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How Local Governments Respond to and Communicate About Climate Change

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Introduction

Scientific consensus from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): climate change is happening and caused by humans (IPCC Summary for Policymakers, 2018)

Recommendations from Climate Outreach's guide for IPCC authors to communicate findings (Climate Outreach's *Principles for effective communication and public engagement on climate change*, 2018):

- **Be a confident communicator**
- **Talk about the real world, not abstract ideas**
- **Connect with what matters to the audience**
- **Tell a human story**
- **Lead with what you know**
- **Use the most effective visual communication**

Research Questions

1.How do NC local government employees **describe the ways they communicate with residents** about climate initiatives?

2.To what extent do NC local government employees **seek and respond to resident input** about climate initiatives?

3.How do NC local government employees **describe successful climate initiatives** with public engagement?

Methods

- IRB review and exemption
- 12 semi-structured Zoom interviews with sustainability professionals from local governments in NC

Findings

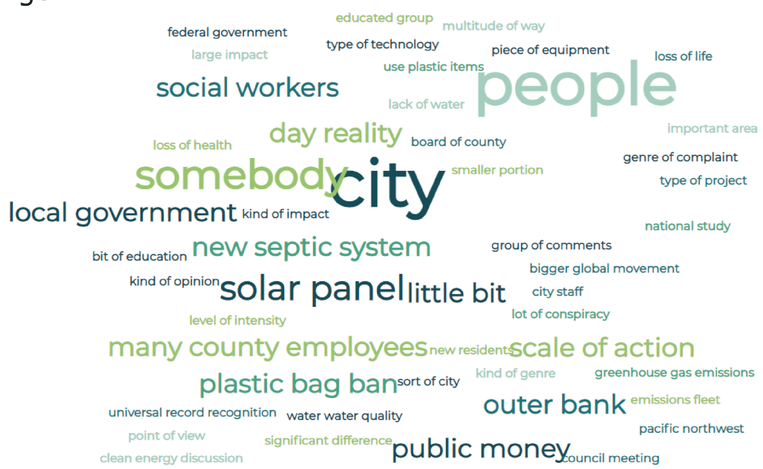
Question 1

- 7 participants (58%) reported using **framing** to appeal to audiences - ex. saving money and improving public health
- 2 participants (17%) mentioned **partnering with community leaders to overcome mistrust of local government**

Question 2

- When asked how they respond to residents who want to support climate initiatives, 4 (33%) mentioned **transportation** and 3 (25%) mentioned **waste**
- 3 participants (25%) heard few or no misconceptions about climate change
- 9 participants shared misconceptions expressed to them about climate change

Right: Responses coded as misconceptions that participants had heard from residents (Made with MonkeyLearn WordCloud Generator)



Question 3

- Factors that participants identified as leading to successful initiatives responding to climate change with public engagement: **funding options** (50%), **metrics** (42%), and **partnerships** (25%)
- Barriers to these initiatives: COVID-19 (75%), money (67%), and utilities (17%)

Analysis

Table: Alignment with IPCC communications strategies

IPCC Strategy	Number of Local Governments	Note
Talk about the real world, not abstract ideas	10 (83%)	The two local governments not included were large/central and small/coastal
Connect with what matters to your audience	7 (58%)	All were in western or central regions of NC
Use the most effective visual communication	1 (8%)	This local government is in the central Piedmont region and the smallest local government in study
Be a confident communicator	0	NA
Tell a human story	0	NA
Lead with what you know	0	NA

Recommendations for Local Governments

- Follow IPCC communications strategies, like using visual communication
- Partner with community-identified leaders to overcome mistrust
- Have dedicated funding, metrics to show progress toward goals, and community/state partnerships to implement successful climate initiatives