Mend the Gap: having a constructive climate-energy conversation

George Marshall  Director of Programmes

Amber Bennett  Canadian Program

www.climateoutreach.org  @ClimateOutreach
2017 Mind The Gap: How We Can Talk With People Who Disagree With Us

➔ Who do we get attacked by?
➔ Why do we love Alberta?
➔ How will climate change harm the things we love?
➔ How do we respect the people in oil and gas?
➔ How will new forms of energy be good for Alberta?
Albertans are split about Climate Change

- 20% Alarmed
- 25% Concerned
- 2% Disengaged
- 34% Skeptical
- 19% Dismissive

Source: Erick Lachapelle, EcoAnalytics
Albertans are split

About the causes of climate change.
54% say human, 46% say natural

About the future of energy
39% want more oil and gas, 34% want less
Albertans are split

Climate change challenges people’s loyalties to their politics, their family and friends, and their sense of identity.
If I say climate change is real maybe my son won’t have a job if we shut off the tap tomorrow.

- Rural Group

Sure, I’m concerned about climate change. My concern is the people that are using climate change to disrupt my livelihood.

- Energy Professionals Group
Mind the Gap

And then a lot happened....
Four ambitions

1. *Training* partners how to conduct communications research
2. *Holding conversations* with a wide-range of Albertans
3. *Co-designing* and *testing* effective language for talking about climate change and energy
4. Putting research into *practice*
Alberta Narratives Project in numbers

- 19 Core organizing partners and funders
- 75 Organizations involved
- 55 Narrative Workshops held
- 120 Hours of group conversations
- 482 People attending Narrative Workshops
- 87 People trained
- 720 Pages of transcribed conversations
- 2,410 Pages of marked up narratives
Two trainings - practice and evaluation
The lead partners and funders
Who we spoke to

Agricultural producers
Rural Albertans
Youth
Oil & Gas workers
Policymakers
Faith leaders
Conservatives
New Canadians
Business leaders
Indigenous people
Energy leaders
Environmentalists

Rural Albertans
Families with young children
Environmental Educators
Teachers
Artists
Renewable Energy Workers
Energy Service Providers
Watershed protection groups
Health Care workers and professionals
City of Calgary communications employees
Environmental Health & Safety specialists
Let’s hear from some of the people who ran the groups...
Narratives that don’t work
Narratives that didn’t work

Green Absolutism

→ Climate change is the greatest threat we face. Renewables are clean and new.
→ Oil is dirty, destroying the world and dying out.
→ Replace oil with 100% renewables.
→ (and renewables have lots of jobs and income).
Narratives that didn’t work

Elite ‘lite’ – costs and benefits.

➔ Climate change brings economic costs.
➔ Albertan oil is the best in the world.
➔ Renewables are a major opportunity for new investment and markets.
➔ There can be new jobs and profits.
Narratives that didn’t work

Politicking

➔ Alberta can be a *leader* in taking action on climate change and renewable technology.
➔ We need a “Made in Alberta” plan, not one *imposed* by Ottawa.
➔ The *experts* say this policy is the best way to *deal with climate change*.
➔ PIPELINES!
Narratives that can work

Gratitude
Protect
Everyone
Secure
Build
Gratitude:

➔ Respect for “Albertan qualities”

➔ Gratitude for living in Alberta

➔ Respect for people who work hard in the oil and gas industry

➔ Oil and energy resources are precious and should be valued
And I am proud to be Albertan. I love Alberta for the mountains, but I also think that a large reason people are here is for opportunity. A lot of people move here for opportunity and I think the new people that come here are often willing to take chances, which I like.

Environmental Activist
In every first meeting that I have with people I like to give my appreciation for those that have come before me and give them respect: Kudos for what you’ve done to make this place something very nice for me to want to come here. When I see people that are new as myself, I’m like, “we’re going to make this place better. You’re welcome.”

New Canadian
Oil and gas has provided many benefits for Alberta. We are grateful for the hard work of the people in the oil and gas industry that have built the prosperity of our province and nation.

Oil is a precious and valuable resource that needs to be used with care. We have given ours away for too little. It makes sense to plan for the future and use it more prudently.
We love our quality of life
Nature, landscape, clean air and water
Facing a challenge we work together
We pull together, support, protect each other in extreme weather
In a crisis, the whole province will pull together and help each other out... it’s an old school Western character... it’s a real salt-of-the-earth bunch of people, and Albertans are just really, really great folks that really take care of each other. And that’s great.”

-Rural Group
Everyone

➔ Transition includes all sectors, not just energy

➔ Respect for the contribution of all sectors especially farming.

➔ Allow a voice for all groups: settlers, New Canadians, Indigenous People
I think people forgot that before 1947 and the oil hit, Energy’s not going to last for forever, but you know what? Agriculture will.

-Farmers Group
Secure

➔ We are too dependent on one sector
➔ The problem of oil and gas is the insecurity of jobs
➔ We need to broaden the economy
➔ A Secure Transition
They put all their eggs in the oil industry basket. Now I think Albertans learned a lesson. Well did we? Now with the pipeline, we’re going right back and we’re putting all of our eggs back in that same basket.”

Farmer
We have become too dependent on this one industry and now we are all tied to the rollercoaster of international oil prices.

The boom and bust cycle generates economic and job insecurity. Our products and pipelines are vulnerable to policies set in other provinces and countries.
Build

- Change is “essential” - part of life, natural cycles and evolution.
- Need to build stronger foundations, spread the load, more balance.
- This is not easy - it is challenging
- Transition towards something new (not away from something old)
Albertans are builders, whether it’s the pipelines, or roads, or bridges, or the electric industry. As a city, we’re far newer than really any of the other major cities, by 80-100 years, and what the province has accomplished really reflects the attitude in this province.

Business Leaders Group
Towards a new conversation
A new conversation

People find it hard to talk about climate change and rarely do so.

People are dissatisfied with the current public discourse. They don’t see themselves in it.

People want a new kind of conversation:

➔ More Open
➔ More Respectful
➔ Discussing our choices
➔ Balanced and critical
These are my friends, and I can talk to them, and we’re having these debates, these massive debates, and they’re very heated, but you know you come to a table like this, where there’s a diversity of views, and you might not agree with each other, but one-on-one, you can have a good conversation about it.

Business Leader
So when can you bring up these issues?

➔ Be confident people want to have this conversation (if based on respect and recognition)
➔ Based on their main concerns
➔ Maybe climate change is not the lead