

ECO Working Group Meeting Minutes

July 20, 2016

The meeting was convened at 10:30 at the Maryland Department of the Environment by the Working Group Chair, Lori Arguelles.

Attending in person: Lori Arguelles (Ferguson Foundation), Steve Arabia (NRG), Michele Peterson (Honeywell), Allison Rich (MD Environmental Health Network), Tad Aburn (MDE), Mark Shaffer (MDE), Lisa Nissley (MDE), Liz Entwistle (MDE), Brian Hug (MDE), Amy Bittler (MDE).

Attending by phone: Jason Schellhardt (MDA), Colleen Turner (MDOT), Anna Lucente-Hoffmann (DNR), Sara Luell (DHCD), Samantha Kappalman (Hatcher Group).

Public attendance. Sara Via, a biology professor at the University of Maryland who conducts climate education through the Agricultural Extension program, attended the meeting.

Welcome and opening remarks. Lori convened the meeting and members introduced themselves.

Presentation on Maryland climate opinion research. Lori introduced the speaker, Dr. Karen Akerlof from the Center for Climate Change Communication (4C) program at George Mason University. Dr. Akerlof summarized 4C research findings on Marylanders' knowledge, attitudes and policy preferences on climate change. 4C has provided research support to Maryland organizations through the Climate Communication Consortium of Maryland with funding from the Town Creek Foundation. The findings are based on data 4C collected from statewide public opinion surveys conducted between 2013-2015 on climate change, energy, and public health. Dr. Akerlof had three key takeaways: 1) public opinion among Marylanders is generally supportive of climate information and programs; 2) communicating the social consensus in the state is important because attitudes are soft on this so peer opinions are important; and 3) worry less about who the messengers should be and how to frame the issues and focus on getting the message out. Testing shows Marylanders trust different messengers about the same (scientists vs. public health officials vs. local politicians).

A Q&A session followed. Dr. Akerlof said that more than ever, we think as groups. Called “party sorting”, people use their “tribal affiliations” to identify risks. Democrats tend to be more communitarian so see environmental risks as high. The Republican “free market” lens makes government regulation risks seem high.

Allison Rich said the survey data should be used to frame the messaging in the 2016 MCCC report.

Samantha Kappalman said the three videos produced for the Renew Maryland campaign talked first about what the State is doing to address climate change and then segued into “and this is what you can do.”

Sara Via said to take the message to where the people are and frame it around issues they care about. Allison agreed that outreach should build on existing captive audiences rather than creating new ones.

Commission updates. Brian Hug reported that the Commission's Steering Committee will meet on July 28 to review and rank the UMCES proposals and will then forward their recommendations to UMCES. Allison reported that the Mitigation Working Group is focusing on equity issues in its July 25 and August 22 meetings and there is an informal expectation that ECO will help with this. She supports holding equity listening sessions in Fall 2016. Lori said equity should be infused into the five listening sessions scheduled for Spring 2017. Sara recommended asking NGOs to reach out to their communities to turn out for the listening sessions.

Lori noted there is an important nexus of opportunity between ECO and the Environmental Justice (EJ) Commission. A discussion ensued about coordinating with EJ and the Children's Environmental Health Commission to extend ECO's outreach to vulnerable populations and underserved communities. There was consensus that Lori should brainstorm offline with these Commissions, together with Allison, who serves on both commissions, and Rebecca Rehr from the Maryland Environmental Health Network.

Closing remarks and next steps. Lori polled members who agreed not to hold a meeting in August. She said she would poll members via email about times/dates/locations for future ECO meetings before scheduling the September meeting, and reminded members to send their phone numbers to Liz Entwistle. There being no further business, she adjourned the meeting at 11:55.