

CAM IGNITE!

Santa Barbara-Ventura-Los Angeles-Orange County Region

October 14, 2011

Aquarium of the Pacific

Thirty individuals¹ from myriad backgrounds met to create a blueprint for museums in Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, and Orange Counties, to expand their reach and broaden their relevance through partnering with experts and stakeholders to ignite community dialogues about critical environmental issues and solutions. After the keynote address, our moderator introduced a list of regional environment issues.² How do we decide what issue we prioritize, and how do we deal with issues that share causes and/or impacts with other issues? After deciding that climate change and water were the critical issues and that each issue and its solutions impacted the other, participants formed four discussion groups, using the diverse expertise in the room to generate ideas for museum collaboration. The four groups each focused on one issue; accessibility, water, values, and integrated climate change exhibits / program ideas.

Museums must increase accessibility

Our region covers four counties and therefore needs to reach a variety of individuals throughout their communities. For museums to be successful and for more people to learn about and act on environmental challenges, we must engage everyone, and dispel the myth that green is elitist and demonstrate that it need not be expensive to go green. Institutions must become part of the community and go into the community, not just remain a "building" in the community.

Museums can create programs to facilitate green pride in growing food, for example, by creating food workshops that connect with community members from all walks of life. Programs regarding climate change can use food as an entry point as people relate to their food supply, unlike remote concepts such as polar bears or sea level rise. Museums can inform audiences about how to grow and cook food, and while doing so connect food to climate change and then discuss local food sources and other solutions.

Other ideas to engage more communities at museums that are not centered on the environment and conservation are food trucks serving sustainable food, mobile outreach programs, or collaborations with other institutions, such as art museum and science center partnerships...

A way to move programs into other museums would be via sustainability of the institution itself.

Wendell Berry writes about the interdependence of people, the land, and weather. Museums might create programs or exhibits about food and climate change, promoting small family farms, yet not vilifying factory farms. In fact, museums should NOT vilify anything. Finally, museums need to make these changes as quickly as possible

Exhibits or programs focusing on Water

Our region faces water crises. Many people think "if I conserve water then more people can live here", which deters conservation. Museums can help change that thinking to a new paradigm, "conserve water to conserve the environment". For example, the "Paddle the LA River" project calls for recreational use of the Los Angeles River, so revitalizing the river becomes more important when the community considers that their children will be paddling in that water. Instead of vast grass lawns, museums can educate residents about climate-appropriate landscaping. The Los Angeles region has a Mediterranean climate, not a desert climate like some people believe, and a wide variety of beautiful, appropriate landscaping options exist.

¹Regional participants are listed in Attachment A.

² Regional environmental issues are listed in Attachment B.

The *Tap into the Future* project showed past-present-future water needs, and can be emulated. Museums might install exhibits that “shrink” the viewer down as they walk through a maze to experience environmental occurrences such as waste water as it flows from origin to ocean.

A key date is approaching: December 2014 is the 100th anniversary of John Muir’s death. Museums might depict historical and future conditions for the region, asking visitors to ponder what can be. Or, museums might tackle the challenge of returning indigenous fish to the LA River – what would it take?

Museums’ value focus

Museums are mission-based, values-focused institutions that have the advantage of using visual mediums, from art to live animals, to communicate messages. An exploration of the relationship between climate change and our food leads us to a values dialogue as values are at the root of our environmental challenge and solutions. What do we value? Values are the basis of what we do. Yet there are always competing values. Food consumption plays a critical role in human evolution; we still are hunters and gatherers. But now we have become a society of consumers, pushed by producers, with the belief that all resources are renewable. Politics historically has been a social mechanism for moderating competing values, but now our society must respond to the failure of political institutions to referee values. We have a culture of more and more, and the impact of our consumption is felt overseas (manufacturing, resource utilization, economic growth, pollution, etc.). Museums promote values; museums might promote the collaboration with nature and with communities. How can museums communicate values related to climate change? Artists are experts in visual communication, and can communicate solutions such as valuing local foods and other values consistent with sustainability. Museums help identify the values that define us, that can protect our future, and those are the values we must promote.

Climate change: An integrated approach

Our resident visitors live here for the quality of life our region offers. As a group, museums and experts can integrate several environment issues and offer bold solutions. Pacific Standard Time (PST) is an example of a regional museum project that this group can emulate to communicate climate change solutions conveying information in order to make informed choices. Our concept is *LA 2015 to 2050*; or *CA 2015 to 2050* if other regions are on board with the idea. The concept consists of hosted dynamics for people to find solutions together, creating an emotional connection to the environment. Museums can offer a pre-visit curriculum for children coming as general attendees, useful for family discussions - families are more likely to adopt behavior changes when presented with information that is discussed by the family. Museums can cross-pollinate with climate change messages, “invade” each other with exhibitions, forums, trained interpreters, and catalogs.

In order to accomplish the installation of these programs regionally and state-wide, we need foundation funding. Using PST as the example, the Getty Foundation took ten years to decide to provide funding.

Another project, LA Rising, also took a long time to fund.

Museums also must consider communication issues. For example, aquariums did not tap into the museum community, particularly those in the Chinese community, when advocating shark fin ban legislation. Any program must not vilify positions polarizing their audience.

Summary

Museums, partnering with experts and other stakeholders, can play a critical role in igniting our communities to find solutions addressing the critical environmental issues facing our region today. Museums can move the public discussion beyond “woe is me” to a solutions-focus, engaging visitors to be part of the change needed to mitigate climate change on a local and regional scale. Visual medium has emotional connection, a different platform and expertise that museums can bring to the climate change discussion. Museums also must be mindful of accessibility issues and use this opportunity to broaden our reach to more communities.

Ignite's keynote speaker, Paul Hawken, urged us to be fearless, and this resonated with the group. Most participants indicated that they wanted to be involved in developing the *LA 2015-2050* program and/or exhibit, and that their institutions would consider being involved in making this project happen.

Next steps

California Association of Museums (CAM) Green Museum Initiative, the state coordinators of *Ignite*, will (1) publish a report on the event in December, 2011, (2) will expand the discussion to other museums at a panel discussion on Friday, February 17, 2012 as part of CAM's annual conference to be held in Berkeley this year, and (3) bring the concept to a national museum audience at the American Association of Museum's (AAM) annual conference in spring, 2012 to be held in Minnesota. The summary report will be sent to all *Ignite* participants for their feedback, and all are invited to attend the *Ignite* session in Berkeley.

This regional event recap will serve as input into the state-wide report so please advise if any summary points need to be added. The Aquarium of the Pacific will host a next steps planning conference call for all interested in January, and will follow up with participants to see if any new partnerships have developed from connecting diverse individuals interested in our region, our environmental challenges, and the role museums might play.

Acknowledgements

Jerry Schubel facilitated the Santa Barbara-Greater Los Angeles *Ignite* event. Rebekkah Dworski, Derek Balsillie, Thomas Bigelow, Amy Kishaba, Erica Noriega, Duane Stanton, and Kim Thompson assisted with the event. Rebekkah Dworski contributed to this report.

Attachment A: Roster of Participants

First Name	Last Name	Organization
Kim	Abeles	IGNITE artist
Rich	Block	Santa Barbara Zoo
Tom	Bowman	Bowman Global Change
Chris	Briggs	Santa Barbara Zoo
Paul	Bunje	UCLA Center for Climate Change Solutions
Eder	Cetina	Olson Visual
Kate	Davies	GMI Founding Member & Past Chair
Torin	Dunnavant	Tree People
April	Economides	Green Octopus
Frederick	Fisher	Frederick Fisher & Partners
Nancy	Goslee Power	Goslee Power & Associates
Phyllis	Grifman	USC Sea Grant Program
Juliette	Hart	USC
Becki	Hartke	Fullerton Arboretum
Jordan	Howard	Rise Above Plastics Student Speaker Series
Karl	Hutterer	Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History
Dean	Kubani	City of Santa Monica
Barbara	Long	Aquarium of the Pacific
Brenden	McEaney	USGBC-LA
Heidrun	Mumper-Drumm	Art Center College of Design
Jonathan	Parfrey	Climate Resolve Los Angeles
Dora	Quach	Chinese American Museum
Jerry	Schubel	Aquarium of the Pacific
Christopher	Scoates	University Art Museum, Long Beach
Nancy	Steele	Council for Watershed Health
Justin	Kalama	Goslee Power & Associates
Vanda	Vitali	California International Arts Foundation
Karen	Wade	Homestead Museum
Jeff	Wilson	Quiksilver America
Laura	Zahn	Climate Registry

Attachment B: Regional Environmental Challenges

Below is a summary list of some of the most pressing issues facing the Santa Barbara-Greater Los Angeles region of California.

- *Increase in Droughts:* Climate change is changing precipitation patterns. Less rain is expected to fall in the coming years. The Sierra Snowpack, one of Southern California's water supplies, has been shrinking and is melting sooner and faster. In the Sierras, precipitation is falling more as rain than snow. Current infrastructure cannot capture all the water from early melting snow, leading to less water available in the dry summer months. Population growth, especially in arid areas, will increase water consumption and water supplies might not be able to keep up with demand.
- *Increase in "Fire Weather":* Higher temperatures and less water available cause chaparral and forest vegetation to dry out and become fuel for more frequent wildfires. Each vegetation community requires a different fire regime to stay healthy, but climate change will alter these fire regimes. People increasingly are living adjacent to or in high fire-risk areas.
- *Sea Level Rise and Coastal Flooding (Greater Storm Damage):* Much of our population lives by the coast. Higher sea level will allow storms to reach farther inland, compounding the impact. California now requires planners assume 55 inches of sea level rise by 2100. Low-lying buildings and other infrastructure along the coast will need to be armored or relocated at huge cost. Coastal based tourism will be impacted.
- *Increase in "Hot Spells" (Heat waves):* Over the past century in the Los Angeles area, the number of days over 90 degrees F have increased while the number of days below 45 degrees F have decreased. Heat waves are becoming more frequent and longer-lasting. More hot days and heat waves will lead to an increased risk of heat-related illnesses.
- *Decrease in potable water from traditional supplies:* The South-Central coast imports water from the California State Water Project (Delta), Colorado River, and Owens Valley, as well as local groundwater. Although people are conserving more water on a per capita basis, population is growing, and rain amounts and patterns are changing.
- *Loss of biodiversity:* The region is part of one of the world's important biodiversity hotspots. Many critically endangered species and endemic vegetation are threatened by climate change and rapid urbanization.
- *Ocean Acidification:* With more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, more carbon dioxide enters the ocean through natural carbon cycles. The carbon dioxide then reacts with the water to form carbonic acid, making it increasingly more difficult for sea creatures to build their calcium carbonate shells. This is expected to impact fisheries, including local shellfish populations.
- *Increased Air Pollution/Ozone:* The South Coast air basin has some of the worst air quality in the nation due to our climate and topography. Air pollution from ships, vehicles, and stationary sources with sunlight and warming temperatures will lead to an increase in low-elevation ozone concentrations. Greater concentrations of particulate matter will aggravate respiratory problems and could lead to cancer.
- *Increase in Infectious Diseases:* Groundwater quality is expected to become an issue: recently almost half of the wells in the San Fernando Basin had to be shut down due to industrial pollution. Additionally, climate change likely will allow the spread of insects such as mosquitoes, known carriers of infectious diseases.

Other issues also greatly impacting the Central-South Coast region include food security, habitat destruction due to development, non-point source run-off, beach closures, beach erosion, El Niño and La Niña, and population growth of more than 28% by 2050. This increase in population will impact demand for water and electricity, existing transportation options, and the decreasing availability of sustainable seafood.