided in media relations with opportunity for practical application of these skills. Participants left the workshop with plans to continue the development of communication plans and seek funding for implementation.

Background

The Reef Resilience Network works to strengthen and enhance training and capacity building opportunities for coral reef managers to address the impacts of climate change and local stressors to coral reefs. To do so, Reef Resilience staff organizes multiple learning exchanges each year to provide intensive in-person trainings for coral reef managers to address their site-specific needs. These exchanges are designed to teach managers new skills and provide them with opportunities to apply these skills. They are also designed to create an environment of exchange where participants can share resources and lessons learned, provide each other with feedback, and expand their network of coral reef managers, practitioners, and experts.

This workshop was specifically designed for Le Tausagi members. In May 2014, NOAA liaisons in American Samoa coordinated the prioritization of recommendations from American Samoa's Capacity Assessment (2012) via the Point of Contact (Dr. Ruth Matagi-Tofiga) and the three Local Action Strategy working groups (Climate Change, Fisheries Management, and Land-Based Sources of Pollution). The results of this prioritization, and follow-up conversations with CRAG coordinator Kristine Bucchianeri, were used to guide the selection of this project to support capacity building for Le Tausagi in support of J-CAT recommendation 1.1: Inform Judges, Legislators, Mayors, Fono, Community Members on Importance of Natural Resource Conservation.

Objectives

The aim of the workshop was to introduce participants to the strategic communications planning process and guide them in creating group communications plans for coral reef conservation-related projects on the island. In addition to this objective, we aimed to improve the communication skills of this cohort so they would be better prepared to talk about their project during an interview or pitch their project as an opinion editorial. The third objective was to build connections amongst practitioners and experts working in American Samoa so that they could share challenges and lessons learned.

Participants

Seventeen marine conservation professionals from 11 agencies participated in the Strategic Communications Workshop. See Appendix A for a list of participants. Organizations that participated included:

- Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR)
- Coral Reef Advisory Group (CRAG)
- Department of Education (DOE-OCI)

- Soil & Water Conservation District (AS-SWCD)
- Department of Commerce Coastal Management Program (DOC-ASCMP)
- Environmental Protection Agency (AS-EPA)
- American Samoa Community College (ASCC-CNR Land Grant)
- Department of Youth and Women's Affairs (DYWA)
- National Marine Sanctuary American Samoa (NMSAS)
- National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS)

Facilitators

To provide the one-on-one coaching necessary for this type of fast paced learning and real world application, Reef Resilience staff aimed to have one facilitator (coach) for every two participants. Learning exchange facilitators included:

- Kristen Maize, Strategic Communications Manager, The Nature Conservancy Hawai'i
- Cherie Wagner, Reef Resilience Program Coordinator, The Nature Conservancy
- Evelyn Wight, Senior Communications Manager, The Nature Conservancy Hawai'i
- Scott Radway, Director, SeaWeb Asia Pacific
- Kristine Bucchianeri, Coral Reef Initiative Coordinator, CRAG

Guest speaker: Joey Cummings, Vice-President & General Manager, South Seas Broadcasting

Agenda Overview

Reef Resilience Program staff worked with by Kristine Bucchianeri, the Coral Reef Initiative Coordinator for CRAG on the development of the agenda and selection of participants. Participants were chosen and invited to the workshop by agency directors. Climate change focus.

Pre-Learning Exchange

Once participants were selected, they completed an online survey to assess their communications skill level and areas of interest. This survey was also used to help staff identify three project ideas to focus on during the workshop.

Day 1

The first training day began with an introduction to strategic communications and a detailed introduction to the strategic communications planning process. Our format for teaching this process is to introduce a planning step/topic in presentation format, and then work in small groups with participants as they apply each step to their own project. The presentations and activities covered during Day 1 included:

- Setting Goals & Objectives
- Setting the Context for your Project
- Identifying Decision-Makers & Target Audiences
- Making your Messages Matter

Day 2

During the second communications planning day, the next three steps of the planning process were introduced and applied:

- Making your Messages Come Alive
- Messengers and Tactics for Communicating Messages
- Measurements and Reality Check

Participants were then provided with group work time to tie the planning activities/steps together into a cohesive project plan, and share a particularly challenging aspect of their project for group feedback. Additional time was provided for participants to incorporate group feedback into their plans, which they then emailed to their coaches for final review.

Day 3

On Day 3, participants were introduced to media relations, opinion editorials (op-eds), and received instruction and practiced communicating their messages by interviewing each other, brainstormed how to successfully develop an op-ed, and met one-on-one with facilitators to discuss their summary project plans. Participants also got a unique opportunity to hear from and interact with the local radio host, Joey Cummings. Joey gave tips on effective PSAs, how to prepare for the Morning Show, and what makes a successful ad.

The workshop closed with participants receiving certificates for completing the workshop and completing workshop evaluations.

Feedback from Participants

Participants' evaluations of the learning exchange revealed that they all felt that skills learned during the workshop could be applied to their work. See the bullets below for additional highlights from the participant evaluations:

- *Great workshop, thank you for sharing your skills. I know I will be utilizing these in the future.*
- *Favorite workshop so far. Very helpful in regards to communicating with various audiences effectively.*
- *Thanks so much. I learned heaps in my post as communications person in our program.*
- *[Hope] to have more of these workshops in Samoa. Hopefully a next refresh in two years from today.*
- *Workshop exceeded my expectations; need follow-up if proposed projects have been implemented and identifying accomplishments.*
- *Best workshop I have ever taken.*
- *I already told other staff about the workshop and want to do training for them.*

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

Reef Resilience staff deemed the workshop successful, highlighting these contributing factors:

- Exchange objectives were achieved and participant needs were met and exceeded
- There is a high potential for participants to apply skills learned to specific projects, which was the focus for the workshop

- Learning from experience at a previous exchange, we connected participants to the online Network Forum during the event to decrease barriers to usage post-exchange

Recommendations for future workshops

Detailed debrief notes outlining specific suggested changes/adjustments were taken during the coaches meeting at the end of each day. Overall takeaways for future learning exchanges include:

- Spend time with participants up front: Time spent communicating with participants prior to the learning exchange was time well spent. Surveying participants to understand their communications skills/training and interests resulted in a training that met – and exceeded – participants’ expectations. In order to help participants get the most out of the fast paced and relatively short training, we took the time to work with participants one-on-one to identify a project and goal (that would serve as the building block for their strategic communications planning process). This helped the participants feel confident enough to get started in the planning process rather than become overwhelmed in the beginning.
- Maintain the intentionally small ratio of one coach for two participants. This proved to be essential during the individual activities. While this meant additional resources (staff time and money to support cost of additional facilitators), the extra attention and interaction with experts resulted in engaged and happy participants and quality final communications plans.

Feedback from participants:

- *With complex projects, this activity [setting Goals & Objectives] was very challenging. Thanks for the extra time. I really appreciate having the individualized assistance coming up with these ideas.*
- *The group discussion amongst coach(es) individually at our tables was great!*

Next Steps

Reef Resilience staff will:

- Continue to manage and monitor the American Samoa Strategic Communications Workshop participants online discussion forum on the RR Network Forum
- Share related resources such as workshop presentations and how-to guides with participants via the Network Forum
- Follow up with each participant to monitor and encourage progress towards the implementation of their project plans